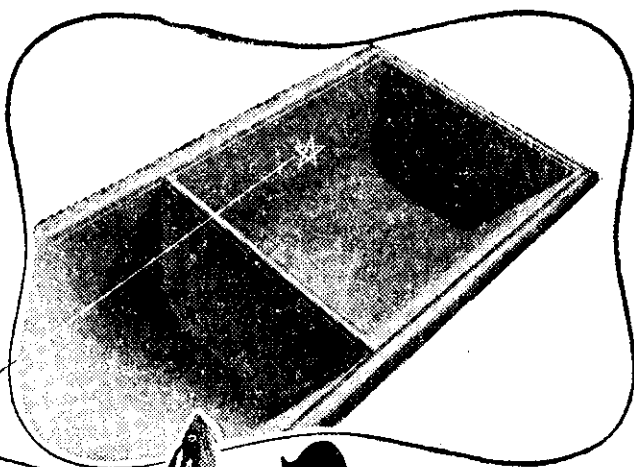


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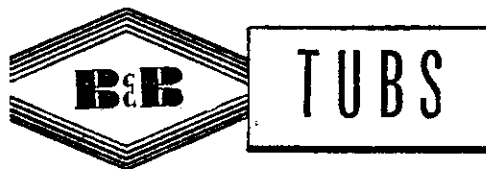
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Holiday Hazards

NOW is the time for holiday preparations. Many thousands of people are planning to go to the beaches and the mountains. If the weather is good—and the signs are encouraging—the early weeks of summer will see the usual exodus from the cities. It is an ungrateful task, at such a time, to utter warnings; but the truth must be told that we are now entering the most dangerous part of the year. Some of those now cheerfully getting ready for a good time will not come back when the holidays are over. They will be killed on the roads, lost in the mountains, drowned in the sea or in rivers and lakes; and although some may be victims of other people's carelessness, most of them will be paying with their lives for their own mistakes.

Are warnings ever heeded? It is sometimes hard to believe that they are, for in spite of all the good work done by officials and committees, whose aim it is to explain the dangers and urge the necessary precautions, the accident-rate remains high. Yet in this work there can be no relaxation: it is justified if a single life is saved. And so the effort goes on, as will be seen from the description on page 31 of a programme intended to answer the questions which should be asked by inexperienced climbers and trampers. No one can question the need for advice. The mountains take their victims every year, and 1953 has a bad record for accidents. New Zealand has many expert climbers, including two of the men who conquered Everest, but in spite of all that has been written there are still people who imagine that no skill or training is necessary before they go deeply into the ranges. Some are able to take risks and survive; they stumble through hazards, almost without knowing they are there, and wonder afterwards why there should be so much fuss about safety.

These are the lucky ones, though they will never emulate Hillary and Lowe, whose achievements rest on a long and solid apprenticeship in the hills. And it should be pointed out to casual trampers that when they go to the mountains without proper equipment, or attempt journeys beyond their strength and without knowledge of bushcraft, they are putting more than their own lives to the venture. Rescues are expensive to organise; they cause a great deal of effort and trouble, and may end with further loss of life.

Other risks are taken nearer home. Last year 120 people were drowned; in 1951 the figure was 163; and this year it is expected to be about 133. The evidence shows an astonishing variety of misadventure. People fall into rivers, are drowned while swimming alone, are swept off rocks when fishing, dive into shallow water, are thrown out of capsized dinghies, fall into harbours, are caught in treacherous currents or overwhelmed by dangerous surf. The strong swimmer, confident in his skill and stamina, is lost as well as the learner who slips out of his depth. Some accidents seem to be the result of cruel chance, and nobody is to be blamed; but again and again the records indicate carelessness, or a strange collapse of judgment. Life would be tame without an element of danger, and we can think too much about safety. All that is asked for is commonsense. It may be said that what we do with our lives is our own affair; but in practice it is nothing of the kind: the moment of folly that is fatal to one person may also be fatal to others, and at the least will bring suffering and sorrow. Reckless motorists, careless or over-confident swimmers and trampers can darken the holidays for the whole community. And at Christmas we are not looking for darkness.

N.Z. LISTENER, DECEMBER 11, 1953