

PEAKS OF THE ASSAM HIMALAYA

H. W. TILMAN

FROM the mountaineer's point of view nothing is known of the Himalaya east of Chomolhari, and not very much is known of the topography. For 180 miles the range forms the northern boundary of Bhutan, and for another 250 that of Assam; but it should be noted that though the Himalaya may be assumed to mark the Assam-Tibet frontier, the boundary has never been delimited. The whole range from the Tista valley in Sikkim to Namcha Barwa (25,545 feet) and beyond is called by Burrard and Hayden the Assam Himalaya; it would be less confusing to confine the name to the mountains lying north of Assam.

Where the range passes from Bhutan into Assam there is a wide breach formed by the upper eastern basin of the Manas, and immediately east of this gap is a group of high peaks which cover about 50 miles on an E.N.E. alignment. These I hoped to explore this year. The major peaks have been fixed trigonometrically from stations in the Assam valley. During their great exploration of the Tsangpo gorge in 1911 Bailey and Morshead travelled and surveyed along the Tibetan side of the range. In 1935 and 1938 Kingdon Ward skirted the western end and visited the valley of the Gorjo Chu, which, for reasons that will be apparent, is the only practicable approach to the range. In 1934 and 1936 Messrs. Sheriff and Ludlow covered much the same ground, but the peaks, passes, and glaciers of this region remain unvisited.

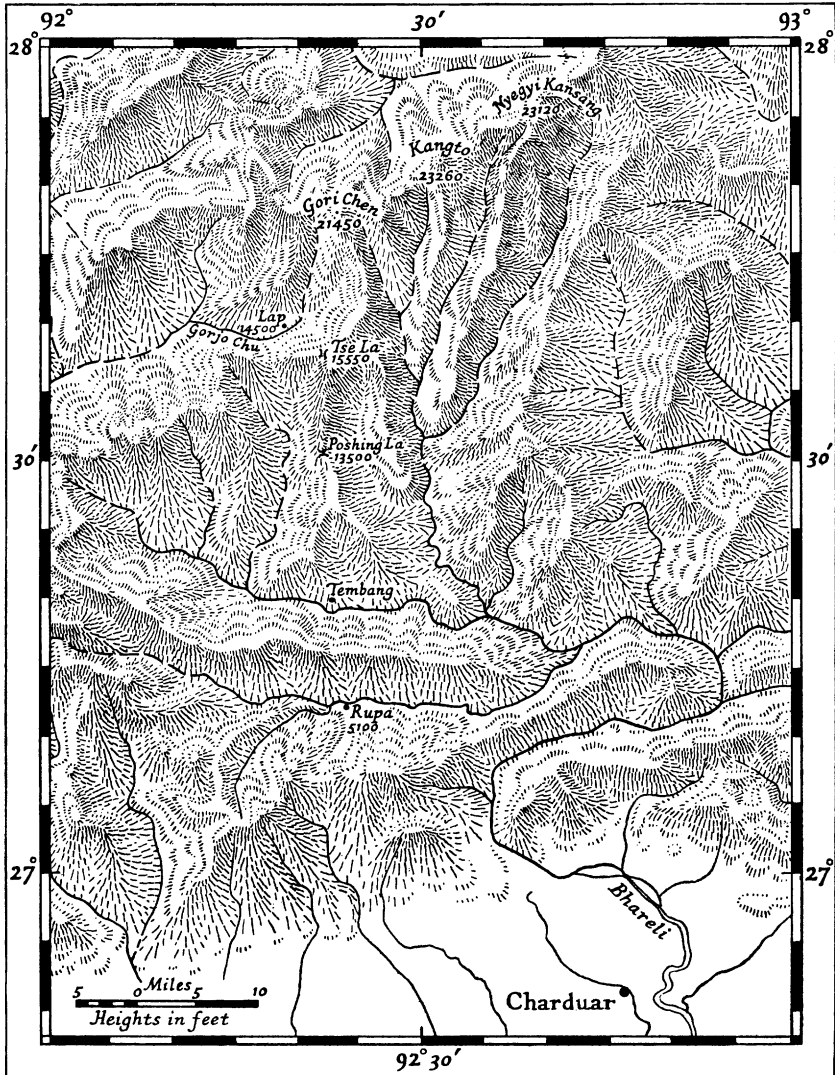
Two routes into Tibet traverse the gap formed by the eastern tributaries of the Manas. The more eastern route skirts the Assam Himalaya, crosses the Gorjo Chu valley, and passes within 10 miles of Gori Chen (21,450 feet), thus forming the obvious line of approach from the south. It would be simpler if an approach could be made from Tibet, where there are villages from which food could be got and where the effects of the monsoon would be less felt; but the good will of Lhasa for British mountaineering parties is given principally to Mount Everest expeditions.

On the south side of the range, except for the narrow strip of country between these two routes, the foothills of Assam are the home of savage tribes: Miji Akas, Silung Abors, and Daflas. Known as the Balipara Frontier Tract, this unadministered territory stretches east to the Subansiri and beyond. The eastern route to Tibet lies on the edge of this hostile country and it is not possible to leave the route until near the Himalaya, where the country becomes too high for these forest-dwelling savages. A Political Officer stationed at Charduar, some 20 miles north of the Brahmaputra, is in charge of the Frontier Tract.

With three Sherpas I left Charduar on April 11 and after four marches through uninhabited forest we reached the first Sherchokpa village of Rupa (5100 feet). On the 18th we arrived at Tembang, which is the last village of any consequence on the eastern route. Two of the Sherpas and I developed malaria here, so that it was not until April 30 that we continued the march with seventeen local coolies (Mönbas). We crossed the Poshing La (13,500

feet), the Tse La (15,550 feet), and camped in the valley of the Gorjo Chu at a shepherds' camp called Lap (14,500 feet) on May 3.

The local men were now dismissed, but our malaria, aggravated by the



The Assam Himalaya

height, attacked us afresh. Two of the Sherpas and I were really ill, but the third Sherpa, upon whom all the camp work was devolved, was less affected. Four plane-table stations were occupied and resections made in the vicinity of Lap; and one Sherpa and I occupied a camp higher up the valley. I still hoped that we should throw off our fever and be able to carry out our programme of

making a circuit of Gori Chen, climbing and mapping *en route*, and then visiting Kangto (23,260 feet) and Nyegyí Kansang (23,120 feet), the highest point of the group farther east and north.

I mapped a bit of the Gorjo Chu near Lap, but not enough to be of use. The Gorjo Chu does not rise in the basin round Gori Chen as indicated on the Survey of India degree sheet 83A, but is cut off from it by a snow ridge about 18,000 feet high. I made an attempt to get on to this ridge to look into the basin, but was too weak to reach it.

On May 24 we returned to the lower camp at Lap, where the two Sherpas had been left, to find one of them, Nukku, lying unconscious. He died on the 26th before help could be obtained. On the 28th we got six men and four *zos* from Mago, a hamlet farther north on the road to Tibet. The six men carried the sick Sherpa to Charduar on June 11, two months after setting out.

Our malaria was probably picked up at our first camp out of Charduar, but there are several precautions that might be taken on a future occasion. This first camp could be avoided by a long double march; trousers instead of shorts, bamber oil, mosquito nets, and heavier prophylactic doses of quinine would all help to reduce the risks of infection.

The strange mixture of peoples and the interesting group of twenty or thirty high peaks lying north of them combine to make this a most attractive corner of the Himalaya which I hope to have an opportunity of revisiting.

THE 1/MILLION MAP OF EUROPE

ONE of our Society's achievements in the war of 1914-18 was to compile about a hundred sheets of a provisional series of a 1/Million Map, covering practically all Europe and extending through Asia Minor to Arabia and Iraq. At that time there were only a few scattered sheets of the *Carte Internationale du Monde au Millionième*, and those mostly not obtainable in war-time. A chapter in Dr. Mill's 'Record of the R.G.S.,' published in 1930, relates how the sheets were compiled in the Society's House and reproduced by the Ordnance Survey or the G.S.G.S., and how a lady Fellow "became such a good amateur draughtsman that some of her Russian sheets were reproduced from her drawings, and remain to this day the only sheets of Russia in the scheme of the 1/Million map." The same is true now, nine years later. About a dozen of these sheets, which an official list distinguishes by the words "rough style only," and another dozen or two which were redrawn with stamped names by the Ordnance Survey from our compilations, have never been superseded by regular editions. The sheets of Russia are called obsolescent in a paper to the Geographical Congress in Amsterdam last year: but if beginning to die they are taking a long time about it, and they may now be taking a new lease of life. For the U.S.S.R. do not adhere to the Convention de la *Carte Internationale du Monde au Millionième*; they have produced a 1/M series of their own, but we are not allowed to buy them.