

Official Frown did not Deter Schoolboys from Mountain Venture

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YOUTHFUL enthusiasm on the part of twelve 17-year-old Duke of Gloucester School boys recently overcame official disapproval of a project on which they had set their hearts and subsequently defeated the formidable natural obstacles presented by the massif of Mount Kenya itself. The boys, all of whom reached Lenana Point—which is more than 16,000 feet high—believe they are the first Asians to reach a point on the mountain higher than 12,000 feet.

One of the party, Meharban Singh, scaled Nelion and before descending tied his turban around the rocky summit, attaching his Boy Scout badge to it. It was the highest point reached by any of the party on an expedition which had received active discouragement from the Mountain Club of Kenya.

The party was formed, the club was approached and asked to supply maps of the mountain. These were refused, on the grounds that the boys were inexperienced and the project dangerous.

BASIL DEAKIN recounts the adventures and dangers that befell a group of schoolboys who, turning a deaf ear to their elders' doubts and warnings, achieved a remarkable mountaineering feat.

MINIMUM OF KIT

"You are likely to lose your lives," they were told.

It was true that the majority of the party had had no experience of mountaineering. Only one of them, Yezdie Rulomji, had been on a previous expedition to Mount Kenya, and he had reached a height of 12,000 feet. The leader, Satyapal Singh, had

twice climbed Kilimanjaro, but as this is a feat of endurance rather than of alpine-type mountaineering, officials of the club were not impressed with the party's prospects of success.

Undaunted by this rebuff, the boys decided to go ahead. Equipping themselves with a minimum of clothing and ac-

cessories for the journey—three carried 60lb each on their backs and the rest 60lb each, together with two tents—they left Nairobi by train on April 11. They armed themselves with two maps from the Survey Department. These were useful up to a point—a point before the snow line—but they did not show paths over the glacier and up to the highest peaks of the mountain. Over the snow, ice and rocks that lay across their base hut, they would have to find their own way.

Starting point for the expedition was Naro Moru railway station, where the party set off on foot on the uphill tramp. It took them two days to walk through the rain forest at the base of the mountain. Here they encountered no game, but heavy rain made the journey uncomfortable before they reached the huts 1,000 feet below the forest line.

NIGHT IN CAVE

After spending the night in the huts, the party set off the following morning for the second hut. By nightfall, however, they had not reached it and it was decided to spend the night in a cave, of which there are many on the mountain.

After resting for a day, the party set off again for the base hut. When the boys reached the edge of a large valley it was decided that the leader, Satyapal Singh, and Meharban Singh should go ahead and reconnoitre the ground.

By evening they had returned to the main party and led the other boys towards their base at Klarwill's hut.

FEELING EFFECTS

Three boys were left behind, however, as one of them was sick. They slept a night in another cave, while the remaining nine, who had continued their upward journey, guided by their leader, found that they could not reach the base hut by nightfall. They camped out in the open, without cover.

The next day the three left behind in the cave joined the others, some of whom were feeling the effects of a night in the open.

Together the whole party set off and reached Klarwill's hut.



New record for Asian climbers



Members of the adventurous Asian team which climbed among the peaks of Mount Kenya (left to right): Satyapal Singh, Jagdish Jansi, Vijay Kishore, Rasik, Surjit Singh, Nasirude Karim, Suresh Kapila, Kanwarjit Singh, Meharban Singh, and Shashikant Chakraborty.

Party lived four days on rations of dried fruit and chocolate



Meharban Singh's Scout badge and turban mark his highest point reached.

usually found the other party, which was returning from Lenana Point. It was agreed that while this party returned to the base camp, the search party should go on to Lenana. After reaching the point it lost its way in the mist and snow. The boys managed to find a hospitable cave in which to sleep. Because of continuing mist and heavy snowstorms, they remained in the cave for a fortnight day and night. On the fourth day they managed to reach the base hut, in an exhausted condition.

LONE CLIMB

To sustain them for four days, the boys had between them three bars of chocolate, a packet of dried dates and some dried apricots, figs and apricots.

It was while the main party was waiting anxiously for the return of the original search party that Meharban Singh went off on his own and reached the highest peak reached by any Indian or the party and subsequently by any Asian. Coming down from the peak, he fell and injured his right-



On Point Lenana... Meharban Singh, Satyapal Singh and Nasirude Karim.

ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA

School boy on a Climbing Expedition.

WHATEVER other qualities the Asians of Kenya and East Africa might have been credited with, the spirit to face danger for its own sake has never been one of them. It will thus come both as a matter of surprise and satisfaction for people in India to learn that within the community there are such groups as the twelve Indian schoolboys of Nairobi who recently, in the face of parental objection and official disapproval, made the hazardous climb of Mount Kenya to a point above 16,000 feet, the highest reached by any Asian so far.

The leader of the party was Satyapal Singh. With Meharban Singh, he and Yezdir Rustonji had previously climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. The nature of this mountain, however, is such that reaching its summit is more of a test of endurance than of the alpine-type mountaineering. Yezdir was the only one who had also made an assault on Mount Kenya—which presents the most formidable natural obstacles. None of the others had mountaineering experience of any sort.

When preliminary arrangements were completed, the party approached the Mountain Club of Kenya with a request for the necessary maps. Unwilling to take any responsibility for what it considered a foolhardy project, the Club turned down the request and gave a very firm warning of the dangers ahead.

But the boys went ahead regardless. Their equipment was literally cut to the bone. Three members carried a total of 3 lb. each, and the others 60 lb. each. They had two tents. And they managed to obtain a couple of maps which, however, could serve only a rudimentary purpose.

From the nearest railway station of Naro Moru, the party walked uphill for two days through the rain-drenched forest, till they reached the first huts which lie well within the forest line. Here they spent the night.



A VIEW of the craggy Mount Kenya, showing the climbing hazards involved.

Next morning, they set off for the second hut. They could not reach it till it was dark, and so decided to pass the night in one of the many caves on the way. After a day's rest, they started for the base hut.

The boys soon realised that it was necessary to send one or two of the more experienced members in the party ahead to reconnoitre the ground. Satyapal Singh and Meharban Singh, accordingly, went along and, returning later, were able to lead the party to the base at Klarwill's hut.

At this stage, one of the boys fell ill. It was decided to leave two members behind to look after him, while the others continued the climb. The next night was also passed in a cave. There was no shelter for the night that followed, however. They had to camp it out in the open, an ordeal from which some of the party showed serious after-effects. Having by now been joined by the three who had been left behind, they made their way back to Klarwill's hut.

After a day's rest, it was agreed that the party should split into two groups—the first to climb Figgott Point, the other to make the assault on Lenana Point.

The first group of five was able to make the ascent and return later in the day, but the second batch did not show up at the base the whole night. It was found by a special search-party the next day. After giving it the necessary directions for return to the base, the search-party decided to make the Lenana Point climb by itself. As luck would have it, mist and snow made the group lose its way while coming back. The boys had to spend four entire days in a small cave, and eventually returned to the base, fatigued and worn out.

OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED

During the absence of the search-party, Meharban Singh went off on his own and scaled the 17,000-ft.-high Nelson—the highest peak reached by any member of the party. While descending from the long jutting peak, he slipped and fell and received a nasty injury on his hand. But, before returning, he tied his turban and scout badge on the summit of the peak.

Another accident occurred whose consequences could have been really serious. Satyapal Singh, the leader, decided to indulge in a bit of exploring on his own while the search-party was away. In doing so, he sustained a fall of about 20 feet and became unconscious. When he came to, he was unable to move and spent the night where he fell. It was not till late next morning that he was able to rejoin his colleagues.

Eventually, all the members of the party reached Lenana Point, which is at a height of well over 16,000 feet.

Thus ended an adventure without precedent for the Asians of East Africa!

NARAIN SINGH




ON LENANA POINT, situated at a height of well over 16,000 ft.



THE TURBAN AND SCOUT BADGE of the conqueror can be seen on the 17,000-ft.-high Nelson peak.

Illustrated weekly of india on November 29 1959 by journalist Narain Singh.





OUTWARD BOUND MOUNTAIN SCHOOL, KENYA

Warden's report on Meharban Singh
of Duke of Gloucester School, Nairobi
who attended the 18th course.

Meharban had a most successful course. He arrived in an uncertain frame of mind, ready to learn but not quite sure of himself or what was in store. He quickly settled down to the patrol life, he was popular with his fellows and did his work conscientiously, when his turn came as leader he got things going well and as he wanted.


Physically too he developed well and he had a most successful final course.


 (S.D. Stroud)

Warden,
 Outward Bound Mountain School, Kenya.


May, 1958

G.P.K. 3026-500-637


OUTWARD BOUND MOUNTAIN SCHOOL, KENYA

This is to certify that Meharban Singh
of Duke of Gloucester School, Nairobi
attended the 18th course held at Loitokitok
in April 1958.

He completed the course successfully and is entitled to membership of the School and the Outward Bound Badge.


 Warden,
 Outward Bound Mountain School, Kenya.

The Course included:-
 (a) Training in safari work with boys of other races.
 (b) Athletics and social activities of an interracial nature.
 (c) Climbing Kilimanjaro.

He reached Kaiser Wilhelm Spitzee.

G.P.K. 3026-500-637

