

A Mountain in China

Dora H. de Beer

Foreword and adaptation: Janet Carleton

Photograph 21

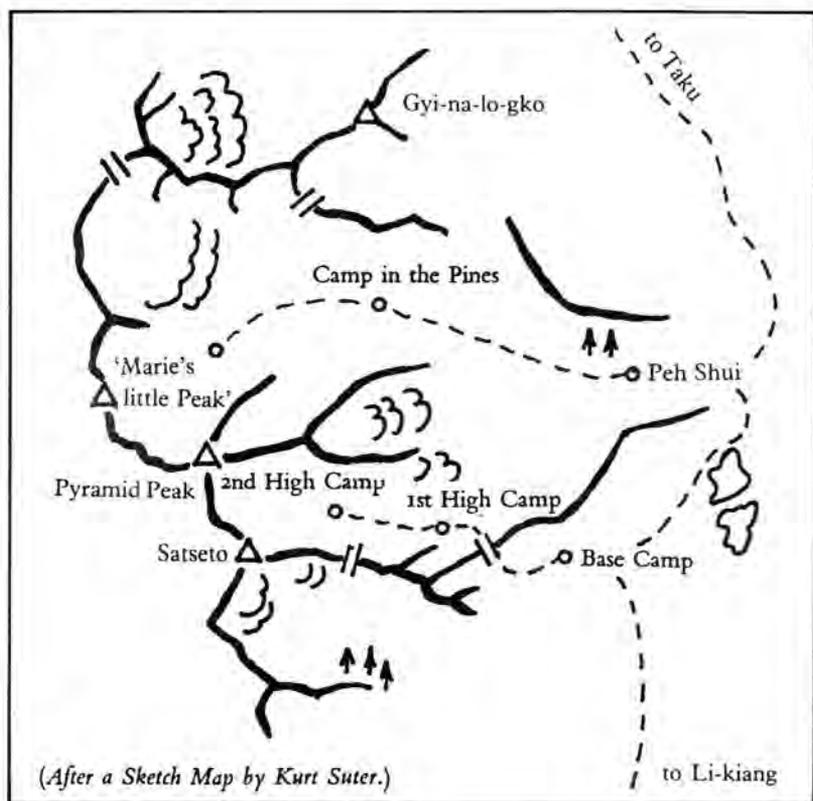
Dora de Beer, a former President of the Ladies' Alpine Club who died in 1982 aged 90, was a climber whose modesty concealed the range of her achievements. She had climbed extensively in New Zealand, her home till 1931, and had made the second ascent of Mt. Hooker. Her Alpine climbs included Mont Blanc by the Peuterey Ridge, and the Brenva Ridge-Mont Maudit traverse. In 1938 she took part in an expedition to Yunnan, and many years later her account was privately printed for her friends. The following narrative has been abridged from *Yunnan — 1938: Account of a Journey in S.W. China*, by kind permission of Dora's brother, Dr. Esmond de Beer.

There were six in the party: Marie Byles and Fraser Radcliff from Australia; Marjorie Edgar Jones, Mick Bowie and Kurt Suter from New Zealand, the latter pair being guides at the Hermitage; and Dora herself, at 47 the oldest member. Their objective was the highest peak of the Yulung Shan, or Satseto, the Snowy Mountain of Li-kiang.

On 7 August they set out from railhead at Myitkyina in Burma, by mule track, mostly following the route of the old trading caravans which crosses the Irrawaddy, the Salween and the Mekong, and climbs up to 1500m above each river bed. A week's walk brought them to the border — 'There was a refreshing absence of officialism about our entering into China' — and two more to Teng-yueh where they stayed ten days with the British Consul while waiting for their baggage to catch up. After crossing the Salween by suspension bridge they came to higher ground towards Pao-shan and saw the new Burma Road, then dipped into the gloomy trough of the Mekong. At Hsia-kwan early in September a Chinese doctor told them that Germany had declared war on Britain, France and Russia; but ten miles on at Tali-fu English missionaries were able to reassure them it was not so. Then on through the walled town of Chien-chuan-chou to Kuan-hsia and — 700km and six weeks from Myitkyina — to Li-kiang, where the Pentecostal Mission became their base. There they stayed for a fortnight, organising stores and porters and acquiring some words of Chinese. Finally, on 5 October, they were off to their mountain. Here Dora's narrative begins.

Yunnan · 1938

The base camp was pleasantly situated at just under 3350m in a fairly level clearing among firs, bamboos, crab apples and other deciduous trees — already turning red and yellow. Earlier in the year it must be a mass of peonies; the plants were everywhere, and later on when their large brown seeds were ripe we and the pheasants competed for them. Two minutes away a spring of good water came out



of the hillside and had been piped into half a dozen long wooden troughs, one below the other. They were made of hollowed-out tree trunks, presumably for the use of cattle. The country is mostly limestone, with very few streams, as most of them disappear underground after a short distance, and this meant we had not a great choice of campsites, so we were fortunate in having such a delightful place.

On Friday we scrambled and walked up to above 4500m. It was a lovely morning but mist covered the summit all day and we could form no idea which was the highest point. The six of us, all rather excited, left the camp at 10 with the muleteer as guide. He was a delicately built little Nakhi from the Snow Village, and had worked for George Forrest, the Scottish botanist and plant collector. We wore mountain boots; the muleteer was perfectly happy and sure-footed in cloth slippers with a few round nails.

Immediately behind our tents we struck up through a belt of trees, mostly spruce, with an undergrowth of small bamboo, deciduous shrubs, and peonies. There were plants of the large pink-flowered saxifrage (now called *bergenia*) with plenty of seed heads, and the muleteer showed his training under Forrest by the practised skill with which he collected the seeds. Above the trees came limestone scree, where to my subsequent and lasting regret I did not collect fossils, thinking

I could easily do it another day, and snow covered the whole slope before that day came. The scree ended in a little saddle above a hollow with a patch of snow. There was a glacier higher up and higher still numerous rock towers and ridges were half seen through drifting mists. It was a delightful day, though not very enlightening. However, we had seen enough to decide that our first high camp must be on the gravel near the snow patch, which would provide water. Mick and Kurt had reached the glacier on their reconnaissance trip with Mr. Andrews, and had followed it up to the base of a large peak near its head; this peak was then free from snow and they were very tempted to try climbing it, but thought it would hardly be fair to dash up it before the rest of us had even seen it. A pity they were so unselfish!

The following morning, Saturday, Mick, Kurt, and five of our eight followers went up to the campsite laden with tents and food. The carrying powers of the Nakhis were a great disappointment: they could not manage more than 20 to 30 pounds, even for a short distance. One consequence of this was that we always carried packs, and I think tired ourselves more than was wise. Later in the day the mules arrived with the remaining loads. It was the Harvest Moon Festival, an important holiday. We tried to contribute something special in the way of food, but the muleteers quite outdid our offerings with their elegant moon cakes, which were large and round and decorated with seeds arranged in patterns.

Mick and Kurt stayed in the high camp for three days. On the first day they were able to walk up the big glacier to above 5500m, but mist hid the upper part of the mountain. What they could see looked difficult, and they decided we should need a second high camp, pitched on the glacier. They both felt the altitude, especially at night, and as the weather grew steadily worse and showed no sign of improving, after three days they came back to the base camp in 1½ hours from the high camp.

Marjorie and two porters had taken some stores up to the high camp one day. Our porters loved the English equipment. The boots were too large, but they enjoyed wearing them, and the carrying frames were a great success. We wanted to stock the high camp with a good supply of provisions, as we were only waiting for the weather to clear before going up there ourselves. Marie and Marjorie with the two guides were to be the first climbing party. I was older and thought the other two more likely to be successful, and so ought to make the first attempt. We were agreed that four was the maximum number for a rope. The state of the weather made it hopeless to think of climbing, and now we all settled down to wait for it to change. Every day we hoped for better things and every day for a fortnight we were disappointed. There was plenty to do, for though some rain fell every day there were fine intervals during which we explored our surroundings. Below the camp a path led down to the plain along which ran a little-used mule track from Li-kiang to Taku on the Yangtze. The two shallow lakes were on this plain and near them the ground was blue with the big autumn-flowering sky-blue gentian. A large Tibetan family camped by the lakes for a couple of weeks and pastured their black shaggy yaks among the gentians.

Another day we went towards Li-kiang along a path at a higher level than the one we had taken on our outward journey. This path contoured round the mountain on an old moraine terrace, where masses of briar roses make splashes of

vivid colour with their long red hips. Where the terrace turned at a right-angle out to the left and away from the mountain, we continued on down its side to the floor of the valley that ran into the mountain on our right, and when we reached the valley floor, we followed it until it ended against a wall of rock.

There was an overgrown track through the vegetation, which included pines, rhododendrons, azaleas, and roses. Soon the moraine terraces were replaced on either side by rock walls that rose almost vertically, with a few stunted pines marking the ledges. At first the stream bed was dry, but after a little we came to the glacier-fed water, which lower down disappeared in the shingle. The whitish deposit in the bed gives the valley its name of Heh Peh Shui, 'Black and White Waters'. Mick found a fossil here of what looked like a sea-shell.

Two and a half hours from the base camp we halted and boiled a billy. The valley had narrowed and then widened into a rock-walled amphitheatre. Near us firs and dense bamboo grew among moss-covered boulders. Above us we could see the lower edge of a hanging glacier; mist shut off the tops. We thought our first high camp must be on the other side of a gap in the rock ridge. A waterfall splashed out in a jet like a giant fire hose. Mr. Andrews had thought it might be possible to climb from here up to the hanging glacier by means of a fan of avalanche snow, which he had seen there on a previous visit, but this year there was no snow on the valley floor (perhaps there never is in the autumn) and the rock was impossibly steep.

We had been told that the rainy season gradually ended with nine 'Rotten Days', and we decided we were having them as wet day succeeded wet day. Unfortunately the number is not always limited to nine, as we found to our sorrow, for the rain continued without a break. The ground round our tents became saturated, the temperature dropped, and we were thankful for a second charcoal stove from Mr. Andrews. We were able to buy charcoal from a charcoal-burner's camp near the two little lakes. We also had a big log fire just beyond our fly, which helped to keep our tent aired. We were well fed, the Li-kiang provisions included plenty of pumpkins, cabbages, potatoes, oranges, and pears, all very good. On the whole we were fairly comfortable, but we all suffered from a feeling of frustration. We had not come so far just for a camping holiday.

First Attempt

At last after an extra heavy downpour we woke on Tuesday 25 October to find the sun shining from a clear blue sky — the first clear blue day since we arrived in camp on the 5th. Mick and Kurt left at once for the high camp and sent a message by their two porters that the tents were all right, though buried under nearly four feet of snow, so that only a few inches of canvas was visible. The next day Marie and Marjorie followed taking two porters who returned in the afternoon.

Meanwhile I ran down to the lakes and took some photographs. Satseto — another name for the Yulung Shan — stood out clearly and was very imposing. The full extent of the eastern slopes was visible. The Kan Ho (or Heh-Peh-Shui) to the south and the Peh Shui to the north are steep-sided valleys that cut deeply into the limestone massif. Our base camp was on a terrace about midway between them, and nearly 300m above the level of the valley floors. The highest peaks form a central group; in the northern sector are two peaks of over 5800m. At first we



thought the highest point was a fine pyramidal peak at the head of the glacier Mick and Kurt had explored. This peak was connected by a white col with a long fluted ridge that bounded the glacier on the west, and after we had been able to explore the group more thoroughly, we came to the conclusion that this fluted ridge was higher. On days when every other peak stood clear against a blue sky, a trail of icy vapour would be blowing off the summit.

Fraser and I went up to the high camp with loads on Thursday and found snow lying a few hundred yards above the half-way rock. It was windy and rather unpleasant. The others had cleared the snow from enough space to pitch three tents. The Everest one which had been left with stores had had a few holes nibbled in it, probably by a mouse, fortunately low down under the eaves where they did not matter.

It was clear that for a few days climbing would be impossible, but we wanted to stay up at this camp to become acclimatized. Fraser and I intended going up on the Friday to stay, but I felt tired, perhaps the effect of the altitude, so we waited until the Saturday when Ho-da-ching (the Tibetan) and a porter carried our packs to the half-way shelter. Above that the snow began and the slopes seemed steeper than when they were bare. We took 4½ hours to the tents.

The other four had just returned from establishing a second high camp on the glacier below the Pyramid Peak — two small Everest tents at about 5200m. There were three tents at the first high camp, two medium-sized Everest, in each of which there was room for three to lie down, though they could not stand upright. We had rubber mats to sleep on, and two sleeping-bags each, and needed them. It was bitterly cold, even though the tents were in a sheltered spot at the foot of some rocks. The altitude was 4700m; the sun reached the tents at 8am and left at 3.30pm, after that one could feel the cold gripping everything.

The six of us were all at this camp on Saturday night, with our followers all down at the base camp. Sunday we all left just before 10.00am and climbed up the steep slope above the camp. We took two hours to reach the second high camp, two little tents in the middle of the glacier. The muleteer — who adored climbing — had made an early start from the base camp and came with us.

There was no difficulty going up to the second high camp. Thick fresh snow covered everything, hiding the snout of the glacier, and most of the crevasses. This glacier winds down from the base of the Tent (Pyramid) Peak, bounded on the west by the precipices of the fluted ice ridge — so steep that very little snow lay on them — and on the east by another wall of rock, culminating at its lower, southern end in a rock tower, like a magnificent gateway.

The weather seemed promising enough to plan an attempt to climb Tent Peak. The two M.'s, Mick, and Kurt stayed at the glacier camp, Fraser and I returned to the high camp. However, Monday was cold and windy and we were sure the climbers would not be able to go high. They came down soon after 2, having taken two hours to climb about 60m of snow-plastered rock. The wind was icy and they realized it was futile to go further in such conditions. They were tired and gloomy about the chance of success from this side so we decided to move round the mountain and make a camp elsewhere, from which to make another try.

However, before we left this part, Mick, Fraser, and I went up on Tuesday to the glacier camp. There was a thick mist at first which cleared while we paused

and ate a biscuit. Above the little tents were some handsome crevasses, easily avoided. We continued on towards the head of the glacier, and in another two hours at 1.00 pm were on top of a low snow knob of 5500m to the right (east) of the Tent Peak.

The view was impressive and enlightening. We could see over a ridge that ran east from the Tent Peak to the northern part of the massif, which was more extensive than I had expected. There was a fine snow peak to the north-west and a rocky one, Gyi-na-lo-gko, to the north. We thought the snow peak about five miles away, but we could not see how deep a gap intervened. Tent Peak was forbidding, with fresh snow. When Mick and Kurt had seen it on their reconnaissance the rock was almost free of snow and they had thought that they might have succeeded in reaching the top.

We made quick time back to the glacier camp, collected the Everest tents and were down at the high camp by 3.00 pm. Kurt returned shortly after. He had been looking for another campsite — we had hoped to be able to contour round the mountain at a high level to save carrying stores and tents down and then up again, but Kurt found that this was impossible, the country was too broken and precipitous.

We were still rather in the dark about the geography of the massif and it was exciting to arrive at any point high enough to give a fresh view; so we determined to climb a small rock peak to the south of the camp before we went down to the base camp.

Accordingly on Wednesday, Mick, Marie, Fraser, and I left at 9.00 am and climbed slowly up a long snow slope above the camp. The snow was very soft and powdery under a crust which let us through more often than not. It was about 11.00 am when we kicked our way up a last little couloir to a narrow col, 5200m. Mick said the view was one of the finest he had ever seen, green and blue hills stretched for miles around, and the narrow valley of the Heh-peh-Shui lay directly below; we looked straight across the glacier of the previous day, with the narrow serrated ridge on the left, to the grand bulk of the Tent Peak at the head. There were further high peaks. The snow one we had seen the day before showed to the left of the serrated ridge, a ridge that looked formidable and inaccessible.

I waited on the col while the other three went on to the top over a loose rock arête, then we went down together and were back at the high camp at 1.30 pm. Marjorie and Kurt had already left and we loaded ourselves with as much as we could carry and followed them down to the base camp. It was sad to have worked hard to get stores up to this high camp and then to evacuate it without using more than a very little of them.

Peh Shui Camp and the Second Attempt

Mick and Kurt on the reconnaissance with Mr. Andrews had visited the Peh Shui or Black Water stream to the north of our base camp, and they thought it would make a good campsite from which to make a second attempt. It was only 3000m but we could pack loads in with mules, and then carry them up to a higher camp. On Friday 4 November we left Mr. Chi in charge of the base camp with Jung-da-go the cook and Ho-da-ching the Tibetan messenger.

At 2.00 pm we once more made our way down to the two little lakes; the track

kept between them and the mountain and rose gently over moraine terraces to a little gap, the summit marked by piles of stones with rags and branches, witness to Tibetan influence. Then it zigzagged down fairly steeply to the Peh Shui, which we crossed by a picturesque arched stone bridge. Then we turned left and went towards the mountain. We followed up this narrow side valley sunk between high tree-covered moraine walls.

We went on for possibly a mile, certainly not very far as we halted at 4 o'clock. Further on the Peh Shui stream emerged from a narrow gorge with almost perpendicular sides. The precipices on the south were impassable, those on the north almost equally so, but plant-gatherers had found a devious route that skirted along terraces and ascended wherever there was a break, and this route we proposed to take the next day.

As so often in our travels things did not go quite according to plan, because owing to a misunderstanding the muleteers halted before the end of the level valley floor, dumped the loads and departed. This was vexatious as it meant further for them to be back-packed.

The Peh Shui was an ideal camping-place. There was a pleasant stream, level ground, dry and well drained, so that it was easy to find good places to pitch the tents. Numbers of tall graceful pines not only provided excellent firewood, but the view of the nearly full moon through their branches was very lovely.

Kurt had been rather seedy for some days and on Saturday was still not very well, so he remained below with the two M.'s and myself, while Mick, Fraser, Li, the five porters and the muleteer went up with loads to establish another high camp. Marie was also not very well and glad of a rest day, but Kurt, Marjorie, and I thought it would be pleasant to have a lazy picnic in an alpine meadow above the valley on the north. The emphasis was on lazy, but it was not to be — as so often happens, fate arranged otherwise. To begin with our alpine meadow receded and was always just on top of the next little rise, and there were bamboo thickets that looked negligible, but were quite troublesome to penetrate. Also Kurt was not really fit for much effort though he dispatched a snake with his usual vigour. However, we felt our struggles were rewarded when we arrived at two or three big wooden troughs set in a damp meadow carpeted with gentians and primulas, an astonishingly lovely place. Suddenly through the trees we had a glimpse of a wild looking man with a gun running gracefully along. Either he did not see us, or did not wish to stop, possibly a Lolo hunter.

Mick sent down word with the returning porters that they had found a good camping site and the next morning the two M.'s decided to go up to it. I went with them, but did not stay, as Kurt was not fit enough to travel and I did not like to leave him without one of us.

The route to this new high camp was fantastic. Plant-gatherers in search of medicinal plants were probably the first people to use it. We passed one or two overhanging rocks that sheltered primitive wooden utensils. The level valley floor terminated abruptly in tree-covered slopes. We climbed upwards sometimes over blocks of stone, like a giant causeway, half overgrown with vegetation, so that we had to be careful not to put a foot down a gap. The track steepened, there was a corner where ferns grew under tall forest trees and above it we had to pull ourselves up a vertical bank by clutching roots and branches. It was not bad when

first used, but after we had been up and down a few times, the roots, etc., became rather unreliable, and the surface very greasy and slippery. Above that came a belt of small bamboo and there the muleteer, who was leading, signalled to us to sit down, and he walked on and disappeared for a few minutes. He then came back without his rucksack and escorted us one by one down a notched tree-trunk which leant rather insecurely against the side of a rock wall. It was a queer place and looked as if a neat straight-sided notch had been cut in the mountain side. We descended the tree trunk for 7 or 8 feet to a ledge about 18 inches wide, walked along it for a few yards until we could jump down on to the floor of the notch. This sloped uphill until it was blocked by a vertical wall and downhill to the edge of the tremendous precipice that forms the north wall of the Peh Shui gorge, a few yards from where we reached the ledge. We of course walked up and away from the edge. The notch was not more than 6m in width. The far wall was slightly easier to climb as there were a few footholds in the rock.

Above came steep grassy slopes where we found a very few flowers of a lovely pale pinky-mauve gentian, an exquisite thing. These slopes abutted against a rock wall and it was possible to walk along between it and dwarf pine trees as far as the bed of a dry watercourse. We crossed this and continued up beside it for a short distance, with the rock wall growing taller on our right, then we turned left along a broad terrace with tall trees and deep moss and soon after reached the tents. It had taken us five hours. I waited just long enough for a short rest then left with Li as escort. He was eager to help and waited at the bottom of any steepish place ready to field me if I slipped. He also did his best to alarm me by indicating that we might expect to meet a bear. Fortunately we did not. It took us three hours to get back to Kurt.

Monday 7 November Kurt and I had a quiet day. On Tuesday he had recovered and we decided to go up and join the others. Soon after we left the valley he killed a viper. I think these were the only snakes we saw on the mountain. We again took five hours going up, a climb of over 1200m.

The tents were pitched under spruce and tree rhododendrons with a romantic view through their branches to range after range of hills. The moon was full and the beauty almost unearthly.

The other four had slept Monday night in two tents higher up below Tent Peak, but cold and wind had driven them back to this sheltered camp in the pines.

Next morning the six of us, with the muleteer and Wong, the sturdiest and shortest of our Nakshi porters, left camp at 9.00am and climbed up through the trees, which grew tall and fairly close together on the wide terrace. The Peh Shui Gorge forced us a little to the right. We had a steep scramble and emerged above the tree line into a glacier-eroded valley. Shingle covered the floor; rounded rocks, glacier smoothed, were much in evidence on either side. A few belated blue poppies indicated past beauty; and the dry remains of a low thistle blew forlornly on the bare slopes.

We passed the beginning of the Peh Shui Gorge, a gap about two yards wide. Mick remarked it must be a wonderful sight when the snows above were melting, as this narrow passage apparently took most of the drainage from a considerable area.

On our left we had the ridge running up to the Tent Peak. From here the summit

was a neat snow pyramid. In front the valley continued to rise gently to a ridge with several low graceful peaks. On our right shingle slopes ran up to the long ridge bounding the Peh Shui on the north.

We walked on without any difficulty to the lower slopes of Tent Peak and had a short halt at the tents where the four had slept on Monday night. The two M.'s, with the muleteer and Wong, went on to climb a little peak of 5500m which Mick and Fraser had been up earlier; the three men and I wanted to look for a possible route up the Tent Peak so we continued upwards to the left on frozen snow. The slope steepened and we put on crampons. A little higher Mick began to chip steps. I felt the altitude very much and suggested the others should go on without me; however, Mick said firmly we were going quite as fast as he liked. We mounted slowly, working our way to the right and towards the col between the Tent Peak and the long fluted ice-ridge we had seen from the other side, but it was a long way to the col and we were a very long way beneath it. At last, at over 5550m we came to a corner below an outcrop of rock. If we went round this corner we would have to climb a difficult couloir of broken blue ice in order to reach the smooth white slope above, which might be good crampon snow or might not. This slope apparently continued right to the summit of Tent Peak, but it was too foreshortened to judge the distance.

We were tempted to go on, but obviously — even if all went well — it would have taken hours to go up and more hours to come down. It was already afternoon, the wind was troublesome, we were not equipped for a big climb; in short, it would have been asking for a night out, so we retreated, full of hopeful plans for the future.

Kurt was not altogether in favour of this route; he wished to try the NE angle, where rock and snow alternated, and where in the event of a slip he thought there would have been less risk of the whole party being pulled out of their steps.

We could see the others on their way down from 'Marie's little Peak' as we called it, and we had a view north up the glacier, which flowed down from the big snow peak we had seen from the knoll above our first high camp. We were all happy and a bit excited; we were really climbing at last in the middle of a wonderful group of unclimbed peaks. We decided to spend a few days exploring and getting acclimatized and then we hoped to make a serious attempt on the Tent Peak.

Next morning, Thursday 10th, the two M.'s. went down to the Peh Shui Camp with the muleteer and Wong, while the three men and I took three hours going to the higher camp. We moved the two tents down 300m to a more sheltered spot. By now we were all seriously worried about the weather, and with good reason, for it began to snow in the afternoon, shortly before we reached the camp in the pines. Li appeared with mail — the only cheerful event.

About six inches of snow fell during the night and transformed our surroundings into a black and grey landscape, with every branch and twig outlined in white. Snow was still falling and it was obviously useless to remain up there in cramped discomfort. We were too disappointed to say much — this fresh snowfall threatened our chance of making a big climb. Sadly we stowed what we could not take with us into the little tent, fastened it securely, and left.

The first part of the way was covered with a few inches of fresh snow and we

floundered in and out of holes and slipped on fallen trees and generally had a trying time. Surprisingly enough Li was nervous and needed a good deal of encouragement until we arrived at easier ground; then he cheered up. It took 3½ hours to reach the Peh Shui Camp, where the two M.'s gave us a wonderful hot meal. It was snowing steadily and Marie decided to remain there, but the rest of us longed for the comfort (as we thought) of the base camp and left again. The walk down the Peh Shui Valley in fresh snow with heavy packs was tiring. The Tibetan and his family were no longer there; we did not see them again. Then after the bridge came the long pull up from the Peh Shui to the top of the moraine, and the flat near the two lakes had surely doubled in length, while the final steep bit up to the base camp was a nightmare. It was growing dark and I was haunted by the fear of wolves so did not dare to fall far behind, but I have seldom been more thankful for anything than I was to see the tents.

Alas for our hopes of comfort! During our absence our followers had burnt up all our store of firewood and almost all our charcoal. Mr. Andrews with two more missionaries (Mr. Colley from A-tun-tzu and Mr. Francis from Kun-ming) had arrived shortly before us, which meant that there were six beds for eight people, and not enough blankets and sleeping-bags. Snow continued to fall until there was over a metre at the base camp. This was Friday. Mr. Francis left Li-kiang on Saturday. By Sunday evening it was quite difficult to make a track through the deep soft snow so we were more or less cut off.

The snow had to be shaken off the tents every few hours for fear of them collapsing under the weight. There was just enough charcoal for a tiny fire in the big tent — ours was like a refrigerator, even though I lit a candle during the night to try to warm it — and our wet clothes froze.

Monday was fine though overcast and we went round to the Peh Shui to see how Marie was faring. Two feet of snow had fallen in three days and we took three hours instead of two both going and returning. It was hard work for everyone and especially for the man making the track. Marie was well, with a plentiful supply of firewood, gazed at with envy. Things became more cheerful with the arrival of three baskets of charcoal on Monday afternoon and a messenger from Li-kiang with mail.

Tuesday the weather was definitely improving and things began to move. Marie, Tai, and the other Chinese returned from the Peh Shui. After some discussion we decided to evacuate the base camp; it was too late in the season for it to be worthwhile staying on. Marie wanted to do some mapping accompanied by the muleteer as guide, and by Wong. The muleteer was very capable and intelligent and Wong our best follower. I was eager to go through the Yangtze Gorge and round the Yulung Shan. C. P. Fitzgerald had told me about the gorge when we visited him in Tali and made me feel we must see it if at all possible. Mr. Andrews had never been and was charmed at the idea so we made up our minds to give mountaineering a rest and go sightseeing instead. In the end we were a party of eight Europeans, i.e. five of us plus the three missionaries, with Jung-da-go the cook, Mr. Colley's Tibetan servant, two muleteers, five baggage mules and three riding ponies.

[Rebuffed by the mountain, the party — augmented by the missionaries —

decided to go back to Li-kiang by way of the Yangtze Gorge and round the Yulung Shan. Then Dora with Kurt and Fraser went back to the Peh Shui, and reached the camp in the pines on Tuesday 29 November.]

Return to the Mountain

Thursday in good weather we left camp at 9.30am and by 12.00 noon were at the dump under Tent Peak. The snow was excellent and with crampons we did not take long to climb the little 5500m peak that had already been climbed by the others. It was a superb viewpoint. Below on the right the Yangtze shone in the afternoon sun, to the left the Tent Peak rose clear against the cold blue sky, and in front was the fluted ice-ridge, with a significant plume of vapour blowing from its highest point.

We hurried down, collecting on the way two Everest tents, four pairs of crampons, a high altitude cooker, and a few stores left there three weeks ago. Wong was not with us; he had taken a load down to the valley then came up again to the camp.

Friday was again fine. With some difficulty we managed to leave camp a little before 9.00am and once more went up through the trees to the glacier valley. This time after a short distance we turned to the right on to the snow-covered lower slopes of the lofty ridge that bounded the valley on the north. Kurt went ahead to a gap in this ridge to see if it were passable. He waved to us to come on and Fraser and I struggled slowly up, panting a good deal. It was steep enough to be hard work, especially where the snow was replaced by rough stones of all sizes that rolled about if one were not careful how one trod on them.

At noon we reached the gap, a distinct notch in the rock crest. According to the aneroid the altitude was 5242m. We now had a good view of Gyi-no-lo-gko, the rock peak on which Kurt had set his heart. It looked forbiddingly steep; all depended on the nature of the rock, and that we could only discover by trial.

Immediately below our col was a cup-shaped depression, snow-covered, into which we had to descend in order to skirt round to the left to reach the lower slopes of our peak. We quickly and easily ran down, then put on the rope before beginning to climb. A steep slope led up to the foot of the bare rock. We approached this rock with considerable anxiety and were delighted to find it pleasantly inviting. Little ledges covered with loose pebbles alternated with easy rock walls and we made height fairly rapidly. Kurt led with skill and judgment. The mountain rose in three steps, at the top of each was a gentle incline covered with fine shingle. Once we had to go through a gap and climb down a few yards, but possibly because of Kurt's leadership, there seemed no difficulty in finding a route. The last step had a band of rotten green rock running across it and this gave us some unpleasantly exciting moments. It was very steep. Fraser and I were waiting at the foot of a shallow recess with Kurt very busy immediately above looking for a good hold, when suddenly a big stone fell from under his hand and hurtled past us. It knocked my spectacles askew, but beyond one speck of blood on my left temple it did no other damage and fortunately did not touch Fraser. Kurt had steadied, expecting, as he told us afterwards, the pull of two corpses on the rope.

He recommenced the attack and once above the green band it was not difficult

for us to follow. After that there was no further trouble and we panted across easy shingle and rock until at 4.10 pm we reached a summit (5822m). There was another point, about 20 minutes further along the ridge and possibly 6m higher, but in view of the late hour we decided against going on, and after a quick look round at yet another wonderful view, we started down.

The wind was bitterly cold and one frightening gust was so strong that we were forced to stop and cling on hard. We avoided the worst part of the rotten green band by keeping more to the ridge. We knew that daylight ended by 6.00 pm and hurried as much as possible. Fraser was leading and, though not an experienced climber, going well. To our great relief we got off the rock just as darkness fell. We were not worried; the moon — almost full — would soon rise and give enough light. The snow slopes glimmered as it rose and the snow crystals caught the moonbeams. We went fairly steadily downhill, but when we came to the slope up to the col we stumbled upward with many a halt, overtaken by fatigue. Once over the col we staggered down the long descent to the valley, down the valley, down through the trees, and reached the tents at 8.00 pm, not quite 12 hours from when we had left.

Gyi-na-lo-gko, our peak, is the fourth or possibly fifth highest of the peaks that compose the Yulung Shan, and appeared to us considerably lower than either the Tent Peak or the fluted ridge. The aneroid had registered 5822m so that we were inclined to estimate their heights as above 6400m. On our return to Li-kiang Mr. Andrews told us that this was the peak climbed by Professor and Mrs. I.A. Richards two years earlier, information which served to heighten my admiration for them, even though it was a little disappointing that ours was not the first ascent. I believe they made the climb from the north-east.

The journey back was by caravan to Tali-fu, from Hsia-kwan a bus to Kun-ming, then Hanoi, Saigon, Pnom Penh, Angkor, Bangkok, Penang, Ceylon and home. 'The 1939 war put an end to all thoughts of returning, as I had hoped, to see the flowers in springtime.'

