

# TRAVEL • & EXPLORATION

**DECEMBER 1909.**

*Principal Contents :*

**Mrs. F. BULLOCK WORKMAN.**

**My Highest Ascent in the  
Himalayas.**

**J. SCOTT KELTIE, LL.D.**

**Travellers' Tales.**

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The Editor does not identify himself with the opinions expressed by contributors. He will be pleased to consider articles and photographs submitted to him, and will endeavour to return those which he cannot use, if they are accompanied by stamped addressed envelope. No responsibility, however, can be accepted for their safety. In written communications all names of persons and places should be written the first time in CAPITAL LETTERS.

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**\*\* TO ADVERTISERS.** All Communications respecting Advertisements to be sent to Advertisement Dept., "Travel and Exploration," REYNOLDS-BALL'S GUIDES, 27, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON, W.C.

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Among the ARTICLES arranged for the JANUARY NUMBER (enlarged to 72 pages) are the following:—

- The Circuit of the Nun Kun. By Dr. W. H. WORKMAN.
- The Motor on the Riviera. By C. N. WILLIAMSON.
- On the Khasia Hills. By LEO FAULKNER.
- Outfit and Equipment for Travellers and Explorers (in 2 parts). By RALPH DURAND, EUSTACE REYNOLDS-BALL, and others.

# TRAVEL · & EXPLORATION

## A MONTHLY ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE ·

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Vol. II.]

DECEMBER, 1909.

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### My Highest Ascent in the Himalaya.

By FANNY BULLOCK WORKMAN, F.R.S.G.S.,

Officier de l'Instruction Publique of France.

THE Nun Kun range, where one of our highest ascents was made, is situated in the province of Suru, Eastern Kashmir. The Nanga Parbat Massif is the highest, the Nun Kun the second highest of what, accurately speaking, is called the Punjab Himalaya. Suru is an arid country, showing little verdure, except near villages, where the inhabitants, by irrigation, cultivate small tracts of land. In this respect, as in its sparse tree-growth, it resembles Ladakh, near which it lies, south-west.

Its people, although Mohammedans, are semi-Tibetan in type. They are sturdy, strong of body, generally light-hearted and less cowardly about approaching the snows than are the Baltis, with whom we have had long and often trying experiences.

Owing to failure of crops, and consequent famine having existed for two seasons previous to our visit, little rice or flour was obtainable in any part of the province. Besides their pay, it was necessary to give the coolies accompanying us for six to eight weeks of exploring work, daily rations of two pounds of flour, and we were obliged to send up sixteen thousand pounds of grain for this purpose from Kashmir. This commissariat work required considerable forethought and planning in advance, and resulted in the despatching of an English agent from Srinagar, in charge of two hundred and fifty coolies loaded with supplies, three weeks ahead of our own party.

None of the upper glaciers, passes or peaks of the Nun Kun having been previously climbed, we wished to explore these as thoroughly as possible

and at our leisure, also make high snow-camps and remain at them perhaps some days for study of altitude effects, as well as for the purpose of attaining goals we might wish to reach.

Knowing the improbability of coolies seconding our attempts in this respect, beyond a certain height, it was decided to bring out a number of European porters to carry camp-kit above where the natives would willingly go. Our party thus consisted of nine Europeans, Dr. Hunter Workman, myself, Cyprien Savaye, guide, of Courmayeur, and six Italian porters.

Well above the Shafat glacier, the northern approach to the Nun Kun peaks, on the last earth-slant of a border mountain, some tent-terraces were dug out and a base camp at fifteen thousand one hundred feet was made. We were here in the heart of the mountains, surrounded by glittering glaciers, jagged ice-falls and splendid peaks, down the sharp-riven slopes of which avalanches roared reverberantly at short intervals day and night.

For several weeks glacial investigation was carried on, new cols and lower summits climbed and measured, and a thoroughly interesting, untrammelled high mountain life lived. About July 20th it was decided to investigate the highest Nun Kun peaks, and see if any of them could be ascended. Four of these rise to heights varying from twenty-two thousand to twenty-three thousand four hundred and fifty feet, but the summits of all but one were hidden from view from Base Camp by high snow-walls and lesser peaks.

After a previous reconnaissance by the guide, three porters with a few coolies were sent off to make a cache of tents and provisions at two or three points along the snowy upward route we wished to ascend. If the coolies gave out or refused to go beyond the first snow-camp, the porters were to push on alone and leave tents as high as possible, then return to join our party.

Two days after they had started, accompanied by guide Savaye, the remaining porters and fifteen coolies, carrying light camp-kit, we left Base Camp, ascending over exhausting moraine ridges or wading icy streams for an hour, when snow was reached. On these slopes we came upon large beds of Nieve Penitente, or corrugated ice-pinnacles, from one to three feet high. They are well known in the Andes, but this was the first time in five seasons' Himalayan exploration that we had met with them.

After one p.m. a snow-scoop near some rocks was reached. Here wood left by the porters was found, and we decided to pitch tents at what was named Nieve Penitente Camp. Its height was seventeen thousand six hundred and fifty-seven feet. Fortunately, a good sleep refreshed us, giving strength to bear what was little anticipated, namely, five nights



Bullock Workman Cairn at 15,000 feet, Nun Kun.



which were passed practically without sleep by the nine Europeans. The next day a sharp snow-wall caused some delay, as steps had to be cut for the coolies, who, however, unlike many we had previously had, bravely and uncomplainingly hung to their work. Great snow cotes, striped by wide bottomless blue crevasses, had also to be overcome, while each hour the scenery increased in snowy splendour.

Toward noon an uncommon sight in untravelled Himalaya met our eyes, two shelter tents were discovered a long way above pinioned to a sloping plateau. All climbers have felt the relief experienced at sight of a club hut in the Alps after a hard climb, and here in Himalaya it was with a thrill of pleasure we slowly climbed on toward the tiny green specks. Finally the advance porters were seen descending a wall left of the tents.

We were now at a high altitude, and the caravan stopped constantly to recover breath, but at last the camp was reached and our tents added to the others on the shelving plateau. This halt, at nineteen thousand nine hundred feet was called White Needle Camp, as the slope on which it was pitched descended from a beautiful white aiguille, a contrefort of the highest Nun Kun.

Nearly all the coolies were suffering from mountain sickness or migraine, so all were sent down to Base Camp except three, who volunteered to carry loads higher the next day. After a dreary almost sleepless night camp was struck, and we started up a long very sharp snow-wall. We were roped in two caravans, the three natives, porters and guide carrying forty-pound loads.

The Nun Kun seemed bound to furnish a most difficult stairway to its unknown ice-wastes above. The word "halt" fell often from the lips of the heavily-loaded men. After more than an hour of nearly straight climbing, a sort of zigzag across the middle of the wall was begun. Luckily none of the party were inclined to vertigo, for behind—at times touching our elbows as we moved—loomed the tall ice-canopy, diamond beflashed with early sunlight, while straight under our feet sank the five hundred-foot snow and ice sheet, at the base of which yawned a thirty-foot wide crevasse, ready to receive the whole caravan should any take a false step. Further below the chasm fell the steep slopes, ascended the previous day, to the curving glacier which sank in shadow to the grass-line many thousands of feet beneath.

To the east long waves of mauve mountains stretched, here and there coquetting with vapoury clouds. The awful grandeur of our own environment, combined with the exquisite outlines of the surrounding mountain world, failed to be appreciated at the moment so tuned were our mental and physical energies to overcoming the gruesome eerie route.

Finally, we turned the wall at an appalling angle, and reaching gentler ascending slopes, the loaded men sank down in the snow for a short well-won rest. Moving on, the rising hillocks brought us to the edge of a wonderful, little suspected, rolling plateau situated in the core of the Nun Kun Massif, at between twenty thousand and twenty-one thousand three hundred feet. Guarding this great snow-desert rise the pointed summits of the six highest peaks.

Soon Camp Italia, at twenty thousand six hundred and thirty-two feet, was colonized by a number of small Mummery tents. In an hour the three natives, who had fallen behind with the remaining kit, arrived, limping, and groaning with mountain malaise. Clouds had crept up over the peaks, and the weather outlook was far from propitious. The scene was a weird one, with the natives standing near the tents calling aloud and salaaming deeply to the summit nearly blotted out by the storm. Having finished their appeal to the mountain gods, we told them they might go down, and even with the dangerous descent before them, they seemed glad to leave our snow wilderness.

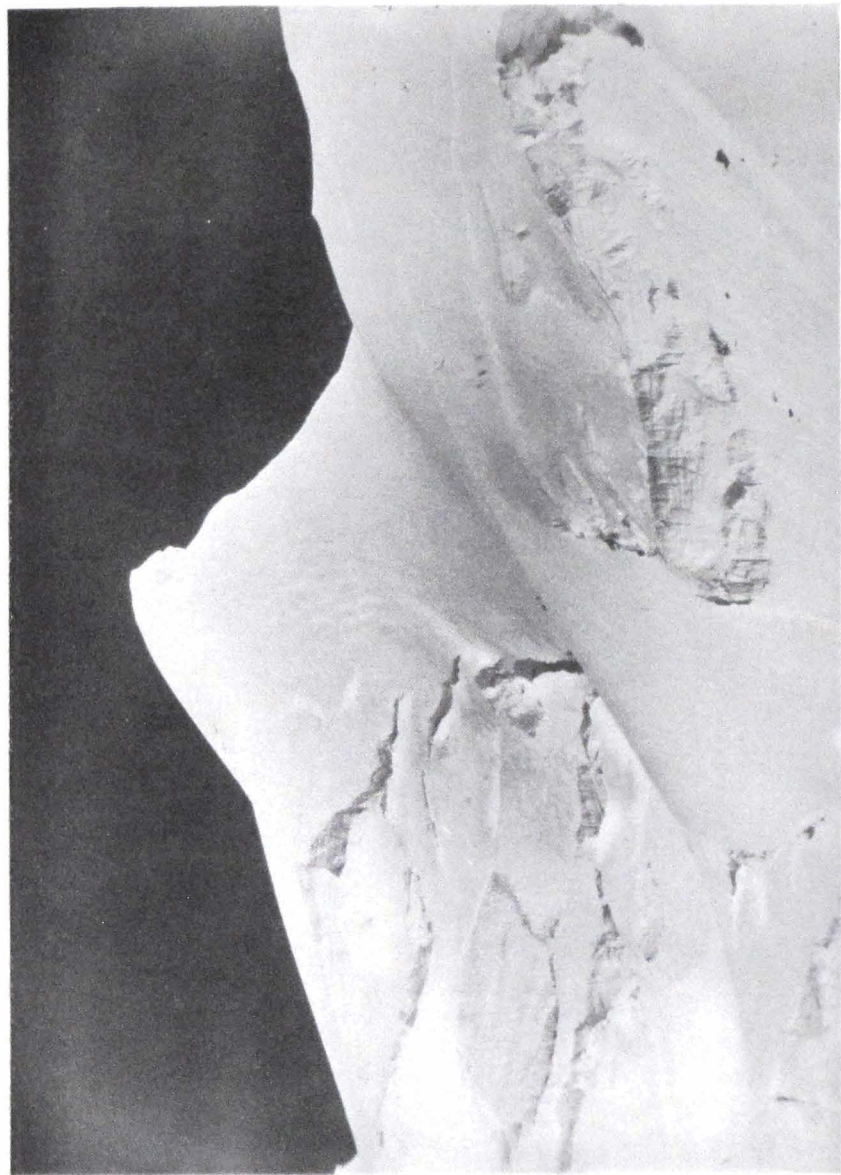
By sending them off our last link with the lower world was severed, but we were rather too far aloft just then to think much about that. One of the Italian porters here became mountain sick, and the next day was too ill to continue, which reduced us to six carriers. Toward sunset the weather cleared, and we studied the peaks to see which could be attempted. There was no chance of a final camp on the highest Nun Kun, and the slopes were too vertical for porters to carry loads, so we decided to attempt the second highest one, lower only by one hundred and fifty feet.

We existed through another long, sleepless, cold night, and as soon as the hard-frozen tents could be pulled up the next day, pushed onward up the rising plateau. The guide and porters carried only our kit and provisions, preferring to go lightly-loaded at that altitude and return for their own things the same day. By the time the base of the peak was reached, the sky was cloudy and the snow conditions under foot deplorable. When our camp was pitched, it was settled that the others, who were obliged to descend, their tents being behind, should return, if the snow allowed, by dusk; if not, those who were to go higher on the morrow, should rejoin us at daylight.

This camp, where we two passed the night alone, was at twenty-one thousand three hundred feet, very carefully measured as are all our heights, by boiling-point readings, compared with simultaneous ones taken for us daily three times during the season at the lower Government Barometric station. It was named Camp America.

During the afternoon there the most sickening heat was experienced. The sun shone at intervals through a thin mist, and life inside or outside





The White Needle.



tents was almost unbearable. The sun temperature taken with solar thermometer at 2.30 was one hundred and ninety-three degrees. At sunset it froze, and the minimum temperature of the night was minus four degrees. Thus in fifteen hours we enjoyed a fluctuation in temperature of one hundred and ninety-seven degrees !

The long hours of darkness passed at this camp were quite terrible, between the insomnia, the gasping after oxygen and the cold. The water froze, of course, in our aluminium bottles, and there was nothing to drink. As faint dawn percolated through the tent canvas, a crunching sound was heard without, and Savaye announced his arrival with two porters. When I succeeded in untying the ice-coated flaps of my Mummy, I beheld three solemn-looking figures with purple bloated faces and moustaches composed of icicles.

We all set to work in the frigid air getting together clothes and food for the last climb. But preparing the necessary cup of coffee was the hardest task of any, for the stove, like ourselves, was affected by want of oxygen and took a long time to light. Still, this was accomplished, as was the pulling on of congealed boots, which at that height seemed a herculean task, and at last we were roped and off.

After three sleepless nights we felt at first scarcely fit, but strength came with climbing, even at twenty-two thousand feet. Step-cutting was in order at once, the incline of the mountain being exceedingly sharp and the snow very hard. There were also many bad places to look out for, ice-falls to contour, crevasses to handle with the precipice beneath our feet ever deepening. Climbing on steadily for three hours, we stopped finally on a small ledge at a height, afterwards computed, of twenty-two thousand seven hundred and twenty feet, where a light breakfast was eaten. Here, as clouds were coming over the peaks, Dr. Workman, with one porter, decided to remain to photograph, while I with Savaye and the other porter continued the ascent.

The climb to this point had been very steep, but the incline now became far sharper and was mostly of rock, which, as Alpinists well know, is much harder to negotiate at great altitudes than snow. The diminished atmospheric pressure was severely felt, and breathing became most difficult as we slowly pushed upward, stopping every few steps to relieve our over-taxed lungs.

Finally we halted on a wind-swept rocky pinnacle, our day's great task finished. A chaos of ranges stretched thousands of feet below us into infinity. Many of the peaks raised only their tips, like jagged teeth, out of the cloud-ocean beneath. The view was essentially a downward one, over many mountain lines and torn snaky glaciers winding toward murky valleys lost in distance. The only peak, the highest Nun Kun, that rose a little above us, was cloud-swathed.

I took my observations and one or two photographs, pausing between each movement to take breath. We were recompensed, however, for our efforts and the difficulties of the ascent, for the peak worked out later at twenty-three thousand three hundred feet.

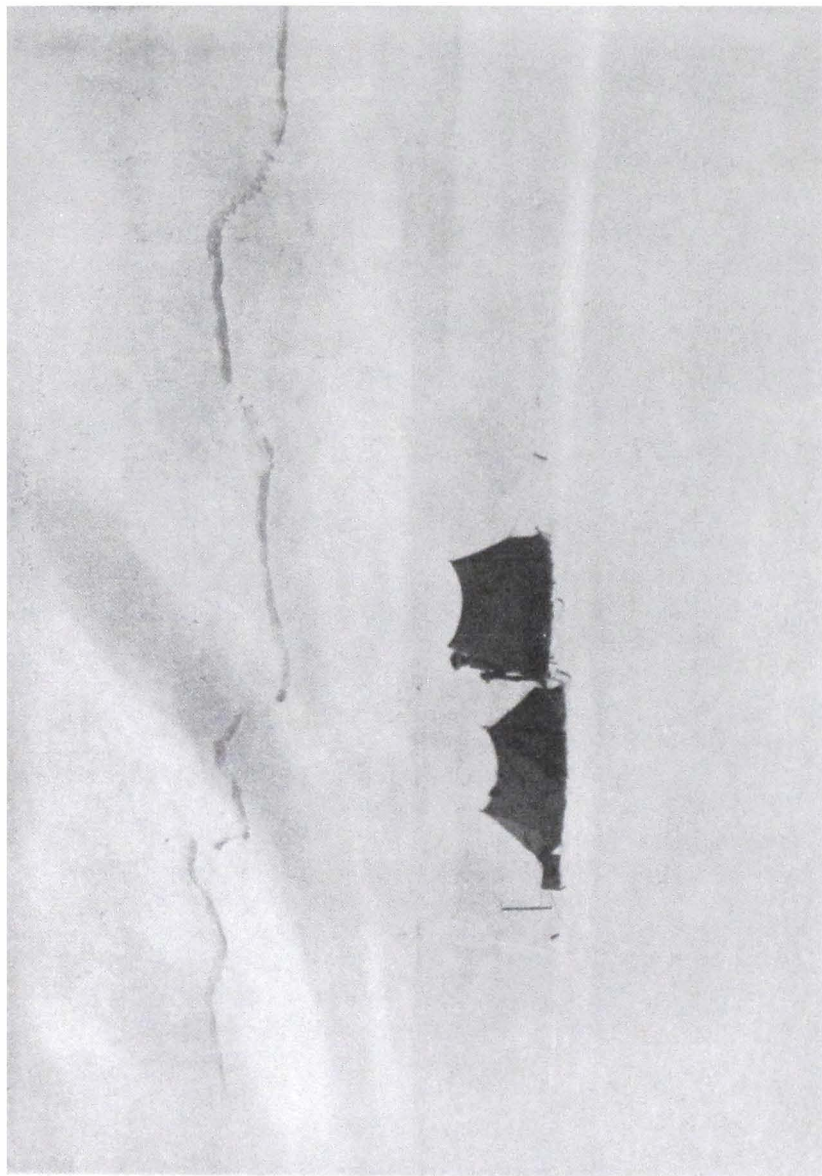
Time was passing, and the cold camp on the plateau could not be reached before nightfall, so down we climbed slowly to the others. From there the descent to the tents was very dangerous, and we sank through the softened snow on to solid ice, which called for great caution in our movements. By seven p.m. the dismantled but icy bivouac was heralded, and after cooking a soup, which exhausted the remaining energies of all, we crawled into our schlaf-sacks to pass the long night as best we could in a temperature of minus six below zero.

By this climb of twenty-three thousand three hundred feet I exceeded my former world mountaineering altitude record for women. Although I have held this record for some years, and still hold it, I make no boast of so doing, for it was not to gain records that we have for six seasons explored the Himalaya.

As, however, Miss A. S. Peck, on her ascent of Huascarán, in Peru, in 1908, claims not only to have surpassed my height, but also to hold the world altitude record for men and women, I feel that in justice to myself this matter should be mentioned.

Miss Peck made no measurements on Huascarán above nineteen thousand six hundred feet, merely estimating by eye its summit as at least twenty-four thousand or possibly twenty-five thousand feet. In these days of scientific mountaineering eye-estimates are regarded as valueless, therefore Miss Peck's altitude claim cannot be accepted. Mr. C. R. Enock, British engineer, whose books on South America are well known, states that this mountain was triangulated at twenty-two thousand one hundred and eighty feet, but gives no points as to when or by whom it was measured.

If this triangulation was done by South American engineers according to their usual methods, confidence could not be placed even on that figure. Aconcagua, measured by Fitzgerald at twenty-three thousand and eighty feet and by the noted French geographer F. Schrader at twenty-two thousand eight hundred and eighty feet, is believed by Andean explorers to be, and probably is, the highest peak of the Andes. I have reason to know that a careful triangulation by European experts is being undertaken of Huascarán, so that if weather conditions permit them to carry out their observations, it is likely to be known within six months whether Huascarán has really a height of twenty-two thousand feet.



Camp on the Nun Kun at 21,300 feet, where Dr. and Mrs. Bullock Workman passed the night alone.

