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सानो : सानु मारुहत
MAY (YOU) CLIMB FROM PEAK TO PEAK

Editor :
LT COL NEERAJ RANA
PRINCIPAL

Asstt. Editor :
Chandranath Das, AMA
Curator

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SWISS FREY'S PEAK BC EXPEDITION

Willy Blaser

It's a tiny expedition who brings me on the footsteps of Swiss mountaineering Pioneers, just me and my sister. We meet in Bangkok (Thailand) and proceed to Kolkata. On the same day we catch the night train * Kanchankanya for New Jalpaiguri. Arriving in Darjeeling I am very disappointed. For the third time I visit the Summer Hill Station I can't see the mountains ! I started to doubt about their real existence. Do they exists only on postcards? Early morning of our departure, big excitement. I can't belive my eyes: the whole range is clear! What a fantastic start to our trek. The next morning at Pelling, the view is still more fabulous. The whole range with Kanchenzunga is coloured in pink from the rising Sun. Reaching Yuksum our comfortable approach in car takes an end and the earnest of trekking-life begins. Namguyl, our guide, advice us to start slowly, the first day being long and the final ascent to Bhakim not easy. The trail is following River Ratong Chu in a gradual ascend and descent through a verdant semi- tropical forest of oaks and walnuts. We have to cross three side streams over hanging bridges before reaching the banks of river Prek Chu. Here begins the ascent, our guide has told us before. He was indeed not wrong. The way up to opposite bank is a knee-grinding ascent towards Forest Rest House at Bhakim. With my last energy I finally did it. The panel showing the distance to our next camp in Dzongri, is devastating! Fourteen kilometers to go! Thoughts comes up to resign. Resign on the second day ? No way, I pull on myself. Behind Bhakim the trail climbs in the same steepway. We arrive at Tshoka (3550m) the last village on our route which is home of Tibetians farmers. A welcome break for a hot tea and biscuits. The way further Tshoka brings us through pine and huge rhododendron (blossom in April/May) forest. The first snow peak emerges. Its Pandim (6691m). The look at this peak works like dope and liberates in me new strength. We reach Phedang meadow (3950m) were our kitchen staff with cook Tashi is ready to provide us new calories for the final ascent to Dzongri alm.

Grandiose Panorama :

Dzongri alm(4030m): its 04.00 in the morning. The sky is again clear. How lucky have we been since our departure. Hot tea is served in the tent and shortly after we leave. By the light of my frontlamp I try to find the way through the thick scrub. Snow has fallen during the night. It's bitterly cold. My fingers hurt lamentably. Namgyul is in front . The path is not so steep, but any physical efforts so early in the morning is terribly painful. We slowly, "bisturi" as the local people say. We don't need to hurry, we have enough time. The new day breaks. In the east, the sky changes from golden yellow to pink. What a fabulous spectacle of nature. At a quarter past five we reach the small coloured prayer flags fluttering in the morning wind on Dzongri Top (4200m). An English group is here, waiting for the sunrise. The whole mountain range is still in darkness. Half an hour later the first sunbeam touches the summit of Mount Kanchenzunga (8598 m), the world's third highest mountain. We are delighted. More and more the other summits get lit up. Kabru South (7317m) and Kabru North (7338 m) are shining like diamonds in the blue sky.

The controversy of Kabru's first climbing :

While enjoying the spectacular panoramic view I thought about W.W. Graham's journey in autumn 1883. He came to Sikkim first in spring to test the so-called winter season. But it was evidently far too early for climbing in high altitudes, the avalanches being incessant on all sides and cold being tense. He and his Swiss guide, Joseph Imboden of St. Niklaus had to retreat. He came back to Sikkim in autumn and was accompanied by Emil Boss, one of the landlords of the "Bar" of Grindelwald and Ulrich Kaufmann as guide, a better pair of mountaineers you could never wish to meet. They reached Dzongri on September 2nd. After one month of reconnaissance, they examined carefully the eastern face of Kabru and made preparation for an assault. On the 6th they finally started. The next day they reached the lower summit of Kabru(7223m) at 12.15 and half an hour latter their goal. The absolute summit was little more than a pillar of ice and rose at most ten meters above them. Due to the extreme difficulty and danger of attempting it, they resign. A bottle was left at the highest point and then they descended.

This great success of Graham, Boss and Kaufmann was later doubted by eminent Himalayan chroniclers. In their opinion they believed that the party may have mistakenly confused Kabru with Forked Peak (6108 m). Having read the detailed account of Graham's Kabru conquest published later in the English Alpine Journal XII, I can hardly understand how they could have confused a 7000m peak with a lower 6000 m peak. Only mountaineers who have summited Kabru may help to the controversy about its conquest.

Frey's Peak Base Camp :

Left of Kabru is Ratong Peak (6679 m), whose western face looks similar to the famous Eiger. Further left lies the flat snowpeak of Kaktang (6147 m), below the rocky pyramid of Frey's Peak, "my peak".

George Frey, at the time 29 was working as assistant Swiss Trade Commissioner in Bombay. At the end of his three-year term in India, he undertook, in autumn 1951 a small expedition in the Kanchenzunga area. Frey was not a scientific man but showed great geographical interest and had the lively wish to serve Himalayan exploration. On 22 September a small party left Darjeeling with three Sherpas namely, Tenzing, later the famous Norgay, Ang Dawa and Phu Tharkey. Frey's goal was to visit the Yalung area and to cross the pass of Ratong-La from the Nepalese side. The journey was going on well and the expedition was about to return to Darjeeling. Still having a little time and the weather being so splendid, Frey decided at Dzongri to climb a small nameless peak on the eastside of the Ratong glacier. It would be the very last excursion of the expedition. Early morning on October 29, after three and a half hour of climbing from his camp over the southeastern glacier of the mountain, they approached the culminating couloir. The trouble began when they could no longer remain on the rocky section and had to climb in the main gully covered by a coating of fresh snow at an angle of 70°. Without rope, without crampons, Tenzing, in view of the situation, advised to return. For a moment Frey seemed to agree but in the same moment, he impulsively moved upwards. Before Tenzing could decide whether to follow him or not, he and Ang Dawa saw the worst they had feared. Frey slipped on the icy slope. Helplessly the Sherpas watched Frey's body rolling and bouncing down the mountain over the precipice, till it

disappeared from sight. Thus ended the first attempt to climb this mountain.

Two years later after the incident, the unnamed peak was named as "Frey's Peak". It is the only peak in Himalayas to be named after a Swiss mountaineer.

Expedition goal failed :

Back to the camp at Dzongri still exhausted from the steep ascent to Bakhim Forest and Phedang the days before, I'm conscious that, due to our physical condition, we would not reach our goal. Frey's Peak BC is still far away. I am terribly disappointed. Being a mediocre trekker, I must admit to have underestimated the journey. But it's a reasonable decision. As for climbers, safety is the absolute priority and with going further I might have put everyone in danger. Nevertheless, the journey was a great experience. How I wish that someday HMI-Trainees would go up to Frey's BC to take the pictures I couldn't!

Mutiny on Kanchenzunga's slopes :

Far left of our panorama lies Kang-La Pass which leads into Nepal, another area with great historical Mountaineering interest. In 1905 Aleister Crowley's party with Swiss Dr. Jules Jacot-Guillarmod, Charles A. Reymond, Alexis A. Pache and Italian R. de Righi, Manager of Drum-Druid Hotel in Darjeeling, came to Sikkim to climb no more than Kanchenzunga. From his hotel window in Darjeeling, came to Sikkim to climb no more than Kanchenzunga. From his hotel window in Darjeeling, Crowley scouted the mountain through his binocular and judged its ascent to the summit as "probably easy" to match! On August 8th, a caravan of coolies left the town with eight tons of material for Kang-La. The approach was long and difficult, but once they reached Yalung Glacier, good progress was made. In the last days of August they set up Camp VII at 6300 meters. Unfortunately the expedition was often disrupted by disputes between Crowley (leader) and Guillarmod (main sponsor). Some of the coolies having been beaten by them.

To Crowley, they complained about Guillarmod. On September 1st, Guillarmod and de Righi moved up from Camp III to Camp V were a loud

dispute broke out with Crowley. Guillaumod announced to him that he was overtaking the leaden and later accusing him of mutiny. Despite Crowley's warning, the snow being in absolute unsafe condition from the afternoon sun, Guillaumod and his men decided to descend to Camp III. As they rushed downwards, the tragedy happened while crossing a long traverse. All six men were swept away by an avalanche. Guillaumod and de Righi survived miraculously but their coolies and Pache died. Their bodies were found three days later under three meters of snow. The coolies are buried in a nearby crevasse, Pasche's body was brought down to Camp III where a rectangular, two meter high tomb, made out of big flat stones was erected. The position of the site is mentioned in today's map as "Pache's grave".

To all Coe's in UK – Please help me :

One of Pache's relative keeps the tobacco-pipe he had in his pocket the day he died. Unfortunately, I could never find out him. The only thing I know is, that the relative's name is Coe (wife's name is Lilian), and is living in UK and they have a grandson called Jonathan. Who could help me?

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About the Author :

** Willy Blaser (1948), Swiss, is a freelancer mountaineering journalist. He is author of Swiss 8000 m summiteers list, CH-8000, & has published several articles in daily newspapers and magazines in the German language. As highlight of his trekking career he has climbed Island Peak (6189m) in Nepal and visited most of the 8000m peaks. He has visited HMI three times in the past years. If somebody could help him regarding the conquest of Kabru or to find out the Pache's relatives, please contact him under willyblaser@hotmail.com – His website : www.willyblaser.ch*