

EXPLORATION

Another Try at Everest

Conquest of the World's Highest Mountain by Airplane Spurs on Climbers Mobilizing for a New Attack

By EMILY C. DAVIS

BBRITISH FLYERS have conquered Mount Everest from the air. The hazardous feat of flying over the maze of Himalayan peaks and spurs and, identifying Everest, circling triumphantly over the summit, has been achieved.

It now remains for the British land expedition to carry through its even more hazardous task of climbing the world's highest mountain and standing in triumph on the topmost point of the peak, five and one half miles aloft!

Despite the most carefully laid plans to reach that summit, no human being has ever boasted of standing on the very ridgepole of the roof of the world. Tibetans in the highlands about the great mountain have always smiled wisely at these futile efforts of the foreigner. In their eyes, Everest is holy and more powerful than the foreigners who try to match wits with the spirits of the mountain. The Tibetans call Everest the Mother Goddess of the Mountain Snows.

These Tibetan natives have seen what befell three Everest expeditions. One man was stricken by illness and death before he even reached the real ascent, in 1921. Seven men were swept into eternity by an avalanche in 1922. Two men mysteriously vanished in 1924.

Among the highland people, the record of fatalities breeds a superstitious legend of divine vengeance, like the legend of a curse against those who tamper with Egypt's royal tombs. Obviously, the natives point out, the spirits of the mountain have spoken in displeasure. The foreigners should have learned their lesson.

But the foreigners are not daunted. The very first expedition to attempt flight over Everest has succeeded. They believe that the mountain can be climbed. So the British are mobilizing now for their new attack up the slopes of Everest.

Like the Tibetans, the explorers feel that the mountain is truly terrible and

awe-inspiring. But invisible demons seeking vengeance are the least of the explorers' worries. Three campaigns to Everest in the past 11 years have shown clearly that the demons of the mountain are these:

1. Altitude, such as mountain climbers have never experienced.

2. Weather so hostile to human bodies that it is no wonder the natives think malignant spirits are responsible.

3. Avalanches, which may hurl an expedition into eternity in a minute.

4. Baleful effects of ultraviolet rays at the high altitudes of the peak.

To fight these demons of Everest the explorers are marshaling all the forces of science. Every bit of experience from previous climbs is taken into account.

"50 to 1 Against"

After the 1921 expedition, one climber reckoned the chances of a given party reaching the top of Everest at a given time as "50 to 1 against." Today there is a strong feeling of confidence.

The new British climb is under the same auspices as three previous expeditions—the Mount Everest Committee, with headquarters at the Royal Geographical Society's House in London. The leader is Hugh Ruttledge, former deputy commissioner in the Indian Service, and well-known for his explorations in the Himalayas.

Conquering Mount Everest is a passion which British explorers have taken to their hearts. There is valuable scientific information to be gathered in this remote skyland of Asia, of course.

Former expeditions have observed geological formations and described the wild life of the mountain. Snakes were unexpected inhabitants seen at hot springs in one of the high passes, and spiders were found in crevices of ice 22,000 feet high. Odell, a geologist, found fossils at a height of 25,000 feet.

The medical officer of the last expedition took records of blood pressure, pulse rate, knee jerk and other physiological data on the climbers at heights up to 21,000 feet. He even set his fellow climbers to doing mental tests, and

found that they could multiply and divide sums with "no definite deterioration of mental activity."

He added, humorously, "It will not please the members of the next expedition to hear that more complicated and worrying tests are required."

But valuable as the scientific data from Everest may be, the attempt on Everest is, to British explorers, primarily a great adventure, one of the last great adventures left in the world. Explorers are coming to the gloomy view of Alexander the Great, who could see no more worlds to conquer. Little wonder that the British are determined to make the conquest of Mount Everest a British achievement.

This viewpoint is clearly expressed by Lord Clydesdale. In announcing his plans to act as pilot for the flight over Everest, he said:

"The objects of the expedition are first and foremost to promote British prestige in the world, and especially in India. Americans have flown over the North Pole and the South Pole, the Pacific Ocean has been crossed by air, and the Atlantic has been frequently flown in recent years.

"There is only one original flight worth while; that is the flight over Mount Everest, which stands out as the only significant part of the world which has not been flown over."

He added that flying over this mountain would have a great psychological effect on India, dispelling the fallacy

FAMED PEAKS

*Everest (Himalayas)	29,141
Kanchenjunga (Himalayas)	28,225
*Aconcagua (Chile - Argentina)	22,834
*McKinley (Alaska)	20,300
*Kilimanjaro (Africa)	19,710
*Elbrus (Europe)	18,465
Popocatepetl (Mexico)	17,543
Mont Blanc (Pennine Alps)	15,781
Whitney (United States)	14,496
Fujiyama (Japan)	12,395

**Highest on their continents.*

that England is weakening, and that the British are no longer a virile and active race. Such a feat would strongly emphasize British daring and hardihood.

Although three previous climbing expeditions have been sent out by the Mount Everest Committee, only two can be said to have failed in reaching their lofty goal.

Surveyed in 1921

The first expedition set out in 1921 to survey the scene and lay the campaign for climbing the peak. This was done successfully. The explorers advanced northward from Darjeeling, India, into Tibet. They journeyed through unknown valleys and plains up to the glaciers of Everest.

From the northeast side of the mountain, where the ice cliffs seemed least formidable, they pushed their way closer to the peak they would some day climb. They stood on one of the ridges 23,000 feet high and were able to see how the climb should be made.

Before that reconnoitering trip, the nearest approach to Everest by a white man had been made by the explorer Capt. John Noel, who got within 40 miles of the mountain in 1913. Yet as far back as 1893 there were plans outlined for climbing Mount Everest.

The first dash for the top came in 1922, in a campaign planned with military thoroughness. Native porters carried supplies. The caravan moved up to one camp after another, resting at each upward stage for the men to become a little accustomed to the rarefied air.

Before that ascent, the altitude record for mountain climbing was held by the Duke of Abruzzi, who attained 24,600 feet on Bride Peak in the Himalayas. Now, on Everest, men slept in camp at 25,500 feet, without oxygen, demonstrating that human lungs and hearts can grow accustomed to such extreme, almost fantastic conditions for life.

At 27,300 feet, Bruce and Finch set a new record and could go no farther. Almost 2,000 more feet of climbing stretched ahead of them, but the season was late, and the men weary. On June 17, the mountain gave a terrible warning by sweeping seven native porters into eternity in an avalanche of snow.

The 1924 expedition saw some of the same men, even relatives of the dead porters, back on the slopes of Everest, more determined than ever. They established chains of camps as high as 27,000 feet, higher than native porters had ever carried loads.



MT. EVEREST LURES

Roerich Museum

Two explorers, Mallory and Irvine, made an attempt to reach the summit. Other members of the party, watching from a lower station, saw the two climbers pass out of sight in the mist. At 600 feet from the top, their forms came into sight for an instant, then they were never seen again.

From these experiences, British explorers feel that they know the worst that this mountain can do, and they believe that they can go over the top to victory.

The fascination which this unfriendly but very beautiful mountain holds for mountain explorers is not easy for groundlings to appreciate, as they hear of the ordeals endured.

Hearts Pound in Thin Air

At such altitudes as 16,000 feet, or even 19,000, natives live comfortably in high plateaus of the world. But for a man to try to rise to 29,000 feet within a few weeks is something entirely different. The machinery of heart and lungs is thrown violently out of adjustment by a sudden rise into thinner air.

Climbers back from Everest expeditions tell vividly of their feelings on the climb. Their hearts pound mercilessly. The thin air parches their throats. Their lungs feel stifled for want of oxygen. A dragging stupidity overwhelms them, so that any exertion seems too much. Yet they must still try to take pictures, or aid in camp work, or push their dragging bodies forward to a higher, more perilous station.

Captain Noel, photographic historian of the 1922 and 1924 expeditions, tells

in his book, "The Story of Everest," about his struggle to get four cameras, tripods, supplies, developing tent, and tanks up the most difficult mountain trails in the world and up to the glacial heights of the highest mountain.

With the help of his porters, he got the cameras up to 23,000 feet. And he adds with the matter-of-fact simplicity that characterizes those who set records on Everest: "That is the altitude record for any motion picture machine."

Needless to say, Everest is approached only at the most favorable time of year. A winter climb would be unthinkable. Summer brings the warm monsoon winds, and avalanches of snow come crashing down the mountainsides. It is only for a few weeks spring and fall that the weather tantalizingly lures men to come up to Everest and offers them a sportsman's gamble with success.

Even in that brief, favorable interlude, temperatures below zero are the rule on the mountain. Far worse than cold is the wind, which cuts like knife blades and never ceases tearing around the mountain. Each expedition has its casualties of frostbitten ears, fingers, and other parts of the body. The infra-red rays of sunlight striking the snow cause snow blindness in any climbers who fail to keep their eyes protected by glasses. And at the same time the ultra-violet rays of sunlight are so strong that there is danger of burning if the face is not protected.

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