

## CLIMBING IN THE NORTH ISLAND OF NEW ZEALAND.

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To the Alpinist, mention of New Zealand may conjure up visions of Mount Cook and other mighty peaks of the South Island Alps. In the North Island there are a number of ranges and isolated mountains, less majestic than the Southern Alps but nevertheless the pleasure-ground of trumper, nature lover, and winter sports enthusiast. A description of this country and of some of the writer's experiences there may be of interest to readers of this *Journal*.

In the southern part of the island are a number of ranges, roughly parallel, of altitude about 5,000 feet, and known as the Tararuas. They are easily accessible by road or rail from Wellington or Palmerston North, and in both of these cities are flourishing tramping clubs that arrange week-end and holiday excursions. One-day trips are often carried out, but the number of excellent huts scattered over the ranges make longer excursions more popular. If time is short the tramp may be restricted to one of the many peaks in the region.

One of the most favoured climbs is that of Mount Hector in the southern Tararuas. Easily reached by road from the small town of Otaki on the main railway route, Hector (5,016 feet) is one of the highest peaks and provides a magnificent panorama of mountain, valley, and plain. Near by are those jagged peaks, the Beehives, a fine sight when covered with snow, and farther south is the Dress Circle, a razorback range of semicircular shape. A brass tablet on the summit, in memory of four people who perished there, serves as a reminder to those who may take the mountains too lightly.

If two or three days are available, a traverse of the ranges may be made, starting perhaps from one of the small towns



in the Wairarapa Valley side and coming out into the Manawatu Valley; or the mountains may be entered at Woodside, near Wellington, and the journey made along the tops to the northern end of the range.

Much of the credit for the accessibility of the Tararuas is due to the early work of surveyors and settlers, but praise must also be given to private parties and club members. One lacking in knowledge of the country may easily become thoroughly lost in the bush, shut in by tall timber and hampered by undergrowth, the supplejacks that festoon the branches of trees and the lawyer vine that clings and tears. After a promising bush route to the top has been decided on, the trail must be blazed, and when this has proved its worth, it will give place to a narrow track cut through the bush. Even above the bush line, which may be reached about 3,000 feet, the good work of cutting must, at times, go on. A belt of the tough and gnarled leather-leaf scrub is often encountered at this height, and progress through this is very slow.

The ranges in this district are very rugged and separated by narrow gorges. The first part of the journey may be up a stony river bed, pleasant going as a rule, but impossible in times of heavy rain. Occasionally a track will be found some distance above the river bed, a valuable alternative in times of flood. The writer was once guilty of pitching camp in an old river bed, the water at that time following another channel. Bad weather back in the high country caused the river to break into its old course and the party was lucky to escape with a wetting and the loss of a frying-pan! Following the river journey will be an hour or two's climbing through native bush. In winter, the muddy state of the track often makes the going difficult and one may be caked with mud up to the knees.

At such a time the glimmer of light through the mist and rain, indicating the nearness of a warm hut, is very welcome. The huts are simply but strongly built of wood and iron, and fitted with tanks for holding rain-water. Those below the bush line contain a supply of dry firewood, and the Kime Hut, at the top of Mount Hector, is fitted with oil



stoves. Food supplies will also be found in many of the huts.

From here on the bush will be much more open and the trees dwarfed. A scramble through the leather-leaf, a steep climb through the tussock or wiry native grass, and then the magnificent panorama of the bare wind-swept tops, peak after peak outlined sharply on the sky-line—or, more probably, as in the Cairngorms, mist enveloping everything and visibility limited to one's neighbour!

The tops in the Tararuas are very sharp and steep and, except for the wind, very unlike the "windy acres" that one finds in the Cairngorms. From photographs I have seen of the Cuillins, they seem to bear some resemblance to those peaks. The distinctive appearance of individual peaks should now keep the tramper going right and, in case of heavy mist, small cairns and wooden stakes will help him out. They do not, however, entirely supersede the use of map and compass.

The equipment carried varies greatly, but for the journey shorts are most popular, being the best garb for wading rivers, climbing muddy tracks, and clambering over fallen trees. Generally speaking, winter conditions are not so cold in the Tararuas as in the Cairngorms, so shorts may be worn even in winter. A change of warmer clothing and a sleeping bag or blanket are usually carried. Mention may be made of that stranger to the hills, certainly no tender-foot, who arrived for an excursion wearing town shoes and carrying an attaché case. The whole journey to Mount Hector and back was carried out in bare feet and rounded off by a 5-mile walk along a metalled road.

Most of our tramping was done in a party of three, an ideal number, as the odd man can usually settle arguments on the choice of routes and such matters. Our most enjoyable excursion lasted seven days. The keeping of bread in good condition was a problem of great importance and, on the advice of our Russian member, we toasted slices of bread in the oven. Decrease in weight and longer keeping powers are two great advantages, but the bread rapidly disintegrates and is hard on the gums.



TOKO (5,006 FEET), IN THE RUAHINE RANGES

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The first three days were spent crossing the ranges from the town of Eketahuna in the Wairarapa Valley to Levin in the Manawatu. The valley of the Mangatainoka was followed the first day, and easy going saw us having lunch in the tussock on Mount Ruapai. By dusk, rain and mist had started to fall, so it was decided to make camp on a fairly level swampy area some distance below the main ridge. After a search, enough small boulders were found to prevent the tent from blowing away. In the morning the mist and rain were still with us and dressing had to be carried out in turn inside the small tent. Outside the prospects were far from bright, and one felt like sneaking back to the comparatively comfortable tent. By ten we were on the tops and the mist kept us there a little longer than usual, owing to a tendency to slip along spurs instead of keeping to the main ridge. Compass and cairns finally led us to Mount Dundas (4,944 feet), where a very cold lunch was eaten. Camp was pitched that night in a small clearing at Avalanche Flat on the upper Mangahao River, and a roaring fire of dry wood was a welcome change from mist and wind. Next day five hours were spent climbing over heavily wooded Deception Ridge and down the Ohau River to the town of Levin.

After re-provisioning, the long road and the bush track were taken to the Waiopehu Hut. During the recent big storm in New Zealand a party of trampers had a trying experience in this district. Trees uprooted by the hurricane were falling all round them and the track was completely wiped out. One of the party collapsed and died. No hut was to be found at Waiopehu, only the four piles and the chimney—400 feet away.

For the next four days of our trip the ranges smiled. Crawford (4,795 feet) in the southern Tararuas was climbed and an hour spent there examining the mountain flowers. Descent was made by a very steep ridge through dense bush to the fork of the Park and Waiohineiti Rivers. Next day the tortuous course of the Waiohineiti was followed. At 3,100 feet the bush gave place to scrub and tussock, and here the river is peculiar for a North Island river in that it shows resemblance to the glaciated valleys of the South

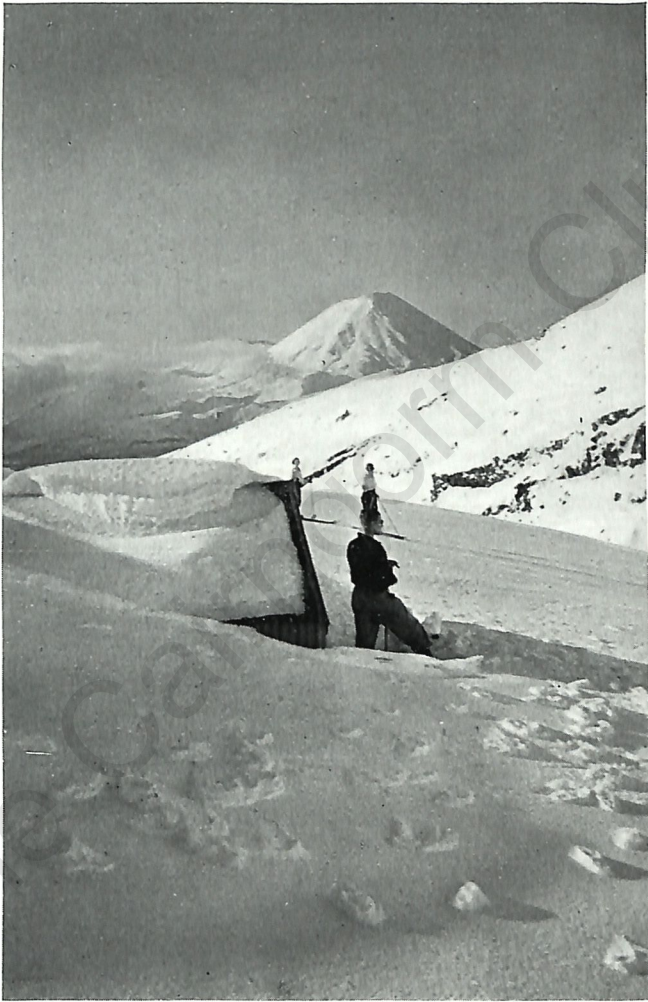


Island. The next ninety minutes were occupied with the 1,300-foot climb on to Mount Lancaster, crudely described in the Club records as steep. Another magnificent view rewarded us, peak after peak shimmering in the hot afternoon sun. Signs of coming bad weather made us anxious to reach the shelter of the bush, so a rapid crossing was made of the peaks Arête (4,935 feet) and Dora (4,685 feet). Camp was pitched below Dora at 2,980 feet, and next day an easy bush and river walk saw us back in Levin.

Many interesting climbs can be made in the National Park, a volcanic region in the centre of the island, with the three mountains, Ruapehu, Tongariro, and Ngauruhoe. The Château Tongariro, a large modern accommodation house run by the Government, is conveniently situated near the foot of Ruapehu. Short trips may be made through the beech forest to the silica springs and up the Tawhainui stream, its bed yellowed with sulphur deposits. The Tama Lakes situated at an altitude of 4,240 feet on the divide between Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe are easily reached. Nearer the larger Tama is a great gorge which is of interest to the rock climber. A short walk from the Château brings one to Scoria Flat, in winter the principal ski-ing ground. Another hour and one is at the Pinnacle Ridge, where good rock climbing may be had. It may be of interest to note that the purple heather has been planted in certain areas of the Park.

Ruapehu (9,175 feet) can be climbed in a day and the ascent is not difficult. The usual route is across Scoria Flat and up the Whakapapa Glacier. From the top a splendid view of the surrounding country may be obtained. A little below the summit is the unique Crater Lake, milky blue in colour and 20 acres in area. The warm water of the lake is gradually cooling. Surrounding the lake are ice cliffs, where careful going has to be made because of the numerous crevasses. The Maori word *ruapehu* means "a resounding hollow."

On one occasion, when we were enjoying the view from the summit, a blizzard came upon us, and within two minutes the scene was blotted out. On the journey back, a nice judgment had to be used to avoid slipping into the lake on



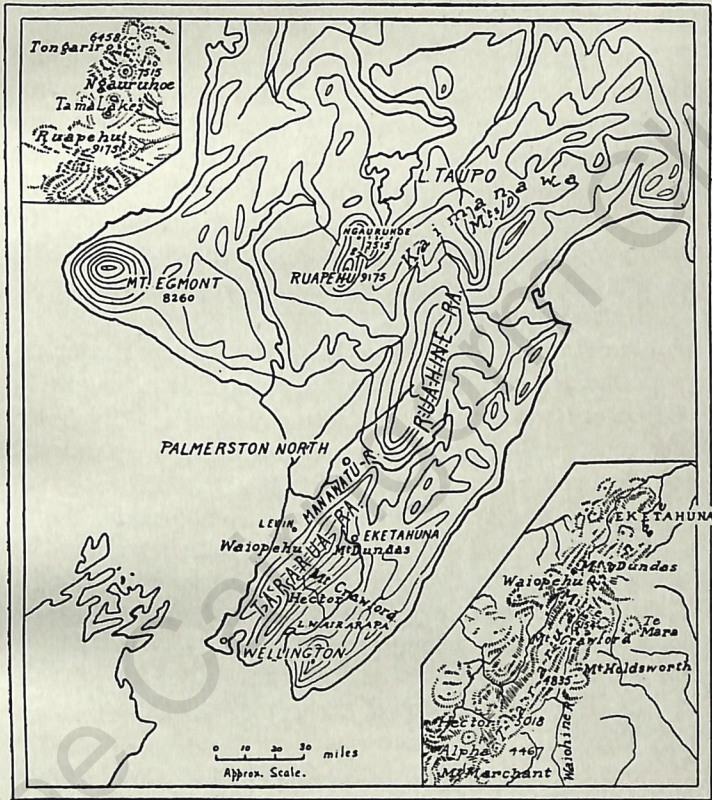
NGAURUHOE FROM RUAPEHU

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the one side or sliding off down the steep mountain side on the other.

Tongariro (6,458 feet) requires a full day to explore its interesting craters and lakes. On the side of the mountain,



SKETCH MAP OF NORTH ISLAND ALPS

in the Ketetahi Valley, can be seen the thermal wonders of boiling water, boiling mud, and powerful steam vents. Colour is added to the wilderness of rock on the top of the mountain by the beautiful blue and green lakes and the gently steaming Red Crater. After a tiring climb, a refreshing warm bath may be had in one of the naturally formed soda pools.



Ngauruhoe (7,715 feet), New Zealand's active volcano, provides good climbing, but the steepness and loose surface make progress somewhat slow. When the volcano is quiet, an interesting time may be had exploring inside the crater, but at times climbers have been known to rush hurriedly down the mountain side, pursued by hot boulders!

There is a Maori legend dealing with these mountains. Ruapehu was a woman married to the great chief, Taranaki. On his return from a hunting trip, Taranaki came upon Tongariro making love to his wife. In his fury, Taranaki turned the lovers into mountains and then marched away until he reached the western sea. Here his magic recoiled on himself, and he also became a mountain—Egmont. And from afar off the jealous Egmont still watches the lovers, Ruapehu and Tongariro.

Mount Egmont (8,260 feet), with its perpetual snow cap and its nearness to the sea, was the point always sought for by Kingsford Smith on his flights from Australia. This is one of the most perfect volcanic cones and always arouses the admiration of Japanese visitors, with thoughts of Fuji-yama. Good accommodation is provided at the Mountain House, and a comfortable hut will also be found on the small parasite cone half-way up the mountain. The climb is steep but not difficult. Unfortunately, Egmont is nearly always cloud-capped, and patience is required to obtain a view from the summit.

I take this opportunity of recording my thanks to Mr H. D. Welsh for having introduced me to the Cairngorms, and to other members of the Club for their many kindnesses. My only regret is that, so far, Lochnagar has repelled all my friendly advances.





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GIRDLESTONE, IN THE NATIONAL PARK