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PHILIPS FOR MUSICAL EQUIPMENT

Auckland Notebook

HOLIDAY EDUCATION

THEY don't run much to zoos in the South Island; the gorillas are all in the football clubs, the owls in university libraries, and the parrots flap between afternoon teas and women's hours on the radio. This may be freedom, but it is said to be less educative than putting the animals behind bars. My zoo education has been a blank since the age of seven, when I gained admission on payment of the usual fee to the London Zoo and a place in Capetown where a black man named Johannes appeared with snakes round his neck in cascades and pendants. I bet every tourist has seen him—up to the time of his premature but not unexpected death. So when I saw a piece in the paper about the elephant at the Wellington Zoo carrying more than 1200 people in one day during the school holidays (a new record), I began to feel I should catch up on my education by trying to gain admission to the Auckland Zoo. This vague urge led me in time to the telephone, where I found that 13,200 children had been admitted to the Zoo during the two weeks of school holidays, and 5300 had ridden on the elephant, which is available for two hours each afternoon. Comparing figures it seems likely that *elephas indicus* in Wellington works longer hours. I hope it gets time and a half and double time on Sundays. There were three loaves of bread, two brown and one white, for the Auckland elephant the day I was there: little enough extra for work so nerve racking. You couldn't stand that sort of gaff on hay alone.

One or two Aucklanders had been writing to the papers saying that a zoo is expensive and no good for the animals, and it was time the Auckland Zoo was converted into a park of culture and rest, or something. These letter writers may have been jealous South Islanders. Anyway, they don't seem to have the Auckland public behind them. My own view of the Zoo, to which I was admitted on the last Sunday of the school holidays, is not very clear cut. The spelling of the latin labels is a bit shaky, but classics aren't educative any more, and wouldn't be likely to get a better spin in a park of culture and rest. I tried to be observant and conscientious. I walked past a lot of cages and enclosures, although I didn't put up the mileage attributed to the Wellington elephant in one day's work. (Twelve miles; a new record.) I stayed a while by the cage of *dasyprocta aguti* (certified correct latin spelling here), the golden agouti, which had its forefeet resting in a small trough of water. *Zalophus californianus* and friend, two Californian sea lions, were totally immersed, swimming up and down their pool with a breath every two lengths, as persistently as Olympic competitors in training. The tuatara (*Sphenodon punctatus*) was training for a long life of stillness and contemplation.

Cougars, flamingos, peacocks and penguins offered themselves as study objects, but all the time my attention drifted off on to homo sapiens, who were present in great numbers, roaming restlessly, chattering, crying, laughing (cf. hyena), sleeping on grassy patches, indulging in love play, collecting in crowds at feeding points, quarrelling, demonstrating infinitely variable individual characteristics. The young of the species seemed to come off best, in comparison with other species present. They counted no cost, or possible damage to those who lived behind bars. The place had been built for them and they were whole hearted in enjoying it. That seemed enough of an education for one sunny spring afternoon.

Highest Point: 644ft.

THE first recorded European attempt on Mt. Eden failed, but since then the peak has gone through the familiar stages of degeneration (paraphrasing slightly): "Impossible; the most difficult climb in the alps; an easy day for a lady driving a car."

There are plaques and a stone platform on the summit, and orange peel and chocolate wrappings in the crater. The view is not the same. You can see as far, but what you see is different. The view is good, though, worth struggling up through the gears to see. Turn your car within the broad limits prescribed. It is not only perilous to go over the edge, but may land you with legal expenses. Romney stud sheep now graze the mountain, and it would be discouragingly expensive to hit one. On a fine evening I shared the summit with a Romney ewe for ten minutes. She must have come up in a hurry and could do nothing but pant and watch the sunset for a while. Then she got enough breath back to start nibbling the grass rim of the turning area. The feed is good this spring and should provide her with easy days through Christmas.

Spectacle

COMING down to Piha on the western side of the watershed is quite spectacular if you choose your day. That day is a westerly with weight in it;

(continued on next page)



"Elephants in Wellington work longer hours"

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 28, 1956.