

## NOT SO OLD

By Helen Stewart.

At what age would members consider was time to give up climbing? Thirty? Forty? Well you're wrong, because Jack and I are still climbing at the age of 65 and nearly 60 respectively.

Recently (such a comforting word for a reporter) we completed a two month trek in the South Island which I feel would extend trappers and climbers half our age. How does this sound? A get fit week if you please, at Arthurs Pass. Anyone knowing this area will remember that there are not many tramps on the flat. We knocked off Mts. Avalanche and Aikin here among other things. Then off to the West Coast glaciers where we tramped and climbed the whole darn 7,500 feet of the Copland Pass. The rata that year was the best for twelve years, as Kit Wilson will verify. Our guide, Mike Browne (now in Peru) who met us at Douglas Hut, was as proud as punch with the combined age of his party - about 200 years. The climb was a honey, steep moraine and scree, lovely slabby rocks, a little ice then the breathtaking view of Mt. Cook across the Hooker Valley at the top, which was worth the rather sticky bit down 400 feet of ice and the night in the Copland bivvy with only dried pineapple and apricots for dinner, and a mouthful of water each, and with the wind gusting at 100 mph, threatening to hurl us into the Hooker Valley. We had to rope up in the hut in the morning, the wind was so bad.

The weather improving, a transalpine flight in a Piper Cub to meet up with Mike again for a flight to the Franz neve and a 15 mile crampon trek in and out of crevasses to Pioneer Hut, over the Newton Pass on the Fox neve - and I mean 'in' because several times I fell into a slot - most undignified, especially when upside down and being told to scramble out myself. Jack was his usual imperturbable self, and the admiration of the guides as he knew nearly as much of the areas they did. He's just as dependable as ever on a rope, too, so between him and Mike I felt safe as houses - well, almost. This was a long and tiring day, but oh! the view from that hut. The weather was perfect right through and words just can't describe the beauty up there.

I suppose one should not introduce indelicate subjects in a magazine, but really the toilet arrangements at some of the mountain huts have only to be seen to be believed. The privy at Pioneer (which we shared with the Blackwatch) is on a rock of its own - with a drop of some 400 feet and a jump of about 1½ feet to the step. With a railing of number 8 wire and iced up along the track at night, it was no wonder Mike told us to take our ice-axes when paying a visit!

All the 'big boys' were in our backyard, so to speak - Tasman, Ledenfeld, Haast, Haidinger, etc., but alas, no longer for us I must admit, far too long a slog for the old frames. Just being among them was wonderful. Two days saw us down the Fox Glacier, travelling en route through small icefalls and viewing large ones with awe, as we saw 200 feet seracs soar above our heads - and plunge to icy depths. The first night we stopped at Chancellor Hut snugly situated in its alpine meadow. At the terminal face of the glacier, I suffered the humiliation of being let down a 70 foot cliff like a sack of spuds. The next day I rested, but not Jack and Mike. They had to go to the Franz to find a way up to Defiance Hut - and had a grand time without their encumbrance!

There followed some rather easier stuff: the Milford Track, Routeburn Track, and Lower Hollyford Trail - bang, bang, bang, but after our alpine adventures, rather in the nature of a rest. All these tracks are well worth doing, wether as tourists or freedom walkers. All have different scenery. We had the thrill of having the oldest person ever to walk the Milford Track in our party - Mr. Alex Adam of Invercargill - 90 years and five months and a real trumper of the old school.