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**THE ATTEMPT ON KANCHENJUNGA**

**FATE OF FORMER EXPEDITIONS**

**INVIOLATE SUMMITS**

*The advance party of the international expedition going to the Himalaya to attempt the summit of Kanchenjunga has left Europe and will reach India at the end of next week.*

Among the high places of the world the Himalayan peaks are in a class by themselves. The Alps are small by comparison with them; a few isolated peaks in the Andes or Africa or the Rocky Mountains come within the same range as a score of the giants among them. Mont Blanc is little more than half the height of Mount Everest; Kilimanjaro (19,700 ft.) and Mount McKinley (20,454 ft.), the highest peaks of Africa and North America, would rank as minor peaks in the Sikkim Himalaya; and even Aconcagua (23,000 ft.), the monarch of the Andes, is no higher than the historic North Col on Everest. The Himalaya are a great assemblage of unscaled peaks towering over a land of immense altitude in the heart of Asia. Man has walked in this land only rarely and at the greatest risk of his life.

Each group of the greater peaks has its peculiar scenery, but none is finer than the magnificent massif that culminates at 28,150 ft. in the summit of Kanchenjunga. The visitor to Darjeeling, who climbs to the top of Observatory Hill, sees it 50 miles away over range upon range of lower ridges, split with deep, gorge-like valleys, incredibly remote and icily aloof, lifting its glaciers like shields to the deep blue sky. There is no scale by which the watcher can appreciate the size of what he sees. The apparently insignificant ridges over which his gaze passes are themselves as high as or higher than the Alps. The labyrinth of slit-like valleys and gorges appears only in the mists, born of their steamy tropical heat, that form towards noon and writhe slowly upwards in columns of massive cumuli. There is no standard of comparison, and experience alone can teach the

heights, depths, and distances, two or three times as great as those in the Alps.



### A MAGIC CORDON

The eye can pass at a glance over these leagues of ridges and valleys between Darjeeling and Kanchenjunga, but the foot of man cannot take them at a stride. The problems of reaching the base of the greater peaks of the main watershed and of carrying sufficient food and equipment are second only to the problems of scaling the peaks themselves. It is largely due to these initial difficulties and to the expense of organizing and maintaining a large banderbast of native porters that so few expeditions are undertaken in the high Himalayan. Yet, in an age when mountaineering technique in the Alps is said to have reached the limits of technical precision, it is indeed remarkable that not one of the greater Himalayan peaks has been climbed.

Mount Everest, Kanchenjunga, Nanga Parbat, Nanda Devi, and the Bride Peak have all repulsed determined assaults by

some of the finest mountaineers of past and present generations. Lieutenant-Colonel E. F. Norton and Mr. T. H. Somervell got to within 1,000 ft. of Everest's summit, and Mr. G. H. L. Mallory and Mr. A. Irvine perished in a final attempt. Kanchenjunga has remained inviolate through three assaults, two weak ones ending in disaster, and a third, an exceptionally strong one, which failed 3,000 ft. from the summit. Nanga Parbat (26,700 ft.) took the life of Mr. A. F. Mummery, the most brilliant mountaineer of his time, together with the lives of his two Gurkha followers. Nanda Devi (25,660 ft.), the highest peak entirely within the British Empire, has defeated the best efforts of that great Himalayan pioneer, Dr. T. G. Longstaff. The Duke of the Abruzzi was forced to retreat when only a short distance from the summit of the Bride Peak (25,110 ft.) in the Karakoram. In addition, there are scores of peaks of 25,000 ft. or more that have never been attempted, and are never likely to be unless by some aeronaut in a helicopter.

The highest actual summit yet attained is that of Trisul, 23,406 ft., which was climbed in 1907 by Dr. Longstaff with the Italian guides Alexis and Henri Brocheril. It is almost as if there were a magic cordon drawn at 25,000 ft. round the necks of these giants by the Mi-go, the "Abominable Snow-men," whom the natives believe to dwell in horrid rage on the summits.

## BRITISH PIONEERS

In spite of the obvious challenge of Kanchenjunga, little was known of the mountain and its immediate environs until the closing years of last century, although Sir Joseph Hooker, the pioneer of exploration in the Eastern Himalaya, had explored the ridges to the east of it many years before. One of the first to undertake serious mountaineering in Sikkim was Mr. W. W. Graham, who, in 1883, carried through a brilliant series of ascents in the neighbourhood of Kabru (24,000 ft.), the southern outpost of Kanchenjunga. His achievements included ascents of three unnamed peaks in the Kabru district, a first ascent of Jubrun (21,400 ft.), and finally an ascent of Kabru itself, the summit of which Mr. Graham claimed to have reached. This last ascent provoked a bitter controversy at the time, and to this day it has not been definitely established whether or not Mr. Graham actually did reach the summit.

The country nearest to Darjeeling was naturally the first to be explored and mapped. It was not until 1884 than an Indian surveyor named Rinsing journeyed through the hitherto un-

known region north of Kanchenjunga. In spite of being ill equipped for high altitudes and of losing two of his party from excessive cold and fatigue, he succeeded in crossing from Sikkim into Nepal by the Jonsong La, a snow pass of 20,207 ft. Another Indian, Sarat Chandra Das, claimed to have traversed the same pass a few years earlier *en route* for Lhasa, but it seems probable, as Mr. Douglas Freshfield points out, that his pass was farther to the north. In 1891 Sir Claude White and Mr. Hofmann were the first Europeans to penetrate to the Zemu Glacier beneath the eastern precipices of Kanchenjunga, where they discovered Siniolchunn, "the most beautiful mountain in the world."

Their enterprise opened the way for others, but it was not until 1899 that Mr. Freshfield's party succeeded in making the first comprehensive circuit of Kanchenjunga and photographing and exploring the glaciers and valleys of its western flanks. Mr. Freshfield described this expedition in his book "Round Kanchenjunga," which contains some interesting speculations on the possibilities of climbing the mountain. Though the principal aim of his party was to explore and map the glaciers and approaches of Kanchenjunga, it was their project to attempt its ascent. A snowstorm made this impossible, and they were forced to content themselves with exploring the head of the Zemu glacier and of repeating the traverse of the Jonsong La, whence they descended into Nepal and returned to Darjeeling over the Kang La and Jongri passes, 16,303 ft. and 13,140 ft. respectively. That the party would have failed in an attempt on the mountain can hardly be doubted, in the light of subsequent experience of the elaborate series of camps necessary and the physical effects of great altitudes. But Mr. Freshfield's expedition accomplished much in determining the easiest lines of attack for future parties.

It was not until 1905 that a direct attempt was made to climb Kanchenjunga, by a party consisting of three Swiss—Dr. Jacot-Guillarmod, M. Raymond, Lieutenant Pache—and an Italian hotel-keeper from Darjeeling named De Righi, who put themselves under the leadership of Mr. Aleister Crowley. The expedition proceeded by the Singalila ridge and the Chumbab La to the Yalung Valley, and having marched up the Yalung glacier attacked the great curtain of icy slopes which falls from the base of the cliffs of the south-west face of Kanchenjunga. They succeeded in establishing a camp at 20,343 ft., and some of them climbed 1,000 ft. higher. On September 1 Lieutenant

Pache and three coolies were killed while descending in bad snow to a lower camp, and the expedition broke up.

In 1911 and 1912 Dr. A. M. Kollas, who died during the second Mount Everest expedition, made two bold and successful expeditions on the peaks to the north and north-west of Kanchenjunga and on the ridges of Kanchenjunga itself. Though his expeditions, which were made alone, with only native assistance, included no actual attempt on the mountain, he accomplished much valuable pioneer work. In 1911 he reached the Nepal Gap, 21,000 ft., on the north-west ridge of Kanchenjunga, and the Zemu Gap, 19,300 ft., on the east ridge; and climbed the Langpo Peak, 22,100 ft., and the Chumiomo, 22,430 ft., to the north-west of the Kanchenjunga massif. In 1912 he climbed Kanchenjunga, 22,700 ft., to the north-west of Kanchenjunga.

### THE LATEST ATTEMPTS

Meanwhile mountaineers of other nationalities had not been idle. Kabru had again been assaulted, this time by two young Norwegians, C. W. Rubenson and Conrad-Aas, in 1907. After immense labours in hacking their way up the intricate ice-falls of the Kabru Glacier and many uncomfortable days spent in high camps they gained the summit ridge about 50 ft. below the summit and some distance from it horizontally. Intense cold and the lateness of the hour forced them to retreat. Owing to the War no further attempts were made on Kanchenjunga until 1929, when the mountain was twice attacked by two separate parties, one going before and the other after the monsoon.

The first effort can hardly rank as an "attempt," for it was one of the maddest pieces of bad mountaineering that can be imagined. An American, Mr. E. Farmer, started from Darjeeling on April 27 with a small banderbast of porters. He left Tseram, a village on the Nepalese flanks of Kanchenjunga, with three porters and four days' food and proceeded up the Yalung Glacier, presumably following the route of the ill-fated Crowley expedition. He established three camps and finally, on May 26, set off with his porters, unequipped with either rope or rucksack. The snow conditions proved dangerous—probably like those encountered by Crowley and the Swiss—and the porters refused to advance farther. Mr. Farmer, however, insisted on going on alone and was last seen by his porters climbing upwards towards the Talung Saddle at about 22,000 ft. He never returned.

The second attempt in 1929 was a very different affair. Kanchenjunga was at last attacked by a properly equipped and exceptionally strong party of expert Bavarian mountaineers. This party which was led by Dr. Bauer, included some of the most brilliant young climbers from the Munich section of the German and Austrian Alpine Club, and was additionally fortunate in securing the services of Mr. E. O. Shebbeare, transport officer of the last Everest expedition, and many of the porters who accomplished great feats of endurance on Everest. Leaving Darjeeling they went by way of Gantok and Lachen to the Zemu Glacier on the eastern side of Kanchenjunga, where they made their base camp. They then attacked the long ice ridge which falls from the main north ridge at an angle of about 45 deg.

### TERRIBLE WEAPONS

The difficulties of the ridge proved terrific. Huge towers of solid ice alternated with narrow edges where the ridge thinned down to a mere unstable ice-blade. Almost every foot of their progress required toilsome hacking with the ice axe; pitons had to be driven into the ice, ropes fixed to enable the laden porters to follow. Camps were made on ice ledges so narrow that there was scarcely room for more than two or three climbers at a time. It must have been heartrending when a snowstorm forced them to retreat and obliterated the ice steps they had so laboriously cut. But heroically the party returned and recommenced its labours. Three weeks of work were necessary to gain 2,300 ft. of altitude on the ice ridge, but they were rewarded at last by getting to a point about 24,600 ft. high, where the difficulties dwindled away and the route to the summit appeared practicable.

But Kanchenjunga had another weapon in store. A snowstorm, in which no less than 6 ft. of snow fell, forced them down again. No Himalayan party has ever encountered difficulties so great as did the Bavarians on the ice ridge, and that they were able to retreat safely in bad weather after undergoing terrible cold and hardships, which included a bivouac in the open without tents or sleeping bags, proves their fortitude and mountaineering skill.

What are the lessons to be learned from these past attempts on Kanchenjunga? First, that it is not a mountain to suffer fools gladly. It allow no margin, forgives no mistakes. It is a relentless opponent, which will hit back with every weapon

in its armoury, with storm, cold, avalanche, and the more insidious devices of sheer altitude. Yet it has been proved assailable by an expert party of mountaineers who neglect no preparations and observe all precautions. The present party are clearly out to attack it purposefully and methodically, taking full advantage of the lessons learnt by former parties on the giants of the Himalayas, and they have in them that sturdy spirit which is necessary for conquering so great a mountain.