

MILFORD TRACK.

This tourist track continues to maintain its large number of visitors and to gain in popularity. The number of visitors during the past season has been greater than ever before; and, in spite of a disastrous fire which destroyed Glade House, the management and staff were able to maintain a thoroughly efficient service. Unfortunately, some of the machinery to be used in the wireless service up the lake was destroyed in the fire, and that improvement has had to stand over. The contractors will have it in operation by next season. The Department has received many letters of thanks for, and congratulations on, the excellence of its service. Among these are communications from the Otago Expansion League, whose president (Mr. Todd) did the trip for the first time; Hon. John Cecil and his wife, who called personally to express their appreciation of the outing; a party from the Otago Tramping Club; and a great many others.

The following from the report of the Milford manager is of interest:—

"I arrived at Milford Hostel on the 10th December, 1928. Since that date we have accommodated 581 guests for various periods. The new Hostel has been much appreciated by the tourists and tramping clubs. Thirty climbers arrived from Elfin Bay via Graves Talbot Pass and returned to Queenstown by the same route during the season. The R.M.S. "Manuka" called here four times, embarking and disembarking passengers on three of the trips. The s.s. "Kotare" made nine trips from the Bluff to Milford, returning via the Sounds, each trip embarking a number of tourists for this round trip. Another trip which was well patronized on this route was to go per "Kotare" to Doubtful and Smith Sound, thence via Lake Manapouri. This, I consider, will become a very popular trip in the future. Trips to Anita Bay have been well patronized; also special trips on moonlight nights. Quite a number of tourists have made excursions up the Cleddau Valley to the junction of the Tutoko and Cleddau Rivers. They have all been impressed with the grandeur of this trip. The general expressed intention of the tourists is to return and spend at least a week at Milford Sounds."

The Dunedin Manager in his report mentions:—

"During the off season members of the staff visited various resorts to personally acquaint themselves with the resorts in question. All the local resorts have been well patronized—Queenstown, Mount Cook, Pembroke, Milford Track—drawing a full quota of visitors. A party from the Otago Tramping Club was organized for the Milford trip. The party consisted of twenty-seven persons, and the trip was highly successful; in fact, the question is being mooted of another party for the coming season. The hostel at Milford Sound has proved very popular with all track visitors, and all the services on the track are running smoothly and efficiently. No complaints of any serious nature have been received in connection with the track. The inauguration of a steamer service to Milford has filled a long-felt want, and, with improved steamer facilities, will soon be one of the most popular trips in the South Island. For variety of scenery with the combination of lakes, rivers, waterfalls, mountains, forest, and native-bird life, the round trip by the overland walk across the Te Anau-Milford Track and returning by steamer through the West Coast Sounds is unsurpassed anywhere. The Manapouri-Doubtful Sound Track has attracted an increased number of visitors. The prospects for the coming season with a more regular steamer service from Melbourne to Bluff and Dunedin are very bright, and the South Island resorts will certainly benefit accordingly."

This traffic will surely grow every year, and under good management there will be a large tourist business at Milford, which is a justification for the enterprise of the Government in erecting Milford House and for the development of the steamer service from the Bluff. This should be fostered and encouraged in every possible way. Better steamers will mean better business.

The Track Manager, Mr. Cheriton, reports on the track generally that the keepers of the Pompolona and Quintin Huts have carried out their duties to his satisfaction, while the track staff have done excellent work, having re-formed seventeen miles of track, apart from bridges, fillings, culverts, &c. The telephone-line has been kept in good order.

OVERSEAS AGENCIES.

The following reports have been received from the Chief Australian Agencies:—

Mr. H. J. Manson (Melbourne Agent) in his report states:—

"I have the honour to submit herewith my annual report for the year ended 31st March, 1929. It is gratifying to be able to report that the year's work just completed has been satisfactory in all respects, the varied nature of which, though onerous at times, has nevertheless been interesting. The publicity campaign committed to our care has loomed large in our activities, and evidence is not wanting to show that the appropriation allowed for the purpose has been economically and judiciously expended. The results up to date have been most encouraging, and are only an earnest of what is possible of accomplishment in the future.

"It is difficult to estimate the full cash value of propaganda work of this kind and its far reaching effects, but the definite and direct returns in our actual bookings speak for themselves. In this connection I am glad to report a substantial increase over last year's figures. They are as follows: Year ended 31st March, 1929, £5,447 8s. 8d.; 1928, £3,377 3s. 9d.: showing an increase of £2,070 4s. 11d. (or 60 per cent.), which must be regarded as satisfactory when the limited shipping facilities at this end are taken into account. Given a more up-to-date and more frequent steamer service between Melbourne and the southern portion of the Dominion a still further improvement in our bookings can confidently be looked for. It is pleasing to note that steps are at present being taken by the Government to bring about this much-desired and long-looked-for improvement. Any success achieved in this direction will be most welcome so far as the travelling public is concerned