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HIMALAYAN JOURNEY

This is not a travel book in the accepted sense of the term, but an exceptionally good word picture of one of the world's most

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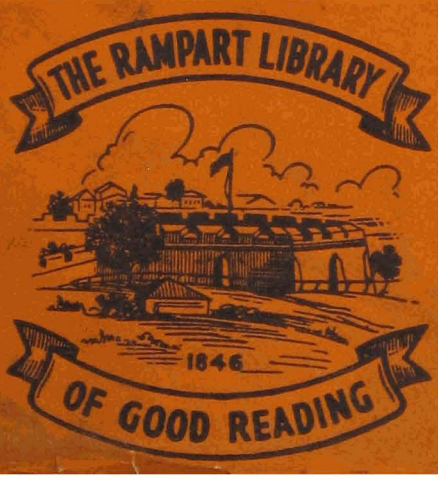

JOHN THOMAS

intriguing railways. Many things that puzzle travellers along the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway are explained here by the psychological method of establishing contact with the readers, by first dealing with facts they know and then leading them on into lesser known territories. John Thomas is skilful in the art of using words, and clever at building up atmosphere.

HIMALAYAN JOURNEY

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BY

JOHN THOMAS

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CONTENTS

		Page
	INTRODUCTION	7
I	DARJEELING MAIL	9
II	THROUGH THE TERAI	19
III	THE "O" AND "Z" PLAN	26
IV	MOUNTAIN MAGIC	41
V	TEA TOWN	55

INTRODUCTION

RAILWAY TO THE CLOUDS

When the broad gauge trains of the Bengal and Assam Railway arrive at Siliguri from Calcutta they find themselves more or less against a stone wall. The tremendous barrier of the Himalayas strides across the horizon apparently barring all further progress. It is left to the little, vest-pocket trains of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway to batter their way up fifty-one miles of this wall to Darjeeling—famous base town of the Everesters.

A journey on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway is one of the world's greatest travel thrills. Within six hours the little trains (they are scarcely bigger than those sometimes seen in British fairgrounds) whisk you into a new world. From the vast, Gangetic plain, with its bamboos and paddy and brown Bengalees you are rocketed to a land of Nepalese, Tibetans and Buddhist temples.

The track begins in the deadly, malarial Terai with its tangle of animal infested jungle, and twists and spirals upwards to the threshold of The Snows. Every thousand feet gained in altitude sees variations in climate and geography which would require many hundreds of miles of travel on the flat to produce. The distance between tropical Asia and the temperate Mediterranean lands is accounted for by this little mountain train in four thousand feet of continuous climbing. Heavy, tropical foliage gives place to homely oaks and rhododendrons. Inside six hours a steamy Indian summer becomes a fresh English spring.

Nowhere else in the world is there a journey like this. And no journey anywhere has so dramatic a climax. The end of the trip brings you face to face with the greatest

mountain mass in the world. Across your field of view stretches a vast array of glittering, white peaks, among them the highest peaks known. Beyond them is the mysterious tableland of Tibet.

"Himalayan Journey" is the record of an ascent of the Himalayas by train. If you are interested in Indian travel, and if you feel like reading about the Himalayas from a new angle you will find plenty to entertain you in these pages. If you hope some time to make the trip on the mountain railway you will find the book a useful guide, for all essential travel information is woven into the narrative. If you have already made the trip you will find the book makes a compact and original souvenir of your adventure.

JOHN THOMAS

India Command

January, 1944.

CHAPTER I

DARJEELING MAIL

IT is the hour before daybreak on the vast plains of North Bengal. Across the shadowy paddy fields rushes a long, darkened train. The engine's powerful headlamp steers the track ahead with an intensely white beam. Sleepers rush up endlessly out of the darkness, and sweep under the roaring wheels. A fiery shaft of light stabbing upwards from the locomotive's cab tinges the plume of black smoke frothing backwards over the carriage roofs.

It is the "Darjeeling Mail" on its nightly dash northwards.

At 7-45 every evening "No 1 UP", crack train of the Bengal and Assam Railway slides out of Sealdah Station in Calcutta. It gathers speed through Dum Dum and pounds north into the night. Barrackpore, Naihati, Ranaghat. The Tropic of Cancer slips unnoticed to the rear. The Mail rumbles over the great Hardinge Bridge spanning the Padma at Sara.

Dark, deserted wayside stations throw back answering echoes as the onrushing express roars along their platforms. Ishurdi, Santahar, Parbatipur. All through the night the "Darjeeling Mail" thunders on towards the Himalayas.

Jalpaiguri at dawn. A bell is rung along the platform to warn passengers that Siliguri is the next stop. The

train pulls out again on to the greying plains. The sky is rapidly lightening in the east. Palms and clumps of bamboo emerge from the thinning darkness as spectacular silhouettes. Pattern appears on the paddy fields. Day is coming fast, and the sweeping headlight of the engine seems to have lost much of its power. The opening phase of the Himalayan Journey is nearly over.

The Mail clatters on over the last of the plains. The black foothills draw nearer and nearer. Then all at once comes a startling sight.

As the sun comes up over the edge of the still-dark earth its slanting rays strike and reveal the mighty peaks of the Eastern Himalaya. Beyond the grey plain, and above the dead black foothills, *five and a half miles up in the sky*, the snowy peaks glow with an indescribable orange light. Kanchenjunga seems to be lit from within with an orange, opalescent light—like the glow of a neon tube.

This is a terrific spectacle, but it is no phenomenon. Any morning when the weather is clear passengers in the Mail can see it. And it is only a curtain raiser for what is to come.

The orange tint is short lived. As the sun rises the colour drains out of the peaks, and leaves the snows sparkling white and clean cut against a pale blue sky. The Mail roars on and the mountains sink below the rolling folds of the foothills. No more is seen of them until the mountain train has climbed a mile up the Himalayan ramparts.

The "Darjeeling Mail" pulls into Siliguri ten hours and fifty-nine minutes after it has left Calcutta. There are no Customs officials on the platform to meet it, yet there is the unmistakable atmosphere of a frontier station

about Siliguri. It is the dividing point between one world and another.

The passengers pack their bedding rolls, switch off the fans which make a railway journey on the plains tolerable, and change into warmer clothing for the trip up the mountain. The little mountain trains of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway are ready waiting on the other side of the station.

In comparison with the broad gauge trains the D. H. trains look like something out of a schoolboy's Christmas stocking. The track is only twenty-four inches wide. You fit on the little carriages rather than get into them. And if you have a lot of kit with you, you find that the compartments are several sizes too small.

The rolling stock on the D.H.R. is as neat as a doll's house furniture. The carriages of the Mail are silver grey with a white and blue band carried waist high along the whole length of the train. The carriage doors are emblazoned with the crest of the company—a snow peaked mountain encircled by the title of the railway. The miniature travelling post-office car, splashed with post-office red and the Royal coat of arms, adds more colour to the scene.

There is an amazing variety of passenger accommodation for so small a railway. Some of the carriages are divided into dinky compartments; others are miniature saloons fitted with sofas and swivel arm chairs.

The yard at Siliguri is like an ordinary goods yard viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. Everything is on a toy scale. Most of the tracks of the big railway are duplicated here in miniature. There are little baggage vans, long timber wagons loaded with logs, fruit vans, live stock vans—all pocket size. Siliguri might have been the Central Station, Lilliput.

There is brisk activity in Siliguri in the hour following daybreak. It takes several D.H. trains to absorb all the passengers disgorged by the broad gauge Mail. While the passengers breakfast, the bright green, toy engines of the D.H.R. fuss about making up the various sections of the mountain train. They are like chickens clucking about the wheels of the great broad gauge engine that has brought the train up from the south. Trains are made up also for the Kalimpong branch and for Kishenganj on the plains, 74 miles away.

Siliguri is a railway-made town. It owes most of its prosperity to the trade fed to it by the D.H. system; and a romantic trade it is. Down the Teesta Valley come oranges from Sikkim, wool from Tibet. Tea and timber come down from the mountains, paddy and jute from the plains.

"The Darjeeling Mail" chugs away from the frontier station, and straight away enters the new world. "Every feature, botanical, geological and zoological is new on entering this district. The change is sudden and immediate; sea and shore are hardly more conspicuously different." Dr. Joseph Hooker, the famous Himalayan explorer, wrote that about Siliguri in 1849. The transition is immediately apparent from the carriage window today.

For a mile the track skirts Siliguri's straggling main street—which is also the road to Darjeeling. Quaint tumble-down hotels and an odd assortment of houses and stores line the road. There is something of the American West about the place. If the sheriff barged out through the swing doors of a saloon and headed for the hills with a posse you would not be surprised.

Skimming over the ground in the toy carriages is a unique sensation. The train knocks up a reasonable

speed on the flat, and the impression of speed is heightened by the nearness to the ground of the floors of the vehicles.

On the outskirts of the town, a line branches off towards the gap in the mountains from which the Teesta River emerges on to the plains. This is the Kalimpong line. Almost immediately the mail line and the road together cross the Mahanaddi on an iron bridge 700 feet long.

The Mahanaddi has a distinctly Scottish flavour. It is like one of those wide, pebbly rivers found all over the Central Highlands. Except during the monsoon the river bed is dry for most of its width. Its empty bed is reputed to have given its name to Siliguri— "The Stony Place". The Bengal and Assam Railway make good use of the Mahanaddi's pebbles for ballast. East of the bridge a track is actually laid on the bed of the river, and trains go in and collect stones. When the river is in flood this track is submerged.

In the dry season the Mahanaddi disappears completely for a part of its course just above the bridge. The water vanishes inside the earth and flows through a subterranean channel. When the rain comes the Mahanaddi becomes a double-decked river, for water flows along the surface watercourse as well as through the underground channel. In the monsoon, the river, flowing majestically Ganges-wards, is worth seeing. Twenty-five miles further on and four thousand feet up the mountain the train passes close to the spot where the broad Mahanaddi begins as a mere rivulet.

The road and railway run side by side to Panchanani where another branch turns away to the plains, and heads south-west for Kishenganj. After that the line

thrusts deep into the Terai. There are no longer paddy fields and yellow patches of mustard.

The Mail runs on headlong towards the wall of the Himalayas. Siliguri was seven miles from the foot of the mountains, Panchanani four miles. The foothills loom nearer and higher. There is no apparent way up; just a towering range of green forested mountain. From the carriage window the mountain mass seems impregnable.

The Himalayas throw down long spurs to the plains, and one of these spurs is the Singalela Range. It shoots off from the mighty Kanchenjunga itself, and gradually loses height until it merges into the plain north of Siliguri. It is up this Singalela Range that the railway makes its way to Darjeeling

The road keeps constant company with the railway. This is the historic Cart Road to Darjeeling. Originally, the track was laid on the roadway all the way up, but later on diversions were made to ease the gradients and curves. The Cart Road was not the first road to Darjeeling. There was an earlier one, now long since disused and partly overgrown with jungle.

Until half way through the third decade of the nineteenth century there was no road up the Himalayas. There was no need for one, for there was no Darjeeling. Darjeeling was merely a hill in Sikkim.

But in 1835 the East India Company decided that a sanatorium built on this hill in Sikkim would be an ideal place for their heat-wilted European staff to recuperate after a spell of duty on the plains. A deal was negotiated which resulted in the handing over of the hill to the British. Dr. Campbell of the Indian Medical Service and Lt. Napier of the Royal Engineers were given the job of

building the new town and giving it communication with the plains.

Napier was entrusted with the building of the road—a tremendous task. Darjeeling, to all intents and purposes was still inaccessible to all but the hardiest climbers. As yet the mountain was unconquered.

The engineer had to hack his way through the Terai, and up the virgin face of the mountain. An army of men was set to work in the forests and on the slopes. A path was torn through the grim tangle of trees. Clefts were hollowed out of the mountain-side. Over three hundred bridges were thrown across mountain torrents.

Four years passed, years in which many roadbuilders died of disease. The road swallowed up eight lakhs of rupees. But the Himalayas were conquered. The road—the Pankhabari Road stretched 7000 feet from the plains into the heart of the mountains. Darjeeling was accessible.

That was in 1842. In the ten years that followed the building of the road, the population of the new town multiplied itself by a hundred and the traffic to and from the plains grew in proportion. In spite of the new road the journey from Calcutta to Darjeeling took fourteen days as compared with the modern fourteen hours.

The trip involved a two hundred mile rail journey to Sahibganj on the recently constructed East Indian Railway, a five hour steamer trip, and then a two hundred mile journey across the, as yet, railless north of Bengal.

Two transport concerns ran a service of bullock carts from the steamer ghat to the foot of the mountains; these were the Calcutta and Darjeeling Bullock Cart Train Company and Bird and Company. They were the Indian equivalent of America's Wells Fargoe and Pony Express—

in slow motion. These firms sent out convoys of bullock carts at regular times, and they arranged for their respective convoys to keep to the same time-table so that they could combine their defensive resources in the event of attack by marauding natives.

Passengers were catered for by a queer conveyance resembling a coffin fitted with shafts and sliding side doors. The passenger lay inside while bearers, two on each shaft, provided the motive power.

Such was the "Darjeeling Mail" a century ago.

The Pankhabari Road was an engineering feat of great magnitude, one of the outstanding road-building achievements of the age. But, for all that, ten years after its completion, the road was hopelessly out of date. Its gradients were too steep for all except the lightest traffic, and it could not cope with the ever increasing demand on its services. Its limitations threatened to stunt the growth of the new town; so a new road was called for.

A start was made on the second road in 1861. It followed a new and easier route all the way up. The time it took to complete—eight years—is ample testimony to the difficulties which faced the engineers.

Within ten years of the completion of the Cart Road an event of extreme importance occurred. In 1878 the Eastern Bengal Railway arrived at the foot of the Himalayas. At the same time, Franklyn Prestage, agent of the E. B. R. approached the Lt. Governor of Bengal with a proposal for extending the line right up to Darjeeling. It was a daring suggestion, but, one which, if feasible, would solve all Darjeeling's problems.

The prospects of the proposed mountain railway were examined. They were not exactly encouraging. In its brief existence the Cart Road had been destroyed in places by storms and landslides, and the highway was swallowing half a lakh of rupees a year in maintenance. Trains, far heavier and faster than road transport, were bound to have a much more destructive effect on the mountain permanent way.

Prestage, however, was convinced that a line with a special mountain gauge of two feet could be built and operated on the existing Cart Road as a steam tramway at no prohibitive cost. He knew that locomotives small, but powerful enough to climb the severe gradients, could be designed. The railway agent was fortunate in having the enterprising Ashley Eden to deal with, and the Government's blessing on the project was soon forthcoming.

The building of the line began in 1879, and progress was swift. By March of the following year the rails had reached Tindharia. Lord Lytton used the line that far when he went to Darjeeling that year. He was the first Viceroy of India to see the new town. Before the end of the same year the line was complete to Kurseong, and in July of the following year the first train steamed into Darjeeling. The Himalayas had been conquered by the railway.

The line as originally built cost Rs. 1,75,00,000, but, like the original road, it was imperfect. Some of its gradients were too steep, and its curves too sharp for efficient working. In subsequent years a further Rs. 2,25,00,000 were spent in improving the alignment. The idea of operating the line as a steam tramway was soon abandoned, and the Darjeeling Himalayan emerged

as a fully-fledged railway. An arrangement was reached whereby the company accepted responsibility for maintaining the Cart Road.

At the base of the mountains the forest closes in on the road and railway. The mail slackens speed and runs into a picturesque little station among the trees. This is Sukna—the station at the foot of the wall. In the seven miles from Siliguri the track has risen only 191 feet. Now begins an unrelieved climb of forty miles which will take the Mail to the summit of the line at Ghum, 7407 feet above sea level.

CHAPTER II

THROUGH THE TERAI

THE different sections of the Mail which set out from Siliguri pull into Sukna station one behind the other, and the engines take water for the big climb ahead.

The climbing begins in earnest as soon as the Mail leaves the station. The train plunges into the depths of the forest, and the engine's exhaust roars and crackles as the little machine gets its teeth into the gradient.

The track twists and twines steeply up through the forest. The dense Terai creeps right up to the railway. You cannot see far through the matted tangle of trees and creepers. The forest, right to the fringes of the track, is unconquered. Its density and primeval state show what a task faced the original builders of the road and railway when they had to hack a pioneer way through the Terai.

If the railway for any reason fell into disuse it would very soon become chocked with jungle growths. Like the old Pankhabari Road it would be swallowed up by the forest. Even now men have to cut down trees and branches when their rapid growth, especially in spring, menaces the safety of the trains. Sometimes when fresh shoots sprout up before the railwaymen have had time to cut them down they brush along the sides of the passing carriages.

The engine sends muffled echoes up through the forest. There are few places in the world where a man can look through a plate glass window into the heart of the jungle. There are strange, unfamiliar trees.—semul, sal and toon and massive bamboos. The ground is cluttered with vegetation. Where trees have fallen their trunks are covered with green fungus and chains of vividly-coloured flowers. Bright confetti-like splotches of lilac and scarlet spatter the dark green interior of the forest. Wrist-thick creepers trail from tree to tree like cables hung in disorder about the ruins of a building that has been gutted by fire. The air is often dank and sickly with the scent of orchids.

In the old days soldiers marching to Darjeeling often left some of their numbers in this dreaded zone. Scattered tombstones in the Terai tell their own tale. Cholera, malaria and dysentery mercilessly cut down Europeans in this area.

After Dr. Hooker made his journey through the Terai in 1849 he wrote of its deadly climate, "Their (the mountain streams) pent up waters, percolating the gravel beds and partly carried off by evaporation through the stratum of ever-increasing vegetable mould, must be one agent in the production of the malarious vapours of this pestilential region. Add to this the detention of the same among the jungly herbage, the amount of vapour in the humid atmosphere above, checking the upward passage of that from the soil, the sheltered nature of the locality at the immediate base of lofty mountains; and there appears to me to be here all necessary elements which, combined,will produce stagnation and deterioration in an atmosphere loaded with vapour."

It adds to the interest of the adventure if you can do the journey with Hooker. His famous "Himalayan

Journals" were published in 1854, and are obtainable nowadays only in secondhand book shops and in good libraries—notably the Imperial Library in Calcutta. Nobody has ever given a more lucid account of the natural history of the Darjeeling Himalayan route. Hooker made his trip long before the railway came, but the route he followed is substantially that taken by the present line.

The Terai cloaks a wonderful variety of wild life. Tigers, panthers, leopards and many other wild creatures lurk in its depths. The larger wild animals are seldom seen near the railway, much to the relief of the station staffs, for a tiger can cause no end of trouble.

One morning in 1900 the staff at Sukna turned out to find a tiger lying on the cement surface outside the booking office, his head resting peacefully on his outspread paws. If he was waiting for a breakfast of Bengalee booking clerk he was disappointed, for a marksman from a nearby forest bungalow soon put an end to his exploits.

Sukna Station seems to have an attraction for tigers. On another occasion one spent the night under the first culvert on the Siliguri side of the station. It must have slept well, for the first thing it knew was that the Mail was rumbling over the bridge above its head. The noise of the train frightened the tiger, and it bounded out of the culvert right into the path of an Indian wayfarer who rushed to the shelter of the station, and warned the passengers of the Mail. But the tiger gave no trouble.

An elephant on the line can be a serious affair, for a pair of D. H. engines would about fit nicely inside an average tusker. An angry, fully grown elephant could upset the whole "Darjeeling Mail" with ease.

Therefore, when one day in 1916, a driver rounded a bend and found a herd of three elephants in possession of the track he was a trifle nonplussed. He blew his whistle and two of the creatures ran away. The third and most formidable treated the whistle blast as a challenge, trumpeted, wrapped his trunk round a milepost and whipped it out of the ground. The driver, not to be outdone, made his engine spurt steam from every possible pipe. The engine transformed itself into a hissing demon more terrible than anything the jungle could produce. And the truculent tusker turned on heel, and lumbered off into the forest after his pals.

It is an interesting and exhilarating experience to come down through the Terai at night. In the winter months the down Mail does this part of the trip in darkness. Everything is blacked out except where the engine's headlight bores a path through the trees. The features of the forest stand out vividly in the white light. The jungle colours look unnaturally bright against the dead blackness beyond the clean-cut beam. Myriads of fireflies glow in the forest like so many little green, electric lights. The engine blares across the road in a series of level crossings. Sometimes the headlight hits the blank wall of a cliff directly ahead, then at the last minute swings violently round with the track. If you look back you can see the lighted carriages of the second portion of the Mail sneaking down through the forest.

The little engine thunders its way up the thickly-forested mountain slope. Road and railway twist and twine together like a pair of pythons writhing in deadly combat; for, to cut down the radius of the curves the line often crosses the road at a tangent only to dive back across it again at the next reverse curve.

You can look from your carriage window on to the mountain road and see, in the space of a few miles, an amazing pageant of transport through the ages. The bullock cart convoys still remain. The slow processions of carts still climb the mountains with their loads—tea chests and coke mainly. In the steepest stretches they cover only a few miles in a day.

Hillmen and their womenfolk still form human freight trains. They plod steadily along with their produce—laden baskets slung on their backs. They earn a livelihood, these human freight carriers, carrying loads which would baffle an Irish navy, fifty-one miles into the Himalayas. Mark Twain says he knows of a woman who carried a piano single-handed all the way from Siliguri to Darjeeling.

And through this pageant of ancient transport blare streamlined cars mainly loudly coloured specimens from the shores of Lake Michigan. You can cut two and a half hours off the Siliguri-Darjeeling trip by using a car, but you miss most of the thrills.

The engine slogs on, the silver-grey carriages snaking after it. The curves and gradients are tremendous. The Mail twists and climbs, at the same time banking over spectacularly with the superelevation of the track—like a car on a race track. First to the left, then to the right twists the train—curves and tangents all the time. The straight sections are seldom more than a train-length long. Often the engine is travelling in the opposite direction to the last coach, although there are only three coaches on the train. The tough little engine never falters. The exhaust keeps up a steady, staccato beat.

For so small a train the Mail carries an unusually large staff. During the run engine and carriages seem to bristle with men.

A standard gauge express engine carries two, or at the most three, men on the footplate. The D.H. engines need as many as six to look after them. On the front of the engine, at each side of the "buffer beam", are two small platforms. Throughout the climb a man stands on each of them ready to sprinkle sand on the rail beneath him should the engine begin to slip.

The open coal bunker is fixed astride the boiler, and two men sit inside it breaking up big lumps of coal and passing them round the side of the cab to the fireman. The firebox door is smaller than the fire door found on many a kitchen range, too small to take normal lumps of coal.

There is no tender. The footplate is quite exposed, and all the controls are open to view. The drivers are immensely proud of their charges, and the steel and brass-work on the engines are always glittering. During one trip which the author made there was consternation among the footplate staff when it was found that the engine had developed a complaint known in railway parlance as "hot box". A man hung over the side all the way up pouring oil on the offending bearing.

The guard of the train travels in his own compartment, but his assisting brakesmen ride throughout on the carriage roofs. There is usually one man to each vehicle. It is odd to see the brakesmen sitting crosslegged on the swaying roofs motionless like Buddhas. Part of their job is to stop any vehicle in the unlikely event of the couplings and double safety chains snapping, and the vehicle running back down the hill.

The "Darjeeling Mail" may present a slightly humorous aspect to unaccustomed eyes, but the Darjee-

ling Himalayan is no comic opera railway. In spite of its toy-like dimensions it handles a formidable amount of traffic, both passenger and goods, with a degree of efficiency that would be welcome on some of the large Indian railways.

The train swings along a narrow shelf on the mountain-side. Sometimes the carriages come precariously close to the edge of the cliff. There is no visible means of support. You look out of the carriage window down the sheer face of the precipice. It would be an easy matter to step out of the door and fall into space.

Passengers have been known to turn ill on the more sensational parts of the journey. An old book on the Himalayas says that travellers on the railway are liable to mountain sickness "due to the ever-shifting scenes of the hill-side which are forced on the vision". The remedies, according to the book are "phenacetin and asperin".

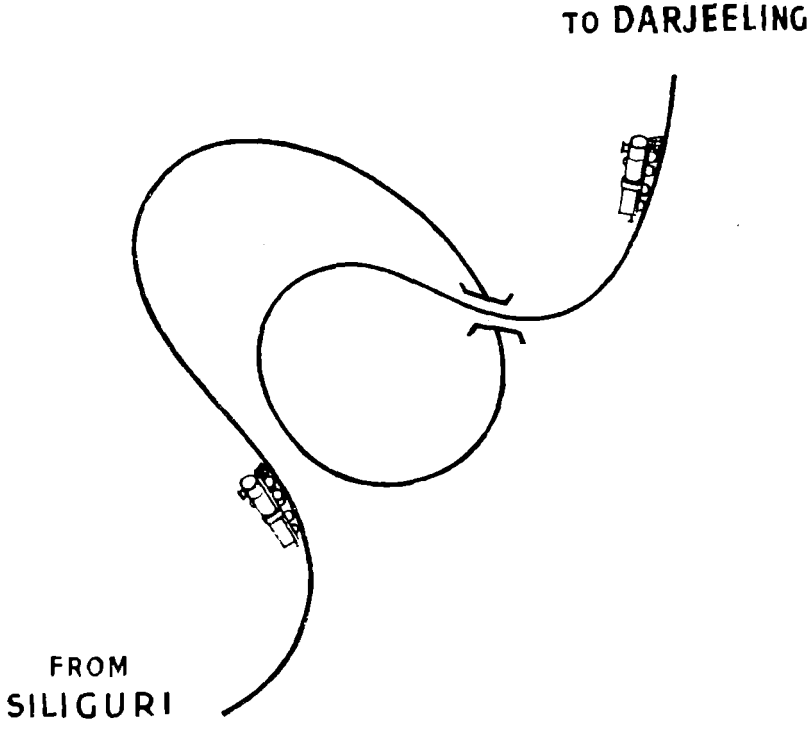
Actually, the rails are a safe distance back from the edge. The carriages are six feet nine inches broad, and they overlap the twenty-four inch track by more than three feet at each side. The fact that the sides of the carriages are sometimes flushed with the cliffs does not mean that the rails are inches from the brink.

CHAPTER III

THE "O" AND "Z" PLAN

THE apparently odd heading of this chapter begins to be intelligible when the train gets to the eleventh mile post from Siliguri. Here the railway ties itself in a knot. The Mail dives under a bridge, spirals sensationally upwards and back on itself, and in a few seconds crosses over itself by means of a bridge.

Like This—



This is loop No. 1.

Even when you are expecting it the loop leaves you rather bewildered. You find it hard to believe, when

you look down from the bridge, that your carriage was on the track below seconds ago. The loop gives the track amazingly rapid elevation—which is exactly what the engineer wanted it to do. The loop is the "O" of the "O" and "Z" plan. Four of these loops help to lift the train up the formidable array of mountains which tower in front of it here. For fourteen miles from Loop 1 the track storms the most difficult section of the line.

Above the loop the Mail roars through a station in the forest, but it does not stop. You catch a glimpse of a painted board hanging from the eaves of the station roof. "Rangtong, Elevation 1404 feet."

The train winds on through the magnificent forest, and fusses continuously round the endless folds and ravines of the mountain-side. Sometimes you get a glimpse down one of the gullies and you see far below the plains, bare, flat and boundless spreading out like a map to the haze of the sky-line. Below you are the peaks of hills at which you looked up an hour ago. Above you, crowding in on all sides, are peaks on which you will look down in another hour. It seems incredible that a railway can conquer such terrain.

Climbing the Himalayas is a thirsty job, and a few minutes run beyond Rangtong the Mail stops at a watering place in the depths of the forest. The engine replenishes its tank from a mountain stream and, meanwhile the passengers stretch their legs by the lineside. This is a favourite spot for leopard hunting. Over a hundred were killed here in the first year of the century. Vendors with trays of oranges (more than likely from Sikkim) are waiting for the train at this wayside stop, and it is the appearance of these people that makes you realise more than anything that you have entered a new world. The

vendors you might have seen at Jalpaiguri three hours ago were typical Bengalees. These hill vendors have laughing round faces, and a deep red glow shows through the pale brown pigment of their skin.

The train thunders on up the mountain. The scenery is everpowering—an everchanging vista of mountain and forest.

Presently the Mail races out on to the end of a spur. For a moment it looks as if it will leap off the mountain like a diver from a diving board. Then it corkscrews back, crosses over itself and continues on its way up the gradient.

This is Loop No. 2. A mile or two further on the track describes a double circle—Loop No. 3. Then it passes through Chunbhati station, swings round the end of the spur and reveals an entirely new view.

Across the valley is the 3500-feet Selim Hill, and beyond that the Mahalderam Range. The rounded summit of its main peak is 7000 feet high. It seems to tower enormously above the train, yet the summit of the line at Ghum is higher than the top of that mountain.

On the face of Selim Hill the railway appears at five different levels, zig-zagging up the slope. And at the end of the mountain range is the most surprising feature of all—a factory. It looks like a mirage. Large workshops and smoking chimneys stand on the crest of the ridge silhouetted against the skyline. A babbling stream with green banks flowing down the middle of modern Regent Street would not be more out of place. These are the Tindharia workshops of the D. H. R.

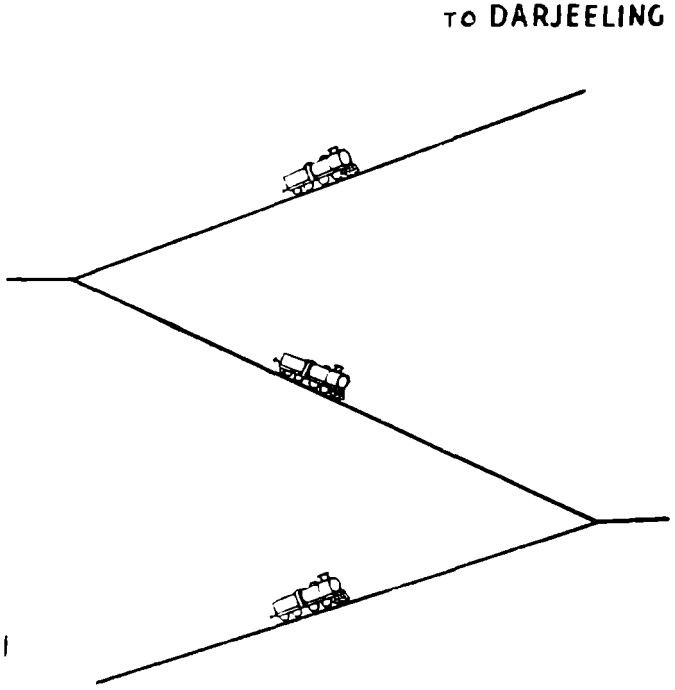
At one time the engineer of the line found himself up against a particularly stiff proposition. He had a sheer mountainface to scale and he could not find a way to make

the line gain altitude quickly enough and at the same time preserve a workable gradient. The configuration of the mountain ruled out the use of a series of loops.

The story is told of how the engineer was puzzling over his plans in his study when his wife came into the room and remarked. "You seem to be having some reverses."

"Reverse!" That was the solution. When the Mail reaches a point a mile above Chunbhati a white board painted with a red letter "Z" appears at the side of the line. This is the first reverse.

The Mail chugs up the slope, and suddenly runs into a shunting neck (a short dead end) and stops. Then the engine pushes the train backwards up a steeply-inclined plane until it reaches another shunting neck higher up the mountain. Then it stops and goes forward again in its original direction, but at a much higher elevation. The diagram illustrates what happens.



The train comes up from Darjeeling, and stops in the first shunting neck. Then it propels to the second shunting neck, stops again, and resumes its journey.

The whole process takes place in a few minutes. The Mail clatters backwards up the slope as quickly as it runs forward. The time taken in the shunting necks is measured in seconds. The train rushes in, bumps to a stand-still and at once is chugging backwards. The railwaymen handle these reverses magnificently. The story is told of passengers in a rear carriage who made attempts to jump out when they saw the train suddenly going backwards. They thought they were running away down hill.

In the fourteen amazing miles beginning at Loop No. 1 there are four loops and four reverses. The train soars noisily up the gradients turning circles and shuffling diagonally backwards and forwards up the mountain, gaining three thousand feet in the process. It is a thrilling, fascinating phase of the journey.

In the reverse above Chunbhati the line clings to the mountain-side like a vine to a wall. The wooded slope is almost sheer, and the track is carried upwards on a narrow, steeply inclined shelf scooped out of the soil. It is more like a zig-zag path through the forest, than a railway road bed. The side of the mountain is stained with freshly exposed brown earth—the marks of landslides. The train crawls cautiously past these danger zones.

Throughout its history the railway has had to fight the mountain. In the monsoon months heavy rains pound the slopes, loosening earth and releasing precariously-held boulders. The scenery gets tired of staying so long in one place. The mountain gets on the move. Sudden

landslides have obliterated miles of track before now. Every winter new revetments and retaining walls mark the patches made to repair the ravages of the last monsoon.

As soon as the line is breached engineering squads go out and begin the work of restoring the track. Often the mountain has merely spilled a few tons of earth and stones over the track, and the clearance of the obstruction and full restoration of traffic is the matter of a few hours labour.

Sometimes the side of the mountain crumbles away carrying hundreds of feet of railway with it. On such occasions the railway has to be re-aligned, a task which may take many days or even weeks. Always the service is restored in the shortest possible time, for the severing of this supply artery provides a headache for everybody in Darjeeling; except troops on leave for whom a serious breach of the line may mean extended holiday.

The end of the 1899 monsoon is still talked about in Darjeeling. On Sunday, September 25th of that year a storm of exceptional fury broke over the Eastern Himalayas. When the Mail left Siliguri that day torrential rain was pounding the Terai. The train forced its way through the dripping forest, and began the ascent of the storm battered mountain. Rain pounded so violently on the roofs and sides of the carriages that some of the water leaked inside the saloons and compartments. Every stream was brimful of water.

The engine battered its way up through a blinding, grey wall of rain. Conditions got worse and worse as the Mail gained altitude. Torrents of water washed over the railway and road. Small stones and trees brought down by the flood littered the track—an ominous sign.

All morning the storm deluged the mountains. In all twenty seven and half inches of rain fell in the area. Tons of soil were washed down into the valleys. Something was bound to happen, and it did.

Big slices of the mountain slope began to peel away. In Darjeeling houses fell in pieces and crashed down the mountain-side with all their furnishings, and even their occupants. Many people perished. All along the line huge boulders, some of them weighing many tons, broke away and thundered down into the valleys like mammoth cannon balls crunching tall trees to pulp and destroying everything in their path.

The railway suffered most between Ghum and Darjeeling. At one point the mountain slid from under the track leaving the rails suspended across space like drooping cables. The Mail, unable to proceed further, terminated at Ghum.

In spite of the different features of the route the D.H.R. has an admirable reputation for safety. There are sometimes minor derailments of engines and coaches when small obstacles get in the way, but a derailment on the D.H. provokes no more alarm than the toy train that leaps from its circle of track on to the drawing room carpet. You more or less lift the derailed vehicle and put it back on the line. Most of the engines carry a long, stout, timber rod which is used by the crew to lever coaches back on to the line. The engines and coaches are made with a very low centre of gravity, and they cannot readily be overturned.

Dotted over the mountain slopes and nestling in the valleys are the white, red-roofed tea factories. Yellow

zig-zag paths, like conventional streaks of lightning, dart over the green hills linking up the plantations and the tea planters' bungalows.

Tea came to the Darjeeling hills forty years before the railway. Dr. Chalmers, the first Superintendent of the district, could hardly have realized what terrific consequences his action would have when he planted a few trial tea plants brought from China in his garden. The tea plant flourished in the mountain air. Today the Eastern Himalaya is the Tea Country and Darjeeling is its Capital.

A mountain tea garden is a strange sight seen from a distance. The mountainsides are stepped like the Pyramids from their summits to their bases. The clean-cut terraces run around the peaks like the contour lines on a map, and the tea bushes grow on the terraces like neat, severely-trimmed privet hedges.

Some of the mountain peaks seen from the carriage window are still covered with thick, virgin forest. All the peaks were like that once—mountains in the raw. To turn them into tea gardens the pioneer planters had to shear them of their timber, and cut innumerable rows of steps down their bared slopes. The mountains are there for you to see, before and after, and the contrast is striking. The virgin mountain is rough, primitive. The finished tea-producing mountain looks as if it had been planed and machined.

To the ordinary man (or woman) the tea that comes out of one packet is much the same as the tea that comes out of another. But once you enter the Tea Country you realize there is more to it than that. In the markets and bazaars you will see mounds of tea piled in black

cones side by side, and the tea in every mound looks different. There is tea and tea, and you cannot remain long in the Darjeeling Hills without becoming aware of the fact.

In the white tea factories the glossy, green tea leaves are turned into the black, flaky substance that civilisation calls tea. The fresh green leaves from the mountainside are first allowed to rot, and then they are sizzled up in a current of hot air. The result, roughly, is the tea of the packet. The dried leaves are shaken through a series of sieves, and out comes the tea graded according to quality.

The top quality is flowery orange pekoe, then comes pekoe, and after that pekoe and pekoe souchang. A flaky residue is left over from the sifting process, and this is subsequently separated into broken orange pekoe, broken pekoe, pekoe fannings and dust.

To the housewife at home tea is 2/8 a pound or it is 1/8 a pound. She does not worry about technical names. But when you buy tea in Darjeeling (and everybody buys tea in Darjeeling) it pays you to know the names of the grades and their place on the social scale. The proprietary brands of tea in Britain are usually blends of two or more grades. The cheaper teas contain a high proportion of dust and fannings.

If you make the trip to Darjeeling in the picking season you will see the tea pickers working on the terraces. They carry big wicker baskets on their backs supported in the fashion of the hill folks, by a strap passing round the forehead. Deftly they pluck the leaves and toss them over their shoulders into the baskets. It looks easy, but the tea pickers have got to be discriminating. Only certain

leaves must be selected for plucking, usually the buds and tender, topmost shoots. These make the delicately flavoured tea. It takes about four pounds of green leaves to produce a pound packet of tea. Darjeeling gives no clue as to the origin of the celebrated refreshment room tea; probably the roots of the plant have something to do with it.

The train thunders along the winding mountain route. Usually there are three portions of the Mail following each other along the line. If you are in the middle one you can often look ahead and see the tail end of the first portion disappearing round the next bend. Occasionally you find a man standing at a bend displaying a red flag. That is to warn your driver that the train ahead has stopped round the corner. Often the three trains find themselves at different levels on the side of the mountain. You look up and see a moving train above you, look down, and there is another below you. It is common to have a train running down one arm of a U while the first train is running up the opposite arm.

The railway wheels round the end of the valley, and swings on to the face of Selim Hill. It traverses the lowest level of track, then it twists round the end of the hill and comes back at a higher level. Still again it doubles back and creeps up to Tindharia station. The elevation board says 2822 feet.

Just before the train reaches the station native boys appear running alongside the carriages. They jump on the step and bellow in a chorus through the window. It is some time before it dawns on you that the urchins are scouts sent out by the tea vendors of Tindharia. They undertake to have tea ready for you, and once they get your order they scamper directly up the mountain to the track at the higher level beating the train by an ample margin.

At Tindharia station the engine takes water again. The atmosphere is notably fresh, and the view is extremely interesting. Eastward there is a succession of hills and valleys stretching away to Bhutan. Below you can trace the railway meandering down the range to the distant plain.

An assortment of vendors besiege the train during the halt. There are innumerable tea wallahs, complete with kettles, loudly proclaiming that their tea is best. Hillmen come round with trays of bright yellow cakes baked in the shape of a heart.

Above Tindharia station you look down on the railway workshops which were so recently far above you. This surely is one of the world's oldest factories. How strange it is to hear, in the shadow of the greatest mountains on the earth, the call of a factory hooter, and to see workmen streaming through factory gates that might be in Manchester. The works are kept busy. There are locomotive departments and a carriage, a waggon, repair shop. As you pass you get a fleeting glimpse of carriages in varying stages of construction.

The Darjeeling Himalayan has plenty of novelty about it for those interested in its engineering features. There is a stud of over fifty engines on the line. Most of those were originally built by the North British Locomotive Company of Glasgow and subsequently reconditioned at the mountain workshops. The standard locomotive used on the hill section is a four coupled saddle tank weighing about fourteen tons in working order. These engines can handle a load of thirty-five tons with ease. Their working boiler pressure is 140 pounds per square inch.

In 1942 the company produced a streamlined engine and named it "Jervis Bay" after the ship of the famous

convoy epic. At the time of writing experiments are being carried out with a Diesel rail car. The line even operates an hospital train, fitted out with bunks and carrying a medical staff. This is used to take troops to the convalescent depot near Darjeeling.

When the line was opened at first the passenger stock consisted of little open trollies seating three people aside. They were rather like the cars that run on the "figure-eight" type of railway. The cars were open to the elements, but canvas side-flaps could be fastened down in bad weather. It was the practice to pull these cars up to Ghum and then let them run in charge of a brakesman all the way down to Sukna on their own. A few of these early trollies are still in service, and are occasionally attached to the rear of a train. By arrangement the D. H. will give permission to ride down the mountain on a hand trolley.

A brief picture has already been given of some of the rolling stock on the line. Apart from the special "Darjeeling Mail" sets there is an infinite variety of passenger accommodation in first, second and third classes. The bulk of the ordinary passenger stock is painted maroon like the L.M.S., although some of it is green like the Southern Railway coaches in England. The modern observation cars are named after Himalayan peaks—Nanda Devi, for instance.

Passenger trains are limited to three or four carriages, and goods trains seldom have more than half a dozen trucks. Livestock is catered for in special double-decked vans. Sheep, for instance, can be loaded in two layers thereby saving valuable space.

Fares are amazingly cheap. The dearest fare on the line is Rs. 10/— Siliguri to Darjeeling in a first class

observation car. Three annas a mile is a bargain considering the amount of entertainment crammed in every mile. The same journey third class costs only Rs. 2/—

The twenty-four inch gauge of the D. H. R. is a especial one used to cope with the special problem of scaling the Himalayas. The engineers can do things with a twenty-four inch line that they could never do with a wider gauge. They can bend it to suit the shape of the mountains, thread it through seemingly impassable places. It makes for easy, rapid and cheap construction and maintenance.

As a passing point of interest the Eskdale and Ravenglas Railway in the English Lake District is only fifteen inch gauge, but the trains there, have very light duties to perform. The standard Indian gauge is 66 inches, and the British standard is 54½ inches.

Above Tindharia the Mail swings round on to the other side of Selim Hill and the view changes completely again. Below is a new and deeper valley, and on the other side a new and higher range of mountains—the Mahalderam Range. Ahead, and high up, is the rocky shoulder of Gidarpahar Mountain. A path slants up the face of the mountain and ultimately disappears through a slot cut in the shoulder. The path is the D. H. R., and the slot is Mahalderam cutting. The Mail has to climb up there within the next hour or so. Looking up from Tindharia it seems incredible that a railway can scale such a mountain. Yet it does, and it goes higher still on ranges still invisible.

The train climbs on. It is like going up in a lift. Peaks sink away below you, and new ones keep appearing above. When each successive height has been conquered

a new and higher mountain appears over the conquered crest with the railway straggling up its face and ultimately vanishing over the ridge.

The Mail tackles another reverse and shortly after it comes Loop No. 4. This loop is the most spectacular yet. Owing to the shape of the mountain the track has to double back on itself in a very restricted space. The result is a curve of 59 feet radius. The train chases itself round the loop like a dog chasing its tail, exhaust crackling, wheels singing as the flanges bite the rails.

The fourth loop and the third reverse carry the train up to Gayabari station (3400 feet) and the fourth and last reverse just beyond the station brings the line to the craggy upper reaches of the range. High, bulging cliffs overhang the track. The Mail noses its way round the foot of the cliffs. It is heavy going, and presently another stop for water is required. The usual orange sellers are there to meet the train. No matter how remote these casual stopping places are there are, always vendors there. Sometimes the local urchins are there too, standing on their hands and doing other acrobatic accomplishments in the hope that some passengers will part with a few annas.

'Pagla Jhora' a dreaded name to the engineers on the line. It means The Mad Torrent, and the name has not been rashly applied. A few minutes beyond the water stop, and a short distance below the 4000-feet level, the Mail passes this notorious water-course.

It looks harmless and docile enough at most times; just a rocky channel with a trickle of water running through it. But in a matter of minutes this quiet stream can transform itself into a raging, dangerous deluge—The Mad Torrent. It is situated in such a position that during

a heavy shower it collects most of the water from a large catchment basin in a very short time. The torrent tears and gnaws at the railway, and on many occasions it has ripped gashes in the track. The railway is strongly buttressed to take the force of the Pagla Jhora's attacks, and up the mountainside, far back from the line are engineering works designed to control the torrent. The D. H. R. has spent thousands of rupees in its fight with the Mad Torrent.

Mahanaddi station is passed at the 4000 feet mark. Before long the train plunges through the Gidarpahar cutting and emerges to face another complete change of view. This is the most striking of the many sudden changes.

The train is now running on an exposed ledge high up on the range. From the carriage window you look straight down from the mile high wall on to the plain stretching as flat as a carpet as far as the eye can see. Hundreds of square miles of Bengal are spread out before you. The plains are streaked with the great rivers flowing away from the Himalayas; the Teesta, the Balasun, the Mechi. It is like a view from an aeroplane. It is an astounding sight, and these superb views continue until, at 4864 feet, the train reaches Kurseong.

"There are many ways of seeing landscape," once wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, "and none more vivid than from the carriage window of a railway train." How charmed R. L. S. would have been with the Darjeeling Himalayan.

CHAPTER IV

MOUNTAIN MAGIC

KURSEONG like Siliguri has something of the atmosphere of a frontier station. This is where India ends and Central Asia begins. There are strange hill people there dressed in rough, unfamiliar clothes, their persons liberally decorated with gold, silver and turquoise ornaments. The Mail stops long enough to enable the passengers to breakfast at the station refreshment room, and then it goes on again to tackle another three thousand feet of the Himalayas.

The train steams right through Kurseong's main street. The track is laid at the side of the road hard against the shops. You have to step over the rails to get into the shops.

Once clear of the town the track winds for sixteen miles along the side of the Balasun river valley. For a few minutes The Snows appear, but the view is limited to Kanchenjunga, with a snatch of Kabru and Jannu.

The temperature drops as the train rises, and the rarefaction of the atmosphere becomes noticeable in several ways. Passengers have complained of mountain sickness on first reaching these heights. Others have noted a clicking sensation in their ears at the moment of passing a certain level. (Much the same thing is encountered by travellers on the London Underground

The line never came that way. The original plan was abandoned. The E. B. R. made Siliguri their goal, and the mountain railway was constructed along its present route.

Hope Town is still there—a group of cottages clustering round a church at the end of a road leading down into the valley below Sonada. Kurseong stole Hope Town's birthright.

The higher the train goes the more pronounced the Central Asiatic atmosphere becomes. Long prayer flags flutter from poles outside the houses. The prayers inscribed on these flags are intended to protect the occupants of the houses from evil. Banners of prayer flags stream across the valleys to give protection to believers who live there. Little white chortens—memorials to the dead—dot the hill-sides. At intervals the train passes shrines gaily ornamented with flowers and painted rocks.

The people who pass on the road are Mongoloid. The men as well as the women are decked with ornaments. It does not seem out of place to see a Himalayan road-mender wearing a pair of gold ear-rings as he works. But imagine the crowd that would gather if the tar boiler attendant in the Euston Road turned up one day sporting a large, conspicuous pair of gold bracelets!

The Mail nuzzles up the slopes of Senchal mountain. The immediate object is the saddle in the range at Ghum. You can see it ahead, a dip in the main range through which the railway passes before it enters on the last phase of the journey to Darjeeling.

One of the peaks of Senchal Mountain is the famous Tiger Hill. There are people who scoff at Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon. Yet in spite of the scoffers the Grand Canyon and the Niagara Falls remain among the

greatest spectacles on the face of the earth. Hackneyed, they may be, but gawking tourists can never spoil their unrivalled majesty.

Tiger Hill is like that. Everybody who goes to Darjeeling goes up Tiger Hill. Darjeeling in fact, has commercialised Tiger Hill. For, from the top of Tiger Hill by a mere geological accident, you can see Mount Everest.

Directly across the Balasun valley from Tiger Hill there is a shallow dip in the Singalela Range, and in this dip, and a hundred miles beyond it appears Everest—like the tip of a distant white sail sticking above the skyline. It is as if the dip had been scooped out of the mountain to give a sight on Mount Everest. Tiger Hill tourists are scoffed at by the pukka mountaineers. But let them scoff. Tiger Hill will always remain the greatest sunrise vantage point in the world.

If you want the treat of a lifetime plan a dawn expedition to Tiger Hill. You can go up nearly all the way by taxi ; but don't unless you are a cripple. A word in a pony wallah's ear, and a few rupees in his hand, will bring a pony and guide to your doorstep at four o'clock any morning. A pony ride to the top of the hill is a novelty. But the best way of all is to go on your own two feet. By all means walk if you can. It is a long way to go before breakfast (about eight miles from Darjeeling, four from Jalapahar cantonment) but the effort is repaid a hundred times over.

The weather is of paramount importance. It must be *clear*. If there is any mist about stay in bed. If, in the darkness, you can see the Singalela Range clean cut against the sky you can be reasonably sure of a success-

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The weather is of paramount importance. It must be *clear*. If there is any mist about stay in bed. If, in the darkness, you can see the Singalela Range clean cut against the sky you can be reasonably sure of a success-

ful outing. If there is a barometer about keep your eye on it. When it goes up you go up. If a bad spell of weather suddenly ends go up at once.

The hour when you set off depends on the sunrise time, your distance from Tiger Hill and your means of locomotion. The idea is to get there about half an hour before the official sunrise time. Taxi drivers and pony boys automatically call for you at the right time. If you are walking reckon on two and a half hours from Darjeeling and one and a half from Jalapahar. Go by the Calcutta Road, for this by-passes Ghum, and brings you out at Jorebungalow at the foot of the road leading up the hill. The Tiger Hill road shoots off from the railway at a steep angle. Another road branches off at the same point, but avoid that one. It goes to Tibet.

The road up the hill rises steeply through the forest. All sorts of beast and bird noises assail you from the darkness, but don't let that worry you. Keep going up and up. At many of the bends the road hangs on the edge of steep precipices, and there are no handrails. Don't walk over the precipice. A torch is a handy piece of equipment.

Three quarters of the way up, the road suddenly flattens out. There was a barracks on this flat piece once—Senchal Barracks. It is a golf course now. A golf course in the Himalayas! At the end of the golf course is a conical mound with a round tower capping it. That is your goal. Another fifteen minutes climbing takes you there.

You pay two annas to get into the tower at the top of Tiger Hill. There is a good chart there showing all the mountain ranges and peaks with details of their heights

and distances from the observation post. If you have timed your exploit correctly you will find a dim rolling mass of dark hills lying below you and stretching into the darkness beyond. There will probably be white frost on the seats of the tower, and if you have had a long spell on the plains your teeth will be making themselves heard. But when the miracle begins to happen you forget all about the cold.

There is always a thrill in watching the birth of a new day. Up here, watching the dawn breaking over the roof of the world, the thrill becomes unbelievably magnified. Sometimes there is a fascinating false dawn. The sky lights up and reveals the mountains, and then the light dies out and leaves the world in darkness again.

When the real dawn comes the first light creeps up over the edge of the plains of Cooch Behar far below. Where before there was blackness there is now a dividing line between plain and sky. The grey light floods upwards always strengthening on the horizon. The rivers of the plains catch a little of the reflected light, and stand out like white streaks against the featureless, black earth.

Long before the sun comes up you can see The Snows, colourless and dim against the skyline. If the morning is clear you get a dim pre-daybreak view of Everest. Three mountains peep over the Singalela Range. The one on the right is Makaul easily recognised by a strange recess cut in its northern face. The centre mountain is Everest. It looks smaller than its two neighbours, but that is because it is further away.

With the advance of the dawn more and more detail shows up in the mountains. The rivers on the plain turn

from white to fiery red—rivers of blood streaking out over the flat lands of Bengal. Just before the sun bobs up over the rim of the plain comes the most dramatic moment of all. The slanting rays touch the tips of Kanchenjunga's twin peaks. The snowy tips gleam with brilliant orange, and as the sun rises the orange tint spreads down the mountain. Other peaks catch the orange light in turn. One by one each of the myriad of peaks light up like lamps according to their height, until the sky above the still dark valleys is full of gleaming orange pinnacles.

Behind, the sun is pushing up over the line separating land and sky. Its red glare floods the plains in a bath of fiery light. You can see nothing in that direction now. The sun rays slanting up into your eyes dazzle you. It is like looking into the headlights of an approaching car. But at least it is a novelty to be able to look *down* into the rising sun.

Watch Everest! Makalu catches the light first; then in a few minutes, Everest. The orange peak glows against a pale blue sky. What a spectacle it is! On the one hand are the great plains of India. Three quarters of the way round the horizon spreads an arc comprising the world's greatest mountains.

The famous, unconquered peaks of the Himalayas are there before you—Kanchenjuga in all its glory, Kabru, Pandim, Narsing, Dopendikang, Kanchenjau, Siniochu. There are scores of peaks, most of them unnamed. Many have numbers. In the north east, 42 miles away, is the mountain Gipmochi where the boundaries of Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet all meet. There are clefts in the vast wall of mountains. These are the passes into the interior of Tibet—Chola La and Doukna La for instance.

Ranges roll in numberless folds away from your feet. There are miles of quaintly-serrated ranges on the eastern horizon. You can see Chomal Hari the most beautiful mountain in the world. The light play on the Kanchenjunga range is ever changing. Magical scenes like these are ordinarily reserved for mountaineers after weeks of hazardous travel to inaccessible places. Yet here on Tiger Hill, three miles from a railway line, is a mountain view that can be equalled nowhere else in the world.

The world lights up quickly and reveals the snowy ranges in all their glittering glory. You can trace the Singalela Range perfectly from Tiger Hill. You can see it shooting off from Kanchenjunga, and snaking downwards in a series of links—like the giant vertebrae of a prehistoric monster. The range bends and passes under your feet, for Tiger Hill is part of the range; it is one of the spines on the prehistoric monster's back. The spur containing Darjeeling and Jalaphar branches off from the main ridge like the hind leg of a crocodile. Behind you the range twists steeply downwards until it finally merges with the plain.

The dip in the ridge which reveals Everest is indeed a happy accident. If America instead of Britain had settled in India, some enterprising corporation would no doubt have had mechanical excavators up there to deepen the depression, and expose more of Everest to view. And everyday about noon a train called "The Sunrise Limited" would have been leaving Sealdah for Ghum.

Presently the Mail slackens speed and enters Jore-bungalow bazaar. As it puffs through the narrow main street a man runs in front with a red flag. The track is

so close to the shops that you could stretch out your hand and pick the wares off the shelves.

A pageant of commerce passes before your eyes. Tailors sit cross-legged beside bundles of multi-coloured cloths. In the next shop a Nepalese blacksmith is making a kukri—the famous knife of the Ghurka. You can hear the clash of the smith's hammer above the rattle of the train. In other shops—they are open-fronted—strangely dressed hill folk are buying Tibetan cheese made from the milk of the yak — odd, shellac-like squares pierced through the middle and strung together in bundles. In still another shop is displayed a glittering collection of brass bowls and dishes of many sizes and designs. Further on a parchment-faced hillwoman sits behind a pyramid of Lifebouy soap in the familiar wrapper. On the wall of the same shop hangs a placard announcing in Bengali that Aspro is the very thing for malaria. Here, in this strangests of hill town markets, the products of Liverpool and Lhasa meet.

Half way through the bazaar a narrow road branches off to the right. It is the road to Tibet via Kalimpong and Jelap La. Lhasa is 355 miles away—not quite so far as Calcutta.

Half a mile of stiff climbing brings the Mail up to Ghum station. The summit board is in the station; 7407 feet. Forty miles of solid climbing ends. The track slants away behind the train spiralling down to the plains like a grand sledge run.

Mark Twain, when he visited Darjeeling in the early days, got into a four-wheeled hand trolley at Ghum and coursed down the whole route. Of his trip the famous author wrote, "It was a sudden and immense exaltation,

and mixed ecstacy of deadly fright and unimaginable joy. I believe that this combination makes the perfection of human delight. That was the most enjoyable day I have spent on the earth. For rousing, tingling, rapturous pleasure, there is no holiday trip that approaches the bird flight down the Himalayas in the hand car. It has no fault, no blemish, no lack, instead that there are only thirty-five miles of it instead of five hundred."

The American author's account of his adventures on the D. H. R. made amusing reading, even if some of his anecdotes and descriptions are overdrawn. Of one of the loops he wrote, "Far down the mountain we got out to look at a remarkable piece of loop engineering—a spiral where the road curves on itself with such abruptness that when the regular train came down and entered the loop, we stood over it and saw the locomotive disappear under our bridge, then in a few moments appear again chasing its own tail; and we saw it gain on it, overtake it, draw ahead past the rear cars and run a race with that end of the train. It was like a snake swallowing itself."

At Sukna, Mark Twain killed thirteen tigers—or said he did. He also claims that from Sukna a telegram was once sent to Calcutta saying, "Tiger eating stationmaster on front porch; telegraph instructions." Further up the line seven elephants crossed the track, but two got away before he could overtake them!

It is a pity in a way that Mark Twain let his irrepressible humour swamp his sense of good journalism when he put his Indian experiences on paper.

Ghum station presents a busy spectacle. In the goods yard bullock carts from remote places unload goods for

shipment by rail. And alongside the station, hard up against the edge of the cliff, is a taxi rank. There are modern yellow taxis that will take you on the road to Tibet or to the frontier of Nepal. Can you imagine leaping out of a train and jumping into a taxi and saying to the driver, "Nepal"? You can do that at Ghum. The taxi drivers make a point of coercing strangers to go to the frontier of Nepal. They take you there, let you stand (without a passport) on Nepalese soil, and bring you back again.

On a shoulder of the hill above Ghum station is one of the most interesting Buddhist monasteries of the Eastern Himalaya. To the Western mind the mention of Buddhism conjures up visions of the mystic interiors of China and Tibet, of rich temples rarely seen by white men, fabulous, jewelled idols and strange rites and rituals performed by weird devil men. The mountains up here on the fringes of Central Asia shelter several Buddhist communities with their monasteries and temples. They are genuine Buddhist temples, and the feet of many white men have trodden their floors. You can walk into Ghum monastery with as little concern as you would walk into Canterbury Cathedral.

The Buddhism in the Darjeeling mountains is not an overflow from Tibet and China. It is rather the end of the receding wave of Buddhism which once enveloped much of India. Buddhism in fact, was founded in Bengal, and it was not until a late stage in its history that it died out in India and appeared in Central Asia.

The monastery at Ghum was founded in 1875. As you approach you find a row of prayer wheels on either side of the door. Very likely the lama, smiling like a

living Buddha will appear when he hears your feet crunching on the gravel.

Facing you as you enter the monastery is an enormous image of the Lord Buddha. It crouches there cross-legged in the dim interior of the building looking down at you. Many of the miniature brass Buddhas you see in the bazaars were made in Birmingham. The Ghum Buddha is genuine. It was constructed under the supervision of the grand lama of the Chumbi Valley of Tibet. It is fifteen feet high, and is veneered with powdered gold. In the statue's hollow interior are jewels and volumes of Buddhist scriptures.

The walls are decorated with strange and beautiful designs of superb workmanship. At the feet of the Buddha are the face masks and cloaks of the devil dancers and the queer horns, cups and other implements used on festive occasions.

Framed on the wall is a notice in English listing the rules to be followed by persons visiting the monastery. It combines a rare mixture of oriental mysticism and western commercialisation; it is worth repeating.

> Visitors, whether European or Indian, gentlemen or ladies who visit the Buddhist Monastery at Ghum are requested to inquire for the Visitors' Book, which is with the inmates of the temple, and to write down their names, the date of their visits etc., and any other remarks they may wish to make in the book so that the undersigned may improve the Monastery management from the information thus collected.

RULES.

1. Tobacco and cigarettes are not to be consumed in the temple precincts nor may visitors enter without removing their hats.

2. The seats of the Priests and books must not be crossed over or sat upon.

3. Any gifts or offerings, donations or subscriptions must be paid to the Kyo-nyer (doorkeeper) and should be legibly entered in the Visitors' Book by the donor himself, along with his name and address, so that the Priests may be enabled to remember him in their daily prayers.

4. The priests may perform special prayers for visitors on payment of Rs. 15/-. This fact must be noted in the Visitors' Book.

5. Visitors may be allowed to take photographs of the interior of the monastery by asking special permission from the Head Lama on payment of a fee of Rs. 25/- which fact must be noted in the Visitors' Book.

6. No monastery properties to be purchased or sold, etc.

7. Any complaints against the Priests behaviour should instantly be made to.....of Darjeeling who is president of the monastery.

1/6/25

On the way down the hill from the monastery you will probably encounter a group of school children who, as you approach, sing "Clementine" and "John Brown's Body" in perfect English and with more melodious voices than the children of either Brooklyn or the Old Kent Road.

It is very odd, but it fits in with taxis on the road to Tibet.

CHAPTER V

TEA TOWN

THE Mail puffs through a cutting in the saddle beyond Ghum station and begins to coil down the spur towards Darjeeling. It is odd after the long spell of climbing not to hear the crackle of the engine's exhaust. The train rumbles easily down the gradient, sweeping in graceful curves in and out of the recesses in the mountainside.

The last of the big surprises comes ten minutes below Ghum. The train swings suddenly out on to an exposed promontory and there, less than fifty miles ahead, is the whole of the mighty snowy range. No pen, even if it was assisted by the ablest of cameras, could do justice to such a scene.

This lofty promontory is negotiated by Loop No. 5—the famous Batasia Loop. In two rapid spirals the line drops to a lower level. This loop, the most spectacular of all, was one of the improvements which swallowed up the additional outlay of money on the line. It is a striking piece of engineering work. The loop cut out a gradient of 1 in 16, and an awkward series of road level crossings.

The line falls rapidly down the spur. From Batasia Loop onwards you can see the end of the spur, with the white walls and red roofs of Darjeeling shining among the trees. There is a Japanese flavour about the mountainside.

Many years ago some Japanese firs were planted on the slopes around Darjeeling. They flourished, and now they give a distinctive character and charm to the mountainside.

The train slides down the slope keeping to the road all the time. Four and a half miles from Ghum the Mail runs into Darjeeling station. The trip is over. A shouting, chattering swarm of Nepalese women surge round the train and snatch your baggage away from you. These are the famous Darjeeling women porters. They are dainty little women, but they can carry enormous piles of luggage on their backs. They seize your gear, you tell them where to take it, and when you get there your porters are sitting at the door waiting for their just reward.

The following table will give you at a glance the rise of the line at the various stations on the route. Read from the bottom upwards.

	Miles from Siliguri	Height above Sea Level
Darjeeling	51	6812
Ghum	47	7407
Sonada	42	6552
Tung	37	5656
Kurseong	32	4864
Mahanadi	28	4120
Gayabari	24	3400
Tindharia	20	2822
Chunbhati	16	2000
Rangtong	12	1404
Sukna	7	533
Panchanai Junct.	4	.....
Siliguri Road	...	.....
Siliguri	...	392

You might say that it would be impossible to build a modern town on the steeply-sloping face of a mountain. In Darjeeling you can see what Dr. Campbell did with the original hill in Sikkim.

The town is terraced for a thousand feet down the hill-side. Every street is at a different level, and roads on inclined planes connect them. The houses in one row look down on the roofs of the houses in the next. The original trees have been disturbed as little as possible, and the modern houses nestle on the wooded slopes. Nearly all the houses have red, iron roofs. In the monsoon the thunder of the rain on the roofs is quite a characteristic sound.

The broad market place occupies a spacious terrace in the lower reaches of the town. Sunday is the day to visit it. On Sunday mornings the hill folk come in with their produce and in this market place assembles a colourful collection of tribesmen—Nepalese, Bhutias, Lepchas. Many have brilliant native costumes, and all are hanging with jewellery. The market is bright with displays of vegetables, fruits and grains in infinite variety.

A walk along any street in Darjeeling soon shows you what Darjeeling owes to tea. Almost every kind of shop sells tea—chemists, camera shops, shoe shops, dairies—and all undertake to send samples to Britain. You can even order tea at the cinema box office. And at the interval in the cinema people come round selling chocolates—and kukris!

The deep valleys which surround the Darjeeling spur are dotted with tea gardens and much of this tea is brought up from the valley on the Darjeeling Ropeway. This ropeway begins at the edge of the market place and

stretches five miles down into the valley to Bijanbari. It has been in operation since 1939. Up till then the problem of getting the vegetables, fruits and tea of the valley up to Darjeeling was a troublesome one. Coolie transport up to the steep mountain paths was hopelessly slow.

The ropeway came to the rescue. It consists of a cable starting at the market goods depot of the D. H. R. and carried on pylons to the bottom of the valley. Carriers run up and down on the ropeway. Goods for transit are brought to the base station and loaded in the carriers which complete the journey in just over an hour.

The more you look at it the more you marvel at Darjeeling's situation. The magnificent backcloth of the Snows is staggering. Most of the world's famous mountains are hidden in inaccessible places. Here a whole range of famous peaks is open to view at the terminus of a railway line.

Kanchenjunga dominates the scene. It is 28,142 feet high—the world's second highest peak. (The honour is sometimes given to Godwin Austin but there is still some uncertainty about its height.) Darjeeling sees Kanchenjunga in all its moods. Sometimes you can see clearly with the naked eye long streamers of snow trailing from the peaks out into space. The glaciers, pouring ice and snow down to the valleys, are plainly visible in good weather.

On a clear moonlight night from the Jalapahar Road above the town, the lights of Darjeeling twinkle down the mountainside, and behind and above them is the ghostly outline of the Kanchenjunga range.

It is difficult to believe, when you look up at the Snows from a street in Darjeeling, that the region up

there is completely unconquered by man. Not one of the big peaks visible from Darjeeling has ever been scaled. Of the fifty peaks over 25,000 feet high throughout the Himalayas only two have been climbed, Nanda Devi and Kamet.

Many attempts have been made to conquer Kanchenjunga, and all have failed. Climbers from many parts of the world have come to Darjeeling, spent weeks organising expeditions and then, full of enthusiasm, have set out on their quest. Always they came back disappointed. Some did not come back. The mountain has taken a severe toll of those brave climbers who have accepted its challenge.

The first assault was made on Kanchenjunga in 1904 by a British climber, Crowley, and three experienced Swiss mountaineers. An attempt was made on the south-east face, the side facing Darjeeling. The climbers went high enough to prove that the mountain could never be climbed from that direction. Unfortunately, during the descent, one of the Swiss and two of the native porters lost their lives.

Other attempts made at intervals were beaten back. In 1929 an American, C. F. Farmer, made an attack on the mountain. He too never came back. In the following year an international expedition composed of British, German, Austrian and Swiss climbers organised a grand assault on the peak, but the party had to give up 4000 feet from the top. An attempt carried out simultaneously against the smaller peak, Simvo, was also unavailing.

Strange things happen to men at these great heights. The air is so thin that to move a few steps produces as

much fatigue as a days march on the plains. Strange afflictions hamper the climbers. They turn hopelessly sick and giddy, develop painful diseases of the throat and eyes.

As a result of the special equipment developed during the war in connection with flying at high altitudes and of the possibility of providing concentrated foods in small bulk, is it too much to suggest that the next assault on the Himalayas will be crowned with success ?

Meanwhile, Kanchenjunga towers above Darjeeling, unconquered, challenging .....

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