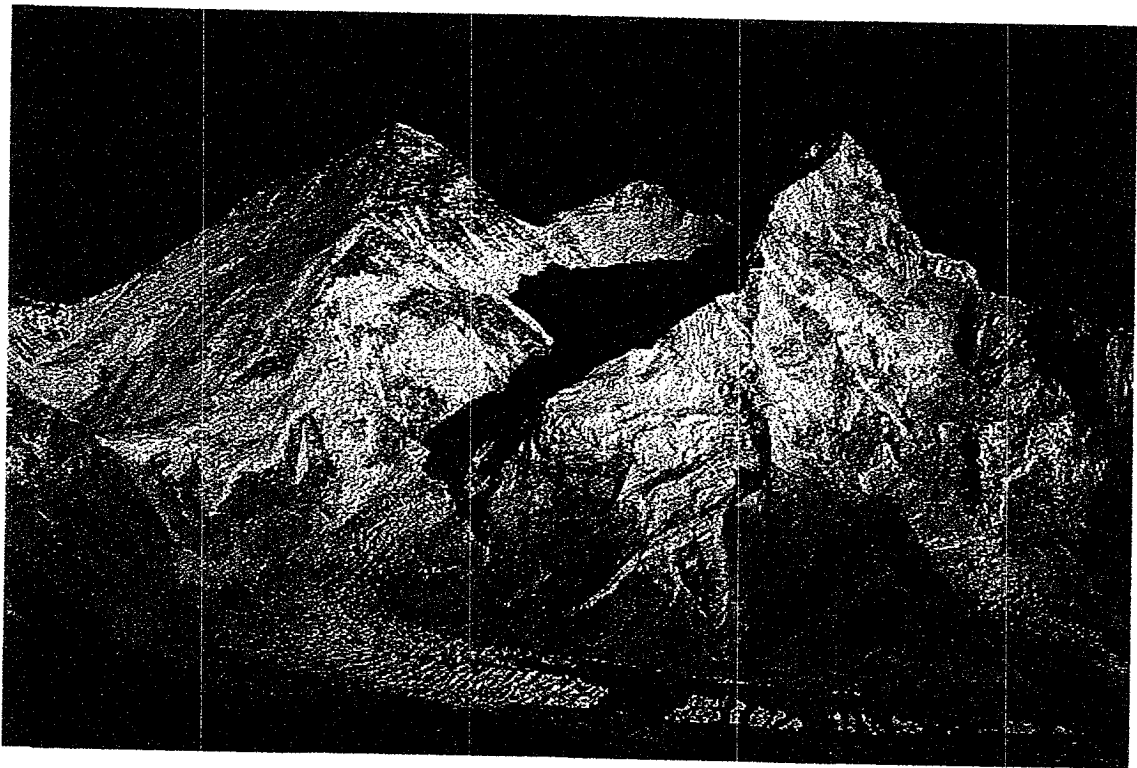




Pohokura
Special
Edition

GEORGE LOWE

HERETAUNGA'S HIMALAYAN HERO



HERETAUNGA TRAMPING CLUB
CELEBRATES THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF
THE CLIMBING OF EVEREST

Introduction

Mountaineer Andrew Anderson, first to climb all of New Zealand's 10,000ft peaks, told the following yarn from about 1945. He met up with guide Harry Ayres and Jack Ede with two women clients. They were bound for Pioneer Pass. At the Haast Hut there was a young park worker, very chatty. Andy invited Harry and Jack to join him on a climb of Mt Tasman. The young bloke asked if he could come with them. "He was a nice lad, but he hadn't done much, so we declined his request."

The next day Harry, Jack, and Andy climbed Mt Tasman via Silberhorn, and knocked off Mts Graham and Teichelmann too. "When we got back this chap had cups of hot tea ready for us." The young park worker travelled with the group to Fox Glacier over Pioneer Pass the following day. Andy recalls, "We were coming to a sticky place. Harry Ayres was chopping at a 20 foot wall. The young lad was chatting away when he fell A over K, dragging the others with him. I hopped across so the rope was going either side of me. Thank God he wasn't with us on Tasman. I reckoned he'd never make a climber. Well now, that young fella, he did other things. He climbed Footstool and David's Dome – found it a hell of a climb – I couldn't understand why. He did a traverse of Cook. He joined up with Hillary and went to England. His name is George Lowe and he turned out to be a cracker."

Collected here in this special edition of the Pohokura is a selection of George Lowe's writings while he was with the Heretaunga Tramping Club. He was born near Hastings, trained as a teacher and returned to Hawke's Bay where he joined the club in 1946. Already a keen trumper he quickly took on the mantle of Club Captain and led an amazing number of tramps. His next 7 years with the club are particularly significant, as it was during this time that his mountaineering skills were developed and when he started climbing with Ed Hillary. Most of the articles included here are from this time before the Everest Expedition and give a great background to what was to come. The climbing of Mt Everest was an outstanding team achievement and George Lowe had a significant part to play in the team's success. George's writings are very entertaining, so here we have an interesting piece of club history, copied from old Pohokura's and other sources, gathered together in one place to celebrate 50 years since the climbing of Everest. George is a life member of the club.



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Mike Lusk for the original idea and to the following dedicated typists: Tina Godbert, Isabella Godbert, Mike Lusk, Gail Harvey and to the original Pohokura typists. Most of all thanks to George for writing so many great trip reports and letters.
Andy Fowler, editor.

Labour Weekend - Oct. 26th – 28th 1946

(or as Angus suggested – “Tramps, Camps and Mountain Vamps”.)

Fourteen of us left at 8.15 am and duly installed ourselves in the “Cottage” at the end of the Kaweka Hut track.

About mid-day we set out with as much malthoid netting and nails as we could carry, armed with slashers and a determination to cut a track to 4100’ (or Kurapahanga Hill). Soon malthoid, packs and bodies were scattered in the manuka near the lakes. We aimed for a steep scree falling from 4100’.

Most of the party dropped their loads and began cutting a good highway through. Clem, Jack Garrick and myself stumbled and cursed (at least I did) through onto the scree and continued up. I foolishly dropped my pack and pushed through some manuka, Clem wisely hung onto his (and succeeded in getting his roll onto the top) and we decided on the route. When I came to find my pack I had no idea where it was. I could look at a few acres of scrub and say “In there somewhere”. I hunted for hours and then the others joined in and located it for me after I had wasted 1¼ hours of their time. Noel, Irvine and Bruce succeeded in getting their loads to the top of the ridge in addition to track cutting, a fine effort.

Sunday:- we were away at 7 and got all the loads (17 in all) to the top of the ridge. June and Nancy shouldered loads and carried up the !!!! scree. We reached Kiwi Saddle with all but 5 of the rolls. The weather was glorious and we took off our shirts and sun-bathed. Angus of course didn’t stop at only a shirt and became foundation member of the Kiwi Saddle Nudist Colony. Before this Angus was the centre of attraction with a great bout of cramp, squirming and swearing, looking for a “counter” to his knotting muscles. Most of us spent about 2½ hours sun-bathing in the saddle. We returned to Peg’s stew and soup about 5pm.

On Monday we were up to see the clouds dispersing after a night’s rain (and snow above 4,000 ft). Seven of us went up the ridge again and took the five remaining rolls to the saddle. Clem and Angus improved the track; Irvine went after deer and the “Squaws” (as they designated themselves) stayed “home”.

We boiled up and continued on round to 4,915’ at 11.30 am. The day was calm and perfect for travel. Ruapehu, Ngaruahoe and the Kaimanawas were white and clear. We saw that the plains were having a perfect day for their Labour Day. In 2½ hours we reached Kaweka Hut and were boiling up. Then on down to the truck and away at 4.30 pm. The “Squaws” were a tower of strength with their over ample stews and brews of tea. We all enjoyed the trip and the malthoid was wafted up to the top on the German “Kulture” cry “Strength through joy”.

No in Party : 14

Leader : G. Lowe.

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Kaikoura Trip - August 1946

Four of us gathered together in Wellington. One a reporter of Auckland, another a part time university lecturer, and two school-teachers. We flew across. Weight was limited to 35lbs of passenger luggage and we lumbered into the plane with all our clothes on-boots, 2 pairs pants, 2 shirts, 3 jerseys, a wind jacket and pockets filled with gloves socks, chocolate, raisins and a dozen oddments. I weighed thirteen and a half stone on their scale (only eighteen pounds overweight). The view was exciting as we flew towards the 'white hills'. Snow had fallen down to 2000' that night and the day was beautifully clear.

A 'daily-run' truck took us the 60 odd miles up the Awatere River to the Hodder Bridge. We sorted our loads and left about 3 p.m. on August 28th. After half an hour it began to snow and did so fitfully for 3 days as we crawled, stumbled and cursed our way to a base-camp site. The gorges were long, narrow and rather depressing. Our pace was slow and 70lb cruel to the shoulders. (I still consider we carried too much-even for a winter trip-even considering the blizzard). On the third day we sighted the tops of our peaks and after terrific labour in thigh-deep snow we dumped our packs, scraped away the snow and found some shingle to fill up the holes in the rock. This was our 'luxury' bed for the next few days. The weather was clearing and we were very tired. We awoke about 5 a.m. to a perfect still night. One of us got outside the tent but the cold was so intense that we decided to wait till sun-up. Everything was frozen and white and exciting (to one who is afflicted in this peculiar way). We got away about 8.30 and decided to attempt our major objective. Mt Alarm (9,400 ft) (our base camp we estimated at 6,000 ft). The approach was via a long exhausting snow slope and it was soft. Here for the third day running I had to remove my boots and massage frozen feet. The cause (I found by trial and error) was wearing too many socks in too small boots. The following days I wore only one pair of socks and could wriggle my toes and they were quite alright.

Well the day was perfect and once on the ridge with the summit curving away above we found the climb interesting. A few steps to chip, some rocks to scramble over, a steep snow slope and then we reached the 30 ft rock wall that was covered with icicles covered in new snow. We cut away the ice and the rocks became clean. The holds were ample and up we went. A delicate ridge of 15 ft or so and we crushed our feet into the pure white snow of the summit. The view was exhilarating. Ridges dropped away with exciting abruptness. Tapuaenuku (sic) (the highest point on the range 9,465 ft) looked inviting. To the south were miles of snow covered ranges, the Spencer and Nelson Ranges. To the east was the green ribbon of the Clarence River and behind it the Seaward Kaikouras looked imposing. The extent and height of this range (two peaks 8,500 ft) was an education to me. It was 3 p.m. when we reached the summit and the moments slipped by. The sun was dipping low, as it was winter and the sun was setting at 5.45 p.m. or there abouts. And when the sun sank the cold gripped everything. Some careful belaying and we soon reached the saddle between the two peaks and ran down to the camp in a couple of hours. Our putties were frozen stiff. Our boots had a permanent cake of ice between the sole and the uppers, that remained the whole time we were above the snow line.

Four of us squeezed into a two man tent and brewed lemon tea and 'dehy' stew. The next day we debated hotly whether to climb Mt Tapuaenuku or not. We set out at 9am with the feeling that it would be merely a duty climb of the highest point. It wasn't dull at all. We took a broken rock ridge that fell from the face. The climbing was very interesting and in places exciting. We reached the main ridge and had to cut a few steps and go carefully to reach the summit. This summit was more accommodating than that of Alarm. The view was not so good this day, owing to low lying cloud but it was still glorious. The same speedy, slithering descent, tea, stew, and peaceful sleep. The next day we broke camp, filled our packs and crossed a high saddle on the range in mist and deteriorating weather. Down the Muzzle Stream (it was steep at the top) in soft slushing snow for 2 hours and then we saw some birch trees (our first for six days). We built a huge fire and gorged until late that night. The next day we followed a high level route south up the Clarence river and reached Bluff station after 10 hours of tramping.

Here we were entertained royally in true back country style. The buildings are made of packed mud and covered with corrugated iron. They are similar to rough-cast houses except that the walls were thicker (about 18 inches). We rested for half a day at the Bluff. So peaceful to recline and see the clouds drift across the ranges that towered on all sides. The Clarence is too swift and deep to ford on foot and we were swum across on musterers' horses. We followed the river valley for a day then crossed the Seaward Kaikoura Range by a high snow pass and reached a big sheep station at 5.30 that night. We rang for a taxi and reached Kaikoura township that night. Next day we returned to Blenheim, and so to Picton and its green and peaceful Sounds. Then back to the North Island and work until 'Next time'.

ON SOME HIGH HILLS - JANUARY 1948

The H.T.C became quite alpine when John Mac., Hugo McKay, Jo Goymour and I worshipped at the Tasman Valley Shrine of the 'snow maiden'. The other three pottered around the different valleys and huts, finally climbing Aiguille Rouge (9700ft).

On the 19th January, Jo & Hugo left and I joined John MacIntyre and Geoff Milne (of Wellington) at Ball Hut. That evening we walked the ten odd miles up the glacier to Malte Brun Hut at about 5000ft.

The following day we left the hut at 4.30 am and after a long day climbed Mts Green, Walter and Elie de Beaumont (10,200ft). The day and the snow were perfect and after a grand climb on crampons-kicking and cutting steps – we reached the first summit at 8 am; the second at 10 am; the third peak, Elie, was reached after climbing down some very steep rocks and climbing up a steep hard ice-wall – about 60 feet, then onto the broad summit at 1.15 pm. After a long careful descent, we reached the hut after 14½ hours.

Two days later we climbed the rock-domed Malte Brun (10,421ft). The climb is up a steep hard rock ridge, where hands and feet and sometimes the seat of the pants are used to caress the mountainside. A 'cheval ridge' is crossed by dangling the feet over the cliff faces and sliding across, all very exciting. The last pitch to the summit was covered in bothersome powder snow. We reached the top at 10.45 am after leaving the hut at 4 am. It was another cloudless day and we gazed at the alps from Aspiring to Rolleston. It took about as long to climb down as it did to climb up.

After two days rest, we decided to attempt the highest and the toughest. All climbers would like to climb Mt. Cook, and all dream they will be lucky enough to try Mt. Tasman (the ice covered Queen near to King Cook).

Leaving at 2 am on the 26th January, we climbed Glacier Dome and ascended to the great plateau of ice that leads to a steep glacier falling from Mt. Cook. While here, John and I became faint hearted and were all for climbing the Anzacs or Mt. Dixon, but Geoff drove us on to Leichelman Corner – "just for a look". The Corner was reached after crossing several crevasses to see that the upper glacier was without slots to hinder us. We climbed up and reached the summit rocks at 8 am and climbed to the top of them in 2 hours. From here it was an hours climb on bubbly blue ice up the thousand feet of icecap to the summit of NZ (12,349 ft). After photographs we returned to the rocks where we boiled the billy and sunbathed for a couple of hours. We reached the Haast Hut after a 17 hour day.

On our last available day we fulfilled our wildest dreams by climbing Mt. Tasman (11,475 ft). John cooked breakfast, we tied on the rope and strepped on our crampons in the hut at 3.30 am. We climbed the Dome and crossed the plateau to the foot of Syme Ridge – a steep snow ridge of exquisite finesse that soars up for two thousand feet onto the main divide close to the summit of Tasman.

The snow was in perfect condition and we climbed it by sticking in our crampons one on each side of this narrow crest. The summit was reached at 8.30 after an extremely quick and comparatively easy ascent. We climbed down the same ridge, ran back to the hut, collected our belongings and returned to Ball Hut then the Hermitage after a grand nine days.

George Lowe.

WAIKAMAKA HUT

&

THREE JOHNS

26th-27th June 1948

FIRST VERSION:

Waikamaka in mid-winter and some snow games was our object. Eight left by private cars on Saturday morning and reached the Triplex creek. This is unfordable at present because of wash outs. A two mile walk took us to the old mill and a boil up in the cold almost damp weather. The “tops” hid their heads but I had seen from home that a recent fall of snow had been washed away. We set off up the Waipawa, a delightful approach to the Ruahines, and in time we reached the saddle and a cold wind. Without more ado we ran down to the hut and put on our stew. The fire burned easily and cheerfully that night – a change from the usual. We bedded down early and rose late. Rain fell during the night and we decided on an easy day. The climb out of the hut creek proved exciting for some of the loose rock – most of us visited Three Johns – an unusual viewpoint, then ran for home. Little ventured and less done but a pleasant memory.

Number in Party: 8

Leader: George Lowe

SECOND VERSION:

Two vehicles were begged, borrowed or and eight trampers started from Hastings one dismal wet June/July (?) morning with hope in their hearts for better weather later.

We had an extra few miles of road walking as the ford wasn't fordable. Hoping for snow we were all armed with ice axes which came in handy for crossing the stream as very little snow was around. We scrambled up over Waipawa Saddle and down the valley to Waikamaka Hut. An icy wind cutting into us and making the pace perhaps faster than usual. A mighty meal was cooked. Most of the party confessed to two or three helpings of stew and a large helping of plum duff and custard sauce. Whew! Nobody felt like doing much after that and gradually the smoky fire place was deserted by bods who retired to their bunks to groan about over laden stomachs, etc.

Next morning we left the hut a trifle late but still had visions of going out 66 and Shut Eye but after a scramble up one of George Lowe's new routes to the saddle (never again) and finding fresh snow and ice on the ground as well as in the wind, we weren't so keen. The party dropped packs on the saddle and hopped up Three Johns for a look see. It was a mighty cold wind and no one was keen on wasting time. Back to the saddle, on with packs, and down to McCullocks Mill, a stop for oranges and then on to the transport 'tother side of ford.

An almost clueless trip, good company and almost indecent weather.

RUAHINE - NO-MAN'S HUT AND A NIGHT OUT - 19th, 20th and 21st September 1948.

Party: Muriel Shaw, Molly Young, Betty Beckett, George Couper, George Lowe, Hugo McKay, Dr. Bathgate and John Mitchell.

“Even the best of parties are sometimes caught”.

(quoted from the Leader)

Five or six weeks ago fifteen of us attempted the above trip and failed – having reached Lessong's Monument, camped in the trees to retreat because of cold driving rain and fog. Near Ruahine we lost our direction somewhat and after a serious talk, counting of heads and extra food we set a compass bearing for home and set off. Luckily we bumped into the hut by accident and were home at dusk on Sunday. Some were glad and others sad that we had not had the expected night out.

Bulldog like, eight intrepid explorers returned to the plateau to make good their mistakes. Left Hastings at 6.30 sharp and reached Ruahine Hut at midday. It was hot and hazy climbing onto the range. After lunch we left for No-Man's Hut at 1 pm and reached it at 5 pm in rain and mist, which developed in the afternoon. Dr. Bathgate told us that the last section through the bush was so flat that you could “ride a

bike along it". This was the source of much chatter (most of it quite witty) which reached its ludicrous height next day in the bluffs, bush and waterfalls of the river.

After a comfortable night we left No-Man's Hut at 8am. The weather was quite good, it was clear anyway! We deviated a little to view Ruapehu from the top of the range. It brought back skiing memories for most of us. Across the open tussock tops thin wisps of fog began to drift and we scampered on to the join of Herrick's Spur, to be beaten by the fog. However, I started carefully down the trackless overgrown bush by compass, followed by a singing carefree band. Although we zig-zagged and reconnoitred ahead and to the sides we dropped off the ridge to the right into the creek between Three Fingers and Herrick's. However, we decided to follow the creek instead of the uncertainties of a ridge in mist. By this time the band were still carefree but without song.

Following the river was quite good fun for an hour or so then we clambered round a little bluff and down a little cataract. Immediately after we were negotiating a big bluff and a big cataract. We did this and by-passed the next difficulties by sidling in the bush. At the end of another hour we were all privately engaged in a series of wild gymnastics – either on a mossy cliff, crumbling bush face, wet water splashed boulders, or perhaps wading a frigid pool that lapped uncomfortably into your pants.

At 3.30 pm our band (having lost its carefree attitude by this time) peered over a 150 foot waterfall to see only mist below and cold close cliffs on either side. We attacked the cliffs, clawing, crawling hand and foot up by manuka and flax bush. The angle eased off after 500 feet of this and we reached a knoll covered with birch trees at 4.30 pm and decided to camp.

A clearing in the fog sent George Couper and me running and crawling through scrub to the open ridge above – to find we were back on the crest of Herrick's Spur and not far from the hut. We ran back with the news. George Couper, John and Hugo volunteered to try and reach Big Hill Station that night to ring Hastings about our position and delay. After a marathon effort they reached Big Hill at 2 am on Monday morning (Herrick's Hut in 1½ hours from our camp – and 6 hours from Herrick's to Big Hill – for this story see George and Hugo, it's a little epic).

The remaining five of us bedded down under Hugo's tent and watched the full moon rise. We slept well and left at 6 am on Monday on a beautiful morning, reaching Herrick's Hut at 8 am. to drink tea and plaster the odd blister. Mr Oliver arrived and took two packs on his horse. We left at 9 am for Big Hill, a very warm and pleasant tramp. At 11 am all the fun was over and we were drinking soup and tea which Mrs Oliver had waiting for us from 10 pm on Sunday night! We loaded up the car and were sneaking into town and home by back routes at 1.30 pm; as a sudden cold southerly storm clouded the sky and whirled the dust.

Leader: G. Lowe.

Another Alpine Holiday - Xmas Holidays 1948-49

For the Christmas holidays of 1948-49 three of us from the Club, John MacIntyre, Hugo McKay and myself, joined Geoff Milne of Wellington for some climbing midst the ice and rock of the Mt. Cook district. The expedition was a great success – not just because of the many mountain tops reached but because of the good fun we had together and the trampers we met.

In some five weeks we climbed 20 mountains between us. Eight were over 10,000 feet and are amongst our highest and grandest hills. The others were of varying heights down to 6000 feet, but height is no measure of success or difficulty, nor of enjoyment.

I enjoyed all of the climbs for different reasons. One day (January 6th) John Mac, Hugo, Rod (Geoff Milne's brother) and I crossed Ball pass, climbing twin peaks, Mabel and Rosa, en route. These peaks are about 6800 feet and are considered small compared with Cook 12,349 and Tasman 11,475 etc. This was a happy day, it included a 9 a.m. start; a lot of merry talk; the watching of a chamois and it's babe engage in a climbing lesson; many mountain daisies and damp tussock; squadrons of clouds low flying; the crossing of the pass in mist and then rain. Just as we reached Ball hut a terrific thunderstorm broke, lashing the place with wind and rain and lighting up all the valley in flashes. We enjoyed the storm because we were in beds with many blankets pulled up to our ears listening to the rain on the roof.

Midst the snow we experienced terrific heat. During five days we sweltered at Malte Brun Hut, the temperature in the hut was around 90 degrees F during the day. One morning at 4.30 a.m. the

temperature was 60 degrees. This softened the snow and made climbing laborious. Outside the hut one hot afternoon the temperature was 140 degrees plus- plus because 140 degrees F was as high as the thermometer went.

When counted in hours actual climbing time is small. Many happy hours were spent pleasantly at the Hermitage, sometimes playing tennis, dancing, meeting other climbers but mostly eating and sleeping. On off days I read several books "Ten Little Niggers", "Fire Over England" and "The Lodger". The last I kept in my pack and it went over several peaks with me, including a traverse of Mt Cook. I kept the volume but unfortunately left it on my bunk on "Rangatira".

As to high climbing, Geoff and I were usually roped together, our starts being made about 2 a.m. each day from high huts. Each day the problems were how to find a route through icefalls and how to climb loose and solid rock walls. Our most difficult and exciting climb was a small peak called Coronet (8,260 ft), this took 12 ½ hours to surmount though only 2000 feet from the glacier but 2000 feet of steep snow and ice, some steep, snow covered rock and lastly a great crevasse and ice wall out of which we chopped several hundredweight of ice to make a platform.

Our grandest and most memorable climb was a traverse of the summit ridge of Mt Cook, which is 1 ¾ miles long. This was a perfect climb on a perfect day (17th January). At 7 a.m. we were at 12,000 ft and stepping along the knife-edge summit yodeling madly for sheer joy. At 9.30 a.m. when most people are only feeling the start of the working day, we were standing on the top of New Zealand. There is a deep satisfaction in standing at an altitude of 12,349 ft and still having one's feet on solid ground.

George Lowe.

TE MATA PEAK

July 10th 1949

Three years ago I cycled out to Kahuranaki on a Saturday afternoon. While pedalling along near the Tuki Tuki River I became fascinated by a steep ridge that runs up to the Te Mata Trig. The face on it is quite sensational and even in profile it still looks steep. Some 200 feet from the top some rocky bluffs looked difficult and this decided me to test my balance and muscle on its angles. I parked my bike and ambled across and climbed to the trig without much trouble. For some reason the doing of this afforded me great satisfaction and I have now been up and down the same place five times, each time since with companions and a rope.

The most recent occasion was with a club party. We were due to leave Holt's at 9 am on bikes. Owing to the size of the party (about 25 altogether) there was lack of co-ordination, some leaving too soon and others too late, some by car and Muriel on her baby dragon, a blue-smoke-breathing auto-cycle. After a chapter of misinterpretations we assembled at our orchard on Te Mata Road and boiled a late billy (by electricity). The pack moved off with so much chaff and chatter that they resembled a pack of hunting hounds in full cry. Over fences, ditches, gullies, an odd bog, past a dam (splashing the unwary) then up to the crest of the range to find George and Betty sunning themselves on a rock. A gusty wind drove us to eat below the crest on the Tuki Tuki side. About 8 or 9 of us left the main pack and traversed round to the steep east ridge which runs up to the trig. We scrambled up and met the others on top. More food and wind jackets appeared, then in groups we descended and ambled back to the orchard and were back in Hastings about 4 pm – a respectable hour especially for a day trip.

Number in Party: 27.

Leader: George Lowe

LABOUR WEEKEND: 1949. HOWLETT'S TO WAIKAMAKA

Last year some of us devised a cunning plan with two cars and two parties of five for an attempt on this journey, viz: to follow the open tops of the Ruahine range along their central and highest portion. We accomplished nothing more than a visit to each of the huts at either end of the journey- Waikamaka and Howlett's. It snowed.

This year we again planned the attempt – a party of ten from Howlett's. The usual Labour weekend weather tried to stop us, but some of us made the journey by a determined dash between storms.

We left by truck at 6 am on Saturday morning – the first all-male trip I can remember. At Thomson's Mill we touched down in cloudy weather and moved off without much ado. It was not long before our feet were wet and we joined the main Tuki Tuki valley and headed up the wide stony bed on the first of our forty eight crossings of this stream. The sun slanted warmly into the valley as we moved along. The travelling was easy and pleasant. It gave me time to reflect on our journeys up and down this route during the Oxford crash search. Some 2 ½ hours in the river – a boil up at the foot of Daphne spur – some relics of the search (boots, a police serge trouser-leg, and tins) – a snooze, then a steep pull up the ridge brought us to Howlett's Hut in the early afternoon. We managed a good meal from the camp oven and after several rounds of bed-time stories we dropped off to sleep.

Sunday was a disappointing day because cloud covered the tops and some rain pattered on the roof. We resigned ourselves to returning the way we had come. Allan Cowan and Des O'Neill went off despite a flurry of rain along the ridge to the Oroua Saddle and further, returning early after route-finding adventures in the mist.

About midday the clouds lifted and I decided two or three of us might make the dash along the ridge. If we did get benighted I had a primus and petrol for a bivvy. At 12:30pm Cyril Davy, Merv Hawken and I left. The others came with us to Tiraha except John, Ken and Peter, who went down to the telephone with instructions for the truck.

An hour's going found us on top of Tiraha with good views of the Sawtooth Ridge and down the Pourangaki Valley. We wasted no time, traversed most of the pinnacles and moved over Ohuinga, which was covered with a fair amount of late snow. We saw a mob of eight deer. We glissaded part of the way off Ohuinga (5330'), ran down into the saddle and climbed up and along Broken Ridge. The wind was cold and strong, but the views were good. Down steeply into the saddle and around a difficult pinnacle, and then up slowly to South Rangi. Over South Rangi and at 6pm we paused on Rangi just to look about, catch our breath and compliment ourselves on being so quick. The rest was easy – a fast walk to the Waipawa Saddle – a run down the scree and river-bed to reach Waikamaka Hut just as dark really closed in.

The fire burned brightly and we drank, fed and were content. The stars were bright and the evening was still as we bedded down. Next morning it was raining coldly, and we slept in until 10 o'clock. It only took two hours in rain to the road. We dried out and drank tea at Fould's house, while Mr Foulds told us of mustering the Big Hill country, with horses along from Ruahine Hut to the Makaroro and the finding of Armstrong's plane.

The truck journey was wet and miserable, but the tramp was one of the best.

Stan Woon found a large moth in the bush on Daphne Ridge. It was green and about 4 inches long with a wing span of 5 inches. I sent it to the Entomological Division of the Cawthron Institute. Their reply was:-

"The moth sent in for identification is *HEPIALUS VIRISCENS*. This large, conspicuous insect is the largest moth that occurs in N.Z. It is generally distributed throughout the North Island. It has a wide range of food plants including wineberry, manuka, beech, willow, etc. The larva tunnels into the stems of these trees, feeding entirely on the wood which it bites off with its strong mandibles. The adult insect appears from September to November."

Our times along the top were fast but may serve as a guide. From Howlett's to Waikamaka 6 ½ hours (Wow, Ed): Howlett's to Tiraha, 1 hour; Tiraha to Ohuinga, 1 hour; Ohuinga to Broken Ridge turn off, 1 ½ hours; Broken Ridge to South Rangi, 1 hour; South Rangi to Waikamaka Hut, 2 hours.

No. in Party: 10

Leader, George Lowe.

Stan Woon, Allan Cowan, John Mitchell, Ken Thomas, Des O'Neill, David Sherry, Peter Lowe, Mervyn Hawken, Cyril Davy.

This was the most important search that the club had been involved with. An R.N.Z.A.F. Airspeed Oxford with three men aboard, en route from Napier to Ohakea, flown by the last serving pilot who had fought in the Battle of Britain, was lost in poor weather in the Ruahines. It was last heard and seen in the Tiraha area. The airforce launched an Air Search, twenty two planes eventually took part in a grid search, in frequent cloud cover, and found no trace. The HTC persuaded the Police to start a ground search, against the express wishes of the Wellington Air Search Organisation.

Norm Elder and George Lowe led out teams, 48 hours after the disappearance of the Oxford. Three policemen accompanied the search party, equipped with one days rations, three grey blankets apiece, and a 40lb radio (plus batteries). Sgt. Le Forte of Napier who wore heavy shoes, a sports coat, and swimming togs led the search. They headed for Howlett's where a piece of fabric from the Oxford was found fifteen minutes south of the hut. Norm stayed at the mill to co-ordinate communications.

At 6am on the Saturday morning, now three and half days after the crash, three teams searched around and into the valley behind the hut. By mid morning several pieces of fabric and an open, unused parachute had been found. By 12 noon, the three teams had reported their findings back to the hut, as per schedule. Tallying their information, a new party of four set off again to explore the most likely area. George Lowe, Maurice Forward, David Bathgate and Bruce Jenkinson reached a creek bed, having found debris every few yards. They then discovered an unused parachute, much wreckage, an engine, then the pilot, dead, relatively unmarked, still strapped firmly in his seat. Shortly afterwards, the two others were found. All seemed to have died instantly. After making positive identification they returned to Howlett's and next morning returned to the road end.

Police commendations of the HTC participation were forthcoming, and supported the existence of a strong local SAR organisation. Napier Police bought in ten sets of equipment to be permanently maintained there.

ASPIRING AND AFTERWARDS

December 1949 to January 1950

Geoff Milne and I usually go somewhere together and for 1949-50 it was to the Mt. Aspiring district. We had been invited along with others as part of the climbing party, in the filming of an ascent of Aspiring.

Geoff had climbed Aspiring before and assured me that it was easy, all the photographs I had seen seemed to say differently. It was Christmas '47-'48 when he was there and that was the first occasion on which a snow cave was used as a climbing base. Since then it has been almost common practice.

About the middle of December we travelled to Lake Wanaka. No-one was there to meet us and we stayed the night in the hotel. The next day was perfect so we soaked our boots in the lake and took photographs. Later that day the Film Unit van arrived and we met the photographer Brian Brake; the minstrel as we called him, Douglas Lilburn; the bard, James K. Baxter; the artist, John Drawbridge and one hanger-on, an architectural student. Altogether a very intellectual bunch!

The bard impressed us most deeply – Firstly as a prize sap; and later as first class companion in every way, a very good poet, ghost-story –teller and card player.

In the Film Unit truck we crawled up the valley to the Aspiring Station cowsheds. Jerry Aspinall who runs the station came from the homestead a mile away with a heavy team of draught horses and a huge dray. We bundled in and trundled off. This mile requires a fording of the main streams of the Matukituki. It was swift and quite deep.

That night we dispersed ourselves to sleep in odd nooks in farmhouses, but before this we watched Jerry connect with the outside world with radio telephone.

The journey up-valley next day was almost a safari. There were 4 pack-horses – 4 riding horses and 7 men on foot. This day was one of our few good days. The walk up to the big Matukituki hut (sleeps 40) is easy and as the river moves in a great curve there is always a further view coming into focus. At the Rob Roy junction we stopped to spell and look up into the Rob Roy Glacier that cascaded down into the bush. This scene deeply impresses our minstrel and bard.

We arrived at Aspiring Hut early one afternoon about 20th December and for the next three and a half weeks it rained on some part of every day except one. Naturally the film was not finished, but a lot was completed; in fact all the valley and build up sequences were completed in short sprints between rains. Because we did not climax the trip by taking the cameras to the summit of Aspiring it doesn't mean the trip was unsuccessful.

The party itself was a very happy one, which at one time consisted of fifteen. We had some gay impromptu parties and great feasts.

Because of the weather there were parties continually weathering in the hut and I did more sitting round a sock-strewn fire reading digests, dozing, tea-drinking and talking than I ever have before. Aspiring Hut was where about nine-tenths of our time was spent. The other tenth was spent in several ascents and descents of French Ridge, to the Bivvy five times, beyond to the Quarter Deck (up on the Bonar Glacier) four times, six nights in snow caves and seven hours one morning in a traverse of Aspiring Peak.

Aspiring can be climbed comfortably from the French Ridge Bivvy – a small but new and well appointed hut – but the film was to be made from snow caves on the Bonar Glacier. The reasons were nearness to the mountain and the crevasse scenery and the story was to show a snow cave as a climbing base. To prepare for this an air-drop was to drop large quantities of food and equipment on the glacier. A small party of us went up to wait for and to collect this. Our wait covered several days and finally one evening the sky cleared and promised a fine day. We decided to attempt the S.W. ridge. At 2.00 a.m. we left the French Bivvy with sleeping bags and food for the snow-cave we had built on the glacier. Dumping these loads at 6.00 a.m. at our cave we roped in a party of three and set off a little later for the S.W. ridge.

It was an unusual climb because eleven people did it that day. The ridge had been climbed only once before thirteen years before and was reputed to be difficult. A 53 degree ice-slope on the last 400 feet has to be surmounted. The first party were already on the ridge like flies – a party of four who had a snow cave at the foot of the ridge. We followed and reached the summit an hour behind the first party. The third were a pair and the fourth another private pair and these reached the summit some two hours after us.

The climb is a good one and requires cramponing a steep snow ridge for a thousand feet. Then you enter a steep ice-gully and cut steps up to the summit ridge, which is an ice-cap. The top is sharp but the wind was sharper and we didn't stay long. We descended the N.W. or normal route which finishes with a short rock climb. At 1.00 p.m. we were back on the glacier. I can now agree with Geoff. And say that Aspiring by the normal route is a very easy climb.

Our nights in the snow cave were comfortable, but all during terrific storms. Inside a cave you hear no wind and the fiercest storm troubles you not. But comfort in a cave is only comparative. If there was ever a hut or bivvy nearby I would leave the cave. If there was a tent near a cave in bad weather I would stay in the cave.

After Aspiring we had still two and a half weeks of holiday and passed the time at the Hermitage. Both my arms were out of action and I rested mostly. Amongst other things we climbed Mt. De la Beche, crossed Graham's saddle and then flew back over the ranges one perfect morning. We spent other days hut-bound in arctic conditions but that only makes the story too long.

EASTER IN THE KAIMANAWAS - 1950

The great exodus to Waikaremoana created a vacuum that nearly sucked us away but three of us planned a more strenuous tour. At the last minute we had misgivings – the weather had turned nasty. However I rang Norman and blithely he said "All my best trips have started in thunderstorms. When do we come to look for you – Wednesday night?" With that to cheer us we were off on Friday at dawn to the Rangataiki Plains and Poronui Station. (14 miles off the Taupo Road). The Chrysler thundered powerfully on the flat bits but the load and the hills caused an odd backfire, clouds of steam and a great lack of urge. After many stops to cool her burning brow we wallowed heavily across the tussock and pumice to Poronui Station (now deserted).

A cold wind accelerated our activity, my brother drove the car away home and we stepped stiffly away about 1.30 pm. I knew the track into the Oamaru-Mohaka junction and we reached the cullers' fly-camp (now dismantled) after an easy two hours. There was yet time and wishing to cut down the long following day we continued up the Oamaru. Simultaneously we spied a fine stag on the open tussock. One of the party had a rifle (taken to defend us from the fierce wild cattle and the roving renegade elephants of this primitive area) and loading he began his stalk. He did well, creeping to within fifty yards on the open flat, but that was all – the stag was aware – he aimed – the stag began his sprint – he fired – the stag kept on sprinting in a sporting wide circle but after three shots he ended the game by disappearing unfairly into the bush. Soon after this we camped in a peasant spot in the bush near to water, wood and warth.

Saturday was fine and warm – even at 7 am when we started in the bush. Although a long upward swag (6 hours), the bush is pleasant and fairly easy (except that some budding bushman has blazed false trails and walked secretly in the direct ones). We disturbed several hinds who were off in a flash, played hide and seek with the fantails and talked intimately with the inquisitive bush robins. An hour after midday we walked onto the clear saddle which looked down on the wide, pumice-terraced Ngaruroro river-bed. Crossing the valley we climbed the terrace and padded up the easy horse track to the Mangamingi junction, sat and snoozed for an hour and then swaggered hotly up the Mangamingi to the hut (4 pm) near its source. On this afternoon George Cooper complained mildly – unusual as George seldom complains – about his boots. He shed them in favour of tennis shoes. That night we drained and plastered some ugly blisters and we realised that a tricky handicap was placed on our schedule.

On Sunday morning the stars were fairly bright, but a red dawn promised wind (promise unfulfilled) as we left. At 7 am we looked down into the frost encrusted Mangamaire (headwaters of the Rangitikei river) and up to Makorako (5665' highest Kaimanawa trig). A climb of Makorako was on the menu, but George missed this course and enjoyed the sweets of the river (with raw and painful heels). Steele and I dumped our packs at 8 am and bounded mightily uphill and round the tops to sink tiredly on the top at 10 am. The view was nearly boundless. Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe, Lake Taupo (almost within spitting distance) and the Kawekas, our destination, away on the horizon and blue distance to the S.E. It seemed a long way. It was.

Some chocolate and snow, a look at the map and we were off hell bent and muscle careless to the valley; (1¼ hours) a short sleep and away after George who we found an hour and a half later toasting his toes in the sun at the beginning of the gorge. From the map directions and the hill contours we expected to find the zig zag track which leads to Kaimanawa hut. We fossicked about and finally climbed up a painful 1500 ft to discover that in the river we were at least an hour short of the take off. Time was short and we hurried into the river, wading some deep pools, moving quite desperately against darkness and the campless confines of the gorge. Just at dark the sides lay back and a tussock flat revealed an old campsite. We settled in. Two deer cullers called in and invited us to their established camp about a quarter of a mile away but we were too tired. One of the deer cullers was a fine, picturesque specimen – tall, blond, hair down the neck, a deer-skin sweatband Greek fashion round the head, torn grey trousers cut down to shorts and split with a butcher's knife up the sides to the hip-bone for greater freedom, agile and fast-moving.

Monday up at 4 am, away at 6 am, up the zig zag, along open tops then down to Kaimanawa hut (9 am). No stop, then up, up to Taruarau Saddle and along open tops parallel to Bishop's Rock and Rocky Creek, down a gentle spur to the wide Taruarau (12.30 pm). No stop – George's feet too bad, when cold he seized up – along, along towards the Hogget – then up, up - slow – tired – along the Hogget tops and then to Log Cabin. A gruelling day of thirteen unrelenting hours. George's feet were in a bad way, but George had made up his mind that we wouldn't be a day late.

Tuesday away at 8 am – our last day – up to the Hogget trig and along to Te Iringa and slowly hobbling down to the Gentle Annie at 3 pm. Journey completed on time but to the detriment of George's feet – he spent a week in bed.

And thus ended our Easter journey. We were picked up at MacDonald's at 4.30 pm and home after one of the most interesting range crossings that I have done.

No. in Party: 3

Leader, George Lowe

Steele Therkleson, George Cooper, George Lowe.

SKIING HOLIDAY? - August 1950

For some years now August has meant an attempt to rally interest in skiing, which has always graduated to an annual ascent of some Ruapehu summit.

Last Christmas at the Hermitage Geoff and I crossed Graham's Saddle on a perfect day and wallowed across the great snow basin at the head of the Franz. We sank deeply into the morass, filled our caps with snow, sweated and groaned our way across the miles. In earnest we solemnly decided to become ski-mountaineers. "It's the only sensible way to move across the country," we said.

August 1950 came and found me on my way with a great ski plan – a week at Queenstown, to the famed Coronet Peak and a week at the Hermitage Mt. Cook. Now I would ski and become a ski-mountaineer. “The only sensible way to move across country.” There were four of us in a friendly Ford, loaded above the Plimsoll mark with two of everything that might be useful. Under full power we leaped away from Lyttleton fully intending to reach Queenstown that night in order to start “this skiing business” without delay. We did get about half way and the following day we reached Queenstown having photographed the Lindis Pass, a puncture, an old stone house, some sheep, a gorge, a gold dredge, a visit to this and that. “Anyway,” we said, “skiing can wait. It would be a pity to by-pass this”

The next day we did go to the grounds and such a queue awaited skis that day that we waited politely until the “None Left” sign was hung out. “It doesn’t matter,” we said, “It’s too icy.”

In a pleasant pub that evening, we caught, by tales and gleaming samples, the virulent epidemic form of gold fever. So sudden was the attack that we left next day on a ten mile tramp up the Arrow River to the Ghost town of Macetown. “Skiing can wait to-day,” we said, “let’s get some gold colours.” It was a long ten miles, but we found Macetown with many derelict stone houses, the old store with loose iron clanging in the wind, old harness, mining tools, ancient pear and apple trees bare and gnarled, dilapidated buggies and buckboards, rotting sluice races and many other signs of a dead past.

The tramp to Macetown was arduous and interesting, therefore the following day required a morning rest and an afternoon recounting our adventures and hearing more Macetown tales at the friendly pub.

Gold fever abated a little and we decided to go skiing, but in rummaging through the molehills of equipment looking for our patent “Aching Hoofers Bindings” (home made) someone found the rifles. “Let’s go and shoot something,” someone said and so we did. Throwing all our gear aboard we thundered off over the Crown Range (first winter ascent!) passing Wanaka and a distant nostalgic view of Aspiring, round Lake Hawea and off to the Haast Pass. But no, a slip on the road turned us back and we plunged north a hundred miles to Lake Ohau and walked up the Hopkins River on a perfect moonlight night. After a night in a hut in this beautiful valley we thought we would like to go skiing so we covered another hundred or so miles, arriving at the Hermitage full of enthusiasm. And so to Ball Hut next day. Yes we hired ski and laboured on to the Ball Glacier. A tow and very easy slopes decided us to try. We spent a pleasant downhill day. “Ah, this skiing is fun. Why did we delay so long? Let’s go up the great Tasman Glacier and ski on to Lendenfeld Saddle and make up for lost time.”

True now to our original purpose we left for Malte Brun hut at the head of the glacier for bigger and better slopes. Alas for him who hesitates! Alas for him who squanders the perfect day in the lust for gold and the desire to shoot something! For two days the sky pressed heavily on the hut, a foot of powder snow dribbled down and we had to plug our way back to Ball hut in a snowy morass in order to catch our boat.

Next August I must go skiing again.

ELIE DE BEAUMONT: FIRST ASCENT FROM BURTON GLACIER - 1950

Plans for Christmas 1950 and New Year 1951 were not at all settled because my companion of five solid seasons had taken his ice-axe and become a professional guide.

An invitation from Earle Riddiford (an illustrious name in the alpine world as an explorer of virgin valleys and new routes on high hills), was accepted, but not without some feelings of inadequate muscle and moral fibre.

Earle’s plan was to swag 70lb loads over a steep and difficult col (snow saddle between high peaks) called appropriately Climber’s Col, down the almost unvisited Spencer Glacier, over a dividing range and into the Burton Glacier. From a high glacier route we hoped to climb a new route on a 10,200ft. peak Ellie de Beaumont. In a way, this was a peculiar ambition, as there is a

perfectly easy route on to this peak from the Tasman Glacier that I had climbed before; but virginity is a fascinating thing.

On a fine Christmas morning we set off with cruel loads. We moved like snails under our shells, cursing the necessities we needed. We stopped for spells about every twenty minutes, but the loads left us panting on the ice like cast ewes. As we approached Climber's Col we quailed at the thought of trying to cut a route up the ice and over the unknown crest. We decided on a simpler (we thought) more roundabout route into the Burton. It took us six days of pass-crossing and route finding, which tested our skill and endurance to the full. On Christmas day we crossed the Tasman Saddle (8,000ft.) crossed the head of the Murchison Glacier to the Whymper Saddle, over the saddle and down a steep 4,000ft. to the Whymper Glacier on the West Coast. This was the first crossing of the Whymper Saddle. We were so tired that we slept out on the shingle-covered ice and were waked in the morning by the crash of avalanches off the cliffs of Hochstetter Dome which were here 6,000ft. high.

Our next obstacle was to cross the unexplored Maximilian range into the gold-bearing Callery river. This took us three and a half days. We crossed about five miles down the range by a difficult saddle which involved 1000ft of water-worn bluffs where we relayed our loads in small weights.

In the Callery river we found a huge bivvy rock and made this our base. There were literally thousands of daisies in full bloom, we had scrub fires and a score of inquisitive keas. From this base we explored. We got onto the Burton Glacier and prospected a route onto the north ridge of Elie; we climbed a virgin peak about 8,400ft; then disease laid one of our party feverish, itchy and swollen under the rock. Chickenpox! There was little we could do, but we rested for a day or two; ate slept, hunted keas with a boot-laced bow and fire hardened arrows. We pot-roasted two and they tasted like strong duck, tough, but it was fresh meat.

The weather looked settled and after urgings from the sick one not to delay our attempt we left him one morning at 12.30 am with mixed hopes about our climb. Some thirteen hours later we dragged wearily on to the summit after a very difficult, exacting, muscle-wearing climb. On the summit we decided to traverse the mountain – this was our original ambition, now it was the easiest way down! Two of us then traversed Mt Walter (9,703ft) and descended to Malte Brun Hut, which we reached about 8.30pm. The other two descended the western side into the Spencer Glacier and returned to our sick member.

The parting on the summit ended the expedition. My climbing partner, Ed Hillary, returned to Auckland in time to contract chickenpox! I waited at the Hermitage for the other boys to return from the West Coast, but they took so long to get out that I packed up and returned home. Actually, they weren't loafing. While returning from the Coast they took a day off and climbed Mt Cook.

GEORGE LOWE.

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George and Ed Hillary were staying in Haast hut when George asked, "Have you ever thought about going to the Himalayas, Ed?". Indeed he had, and they were both excited to find someone with the same views. They decided to plan together. Ed headed off to Europe where he climbed some Alpine classics before receiving a letter from George with exciting news. George had had been invited to join a group of New Zealanders planning to go to the Himalayas and at his suggestion they'd invited Ed too. At first their plans were very ambitious – a ten man party to

climb Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. But in the end Earle Riddiford, George Lowe, Ed Cotter (who's son Guy, has climbed Everest twice) and Ed Hillary headed for the Garhwal Himalaya.

LETTERS from the HIMALAYAS

c/o West View Hotel,
Ranikhet, India.
June 8th, 1951, Friday.

Dear H.T.C.,

I won't tell you of the voyage to Colombo, which was filled with incident. Of the train journey from Ceylon to Calcutta – about 12 or 1400 miles of rail travel – the heat and dust and the sameness of the country will be of interest when I get home. A similar 1200 mile journey from Calcutta to railhead at Kathgodam via Lucknow with a temperature of 113 °F was hot and full of trial and exorbitant expense in baggage. We had ¾ ton and our fare for 4 came to 260 rupees – the baggage cost 273 rupees!!

We arrived at Kathgodam about 30th May and were charged another huge sum to get our gear and ourselves 52 miles and 6000 ft higher to the haven of Ranikhet. The road is superb – the bus is a sporting model – you've got to be a sport to go in it. The road winds up through open bush and villages to the pine scented Ranikhet hill station. The hotel-keeper was a member of the Himalayan Club and of immense help. While two of us wrestled with making up 60 lb loads into heavy kit bags, Earle, our lawyer, negotiated for passes, extra gear such as sugar, ata (native flour), tsampa (a roasted grain), split peas, rice, pots & pans and a thousand other things. In the record time of two days we were packed, our 4 Sherpas had arrived from Darjeeling and we had become acquainted with them, namely Pasang Dawa, Tondoo (looks for all the world like a pirate off a Chinese junk), Nyima and Tenzing – all good types. We engaged 29 Dotial coolies, professional load-carriers from Nepal, to pack our loads of 60 lbs. For the paltry sum of 3 rupees per day (4/6). They feed themselves as well. The Dotials were a rough-looking crew with bare feet and ragged clothes with a blanket thrown over their shoulders. Their pack consists of a small head band attached to a doubled piece of rope which they hook under the load.

On 2nd June we left Ranikhet and bussed 52 miles to Garul and climbed 3000' to Gwaldam with a glorious view of the mountains. For 7 days we've been at it pretty steadily crossing a pass nearly every day. We've been carrying about 40lb. ourselves and have become pretty brown and fit. The climbs are strenuous compared to N.Z. Here's a resume:
Gwaldam to Karat Bagat, 10 miles – 4000ft and 2000ft climb;
K.B. to Ghat, 17 miles – 4000ft climb and 6000ft descent;
Ghat to Ranni, 2500ft climb and 9 miles;
Ranni to Kaliaghat 2000ft (over a pass of 10,500ft) and 4500ft drop;
Kaliaghat to Dakwani, 10 miles and 4000ft up, 2000ft down and 2500ft up to camp at 10,400ft; and today we left Dakwani and crossed Kuari Pass 12,400ft and dropped – and I mean dropped – to Tapoban 6500ft lower. Altogether the approach march will take us 10 days.

We now follow a broad trail, the pilgrim route to Badrinath. The tramping has been over paths mostly and in a few places what might be called tracks. Route finding consists of giving the name of your destination at each village and they nod and point the way. So far it's all been over hills similar to the Kaimanawas – but today we went high enough to see beautiful alpine gardens of primulas, gentians, irises and even a few orchids – which are rare and greatly sought after. The

view from Kuari Pass was terrific with literally dozens of giants over 20,000ft with Kamet above all at 25,447 ft. Our hope, Nilkanta, 21,600ft, looks steep and difficult. If we climb it, it will certainly be a feather in the old cap. At present I'm sitting beside the tent in a glade – the sherpas are preparing our evening meal (very genteel) – stew and rice, while the Dotials are spread around their own fires cooking chapaties, a sort of thin wafer of flour and water which is almost wholly their diet.

That's all for now. I post this at Josimath where it goes out by foot post. If you write and I hope you will, send it to the above address and I'll get it at base.

Cheers and good tramping,

GEORGE LOWE.

Written from Base Camp – 16,000 ft on Dakkhni Chamrao Glacier about five miles from Tibet: 1st July 1951. Given to a local coolie about 8th July and posted I don't know when.

Dear H.T.C.,

Today is a rest day and I have been wondering how the old club is functioning? Although I'm amongst the high hills, the thought of a good wood fire and the green trees of Kiwi still calls strongly. I'll never growl about Waikamaka again now that I've had to scour the moraine for old yak dung and a green fungus that grows high. No trees grow here and our eyes are starved of greenness – we gather our talk around the comparisons of Himalayan and home mountains, and even though we sit and look at Kamet 25,447 ft we still say ours are best! The mountains here are high, the magic figures of 20,000 ft plus are their only claim to pre-eminence; true they are massive but so is Cook; they have glaciers – but none as sweeping and snow fed as the Tasman, none as attractive or steep as the Franz, and none have the green of bush to add to their sameness. But it's hard not to be excited by their presence – here we are in a virgin valley. About 12 great peaks, four over 22,000, only one named – Mukut Parbat 23,760 ft – some of rock and some pure ice and all unclimbed.

Last week, 24th or 25th June, we reorganised our gear and rested in the Govt. bungalow in Badrinath. We packed up 50 days food and fuel and conferred over the map on how to approach Mukut Parbat. The map gave us two glacier approaches and we didn't know which to use. We required 20 coolies to move over 20, 60 lb. loads and we couldn't afford to pay them to carry up and down the glaciers as we decided on the better. The answer was a reconnaissance. Earle was sick with dysentery, and Young Ed stayed to organise the coolies and loads while Big Ed and I moved off on 27th with a coolie and a Sherpa carrying most of our gear.

Three miles above Badrinath a huge landslip of many years ago has blocked the valley to a depth of 1200ft and through the slip the Saraswati river has cut an amazing cleft about 4 or 5 yards wide. The volume of water, the spray, the roars and rumbles and the depth of the cut in solid rocks is amazing. We crossed the cleft on a rock that had fallen and lodged in the cleft – the water thundered about 800ft directly below us. We tramped up the Saraswati valley towards Mana Pass which leads to Tibet. The upper valley was open and shingly with pleasant mountain flowers among the rocks – we passed a Mana shepherd with his flock of goats and black horned sheep grazing the short grass – he whiled away the time tootling on a flute.

About 3pm we came in sight of a camping spot and what was on our map as a bridge. The bridge consisted of stone platforms on each side of the roaring torrent and the two poles that formed the bridge were lying on our bank dismantled because of the winter floods. We tried for two hours by fulcrums and balancing, pushing and shoving to push them across the 35ft and finally gave up and camped by a delightful lake. Next morning we contemplated fording higher where it broke into 6 streams but the boulders bumping along the bed and the icyness warned us

off. Big Ed and the Sherpa went downstream about 3 miles and found a bridge of old avalanche snow. They appeared later on the opposite bank and by rope throwing and pulling the poles into position we bridged the torrent. Our Mana lad – 20 years old – picked up his load and walked across the springy pole which was round and only 4 inches through – we straddled and moved more cautiously. Just above the bridge we saw two figures moving towards us. They wore skirts and drove a flock of healthy goats and sheep. They proved to be Tibetans, the first of the year over Mana Pass to trade their salt, borax, rugs and woollen goods for wheat flour, rice, dhal and potatoes, also metal goods in Mana village. They were the real Mongol type, tough and smiling, leather skirts, long knee length boots and embroidered blouses. After an avid conversation with our Sherpa and coolie they swept on down valley, their herd-bells tinkling. We turned up and climbed the Pamche Kamet Glacier and camped about 15,500ft.

Next day we left 6am and almost ran up the rough moraine trough and then climbed rapidly to a peak of 19,500ft from where we had a marvellous view of the valley head and peaks. Kamet was less than 1 mile across the valley and a terrific rock face; Mukut Parbat was next door and quite inaccessible from this angle. We glissaded and ran back to camp in 2 hours, packed our tent and dropped into the valley, 7000ft in all. We have acclimatised well, we climbed 4000ft and covered 6 miles of glacier in 4 hrs. with just as much horsepower as we use at home. Very satisfying to us. Now to explore the next glacier. The monsoon has arrived and the rain will hold us up I expect.

Regards to all.

George Lowe

Further News from the Himalayas

From Badrinath the party established a series of camps with the object of climbing Nilkanta, a 21,000ft peak near Kamet. After reaching a height of over 20,00ft, the party was forced to abandon the climb because of bad weather and much fresh snow.

They returned to Badrinath, re-organised, and set out for an attempt on Mukut Parbat, a peak of 23,760ft, in a little known, poorly mapped district.

Mukut Parbat – First Ascent

(Extracts from a letter written by George: July 14th 1951)

... On 9th July we rested at Camp II, and I told you of the recce and success in getting up the 2000ft. icefall. 10 July we carried our camp to an ice terrace at 21,000ft. and pitched our two tiny tents out of the wind in the shelter of an ice cliff. Only a few peaks in sight were above us as we went to bed. Our tents were pitched on snow with 2,760ft. of steep windswept ice ridge between us and the top.

Our beds consisted of a thin sleeping-bag cover on the waterproof tent floor, then a short neck-to-knee lilo air cushion (that leaks and lets you on to the cold snow). Over the lilo I spread pyjama trousers, spare shirt, scarf & parka. Next my two sleeping bags, one inside the other; pillow consists of boots, camera, gloves, wooly underpants, spare socks, wind jacket, and Archie's ex-army kit bag. Five of us (including Pasang our head Sherpa who wanted to try the climb) crushed into the two tents.

Awake at 5am, having slept in shorts and long gaberdine trousers with windproof trousers over that; woolly singlet, polo-neck jersey, thick shirt & balaclava to complete the ensemble. Breakfast on one primus took three hours. It consisted of a plate of porridge, sugar, & dried milk, followed by tea – which boils at about 160 deg. F. due to the height, consequently the tea is not good. A pot of snow – our only water – takes 1 ½ hours to make into water! The inside of the tent was covered with icicles of condensed breath; touching the sides brought a shower. My boots had a film of ice inside from the condensed air. We ate – not heartily – and booted up. We left

8.15am just as the sun hit the tents. The cold was bitter. We had everything covered except our faces and this was covered with beard, snowglasses and thick vaseline on my lips and under nose (but still they cracked and burnt in the wind).

Big Ed and I led off, cramponing over an ice bulge and on to the Tibetan Col – then up a very steep snow face, crossed a crevasse by a long step and a pull up on the axe, then on to the steep hard ice ridge into which only the points of our spikes bit. We cramponed and cut slowly for an hour, then stopped in the shelter of a rock to pull off our boots and massage our feet, which had frozen. Earle, Pasang and Young Ed came up and joined the rub which lasted half an hour. Earle asked if he could lead the climb and continued on up and over a prominent peak on the ridge – height about 22,500ft.

We followed slowly, having tried to take the odd photograph, but the focussing screw on my camera had frozen stiff and the wind shrieked and rocked us, and we couldn't remove our thick windproof gloves to press the release. We topped the peak, the rope between us billowing out over Tibet, to see Earle and the others in a little hollow cutting slowly away at some green hard ice. They turned this in ten minutes as we waited and gradually froze. Ahead was a steep rib of snow and ice that curled over in a cornice. The side we had to climb was sheathed in hard green ice. Big Ed and I reckoned it would take 3 or 4 hours to cut up this, and the chances of getting to the top were almost nil. Above this cornice was a blade-thin ice ridge and then a long level bit with a steep snow rib to the summit. At 12 noon and about 22,500ft. we turned down out of the cold wind and raced down to camp by 2 pm. At 2 pm we looked back and saw Earle, Pasang and Young Ed high above us but only 200ft further on after two hours' work. They decided to avoid the green ice by creeping up the airy crest of the snow rib. We saw them cross the cornice on the dangerous side (they didn't know they were on it), then they disappeared.

I spent the afternoon reading "Wuthering Heights" and Big Ed Shaw's play "Major Barbara". At 5 pm they were not in sight: at 6 pm they were still absent. The sun began its evening glide and we put down our books and began to worry. 7 pm and still no sign. A mist wrapped the tents for an hour and hoar frost and long icicles formed on the tent ropes. 7.30 pm left less than half an hour to dark and I thought they must have fallen off the mountain. I put on my storm clothes and cramponed alone onto the col, flashing a torch. Just as the dark presses in I saw the three of them come over and crampon down the 22,500ft lump at a great speed. They were too intent to see my light. In half an hour they were within shouting distance. "Are you all OK?" "Yes!" – a laconic reply. "Did you climb the bugger?" "Yes!" – another laconic reply. "Bloody good show!" replied the search party. They slid on their seats down the snow face to the col and sank in the snow and had their first drink for the day from the freezing water bottle at 8.30 pm. After a spell we trudged back to camp at 9 pm by the light of a half moon. I shouted news of safe and successful return to Big Ed who was working for their return over a fuming primus.

There was not much elation – only hollow exhaustion. The boys didn't object to my unstrapping their crampons and untying the rope and even taking off their boots. "What time did you get on top?" I asked. "Quarter to six!" said Earle. "Hell you took a risk", said I. "I reckoned we could get down in 2½ hours, and Pasang kept saying 'Top very little time, long way come', which indicated we'd have no strength for another attempt" said Earle. "The struggle became so intense that even 50 feet from the top we couldn't be sure we'd get there. Unfortunately we took no photographs on the ridge, but it was sensational. I took a few on top and we almost ran down thinking how fatal to be caught in the dark. We saw a very easy snow route on to Abi Gamen from a Tibetan glacier – I'd like to have a try at it!" (What enthusiasm!) "My God!" he continued, after half an hour in bed, "my toes are still frozen!"

About midnight Young Ed asked me to put drops in his eyes – he was snow-blind. We had a bottle of cocaine in castor oil with eye-dropper, and every three hours for that night and the next I forced watering, burning, swollen lids open and squeezed in the thick oily local anaesthetic. Soon after midnight Earle asked me to try to restore his feet. His toes were cold and

stiff. I rubbed and banged and worked for over an hour but the tips stayed dead. Today his feet are sore and slightly frostbitten, but I'm sure they'll recover.

On the 13th after three inches of snow in the night and in bitter mist and wind, Big Ed and I had a go for the summit. The rocks were covered in ice, the wind was worse than the 11th July and Big Ed suffered from altitude by feeling faint. We returned, packed up and staggered down to Camp II and then on to Camp I at 5.30 pm, quite exhausted by altitude living, heavy packs of 40lbs plus, the soft and sometimes thigh deep snow, and an adventure with two crevasses, into which I fell. The second held precariously just below the surface by the rope and my feet jammed against the far side with a black dripping abyss beneath me. And now safely and warmly nestled amongst the flowers and butterflies of Camp I we rest and eat.

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A very successful introduction to the Himalayas, they had climbed seven new peaks, and on their return to Ranikhet they received a cablegram inviting two of them to join Eric Shipton's reconnaissance expedition to the Nepalese side of Everest. This caused great excitement and after much debate it ended up being Hillary and Riddiford who were given the opportunity. With Pasang and Nyima they set off immediately, this expedition discovered the southern route up the Khumbu icefall. Ed Cotter and George Lowe returned to New Zealand, hugely envious of their friends.

Thanks to Ed Hillary, George's own opportunity came one year later when he was invited by Eric Shipton to join the British expedition to climb Cho Oyu (26,867 ft), the formidable next-door neighbour to Everest and the seventh highest peak in the world. They flew to India in March 1952 and spent sometime reconnoitring routes up this difficult mountain. They found a possible way up from the north-west side, but this brought them into Tibet where Chinese Communist troops had taken control. With a severely stretched supply chain George and Ed reached 22,500 feet but were turned back by some dangerous ice-cliffs. Shipton then decided the expedition should retreat from the mountain. Ed and George headed off independently with two Sherpas to attempt another peak of 22,600 feet. After a bitterly cold, hard struggle in frightening conditions they made the summit, which was a shrieking inferno of wind-whipped rock and ice. Very relieved they got back to camp to be administered hot drinks by their Sherpas.

They then descended and met up with Shipton who decided the party should split up into smaller groups and explore and climb where they willed. He suggested Ed and George might like to have a go at crossing for the first time a pass to the east of Cho Oyu called Nup La.

ACROSS THE NUP LA TO EVEREST - June 1952

Janet has asked me to write about this crossing of the Himalayan divide and of the visit to the historic camp sites (Base camps 1, 2 & 3) on the north side of Everest. It is unlikely that this side of the mountain will be visited again by British parties because of political changes in the control of Tibet.

The journey occupied about three weeks and followed immediately after the attempt on Cho Oyu (26,867 ft). It was accomplished by Ed Hillary of Auckland and myself, with three good Sherpas, Ang Puta, Tashi Puta and Angye. The experience remains, in our estimation, the most exciting, exacting and satisfying mountaineering that we have undertaken. Never do I expect to surpass it. The icefalls of the Nup La were immense – immeasurable. Six days were required to cover some four miles or less. The iceworld cut through, over and round, was quite

“out of this world” and the memory is still vivid of the flaming excitement that burned through us when we reached the top and looked into Tibet and the historic face of Everest. We spent six days on the north side covering many miles of glacier in extremely short time. All of us carried fifty pounds plus. The days were long and strenuous but very rewarding.

As before, I'll revert to a letter that I wrote during the crossing – it's rough, but the story is there:

West Rongbuk Glacier – Tibet,
2nd June 1952.

Dear Folks,

As I left Namche sixteen days ago I put these last three pages of pad in an envelope and decided to write the odd incident of this Nup La journey. At least it started out in a leisurely sort of way, but the tempo has increased until today when it has dropped to a solemn rather heavy largo – a largo feeling for Ed and me because of the storm that's about us – snow, wind and monsoon cloud, shortage of food and drink, and we're far from home on the Tibet side of the range with the difficult Nup La to recross to get to comfort and security.

This journey has been our greatest achievement to date and it is proving to be the most exciting and exacting exploration we have done. Even after the hard days we are doing there are nights when we toss sleepless because of the morrows exciting prospects and passes and the day's exciting finds and exploring: and too, there are others when we wonder how we're going to get back over the terrific crevasses of the Nup La and whether our food will last out – whether we'll be able to reach our Nup La icefall dump in time, and so on. In that way it's been easily the most exciting journey yet. And, too, we've been over half way round the great flank ridges of Everest and we'll have an almost unique set of colour slides that we are dying to see the results of.

Fifteen days ago we set out to try and cross the Nup La which would put us on the Tibetan glaciers of Everest. I wrote on the 24th from the icefall camp. On 25th May Ed and I tried to scale the cliffs to the left of the icefall and had some very exciting moments mostly in trying to get down without falling off, and later without being hit by flying boulders. On 26th May we tried a subsidiary icefall and after several hours we emerged through the broken ice overlooking Nup La. That was one of the most thrilling moments. We descended and on the 27th carried up kerosene and 80lbs. food and went to dump it on the Nup La when to our surprise and disgust we found that an unseen labyrinth of crevasses and an icefall was below us and between Nup La and us. It took us two days to cross this with loads and one section was particularly touchy with hidden mines, Ed fell down one until the rope held him 12ft down, out of which he cut his way.

On 29th we crossed the snow saddle – Nup La – 19,400ft, and set sail down the W. Rongbuk and so to Tibet. Everest was only six miles away and looked huge. We went down the Main Rongbuk, and here there are acres and acres of terrific ice pinnacles 300 and 400ft high. We had some fancy ice work cutting through these and lowering our three Sherpas down, but got through and entered the valley of the E. Rongbuk and passed the old Everest camps 1,2, and 3 up to 21,00ft We shot up the Changtse Glacier and camped under the North peak of Everest, 24,730ft (unclimbed), and the next day made an attempt and got to 22,000. There we were stopped by some dangerous slab snow and bad weather. We backed down from our rather cheeky attempt and the same day ran (literally) down the glacier and camped last night by a small tarn at the terminal of the Rongbuk. A few miles down valley in the beautiful colours of the barren Tibet side we could see the famous Rongbuk monastery, which excited our Sherpas considerably; but even though short of food we could not show ourselves as we are trespassing again.

Today the weather has been foul – snow and wind – and we fought our way against it up here to within a few hours of Nup La again. We have a dump of food (2 days) on Nup La which we hope will get us down the icefall and down the valley to a yak herd where we can get milk, curd and potatoes. If we get this we hope to head off with two or three days' food and cross a pass to the Khumbu glacier and explore the terrific S. faces of Everest that they saw last year. If this comes off we'll have been around more than half the great flanks of Everest and will have a unique set of colour slides – if they come out – and if the weather lifts for our fast reconnaissance of the S. face. It's a really big hill. Today we had a fleeting glimpse of the terrific N. face from five miles away and it was plastered last night with monsoon snow. The monsoon is now here with bad weather and treacherous snow conditions.

5th June

It's only a few days since I wrote the other pages, but our adventures were by no means finished. The following morning we planned to visit a 20,000ft snow col that was unmapped and unvisited. We thought it might take us into the Khumbu on the Nepal side, and thus quite a find. At 2 am. On the 3rd. I awoke frozen in my bag and put on down clothing and anything available. A damp penetrating cold of away below zero was about us. Everyone was affected. I crawled out and the peaks were clear, but a high ceiling of cloud cut out the stars and almost continuous lightning was flickering along the Nepal side of the range. At 3.30 Ed looked out and we decided to try and reach the unknown col, for although the difficulties and the altering shape of the Nup La icefall had us worrying, we were filled with the desire to explore.

About 4.30 it began to get light and Cho Oyu, Everest, Lhotse & Co. were tinged with yellow and then evil red with light hog's back clouds contouring over their summits. This is a bad sign. We waited and in a quarter of an hour the whole sky turned black and became a huge fast-moving snow cloud. We changed plans within seconds and shouted to the Sherpas, whipped down the tent, slammed everything into any pack and began to run – and running at 19,00 with a load isn't easy. We knew a monsoon snow storm was coming and to be caught on the Tibet side with only two or three days' food would have been rather grim. We had six miles to go over the Nup La to a two-day food dump on the Nup La. Ed and I did it in one hour 40 mins. And the Sherpas with 40-50lb. each in 2 hours.

The cold was really arctic and we arrived in complete down clothing and our beards were stiff with ice. We picked up the dump and decided to try and get down the icefall the same day. Left at 9 am. as the snow began, visibility nil. We roped, five of us on the two ropes, 200ft, Ed at the back to keep direction and me in front, not being able to see even our feet, whether they were going up hill or down. After twenty minutes we were to hit an ice gully under a huge rock and here I skirted along the edge with ice about 30 ft to my left. Snow masked a great frozen lake and I trod on the snow and went through the ice to my waist and was pulled out like a fish on the rope. My Feet froze but we cut through some ice ledges and headed across a crevasse plateau and just as things were grimmest we saw our "tuck rock" appear and after 1 ½ hours reached an old camp site. Ahead was a quarter mile of flat that was the most treacherous area of masked crevasses that we've ever been on. In N.Z., if the axe shaft goes down in snow full length on a snow bridge it's safe to say it will hold you-but not here. We got across this without anyone falling right through – and believe me the rope was tight between us. The Sherpas, who are usually casual and rather annoying with their rope habits, were super cautious. We knew what was coming next and wondered just what had happened to the two huge crevasses of over 100 ft wide which were ahead. They had had snow in the bottom six days before. The first seemed all right and Ed cut down the wall 50 ft and carefully sounded his way across a flake and cut up the other side. The Sherpas went very well even though the walls were so steep that their loads pushed them off balance. Ed belayed them from the lip and held them upright. The second was

my turn to cut and was much the same as Ed's except for a jump across to an ice knob at the bottom and a long ice traverse to get out. It took us 1 ¼ hrs. to do 300 ft in horizontal distance.

Snow was falling heavily. Six inches of new snow overlaid ice on the Nepal side now, and we started down the steep portions of the icefall. Our old icefall dump was only a mile away but we spent the next two hours cutting down walls and peering in the mist – at least Ed did, while I had tied on behind him to anchor him more safely on the steep bits. One ice ledge which the Sherpas hated on the way up had slipped and widened and Ed spent half an hour making a complete platform along it for the Sherpas to shuffle along. They did well, but it was punctuated by muttered “Bhote Kharak” (very bad). The snow lessened slightly and we could see a few hundred yards and we followed our old route down and under some cliffs. These cliffs were pouring powder snow avalanches on to big fans and we had to keep just beyond these. About 3 pm. and dog tired we got out of the labyrinth on to the lower ground and then on to a moraine wall and unroped. The real dangers were over: the Nup La icefall was behind and we were back in Nepal – but what a day! It finished an hour later when we camped in driving snow, heavier than ever. Ed had fallen in to his knees in a snow covered water hole and we were really frozen. We pitched the tent and crawled into wet bags but the Sherpas were cheerful and with their consideration and kindness they brewed soup and rice with curry while we lay exhausted, getting warm.

We were glad to be across safely, but were sorry to lose our unique chance of exploring an unknown bit near Everest. There was no insomnia that that night and we woke to a perfect morning, snow everywhere. We dried out the wet socks, gloves, bags, scarves, boots etc. and 20 minutes took us to our icefall food dump. A green bag contained some mail brought up the day before by a local man. The same day we pushed off down the glacier to a small lake and some grass and flowers and camped. We sent the Sherpas down to the yak herd and they have just come back with 40lb. spuds, some yak milk, but no curds, which are really delicious mixed with tsampa (ground cooked maize) and sugar. Our main diet at present however, is rice and potatoes. I haven't eaten a green veg. since leaving N.Z., we're fit as hell.

This morning I got out at 3 am. and it was such a perfect morning I climbed 19,000ft peak and got the best view of mountains that I've ever seen. Wait until you see the photographs. Ed went up later and he agrees with me. Tomorrow we will set out for Khumbu pass and then to Namche where I hope to post this about 12th June.

That's about all – except for a crossing of a 20,000ft pass to the Khumbu valley and a flying visit to see the famous icefall where it cascades down between the confining jaws of the Western Cwm (pronounced COOM – ‘oom,’ as in room). During the climbing of rocks on the pass the Sherpas found a piece of hair and skin which they proclaimed to be of the “yeti” – the snowman. It is unfortunate that we did not secure this and return with it to confound the sceptics and the experts.

The day following our visit to the Khumbu icefall we hurried down the valley, met Shipton and without pause set out on the Barun exploration, which was recounted in the last “Pohokura”.

George Lowe

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EXPLORATION IN NEPAL.
THE BARUN GLACIER AND THE ARUN RIVER

The following is an extract from one of George Lowe's letters, dated July 7th, 1952.

We've been exploring again and as I never returned to Namche first, I set off with Eric, Charles Evans and Ed on this last journey in what I stood up in plus only a sleeping-bag, lilo, down jacket and a few exposures in my camera. In fact I set off with less than I would have for a weekend tramp to Kiwi Hut.

It happened like this: after the descent from Nup La we crossed a high pass to the Khumbu by the Swiss base camp, a mile or so from the W. Cwm icefall (we missed the Swiss by a few hours as they evacuated that morning), then after a quick journey to the foot of the famous icefall we started down the Khumbu on the two-day journey to Namche where we dreamed of a long rest and some fresh food. My trousers were just able to cling on with me cutting new holes in the belt, I had become so skinny. We talked about eggs, big chunks of meat and even gleaming bowls of rice were high on the list.

The Khumbu is an attractive valley and we spun along rapidly, stopped for a drink of Yak milk at the first herd, then buzzed on and in the afternoon we dropped into the trees and greenery and stopped for the night with only a few hours of walking to reach Namche. We had just settled in when Eric walked in on our camp with two Sherpas carrying his kit and twenty-four days food and asked us to join him in exploring the Barun and then following the river to the huge Arun river and so down by a new route to the Nepal border and out. He told us that all the others had left Namche and were trekking to Katmandu. We accepted Eric's plan as this was a very special exploration which Ed and I had hoped to do this year. So cutting adrift any wishes for omelets, potatoes, milk and fresh greens, we hitched our belts, filled our bellies on a brew of Tsampa tea and set off up valley to cross high passes over the S. and E. flanking ridges of Everest and so get into the Barun Glacier – an unexplored ice stream between Everest and Makalu (27,790ft and fourth highest in the world). Makalu has never been approached before and reaching the head of the Barun and looking into Tibet from there would, for us, complete a circuit of Everest over its highest passes. To cover this in colour and do it all within six weeks appealed to Ed and me – it seemed we were getting all the cream of the exploration and we liked it.

On 10th June we headed up a side valley from Khumbu and went along a valley under the five-mile wall of rock between Lhotse (27,890ft) and Nuptse (25,700ft) which nowhere drops below 25,000 ft. It's just a sheer black and grey wall, too steep to hold any snow, and it extends up to where a ridge runs south off Lhotse. We hoped to be able to climb direct into the Barun, but found no feasible place. On 12th June we climbed the ridge further S. and looked into the Hongu valley, which is unexplored, and got ourselves and our loads down and camped by a huge glacial lake (about 500 acres).

The crossing was fun – we had to double pack 70lb loads over 19,400ft. We took a dump of food up on the 12th to within 400ft at the foot of a rock wall. Next day we carried up the rest and then Ed and I tried the walls. Ed got up a long ledge and we pulled up the loads and people and reached the top at noon. The Hongu side was even steeper and covered with broken glacier. We fixed a hand-rail rope and cut steps into an ice chute and by cutting platforms and me sliding gingerly down a 100ft at a time on crampons we lowered everything in four relays to an avalanche fan and then fixed it in big bundles and towed it down to the rocks. Then with everyone carrying 140lb each we staggered to the lake and camped. Here we met Charles Evans who with two Sherpas had come into the Hongu to meet us and join the Barun exploration. With his carrying power added we were slightly more mobile and next day (14th) crossed the Hongu

Glacier and up 800ft of steep loose rock to a saddle which we thought would put us in the Barun – but we walked out onto a huge snow plateau at 20,500ft, ringed by attractive snow peaks. On the 15th the four of us climbed one of those peaks and by altimeter it was 22,560ft. We took compass bearings and fixed our position and could see the head snowfields of the Barun and the point we hoped to reach. We saw that if we crossed the plateau (5-6 miles) we might be able to find a pass and drop down to the Barun.

Next day we crossed and climbed a difficult ice-fluted peak (21,800ft) and saw a gap that was possible. We descended and lowered the gear and Sherpas down a rock wall and got down a difficult 1,000ft, then descended a steep tributary glacier and on to the rough and tumble Barun ice stream, at about 17,000ft. This was a strenuous day. We were now right under Makalu and feeling very pleased with ourselves. The monsoon was building up and every afternoon the wet clouds crawled up the valleys from India and Nepal and it snowed at night. We had one classic thunderstorm with lightning, which made any other thunder-and-lightning display that I've experienced look mild. I couldn't stop thinking, as I lay being dripped upon, that I was glad there were no bigger mountains in the world if it meant bigger thunderstorms!

Next day we set out for the head of the glacier. The rough travelling over moraine, ice gullies, rivers on the ice and pinnacles, together with Eric's being sick made that day tedious in the extreme. Cloud closed in early and we camped near the head not knowing where we were exactly. Next morning the fog cleared for only an hour and we took bearings and headed on to the ice by a fantastic route through pinnacles and lakes in the ice and up and up in the mist to the saddle at over 20,000ft. It began to snow and we didn't get our view. The saddle was hard, hard ice, too slippery and gluey to pitch camp and we descended to a safe avalanche-free point and pitched camp there. Then it snowed and snowed and snowed. The snow was soggy and wet and leaked through the tent.

Next day we retreated, wading in knee-deep, new snow, falling in up to the shoulders in masked crevasses and generally having a bleak retreat. The monsoon was really on us and we got out and down to grass level and then hitched our belts, very seriously this time, because we were going to try to follow the Barun Glacier and river to its junction with the Arun River, 17 miles away. We were at 18,000 ft. and the junction was at 4,000ft., and we guessed with that fall there would be gorges galore and formidable jungle. But this sort of thing is bread and meat to Eric who thinks that this way of finishing a trip, by exploring to the very end, is the choicest delight, with the greatest savour and spice; so we set off with nine days' food still left.

Although in rain the terrain was easy - grassy, lateral moraine walls, and we covered many miles. We forded the Barun river a mile below the terminal – and it was cold! (The first wash my feet had had in two months). Late that day we had paused for a spell when Eric and Ed both said together, "Look! There's a man!" To us alone in that lonely valley this was arresting and I was about to rush off shouting to attract him because we wanted information. If there were people, then there would be tracks and yaks, and yaks meant milk and dai (curds). But Eric stopped me and told us to hide! Then he explained how a similar situation had occurred with him in the Karakoram and how on approaching the men, they, taking them for wild snowmen, had run away. So there we were, within a quarter-mile of people who – as we could see through Charles's monocular – were putting up a shelter for themselves while the flocks grazed the new grass and we dared not approach them openly. As Eric pointed out, if we ambled down a valley from the snow towards them, who knew that nothing ever lived up there, they would naturally take fright. The Sherpas caught us up and we told them to go ahead cautiously out of sight and interrogate. By the way, we were out of Sherpa country among Nepali herders and we didn't talk the lingo. The Sherpas set off and when half way one of them couldn't resist the temptation and for the fun of it shouted luridly and showed himself. The result was funny. We saw them stop

then, startled, they lit out, first to try and cross the river, and failing, then down valley with the most obvious signs of panic and desperation. Eric said, "Let's catch them or they'll alarm the whole valley population who'll hide and we'll get no information or food." He and I dropped packs and set off to cut them off, but we never stood the slightest chance against them, barefoot and filled with mortal fear of the Yetis after them. We couldn't help seeing the funny side of it, as well as the serious (for us), and roared with laughter with the Sherpas.

We followed their tracks which led into a gorge where the river boiled against rock walls. We climbed high over the top and lost them. We went on down and then saw a lone figure with a load of firewood. We hid and unloading one Sherpa we sent him off alone to scout around and go past the figure and approach him from down valley, so that if he ran we could trap him - very cunning. Ila, the Sherpa, crept up to within a few yards and called out in Nepali and managed to greet him without his taking off. He called us from hiding and we talked to him about tracks, bought some curds and ate it on the spot like wild men, and with his instructions we went on and camped near the first stone hut of a yak herder amongst the most beautiful natural flower garden. The hillsides for acres were covered with azalea bushes which were in glorious full flower. I hope the pictures come out. We bought a sheep - an old ram was all they'd sell us - I killed it with a kukri and skinned it with a blunt pocket knife and we cooked and ate all the back legs and one side of ribs, just the four of us.

Well I can't tell in detail the whole trip but there were incidents galore. Next day we found the blue mountain poppy again, some wild onions and wild rhubarb which we scoffed raw! The descent of the upper Barun gorges was easy with a rough shepherd's track, marvellously scenic, like the Hollyford country down south. Then into the lower Barun gorges - boulders and conglomerate slides, a roaring mad, dirty unfordable river and eerie Scotch mist for two days, with wet camps and mosquitoes. Then foiled in getting down river all the way we had to climb from 7,000ft. through evil rhododendrons and leech-infested jungle, the sort with exotic wax flowers and huge black or navy blue lilies with evil smells and cruel-looking leaves, huge forest trees and wet, rocky stream-beds as the route through. This was arduous plus, and the leeches in our boots and down our necks didn't help either.

Up we went for two days and over a gap about 14,000ft. to a high lake surrounded by rhododendrons in bloom and acres of primulas of every colour. This garden of wild flowers is the most impressive that I've ever seen. This part of the journey in contrast with the snow and ice and the evil cloying growth in the jungle, the clear lakes and fresh flower gardens, was one of the grandest experiences of the exploration. From there we reached the Arun by descending a long hummocky ridge on a rough track. Back to huts and fields of corn, young rice and pumpkins just coming through. At 4,000ft. by the mighty Arun it was hot and we felt the rapid change rather sad. We bought some young maize cobs and had twelve each! Then eighteen eggs and made them all into a glorious omelette and scoffed it. We stayed the night in a village and slept outside the houses in the open, to avoid the fleas. We bought a chook and a pumpkin and some hard beans and ate again. The sleep outside was just in underpants and singlet (that's how I travelled out in the heat, usually minus both later with a loin cloth fashioned from my dilapidated silk scarf) - and the fleas came out and chewed us; lice from the fowls got into our undies and we couldn't get rid of them until I burnt them the other day, and mosquitoes enjoyed the suck of blood with a super high haemoglobin content. On awaking Ed recoiled at the sight of a leech gorged with blood and about three inches long and as round as a forefinger lolling too full to move near his head. His hair was matted with blood where the foul thing had attached itself full all night.

Next day we had to cross the main Arun by a rope bridge and so get on to a coolie route with good tracks available. The bridge was upstream and we set off through fields with leeches

on every stalk of grass and bush – all reaching and wiggling to feel for us. A side river had been washed out and the bridge gone with overnight rain and we spent four hours cutting saplings and bridging this across a rock defile like a smaller edition of the Huka falls. Once across the crazy bridge it had the added charm and excitement of a fancy rock climb that could only be done with bare feet, the big toe in a tiny hole and whatnot. An afternoon of heat and climbing in which one of the Sherpas, an old creek with staring eyes and a constipated walk, found the going so hot and his load so heavy (about 35lbs. At this stage) that he collapsed and went delirious. We took his load and revived him, and when he could stumble along he walked off the track, so the other Sherpas tied a string around his neck and led him like a dog, tugging him back when he flopped off the track and laughing like hell at him.

We reached the rope bridge across the Arun at 6.30, all tired, hungry and sweaty. The river was 300 yds. Wide, turbulent, dirty and very impressive – but not half as spectacular as the rope bridge across. A crazy swing of three ropes v-fashion high above the water and laced occasionally with struts of flax rope from the hand rails to the foot rope. The method of crossing was to walk the tight-rope barefoot and steady yourself with the two hand-rail ropes. Wow! Is it sensational! Once you get the hang of it it's easy, but with the river roaring along underneath and the whole structure waving with your movement it's very hard not to decide that the river is standing still while the bridge is moving away at a swirling eight knots. The Sherpas nearly died of fear and some locals carried their loads across while Ed and I tied up the delirious old man. He was dribbling and blubbing and saying prayers and shutting his eyes all the way over and we just managed to hold him up when he trod on space. He would groan. We carried him mostly, he being roped in slings and only a foot in front of me and a foot behind me. I think he was so miserable that falling off would have been a pleasurable escape from it all. With a good night's sleep and an extra ration of food and no load he revived and completed the whole journey out.

And so once across the Arun we marched for seven days, starting at 4am and going until 10 or 11am and then in the cool evening 5-7pm and doing ten to fourteen miles each day, we came out to Dhankuta, then Dharan where we got onto a jeep – all of us – and ploughed through thirty miles of mud track. This thirty miles took 9 ½ hours of steady pushing and riding, to Jogbani on the Indian border. We took a train for 24 hours to Raxaul (the train broke a piston drive shaft and we baked on the plains for 5 ½ hours before a relief engine towed us away). From Raxaul it was two days journey by train, truck and walk to Katmandu, the capital. And now I've been here for a day at the Embassy living luxuriously, eating, sleeping, and drinking cocktails (last night) with the advisor to the King of Nepal.

In October 1952 it was announced that Eric Shipton was not going to lead the 1953 Everest Expedition, but instead the Himalayan Joint Committee had appointed John Hunt. Fortunately he selected Ed Hillary and George Lowe, summarising George as follows:

George Lowe – Tall, well-built, aged 28, a teacher at Hastings, New Zealand. Introduced Hillary to some of the high standard climbs in New Zealand mountains. Lowe was another of Shipton's strong team on Cho Oyu; his ice technique is of very high standard.

LETTERS FROM NEPAL. 1953

The following are extracts from some of George Lowe's letters:-

20th February. TAJ MAHAL HOTEL, BOMBAY.

Yesterday morning I stepped ashore at Bombay and work began. The Taj Mahal Hotel is the largest and best known in Bombay, a huge place with a thousand servants and great gardens. I have a "room" at 36 rupees a day (approx. 3 pound) with all meals. The room consists of a shower, conveniences, bathroom, writing room with two lounge chairs and a fan, a bedroom with twin beds built-in, lighting, electric clock, another fan and marble inlaid floor. I'm fit and well, looking forward to seeing the other boys.

24th February.

Phew it's hot, at least it was, but I have my tie off and am writing this in an air conditioned office in Bombay. The Himalayan Club secretary here is a big business man and he has looked after me with free use of his home, car and chauffeur, his clubs and meals, his office and its facilities and his knowledge of the influential people of Bombay; and, too, I have been included in tennis parties and dinner parties. All in all he has been a heaven-sent aid in a hell hole of heat and government red tape. I am fit and well, eating ravenously and despite heat and flies and office work I am becoming fitter and fitter. There have been many more things to attend to now that I have been in Bombay for a few days and the most tedious are the cancellations of the air bookings and re-bookings of fresh ones, adding 20 gallons of kerosene to the lot which has already gone forward (there are no suitable jerry cans in Bombay). The packing of the wireless gear, walkie-talkie sets and receiver sets is quite fun; all have to be tested. The customs officers have to be seen regularly and we are arguing about the expedition food. They claim that we should pay customs duty on that food which is consumed in India. We argue that the food will be consumed in Nepal, separate country, and they cannot charge customs on that. It will take a day or two to clear this up. The railways will not so far attach a special waggon carrying out 8-tons of equipment on to the fast express by which intend travelling from Bombay. We think the chance of theft and pilfering is too high to risk having it sent by goods train. This argument will take a few days and may not be settled completely to our advantage.

27th February. NEW DELHI – INDIA

I am having a very memorable time in India – in fact a more wonderful and eventful trip than I have ever had previously. I didn't think that I would enjoy the time in Bombay so much. Actually I am now in Poona in Professor G.I. Finch's spacious fan-cooled office. The temperature is 99 deg. F. today, calm and clear with air like a furnace outside. My lips and face are dry and a bit sore from the change to such dry evaporating heat.

Yesterday afternoon I came up to Poona, 2,000ft. and 150 miles inland on a table-land with the jagged teeth of the Western Ghats - a range of hills – showing along the horizon. At 5.10pm. I stepped aboard the "Deccan Queen", a fast electric train to Poona and we streaked out of Bombay, whistling and whizzing through the suburban stations and quite exciting speeds. The sun sets early here at present and we slammed across the coastal plain as the sun went down behind the hills. It was hot, searing hot, the wind was like a flame-thrower through the window – I think that's how my lips and skin became so dry and sore. With only two stops and a steep climb up the Western Ghats travelling still at a high rate – we skidded to a halt in Poona after 2 ½ hours. The Professor and his wife met me at the station and whisked me off in the Zephyr Six to a dinner with two doctors and two brigadiers. Professor Finch is the director of National Chemical Laboratories – a huge central building with a whole colony of houses round about.

Friday 27th. BOMBAY.

Life moves rapidly. I talked all afternoon with Finch mostly about oxygen and discussed with him the physiology of high altitude – he is lecturing to some people this evening with slides. I am going along and then joining him for dinner. In Poona for two hours we met the director of meteorology for India and discussed and fixed with his department an arrangement to have the weather forecast broadcast to us over All India radio and the BBC (Short wave) at 13.50 hours GMT. This will be a special service for us during May and the first week of June. They are to give the wind velocities in the altitudes of 25,000 to 30,000 ft and the warning of the approach of the real monsoon and the westerly disturbances (the “little monsoon”) which occur before the main onset. We intend to climb on during the westerly disturbances but retreat smartly when the real monsoon begins. They guarantee to give us 4 days’ notice.

The Secretary of the English alpine club arrived in Poona – Basil Goodfellow is his name (and the name is very appropriate) – and with he and Finch talking I learned a lot. The oxygen equipment this year is of three types. The main standby consists of a 10lb cylinder of oxygen with a valve and flow control and a rubber tube going straight into the mouth and held by the teeth. The climber trains himself to breathe in normally while the tube allows a 3 litre per minute (or more) flow into the lungs to augment the rarified air. In breathing out the user bites the tube and conserves the flow. The supply lasts approximately 4 hours at 3 litres per minute and the whole thing is then discarded and a new bottle picked up. As far as possible dumps will be made. This simple type is what Finch thinks is “the goods”. His theory is the simpler the better. With augmented breathing apparatus he claims we’ll breathe less rapidly and move more quickly. Weight, claustrophobia, irritation due to pure oxygen will be avoided and the chance of break down in supply is very slight. He is surprised that this method has not been tried since his experiment in 1922. (He reached 27,300 ft by this method in 1922 – on Everest.)

9th March. Katmandu. (British Embassy)

Returning to Nepal was not without its pleasure. I got a certain kick out of crossing the border into this place again. The baggage came in over the mountains on the famous aerial ropeway. This is about twenty miles long and loops across deep valleys over 2,000 feet above the valley-floor. It must be 1½ miles between the pylons on the longest stretch. Everything seems to have arrived intact so one of the major tasks of the expedition has been accomplished.

Yesterday I got my first view of the snows. We crossed a little pass on the walk in – the valleys are full of green spring growth – and then Michael and I spotted simultaneously the peaks; incredibly high and blurred by haze away behind. The outline of these Nepal peaks is quite fantastic. There are no rounded mountains here. They jut and sweep up with quite exciting angles – always fluted with ice channels and looking from the distance quite impossible. It is a thrill to look at these hills. If I came twenty times I would still get a kick out of the looking.



Evans, Lowe and Hillary, three experienced Himalayan travellers, used umbrellas to shield the sun and deflect the monsoon rain.

12th March. ON THE MARCH.

It's dark now, the sun sets early here now, about 6.15 pm and I'm holding a torch in one hand as it's too early to go to sleep and the kerosene light is too weak to read by. We had completed the third day's march by 1 pm today and I have been sunbathing, sleeping and catching butterflies since then. Last night we camped on the river bed of the Sun Kosi river. It's winter here and the water is icy cold. The night is perfectly clear. I slept on my eiderdown bag as the night was warm. At 5 am we got up and after a mug of tea set out at dawn – 6 am. Today we climbed out of the steep Sun Kosi valley up to 7,000ft and now we are camped high above the valleys and it's only two minutes walk to a great view of the high peaks (we've identified Karyolung, Numbur and Gauri Sankar). On the way up the ridge we had several wonderful views all down the valley. There were flowering peaches and perhaps some flowering almonds and just a few Rhododendrons. In Katmandu we were issued with and fitted with our oxygen masks and urged to wear them on the march in. I put mine on today during the steep uphill and found that when I was hurrying and breathing really hard I forgot that it was on my face and nose. It's an ugly looking thing – a big rubber mask covering the mouth nose and chin. To keep the fitting tight it is necessary to shave, which may cause some bother later with sunburn and even cold. This evening three of us went for a stroll and looked at the cloud rolling over the range. Later John Hunt and Mike Westmacott came up with butterfly nets and began chasing butterflies, they are collecting specimens for the British Museum. It was fun watching them stalking up to a shrub

with a net poised, it seemed incongruous that these hardy mountaineers should be such crackpot looking butterfly catchers. Later on we joined in the game and found that the hunt was really good fun. We caught some big jet black beauties and some smaller yellow ones. John Hunt seems to know something of the different varieties and he has a collection of his own in England.

At sunset the clouds over the peaks rolled away and we all ran up to see the peaks turn gold in the setting sun. We ate curried rice, cauliflower, peas and tinned steak in the big communal tent and now that it's dark I am writing this. Most of the boys have taken their lilos and sleeping bags outside and a group of them are identifying stars and planets, George Band seems to be the expert on names and settings.

15th March.

By the time you get this I expect we will be up at Thyang Boche our first base camp. We expect to be there on the 27th or 28th March. After two days there we are breaking into sets of four men each and going off to climb and practice with our oxygen equipment for eight or ten days and then return to discuss the results and split up and climb with others practicing with oxygen for another ten days. So I expect it will be some time before you hear reports of us attempting Everest. That won't be until after the middle of May. With this oxygen equipment we have optimistic hopes of success.

I guess that's all for now. It has been suggested that the expedition address be altered to:
British Everest Expedition,
C/o British Embassy,
Katmandu, Nepal.

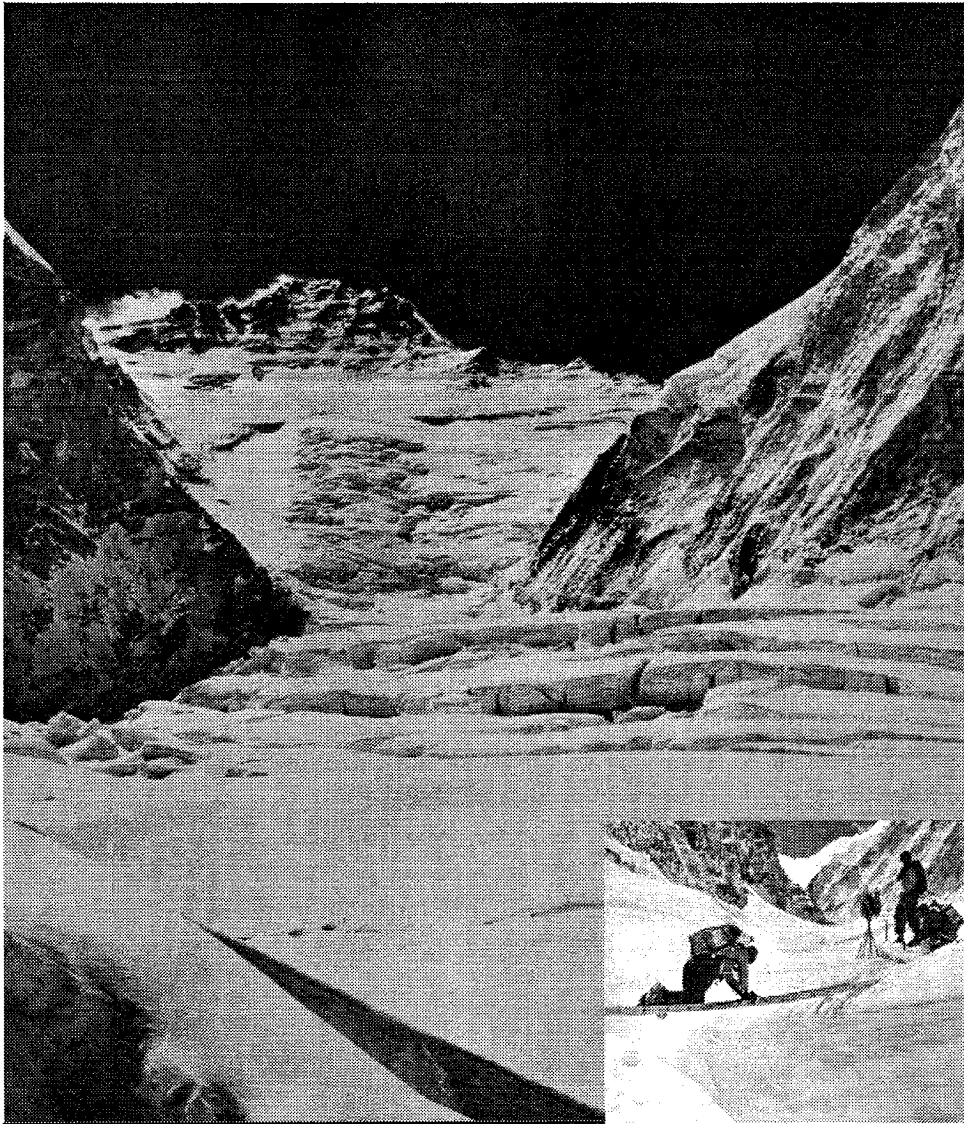
Which I am sure will be faster and more efficient than New Delhi. I am looking forward to the next mail delivery which won't be for another two or three weeks. Kindest regards to the people of H.T.C. and all the other interested folks.

GEORGE LOWE.

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The club continued to receive letters from George as the expedition progressed, these were read out at club meetings to an enthralled audience.

The expedition established base camp on April 12 and then attacked the very dangerous Khumbu icefall. Lowe and Hillary were at the front of the attack. By early May they had a route through to the upper Western Cwm. The Lhotse Face towered above them, rising steeply over a vertical distance of 4,000 feet to the South Col at 26,000 feet. John Hunt gave the task of preparing a route up this face to George Lowe. He later wrote, "During those eleven days, George, supported at intervals by others, had put up a performance which will go down in the annals of mountaineering as an epic achievement of tenacity and skill." On May 21st the South Col was reached, and a huge effort was put in by the Sherpas to stock it, nineteen of them went to the South Col, six of them twice, lifting 750 lb. of supplies.



The Lhotse Face from the Western Cwm

Crossing crevasses

Letter from Base Camp. 1st June 1953

...At present don't imagine our band of thirteen rolling and rollicking in an ecstasy brought on by victory. If you were at base camp now you would see nine sahibs and about fifteen Sherpas lying listlessly around the tents with bloodshot and glazed eyes, thin, dirty and bewildered. Ed now is sleeping as he has done for hours and hours, Charles is just smoking and tired; the talk is desultory and dull; everyone is quite played out. Five of the other lads will be descending tomorrow from camp III and they too will come in stiff-legged and flogged after the last two weeks.

Two days ago we were on the South Col urging ourselves to the limit-and now like pricked balloons all our reserves have gone. Yesterday we came down to base camp. Ed, Charles Evans and I were together on one rope and it took hours. I have never been so tired, nor had Ed. Now, if you could see us, you would see the most beaten, played out, lustreless team of climbers that it is possible to imagine.

When the great lift reached the South Col on the 22nd May, John Hunt decided to launch the Assault Plan and accordingly the closed circuit boys went into action. Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans set off on afternoon of the 22nd with all their bedding tied around their closed circuit apparatus, with spare soda lime canisters and spanners poking out - in all 50lbs. John Hunt went with them on open circuit as support and possible

emergency. Two Sherpas also went (Da Namgyal and Balu, who had been specially chosen) to carry a tent and oxygen above the South Col as a possible emergency ration and shelter in the case of a late descent by Tom and Charles. In the event of this tent and oxygen not being used it was to be added too by the second assault party (Ed and Tenzing) backed by Gregory and three special Sherpas, who would establish Ridge Camp – Camp IX.

It was at this stage that I came into the story. The original plan did not include me but I was very keen to get to the South Col. Because of Ed and Tenzing's trip to the South Col with the first Sherpa lift and their consequent tiredness, they decided to wait a day longer than originally planned. Then it was discovered, mostly by my propaganda, that a little more food and oxygen would be advisable. Accordingly I was commissioned to escort five Sherpas to South Col along with Gregory and his three special Ridge Camp boys to back up Ed and Tenzing. I spent all 23rd May frantically trying to fix a leak in the oxygen set I was to use. Finally by cutting and binding one of the rubber feed pipes I stopped the hiss. Tom, Charles and John climbed to Camp VII on the 23rd.

24th May. Tom, Charles and John with their two Sherpas crept above Camp VII and worked slowly to the South Col. We watched them through glasses; they were slow, seven hours, and arrived late and very tired. We packed up and Greg and I with our Sherpas left for Camp V, where we spent the night (a cold night – our thermometer read minus 27 deg centigrade at 5 am).

25th May. Tom and Charles were time to make an attempt on the South Peak – and summit if possible, using closed circuit. Due to the weather (wind) and their tired condition from previous day they stayed on South Col. Greg and I left for VI using oxygen (2 litres per minute). We made good time, and at VI I changed to 4 litres and we headed up on the Lhotse Face for VII. You will remember that the climb from V to VII is up the difficult Lhotse Face on which nearly a thousand feet of rope is fixed. Above VI I began to falter. I began to worry and think I was failing – but it turned out to be a defect in my oxygen set which was cutting right out and the mask was stopping even the outside air getting in. The trip to VII, for me, was hell, and I collapsed on the snow there and took a couple of hours to recover. At VII I was able to trace the trouble and the set behaved beautifully the next day. Ed and Tenzing came right through to VII from IV that day and arrived fresh and fit.

Although Everest was blowing a cloud plume on these days the weather was very settled and the weather report (from Indian radio) gave us: 'Warm temperatures, winds 15 to 20 knots and settled weather. Monsoon still only in the Andaman Sea.' Camp VII (24,000 feet approximately) was calm that night (temp. -28 deg centigrade).

26th May. We left VII at 8.45 am and had wonderful conditions for our climb to South Col. I filmed much of the climb and felt really wonderful. The climb starts near the top of the Lhotse Face glacier and for perhaps a thousand feet is a steady crampon climb up crevassed slopes and then swings left to traverse above rock bands and goes diagonally and up the great snow slopes towards the col. The South Col is not reached direct. The rock buttress of 'Eperon de Genevois' stops this and our route connected with the very top of the Eperon over which we climbed and dropped several hundred feet into the South Col (25,850 feet).

About 1pm on 26th we began traversing rock and snow on the top of the Eperon. The South Peak of Everest was in view (the South Peak is a beautiful snow peak and sweeps up looking incredibly steep) and on the final slope I saw two dots, like flies on a wall, about two hundred feet below the cornice on the top. We went mad with excitement as we watched Tom and Charles go steadily up and over the South Summit (28,720 feet) and, we thought, off for the main summit. They were higher than anyone had ever been before and were apparently going at a very fast rate. They had climbed from the South Col that morning and reached the South Summit in 5½ hours. John too had set out with

Da Namgyl (both on open circuit) ahead of Tom and Charles to carry ridge camp, but with closed circuit they easily overtook him and far outclassed the open circuit at the highest altitudes. Balu, the other Sherpa had not gone above South Col.

Greg and I were so excited at seeing Tom and Charles that we ran down into the Col Camp to shout the news to Ed and Tenzing. Ed came out of the dome tent with a great whoop and then dived back again. Tenzing, we were hurt to find lost his smile and did not share our enthusiasm. The idea of team effort had not been revealed to him, and the idea that anybody but Tenzing should reach the summit was not pleasurable to him.

Ed's disappearance into the dome I thought strange, and I pushed my way in to find John lying quite exhausted with Ed plying drinks and oxygen. Ed and Tenzing had arrived on the Col before us and Ed saw John returning with Da Namgyl from his ridge carry. John and Da Namgyl had carried to 27,350 feet, and were returning completely done in. John was staggering and crumpling and staggering on again, when Ed rushed off to help him. Ed assisted him on his shoulder and slapped his oxygen mask on him for a good half hour (John's oxygen had run out at 27,350 and he came down without). Da Namgyl's hands were frost bitten and he was very tired.

John certainly earned our admiration – he's got tremendous guts and this day he pushed himself to the absolute limit – but this was typical of him all through.

There were three tents on South Col; a pyramid, a dome and a Meade. They respectively housed four, two and two. The pyramid had previously been used by Sherpas and was in a disgraceful condition. The floor was in shreds and parting at the stitching at the seams. The windward side had a four inch tear which later caused great inconvenience by admitting drifting snow and cold wind. The rope guys were far too tight and in the tremendous and ceaseless buffeting on the Col they were fraying and broken when we arrived. Ed and I went out in the afternoon into a freezing, roaring wind and began to repair the tent. We found a pile of strong Swiss line and began replacing all the guys and placing rocks around the worst tears in the floor to protect it from the plucking of the wind.

During this time the South Summit became enveloped in cloud and we began to worry about Tom and Charles. We knew, as they knew, that if their closed circuit sets failed in any way (and they had many gadgets, valves, tubes and canisters susceptible to error) they would not come back. Tom was an exceedingly determined thruster and we felt his enthusiasm could overcome good sense-but Ed remarked "Charles is pretty sensible-I think he'll balance Tom".

About this time the three Sherpas who had been chosen to carry with Greg to the Ridge Camp arrived on the Col from camp VII. They had set out with us and gone slowly and badly. This was disturbing as we had placed high hopes on them. They were Ang Temba, Pemba and Ang Nima. Ang Temba we thought the best and were amazed to find that when he dumped his load (30 lbs) outside the tent he keeled over and for ten minutes was out cold. Pemba was very tired, while Ang Nima was quite fresh and unaffected by the altitude.

John by this time had recovered and was fretting about for Tom and Charles. He kept peering up the ridge looking for their return. The afternoon passed and we all became more and more worried. As we fixed the last ropes I saw some moving dots at the head of the couloir by which they had reached the ridge. I watched until in shifting mist I was certain and shouted the news. Our relief was tremendous.

Their descent of the couloir was frightening to watch. Dog tired, they started down one at a time, each anchoring the other and each falling off as they tried to kick down hill. They slide and fell, their rope length each just managing to hold the other. As Tom said, "we yo-yo'd our way down – it was quite fun!"

Ed and I went out to meet them and I filmed their arrival. They were still wearing and using their closed circuit, and apart from the masks which covered nose, mouth and

chin they were covered in icicles. Ice driblets from the mask outlet had stuck to their windproofs and they were panting and labouring just to move along the flat.

They had not gone far beyond the South Summit – a few yards only – their soda-lime canisters did not leave them with enough time in hand to risk going on. The summit ridge seemed long (Tom judged two or three hours and Charles thought four or more), it was corniced and had a difficult vertical rock step in it. Tom took eighteen photographs and they turned down. Just below the South Summit they jettisoned two oxygen bottles, having enough left to get to South Col. These bottles were a vital help in getting Ed and Tenzing to the top two days later.

That night Ed, Tenzing, Greg and I slept in the pyramid, while Ang Temba, Pemba and Ang Nima passed the night in the even smaller dome. That night for everyone was pure misery. The wind slammed over the Col and worried the tents, whining, roaring and snapping incessantly. It became the curse of the Col, sapping our tempers and eating indelibly into our memories. We will never forget the South Col. We all spent there the most miserable days and nights of our lives.

The temperature dropped until we were all cold even though fully dressed (we wore our high-altitude boots in the sleeping bag too stop them freezing) with full down clothing and our warm sleeping bags. I have never been so miserable with freezing feet (they were lightly frost-bitten – getting better now), cold knees and back which was rammed hard against the windward side of the tent. My pillow was a kit bag full of frozen snow – hard, cold, and unsatisfactory. What a night! But it was only the first of four which grew increasingly worse.

At 4.30 am we began to prepare breakfast in the hope of an early start in carrying Ridge Camp. Our appetites were good – we had carried up some ‘luxury food’ and ate the lot at breakfast. I remember the menu – ‘Vita-Wheat biscuits with honey; sardines on biscuit; two tins of pineapple (between four); slices of saucisson (salami or raw bacon sausage); Biscuits and honey, and lastly a tin of Australian pears. We ate and spread honey with gloves on and you can imagine what a messy business it was.

Our hopes of starting faded when at 8am the wind velocity had increased to over 70 or 80 mph and never looked like decreasing. All day, 27th May, it blew and put the chances of climbing on a ridge out of the question.

Supplies on the Col were limited and Charles and Tom had to go down. Ang Temba was so sick that he too was to go down. John, too, although he felt as leader he should stay to see and support the main assault, decided to go down and leave me to join the Ridge Camp carry. With Ang Temba out of the carry, someone had to replace him and I was fit. So again, although not supposed in the plan to stay on South Col, I was now in the Ridge party.

Ang Temba, Tom, Charles and John left in the howling wind. Their climb to the top of the Eperon (300 feet) took nearly 2 hours. Ed and I assisted them – they were dreadfully weak but once over the Eperon they were out of the worst wind and going down hill. Their journey to the VII was an epic and there they were received by Wilfrid Noyce and Mike Ward. On the 28th they limped to Advanced Base, to good food, attention and rest.

For the remainder of 27th May we sat out the wind and dreaded the coming of night. The night was a repetition of the previous one and in the morning we were still bad tempered and ill fed with very frayed moral. The wind mercifully eased and we stiffly prepared to go. Three hours it took to make a few simple preparations. Then an apparently crippling blow fell. Pemba suddenly spewed over the tent floor and began to groan and said he couldn’t go. That left one Sherpa, Ang Nima, and we needed three. That hour the expedition hopes recorded their lowest reading!

After a discussion we agreed to try and lift the two extra Sherpa loads between us. The weights were about 45lbs, each of which seemed Herculean when a good load *at this altitude* was considered to be 15 lbs.

Greg, Ang Nima and I got away at 8.45am. Ed and Tenzing decided to delay at least an hour to save their strength and oxygen while we cut steps up the couloir. We were heavily clothed and with the loads we stomped along like robots. We made a very slow steady pace which we managed to hold without stopping and began to make height. The wind dropped to a comparative breeze and we slugged up into the couloir and I began cutting steps. Cutting steps at 27,000 is an experience – a study in ‘go slow’. It took three hours to get up to ridge (27,200 feet) where we saw the wreckage of the Swiss top camp (one tent) with not a vestige of the cloth on the aluminium bones. Here we dropped our loads and enjoyed the tremendous view. Lhotse and Makalu were wonderful, Kangchenjunga jugged out above the clouds. Below was the Kangshung and Kharta glaciers, with wonderful views of brown Tibet beyond. Oddly enough I enjoyed and remembered the couloir climb and the view as if it were at sea level. I had read that altitude robbed both enjoyment and memory. With me it was not so. Here Ed and Tenzing caught up with us. Greg was going exceedingly well, Ang Nima the same, and we urged him on by saying that if he went a bit higher



George Lowe leading SE Ridge

he would have carried and gone higher than any Sherpa in the world. He was very ambitious and carried magnificently. About 150 feet above here we reached John highest point and found the rolled tent, food, and RAF oxygen cylinder and other oddments and these we had to add to our loads. Ed took the tent, Greg the RAF cylinder and I took food oddments and some of Greg's load: we left there with Ed carrying 63lbs; Greg 50lbs; self 50lbs; Ang Nima 45lbs; Tenzing 43lbs.

From here the ridge is moderately steep – odd broken rock and towers followed by snow ridge. I led and the snow was bloody – knee deep and loose. From then on the upward progress was grim dead-brained toil. I don't really know how we endured the weight. We pushed up to where we thought a flat spot would be and found it quite untenable. We pushed on again – and again the same thing – and so on. At about 2.30pm we stopped below a snow shoulder and found a tiny ledge where we dumped our loads. Ed and Tenzing began clearing a site which was too small for the tent. Snow flurries were beginning, and although very tired we set off within two minutes of arrival after some cheery banter to and from Ed on the chances for the morrow. The height of Camp IX – Ridge Camp – has been estimated at 27,900 feet.

Our return was slow and tough. Greg had cracked up, Ang Nima was very tired and I had to re-cut steps all the way down the couloir. From the couloir Greg was collapsing every 50 yards and gasping with exhaustion. I was tired – dreadfully tired but quite able to keep going without pause – and funnily enough with sufficient mentality to appreciate the glorious evening colours over Kangchenjunga and Makalu. I photographed them. Near the tents I unroped and pushed on. Pemba had made a hot drink and I tossed this down, grabbed the movie camera, staggered out and, sitting against a rock, filmed the arrival of Greg and Ang Nima, Which I hope shows something of the state of really flogged men. We drank hot lemon and tea and crawled into our bags – but not to sleep. The night, the wind, and the cold came and we passed another bloody night.

The 29th of May finally dawned. On the Col it was windy - it was always windy. The sun hit the top of the tent about 5 am. It crept down the walls, releasing the frost of condensed breath in a shower over us - as usual. At 8 am we saw Ed and Tenzing on the way up the final slopes of the South Summit - going slowly but steadily. Greg had decided to go down as he was too weak to be of use to any returning summit party. Ang Nima and Pemba went down too and left me alone on the Col to receive Ed and Tenzing. At 9 am they disappeared over the South Peak and somehow then I felt that they would reach the summit. I boiled soup and lemonade and filled the two thermos flasks we had. I prepared oxygen bottles with all connections and masks ready for instant use and set bedding ready as if to receive casualties.

Outside I prepared the spare oxygen frame with the two emergency cylinders which I intended to carry up and meet them to assist their descent. At 1 pm they appeared again on the South Summit and began the descent of the steep loose snow slope. I was wildly excited and leapt into action. I packed the thermos flasks, slung the movie camera in (4 lbs) - put on crampons, gloves - greased my nose face and lips against the wind - tied a scarf round my face for extra protection (I was severely wind burnt and my skin was frost-affected from the other days - and very sort); got into the oxygen carrying frame with two bottles and set off to meet the boys. About four hundred yards from camp I began to feel groggy - I was carrying too much, had started too excited and too fast, and was climbing without inhaling oxygen. After the previous days effort I was not as good as I thought. I looked up and saw Ed and Tenzing were coming down quite fast and steadily and were so far away that I could be of no immediate help, so I tottered back to the tent. There I watched them from the tent door. They stopped at Camp IX at 2 pm and didn't leave there until 3 pm (they had a boil up of lemonade and collected their sleeping bags), and came down the ridge and then the couloir going absolutely steadily.

Just before 4 pm I set out again to meet them, and as I left the tents Wilf Noyce arrived with Pasang Phutar. He had been sent up by John as a useful support to receive and help the summit party in case they were exhausted. It was good to see them and they began to prepare hot drinks as I left.

I dragged up again and met Ed and Tenzing at the foot of the couloir - perhaps 500 feet above the Col. They were moving fairly rapidly - the only tiredness showed in their slightly stiff-legged walking as they cramponed the last bit of the couloir. I crouched, back against the wind, and poured out the thermos contents as they came up. Ed unclipped his mask and grinned a tired greeting, sat on the ice and said in his matter-of-fact way - "Well, we knocked the bastard off!"



Dear Janet & Kim,

CAMP BASE
1st June.

At present she would doubt know the news of our success but by the time you get this the noise will be over. Two days ago Ed & Yancy reached the top & I was waiting alone & expectant on the South Col to receive them. We are pleased that N-Z was well to the fore in the whole game - especially so that Ed was the summiter. I carried a Sherpa load plus a Sahib-load 55 lbs in all to Ridge Camp 27,000 ft on 28th May (Ed carried 63 lbs!!) & was fit all through the vital days. Now it's over & here at Base are 13 Sahibs in an absolutely lazy, listless condition - utterly tired & weary looking & quite unable to grasp the idea of success.

I hope to write a full account to Betty in the next few days - but this in the meanwhile is a personal thanks to you & members of the Club for the interest that you have taken in our doings. First for the letters & the most interesting account of G.W. Young's visit to the Club; next for the duplication of my letters which is saving me a tremendous amount of writing, especially so for the air-mailing of Pohokura which I & all the boys read up at Camp etc.





George Lowe getting a hair cut at Base camp



Ed and George in London after the climb