

The Mountains of New Zealand

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LITTLE more than a fortnight's voyage from San Francisco lies New Zealand with its English-speaking population and glorious Southern Alps, a veritable Mecca for the mountaineer with as good and perhaps even more difficult ice and snow climbing than in the European Alps. The highest mountain, Mt. Cook, rises only to a height of 12,349 ft., but the snow line is much lower than in Europe, while the hotels and huts are at a proportionately lower altitude.

From the high peaks of the main divide which lies near the West Coast the ocean can be seen on either side of the South Island; the great glaciers to the west with their network of crevasses and gleaming seracs coming down almost to sea level through impenetrable bush, the silence of which is only broken by the musical cry of the bell bird and tui and the murmur of stream and waterfall.

High above the other peaks tower Mt. Cook (Aorangi, the Cloud Piercer) and Tasman with their fearsome ice ridges, and a dazzling array of lower mountains stretching away to the north and south; a gleaming chain of snow, rock and ice with the great Tasman glacier winding down gradually to the east for eighteen miles from the foot of Elie de Beaumont to the Mackenzie Plains.

One great advantage in New Zealand is that most of the best climbing is within a small area. The hospitable Hermitage, the premier and oldest mountain resort in the country, is the main climbing center on the eastern side of the range, and there are two comfortable hotels on the West Coast: the Glacier Hotel kept by the two famous pioneer guides, the Graham brothers, at the Franz Josef glacier, and the nice little hostel at Weheka at the foot of the Fox glacier.

These hotels, each of which has an efficient guiding staff, are in control of the numerous excellent huts, the latest addition to which is the new bivouac hut (8,000 ft.) on Pioneer Ridge at the head of the Fox glacier, the highest building in New Zealand.

The huts are well equipped and provisioned so that many of the great peaks such as Mts. Cook, Tasman, Sefton, Malte Brun,

Elie de Beaumont, Douglas and Hardinger can be climbed from a comfortable base.

New Zealand has reason to be extremely proud of her mountain guides. They have all the traditional kindness, unselfishness and courage of the old pioneer guides and early climbers allied to a very good knowledge of their own mountains and the weather conditions in the Southern Alps.

The weather is, alas, not always good in this wild mountain region but then one has to remember that these magnificent snow and ice peaks which are so lovely as to almost outrival those of Switzerland would surely cease to exist as such if it were not for the fierce storms which sweep over them from time to time.

There are other attractive ranges to be visited with more difficulty in the southern part of the island with many unclimbed peaks and two specially beautiful mountains to be ascended in the Wanaka and Sounds districts: Mt. Aspiring and Mt. Tutoko.

Mt. Earnshaw, too, near Paradise at the head of Lake Wakatipu is a lovely mountain and the surrounding country with its beech woods, lakes and snow-capped peaks is most beautiful.

The New Zealand Alpine Club which is in control of the De la Beche Hut halfway up the Tasman Glacier will do anything in its power to help overseas climbers as will all the mountain people, so that one feels oneself a really welcome guest.

The white loveliness of the wild flowers in these mountains forms an especially appropriate foreground to the ethereal beauty of the Southern Alps: lilies, gentians, edelweiss and many other fragile mountain blooms grow in profusion on the open slopes below the snow line.

Chamois and Tahr, whose ancestors were brought from Austria and India many years ago, roam the hillsides, and high over the glaciers and lower ranges fly the grey-green keas, those mountain parrots with their flame-colored under-wings and cruel beaks who hover and hop around the huts, amusing us at first with their quaint and friendly ways, but sometimes becoming exasperating when they try to run off with clothing and other belongings.

Their shrill cries of "Kea, Kea" as they slide down the corrugated iron roof are not very conducive to sleep after a long

day's climbing. But they belong to the mountains and one would not be without them.

Mt. Rolleston which can be ascended from Arthur's Pass is a good climb and there are several other nice mountain districts in the northern part of the South Island as well as the lovely and interesting volcanic peaks of the North Island: Mt. Egmont which can be ascended from one of the mountain houses near New Plymouth and Kuapehu and Ngauruhoe from the fine Chateau Hotel at Tongauro National Park.

The season goes by so quickly though that the time soon comes to sail for home once more. One feels loath then to leave the excellent climbing and sorry to say good-bye to the kind New Zealand people who make one feel so at home amongst them that one longs to return times without number to their beautiful country.