

TOURS IN DARJEELING AND SIKKIM

by

N. A. Tombazi

and

S. J. Vlasto.

The following is a short account of two excursions we made in Darjeeling and Sikkim during our leave in **May** 1919. They were both circular tours and Darjeeling was the starting point on each occasion. The distance covered riding and walking was 300 miles and we reached altitudes ranging from 710 to 15200 feet, with a maximum temperature of 95° F. and a minimum of 4° below freezing point. It is not easy to describe the beautiful valleys and forests through which we passed nor the many kinds of vegetation that grow at different heights. There was a great contrast in scenery and temperature as we climbed higher and higher till we reached a point where there was nothing but snow. There is no doubt that on a clear day one is fully repaid for a steep climb by the glorious views of the snowy range. It was our good luck to meet with fine weather which made it all the harder to bid farewell to the Himalaya and return once more to the steaming plains of Bengal.

I. CIRCULAR TOUR TO PHALUT AND THROUGH SIKKIM.

1st Day.	Darjeeling to Tonglu	22½ miles	page	3
	(via Ghoom and Jorepokri)			
2nd "	Tonglu to Sandakphu	14 "	"	5
3rd "	Sandakphu to Phalut	12½ "	"	7
4th "	Phalut to Dentam	17 "	"	9
	(via Chia Benjan)			
5th "	Dentam to Pamionchi	10 "	"	12
6th "	Pamionchi Monastery			
	thence to Rinchinpong	11 "	"	13
7th "	Rinchinpong to Chakung	13 "	"	16
8th "	Chakung to Darjeeling	20 "	"	18
	(via Singla Bazaar)			

Total 120 miles.

11.

CIRCULAR TOUR TO THE TIBET PASSES.

1st Day.	Darjeeling to Pashoke. (via Ghoom and Lopchu)	17½ miles	page	20
2nd "	Pashoke to Rungpo (via Tista and Melli)	17½ "	"	22
3rd "	Rungpo to Gangtok (via Sankokhola and Shamdong by short cuts)	22½ "	"	24
4th "	Gangtok to Karponang	10 "	"	26
5th "	Karponang to Changu	10 "	"	27
6th "	Around the Changu lake	5½ "	"	30
7th "	Changu to Kupup (via the Nathu La)	11 "	"	34.
8th "	The Jelap La. Kupup to Sedonchen (via the Taku La, Gnatong, and Jeyluk)	22 "	"	40
9th "	Sedonchen to Rungpo (via Lingtam and Rongli)	22 "	"	51
10th "	Around Rungpo	7 "	"	56
11th "	Rungpo to Pashoke (via Melli and Tista)	17½ "	"	57
12th "	Pashoke to Darjeeling (via Lopchu and Ghoom)	17½ "	"	58

Total 180 miles.

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1. CIRCULAR TOUR TO PHALUT AND THROUGH SIKKIM

1st Day. Darjeeling to Tonglu

(via Ghoom and Jorepokri)

22½ miles.

We started on our first tour from Mt. Everest Hotel at 9.30 in the morning on the 3rd May 1919. We had two strong Bhutia ponies with us and our party was made up of a sirdar, a cook, a sweeper, nine coolies and two syces or grooms. They were representative of almost all the tribes of Northern India; amongst them were Bhutias, Nepalese, Sikkimese, and some were from Darjeeling itself. The sirdar or headman, who boasted of a fine pig-tail, was in charge of the coolies and acted as a guide. The cook had a smattering of four or five dialects and could speak a few words of broken English; he was an amusing fellow who knew his job but whose one failing was an inordinate love of the bottle. A sweeper is necessary on such excursions as the dak-bungalows or rest-houses where one spends the night are only provided with a chowkidar or watchman. The coolies carried our luggage and provisions; some of them were women who were quite as strong and capable as the men. They carry on their back a load of 50 or 60 lbs in baskets made of plaited slips of bamboo. The load is supported by a

leather strap that goes round their forehead which thus bears all the strain. This queer custom of carrying their burden appears to be of great help to the coolies in climbing the steepest mountains. It was a difficult task for the sirdar to allot the daily burden as before starting on the day's march the coolies had endless discussions as to how the luggage should be distributed. There were always many volunteers offering to carry our photographic implements and luncheon basket which were the lightest loads.

The Bhutia coolies are always in good humour ready to laugh or joke and are very often seen playing like children. They are powerfully built and can bear with ease the most rough weather on the snows. They are very Mongolian in aspect with broad mouths, oblique eyes and flat noses. Their dress is quite unique; a robe of thick wool with loose sleeves is fastened round the waist by a leather girdle. Most of them walk barefooted and it is surprising how easily they climb on the stony mountains. Snow boots are unknown to them; when crossing the snows they wear instead Tibetan top boots. The men wear the famous Nepal "kukri" or curved knife of the shape of a boomerang which they use in the most wonderful manner in cutting down trees to light a fire or build their hut.

We thus reached Ghoom at ten o'clock and passed through Sookiapokri at 12.30 cantering on a good road through a thick

forest up to Jorepokri. The bungalow is situated at 1½ miles from the village on the top of a hill where we halted for tiffin (1.5 p.m., alt. 7400 feet). After leaving Jorepokri bungalow at three o'clock we rode through a dense jungle of pine-trees. Through old age the trees were covered with creeping plants and moss and the stems of many trees were ringed with beautiful ferns growing one above the other. We walked down a steep descent which lasted 45 minutes to Manibanjan. Until then we had fine weather when it started raining slightly. Beyond Manibanjan we had a steep ascent the whole way up to Tonglu over a road zigzagging through forests of bamboos. As we were nearing the bungalow the lights of Darjeeling were faintly visible in the dark. We reached Tonglu at seven in the evening (alt. 10074 feet; temp. outside at 8 p.m. 52° F.).

Our cook was particularly late that night and only served dinner - which consisted of cold mutton and cauliflower - at 10.30. We suspected him of having had a drop too much on the way to keep himself warm. It was a cold night; we made use of all our rugs and slept soundly.

2nd Day. Tonglu to Sandakphu.

14 miles.

4th May. We left Tonglu at nine o'clock and passed

through thick forests of bamboos and rhododendrons. We had many steep ascents and descents till we reached the 24th mile-post where there was a "bagan" or neck with a precipice on both sides. It was a narrow strip of land about 100 yards long, and we did not feel very comfortable when just about half way our ponies started grazing. They were obstinate animals and it was impossible to make them budge till their hunger was satisfied. It is characteristic of these Bhutia ponies to walk always along the edge of the path, which is very unpleasant at first, but in time one gets accustomed to this as they are very sure-footed. Then followed more ascents and descents till we reached a small village and pond called Kalapokri (1.15 p.m. - 5 miles from Sandakphu). We halted at Kalapokri for an hour where we had tiffin in a small hut and dried our clothes round the fire.

After Kalapokri there was a steep ascent for half an hour, followed by a couple more ups and downs over some nasty bits of road. We had then reached a height of 11000 feet when it started snowing. The snow increased as we ascended and the path was covered with snow during the last stage of the journey. We arrived at Sandakphu at 4.45 soaking wet and it took us a couple of hours to get dry. There was a thick layer of snow round the

bungalow situated on a small plateau. Our coolies arrived late that evening having been delayed by the snow (alt. 11929 feet; temp. outside at 9 p.m. 32° F).-

It rained nearly the whole day and we had no view of the mountains. It was, however, a pleasant walk as most of the way was through the jungle and its luxuriant vegetation. The rhododendrons in blossom deserve special mention, and have well been described as the "glory of Sikkim". They grow at altitudes ranging from 9000 to 13000 feet and a noteworthy feature is that although they attain a height of 40 feet in the lower zones they are only of the size of a bush in the higher altitudes. There are many varieties of different colours the red perhaps being the most beautiful.-

3rd Day. Sandakphu to Phalut.

12½ miles.

5th May. It was a bitterly cold morning when we awoke and found ourselves surrounded by snow. We left very early and climbed some rocks to the North West of the bungalow to obtain a view of Mt. Everest and the snowy range.

The panorama was glorious. The whole snowy range was visible from far away to the North West in Nepal and Tibet to Bhutan in the far East. First we saw the giant Makalu peak (27790 feet) then peeping over the left

shoulder of Makalu was Mt. Everest (29002 feet) the highest known mountain in the world, and beyond Everest the great peak known as T45. Mount Everest being the furthest away appeared to us smaller than Makalu. To the North, towering above the many huge masses stood the imposing Kangchenjanga (28156 feet); on its left rose the saddlesnaped Kabru (24015 feet) and on either side more than twelve snowy peaks could be seen over 20000 feet. The valleys below were shrouded in clouds rising slowly towards the peaks. Little by little the clouds were enveloping the slopes of the mountains and soon only the higher peaks were visible till they also finally disappeared. It was indeed a sight never to be forgotten which lasted but a few minutes only.

Before starting on our day's march to Phalut we were surrounded by mist and it was with great difficulty that we managed to take a few photographs of the snows. We left at 9.15 and followed the path downhill for about an hour through masses of stunted rhododendrons. During the first stage of the journey the road was covered with snow; lower down we passed many grassy slopes and after another steep descent we reached mile-post No.40. We halted at noon and had tiffin on the trunk of a fallen pine-tree while our ponies were grazing beside us. The road then ascended practically the whole way through a

fine jungle of pine-trees to mile-post No.43; then a fenced road ascending steeply led to Phalut which we reached at 3 o'clock. The bungalow is comfortable and has a closed verandah facing the snows (alt. 11811 feet; temp. outside at 6 p.m. 50° F.)

After tea we took a short stroll to Boundary Pillar No.1 which is the point where the three Kingdoms of British Darjeeling, Nepal and Sikkim meet. The view from Phalut was almost the same as from Sandakphu. In the morning we had seen the sunrise at Sandakphu, whilst in the evening at Phalut we were present at a most beautiful sunset. The whole sky was lit by the rays of the setting sun shining on the snows of Mt. Everest. The clouds were rolling over the valleys below such as the billows on an angry sea; only the crests of the mountains, like cliffs, were towering above the sea of clouds.

We returned to the bungalow and after dinner lit a huge bonfire to announce our arrival as promised to some friends in Darjeeling. On our return, however, we were told that owing to a thick mist in the valleys they had not been able to see the fire.-

4th Day. Phalut to Dentam.

(via Chia Banjan).

17 miles.

6th May. Hoping to obtain the same view as on the previous day we were up before sunrise and climbed a hill to the North-West of the bungalow near Boundary Pillar No.1. Unfortunately there was no view to be had owing to a thick mist and we returned to the bungalow. On our way we passed a "mendong", a long wall-like construction, which we frequently met on our tour in Sikkim. Many of the stones were inscribed with prayers, especially with the well-known formula "Om mani padme hung" (Hail the Lord of Mercy).

We started on our day's march at 7.35 and rode uphill on a good path for 35 minutes. There was then a descent to the foot of Mt. Singalela which stood out as a black mass in front of us (mile-post 48). It took us about half an hour to ride up the 25 zigzags over a stony path. At the top of Mt. Singalela (12161 feet) there was a cairn upon which, according to the native custom, the coolies and ourselves piled up stones. The eldest of our men offered a prayer of thanksgiving for our safe arrival and we all contributed a few annas or some grains of rice which we left in a cavity of the cairn for the lama (Tibetan priest). The coolies then decorated the spot with tiny triangular flags on which prayers were inscribed. Each time a flag flutters in the breeze a prayer has been offered to the god of the winds.

We next had a steep descent of 8 miles which we walked down in two hours; we passed many grassy slopes where we saw huge vertical rocks and the ruins of the old Chia Banjan bungalow. The descent was very steep and rather tiresome but the variety of the scenery made it interesting. We passed through forests of pine-trees and rhododendrons and further down through a thick jungle of bamboos. In some places the jungle was so dense that the rays of the sun could not penetrate. The bamboos were hanging over the side of the path with their branches intertwining above our heads. A feature of the bamboo is that the height and more especially the thickness of the stem diminish at higher altitudes to such a degree that it is possible to gauge the elevation by this difference in size.

At 11.30 we reached the bed of the river Kulhait where we halted for an hour and had tiffin near a bridge. We took some photographs and walked through a wooded valley where beautiful ferns were growing. We then rode up a small hill from where the Dentam bungalow was visible, some four miles distant, lying on the top of a green hill in the middle of the valley. We reached again the banks of the river after another steep descent. The path was stony for some time until we crossed two bridges and finally arrived at the Dentam bungalow after a short

but stiff climb (alt. 4500 feet; temp. outside at 6.30 p.m. 66° F.).

It is interesting to note that on this day we reached the highest point of our first trip, Mt. Singalela, 12161 feet and ended at Dentam 4500 feet high, which represents a drop of about 7700 feet.

As we were having a well earned dinner that night our cook served us a dish of mushrooms. He was a humorous fellow whose usual reply to any question was "Yes, Sir". Upon our asking him whether the mushrooms we were eating were "poisonous" he replied without the slightest hesitation "Ji han".

5th Day. Dentam to Pamionchi.

10 miles.

7th May. We started at 9.30 and descended in a quarter of an hour to the bed of the river Kulhait. We crossed a bridge and rode uphill over a good but steep path for about 4 miles. As we were getting higher the sound of the river gradually became fainter, and in the deep valley the river appeared only as a tiny stream. It was a hot day and the bushes on the roadside did not give much shade. We were glad to come across several waterfalls and also to gather some yellow raspberries which had a sweet taste.

There was a break in the weather and we had a shower which lasted for a short while; we had no rain during the rest of the afternoon though it remained dull. We reached grassy level ground which we cantered across and passed a cairn about half way on our journey. These cairns or "chorten" are Buddhist monuments built on sacred and usually beautiful sites. They form a solid piece of masonry in four parts consisting of a cube, an orb, and a cone surmounted by a crescent which represent Earth, Water, Fire and Air, or the four elements.

We branched off to the left and descended for about 45 minutes through a fine and shady jungle of pine-trees. The Pamionchi bungalow could be seen in the distance on the top of hill surrounded by trees. We then climbed two hills through a thick jungle and after a ride of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles we reached the bungalow at three o'clock (alt. 6920 feet; temp. outside at 6 p.m. 57° F.).

We arrived long before any of our coolies and called for the chowkidar. He did not appear but instead we were greeted by the squeak of a monkey which had found its way into the stables.

6th Day. Pamionchi Monastery,

thence to Rinchinpong.

11 miles.

8th May. We arose early to visit the Pamionchi monastery which stands about a quarter of a mile further East on the top of a hill. To reach the entrance we passed under a porch and crossed a paved court surrounded by a low wall. The outside appearance did not strike us as that of a monastery. The building was of the usual Sikkim style with high walls and no windows on the first storey; it had also a zinc roof which did not improve the effect. A flight of steps led to the door of the temple which was of beautifully carved wood. As we entered, the service had just begun. It was a queer ceremony with weird sounds and prominent was the noise of the tum-tums, cymbals and drums. This lasted a little while; there was a pause, then was heard the sound of a bell calling the lamas to silence and prayer. And the infernal noise started over again.

There was a faint light inside the temple and at the far end we could descry a huge brass statue of Buddha with his saints on either side. Allegorical figures of men with the head of fantastic creatures were painted on the walls in most vivid colours. We visited the first floor of the monastery accompanied by one of the lamas; the railing of the staircase was studded with prayer wheels which the lama turned round as he passed by. These prayer wheels are of the shape of a cylinder with

an axle in the centre; the lamas roll up strips of paper or parchment on which their prayers are inscribed and place them inside the wheel. The prayer is offered by turning the wheel round the axle.

On the first floor of the monastery there was a miniature temple of carved wood with little balconies around on which were seated tiny gods and goddesses made of brass or wood painted in bright colours. We saw a fine collection of religious books handwritten on parchment; the leaves were tied by strings and the lids of the books were made of wood. Against the walls were "pigeon holes" in which the holy books were kept. Before leaving the monastery we took some photographs and were much amused by two village idiots who performed the devil-dance. They were both deaf and dumb and looked as if they had never had a bath in their life.

We left the monastery at 10.10 and went down a steep descent of 5 miles. On our way we crossed the village of Geysing where we stopped to take a few photographs of some typical Sikkimese. It was not without difficulty that we contrived to photograph a pretty Sikkimese girl who was afraid of the camera. We also took a snapshot of an old man turning his prayer wheel. The village of Geysing is celebrated for its wonderful mendong which runs down the hill for some 200 yards; it is built of flat slaty stones inscribed with prayers. A tall monolith and

two cairns stand at the lower end of the long mendong.

It was a very hot morning and we reached the river Kulhait after a steep descent. We stopped there for tiffin and then crossed the Ligsip suspension bridge about half a mile further near the junction of the Kulhait and the great Rängeet. The bridge rested on two pillars of stone built on the banks of the river. Two long steel ropes supported the cross-planks which shook as we went over. We then had a steep ascent of 5 miles to Rinchinpong village through a thick jungle. Beyond the village we branched off to the right and reached the bungalow at 5.30 after a delightful walk through a dense forest (alt. 6000 feet: temp. outside at 8 p.m 50° F.).

7th Day. Rinchinpong to Chakung.

13 miles.

9th May. It was a fine morning and as we only had thirteen miles to do that day we went for a short walk round about the neighbouring hills. The light was very bright and suitable for glyphoscope photography; we obtained some good views of the jungle and returned to the bungalow for breakfast. The bungalows are nearly always built a little higher up than the road on a spot that commands a good view of the surrounding hills, and Rinchinpong was no exception; it had a most beautiful garden and a verandah

overlooking the mountains. Before starting we took some photographs of our party. It was difficult to get the coolies to keep still but we at last succeeded in doing so.

We left at 10.45 and rode on a level path across a dense jungle for the first hour, then descended to the bed of the river Kulhait which we reached at 12.30. We ascended for half an hour and stopped for tiffin at the hamlet of Dngam where we had our first opportunity of tasting "murwah" the favourite beverage of the Sikkimese. This drink is made of crushed millet and has a bitter taste; it is drunk through a bamboo pipe and is not intoxicating unless taken in great quantities. We continued our march uphill for 45 minutes through a drizzling rain then descended a short distance and crossed at 4 o'clock a small bridge made of logs. We had a final ascent which lasted for an hour and a half; it was very steep and it took us much longer than we had thought to reach the bungalow (alt. 5100 feet; temp. outside at 8 p.m. 60° F).

From the Chakung bungalow, where we arrived just before sunset, we had a clear view of Kalimpong village lying on the summit of a wooded hill opposite the bungalow. It was the last evening of our excursion and we spent the time talking about the incidents of the trip which we had so greatly enjoyed. It was there that we decided to go on

another tour instead of spending the rest of our holiday in Darjeeling and what struck our fancy most was the tour to the Tibet passes.

8th Day. Chakung to Darjeeling

(via Singla Bazaar).

20 miles.

10th May. As we had a twenty miles' march that day, we were up early so as to lessen the hot hours of the morning when the sun's rays are as scorching as in the plains. The road was good and level for the first half hour till we passed another of those picturesque cairns which the traveller never wearies of meeting on the roadside. From that point we had a long and steep descent of $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles which we found rather trying owing to the great heat. Before going downhill we could see Darjeeling in the distance lying on the top of a hill dotted with white buildings. As we were descending we could hear the roar of the Rahman, the river which separates Darjeeling from Sikkim. We reached its banks fairly exhausted, glad to wet our parched lips with cold water which we would not have exchanged for the best Falernian wine. We then crossed a suspension bridge, gave up our passes to the guard and were again on the soil of Bengal. It is not

usual to associate Bengal with snow, mountains, and lovely glades, and it is only a geographical fiction to call these beautiful places Bengal.

The first inhabited place across the frontier was Singla Bazaar, a small village of no importance where only Manchester piece-goods were conspicuous. We halted there a few minutes to give our ponies a rest, crossed another suspension bridge and climbed the slopes of a mountain covered with tea plantations. At one place we lost our way as our sirdar and coolies had gone ahead by short cuts and there was no signpost at the cross-road. However we got on the right track again and ascended over a good path to a small village where we had lunch. We had one final ascent through tea plantations till we joined the Lebong cart road at St. Joseph's College, a couple of miles from Darjeeling. It was raining hard at the time and though our ponies were very tired it did not take us long to reach Darjeeling and ride past the Chowrasta the favourite promenade of the fashionable Calcutta crowd.

II. CIRCULAR TOUR TO THE TIBET PASSES.

1st Day. Darjeeling to Pashoke

(via Ghoom and Lopchu).

17½ miles.

13th May. After spending a couple of days in Darjeeling making preparations for our second excursion, we left on the morning of Tuesday the 13th May casting all superstitions to the wind. We paid, however, for our rashness as on the fifth day we met with an accident which cost the life of one of our ponies.

We started then at 11 o'clock and rode to Ghoom via Jalapahar, passing on our way the barracks situated on the very top of the mountain on which Darjeeling is built. We went through Ghoom, well known as the place of continual rain, and followed for some six miles a road good enough for any motor-car till we arrived at a small village known as the "sixth mile basti" where we halted for tiffin. Up to that point we had been riding but the rest of the journey that day was done walking. The path beyond the sixth mile basti was narrower but quite good and the slope was so gentle that when we reached our destination we hardly realised that we had descended

4800 feet. We passed the village of Lopchu where we took a photograph of a native girl dancing. The Sikkimese women are very fond of ornaments and this girl was clad in a gorgeous costume with trinkets round her neck, arms, and feet. After watching the dance for a few minutes we continued our march downhill by short cuts till we came to the Pashoke bungalow (alt. 2600 feet; temp. outside at 10 p.m. 73° F.). This bungalow which belongs to the Public Works Department is situated on a hillock from where the river Tista can be seen winding in the valley.

At the bungalow we met another traveller Mr. D. Gould who was on his way to Kalimpong. He had dinner with us and we spent a pleasant evening together. The Tista valley is very beautiful but a great drawback is its unhealthiness due to the prevalence of malaria fever. As a precaution, before going to bed that night, we gave a dose of quinine to all our coolies and took some ourselves. It was a warm night but a light breeze blowing through the open doors of the verandah kept us cool and free from insects of all sorts so abundant in the valley of the Tista.

2nd Day. Pashoke to Rungpo
(via Tista and Melli)

17½ miles.

14th May. After taking some photographs of the bungalow, we continued our march through the jungle for 3½ miles to the Tista bridge (alt. 710 feet). The descent from Pashoke to the Tista was not steep, but it was very hot and we perspired profusely. It would have been still warmer were it not for occasional clouds that tempered the strength of the sun's rays. It was a great relief to slake our thirst at every spring or running water we passed by. The valley of the Tista is remarkable for the lovely butterflies of all colours that would have rejoiced the most peevish entomologist. The whole forest was humming with myriads of curious insects enjoying the warm sunshine. We saw red-headed lizards running up the barks of trees and snakes disappearing under the dry leaves at our approach.

At last we reached the village of Tista and crossed a suspension bridge which was the largest we met on our tour. It was about 100 yards long and at both extremities there were powerful pillars of stone supporting the bridge. After a short halt near the bridge we went on and at noon passed the junction of the Great Rangeet and



Our party before leaving the Dentam bungalow
- sirdar and cook in the centre.

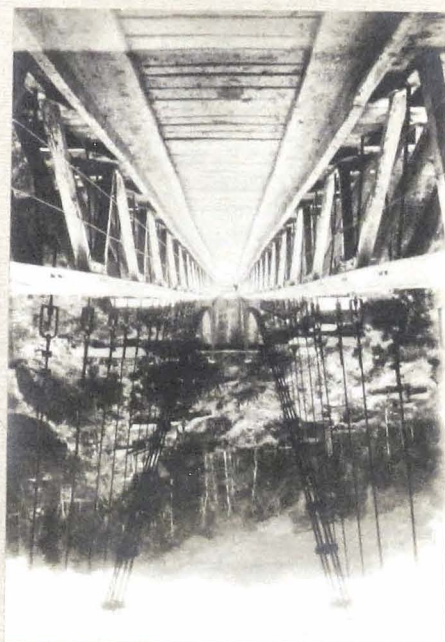


The junction of the Great Rangeet
and the Tista rivers.

The Rahman river near Single Bazaar.



The Tista suspension bridge (alt. 710 feet)
and the village at the far end.



the Tista. We went down a rather steep embankment to obtain a good photograph of the spot where the two rivers meet. There was a strong current and a marked difference in colour at the sharp bend where the clear Rangest mingled with the dark waters of the Tista. At one o'clock we passed the village of Melli where there is a small bungalow (alt. 800 feet) and followed the course of the Tista. The road continued uphill and from many sharp bends of the path we caught a glimpse of the river below. We crossed a bridge and passed through the hamlet of Tarkhola where both in going and on our return our coolies got left far behind. As already mentioned the heat that day was great and it would appear that the "murwah" at Tarkhola was of a superior brand. Apart from the heat we and our ponies were greatly pestered with flies and insects of all kinds.

Just before reaching the bungalow at Rungpo we had to cross another large suspension bridge separating Darjeeling from Sikkim. The ponies knowing our destination started cantering and it was impossible for us to stop when ^{the} sentry guarding the bridge asked us to give up our passes. In spite of his expostulations we went on at full speed for another two hundred yards or so till the ponies stopped in the bungalow compound. Meantime the sentry had followed us up but a small "backshish" soothed

his ruffled feelings.

The Rungpo bungalow built on a small eminence above the river was large and comfortable with an open verandah right round it. We were more than glad that night to find mosquito nets, a sad necessity (alt. 1200 feet; temp. outside at 8 p.m. 68° F.).

3rd Day. Rungpo to Gangtok
 (via Sankokhola and Shamdong
 by short cuts)
 22½ miles

15th May. As we intended to reach Gangtok the same day, which meant a double march or a distance exceeding twenty miles, we sent our coolies ahead at daybreak. Before starting for Gangtok we went for a short walk round the village of Rungpo and took some photographs of the river with the suspension bridge. We left at 8.25; it was very hot during the first four miles as we rode across a bare stretch of land beaten by the rays of the sun. Beyond the fourth mile we did not feel the effects of the heat so much as the road was shady. We still followed the course of the Tista for another seven miles. The views we obtained of the river from the bends of the road were even more beautiful than on the previous day.

At 10.30 we passed the bungalow of Sankokhola and further on the camping ground of Singtam where the Sikkimese soldiers are trained. Near the camping ground was the hamlet and bridge of Singtam. A few minutes after crossing the bridge we met a missionary Mr. A. E. Schiffler who was on his way to Kupup and who did part of the journey with us. At one o'clock we arrived at the bungalow of Shamdong situated on the top of a hill ten minutes off the main road; it commands a good view of the hills round Gangtok and of the Tista which flows immediately below the bungalow.

After Shamdong the road became much steeper than during the first half of the journey. About a mile beyond we passed a bridge over the Raneekhola where we met a fisherman from whom we bought some fish that had just been caught. The road leading to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, was broader than the usual path over the mountains. As it was getting dark we went by short cuts and the last bit was steep and stony. Owing to the increasing darkness we lost our way coming up the bazaar short cuts, but with the help of a good Samaritan who happened to speak a few words of English we finally managed to reach the dak-bungalow at nine o'clock at night. It had been a long day and we soon fell under the spell of Morpheus (alt. 5800 feet; temp. outside at 11 p.m. 59° F.).

4th Day. Gangtok to Karponang.

10 miles.

16th May. Before leaving Darjeeling we had been given a letter of introduction to Capt. Turner the Civil Surgeon at Gangtok, so we went to see him that morning. He dwelt some little way from the centre of the village and it took us about twenty minutes to reach his bungalow.

It would have been difficult to select a more beautiful spot to enjoy the sight of the mountains in their full splendour. The garden was fragrant with daisies, jessamine, gardenias, sweet-scented heliotrope, and roses of all colours. It reminded us of an English cottage or of one of those charming country houses in Wales. Mrs. Turner showed us a most interesting collection of photographs and some Tibetan and Sikkimese curios, and we left Gangtok carrying away a pleasant recollection of our hosts kind hospitality.

We returned to the dak-bungalow and before leaving for Karponang we took a photograph of the whole of Gangtok from a hill on which a monastery and the jail of Sikkim are built. That these two buildings serving such different purposes should have been constructed at only a few yards distance from one another struck us as a

singular coincidence. And yet there was something appropriate in this, as if the one was a compulsory prison for evil-doers the other was a voluntary prison for those who sought to take refuge from the pleasures and temptations of the world.

We left Gangtok at 12.40 and for about five miles we rode over a fairly good path. We halted for a short time and had lunch on the roadside near some running water. The second part of the journey was up a steep and rather stony mountain with formidable precipices. A few minutes before reaching our destination it started raining and we arrived at the bungalow just in time before the heavy downpour (alt. 9500 feet; temp. outside at 8 p.m. 42° F.). We lit a huge fire and sat round the crackling wood trying to keep ourselves warm. Outside there was a violent hailstorm and we could hear the hail pattering on the zinc roof making a noise like the firing of a machine gun. Then when the storm was over the silence in the jungle was complete.

5th Day. Karponang to Changu.

10 miles.

17th May. We started at 7.45 after sending a coolie in front with provisions as we hoped to climb the Nathu La ("La" is the Tibetan word for "pass") that afternoon.

From Karponang the road was uphill and rather steep with many precipices. It was at $1\frac{8}{10}$ miles from the Karponang bungalow whilst crossing a "jhora" or frozen waterfall that we met with our accident. We had already crossed a smaller waterfall a quarter of a mile before without any difficulty. At the time of the accident we were not riding, each of us was leading his horse by the bridle and a syce was following behind. Before taking our ponies across the jhora which was about twenty yards long, we first went over by ourselves to make sure that there were no crevices. As there was a rise of about two or three feet from the level of the road on to this strip of snow, we dug three steps into the snow so as to facilitate the crossing over. Tombazi led his pony first when at the second step the pony stumbled and fell; it did not go right down but its hind legs were overhanging the precipice. Vlasto rushed to his assistance and caught hold of his arm to prevent him from being dragged over the precipice by the weight of the horse. We held on for nearly five minutes but we were rapidly losing grip when we caught sight of the foremost of our coolies coming round the bend. We shouted for help, and throwing down his load the man came to the rescue in the nick of time. The rest of the coolies then arrived on the spot and through our combined efforts we dragged the pony on to

the path. The coolies immediately secured the horse with a rope safely away from the edge of the precipice. We also built a railing with fallen trunks of trees so as to prevent the pony from rolling over the edge. During four hours we did our utmost to assist the horse in rising, but it was all in vain. We despatched a messenger to our friend Capt. Turner at Gangtok requesting him to send us a veterinary surgeon, but it was of no avail as the horse had injured itself fatally. There was nothing else to be done and we had to continue our journey. We sent back the other pony with the syce to meet us at Rongli on our return.

It was past one o'clock when we started again and it began raining. We passed two more frozen waterfalls without any incident and shortly afterwards we were walking in deep snow. We had a stiff climb along the flanks of a wild valley strewn with blasted pine-trees, and further up it was only rock and snow. At the 18th mile-post from Gangtok we reached the end of the valley, and suddenly there burst upon us the sight of a wonderful lake at the end of which was the Changu bungalow. The lake was beautifully situated in the midst of the snow; the dark green almost black colour of its water formed a striking contrast with the white mountain tops. We reached the bungalow at six o'clock while big hailstones

were coming down with great strength (alt. 12600 feet; temp. outside at 8 p.m. 30° F.).

6th Day. Around the Changu lake.

5½ miles.

18th May. The morning was brilliantly fine. A thick layer of snow at some places several feet deep surrounded the bungalow. It was a wonderfully white landscape with only a few black rocks projecting here and there above the dazzling surface of the snow. We noticed an unusual animation amongst our coolies who were more noisy than ever in their lengthy discussions as to how the loads should be allotted. Some of them were skilfully manufacturing snow spectacles with the cardboard lids of their cigarette boxes and strips of cloth smeared with soot; others were tying rags round their faces whilst the women coolies were undoing their pigtails and tying their long hair as a screen before their eyes. They reminded us of children playing at blindman's-buff. Things however were more serious than we had thought as the absence of snow spectacles was badly felt by most of us during our attempt to reach Kupup.

We left the bungalow at eight o'clock and plodded in deep snow; there was no trace of the road. According



The Changu bungalow in deep snow
(alt. 12600 feet).



Our coolies on the way to Kupup
(7½ miles from Changu).



The Jelap-La (alt.14390 feet).



The spot of the accident
on the way to Changu (alt.10000 feet).

to the chowkidar's indications the path leading to Kupup described a semi-circle along the Northern slopes of the hills surrounding the lake and passed under the cliffs of Mt. Changu. It might have been possible to reach the end of this huge bend of the road by short cuts passing near the Changu lake, but under prevailing conditions we thought it unwise to take any risks. Our advance was very slow as we were sinking to the knees in the soft snow. We struggled along stumbling every now and then into some pitfalls masked by the treacherous snow. The good old warning to the tourist "keep in the middle of the road" was evidently impracticable that day. Our march became more and more tedious owing to the blinding reflection of the sunshine on the snow. The glare was terrific. After plodding along for some time we reached a fairly big rock - a welcome bit of solid ground - projecting in the centre of the valley. It took us over thirty minutes to reach this spot which was barely half a mile from the bungalow. Our coolies were glad to relieve their shoulders of the heavy burden they carried and we sat down for a few minutes gazing at the beautiful Changu lake which was lying at our feet in all its glory. We were much perplexed when the chowkidar who had escorted us to that rock informed us that the path was even worse further on. One of us accompanied by the chowkidar went on to

reconnoitre while the rest of the party returned to Changu. Just as the party was nearing the bungalow our old acquaintance the missionary, whom we had previously met on the way to Gangtok, was coming up from the opposite direction.

It was long after midday when the reconnoitring party returned. The chowkidar's report was to a certain extent correct. The main obstacle, to say nothing of the snow spectacles of which we were not the fortunate possessors, was the sinking snow which completely blocked the path at certain places. The snow was very soft and a depth of six feet was registered about a mile or so from the bungalow. In spite of the drifting mist the party had succeeded in taking a few photographs of the hills surrounding the Nathu La.

After reviewing the situation we came to the conclusion that it would be too difficult and risky to attempt again the same journey through the snow with all our heavily laden coolies. We decided that Tombazi with three picked coolies should leave for Kupup on the following morning whilst Vlasto with the rest of the party should return to Rungpo where we would meet again. The missionary Mr. Schiffler who had three strong coolies with him was bent upon continuing his journey and left on the following morning with the party for Kupup.

We spent an enjoyable afternoon reading Freshfield's "Round Kangchenjanga", a narrative of mountaineering of a most daring expedition round the heart of the Himalaya. In the evening we witnessed one of those wonderful sunsets on the snows which cannot be forgotten. The sky was undimmed by any fleck of vapour and the snowy hills surrounding the Changu lake were glittering in the rays of the setting sun. In the centre of this white amphitheatre the dark surface of the lake was clearly outlined calm and serene. There was a faint flush in the sky as the sun was slowly sinking behind the mountain ridge. The shadows deepened, the light faded away, and soon the lake was enveloped by the silent night.

We spent a couple of hours making preparations for the next day. Amongst the three coolies for Kupup we should name Minma, a gay and useful lad of about nineteen, who was an extraordinary good climber. He was quick in his work and had a fairly good knowledge of cooking. It may be interesting to mention here that the sirdar who had accompanied us on our tour to Phalut failed to join our party at the last moment before leaving Darjeeling. The absence of a sirdar was felt during the first few days as the substitute we were given was good enough for the work of a bearer but had no idea of the duties of a sirdar. As Minma was the only one of our coolies who had

climbed the Jelap La on a previous occasion we placed him at the head of the party. We thought it advisable to reduce the loads of the three coolies for Kupup to about thirty lbs each or half the usual weight so as to lessen the difficulties of our march across the soft snow. We ended our preparations that evening by selecting carefully whatever was absolutely indispensable, such as sleeping bags, provisions for four days, and photographic implements. It was bitterly cold and we had a restless night owing to a painful inflammation of the eyes caused by the strong glare. It was only towards the early morning that we obtained a few hours of rest in our sleeping bags (temp. outside at 9 p.m. 1° F. below freezing point).

7th Day. Changu to Kupup

(via the Nathu La).

11 miles.

19th May. It was a perfectly clear morning without the slightest sign of a cloud. A light breeze coming from the neighbouring hills was blowing gently over the surface of the snow. The bright sunshine made everything look cheerful, and the pain in the eyes of the previous day was quite forgotten in admiring the beauty of the surroundings. As we had a better chance of accomplishing

our journey in the early morning when the snow was harder, we were unable to prolong our stay as much as we would have desired. We hastily got everything ready and left the Changu bungalow at eight o'clock accompanied by our coolies.

For the first mile or so we went over the same track as on the previous day. We skirted the sinuous cliffs of Mt. Changu and climbed a lofty hill covered with dwarf rhododendrons. The reflection of the sun on the white mountain slopes was intense, but thanks to Mr. Schiffler who had provided snow spectacles we did not suffer from the glare as much as the day before. In about half an hour's time we reached the top of the hill from where we had a good view of the whole basin-like valley with the Changu lake in the centre.

We turned to the left and plodded in deep snow over most fatiguing ground still following the track of the reconnoitring party. Fortunately the snow was a little harder though it was not solid enough for our laden coolies who were stumbling and sinking to the knees at every other step. We thus crossed a small plateau about half a mile long and toiled circuitously along the snowy hills. On the way we saw the giant rhubarb growing above high boulders and shrubs scattered here and there amid the rugged surface of the snow. We passed the ruins of a

cluster of stone huts that were used as cattle sheds by the yak herdsmen. Owing to the late snow the huts were deserted as their rustic inhabitants were still wandering over the fertile pasture grounds of the lower zones. Our toilsome march over this sinking ground was suddenly broken by a sharp bend to the left and we came to the point which the reconnoitring party had reached on the previous day. It was an excellent spot for observation purposes situated at an altitude of 12800 feet and overlooking a huge open amphitheatre. Before us lay a deep wooded valley surrounded by steep mountains with their snow-capped crests projecting towards the sky; beneath us the valley was carpeted with a dense forest of pine-trees and rhododendrons. The Nathu La was rising above a cloud of drifting mist. At some places the path was easily discernible winding round a great wall of formidable precipices. The weather was fine and we halted for a quarter of an hour to take some photographs.

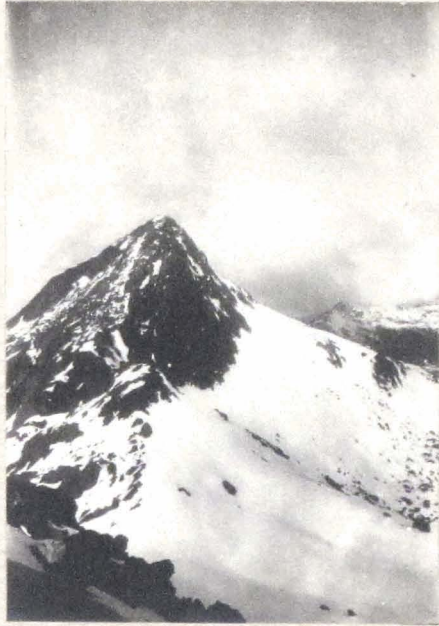
It took us a couple of hours to reach this point which we reckoned to be about one and a half miles from the Changu bungalow. We noticed that the path from Changu to Kupup had no mileposts similar to those we had met on all the other routes in Darjeeling and Sikkim. The mileage was recorded instead on the smooth surface of rocks facing the path. As the weather had been abnormally severe

that spring, most of the rocks were buried under the snow and we had great difficulty in registering the mileage in our diary. Our head coolie being well acquainted with these mountains, we had no serious trouble in finding our way at places where there was no trace of the path.

A quarter of a mile further we met a bit of solid ground which only lasted for a few hundred yards to our great disappointment. Here the path was cut in an almost vertical rock with a precipice on the right. A huge mass of snow blocked our way forming a dangerous slope right up to the edge of the path. Our struggling march started over again. It was the most exhausting piece of ground we had to cross on our journey. Sinking in the melting snow we waded along balancing ourselves on unstable boulders that tipped over with our weight. We were again compelled to beat a track over the soft and untrodden snow. Presently one of the coolies sank to the waist and his leg was caught between two rocks. After some trouble we managed to pull him out but his Tibetan boot remained buried in the snow. We lost a quarter of an hour sewing a bit of canvas in the shape of a boot and even then it took some persuasion before the coolie would consent to continue the journey with us.

Beyond this point we had welcome intervals of solid ground where the edge of the path was clear. We descended

gradually and at noon reached a point, four miles from Changu, where the path was zigzagging down a steep ridge leading to the foot of the Nathu La. All traces of the path were completely obliterated by the heavy fall of snow which formed a huge slide. We sat on the snow and very slowly glided down the steep incline, making use of our hands and feet. A Swiss mountaineer would have found no difficulty in going down this declivity in a sledge. Although a rough descent, our coolies thoroughly enjoyed the sport like children. The next two miles or so were over a fairly good path winding up the northern slopes of this gorge. We passed a beautiful little lake called "Sharab" lying between a rock-buttress on one side and a snowy ridge on the other (alt. 12400 feet). The water was of a greenish hue and the calm surface of the lake reflected the shadows of the surrounding hills. We climbed a hillock overlooking the lake and soon passed a signpost indicating the path to the Nathu La (1.30 p.m; 6½ miles from Changu). During the rest of the afternoon the walking was over rough ground though free from difficulty. We crossed another huge depression with the Kupup lake in the centre. The path was again covered with snow but it was not so deep and after our recent experience the march through this glade was an easy matter. It was a day remarkable for valleys and lakes as they seemed to



A peak to the North West of the Jelap-La
16000 feet high



Near the Changu lake (alt.12600 feet).



The clouds over the Changu lake
(alt.12600 feet).



The Sharab lake
(6 miles from Changu- alt.12400 feet).

succeed one another indefinitely.

At about three o'clock we passed a huge waterfall and entered the Kupup valley. The melting snow mixed with stones and mud was scattered in patches. We sinuated through a densely wooded ravine, splashed along the watercourses, and skirted the slippery sides of this endless valley. Our feet were frozen and badly bruised. At last we reached more level ground and caught a glimpse of the Kupup bungalow situated on a small plateau at the foot of the Jelap La. After half an hour's walk through a forest of rhododendrons we arrived at the bungalow as it was getting dark (alt. 13000 feet; temp. outside at 8 p.m. 30° F). It had taken us nine hours to cover the comparatively short distance of eleven miles separating Kupup from Changu.

At the bungalow we were pleased to meet Lieut. J. T. Lloyd and a friend of his who had reached Kupup from the opposite direction via Sedenchen and Gnatong. We did the Jelap La trip together on the following morning. It was a very cold night and we lit a blazing fire to warm our frozen limbs and dry our clothes and boots that were soaking wet.

8th Day. The Jelap La. Kupup to Sedonchen.

(via the Taku La, Gnatong and Jeyluk).

22 miles.

20th May. As we had to go on a long excursion that day we completed all our preparations on the previous evening. Our plan was, in the first place, to visit the Jelap La in the early morning to obtain a good view of Tibet. Then, as our passes for Sikkim expired on the 23rd May, our intention was to reach Sedonchen in the evening so as to make up for the day we had spent at Changu in our attempt to cross the snow. Our main object was to climb the Jelap La and the possibility of reaching Sedonchen on the same day, which meant a double march in one afternoon, greatly depended on the condition of the path. For the trip to the Jelap La one coolie was sufficient to carry our cameras, a thermos flask and provisions, so we decided to take Minma who was our best guide. We sent the other two coolies ahead to meet us at the Sedonchen dak-bungalow, fifteen miles from Kupup.

We were up at daybreak and saw a beautiful sunrise. The cloudless sky was the forerunner of another fine day. From the bungalow we had a splendid view of the neighbouring hills covered with shrubs and rhododendrons, but the distant view was hidden by the high mountains that

separate the Kúpup valley from the Mo Chu in Tibet. We were at the foot of the Jelap La the propylæum leading into the sacred land of Tibet. On either side of the Pass, like sentries guarding a gate, stood craggy mountains flashing back the sunbeams as they shot across the ridges.

After a light breakfast we left the bungalow at six o'clock. The first mile was over a level but stony path leading to the entrance of the Great Pass. We crossed a bridge over a small torrent and ascended a gentle slope for about twenty minutes. On the way we met two Tibetan shepherds. They were sturdy looking fellows with long knives stuck to their girdle and pigtails swinging down their back; they wore Tibetan top boots and were clad in woollen robes fastened round their waist by a leather belt. Our coolie was familiar with the Tibetan dialect and from a short conversation he had with them we understood that they had come from Phari Jong, a small village thirtyeight miles beyond the Tibetan frontier.

The Jelap La is the most important pass between Tibet and Sikkim. It lies on the direct route from Lhasa to the Tista valley and is frequently crossed by Tibetan tradesmen going to Kalimpong, the centre of the wool market. The winter is very severe on these high mountains and the caravans bringing the wool into Sikkim are very

Jelap La. To the East, the deep valleys of Tibet carpeted with forests of perpetual green were lying at our feet. Behind the Chumbi valley and the Ammo Chu, spurs of mountains were spread out range beyond range; while far far away, veiling the horizon, stood the snowy tableland of once unknown Tibet. Towering above this great plateau rose magnificently the sacred mountain of Tibet, Chumalhari. Its white crest, 23940 feet high, stood like a sugar-loaf. This mountain has the peculiar shape of a half dome leaning towards the North where it is cut down vertically forming an upright cliff over 10000 feet high above its visible base. To the South, the view was concealed by a barrier of cliffs rising on the right of the Jelap La. In the foreground the Great Pass could be seen like a map at our feet. Over the white surface of the snow a long line of black dots indicated a caravan on its way to Tibet.

After studying this beautiful panorama with the help of a map and a compass, we took many photographs and had a welcome cup of hot tea which we had preciousely kept in our thermos flask. Fortunately none of our party suffered from mountain sickness which is generally attributed to rarity of the air at elevations exceeding 13000 or 14000 feet. It was with regret that we left at nine o'clock that unfrequented rock on which

often badly caught in snow blizzards. It was at the Jelap La, at an elevation of over 14000 feet above sea level, that a battle was fought in 1888 between the Tibetan tribesmen and the British soldiers.

As we went higher the ascent became steeper and the ground was covered with a thick layer of snow. The streams coming down the mountains were frozen and the ice was crackling under our feet. We followed a fairly good track over hard snow for about a mile. It was a steep but not difficult climb. The narrow pass gradually became wider and at seven o'clock we reached a small plateau where there was a cairn decorated with prayer flags. At last Tibet was within sight. At our feet the path was winding down towards the Chumbi valley. Rocky mountains covered with snow were rising steeply on either side of this plateau. The weather was exceptionally fine and the atmosphere was as clear as we could have wished it to be. We stopped for ten minutes near the ruins of a wall which the Tibetans had constructed in 1888 with the intention of defending the pass (alt. 14390 feet).

Although we had a splendid view of Tibet, a good portion of the panorama including the Kangchenjunga range to the North West was concealed by high mountains. We therefore decided to climb a peak rising to

the left of the Jelap La. The ascent was gentle at first till we came to a spur from where the real stiff climb began. The ground was very rough. Big rocks and patches of snow were scattered over the bare slope. At a height of about 14800 feet the vegetation consisted only of moss and tiny shrubs with curled leaves. The severe cold seemed to have prevented these bushes from growing any bigger. At eight o'clock we reached the top of the peak (alt. 15200 feet) and our toilsome ascent came to an end. This point was the highest we attained on our tour, and within a few hundred feet it was equal in height to the top of Mont Blanc.

Perched on that spur of the Jelap La we spent over an hour admiring the view. Far away to the North West rose the majestic snowy range with the giant Kangchenjanga in the centre. The rocky cliffs of its eastern face were partly hidden by the nearer hills above the Jelap La. To the left, stood the twin-peaked Kabru and the great Jannu with its massive head; to the right, rose in a line the peaks of Pandim, Simvu, and Narsing. To the northern extremity of this imposing range the blunt snowy peak of Siniolchum was peeping over the saddle of Pakichu. Beyond, there was a great gap over some lofty hills overlooking Nepal, and the view was again hidden by a near peak rising from the

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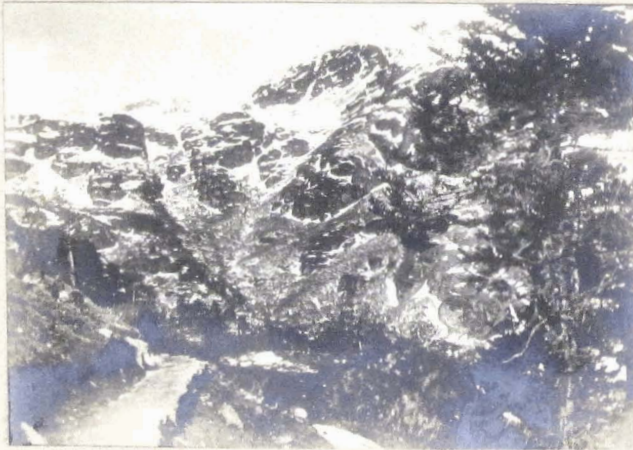
The Jelap-La peaks, 16000 feet high.



General view of the Jelap-La from a peak 15200 feet high;
in the valley, a caravan on its way to Tibet.



Snowy mountains round the Kupup valley.



The Kupup valley and the pine-trees.

we had spent a short but happy hour. We descended over the rocks and in twenty minutes reached the cairn of the Jelap La. From there, as the clouds were rising from the valleys, we caught a last glimpse of Tibet, and following the same path over which we had ascended we returned to the Kupup bungalow for breakfast.

There was a change in the weather and the afternoon was overcast. We left Kupup at 11.30 and ascended for about ten minutes a hill covered with shrubs. The path was quite good and almost free from snow. From a sharp bend to the right we saw the vast Bidentzo lake lying in the middle of a valley surrounded by lofty hills. The Bidentzo is a glacial lake about a mile long and a half a mile broad, situated at an elevation of 12700 feet above sea level. The neighbouring ground is known to be very good for duck shooting, though on the whole Sikkim is a poor country for sport. We saw some wild duck and further up near the Taku La we came across a couple of snow partridges. The game in Sikkim consists of pigeon, pheasant and jungle-murghi which are all found in moderate quantities amid the densely wooded hills of the lower regions. The quail frequents the swampy valleys and the woodcock is a cold weather visitor. The barking deer and the hornless musk deer are only seen at elevations exceeding 15000 feet. Bear, snow leopard, and wild boar,

live in remote dens of the jungle and are rarely seen. Marmots are very common on the whole range of mountains from the Nathu La to the Jelap La. We did not see any, however, during our trip across the passes, probably because these hibernating creatures were still in their winter sleep owing to the late snow.

We continued our march uphill to the top of a narrow pass, the Nim La (or Chota Taku La; alt. 13200 feet). Beyond this pass we came to a broad valley covered with snow and mostly bare of trees. At the lower parts of this depression the melting snow mixed with turf and stones had turned into sleet. In a quarter of an hour we reached the summit of the Taku La situated at the other end of the valley (alt. 13450 feet). Close by there was a cairn in ruins that might have been a monument to the fallen of the great fight in 1888. Overlooking a deep gorge, the Taku La commands a good view of Gnatong lying on the opposite mountains. We descended by short cuts the steep hillside called the "Derby Downs" after the Derbyshire regiment that helped to defeat the Tibetan invaders. It took us a good half hour to reach the bottom of the valley where there was a small stream. We crossed a bridge and ascended a bare slope over a steep path leading to Gnatong. We arrived at the bungalow at one o'clock (alt. 12300 feet; temp. outside at 1.20 p.m. 51° F.).

Gnatong is the first halting place for caravans coming from Tibet and is an important market for cattle. We visited the old fort which was in ruins; only a portion of its northern battlement stood up looking towards the heights of the Taku La. After a light meal, we left the bungalow at two o'clock and crossed the small bazaar of Gnatong that was packed with Tibetan mules and cattle of all sorts. About ten minutes afterwards we passed milepost No.51. The mileage of this road starts from the Tista bridge and ends at the cairn of the Jelap La which is near the 58th milepost. The weather became dull and everything except our immediate surroundings were hid by the mist. The path was fairly level at first, then we descended about half a mile and came to a hollow containing the ruins of an old camp. Further down we crossed a wide plateau strewn with moss and laurels. The purple flowers of the rhododendrons hung in clusters through the dense foliage, while the leaves of the low shrubs sparkled with silvery drops. We were gradually leaving the alpine zone and entering again the enchanting forests of Sikkim. Suddenly between two patches of drifting mist we caught a glimpse of Mt.Gipmochi with its cloud-capped peaks. The southern spur of this mountain (14532 feet) forms the trijunction point of Sikkim, Tibet, and Bhutan.

We branched off to the right and followed a path along the northern slopes of Mt. Lingtu. At the top of a steep hill we passed the ruins of a fort and about a hundred yards further the remains of a great wall built by the Tibetan invaders in 1888. From this point, started the great descent of Mt. Lingtu, a descent of 9900 feet over a distance of $8\frac{3}{4}$ miles. The structure of the road winding down this steep incline was remarkable. The edge was formed by big flat stones set one against the other while the middle of the path was made of smaller stones inserted between the rocks. On the whole this road was similar to a causeway, but the torrents rushing down the slopes of the mountains had washed away the turf and gnawed the big stones in such a way that the surface was very rough. It is doubtful whether any other road on the flanks of a steep mountain like Lingtu could have withstood so well the violent storms that beat against it every monsoon. Although taken near the village of Lingtam where the road was level, the photograph of the Tibetan mules on their way to Lhasa may perhaps convey an imperfect idea of what this path was like.

The slopes of the mountain were covered with dense vegetation of all kinds. We passed through forests of pine-trees, laurels and rhododendrons, and further down under long arcades of bamboos. After half an hour's walk



Tibetan mules laden with piece-goods
on their way to Lhasa.



The Rongli dak-bungalow (alt.2700 feet).



In the snows near Sandakphu
(alt. 12000 feet).



A cairn on the way to Pamionchi-
5 miles from Dentam.

we came to a hamlet built on a small eminence of the mountain. We noticed a big rock with the letters "C. I. N. R. A. 21-3-38" carved on the side facing the path. We could not make out what it meant, but thought they might probably be the initials of some soldier fallen in the expedition of 1888. We continued our march down the ladder of stones till at 4.45 we passed a grassy slope where level ground was most welcome. Small stretches of pasture-land were lying on either side of the path. Through a clearing of the wood we caught sight of a few huts and of a herd of yaks grazing. They were fine creatures with long brownish hair hanging down almost to the ground; their wavy tails were chasing the pestering flies. Of a sudden a pair of ebony horns were seen jutting out from a bush close by; gradually the head of a yak with its white muzzle appeared above the leaves. The animal gazed at us inquisitively for a second, then, before we had time to pull the shutter of our camera, it disappeared into the thick jungle. It was a signal for its companions to retreat and the whole herd bolted; an old female yak with her calf was left behind, but on our approach they quickly joined the rest of the herd.

The yak when tamed is a valuable beast of burden to the Sikkimese or Tibetan peasant. The milk of these animals is very rich, and their hide, horns, and even bones

are put to profitable use in various ways. The Sikkimese are very fond of yak flesh which they consider a great delicacy; but as the young animals are their chief means of livelihood they only slaughter the old beasts. The flesh is cut up, dried in the sun, and made into a sort of jerked-beef which is eaten raw. When travelling, the Tibetan carries a quantity of this "beef" in the capacious folds of his garments in which he also frequently stows his dirty boots.

A little further down we came to the village of Jeyluk ($6\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Gnatong) mostly inhabited by yak herdsman. We halted near a hut where we obtained some yak milk and a supply of fresh eggs. The sky darkened with threatening clouds, and we left in a hurry to reach the bungalow before the heavy downpour. Beyond Jeyluk the road was level only for a few hundred yards, then the endless stony path started again. From the 45th milepost we could see Sedonchen lying half way down the slope; we were still, however, another two miles off. We finally reached the village at 5.30 just in time to escape the heavy storm. The Sedonchen bungalow is comfortable and has a large verandah raised over a porch (alt. 6500 feet; temp. outside at 7 p.m. 70° F.).

9th Day. Sedonchen to Rungpo

(via Lingtam and Rongli).

22 miles

21st May. At daybreak the mist had lifted and the early rays of the sun fell upon the bungalow. Through the foliage of the creeping plants that covered the verandah we could see the green landscape. The birds were chirping merrily in the wood. The small farmhouses of Sedonchen with their thatched roofs and wooden balconies were scattered over the grassy slope. On the flanks of the mountain, the ladder path was winding down to a deep wooded valley. In the far distance the Tonglu-Phalut ridge and the Darjeeling hills were faintly visible behind a silvery haze.

The village of Sedonchen is built on a narrow stretch of level ground that connects the two long flights of this ladder path like the landing of a staircase. We left the bungalow at 6.45 and descended the steep mountain over a road similar to the one we had followed on the previous day. There was a noticeable change in temperature as we approached the lower zones. The vegetation grew more tropical in aspect. We first passed through vast forests of oak and chestnut trees, then through giant bamboos and broad-leaved banana trees. In about an

hour's time we reached a stream and crossed a wooden bridge near a small village. From this point the path was fairly good and level with only occasional stretches of the stony causeway. We had barely gone a mile further when the tinkling sound of distant bells caught our ears. The noise gradually became louder and on turning a sharp bend to the left we met a caravan of Tibetans coming up from the opposite direction. It afforded us an excellent opportunity of examining the peculiar way in which these pilgrims are equipped for their long journey to the mysterious land of Tibet.

An old man riding a strong Tibetan mule was leading the way; small groups, of six or seven mules each, were following one behind the other. The foremost mule of each group wore a necklace of beads from which hung small bells producing musical sounds; the others following behind had a big red tassel swinging down their neck. It was a strange caravan of pilgrims emigrating with all their belongings, women carrying their babies and children walking barefooted. Towards the end of this long cavalcade came a group of pack-mules carrying food, cooking utensils, and beddings; then came a few merchants followed by another group of mules laden with bags of flour and maize or bales of piece-goods. We stood by the side of the path watching this queer procession as each group

passed by until they disappeared behind the ridge. For some time after we could hear the sound of the bells till it became fainter and fainter and gradually died away.

Beyond the 40th milepost the path was winding in and out the flanks of the mountain. At 8.45 we caught sight of the village of Lingtam lying on a slope amid dense vegetation. A few minutes later we met a party of woodcutters at work and two engineers of the Public Works Department constructing a small bridge. We halted at Lingtam for a quarter of an hour to give a rest to our coolies. Near the door of a thatched hut stood a few villagers who greeted us with smiling faces. Beyond Lingtam we followed a good path running along the banks of the torrential Rongli. It was a very hot morning and whenever we passed a spring we stopped to quench our thirst. At some places the path was cut in the steep flanks of the mountain forming a roof above our heads in the shape of a half archivolt. Many hundred feet below we could see the Rongli foaming and rushing down amid huge boulders. About a mile further we descended over a gentle slope and entered the village of Rongli. The daktabungalow is built on a wooded hillock situated at a distance of five minutes from the other end of the village. At this point the waters of the Rongli bifurcate and meet again lower down; the bungalow is thus isolated on a small

island which is joined to the path by an iron bridge (8 miles from Sedonchen; alt. 2700 feet; temp. outside at 11.30 a.m. 93° F.).

Although the next stage to Rungpo meant a march of fifteen miles during the hot hours of the day, yet our downhill journey from Sedonchen seemed hardly enough even for our coolies. We therefore decided to halt at Rongli only for lunch, and continue our journey to Rungpo on the same day. We left Rongli at noon and followed a good path along the left bank of the river. About half a mile from the bungalow we passed the junction of a road leading to Ari and Kalimpong. We kept to the right and descended a hill covered with giant trees. At one o'clock we came to a small grotto and again halted near some running water to slake our unquenchable thirst. Overhead, on a big tree, sat a group of monkeys; some of them were quarrelling, while others were leaping from branch to branch and jabbering for all their worth. Our presence did not disturb them in the least. They appeared to lead a happy life in this great forest.

After a march of four miles along the bank of the river, we came to milepost No. 8. The heat was intense and we stopped for a short while as our coolies seemed to be exhausted. We had done a little less than half the journey from Rongli to Rungpo and still had another long

eight miles before us. We started again at three o'clock and crossed the river over a long wooden bridge built on the cantilever principle. For the remainder of the afternoon we followed the right bank of the Rongli now and again ascending a small hill, then descending to meet the river further down. After passing milepost No. 6, we followed a path cut in the steep hillside with a precipice to the left. Suddenly we came to a point where the road was completely wrecked by a huge landslip. The big rocks in their precipitate fall had torn up the trees by the roots and swept the mountain side carrying down a heap of rubbish. We were compelled to return for a short distance and descend to the bank of the river, which delayed our march for half an hour. As we met the road at the other end of the landslip, it started raining slightly. About two miles from Rungpo we crossed a long suspension bridge and caught a glimpse of the bungalow situated at the other end of a huge horse-shoe bend of the road. It was pouring hard at the time, and we arrived at the bungalow at six o'clock almost exhausted and drenched from head to foot (alt. 1200 feet; temp. outside at 7 p.m. 67° F.).

10th Day. Around Rungpo.

7 miles.

22nd May. We still had one day more before our passes for Sikkim expired so we decided to spend it at Rungpo. At the same time it would afford a day's rest to our coolies and it would enable us to rove about the neighbourhood before crossing the bridge that would lead us again into Darjeeling district.

We spent the day taking photographs of the Tista and of the famous bridge where our ponies had galloped past the sentry who now smiled recognition. It was rather hot and in a short time we returned to the bungalow. We sat on the circular verandah idly watching the Tista winding down the hill. The bungalow was built on a small height and the river was flowing at our feet not many yards away. Towards the evening when it was cooler we took a short stroll and admired the sunset. From the valley we could just see on a high peak a streak of snow glistening in the last rays of the sun sinking below the horizon.

On our return to the bungalow we read another chapter of Freshfield's fascinating book "Round Kangchenjunga" that had been kindly lent to us by a friend in Darjeeling, and in which we found the occupation of some idle hours.

11th Day. Rungpo to Pashoke.

(via Melli and Tista).

17½ miles.

23rd May. We started very early to avoid the heat, and followed the course of the Tista for the greater part of the day. Having already described the route, there is nothing much to add except that it was very hot, especially between nine o'clock and 11.30 at which time we reached the village and dak-bungalow of Melli. We halted there for tiffin and afterwards took a few photographs of the whole party. One of the groups was made up of our coolies with our chef in the centre holding a murghi. We left Melli at one o'clock and about an hour later crossed the imposing Tista suspension bridge. It became cooler, and it rained part of the way during our ascent through the forest leading to Pashoke. It was a peculiarity of our trip that we were invariably caught in the rain just before the end of our day's march. Again we reached the bungalow soaking wet, and had to wait some time for our coolies who had lagged behind. It was only three o'clock in the afternoon when we reached Pashoke. The next day was a Saturday, and we were due to return to Calcutta on Sunday. As we desired to reach Darjeeling before the shops would have closed, especially the

photographers where we wished to develop some of our photographs, we decided to go to bed early that night and to get up at two o'clock the next morning. For the purpose, we ordered three coolies to keep vigil on a shifting system. We had some difficulty in explaining to them how this should be done, as it was apparently the first time they had performed such a task. Anyhow by telling them to repeat every word of our instructions and giving them a watch, we finally made them understand what they would have to do. We had a very early dinner and went to bed shortly afterwards (alt. 2600 feet; temp. outside at 7 p.m. 68° F.).

12th Day. Pashoke to Darjeeling.

(via Lopchu and Ghoom).

17½ miles.

24th May. Punctually at two o'clock we were awakened by our watchful coolies. It was not at all pleasant rising so early, however we soon got over this inconvenience. Fortunately it was not cloudy, and the half moon shed just enough light for us to see a few yards ahead. For the first two hours, we had a steep ascent winding up the mountain till we reached Lopchu (5300 feet). At Lopchu we saw a glorious sunrise on the

snowy range. The sky was tinged in scarlet, and the sunbeams were fleckering the snow-capped mountains in all the colours of the rainbow. After leaving Lopchu the ascent was much easier and the path was excellent. In a short time we arrived at the "sixth-mile basti" where we halted for breakfast. It was exactly the same spot where we had stopped when going in the opposite direction on our departure from Darjeeling. In about half an hour we continued our march and reached Ghoom at 8.30 after a two hours' walk along a splendid road. As if to keep in uniformity with previous days, it started raining at the end of our journey.

The last $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Darjeeling via the Jalapahar barracks took us an hour. At half past nine in the morning of the 24th May we reached Mt. Everest Hotel, thus bringing to an end a most delightful excursion. Out of 28 days' furlough we had spent twenty on the mountains, and we came back feeling all the better for our trip.

We left Darjeeling on Monday afternoon. As we were rushing in the train towards the plains of Bengal, the fleeting vista of the Himalaya passed before our eyes and imprinted itself in our mind for ever.
