

MOUNT COOK DISTRICT



A KORERO Report

IF YOU were to travel in an aeroplane from North Cape to Bluff on a clear day, the most impressive natural feature of the land you would see would probably be the central region of the Southern Alps. Here, in a compact group roughly a hundred miles due west of Christchurch and not far from the other side of the South Island, stand seventeen ice-clad mountains towering to more than 10,000 ft. This is the Mount Cook district. It has interesting post-war possibilities. With transport and accommodation problems solved, it could well become the snow-sports playground of the South Pacific. For nowhere else on this side of the Southern Hemisphere is there snow in such quantity for round-the-year ski-ing; or peaks more likely to delight the mountaineer; or alpine scenery—glaciers, icefalls, and lofty summits—more likely to charm the tourist's eye.

Certainly this is looking ahead. So is that aeroplane ride from North Cape to Bluff, these days. Just the same, an aeroplane is the thing for sight-seeing here. Fantasy should be proper for the fantastic, so let's invent ourselves a new kind of magic carpet which needs no fuel and ignores down-draughts. It will be ideal for a kea's-eye view of this incredible country.

First, we'll cruise over the lonely ocean off the coast of South Westland. From here these mountains seem to rise almost sheer from the sea. A coastal belt of

darkly forested land, seamed vertically by the gleaming ice of the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers flowing down for thousands of feet almost to sea-level; above them the great snowfields, measured by the square mile; above the snowfields the high peaks topped by the shimmering beauty of Mount Tasman (11,475 ft.) and the rugged grandeur of Mount Cook (12,349 ft.). A tremendous picture, this, twenty miles long and over two miles high. It earns a place among the scenic wonders of the world.

Now for a closer look. Turn inland, and soon the Franz Josef is beneath, to the left; the Fox, to the right. You wonder where all that ice comes from, and the answer is right ahead. Ice comes from snow, and here, above the glaciers, lie the snowfields, on a shoulder of the range at least twelve miles long and in most places not less than three miles wide. From the air this great expanse of snow looks almost flat, but in reality it reaches up in places to nearly 9,000 ft., while the lower fringes extend down to 5,000 ft. If you were a skier you would be tempted to parachute down with a pair of "sticks," for the ski-ing looks good. Plenty of undulating slopes; above all, plenty of snow—miles of it.

The high peaks are close now: Douglas on the left, Torres on the right, Tasman ahead. The Fox Snowfield pushes snow fingers high into the rock cliffs. At the top of one of these fingers lies Pioneer