ACCIDENTS IN AMERICAN MOUNTAINEERING
EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SAFETY COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN ALPINE CLUB
1955

This, the eighth annual report, deals with the accidents that occurred in 1954. In addition two accidents that occurred in 1953 are reported which had not been previously reported to the committee. The statistics for 1953 have therefore been corrected to include these two accidents.

The total number of reported accidents and the number of deaths for the past eight years are recorded in Table I. The total number of accidents reported in 1954 was high. This was due to a more complete reporting of many minor accidents largely by the persons involved. There probably were many others that were not reported. The number of deaths, however, was relatively low. It should be re-emphasized that these values in general are small and the amount of variation seen from year to year could be expected on the basis of chance.

The response to the questionnaires regarding the man mountain days was insufficient last year. This year the questionnaires were recirculated and a somewhat better response was obtained. In 1953 twelve clubs responded, representing 4,244 climbers, and gave an estimated 16,000 man mountain days. In 1954, fourteen clubs responded, about one-half of the clubs contacted each year; they represented a total of 3,224 climbers and 21,440 man mountain days. The proportional representation of the various age groups showed approximately the same distribution in the two years despite some difference in the clubs reporting. In order to obtain an estimate of the hazard of mountaineering, the data for 1953 and 1954 were pooled. The average number of reported man mountain days per year was calculated. These man mountain days were then apportioned to the various age groups on the basis of the reported percentage distribution of each age group. A similar procedure was done to obtain an average of the reported accidents and the deaths for 1947-1955 for each age group. This made it possible to calculate an accident and mortality rate as presented in Table II. Admittedly these are only rough estimates. It should be pointed out that the number of man mountain days is probably too low since it represents only the reported values and may represent only about one-half of the total number of man mountain days. If this were so, the accident and mortality rates could be one-half those reported. This also presumes that most of the accidents have been reported which also may not be true. The mortality figures are more valid since probably few of the fatal accidents are missed.

The accident rate as reported here is lower than that reported for skiing in the Southern Rocky Ski News where accident rates were published for some of the Colorado skiing areas. These rates varied from 10.3 to 3.8 accidents per 1,000 ski man days. Many of these accidents were of a minor nature and perhaps this is not quite a fair comparison. No mortality figures were available for comparison.