

# WE ARE BECOMING MOUNTAIN-MINDED

## Extending The Chain Of Huts In The Hills

TEN years ago few New Zealanders knew more of the mountains in their unusually mountainous country than they could see from a football field on a winter's afternoon, or from the cricket field or tennis court in summer. More and more since then they have been migrating across the plains and into the valleys; to stand in the shadow of the hills and peaks, until so much looking up persuades them that looking down is better still. To billy and frying pan they have added boots, axe, and rope; to a love of open spaces they have added love of high places; and to New Zealand's splendid history of mountain adventure each has added his pinch of spice.

Superstitious fears that mountaineering is a dangerous sport are born, like all superstition, only out of ignorance. In fact, the sport is as safe as any and safer than a lot. It is dangerous only for the foolhardy. For the initiated it is actually the most placid of sports—as placid as country lanes to a city motorist, and less hazardous than motoring in town or country. Confidence in these precepts has grown during this renaissance period of mountaineering.

### Mushroom Growth

The greatest single contributing factor to this growing feeling that mountaineering is a justifiable sport has been the mushroom extension of a chain of huts for trampers and climbers, in both North and South Islands, but especially in the South, where distances are greater, rivers deeper and swifter, peaks higher, and weather wilder.

Once there were no huts anywhere near the hills. Then squatters opened up pasture lands near the headwaters of the alpine river beds and in one or two places private companies established tourist resorts. But still the climber's needs were not satisfied. More huts were needed. These have been and are being supplied by clubs. Numerous tramping clubs scatter huts about the dripping forest-slopes of the North Island hills. In the South Island, the development of real mountaineering has been made possible by the work of the Canterbury Mountaineering Club, in Canterbury, and the New Zealand Alpine Club, in South Canterbury and Otago-Southland.

### Matriculation

To these clubs trampers advance when they reach the stage of wishing to matriculate from the low levels. And to these clubs they look for the provision in the hills of the amenities which give the final capital S to the Safety Factor in mountaineering.

From the northernmost glacier country in Canterbury (near Arthur's Pass is the most northerly glacier in New Zealand) to the mountains of Western Otago and further south still in the Fiordland of Southland, these two clubs have added



When these clouds come, huts in the hills are home sweet home. Picture shows the Rudolf Glacier going up to Graham Saddle in the middle left, Mt. de la Beche, the Minarets, Mt. Elie de Beaumont, and the Hochstetter Dome at the head of the Tasman Glacier, biggest in temperate regions in the world. The photograph was taken in midsummer—at the end of January, this year

to the work of private and public enterprise to establish a chain of huts which opens up nearly every major alpine district in or near the Southern Alps.

The Alpine Club establishes its first sphere of influence with a hut in the Godley Glacier Valley. Over the valley, where the Classen Glacier joins the Godley, the Canterbury Mountaineering Club has made another shelter available for climbers by purchasing from private ownership the Classen Bivouac, a small but substantial hut which serves the mountain district in which Mts. Moffat and Huss are outstanding, offers a base for crossings of the comparatively easy Sealy Pass, and acts as a milestone on the route between the Rangitata headwaters and the glaciers district around Mt. Cook.

### Recent Additions

In the valley of the Tasman Glacier the Alpine Club owns the hut at de la Beche corner, erected as a memorial to a party which was overcome by storm and flood on the glacier. Gradually, in the lovely parkland valleys of western Otago, North Otago and Otago sections of the Alpine Club are extending the chain southward. A bivouac shelter on Mt. Aspiring has been one of the most notable recent additions.

Building on a groundwork of larger huts established in the headwaters of the Waimakariri, Wilberforce, Rakaiia, and Rangitata Valleys, the Canterbury Mountaineering Club is now developing a policy of bivouac-building in more remote situations. Without immense labour large huts cannot be built far away from areas available to pack-horse transport. Now the Club is working on designs for bivouacs, made entirely from metal, and designed so that the material can be transported in one trip

and erected in a matter of hours. These have already been tried, and found successful. Plans are in hand to place them in key positions right along the main range.

Trampers have not always received similar service. In the North Island, where the terrain creates trampers rather than mountaineers, it has been the rule for tramping clubs to gather sufficient strength to undertake hut building. In the South Island where the mountains go up further and fall down steeper, trampers have had to rely on resources made available by other organisations.

### A New Development

A new factor now enters into their field.

Although there is no mountaineering experience represented in the Physical Welfare Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, officers are confident of their ability to meet the demands of young men and women, and boys and girls, too, for organised tramping excursions. The organisation starts in the towns and cities, and has already come into line with the drift to the hills by making provision for developing its city recreational activity to provide for the new necessity.

Plans are in hand for establishing a line of huts over a popular Tararua hills crossing, and are almost complete for the line of huts covering the route from Hawarden in North Canterbury, over Harper Pass to the West Coast. At Easter, a party arranged by officers of the Branch in co-operation with Christchurch Tramping Clubs covered this route and established a precedent which is bound to be followed as the idea catches on. Five huts will make the chain when it is completed.

Recently, to Area Recreational Officers—a name which could come out of no other dictionary than that used by the Public Service—previously established in the Waikato, Wellington, and Southland (one man, one woman, in each district), have been added officers for Auckland and Christchurch, with Dunedin appointments about to be finalised.

In Auckland Jack Bonham, swimmer, diver, ex-Y.M.C.A. physical director, works with Gladys Gebbie, basketball and women's cricket rep. In Christchurch, John McDonnell has arrived with Australian experience of the new idea in supervised play areas, mainly for children. He works with Joyce Adams, late of Waikato Diocesan School.

Where co-operation can assist and further sports activity, these people are in a position to organise it, and have already done so to a markedly successful extent. Much of their work is concerned with special facilities available in the towns, but it is already noticeable that a good deal of it is taking them out into the country, up to the hills, and over the hills. And when they go to the hills they like to go to huts, so they build them.

### Kinks for Ski-ers

Ski-ers, now creasing their pants and wondering how to get the kinks out of Southland Beech since 100 per cent. import restrictions were imposed on hickory skis, are still served best at the tourist centres. In more isolated parts they have built huts, but nowhere in country so attractive to ski-ers as where the tourist hotels are situated. The North Island is in this respect better served than the South. Although the North Island fields are inferior, both in extent and quality of snow, they are more accessible. Around Egmont and Ruapehu, clubs have managed to establish their own huts. In the South Island, ski-club huts have not been established on fields which are any better, in spite of the far greater scope offered South Island ski-ers by their special advantages of terrain. For this paradoxical state of affairs the reason is found in accessibility. The really big glacier fields are too far away from transport routes except at Mt. Cook, and therefore go through the winter untrodden except by very rare ski-touring parties. For the ski-er who likes using skis for the purpose their inventors intended, the South Island is a paradise. There he can travel hundreds of miles almost without taking off his boards. But most ski-ers just like to ski, and they can do that fifty feet from a road almost anywhere in winter.

In short, ski-ing has not yet reached the stage where there is sufficient hardy initiative in the sport to drive it off the beaten tracks where mountaineering has gone. Perhaps from its nature there never will be more than a few ski-ers who want to cut the great acres of powder snow miles from anywhere. However many of these stalwarts there are, they can be sure of virgin fields for the next fifty years, more or less. For them the mountaineers and trampers supply the most suitable huts.