

A LITTLE-KNOWN SIKKIM PASS

THE following account of the crossing of the Patra La in August 1905 is taken from letters written at the time to my parents which I have now come across.

The Patra La is a pass on the range between the Lachung valley in Sikkim and the Chumbi valley in Tibet and is about 3 miles north of the Tanka La and 7 miles south of the Gora La. The more direct and easier pass for me to have taken would have been the Tanka La itself; but as I was having difficulty in getting permission to enter Tibet I thought it better to take the pass which led me direct to the hot springs in the Kambu valley without troubling the military authorities at what was then known as New Chumbi but is now called Yatung.

In 1904, during the Tibet Expedition, I had been ordered to take a patrol of mounted infantry from Phari to the hot springs in the Kambu valley to report on the possibility of a Tibetan force gathering there and attacking the lines of communication from the west. I had to go out and back to Phari in the day. When I reached the hot springs I found on the hills many herds of burrhel with some fine heads, and this determined me to visit this valley again after the expedition was over.

Leaving Darjeeling on 14th August I spent my first night with Mr. Lister at his tea-garden at Peshoke. Lister was a wonderful naturalist and knew more about the people and the country in that part of the Himalayas than any other man. He had, I believe, come out to India when a young man as botanist to the Abor Expedition of 1854.

There were, of course, no cars in those days and the cart road from Rangpo to Gangtok was new and in an uncertain state, especially in the rains of August. So to reach Gangtok I travelled via Rangpo and Pakyong. I reached Lachung on the fifth day from Darjeeling. Here I was delayed a day as the coolies had to make themselves boots and undertake other preparations for the journey over the pass. I was delayed a second day as Mr. Claude White, the Political Officer, who had just arrived in north Sikkim direct from Gyantse, had sent for coolies to take him on to Gangtok. Luckily these were not required after all and I succeeded in getting off on the third day. There were two pleasant Swedish missionaries, Miss Fredericksen and Miss Johansen, in Lachung who fed me with delicious scones, fresh butter, and jam made from wild strawberries. I had some difficulty in persuading any coolies to take me over the Patra La, which none of them had ever crossed, and they tried to persuade me to cross the Tanka La.

The first night we slept at an overhanging rock called Menpupya. This was only 4 miles by the map but took me and my men $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours. It is called 'Monphu Cave' on the map. My aneroid showed an alti-

tude of 11,700 feet. The next day, six hours' travelling took me to Sumdendzong at 15,500 feet. This was above fuel level and I did not expect to find yak dung on this little-frequented track, so just before leaving the fuel level I made each man collect a little firewood, enough for one night. On 23rd August we made an early start. I came on some snowcock and in futile pursuit of them I got lost in a fog; but by good luck I found my coolies again. There was now no track of any kind, but I had an inaccurate map on a small scale. After crossing two low passes we descended to a valley where there were a few rhododendron bushes. From here on our journey was pure guess-work, but we happened to strike the right valley. After going up this for two hours we reached a fork with no indication as to which branch to take. It was very cold and pouring with rain. I sent some of the men up the most likely branch to see if they could find any indication as to the way to the pass. My Indian servant and I, who were both mountain sick, took what shelter we could among the rocks and had a calorit of hot pea-soup. I have often wondered why calorits went out of fashion. Perhaps because they had an unpleasant flavour and were more bulky than ordinary tins of food; they were, however, handy and comforting, quick to prepare, and carried their own fuel. As I have not heard of them since those days I may explain that the tin of soup or stew was surrounded by an outer tin about a quarter of an inch larger all round. This outer casing was pierced in three or four places with a skewer. This allowed two chemicals to mix and in a very short time the food inside was heated and was then opened in the ordinary way. After $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours the men returned. They had found a single stone balanced on another and this was sufficient to indicate the road. The clue seemed slight but we followed up that valley and came on several more of these faint signs. We had to scramble over loose stones among patches of snow. Near the summit I was so bad with mountain sickness that I had to be helped up to the pass, and several of the coolies were in the same state. The fit ones left their loads at the pass and gallantly returned to carry the loads and generally assist those who were ill. The summit was 17,500 feet by my single small aneroid; but I think the pass cannot be quite so high as this.

Just over the pass we had to cross two patches of ice—small incipient or dying glaciers. We had an easier time down and soon got on to open turf which we descended until to our joy we saw a black Tibetan tent surrounded by a herd of grazing yaks. I was glad to get warm and to dry my soaking clothes before the *drukpa's* fire, and here we spent the night at 16,100 feet. The next morning it cleared and I saw that the pass behind us was white with snow. Our host the *drukpa* said that now the pass would be closed till next July, so that my efforts to avoid the military authorities in Chumbi were of no avail!

According to my map I should have dropped straight from the Patra La into the upper Kambu valley, but this did not turn out to be so; I had to descend 3,000 feet and then rise 2,000 feet over a spur called the Gepa La before dropping into the Kambu valley itself. The latest maps are accurate compared with those available to me in 1905, and I see that the Gepa La is now marked at 15,420 feet, though no height is given for the Patra La itself.

I hope I have not exaggerated the difficulties of this pass; perhaps my impressions were coloured by mountain sickness. When all is said and done I was able with difficulty to have my pony led over the pass.

I remained in the Kambu valley for over three weeks and shot several burrhel besides pigeons and partridges for the pot. I travelled up and down the valley, moving my tent several times. Once I went up to the head of the valley, whence from a hill I had a view of the real dry Tibetan country in the direction of Kambu Dzong—such a contrast to the green hills of Kambu with the comparatively large rainfall.

I came on one curiosity in this valley. Going through a patch of fir forest at the lower end of the valley I suddenly came on a gilt turquoise-studded *chöten* (shrine), roofed and protected from the weather on three sides but quite open in front. It was, if I remember rightly, 5 or 6 feet high and must have been of considerable value. I was told that when the Nepalese sacked Shigatse in 1790 this was removed and hidden in the valley for safety and no one had ever taken the trouble to take it back. I paid repeated visits to this valley in subsequent years, the last being in 1928; but the people professed not to know or even to have heard of such a thing. The *chöten* may still be there. I can say from memory that it was low down on the west side of the valley.

F. M. BAILEY

ZELT-SCHLAFSACK (TENT-SLEEPING-BAG)

Made by the Ballon-Fabrikwerke, Augsburg

THIS is designed for regions of great cold, such as the Arctic and the high Himalaya. It insulates against cold, can be used on any kind of ground, will serve as a boat, weighs very little, and packs up very small. It consists of tubes made of rubber-cum-linen fabric, each tube being inflated either by the mouth, with bellows, or compressed air. Damage is thus localized. The arched roof, which can be fastened from inside after folding over, is secured permanently on one side. The inflation of the tubes stiffens it against collapse through external pressure. The special pattern supplied to Himalayan expeditions is a