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THE MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION OF 1922

*Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society and the Alpine Club,
16 October 1922. Map follows p. 452.*

I. DARJEELING TO THE RONGBUK GLACIER BASE CAMP

Brig.-General the Hon. C. G. Bruce, C.B., Chief of the Expedition

ABOUT the beginning of the last week in March the whole of the members of the Mount Everest Expedition collected at Darjeeling. Previous to this the Staff of the Expedition had been in Darjeeling for nearly a month to make all the necessary arrangements, select the porters, and to receive from Calcutta the large amount of supplies which had been previously forwarded from England. On our arrival we found that our agent, Mr. Weatherall, had carried out the directions which we had previously sent him in the most efficient possible manner. Not only had he our large stocks of local supplies, grain, etc., all ready for transport and beautifully packed, but he had collected from the surrounding district at least 150 Bhotias and Sherpas from whom we could select our porters. He had also a large selection of cooks ready for us to choose from. All stores, as they were received in Calcutta, were forwarded by the Army and Navy Stores direct to Kalimpong Road, where they were received by one of our transport officers, Captain Morris, handed over to the contractors who had undertaken the transport of the Expedition, and forwarded by them with the greatest possible speed to Phari Dzong. Naturally this took a good deal of arranging, as the stores arrived in no less than four different consignments, the last consignment of all, the oxygen cylinders, actually arriving in Calcutta on or about the date that the Expedition left Darjeeling. Luckily, owing to the first-rate arrangements made for all the clearing and forwarding of our stores, there was no delay on the arrival of the ship in getting the oxygen to Kalimpong Road.

Although we had a great deal of work to do in Darjeeling itself, it was really most interesting. The selection of coolies alone was of great interest. We chose seventy-five of the best men we could find; they were put into the hospital for three days to be under the observation of the civil surgeon; the pick of them were re-selected on his report. We also had to select an interpreter, and we found a most excellent youth in

the person of Karma Paul, a Christian Tibetan. He was a lad who had done no work for Government previous to our engagement, and was rather a simple person filled with a quaint little vanity of his own. His one idea in coming with the Expedition, beyond the fact that he wished to travel in Tibet, was to get a good report from it with a view to permanent employment afterwards. He was very light-hearted in his outlook. When he was Karma he was a Buddhist, and received blessings from every Lama he could get near to. When he was Paul he was a Christian. Otherwise he did very well for us, and never lost his keenness right to the very end of the expedition. There was also the sardar who was employed by last year's Expedition. On this occasion he played up and did very well right through the expedition. However, a great number of his duties as sardar were unnecessary, as they were much more easily carried out by the officers of the Expedition themselves. He went as general utility man to a large extent, but was also in charge as sardar of Col. Strutt's party when they returned post-haste from Rongbuk to Darjeeling in June, and on that occasion he received a first-rate report, both from Col. Strutt and Dr. Longstaff. By this it must not be thought that he was a saint. Among his many backslidings he committed two sins of the first class ; for one of which there was some excuse, for the second of which there was absolutely none. The first crime consisted in his having poisoned a well-known Lama at the head of the Dud Kosi. The second—an entirely unforgivable crime—was that he lost my ice-axe within four days of leaving Darjeeling.

Among the other followers of the Expedition were the cooks, a most important part. Having fixed on the men we thought were the most likely, my cousin and I took them out into the mountains and tested them as well as we could. I do not think there was any complaint whatever by any member of the expedition of the behaviour of the cooks, as will be seen later on, nor, under the conditions, of the quality of the food they gave us to eat ; in fact, they were quite a feature.

We also provided ourselves with a cobbler ; this cobbler has, I think, probably the distinction of being the absolutely thickest-headed person that I have ever met during the whole of my service in India. He did very well considering, his only complaint being towards the end that if he had known what was in front of him he would never have come. We had also a most excellent servant of the expedition called Chongay, whose first duty was the charge of the tents and stores. He did excellent service, and was ready to turn his hand to anything. A Lepcha plant collector was added to our personnel, and I must not forget to say that, owing to the kindness of the Commander-in-Chief in India, Lord Rawlinson, we had four young non-commissioned officers of the 2/6th Gurkhas attached to the expedition.

Before leaving Darjeeling we received a permit from the Dalai Lama authorizing us to travel in Tibet, and directing all his officers to give us

every possible assistance. As the permit mentions Mount Everest by name, I think now is the time to again refer to the name of the mountain. If you will look at the permit you will see that it is quite clearly called Chha-ma-lung-mo. Working this out I found that the Sherpas from the southern face of the Himalaya call the mountain by the name which I had got for it in 1909—Chho-mo-lung-mo, “the abode of the goddess”—which was confirmed afterwards by Dr. Kellas, and later by last year’s Expedition; whereas on the north it is known by the name by which it is called in the Dalai Lama’s permit. Chha-ma-lung-mo has been translated to me by Mr. Macdonald, the Trade Agent at Yatung, in two ways: first, as “the place of the female eagle,” and secondly, as “the place where it is so high that even a bird goes blind when he gets there.” I think we can take it that both names—with the small but important difference in the vowels—are in ordinary use.

Before we left Darjeeling, by invitation of the Buddhist Association and the Hillmen Association, all the members of the Expedition, including every one down to the cobbler, were entertained by these two Associations, and there, after much speech-making, we all received the blessing of the local Lamas and Brahmins. This gave the porters a particularly good send-off, and it is possible that their wonderful behaviour owed something to this stimulation. The Gurkha N.C.O.’s were doubly fortified, as they took blessings from both the Lamas and Brahmins, as also did the European members of the party.

A great gratification was a most kind telegram received from His Holiness the Pope just as the expedition was leaving Darjeeling; in fact, I think it arrived the actual day we took train. The telegram was as follows: “May God who lives in the heights bless the expedition.”

By the kindness of the Himalayan Railway, the remaining heavy baggage and members of the party were moved round from Darjeeling to Kalimpong Road free. We all went round the Teesta valley in the normal manner, with the exception of Captain Noel, who elected to ride on the roof of the train with his cinema-camera and take records of that wonderful place. The valley could not really do itself justice, as we had had no less than a full month of fine weather, and the hot-weather haze rather obscured and belittled the scenery, besides tending to dry up the gorgeous tropical vegetation and jungle.

From Kalimpong the party broke into two for our journey to Phari Dzong in Tibet. On the whole we had a very comfortable march indeed through Sikkim and over the Jelep La to Chumbi, though we ran into rather rough weather from Gnatong for a march and a half over the pass. We also made acquaintance with the wonderful Chumbi mule transport. These mule-men work regularly seven months in the year carrying wool from Tibet down to Kalimpong, and they thoroughly understand the art of loading and travelling the mules. Not only that, but they march at the most astounding pace. The continual hard labour, I am afraid,

rather makes sore backs, but this is also largely due to the enormous and continual ascents and descents between a very cold climate and a very warm one.

The march through Sikkim in fine weather is, at any rate, a wonderful experience. After the very deep tropical valleys, it is very strange to emerge at Gnatong into what one might almost describe as uplands, from which more or less minor peaks rise, the whole country giving one quite an impression of the Scottish highlands in spring, both from the colouring and from the amount of snow on the mountains themselves. In the Western Himalaya snow lies many feet deep right into May down to a height of 11,000 feet, or even below, but here at the end of March we were troubled in no way by deep snow, and many of the peaks up to 15,000 feet appeared to be almost clear of winter snow. Most of the great amount of moisture deposited on these ranges falls during the summer months, the winter months being comparatively dry.

The descent into Chumbi, as it always is, was very striking. One leaves Sikkim behind and enters a valley which reminds one much more of the west than of the east. At Chumbi itself we were entertained by the Trade Agent, Mr. Macdonald, who accompanied us afterwards up to Phari Dzong. The road from Chumbi to Phari Dzong is again rather different in type, but quite beautiful in its way, and as wild as it is possible to make a forested gorge. It is very striking, emerging from the black and forested gorge of the Ammo Chu (the Chumbi river) on to the bare plateaux of Tibet.

When we were crossing the Jelep La we got a first-rate view of Chomolhari, which is 23,800 feet high, and stands right over the fort of Phari Dzong. It shot up into the air, doing full justice to its real height, and looked enormous. I collected the members of the Expedition who were with me, and I said, in order to encourage them, pointing to the top of Chomolhari: "Your advanced base camp will be very nearly as high as the top of that mountain over there." This seemed to amuse them very much, especially as there were great streamers of snow blowing off the summit.

On arrival in Phari we found all our stores collected, and also the whole of our tents pitched and mended by our excellent tindel Chongay, who had gone on before. The chief business we had to do at Phari was making our first contract for moving our enormous collection of stores by the local transport. Early in the year all Tibetan animals are in very poor condition, and it was apparent that this must be so. Everything was frozen up and dried, and it is a wonder how the animals themselves manage to keep alive at all on the amount of grass to be seen on the hill-side. However, we finally arranged to move from Phari in two days, but we were also obliged to take with us 50 of the Chumbi mules to complete the transport required. Ultimately our transport consisted of some 320 mules, yaks, cows, and donkeys, eked out with 15 or 20 coolies.

In order to save time we had determined to go by the short cut to Kampa Dzong, and contracted with the Dzongpens to get there in four days with 100 animals, 50 of whom were the Chumbi mules, and it was the greatest possible luck for us that we were able to take these same 50 mules. Two hundred yaks were to arrive in Kampa Dzong in six days, and we arranged for them to march with the sardar Gyaljen and two of the Gurhka non-commissioned officers, Hurke Gurung and Lal Sing Gurung, the other two N.C.O.'s being in charge of the treasure chests and marching with the advance party.

We all now collected in Phari with the exception of Mr. Crawford and Captain Finch, who remained behind at Kalimpong to bring on the oxygen. We left Phari on the morning of April 8 in bad weather, which very rapidly degenerated, until the wind was blowing half a hurricane and it was snowing very heavily. After a most unpleasant march of 16 to 17 miles we managed to make a camp, and it was here that we found the great advantage of having kept 50 of our Chumbi mules. The rest of the animals with the advance party drifted in up to ten o'clock at night. The camp was deep in snow, and the cold was rather severe. This was not exactly an encouraging entry to Tibetan travel.

The following day was a really magnificent march, but exceedingly trying. The wind was very high, but the weather perfect in other ways. The road led us over three great ridges, all being part of a great northerly ridge running from the northern slopes of Pawhunri, all these ridges being 17,000 feet above the sea, more or less. It was an exceedingly cold march, and very trying to men and animals. We finally camped under some small cliffs at a place called Hung Zung Tak; animals not arriving again many of them until ten o'clock at night, but the position was saved by our 50 Chumbi mules. We waited the next day, as the animals were completely tired out. This was partly due to the fact that owing to the snow at the last camp there had been a minimum amount of grazing and rest for the animals. The men, too, required cooked food, as no fuel of any kind was available at the previous camp. It was a good test of the stamina of the porters, none of whom suffered, although three on the second march who had stayed behind were benighted and stayed out all night just as they were, without bedding, being retrieved the following day perfectly happy. The running stream by our camp was frozen absolutely solid during the night.

On April 11 we marched to Kampa Dzong, leaving the nunnery of Tatsang on our right, and on our way passing through a great quantity of game. At Kampa Dzong we halted three days owing to difficulty in collecting such an immense mass of transport, and we were joined by Captain Finch and Mr. Crawford, who had had a very rough time crossing the Jelep. The blizzard which caught us on our visit to Phari had caught them on the Jelep, and so heavy had been the snow that it had lain 6 inches deep at Yatung and Chumbi, which are only 9800 feet above the sea.

Every member of the Expedition was provided with a riding-pony, as it was found that continuous walking without rest on these heights was likely not to improve the condition but to exhaust, whereas a mixture of riding and walking would gradually acclimatize and bring them into training. We were most particular also to see that all our porters were well clad and warm at night and well fed, and whenever possible we added to their ration allowance by buying them meat and any other local comforts that could be found.

From Kampa Dzong our road led us *viâ* the fort of Tinki to Shekar Dzong, and this, being over the same country as was travelled last year, requires no particular description. Shekar Dzong is most wonderfully situated and very striking as one approaches it. Shekar, I believe, means "shining glass," and from the white exterior of the forts and town situated on the brown slopes of the mountain it is a very suitable name. At Shekar we found an enormous number of lamas, and I think that the priests were even dirtier, if possible, than at Phari Dzong. If you happen to smack a young lama friendly on the back, say, a flake of dirt falls off. They are perfectly astonishing in their dirt. This, however, does not apply to the Dzongpens or others of position, for in this part of Tibet the Dzongpens wash on New Year's night, and I think—I think—their wives do also.

From Shekar our road led across the Arun *viâ* the Pangla La down into the valley of the Dzakar Chu, thence following that valley up to the Rongbuk monastery in the Rongbuk valley.

Our last march up the Dzakar Chu into the Rongbuk valley was exceedingly interesting. The valley itself is deadly bare and barren, and the mountains are great horrible humps with nothing on them. One suddenly arrives where the valley opens on to the Rongbuk monastery. It is wonderfully new and clean for a Tibetan monastery, and even its lamas in this respect take after the monastery. The Head Lama of Rongbuk was a very interesting character. He is of extreme sanctity, and pilgrimages are made to his monastery; and further, the Dalai Lama visits the Rongbuk monastery yearly by proxy. The Lama of Rongbuk has the distinction of being an incarnation, not of Buddha, but of a god, the God Chongraysay, who owns no fewer than nine faces, and this particular lama himself is reputed to be able to change his face as he likes. He received us extremely well, and was a most striking and interesting old gentleman with perfect manners and perfect courtesy—far the finest type that we had yet struck. Of course there was the usual Tibetan tea. This is most appalling, having butter, generally rancid, salt, and other ingredients added, and the whole churned up before being served.

There is a local belief—or possibly even more than local, as we found it in the Chumbi valley equally—that many years ago during a previous incarnation this lama was challenged by a Pembo lama, who was also a magician, to race to the top of Mount Everest; the lama having agreed, the Pembo lama jumped on his magic drum and, beating it for all he was

worth, started off on the drum to the top of the mountain. After the Pembo lama had nearly reached the top the followers of the Rongbuk lama suggested his starting. Just then the sun rose; the Rongbuk lama, leaping on a ray, was carried to the summit in triumph.

The Rongbuk lama was very anxious to know what was the reason for all the trouble we were taking to explore Mount Everest. I thought that my best way to explain it was that we treated the expedition as a pilgrimage, and that it was an attempt to reach the highest point of the Earth as being the nearest to Heaven. This point of view was accepted. I added also, with a view to my own comfort, that I had registered a vow never to touch butter until I arrived on the summit. I dislike butter at any time, and Tibetan tea was absolutely the limit. From that time on I drank it without sugar or milk. We took the opportunity here of having our men blessed.

From the Rongbuk monastery the whole southern end of the valley is filled by Mount Everest. In a way this particular view is very striking, but I personally regretted the presence of those horrible humps which form the Rongbuk valley. In my opinion they belittle and, if possible, bemean the great mountain range, besides committing the obvious crime of shutting out the gorgeous mountains to its right and left.

We hoped to be able to push on and take the whole of our heavy luggage beyond the snout of the Rongbuk glacier, but our transport would have none of it, and rightly so; halting here we established our base at a height of 16,500 feet and collected our full stores, and a very imposing mass they made. Owing to the work of the reconnaissance of 1921 and to the fine survey carried out by Major Morshead and Major Wheeler, we knew now fairly well the line of our advance. From Wheeler's map it was quite apparent that our line must be up the East Rongbuk glacier, but a detailed reconnaissance had to be carried out in order that we could lay out a series of camps and make an advance base before attacking the mountain. Therefore, while the staff of the Expedition was establishing the base camp and Captain Finch was getting his oxygen apparatus into order, Colonel Strutt, Dr. Longstaff, Major Morshead, and Major Norton started out to make full reconnaissance of the East Rongbuk glacier. It was quite apparent that the work of establishing the camps and of making a further advanced mountaineering base on the Chang La would be very severe indeed. On these camps being fully rationed, fully provisioned, and supplied with fuel, would depend the success of the attack on the mountain itself. Evidently there was an enormous amount of stuff to be moved, and it was also apparent that, owing to the very short time at our disposal, none must be lost. Moreover, to employ our own porters in moving the stores themselves would not only take a long time but would greatly exhaust the porters, and then they would not be near their full strength for moving camps as high as possible on the mountain. We had very carefully looked after these

men, and it would have been poor economy to overwork them before it was necessary.

I do not think that I have explained that the whole problem of climbing Mount Everest was one of pace. Owing to the severity of the winter and early spring, it would not pay to start earlier than we did, and in fact we had a quite low enough temperature as it was on our arrival in our base camp. In a good year we could count on respectable weather only up to June 15. In an early year the weather might break up any time after June 1. So that the problem was really a race against the monsoon.

Our base camp was now established on May 1. We could therefore say that we had our time divided up as follows: We aimed at getting our camp on the Chang La or North Col by May 15, and that would give us fifteen days for certain, twenty-one days with decent luck, and a month if our luck was really good, to work on the mountain itself. We considered this would probably be ample if these dates could be adhered to. I therefore strove by every means in my power to collect a sufficient number of porters to assist our own men. It must be understood though that the Dzakar Chu and neighbouring part of Tibet is very sparsely populated, and not only that, but the ploughing season and spring were approaching and it was absolutely necessary for these people to work on their fields. I had been given a promise of 90 porters to help, but only 45 were forthcoming. After two days' work these 45 said that their provisions were done and they must go for more. Taking the best guarantees we could, we let them go, but they never appeared again, so we had to set to work with our own men to move as much stuff as we possibly could and get the Expedition forward. At the same time we used the agent of the Shekar Dzongpen and our own sardar to scour and scrape the entire Dzakar Chu for porters. In order to get them we had to offer very high wages. These porters came up in batches, sometimes ten, sometimes half a dozen, sometimes five-and-twenty. They worked for short periods and then went away to their ploughing, but under these conditions and with a little arrangement we were able to get our work done.

We established a staging system up the East Rongbuk glacier, making Camps I., II., and III. as shown on the map. Each of these camps was fully rationed and supplied with a cook. This of course was done gradually, everything being pushed up in batches, and here the value of our transport officers and of our Gurkha N.C.O.'s came in. They were given charge of different stages. The Tibetan coolies could be used only for the first two stages; our own porters moved everything from Camp II. to Camp III.; and also great quantities of stores right up from the base camp to Camp III. The approximate heights were: The base camp 16,500 feet; Camp I. 17,800 feet; Camp II. 19,800 feet; Camp III. 21,000 feet. This required the most continuous hard work. I do not think ever before in the history of Himalayan exploration have

men been called on to do harder, or even as hard, work. I think their performance was absolutely without precedent. The track itself was very rough, the elevation was very great, and yet these men put a full month's stores into these camps sufficient to keep 12 Europeans and 50 of themselves. They also carried the great oxygen outfit, tents, and alpine equipment and an immense mass of stuff. Further than that, as soon as these camps were established they moved what was required to form the base at the Chang La, Camp IV., and from there carried loads for the first climbing party to 25,000 feet, and for the second party to 25,500 feet. I may point out that only on one occasion before has a camp been slept in for one night at 23,000 feet. This camp on Chang La was continually occupied by quite large parties, as mountaineering parties go. One man even made four trips to the 25,000 camp, on one occasion carrying as much as 40 lbs.

During the whole of this period the climbing parties themselves were being pushed up to the different camps, the transport officers taking charge of the lines of communication, headed by a party of climbers who were quickly established at Camp III., whence Mr. Mallory and Dr. Somervell prepared the road up to the North Col. Finally, the whole of the climbing party was assembled at Camp III.

While we were at the base camp our Sherpa coolies were visited by some of their relations, men, women, and children, who had come up from the great Sherpa settlements of Sola-Khombu and across the Nghaughu or Khombu La, which is 19,000 feet, and then up to our camp, some of the wives even carrying babies of six months old over this pass, and sleeping out in the open under rocks the whole time.

I am not going to touch on any of the mountaineering, as I am leaving that for Colonel Strutt, Mr. Mallory, and Captain Finch, but I must mention the way the porters took the accident. Two of them lost brothers, and others their special friends, but not a single man has shown any desire not to return; in fact, in Darjeeling on our return every single man volunteered for the next year. One man on the way down pressed me several times to know whether he might go back with a friend and try and retrieve stuff that we had left at the North Col. After the accident the Lama at Rongbuk played up very well. I paid money for services to be said in the monastery for the men who were lost, and he went out of his way to send for the porters and again bless them, which they thought a great deal of.

But Sherpas and high-living Nepalis have this belief: When there is an accident, and a man falls either in the high mountains or from a cliff into the river, it is called "*Parmeshwar ko balidhan bhayo*," which means "a sacrifice to God," and they believe that if any one visits the same place *on the same date and hour* he will equally fall and be killed.

When the camps were moved down after our last attempt under the direction of Captain Morris, he told me that it was perfectly wonderful

to see the effect of the south wind even in the two days that he was evacuating the camps. Whole hillsides had become rotten, and even the great seracs, which are shown in the pictures so clearly, had begun to tumble down, and the great trough in the glacier which Colonel Strutt will describe, was filled in no time with a rushing stream. As long as the west wind, the great enemy of all climbing at this end of the Himalaya, is blowing, the mountain is generally in a fairly safe and firm condition. Though the west wind is a horrible wind blowing the whole length of the Himalayas and inconceivably cold, still it is dry. The south monsoon winds are warm and wet and destructive.

One thing that was proved is that woollen garments for very great heights are not sufficient in themselves, and that it is necessary to have wind-proof outer clothes. I think it is extremely likely that the breakdown of Tejbir, the Gurkha who went so high with Captain Finch and with Captain Geoffrey Bruce, is due to the fact that he had no wind-proof clothing.

It is not my province to-night to touch either on the mountaineering efforts of the party or on the oxygen apparatus, but I may point out that the experiences of the Expedition must very much modify the scientific outlook on the power of ascending to great altitudes, on acclimatization, and on the manner in which oxygen should be employed.

Although I am not touching on the mountaineering side of the Expedition, I must here tender my thanks and the thanks of us all to my two transport officers, Captain Geoffrey Bruce and Captain Morris, for their hard and unselfish labours, and in one particular especially to Captain Morris, who counteracted the effect of my rather peculiar handwriting, thus making it possible for me to communicate with the President of the Mount Everest Committee. The thanks of all of us are also especially due to Captain Noel, the official photographer, for his unremitting and astonishing enthusiasm; the wonderful success which he has obtained we shall not be able fully to realize until we are able to enjoy his major work, the films.

Finally, before leaving Darjeeling Major Morshead gave me the latest figures of the two magnificent attempts made by the climbing parties on Everest. The first party—Major Norton, Dr. Somervell, and Mr. Mallory—reached a height of 26,985 feet, which is 185 feet higher than our first computation. The climb of Captain Finch and Captain Bruce works out at 27,235 feet. I am sure you will be glad to hear that Major Morshead's numerous frostbites are getting on very well indeed, and that he will not be incapacitated in any way, nor his profession in life interfered with.

I will bring my part of the account of this expedition to an end with a little story. On our way back to India we were met by a Babu in a good position. He said: "Sir, I hear you have climbed the Himal by means of thread—no doubt the thread of life."

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The Route of the
MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION 1922
CHUMBI TO MT EVEREST
from the Maps of the 1921 Expedition.

Scale 1/750,000 or 1 Inch = 11.84 Stat. Miles.

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Route of the Expedition ——— Passes
Heights in feet.

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