

**THE ENGLISHMAN
CALCUTTA, WEST BENGAL, INDIA
31 AUGUST 1905
(pages 10-11)**

The Kinchenjunga Expedition.

Errant Stores and Coolies.

(From our own correspondent.)

Nego Cave Camp, Nepaul, Aug. 16.

In continuation of my last letter I received orders to march, and by 5-45 p.m. I was en route and stopped out to make the 6½ miles to Chaubagan as quickly as possible; the night was very favourable the moon shining through the clouds making the road clearly visible. The rain luckily held off the whole time so that I had a fair journey all the way. My bedding and food I sent on ahead and in about a quarter of an hour I reach the "Chorten" on the summit of Phalloot hill the work of pious Tibetans, who use this road. It is erected to gain merit (by affording work to Lamas who are stone cutters), appease the local Demon, and offer devotion by the inscribed prayers to the less feared Divinity. The road as far as Singalela is in very good condition, and I get along pretty quickly. Daylight gradually fades away, the clouds open a little and give me a glimpse of the surrounding hills. I have no time to stop and admire them. By 8 o'clock I am well over the ridge and among a forest of Dwarf Rhododendrons. The last time I gained this summit was in November, 1902, and not a cloud marred the view of the snowy range, which is by far the finest obtainable anywhere excluding Sandakphu. Now there is nothing but clouds, and darkness makes itself felt by the moon hiding itself deeper in the clouds. As we get lower down we meet larger trees and have to light our lantern. We, the chowkidar and I, are now walking down what a climber would call an excellent mountain path, and a city man a beastly torrent bed. Our steps must be carefully chosen, as we are walking over ancient landslides, and slip and fall might be serious.

A good hour's walk brings us within hail and sight of the little camp fires of the 109 coolies who are to take our stores on to Jongri. I soon rouse out the Sirdars and Baiders, and ask

them why things have been brought here from Chakung instead of Jongri. They do not know; the Chakung Dewan has given them orders to collect labour from the different villages under their control, and here they are. None of them, so they say, has ever been to Jongri, and they do not know how many days' march there are or anything about this road, but they have a man with them who has been before. They also put forward an excuse that they have not enough food with them to carry them through. This I cannot believe and tell them that it is their own look-out, and they must be off by 8 o'clock the next morning, as it is of vital importance to us that these stores should arrive intact at Jongri, for we have eight hungry mouths to feed daily, and we sent off this same convoy of rice on the 24th and 25th of last month. It ought to have reached Jongri on the 30th and 31st of the same month, but through the fault of the Dewan of Chaking here is the food, where it is useless as far as the expedition is concerned. It is very lucky we found this out a day before we started or we should have found ourselves in a difficult position. The ground roundabout the bungalow, now simply four walls, is swampy. The only available dry ground is taken up by the hundred or so coolies, and I find no alternative but to camp alongside of them and am in for no sleep owing to their chattering the whole night through. This is the first night I pass in a mummy tent, and very comfortable it is—warm and thoroughly waterproof. It rains very hard during the night but I am as dry as I can wish. I am up by 5, and by 6 o'clock, I have all the coolies on their way. By 7 all have gone and Tenduk, my faithful servant, had breakfast ready. Thus done justice to I stroll off to see the sights, which, consist of a large pokeri or waterhole. A terrible tale is told of this lakelet. Sometime or other there was a great fight near by, and two thousand corpses were thrown into it, when it burst into flames and since then nothing will float on its surface. Even a leaf is either engulfed or driven ashore.

By 11 o'clock we are again on the march. The road now is a good mountain path. Waddell in "Among the Himalayas" describes it as a terrible path of knife edges, which cut all his boots and lamed some of the men. A few of its rocks are pretty sharp, but on the whole we do not find it very bad. The rocks are mostly gneiss, full of mica; all around us are jungles of the ever present rhododendron. As we mount it is raining cats and dogs, and, waterproof or no waterproof, the rain percolates to the skin. This is the state one wants to be in to be able to describe scenery! We are wrapped in clouds and but little is to be

seen. On enquiry the Tamany shepherds, who live at Chambanjan tell us of a good camping place about three miles on, so to make sure not to miss it we ask him to come along with us with a promise of payment, but he is very unwilling. We use a little persuasion (French for ice axe), and he is simply dying to come along. I start off in advance, and on reaching the summit of this hill I find the place only about a mile away from Chambanjan, and no good drinking water, so after resting a little I decide on going down to another pokeri lower down, where a larger naidan will better accommodate our porters, besides having some good, clear, though stagnant, rain water. I have some trouble in getting the coolies to follow. They grumble and say we have no tents for them, and that we want to kill them. It is no good my explaining that we have shelter for them in the shape of tarpaulins and all they have to do is to put them up, so, failing this, ridicule brings them round. I simply tell them thought we had engaged men, not women. This raises a laugh, and I have no further trouble with them. Wet and weary we at last reach this camping ground, which, being unable to find a native name for it, I will call Valley Camp No. 1. All gradually come in and soon we have a little busti set up, each crowd of coolies with their little fires burning and men running about everywhere, some carrying water, others cutting wood some building their shelters with a tarpaulin roof and branches of rhododendron for walls. Leeches abound, mostly the yellow striped variety, the most voracious and the largest of all I believe. The men with their naked feet, all bleeding from their bites, suffer the most. I thought I had escaped, but on taking my putties, boots, and stockings off I find four bites, so boots, etc., are no safeguard. We found these pests of the jungle at Jorepokry a small kind but very lively. At Many Banjan we rid some cows of a good many of them. I think Hooker gives a detailed description of this, the pest of Sikkim, but only mentions having found it from 3,000 feet to 10,000 feet, but we found them here at 13,000 feet. Whether they have been brought up by our coolies I cannot say but there were numbers of them.

14th August.—Reveille as usual at 4-30. We get on the road by 6-30, but the doctor and myself taking rear guard, we do so with pleasure, as at every sheltered rock we manage a little game, of chess. The rain which had held off till we got under cover now comes down in torrents, which mars a good deal the pretty scenery we are marching through. I need not mention the ever present rhododendron, with fine vistas at every turn, lovely glens, dells, waterfalls, and tiny trickling streams. Our

map of the district does not give us a correct idea of the distance to be travelled from point to point, and we have some difficulty in deciding at what place we actually are, no high or known peak being visible to take our observations from. We are like men groping in the dark till we reach Naya, a large overhanging rock, which can shelter a number of men. This is mentioned in the map, but taking the distance indicated there it is much nearer to our last camp (even after due allowance is made for up and down) than we actually find it by road. Any way we continue our march, and finally reach camp by one o'clock. We make this a short march on account of the road which is pretty hard for our coolies to travel on heavy laden. We get a glimpse of our camp from the distance, pitched on the green sword. Its sight gladdens us with its curling smoke denoting lunch. After lunch I take a gun and go in search of game, not for sport but for a variation of our diet, which has consisted up to now of mourgghi and mutton and vice versa. We do not want any tinned food, as we shall have more than we care for when we reach the glacier. I return empty-handed, having found only a few traces of bears but seen no winged game. It rained hard all night, and still rains this morning, the 15th. This hinders our getting away early, as fires will not burn and the porters cannot get their food cooked quickly. C. gets away first to find a site for our valley camp No. 3. I take up a position just above and watch the operation of striking camp and check each man's number and load as it passes me on the way upwards. The sight seen from my point of vantage has its charm. The rain just stops and make it pleasant to watch the little green tents being rolled up, Sherpa coolies, Boothias, and Nepaulese, all hustling around picking their load, dressed in many coloured clothing, some taking down their shelters, some, alas, still eating their morning meal, others almost ready, packing their few belongings on the top of their head. These loads have gradually lightened since leaving Darjiling, from whence each man had a full maund to carry. At last everyone has gone, and we follow on their track to help or hurry on as found necessary.

We are now on the real mountain, lovely Alpine flowers are everywhere mostly recognised by our Swiss friends. Wild rhu-barb is growing here most profusely, gentians, a white flower like an overgrown lily of the valley is also everywhere. Shrubs there are many, the dwarf rhododendron, juniper, cherry, wild rose, aspen cypress, and a good many other varieties which I do not know and cannot find out the names. We are now at

about 13,000 feet, and to my surprise I came across a bed of a large kind of maiden hair fern. It is simply beautiful; it grows in great clusters. Here it is running wild, and we in Darjiling pay large prices for a pot of it! Other ferns are as beautiful and innumerable. Last night our camp by the hypsometer was 12,060 feet above sea level ; to-day we are rising higher and will reach points above 13,000 feet. There is very little variation in the scenery around us. The geological formation is varied. We are walking now over gneiss full of mica, now over limestone, farther on over slate, and also over granite boulders. The soil seems very rich and very black. We see also a good deal of clay. Great rocks are everywhere about the hill side, some as big as, and bigger, than the Choom [?] Rock. The mountain path is rather trying to the naked feet of the porters, the rocks being rather slippery and some of them sharp. We fare well with our thickly nailed boots, but must be careful to choose our steps. The foot of Mego Mountain we reach by one o'clock, and a steep climb it is to reach the top, which is about 13,400 feet. Once the top is reached it is alright. Our way is easy. One or two more descents and ascents, and we are at the Nego Cave, where our camp No. 3 is pitched besides, a rushing stream in which I get at last a long needed wash.

15th August.—Camp we reach at 3-45. A change of clothing is peremptory, as we are soaking. A cup of tea refreshes us. The rain continues off and on. Some take advantage of clear spells to take photos roundabout. I myself get into my tent to moralize, and come to the conclusion that it is in every way worth all the wetting and trouble to get here. The scenery and pleasure of an outdoor life amply repay us.

The morning of the 16th breaks very stormy, and with heavy rain we decide not to start, and take a day's rest, which is only broken by the excitement caused by the arrival of a messenger from the Deputy Commissioner, announcing that the Nepal Durbar has graciously permitted our entering Nepal and making a base camp at Tseram under certain conditions. This news is received with great joy, as it does away with the alternative of the Zeum gap which I have already written about. To-morrow, wet or fine, we start for Gamnthing. It will be a hard march, as we must cross Oma Pass 15,000. The dāk is soon leaving, so must say au revoir till we reach Tseram.