

transport available in case of accidents. The carrier-pigeon service established last year has been of great assistance, the birds doing excellent service for the guides.

Among the visitors to the Hermitage during the season were His Excellency Lord Ranfurly, Lady Ranfurly, the Ladies Constance and Eileen Knox, Lord Northland, Lord Borrrington, and Major Alexander.

The receipts amounted to £914 15s. 6d. for 1902-3, as against £597 10s. 4d. for 1901-2, and £358 16s. 6d. for 1900-1, the increase for the year over the previous year being £317 5s. 2d., which must be considered an exceedingly satisfactory advance.

Mr. D. McDonald and wife, who for some years had charge of the Spa at Hanmer, are now caretakers at the Hermitage.

With the increase of visitors the guiding-work has also increased. In addition to Guide Clarke, an assistant guide was employed throughout the season. An extra man was also engaged for the tracks and repairs to the Hermitage and huts, and to give occasional assistance to the guides. The revenue from guiding, hire of horses, portorage, &c., was £138 16s. 8d.

The alpine huts have been greatly improved. In the Ball hut a 6 in. concrete floor has been laid in the general room, and a wooden floor in the ladies' compartment. Similar improvements have been commenced at Malte Brun hut, and will be completed next season. Both huts have been refurnished and good oil cooking-stoves provided. Seventy-three visitors made use of the Ball hut, and twenty-eight the Malte Brun hut. Some extensive improvements have also been made to the alpine tracks.

With a view to preserving the alpine flora 18,000 acres of land have been reserved in the vicinity of the Hermitage, and Guide Clarke appointed a Crown Lands Ranger to give him the necessary authority to prevent the trespass of stock.

Guide Clarke reports that there was a considerable increase in climbing and minor excursions, and, although the weather and snow conditions proved treacherous at various times, no accident of any kind occurred. Several interesting climbing expeditions were undertaken during the season. Mr. Claud McDonald of Australia, an active member of the English Alpine Club, made two attempts on Mount Cook, first by the Hooker side and later by the Tasman, but both attempts were unsuccessful owing to the unsuitable weather and the condition of recent snowfalls. Messrs. Tennant and Bambridge made ascents of Mounts Sealy (8,631 ft.), Darwin (9,716 ft.), and the first ascents of "Rotten Tommy," or Mount Blackburn, and Climber's Col. On the 3rd April the first party of ladies to attempt to cross the Alps by the Copland Pass left the Hermitage for the West Coast. The party consisted of Mrs. Thomson and Miss Perkins, Greymouth, and Miss Barnicoat and Mr. Tennant, London, accompanied by Guide Clarke, with Fluckiger and Smith as carriers. The first night's camp was made at the foot of the pass, which was crossed the following day in a dense fog; and a sheltered rock in the Douglas Valley reached for the second night's camp. The hot springs, Welcome Flat, was the scene of the third camp, and on the fourth day Scott's accommodation-house on the west side of the Alps was safely reached. The trip is a really magnificent one, there being a glorious combination of ice-clad peaks, glaciers, forest, and river scenery. The present conditions, however, make the trip one unfit for ladies, and negotiable only by men physically strong. Before the trip can be generally recommended it would be necessary to have a good track from Scott's to Welcome Flat, and a comfortable hut erected at the latter place.

LAKE WAKATIPU.

The number of visitors to Lake Wakatipu during the past year has largely exceeded any previous records, due, I think, mostly to Government control of the steamers on the lake and the consequent reduction in the cost of travel.

The improvements to the Park and Esplanade at Queenstown recommended in last year's report are now being carried out by the Borough Council on a plan drawn up by the Chief Forester, and consist of the forming of paths and drives, an ornamental lake, erection of band rotunda, and preparation of a bowling green. The creek running through the grounds is being cleared of rubbish and weeds, and the borders planted with flax and suitable shrubs. Altogether about a thousand trees and shrubs are to be planted throughout the grounds as part of the plan of improvements, which is progressing in a most satisfactory manner. An amount of £500 has already been paid to the Council, and a further similar sum will be payable as the work progresses. When these improvements are completed the place will be much more attractive than formerly.

Other works, such as the track to the top of Queenstown Hill and the extension of the Queenstown-Glenorchy Road along the shores of the lake, have been undertaken, and considerable progress has been made.

TE ANAU AND MILFORD SOUND TOUR.

This trip is destined to be one of the most popular in the colony. It is rapidly becoming recognised that in no part of the world is there anything approaching Milford Sound for grand and magnificent scenery. Many of those who have visited these sounds recently, and who know thoroughly the fiords of northern Europe, consider that in majestic beauty the latter are far surpassed by Milford.

The organization and conduct of this tour, which has up to the present been in private hands, is not at all satisfactory, nor in the best interests of the colony. A contract for keeping in repair the track from Te Anau to Milford has been let from year to year, costing £400 last year. Owing to the large amount demanded for this work I refrained from giving more than one year's contract. Even with this expenditure there have been many complaints concerning the condition of the track. There being no Government officer near at hand it is difficult to exercise any supervision. For this outlay the Government receives no financial return whatever, the whole guiding-fees going to the contractors. I have now to strongly recommend that the Department should control the work on this track for the coming season. I am convinced that it can be maintained for a lesser