

Note on the Tehri Tibet Dispute

During the course of my leave, part of which from August to October 1932 was spent in western Tibet, I was asked by the Tibetan Government and the Government of India to look into this dispute. Mr. F. Ludlow, O.B.E was with me and we were accompanied from Gartok to the disputed area by the Dzongpon of Tsaparang, who represented the Tibetan Government. Although the Tehri Darbar were, I believe informed in August of our proposed visit, they sent no representative to the spot. This was not a great consequence, as I was able to discuss the matter later with His Highness the Raja and his Dewan at Narendranagar.

2. The dispute originated in 1923 when the Raja of Tehri complained that Tibetan officials were interfering in his territory at Nilang. Mr. Acton was deputed in 1926 to hold an enquiry in conjunction with two representatives of the Tibetan Government, and to try to settle the matter.

3. The map which accompanies the file shows the frontier claimed by Tehri as a thick red line. The claim corresponds with the watershed. The Tibetans claimed a point where they alleged that a pillar used to exist, at Gumgum bridge about a mile west of Jangla forest bungalow. Mr. Acton understood them to claim the yellow line on the map. Mr. Acton reported in favour of the watershed boundary claimed by Tehri, but the Government of India considered that the evidence showed that Tibet was entitled to a frontier further to the west. After considering the report, the Government of India proposed to the Tibetan Government that the frontier should be the red dotted line on the map, giving the village of Nilang to Tehri and the village of Jadhong to Tibet. When it was pointed out to the Tibetan Government that their original plan, as understood, would include within their frontiers the shrines of Gangotri and Gaumukh, they dropped this part of their claim and stated that they would accept a frontier following the yellow line on the map from its northern extremity to Gumgum bridge or Jangla forest

bungalow, and thence roughly, the blue line to the east. It will be seen that their revised claim leaves still in dispute a tract of country measuring 12 miles from north to south and some seven miles east to west. With the exception of the northwest corner, this tract appeared to my untrained mind to be practically valueless. But the south-west corner contains valuable deodar forest.

4. In their letter no. 956- C, dated the 29th July 1932, the Government of the United Provinces remarked that "judging by maps and references in old documents..... the claim of the Tehri Darbar to terminate north of the line marked in blue on the map cannot be regarded as a strong one". The local Government, however, support the Tehri Darbar's claim to at least all the territory to the west of red dotted line, on the ground that it has been administered by the Darbar for many years. The maps and old documents in question were summarised in Mr. Acton's report and also more briefly by Colonel Bailey, then political officer in Sikkim, in his letter no. 159 P., dated the 7th of March 1927. None of the maps showed Nilang to be in Tehri territory.

5. When I passed through Narendranagar, the new capital of Tehri on the 26th and 27th October, I was given a tracing of the "map of the territory restored to the rajah of Garhwal". It seems to me that this map shows perfectly definitely that none of the territory now in dispute was at that time restored to the Rajah. His Highness and the Dewan maintain that, as the word "Tibet" does not occur on the map, it shows they were entitled to further territory to the north. It seems to me, however that any territory to the north, of which they may now be in possession, has been rightly or wrongly acquired subsequently, and was not originally granted. The Tehri claim to the watershed frontier passing through Tsang Chok La has no more justification than the Tibetan claim to a frontier at Gumgum bridge. Any boundary pillars which Tehri may have erected were put up without the knowledge and consent of Tibet and cannot possibly have any validity. On

the other hand it is admitted that Tehri has been working forests within the area at present in dispute, to the east of Gumgum bridge, for at least sixty years. The Tibetan Government have persistently maintained that there used to be a boundary pillar at Gumgum bridge, and that this was removed by Tehri people shortly before Mr. Acton's visit in 1926. I have no doubt that there was formerly a pillar there, and it is certainly not there now. One old man, who impressed me as being very respectable and probably truthful, and who is not a Tibetan or a resident of the disputed area, told me that he knew that it had been removed by a minor Tehri official just before Mr. Acton's visit. Even, however, if this is true (and there is a strong suspicion, though no real proof, that this is true) that does not make it a boundary pillar any more than the Tehri pillars on the Tsang Chok La. It would merely imply that some Tehri official had felt that the pillar might possibly be of value as evidence to the Tibetans and had therefore removed it.

6. In Father Wessel's book "Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia" published in the Hague in 1924, it is remarked that one of the missionaries, travelling in about the year 1630 through what is now British Garhwal in Tsaparang in Tibet, was held up for some time in the neighborhood of the Mana Pass because 3 local Rajas had rebelled against their Tibetan overlords.

Apparently at that time Tibet had control of some of the hill Rajas. It is very possible that 300 years ago, or even more recently, Tibet may have maintained a frontier as far as Gumgum nala. Several people told me that the alleged boundary pillar was put up in the time of the King Cho Dakpo of Tsaparang. The name Cho Dakpo is applied to a dynasty of kings, the last of whom appears to have reigned at least two hundred years ago. Although many people agreed that the pillar used to exist, none of them could produce any proof that it marked a boundary. It seems further that the Tibetan claim to a frontier at Gumgum bridge cannot in justice be admitted, in view of Tehri's effective possession of the forests for at least sixty years. I pointed out the Dzongpon that practically every frontier in the world is now different from the frontiers of 200 years ago.

7. Another strong argument against ceding the forest area to Tibet is that least 3 miles of the pilgrim road to Gangotri passes along the north bank of Jangla to Bhaironghatti. The road to Nilang also continues for a further 3 miles on the north bank as far as Gartaga bridge, where it crosses to the south bank. No road has been maintained by Tehri to the north-east of Kareha. A great deal of money has been spent on these roads and the raja of Tehri told me that it was proposed to build a new girder bridge across the river at Bhaironghatti at a cost of over a lakh.

8. The case of the villages of Nilang and Jadhong is however different. Apart from a couple of forest guards at Jangla, these villages are the only inhabited places in the whole disputed area. The Tibetans showed me the two old books which they had showed Mr. Acton, regarding the collection of certain revenue from these villages, and this revenue is still being collected in the form of a cash payment of 74 rupees a year. On the other hand I understand that Tehri also has, for many years, collected 24 rupees a year from these villages. The Tehri Darbar claim that the Tibetan tax is a trade tax. It seems to me, however, that both taxes are exactly on the same footing and that one is a land tax just as much as the other.

9. In 1878 Mr. Kinney surveyed the Gangotri valley and his map, No. 364.8.402 is an extremely accurate one. One may perhaps, therefore assume that when he marked a frontier on the map, as he did, he did so after enquiry and that the line he marked was really regarded as the frontier in 1878. The frontier he marks is almost, but not quite, identical with the red - dotted line proposed by the Government of India to Tibet. It must be noted, however that the position of Nilang has now been changed. In 1878 it was on the north bank of the Jadh Ganga just to the west of Kinney's frontier. It has now, however been moved to a situation south of the Jadh Ganga river and to the east of Kinney's frontier. Its present site is clearly in what Kinney took to be Tibet. To the south of the Jadh Ganga Kinney's

frontier ran up a glacier stream and I may as well state here what I consider we should now offer to Tibet. We should, I think, adhere to Kinney's line with a very slight deviation. Instead of following the glacier stream at its lower (northern) end, it should make a slight deviation, to the west to include in Tibet not only the village of Nilang itself but also some sixty or seventy acres of cultivated fields which lie to the west of this line and which would be left in Tehri if the glacier stream frontier was strictly followed. If we adhere strictly to Kinney's line, Nilang and two thirds of the cultivation would be left in Tibet, and the remaining third of the cultivation would be in Tehri.

10. I told the Tibetan representative that I did not think I should be able to get the Tibetan Government all they wanted, and asked him how he would review a solution on these lines. His reply was non-committal. He had of course no power to agree to anything himself and did not know what his Government would say. He reiterated that the frontier was at Gumgum bridge.

11. When I reached Narendranagar to discuss the matter with the Tehri Darbar, I was fortunate enough to find, in addition to His Highness the Raja and the Dewan, Mr. Stubbs (the political agent) and Mr. Acton. The attitude of the Tehri Darbar as stated by the Raja and the Dewan is that they still contend that they are entitled to the watershed frontier. They are however, perfectly willing to give up anything or everything in this area if the Government of India so desires. If, however, they do so, they claim that they should be given some compensation in British territory. Mr. Stubbs suggested that the most acceptable form of compensation would be the Badrinath area in British Garhwal. He stated that he thought the Government of the United Provinces would be quite ready to agree to this. On this being mentioned to the Raja, he seemed to be very pleased and said that it would be most acceptable. It seems to be that this is a matter chiefly for the United Provinces Government and that, if they are willing to cede

Badrinath, the Government of India may well agree. Mr. Stubbs considers that Tehri has been very accommodating over the whole boundary dispute.

12. There are one or two other points which may be mentioned. Mr. Acton considered that Tehri's claim to the watershed was a strong one but it seems to me rather difficult to substantiate this by the evidence which he recorded and particularly by the old documents he cites. The Government of India were also of this latter opinion. I questioned separately several of the oldest inhabitants of Nilang and Jadhang, no one else being present. Nearly all of these people said that they had been questioned by Mr. Acton. Most of them said that they had told him that the frontier was on the Tsang Chok La, but that it was really untrue. They had been intimidated by threats from Pandit Ram Parsad, who was then settlement officer of Tehri, and had to say what they were told. They were more afraid of Tehri than of Tibet, as they have to go down to Tehri territory in the winter. Incidentally this Pandit Ram Parsad has, I understand, since been dismissed by the Darbar but I do not know why. One old man in particular, Panch Ram of Jadhang, said that he had refused to state that Nilang and Jadhang were in Tehri and that he was told by Ram Prasad that he would have oil poured over him and be burnt if he ever came down to Tehri. He has not dared to go down there since. I brought his case to the notice of His Highness and the Dewan, who promised to re-assure the man. I asked Mr. Acton whether he felt sure that his witnesses had not been tutored on a large scale and he said that he did not think so; but I do not think that the evidence he recorded as to a frontier on the Tsang Chok La is really of any value. I have only mentioned this point because I consider that the cession of Nilang would really be a great loss to Tibet.

13. The Tibetans have not been able to produce any evidence showing that they have actually administered Nilang and Jadhang but, under their system of Government, records are not regularly kept in the way they are in Tehri. One murder case of 30 or 40 years ago was vaguely quoted but, apart from

their tax of 74 rupees a year and a contribution of some 41 rupees 12 annas paid yearly to support two monks at a monastery in Tibet, and the occasional levy of transport from Nilang four or five stages northward, they seem to have done little. On the other hand the Tehri Darbar produced before Mr. Acton a considerable number of documents showing administrative activities. A great many of these documents, however refer to the Gangotri area, which is now not in dispute, and a good many of them refer to the collection and assessment of revenue, which Tibet admits that Tehri as well as Tibet has collected for many years. It must be remembered that, although the inhabitants of these villages used formerly to stay throughout the year, they have during that last 30 years or so been in the habit of moving down to lower valleys in undisputed Tehri territory for eight months in the year and living at their villages of Nilang and Jadhong for the other 4 months. This is because they have become richer and have acquired sheep and goats which must go to lower altitudes when snow covers the higher grazing grounds. Incidentally Nilang is at a height of 11,300 feet and the tree line begins about 3 miles below Nilang.

14. Tehri have stated that they would have to abandon a school and a customs post at Nilang if it were given to Tibet. The school is not there now and was, I understand, not maintained for long. The customs post was a trade registration post maintained at the expense of the Government of India. Such a post does not necessarily imply that its site is within the frontiers of India, as we maintained one for many years at Yakung in Tibet. As to the judicial cases decided by Tehri, I do not know whether most or all of these were decided during the eight months when they live in Nilang and Jadhong. When they move down they must of course be under Tehri jurisdiction.

15. The people of Nilang and Jadhong certainly look superficially much more like Garhwalis than like Tibetans. This is mainly due to their dress. If they were to be put into Tibetan clothes, many of them would easily pass as

Tibetans and they are much more different from the people three or four marches down towards Tehri than they are from Tibetans. They are of course a transition people. Kinney said that they were descended from Tibetans, and their own tradition seems to be the same. They seem to speak Hindi, Tibetan and some dialect of their own, which is rather allied to Tibetan, with equal facility. But they always write Hindi. None of them called the Tsang Chok La by its Hindi name of 'Jelukhaga' Pass and all of them, in referring to Mr. Acton's visit, used, even when speaking Hindi, the Tibetan word for an "investigation". "Mani walls" which are common in Tibet and are walls covered with flat stones inscribed with the prayer of "Om mani padme hum" exist as far south and west as Nilang but no further. The people of Nilang and Jadhong call in Lamas for ceremonies and give Tibetan names to any children born during the 4 months when they stay at Nilang and Jadhong. When they move down to the lower valley they call in Brahmins and give any children born there Hindu names. It is most important that these villagers who are peaceful and amiable people, should not be troubled by either side. It is most necessary that the Tehri Darbar should continue to permit them to go down the valleys in the winter as they do at present and where, of course, they will be entirely under Tehri's jurisdiction. The Darbar have hinted in one of their letters that this privilege might be denied to them. What these people wish, I think, is that the case should be decided one way or another at once.

16. The Tibetan Government have constantly urged that their claims are supported by certain maps "published by the British Government". The maps in question are not Government ones, and I have only seen one of the 3 they quote, namely that is Sir Charles Bell's "Manuel of colloquial Tibetan". Although, not a Government map, it was prepared by the Survey of India, and shows Nilang to be in Tibet. It is easy to understand that the Tibetan Government thinks that these maps give them an unanswerable claim to Nilang, for they cannot distinguish between a map published by a private agency and one published by the Government. The Tibetan representative

constantly referred to these maps. I explained to him the difference between Government maps and privately published ones but he did not understand it. I also pointed out to him that Sir Charles Bell's map, which I had with me, even if it showed Nilang on the Tibetan side of the frontier, certainly did not show Gumgum bridge as being in Tibet.

17. If the Government of India agree with my proposal, I fear that Tibet will not be so agreeable and will still continue to write letters every 2 or 3 months maintaining their claim to the Gumgum bridge. We could, without really harming Tehri, give Tibet practically the whole area in dispute with the exception of the forest, which Tibet could in no case work. I do not, however, see why we should give any more to Tibet than what I have proposed, and I think that it will probably be necessary to inform the Tibetan Government that this is our last word on the subject and to maintain that attitude.

18. There are one or two other points affecting the relations between Tehri and Tibet. The Tibetans undoubtedly feel that, whereas they have, since Mr. Acton's enquiry, avoided all action in the disputed territory except the collection of annual 74 rupees, Tehri felled a lot of trees near Gumgum bridge in 1928. The Tibetan representative constantly recurred to this subject. He said that obviously Tehri had disregarded the orders of the Government of India. This is not really so, however as the Tehri Darbar maintained in paragraph 4 of their letter to the political agent, Tehri-Garhwal, No. 1812 - XXV11 1004 (1), dated the 14th October 1927, that the area in which no action should be taken was from Jadhong to the watershed, and this contention was accepted by the Government of India. The fact, however, remains that this felling of trees has been much resented by the Tibetans.

19. Another small matter which annoyed the Dzongpon very much was that, when we camped at Jangla and his transport animals began to graze they

were stopped by a forest guard. I spoke to a minor official whom we had met by chance at Nilang and who was with us and suggested that he might be a bit more tactful. the matter was immediately adjusted, but the Tibetans remarked that everybody including the Tehri people was allowed to graze wherever they liked in Tibet, and this was the sort of treatment they had to endure whenever they came into contact with Tehri.

20. Another much more important matter is that Tehri had just imposed customs duties on goods entering from Tibet. This has not yet come to the notice of the Tibetan Government and even the Jongpen complained only that the duties were being collected from Tibetans and from no-one else. This latter allegation is denied by the Darbar and what probably happens is that the only people importing dutiable articles at present are the Tibetans. I think it is most undesirable that Tehri should charge any customs duties on their Tibetan frontier. Mr. Stubbs told me that the Darbar did not care about these duties at all in themselves, but that they were simply imposed in view of what might possible happen when a federal India came into existence, so that they might eventually claim more compensation, from the Government of India for giving them up. I was told that in northern Tehri that the duty on wood is as high as 8 annas a seer which is more than 50%; the Dewan , however told me that the tax is 1 anna a seer. If however, the Tibetan Government at Lhasa come to know of these duties they will certainly protest strongly. Trade between Tibet and Tehri is of course, trifling compared with that which passes through Sikkim, but the same considerations which made the Government of India prevent Sikkim from putting on customs duties are really of equal force with regard to customs duties in Tehri. In any case these duties ought to be abolished at once and I trust it will be found possible to ensure this. Further, if any compensation is given to Tehri in respect of this boundary dispute, I think one of the conditions should be that she must immediately discontinue these customs duties and should not re-impose them.

21. Feeling on both sides is at present a little hostile and it is necessary that this dispute should be ended in order to restore local friendly relations. The case of a Tibetan who shot a musk deer in the forest area above Gumgum bridge and was arrested by Tehri, was made the cause of complaint by the Tibetans. They even alleged that he had been arrested at Jadhang, on the Tibetan side of the frontier proposed by the Government of India. It is not worthwhile to go into all the details, but Tehri deny that he was arrested at Jadhang and say that a number of their subjects, who were trading in Tibetan territory, were kept in temporary confinement by the Tibetans as a reprisal. I do not think we shall hear of this particular case again unless the Dzungpon drafts long complaints against Tehri and sends them to Lhasa.

22. The country down as far as Nilang is Tibetan in aspect. The question of administrative control is not, I think very important. The passes are closed for only 5 months in the years, and not for nine as stated by the Darbar in one of their letters, and during these five months no inhabitants are left at Nilang and Jadhang except one or two old men. The rest all move down to Tehri territory. Tibet really has a system of administration and these very amenable people can easily be controlled by Tibet during the time they stay at their higher villages. In these days when everyone is over-administered, they will not be so fortunate as to be left without administrative control.

23. Both the Raja and the Dewan stated that they considered that if Jadhong was going to Tibet, Nilang should also go to Tibet. If Nilang was going to Tehri, Jadhong should also go to Tehri. Both the villages and all the cultivation of Nilang should be under the same Government. As the Government of India have already offered Jadhong to Tibet, it is difficult to see how, having regards to these expressed views of Tehri, they can now avoid giving Tibet Nilang also.

24. His Highness asked Mr. Stubbs and myself as to the extent to which he should still refrain from administering the disputed territory. We agreed that

no obtrusive activities should be undertaken in the forest. Fortunately there is no likelihood of any such activities for at least the next five years. The Raja enquired as to road and bridge repairs and we agreed that there was no reason for his refraining from carrying out any such schemes as were contemplated. He is not, however, taking any actions in or around Nilang until the matter is settled.

25. I recorded the statements of a number of persons but do not think it is necessary to trouble the Government of India with them. A few other remarks may be made. The Dzungpon told me that the three hundred rupees collected from the Jadha (inhabitants of Nilang and Jadhong) by his predecessor in about 1920, was an animal tax ordered by the Tibetan Government from the whole of Tibet for that year only, to pay for the expenses of the army in Eastern Tibet. He also told me that later in the year of Mr. Acton's visit a number of Jadha who were trading in western Tibet met him and he asked them why they had told lies to Mr. Acton. On their own initiative they submitted a petition in Hindi saying that the Tehri Darbar forced them to give false evidence and asking forgiveness. The original petition together with a Tibetan translation was sent to Lhasa. This statement of the Dzungpon was confirmed by individual private enquiries from several leading Jadha who confirmed Mr. Dzungpon's story. They added that they had also sent a hundred rupees with the petition as a *salami* to the Dalai Lama. Although these men said that they had been in no way persuaded by the Dzungpon, it is difficult to believe that, at any rate in this case, there was no tutoring by the Tibetans.

26. I regret that this note is so long but am anxious not to omit any point of importance. To summarize, I proposed that we should adhere to Kinney's frontier line as shown in his map No. 364- 15/02 published in 1879, with a slight deviation so as to include in Tibet the whole of the fields irrigated by Kinney's frontier stream. We should inform Tibet that, as they admit themselves, an annual tax of 24 rupees has been taken from the villages of

Nilang and Jadhung by the Tehri Darbar for many years. This being an old tax and a matter of immemorial custom, should be allowed, to continue. I only make this latter proposal in view of the fact that Tibet collects certain dues from the Bians and Chaudans people of the British district of Almora. If Tibet should ever contend that these dues show that Bians and Chaudans are Tibetan territory we can retort "No, the Tehri Darbar, also collect a tax in Tibetan territory. It is a matter of old customs". I do not think there will be any objection to asking the Tibetan Government not to collect more than their old customary tax of 74 rupees a year from the Jadhha. Although we should find it difficult to insist on this if they were to refuse, I think they would be likely to agree. My whole object in this suggestion is to see that these unfortunate people do not suffer. Tibet will certainly not oppress them generally speaking, but they might occasionally demand another exceptional tax such as they collected in 1921.

27. If the Government of the United Provinces have no objection to ceding the Badrinath area to Tehri, as recommended by Mr. Stubbs, I would suggest that the Government of India might readily agree. But we should insist on the abolition of the customs duties levied by Tehri on Tibetan Trade in any case, and with re-doubled force if we give them "compensation" in regard to this dispute.

F. WILLIAMSON

The 31st October 1932

No. 7 TEHRI-TIBET BOUNDARY MAP

RED LINE	BOUNDARY CLAIMED BY TEHRI.
YELLOW LINE	BOUNDARY CLAIMED BY TIBET.
BROKEN RED LINE	KINNEY'S SURVEY.
BLUE LINE	HERBERT'S SURVEY.
GREEN LINE	BOUNDARY BETWEEN TEHRI AND INDIA.
BROKEN GREEN LINE	TEHRI-BASHAHR BOUNDARY, 1936.

