

## ON THE WESTLAND ALPS.

By MR. C. E. DOUGLAS.

IN accordance with instructions, a reconnaissance survey has been made of the Upper Waiho country. I was accompanied by Mr. A. P. Harper, whose ability as a photographer and sketcher, and his past experience on the Swiss and Canterbury ice-fields, rendered him invaluable on the Franz Josef Glacier, on which he schemed out and headed every excursion. A separate report by Mr. Harper is enclosed. We are extremely sorry that, owing to bad weather and state of the ice, we were unable to reach the upper *névé*, and to map the upper ice-fields. The routes marked on the map will show how frequently we were baffled.

We also, as instructed, blazed a route for the proposed road up to the glacier, and cut a track up the Moltke Spur to "The Outlook."

The road-line, river, and terminal face were traversed with chain and compass, but the glacier was too rough for measurements; hence we ran a compass ray-trace as far as we went, fixing numerous points *en route*. Two aneroids were used, and temperatures duly recorded. Checks on our horizontal and vertical measurements were obtained by reference to the trig-station on the Sentinel Rock, and the positions and heights of Cape Defiance, Unser Fritz Waterfall, and point G, all of which had been previously fixed by the trig. survey. To write a glowing account of the scenery can hardly be expected from me, as I have travelled so much in the inland parts of Westland, and the general appearance of the country is—in my eyes, at least—very similar, whatever the locality; what would appear wonderful to a stranger, I take a matter of course.

As to adventures, I cannot dilate on hair-breadth escapes, or relate tales of privation and suffering, such as having a camp blown away in the middle of the night in heavy rain and hail, and matches not to be found. This sounds horrifying, and is suggestive of untold discomfort to outsiders; but to us, and those who foolishly leave civilization for a life of exploring in new country, such mishaps are accepted as a matter of course.

It is sad to have to repeat the same old story of the gradual extinction of the native birds up every river in Westland, and the Waiho is no exception. Cats, when they run wild in the bush, would, in the course of a few years, become extinct, not through want of food, but by the young dying of starvation, or being picked up by the maori-hens, as the mothers either lose the run of them or cast them adrift before they are able to skirmish for themselves. The supply is kept up by more running wild from deserted diggings, survey and road camps, and that sentimental feeling which prompts the solitary digger to keep kittens as long as they are kittens, and then to kick them out to find a living for themselves. This is really the cause of the scarcity of birds. Dogs are little to blame, as they kill very few. Ferrets and stoats are now up to the Waiho Forks, and will soon be over the northern districts. They will finish the birds, and no doubt will get all the blame; but the process of extinction had commenced long before they arrived in the country. The Norwegian rat, which was no doubt responsible for some destruction, and which swarmed in the country at one time, is now becoming extinct from some cause or other, and the native and black rats are taking its place—two animals perhaps not quite so destructive as the grey gentlemen. Perchance the ferrets will go the same way. Now that the country knows what they really are—namely, a perfect pest—it is not likely that they will be deliberately bred and turned out to plunder, as is the style at present on the Wanaka; and it is to be hoped that the native birds will learn some of the hereditary instinct of the imported Home ones, which can take care of themselves, and are swarming everywhere. But I fear that the kiwi and kakapo are doomed. There is talk of putting some on islands in the Sounds or elsewhere; if so, the Government had better be quick about it, as it is quite possible that a few years will see the last of them. The eggs and young are being destroyed, and the birds are loth to pair; a year or two of the total loss of increase, and a bird species becomes extinct. It is extraordinary the number of bachelor and old-maid maori-hens and kiwis one now finds during the breeding season in Westland. An unknown terror has appeared, and they become depressed in spirit, and ignore the cares of matrimony. Mrs. Kiwi says, "What's the use of my laying that awful egg which Nature has given me, if that stoat sucks it; yes, actually sucks it while we are sitting on it? No, I'll be stuffed or roasted first."

The natural courage and fighting abilities of the maori-hen may enable it to hold its own, especially as he is evidently learning caution. Away in places where he could never have seen either a dog or a man, he has found out that from the dog his safety lies, not in running along an open flat, but in keeping in the dense scrub. He is just as curious as ever about a tent; but try to snare him in the old way, and he scratches his nose, winks slowly with his left eye, and says "Not this time."

If bird-life is scarce on the Waiho the variety is scarcer: two grey ducks, a pair of blue ducks with five young ones, a solitary exploring shag, and a misanthropic old gull represented aquatic bird-life. The blue ducks we tried to preserve; but the road-party exterminated them, of course. In the bush are plenty of kakas, a few pigeons, kiwis and hens; but no bell-birds, few saddle-backs and tuis. There were, however, numerous crows, storm-birds, and canaries; but, what is most singular, we saw no tom-tits, only one robin, and very few mountain wrens, although we found a lot of the latter birds lying dead on the glacier. As a rule, where the tui and crow are, there you will find all the other small birds; but here it was different. On the ice, 4,000ft. up, we found numbers of dead mountain wrens in all stages, from complete skeletons to ones covered with feathers; lower down, a few remnants of maori-hens, and one swamp-hen, were found lying on the ice. Keas are fairly numerous. The maori-hens fell, no doubt, from cliffs on to the ice, and were killed. They often perish in that way over the sea bluffs. The wrens are a bird with a very short jerky flight, and no doubt they, in trying to cross the glacier, got caught in a fog or confused among the ice-hummocks, and perished from cold. As for the swamp-hens, I have often found them lying dead on the main divide, and on snow-fields away south, as if they had been trying to cross and fallen through exhaustion.