

To Captain Farrar

18 July 1921

[2 July 1921]

You will be wanting to know something of the mountain and in one respect it is very easily told. It's a colossal rock peak plastered with snow with faces as steep as I have ever seen. Bullock and I are at our first advanced camp now established only 3 days ago. We are above the left bank of a long narrow glacier (incredibly narrow considering the scale of things) whose right bank is the North ridge of the mountain. This glacier runs itself up into a cwm like the charge of the light brigade, up under a 10,000 ft precipice, & as I saw it yesterday round to the ~~left~~ left towards something like the Calderon on the Teifun matter side.

The slopes of the first peak on the north ridge beyond the col are impossibly steep except perhaps near the col (I could not make that out through the mist). The west side of the cwm ~~is the only part of the mountain we have seen close to~~ is formed by a huge buttress coming steeply down from a snowy shoulder to a low broad col where the glacier presumably sweeps round into the WNW bay.

into which we have not penetrated. That's our N.N.W. cwm—the only part of the mountain we have seen close to. It's difficult to believe aneroid heights; B's reads 400 ft higher than mine & I suspect it of being 300 or 400 ft low; I was practically in the head of the cwm yesterday when bad weather came on & my aneroid which is working very well read 18650 (only 1600 ft above the camp for 7 hrs going) It's difficult to believe the face we see continually is nearly 10,000 ft; but it may well be good & it is completely unassailable.

The W.N.W. face is impossible near the top & the same roughly speaking though with less certainty must apply to the N.E. & S.E. faces—all this from a number of distant views.

There remain the arêtes. The West ends in very steep rocks—we have seen no more. The N.W. could be ascended to the snowy shoulder I mentioned if we met it in the Alps—a crampon job I should say. Above this a long stretch of snow ridge leads to a steep pitch of rocks & there is a further but shorter steep pitch where one of the vertical bands meets the ridge but in both places the rocks

appear broken by gullies & I don't think them impossible. The actual summit is rock at a moderately easy angle. The North arête does not come down from the summit but from the E. arête which is comparatively flat & snowy above the point. I think it might go if one could reach the col between it & the 1st peak to the North it is a sort of rock rib with a steep drop to the E & slope to the W flat enough higher up for what looks like a permanent snow slope - the only one on the whole of this prodigious face except what lies under the band near the top. The E. N. E. arête comes up to a very nasty corner where it meets the N. arête & I've little hopes of it. The S. S. E. arête - leads to another huge mountain (guessed at $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away from Everest & about 1500 ft lower) a black rocky crest. The two peaks are divided by a snow col from which the ascent of Everest would be easy but it is almost certainly inaccessible. The rocky peak has great rock precipices facing N. E. & the E face of Everest the only snow face we have seen has hanging glaciers that look impossibly steep. Well that is about all we know of the mountain from the point of view of attack. We have seen something of the high peaks to the W. & these are joined to Everest by a broken

with other great peaks upon it; all the faces on the N. are frightfully steep so I doubt there being an accessible col on this side near Everest even should the W. route be a line of attack.

You'll understand from this that we have a formidable job. I've hardly the dimmest hope of reaching the top, but of course we shall proceed as though we meant to get there. Masshead has not yet joined us for climbing but appears a very fit man and should go as far as any one. Wheeler continually suffers from indigestion & I've no hope of him being any use to us. Bullock is feeling the height at present rather more than myself but he will do well I expect. The coolies are a very fine lot of men, we have a first rate snow pluggers already & I've little doubt we shall find slip cutters too. Personally I'm as fit as can be; but there is no use pretending one can go as one does in the Alps. On our first reconnaissance I had two hours working through spires of ice on the glacier (no crevasses or séracs) & was infernally tired on the descent. Yesterday we went a very good pace & I did six hours plugging in very nasty snow on the glacier & arrived at the end of our ascent quite happily; but again on

the descent I had great difficulty in making myself go - one had to ~~adopt~~ adopt a deep breathing system going down as well as up.

The fact appears to be that any exertion beyond an even balanced pace demands more of ones organs than they are inclined to give. It remains to be seen how well one can become acclimated - after all we have been only living at this elevation a few days so there's no cause to despair.

Tomorrow we shall try to get up a near peak about 20,000 higher but much less far. And after that we have several intended expeditions taking two or three days with two Mummery tents.

You would be disgusted by the sight of a glacier here. The surface is either great hummocks covered with stones or broken into a maze of white towers & spires often 50 ft in height & enclosing little lakes - impossible to work up through such narrow gorges to be crossed. One proceeds mostly between ice & moraine until a higher altitude has been reached.

