

1st Base camp under Everest

MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION.

June 28, 1921

My dearest Ruth, Would that I had time to write you at length to-night, but with many details to arrange in camp this is a busier life than you might imagine even on an off day. It is after 9.0 a.m. & I have only just finished my lengthy but necessary despatches to Howard Bury & I shall have to be up at 5.0 a.m.

Our journey here was extremely interesting. We set off across the plain with 4 bullocks & 18 coolies. Our Tibetan friends with the Bullocks tried to mislead us so that we should spend more days than we intended on the way & put more money in their pockets; & I had to send the Sirdar, after a horrible crisis in his tongue I couldn't understand, with the animals to the village whither they had arranged to go to bring on fresh transport & meet us later on the banks of a big glacier stream. Luckily they arrived in time for us to proceed all together & camp near a rickety bridge which we crossed next morning.

The 2nd day's journey was uneventful except as falsifying the existing map; but we got in early (4.30 p.m.) & B. & I going up a few hundred feet had a most glorious & interesting view. The following morning we entered the valley which leads straight up to Everest, & shortly before we reached this spot we saw the great mountain standing up from its base at the end of it - a more glorious sight than I can attempt to describe (I'll tell you about Everest in my next letter). Suffice it to say that it has the most stupendous ridges & appalling precipices that I have ever seen & that all the

talk of easy snowslope is a myth.

We are not completely cut off from civilisation here - there is a monastery quite close to us; it is rather a convenience as supplies come up the valley for the monks & we can arrange for fuel to come for us with theirs, so I shall probably keep the base camp here for some weeks. It is a fairly sheltered spot & just near a beautiful little spring, but on the wrong side of the valley for the morning sun. Everest is just a little east & south from us.

Yesterday we made a first mountaineering expedition - started at 3.15 a.m. with five coolies; 1½ hrs to the terminal moraine of the glacier; 5.45 crossed a torrent with difficulty, then across a flat basin to the end of the glacier which is covered with stones & made of enormous hummocks; bore across to the true left bank of the glacier & worked up - dry stream bed. Breakfast at 7.0 a.m. near a great stone just as the sun hit us. An hour's fast walking brought us to a corner where a glacier comes in from the West. We worked round this corner & up into a shelf on the mountain side to a point whence we could see round it - what we saw is of topographical interest - I shall keep it for my next letter. B. was very tired at this point & the coolies had a long rest below on the edge of the glacier while we prospect. We then crossed the glacier to investigate the other bank. It has a section of pure white ice in the middle which is nothing but a jumble of surprising pinnacles many of them over 50 ft. high. It took us 3 hrs (2.15 p.m.) working to the far side of these - I had to cut many steps - very arduous work & very good training for the coolies but very tiring for me. Then an hour's halt. After this we made our way to a shelf above the right bank where we discovered an excellent camping ground. It was a very

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long - tiring descent. We had to go back into the glacier to get round a torrent which luckily runs under it - & then down a long vale of stones. We got in at 8.15 p.m.

Incidentally I had two good wettings - one in a great glacier pool surrounded by lovely pine woods - an ideal bathing place from an aesthetic point of view - where the ice gave way & two in crossing the stream which had troubled us in the morning. I found it pretty hot on the glacier - there is no doubt the sun tends to take the heart out of me - but not unbearably so. I must confess to a degree of tiredness after the glacier work which I have never quite reached in the Alps but in all I was very pleased with myself from a physical point of view. TSto recovered well on the descent.

We have decided to make our advanced camp to-morrow on the left bank of the glacier about 4 hrs walking from here. At least we shall have good water there & a fairly early sun.

My darling this is a thrilling business altogether - I can't tell you how it possesses me & what a prospect it is. And the beauty of it all!

You shall have a long letter next time. I haven't yet said that I received another letter from you on the morning we left Tingri - a lovely letter I thank you. I'm very sorry about your troubles with the Monks.

Probably you will have forgotten all about her before you get this! I hope Vi will stay with you a long time.

Now Good Night & God bless you.

Why aren't you lying there where Guy Bullock lies so that I could kiss you Good Night!

Come close to me at least in spirit dearest - as you shall be all night.

Ever your loving

George.

