

— THE —
HIMALAYAS

PLAYGROUND OF THE GODS

Trekking, Climbing, Adventure

Capt. M.S. KOHLI



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PREFACE

On February 1, 1971, I was deputed by the Indian Navy to serve with Air-India. On joining the airline's Commercial Department in Bombay, I discovered that it had no precise plans with regard to my assignment and responsibility.

After several weeks of briefing and familiarisation with various divisions of the Commercial Department I was still in a quandary — till one fine morning an important development took place. I was invited to address the International Tourism Council. The President of the Council, Mr Homi Taleyarkhan, left the choice of the subject to me but stressed that it have some relevance to tourism.

During the past few years, and especially after our ascent of Everest in 1965, I had given several talks on Everest and other mountaineering and Himalayan subjects, but never on tourism. I was in a fix! Can there be any common ground between the Himalayas and tourism? And then an exciting idea began to evolve — why not promote tourism to the Himalayas? The more I thought of this, the more convinced I became of the tourism potential of the Himalayas. I titled my talk "Operation Himalayas" and spelled out a plan of action to market trekking-tours in the Himalayas. The idea received immediate response and there was wide coverage in the press.

I was now fully convinced of the vast scope and potential of the Himalayas for tourism. And for me this also clinched the issue of my assignment. The next morning I saw Mr S.K. Kooka, the then Commercial Director of Air-India, and suggested that I take up the task of promoting Himalayan Tourism. Mr Kooka, without any hesitation, accepted my suggestion and asked me to go ahead full-speed. Within a few weeks I wrote *Trekking and Climbing in the Himalayas*, which was later revised as *Trek the Himalayas*.

For the first promotional visit I chose Japan. This was primarily because I had met a very large number of Japanese mountaineers visiting India during the past few years and also knew that there was mass interest in mountaineering and trekking in Japan. In Tokyo alone, I was told, there were over 1,000 mountaineering clubs! The response to my tour was even better than expected; it resulted in over 300 Japanese registering for various Himalayan treks. I was naturally delighted.

I followed Japan up with visits to Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. On a few occasions Tenzing

Norgay, the first Everest climber, or his nephew, Nawang Gombu – the first man in the world to climb Everest twice – accompanied me. I even visited the Scandinavian countries whose people had never before been to the Himalayas. My visit to Stockholm in 1971 resulted in the Swedish Alpine Club deciding to send a team of climbers to Nun Kun. The next year, I was again invited by this club to attend their press conference in Stockholm called on the eve of the departure of its team to the Himalayas. As I took the plane for Paris the next morning, I noticed my photograph with the team under banner headlines. Could the departure of a small mountaineering expedition for the Himalayas be so important? On my request, a Swedish lady in an adjacent seat translated this for me. It read: **THE SWEDES ARE BECOMING CRAZY – THEY ARE GOING TO THE HIMALAYAS.**

However, the concept of a journey into the Himalayas received acceptance everywhere. I was invited to address several mountaineering and adventure clubs, as well as to appear in prestigious TV programmes such as the David Frost Show and To Tell the Truth.

In two years over 10,000 trekkers were visiting the Himalayas, and the number kept growing steadily every year. The credit for such a phenomenal growth does not go to me; it is the beautiful Himalayas which have drawn them all. My contribution was perhaps that of a catalyst.

The number of mountaineering expeditions to different parts of the Himalayas has also been going up considerably. For peaks like Everest there is a long queue and one has to wait for six to seven years for a booking. With an influx of trekkers, some popular trekking-trails are showing signs of pollution. As this edition goes to press, the Nanda Devi Sanctuary has been declared a National Park and temporarily closed to all trekkers and climbers. While some fragile areas in the Himalayas may need special attention, it is my belief that the Himalayas are too vast to be polluted like several other tourist-infested destinations in the world.

Besides trekking and mountaineering, there are other adventurous Himalayan pursuits such as river-running. In 1967, Sir Edmund Hillary introduced jet-boating in the Sun Kosi River in Nepal. In 1977, I joined him in another jet-boat expedition up the Ganges, from the Bay of Bengal to its Himalayan source. An exciting film and a book on this, *From Ocean to Sky*, has aroused world-wide interest in rafting and jet-boating in the Himalayan rivers. Several Himalayan expeditions and trekking groups today include rafting in their programmes. In 1981, the Himalayas witnessed a new concept – a traverse along its length from east to west. The first two major traverses were by the Indian Army and joint Indo-New Zealand teams. Today, several teams are engaged in such traverses which take from six to 15 months. In 1983 two Britons introduced yet another concept – a Run Across the Himalayas. With such new trends gaining popularity I have included in this book opportunities for river-running, climbing and other adventures in the Himalayas.

In 1981, I was invited to the first ever International Trekking

Convention in Rawalpindi. This gave me an opportunity of visiting Haripur Hazara, a beautiful mountainous town nestling in the hills of the Kaghan Valley, barely 50 miles from Rawalpindi. It was here that I was born and spent the early years of my life. I was returning to Haripur after 34 long years and was naturally full of emotion and excitement.

It was during this Convention, which was attended by several leading mountaineers from different parts of the world, that I decided to include the beautiful Himalayan region of Pakistan, as well as all other Himalayan countries in this book: The Himalayas straddle eight countries, Russia, China, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma. Of these I have not included Russia and Burma as not much trekking activity is noticeable in these eastern and western extremities of the Himalayas.

I also realised that trekkers and mountaineers are easily the greatest repeat-travellers in tourism – those who visit the Himalayas once keep coming back, be it to India, Pakistan or Nepal. And those who have never visited the Himalayas can never really understand fully the meaning of a journey into them. No words or description of the Himalayas can ever do full justice to the beauty and majesty of this enchanting environment; one has to experience this white and timeless world to fully realise its impact. It is also my firm belief that the promotion of Himalayan tourism could become a shining example of regional cooperation among the countries sharing the Himalayas.

Today the Himalayan scene has undergone a great change. Every year, there are around a score of people engaged in a long and arduous Himalayan traverse: around a hundred or two indulging in river-running and about 3,000 climbers attempting various Himalayan summits. But the number of trekkers has gone even beyond 50,000. And the number of those just visiting the numerous hill stations and simply enjoying the cool climate and magnificent scenic views, is still larger. This guide is meant for all such categories of tourists.

In writing this book, I have received considerable help and assistance from several persons, particularly from Mr M.C. Motwani, the Administrative Officer of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, and Mr S. S. Khera, a former President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. The title of this book has also been chosen on the advice of Mr Khera.

I am most grateful to them all.

M.S. KOHLI

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INTRODUCTION

The Discovery

"... I hurried still more not to miss the vision for which we had come so far. Then the miracle happened. Folded in light mist, hill after hill rolled away into the distance from beneath my feet, and over this green ocean sparkled the vast icebergs of the Himalaya. Never in my remotest dreams had I imagined such beauty could exist on earth ... time effaces all memories, but the feelings of that moment are branded in me while I live Looking back today I see more, that it was not only the revelation of my dreams of youth, but the beginning of an experience which has influenced me more than almost any other ... the discovery of ... a world outside our time."

Lionel Terray, 'Conquistadores of the Useless'

In the summer of 1955, while holidaying in Kashmir, I happened to meet a middle-aged gentleman who was on his way to the Amarnath Cave, a sacred Hindu shrine situated at about 13,000 ft. His wife had knitted him special woollens for the freezing Himalayan weather, and he had made elaborate arrangements for the trip. He was, however, alone and wanted a companion for this arduous journey.

I did not need much persuasion, and promptly decided to join him. With a gabardine suit and thin-soled dancing shoes, however, I was far from being properly equipped for this, my first Himalayan journey. On the advice of some local experts I bought a pair of jute bootcovers and a bottle each of brandy and honey.

Little did I know then that this maiden and brief Himalayan venture would unfold to me an altogether new world whose beauty and charm I had never known before. It was early May and there was plenty of snow en route. On the second day we started sinking ankle-deep and later, waist-deep, in soft snow. My colleague, thinking of his wife and children, decided to return. For me, this was my first experience of going through snow, and I was too excited to give up. Fortunately, a hermit, bare-footed and scantily clad, appeared on the scene, and in his company I completed my first Himalayan trek.

The impact of this three-day trek was overwhelming. The experience of going through snow and ice, the sight of icebergs floating in the Sheshnag Lake — possibly due to falling chunks of ice from the snow-covered mountain face rising from the far end of the lake — the

majesty of Himalayan peaks glistening in the sky, the caress of soft and soothing snow which fell on my sweltering face which I experienced in dangerous situations, the spiritual impact of closeness to Amarnath, and above all the sense of achievement, the self-confidence and physical fitness that I felt on my return to Pahalgam, made me a changed man.

I made a silent decision to return to this beautiful world of the Himalayas, whenever possible.

There has been no looking back since. After that year, almost every year I returned to the mountains. During the next ten years, I was on as many expeditions, which included three attempts on Mount Everest, and expeditions to Saser Kangri, Nanda Kot, Kabru Dome, Ratong, Annapurna-III, Trisuli, Nanda Devi East and Nanda Devi. Though a naval officer I was now more in the mountains than at sea — surprisingly, I felt at home in both scapes. The fury of the elements as well as the realisation of one's insignificance in the midst of the mighty Himalayas or deep seas was common to both. The Sino-Indian border conflict in 1972 resulted in my volunteering to serve with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. For over seven years I continuously wandered in the Himalayas. This afforded me rare opportunities to see the mountains in various seasons and moods, and thus enjoy in full measure this paradise on earth.

It was during these years of intense activity in the Himalayas that I realised that the climbing of a Himalayan summit is three-fourths torture and one-fourth fun. The real pleasure, in fact, lay in the approach and the return marches, which is plain trekking. While trekking, climbing and any other adventure could be a rewarding experience anywhere in the world, it has a special significance in the Himalayas. Here you see unparalleled views of the high peaks and a great variety of flora and fauna. Equally interested are the colourful and innocent mountain people of the Himalayas in whose company one not only enjoys but learns to appreciate some of the finest human qualities, which today are missing in what we call civilised people.

The majestic Himalayas have always held a strange fascination for men all over the world, and have drawn people from all walks of life — artists, writers, poets and scientists. There are blue and emerald lakes and pine forests, slow-moving rivers and swift mountain streams, rugged rocks and snow-covered peaks, grassy downs and meadows resplendent with multi-coloured flowers, snow bridges spanning angry torrents, deep and narrow gorges, high passes enveloped in mist, or a mountain peak rising above masses of clouds, reaching out to the deep blue sky.

There is no fragrance so delightful and so wholesome as the resinous odour of a pine forest, there is no sound so soothing and comforting as the music of pine needles. It has been said that the

air of the Himalayas has the sparkle of champagne, for the higher you go the purer it is, the farther you travel the safer you are from the ills of a crowded city.

It is the grandeur, the beauty and the splendour of the Himalayas that will captivate you. The glitter of the morning sun on a snow peak, the majesty of a rugged monolith, the infinite peace of a meadow strewn with daisies, forget-me-nots, buttercups, and wild primulas, the silence of a starry night, the sensuous joy of bathing in the cold waters of a mountain stream will leave a great impact on you.

There are, in the Kulu Valley, the hottest springs in the world. They are said to be radioactive and have amazing curative properties. The local residents cook their food by letting their pots stand in the waters of the spring for an hour or two. Rice is cooked in twenty minutes by tying it in a piece of muslin and keeping it suspended in nature's boiling pan.

In the Himalayas you will be overcome by a strange sense of peace and a feeling of spiritual joy. Some people believe it is a kind of magic worked by sages and rishis who have gone and lived in the mountain solitude since time immemorial and invoked the blessings of the Gods. The call of the mountains is alluring, but the call of the Himalayas is irresistible.

To me, my very first Himalayan journey in 1955 was the greatest discovery of my life; and the experience of several visits to this magnificent region during the subsequent 28 years, my greatest treasure and possession.

PRINCIPAL PEAKS IN THE HIMALAYAS

| No. | Peak | Height | |
|-----|----------------------------|--------|--------|
| | | (m.) | (ft.) |
| 1 | Everest | 8,848 | 29,028 |
| 2 | K 2 | 8,611 | 28,250 |
| 3 | Kangchenjunga | 8,598 | 28,146 |
| 4 | Shartse Himal | 7,502 | 24,613 |
| 5 | Lhotse | 8,501 | 27,891 |
| 6 | Roc Noir | 7,485 | 24,556 |
| 7 | Makalu | 8,475 | 27,790 |
| 8 | Dhaulagiri | 8,167 | 26,826 |
| 9 | Cho-oyu | 8,153 | 26,750 |
| 10 | Nanga Parbat | 8,126 | 26,661 |
| 11 | Manaslu | 8,125 | 26,658 |
| 12 | Annapurna | 8,091 | 26,502 |
| 13 | Gasherbrum-1 (hidden Peak) | 8,068 | 26,470 |
| 14 | Broad | 8,047 | 26,402 |

| | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-------|--------|
| 15 | Gasherbrum-II | 8,035 | 26,363 |
| 16 | Gosainthan (Shisha Pangma) | 8,013 | 26,291 |
| 17 | Annapura-II | 7,937 | 26,041 |
| 18 | Omi Kangri | 7,922 | 26,132 |
| 19 | Gyachung Kang | 7,922 | 25,990 |
| 20 | Kangbachen | 7,902 | 25,926 |
| 21 | Himalchuli | 7,892 | 25,894 |
| 22 | Nuptse | 7,879 | 25,851 |
| 23 | Dakura | 7,837 | 25,713 |
| 24 | Masherbrum | 7,820 | 25,657 |
| 25 | Nanda Devi | 7,817 | 25,647 |
| 26 | Ngojumba Ri Kang | 7,806 | 25,611 |
| 27 | Rakaposhi | 7,788 | 25,552 |
| 28 | Namche Barua | 7,756 | 25,447 |
| 29 | Kamet | 7,756 | 25,447 |
| 30 | Ulug Mustagh | 7,724 | 25,340 |
| 31 | Kungur | 7,719 | 25,326 |
| 32 | Jannu | 7,710 | 25,296 |
| 33 | Tirich Mir | 7,706 | 25,230 |
| 34 | Saser Kangri | | 25,170 |
| 35 | Minyag Gongkar | 7,587 | 24,893 |
| 36 | Annapurna-III | | 24,857 |
| 37 | Changtse | 7,553 | 24,781 |
| 38 | Mustagh Ata | 7,546 | 24,757 |
| 39 | Peak-29 | 7,514 | 25,705 |
| 40 | Jhomsom | 7,473 | 24,522 |
| 41 | Kommunizma | 7,495 | 24,590 |
| 42 | Noshaq | 7,492 | 24,581 |
| 43 | Pobejda | 7,439 | 24,407 |
| 44 | Ganesh Himal | 7,406 | 24,299 |
| 45 | Istor-o-Nal | 7,403 | 24,289 |
| 46 | Churen Himal | 7,375 | 24,184 |
| 47 | Saraghrar | 7,349 | 24,112 |
| 48 | Talung | 7,349 | 24,112 |
| 49 | Tent Peak | 7,365 | 24,162 |
| 50 | Kabru | 7,338 | 24,076 |
| 51 | Chamlang | 7,319 | 24,014 |
| 52 | Chomolhari | 7,314 | 23,997 |
| 53 | Langtang Lirung | 7,245 | 23,771 |
| 54 | Langtang Ri | 7,230 | 23,750 |
| 55 | Baruntse | 7,220 | 23,690 |
| 56 | Sharphu | 7,200 | 23,623 |
| 57 | Glacier Dome | 7,193 | 23,599 |
| 58 | Gurza Himal | 7,193 | 23,599 |
| 59 | Melungtse | 7,181 | 23,561 |
| 60 | Nepal Peak Central | 7,168 | 23,500 |

| | | | |
|----|----------------|-------|--------|
| 61 | Amne Machin | 7,160 | 23,492 |
| 62 | Gyari Peri | 7,150 | 23,459 |
| 63 | Gauri Shankar | 7,150 | 23,459 |
| 64 | Gangapurna | 7,150 | 23,457 |
| 65 | Pumori | 7,145 | 23,443 |
| 66 | Nun | 7,135 | 23,410 |
| 67 | Lenina | 7,134 | 23,407 |
| 68 | Tilicho | 7,132 | 23,405 |
| 69 | Api | 7,132 | 23,399 |
| 70 | Saipal | 7,032 | 23,070 |
| 71 | Himlung Himal | 7,128 | 23,380 |
| 72 | Trishul | 7,120 | 23,360 |
| 73 | Kangto | 7,090 | 23,262 |
| 74 | Kun | 7,087 | 23,250 |
| 75 | Big White Peak | 7,083 | |
| 76 | Santopanth | 7,075 | 23,213 |
| 77 | Rakhiot | 7,070 | 23,197 |
| 78 | Nupchu | 7,028 | 23,052 |
| 79 | Khan Tengri | 6,995 | 22,950 |
| 80 | Machapuchare | 6,993 | 22,944 |
| 81 | Lamjung Himal | 6,931 | 22,741 |
| 82 | Siniolchu | 6,887 | 22,596 |
| 83 | Nanda Kot | | 22,510 |
| 84 | Ama Dablam | 6,856 | 22,494 |

The Himalayan Range

The Himalayas — or if one prefers it, the Himalaya — are the greatest physical feature of the earth. Extending in a 2,400 km curve across southern Asia from the Pamirs, west of the great bend of the Indus River and eastward to the great bend of the Brahmaputra River, this range is over 300 kms. wide in its north-western extensions — the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush — and its stupendous white rampart is composed of hundreds of peaks higher than the highest summits of Europe, Africa and the Americas.

The Himalayas which are shared by India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, China, U.S.S.R. and Burma, are much more than great snow ranges. They are the source of many great rivers and determine the weather in this subcontinent. They sustain a rich treasure of flora and fauna, and are inhabited by a variety of interesting and simple mountain people. They constitute a watershed of race and empire.

The Himalayas, at one time, were under sea. Geologically

speaking this was not too far back — even today the fossilized remains of sea life are found on the higher reaches of Everest and other mountains. It is said that under the stress of elemental forces the Himalayas rose to their present eminence

The word "Himalayas" is an ancient Sanskrit compound: *hima*, snow; and *alaya*, abode. The names and legends of the Himalayan peaks indicate their association with mythology. In the Kumaon Himalaya there is Swargarohini, "the path to heaven," Mount Kailash in Tibet is considered "the abode of Shiva," and Annapurna the "goddess giver of food." Chomolungma (Everest) is the "goddess mother of the world," and Cho-oyu "the turquoise goddess," and so on.

The names of the Karakoram peaks are also quite interesting. Masherbrum is translated as "Day of Judgement" or "Doomsday Peak." Rakaposhi is known as "Dragon's Trail," while Sia Kangri means "the Ice Mountain of the Rose."

The southern edge of the Himalayas rests against the Indo-Gangetic plain while the northern edge extends to the high plateau of Tibet. In between there are three distinct and roughly parallel mountain zones — Outer Himalayas, Middle Himalayas and the Great Himalayas. For the trekker and the mountaineer this three-fold division is so vast that it can be distinguished only from a high-flying aircraft.

There are six main mountain divisions:

- (a) Punjab Himalaya;
- (b) Trans-Himalaya (Karakoram and Hindu Kush);
- (c) Kumaon Himalaya;
- (d) Nepal Himalaya;
- (e) Sikkim Himalaya and
- (f) Assam Himalaya.

With the exception of Karakoram and Sikkim Himalaya all other divisions have three zones: (a) Shiwalik; (b) Lesser Himalaya and (c) Great Himalaya.

The Punjab Himalaya is roughly 300 miles long and 150 miles wide lying between the Indus on the north-west and the Sutlej on the south-east. It contains the mountain basins of four rivers: Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi and Beas. It contains Nanga Parbat, Nun Kun, the Zaskar Range, Harmukh and Kolahoi.

The Trans-Himalaya range consists of Karakoram and its associated ranges. The Karakorams consist of the mountain region between the lower Shyok and Indus Rivers to the south, and the Shaksgam tributary of the Yarkand River to the north. Beyond the Karumba River on the west, the mountain chain is known as the Hindu Kush. This region is most heavily glaciated outside sub-polar latitude and is famous for several peaks including the second highest mountain in the world, Gasherbrums, K-2,

Masherbrum, Rakaposhi, Saltoro Kangri and Saser Kangri. The Karakoram also contains some of the longest glaciers outside sub-polar regions.

The Kumaon Himalaya is bounded by the Sutlej on the west and the north, and by the Kali on the east, which here forms the western boundary of the kingdom of Nepal. This region includes the peaks of Nanda Devi, Nanda Kot, Kamet, Panchuli Gangotri, etc.

The Great Himalaya in Nepal is surrounded by three large rivers, Karnali, Gandaki and Kosi which form three distinct sections. It contains some of the highest mountains in the world including Everest, Makalu, Cho-oyu, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri and Manaslu.

The Sikkim Himalaya is the smallest of the five, containing the Kanchenjunga massif, the third highest peak in the world. It is less than 50 miles from Darjeeling. The large massif of Kanchenjunga, from west to east, consists of Janu (25,294 ft.), Kangbachen (25,782 ft.), Kanchenjunga-I (28,146 ft.) and Kanchenjunga-II (27,803 ft.). East of this massif there are two fine mountains, Simreu (22,360 ft.), and Siniolchu (22,600 ft.) — known as the most beautiful mountain in the world.

The Assam Himalaya has not been explored much, and very little is known of this region. The western half of it is around the border between Tibet and Bhutan, and the eastern half extends to the frontier between Tibet and Assam and Burma. It contains Chomolhari (23,997 ft.) and Kulha Kangri (around 24,784 ft.). At the eastern end of the Assam Himalaya is Namche Barua.

A Day on a Trek

You are woken up by your mountain guide or his kitchen assistant with the welcome greetings, "Tea, Sahib, tea." Having walked about ten miles and climbed a couple of thousand feet the previous day, you had slept like a dog.

With some effort you stir out of the sleeping bag, undo the zip of your tent and see the smiling guide outside holding a mug of steaming hot tea. With just a three-day trek your appetite has sharpened and you are feeling hungry at six in the morning — a new experience! With each sip of hot and refreshing tea and the rays of the morning sun hitting your tent, your body springs to life. You had never felt so good getting up in the morning.

There is no morning newspaper or disturbing phone calls which may leave you tense even before you start your day. You are completely cut off from the world. Momentarily, you have even forgotten about your job and your daily routine at home. Though only three days have gone by, on a trek it seems like ages.

On getting out of the tent you are greeted by your companions,

some of whom are already dressed up. This is no casual or artificial greeting — the human warmth you had forgotten has now come back to you. You have genuinely made some friends amongst the group and you feel really happy in their company. You soon notice a group with eyes set on a Himalayan summit, glistening in the early rays of the sun. You are left speechless for a moment. A hot debate ensues about the identity of the peak. Could it be Everest, Makalu or Ama Dablam? Could it be Nanda Devi, Trishul or Nanda Kot? A few consult their guide books but finally your guide comes to your rescue. He knows all the peaks, and even the history of their various climbs.

After an enjoyable breakfast you are on the move. The going looks difficult in the beginning but you soon get into the rhythm. You stop off and on to hear a bird or photograph a wild flower. Terraced fields across distant slopes, mountain people with happiness and entertainment written on their faces, an ever-changing landscape and mountain peaks, all fire your curiosity. You find the local people, though poor, happier than people in the city.

After three or four hours of walking it becomes quite warm. The sun is now shining bright and you start sweating. Soon, you come across a glacier stream, its waters crystal clear. No persuasion is needed; you take a dip, and are refreshed. No swims in pools at home have ever been so enjoyable as a bath in a cool Himalayan stream. Your mountain guide has already chosen this site for lunch. You feel awfully hungry; it is a simple rice-dal-mutton curry lunch but you relish it much more than a sumptuous dinner in a five-star hotel.

During the leisurely afternoon walk you suddenly confront a colourful building — it is a Buddhist monastery. Your guide takes you inside. You turn the prayer wheel with Buddhist prayers written on it. Prayer flags on tall poles outside the monastery are fluttering continuously. The whole atmosphere is replete with spiritual joy and tranquillity. You move on.

Despite the fact that you have just completed an ascent of over 1,500 ft. you are delighted at the sight of a small village which nestles in an idyllic setting. It is perched on a ridge commanding a view of great scenic grandeur. You stop for a while and find the local people gay and captivating.

Courtyards of houses are full of various fruit trees. One local patient requests you for some medicine. Fortunately there is a doctor in your group and he dispenses the necessary medicine. To say "thank you" the women of the household turn out in gorgeous dresses, carrying big brass plates laden with a variety of fruit. The expression of their gratitude is touching and you are exalted by the peace, contentment and happiness of their lives.

You have an irresistible desire to linger awhile but you still have another four miles to go and so, reluctantly, move on. Leisurely you meander along. It is the month of May. You see a riot of colour all along. Rhododendrons are in full bloom; the green of the forest, the passionate glow of the blossoms and the grey and brown of the trees is overpowering. You see all nature's beauty welcoming you.

As you pass through another small village, a groaning and moaning sound is heard from the courtyard of a large house. It is a pig being slaughtered. Two men are attacking the animal with sharp-edged bamboo sticks. Your guide tells you that this is the best method of slaughter to get a delicious quality of meat. You cannot stand the torture and move further.

Much before dusk you arrive at your destination for the day. A cup of hot tea awaits your arrival. Tents are already pitched and the camp comes to life. As the sun sets in the western sky the high peaks in the distance turn crimson-red in the evening twilight. Are they on fire? Could you have imagined such sights? You feel highly pleased with your decision to undertake this trek.

Your guide had purchased some *chhang* and *rakshi* — local brews. The Sherpas and Sherpanis have already started helping themselves and soon they all start dancing around a camp fire. You also join them.

Appetite for dinner is even sharper than that for lunch. You really feel on top of the world. You eat more than twice your usual quantity. As you get your sleeping bag your thoughts go back to your home. Your love for immediate family members has intensified and you look forward to being back with them soon. You are also looking forward to some of the amenities of life to which you have been accustomed, but have missed on the trek. You begin to realise that for years you were just being driven by hectic city life and had no time for introspection. You now think of several new ideas and plans that you would want to act on, on your return.

Just before you fall into deep slumber the realisation becomes stronger and stronger that if one wishes to offset the strains and stresses of this materialistic society, and keep in touch with the simplicity and beauty of nature, if one wishes to possess a healthy body, alert mind, and master one's weakness, both physical and mental, and also to affirm faith in your fellow beings, the Himalayas are there to offer all this and much more.

Ways and Means

Once you have decided in favour of a trekking holiday you will want to make plans and preparations and tackle the problem of ways and means. The first thing to do is to ask yourself a few

simple questions. How much time have you at your disposal? What are your powers of endurance? What is the strength of your purse? What do you want to see and do and experience? These are matters which must be settled first.

Having decided upon the length of your trek or climb and just how strenuous you would like it to be, you will need to buy your international passage. Many a time, if you are going to have your arrangements fully organised by a specialised travel agency, it works out better if you buy a full package including the air-fare. Basically there are two major approaches to trekking — with or without a trekking agency. There are several variations and it is useful to know all.

Through a trekking agency: Comprehensive trekking arrangements are possible through several professional and specialised trekking agencies available today, both in the Himalayan countries as well as in most tourist-generating countries.

There are reputed agencies in U.S.A., U.K., Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and several other countries. They publish attractive brochures offering a variety of treks in almost all Himalayan countries, and use local professional agencies in India, Nepal and other countries for all trekking arrangements.

Though somewhat costlier, this mode of travel is more suitable for first-comers who have no knowledge of the terrain and local conditions or who have no experienced companions with them. Food and accommodation arrangements by trekking agencies are also much more luxurious, and one does not have to spend any time or effort on organisational matters.

These agencies have the services of experienced guides, and their routes and schedules are predetermined. They are also well-equipped to handle such medical problems or emergencies.

With a guide: In India, Nepal and Pakistan, experienced professional guides are available. If one is prepared to spend some time in organising the logistics it would work out much cheaper just to secure the services of a seasoned guide. In Tibet, Bhutan and Afghanistan, however, a complete package is encouraged. These guides, at times, also serve as cooks. They ensure that the party remains on the right trail, and act as liaison officers for interaction with the locals, and also for making day-to-day purchases.

Such an arrangement allows considerable flexibility in the choice of the route, additional stoppages wherever desired, and any diversions. There is also more opportunity for mixing with the local people.

For trekkers with any special interest, such as flora and fauna, photography, geology or anthropology, this approach works out better. You can stop whenever you like and resume your trek at

will.

Trekking without a guide: This naturally can be possible either if one is reasonably knowledgeable about the route or if one is on a well-beaten trail such as the one to Mount Everest. In this case you just live off the land. This is the cheapest mode of trekking and is well-suited to budget-conscious travellers.

On popular treks you may meet a number of fellow-trekkers and strike up acquaintanceship. On popular trails in India and Nepal, hundreds of trekkers every year pick up their rucksacks with a sleeping bag, some food, and a stove and set off on a trek. On such popular trails there are several wayside restaurants which also provide shelter and one need not carry a tent.

On these situations one has maximum scope for mixing with local people, learning their customs and traditions and, perhaps, picking up a few words of the local language. While travelling without a guide, it is desirable to follow more populated routes in order to purchase food from villages. If you plan to travel into the higher regions, you must carry with you one tent, a stove and food.

Travelling with families: Walking in the Himalayan regions does not require any technical ability. You just need to be physically fit. Age is no bar — you may be 70 or just ten. On most of the treks at medium altitudes it should be possible to take all members of your family along. Of course, persons suffering from heart ailments, asthma and diabetes should avoid altitudes beyond 10,000 ft.

With children, perhaps you will need to avoid a strenuous and high-altitude trek but it could be great fun. A strict schedule may not be possible with small children and it is desirable to keep schedules and routes flexible. Amazingly, children are capable of covering large distances, like adults, though special medical and health care for them is necessary.

Infants and very small children can be carried on back carriers or conical baskets such as those used by the hill people. Disposable diapers, if needed, should be brought along as they are not locally available.

Food for children should not pose any problem. After a while children normally get used to the simple local food of rice and dal, although it may be desirable to bring any special favourites such as chocolates etc., with you. If arranged properly a family trek could be a most exciting, rewarding and memorable experience.

River Running

Man has always been dreaming up new adventures. In 1967, Sir Edmund Hillary brought two New Zealand built jetboats and went up the Arun River in Nepal. One of his boats capsized but

the four members of the crew managed to swim to safety. Next year, he returned to go up the Sun Kosi, venturing 250 miles upstream to the outskirts of Kathmandu. It was a remarkable adventure.

In 1976 an eight-member team of the Indo-U.S. expedition, led by Lute Jerstad and Avinash Kohli of Wild Life Adventure Tours, successfully completed a 120-mile run on the upper coast down the River Ganges. The expedition used two inflatable rubber rafts with steel rowing frames and wood and fibre-glass oars.

In 1977, Sir Edmund Hillary decided to take another jetboat expedition up the Ganges. This required a lot of assistance from India and finally took the shape of the joint Indo-New Zealand expedition. The Indian side was represented by H.C. Sarin, President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Cdr. Jogindar Singh and myself. The film and book on this expedition have aroused worldwide interest in river running in the Himalayas.

The same year an Indo-German Indus expedition which included the well-known Indian climber, Col. N. Kumar, came down the River Indus in a tiny rubber boat measuring 3.1 to 3.5 m. and weighing only 12 kgs.

In 1979, an Indo-New Zealand expedition led by Col. Balwant S. Sandu climbed Rataban, the 22,000 ft. Himalayan peak in the Central Himalayas and then rafted down the Mandakini, using two fibre-glass skanners and two rubber rafts, from Rudraprayag to Haridwar. The skanners were launched at 28 kms. above the confluence of the Mandakini with Alakananda.

In 1980 I joined an Indo-French expedition using a hovercraft in the Yamuna — a first experience in the Himalayan rivers.

During the past 15 years or so, many of the great rivers in India and Nepal have been run by rubber rafts, canoes, kayaks and other craft. Apart from the logistic arrangements regarding the transportation of boats to the starting points, and again at the end of the journey to transport them back, there are no serious problems in river running. River running in the white waters is extremely thrilling, but can be risky.

One of the great advantages of rafting is to travel leisurely through the varied terrain and enjoy interaction with the locals and take photographs. In river running each day could hold promise of new discoveries.

In Nepal river running may be done in Trisuli, Seti, Sun Kosi and Narayani. In India there are great rivers like the Ganges, Indus and Yamuna. In Pakistan, the Indus can be very exciting specially during its course through the North West Frontier Province.

Most travel agencies have included rafting in their trekking itineraries. They use the most modern unsinkable rubber rafts and have a set of reasonably trained river guides who have also

developed some expertise in cooking and first aid.

River running is usually organised early in the morning until mid or late afternoon when the camp is set up on some secluded area on the beach. Travel agencies have fairly good logistic support and delicious meals are cooked in the camp.

River trips are generally safe and can be enjoyed by families and holiday-makers of all ages. It would be desirable to ensure that the inflatable rubber rafts are of reasonably good quality and are specially meant for river running. Most rafts are specially outfitted for safety and are virtually unsinkable, with an independently inflatable compartment. Each traveller is provided with a life-jacket as well as water-proof kitbags for clothes and water-tight boxes for cameras, etc.

The rowing of these rafts is done by a trained crew, arranged by travel agencies, and they usually conform to international standards.

Some of the river running programmes currently being handled by various travel agencies are:

1. Ladakh Sarai-Stok: One- to four-day trips are organised in this run. Accommodation is arranged in twin-bedded "Yurts." Apart from river running, a sightseeing tour of Stok Village in Ladakh, Stok Palace and Museum are also included in this programme.
2. Journey to Ladakh: A day on the Indus River presents the visitor with a different perspective of the scenic attractions of this city. The river passes through canyons in the Ladakh and Zaskar Ranges; the landscape is breathtaking. From the river, ancient gompas and monasteries, many containing frescoes and statues 700 or 800 years old, can be seen.
3. The Ganges Trip: Deoprayag to Rishikesh is an exhilarating two-day trip and the most exciting of all the river running trips in India. Tourists normally drive from Delhi to Deoprayag where a camp is set — this is the junction of the Alakananda and the Bhagirathi. It is an exciting river run and a two-day programme is planned, with an overnight camp arranged on the banks of the river.

Some of the rapids are dangerous but this area gives you the thrills of fast water, deep gorges and silver sands.

4. The Bagmati River: All through the winter months the Bagmati River is reduced to the size of a stream. But with the monsoon rains, the Kathmandu Valley and the holy Bagmati come to life.

Rising in the foothills to the north of the valley, the Bagmati meanders through the rice fields of the Thimi area before passing along the sacred Hindu temple of Lord Pashupatinath.

It is just below here that the Himalayan river exploration trip begins, offering unique views of this beautiful valley. A peaceful glide through standing rice crops, incredibly green in the summer months, and a long sweep down leads to the Patan Shankamul temple with its magnificent 800 m. river frontage. You slowly drift through the heart of the great cities of Patan and Kathmandu before emerging into the rolling countryside at the southern end of the valley.

Both in India and Nepal travel agencies are marketing several treks which include river rafting as a part of their programme; for example, a 21-day Sun Kosi expedition includes a trek and a nine-day rafting trip.

White water rafting conditions are based on the Himalayan weather pattern. Because of incessant monsoons, no rafting tours are marketed during the summer monsoon season. Post-monsoon conditions are most favourable for rafting in the Himalayan rivers. Even in winter rafting is good fun though at times it can be fairly cold.

The most popular rivers for rafting in Nepal are Trisuli and Sun Kosi. The Trisuli is well suited to adventurers who have limited time at their disposal. Here the road runs along the side of the rivers ensuring speedy availability of provisions and medical aid.

Running the Himalayas

Running the Himalayas is the latest in adventure. With the advent of mountaineering in the Himalayas the institution of mail runners had started; these porters virtually run between the base camp and the mail point. On Everest expeditions, mail runners covered the distance between Kathmandu and base camp from the usual eighteen days to eight days only. No trekkers or mountaineers ran, except that many covered return journeys doing double marches.

In 1952, when I was President of the International Youth Organisation, I came across several adventurers who used to embark on round-the-world journeys on bicycles or motorcycles. There were also a couple of instances of persons embarking on walking trips from one end of the country to the other, taking a couple of years on the trip. In one solitary case, a young man sent in a proposal for running around the world, and just to prove his point, ran from Delhi to Ludhiana, a distance of about 190 miles. But I never imagined this concept would one day spread to the Himalayas.

Running, which has been fairly popular in the West during the past few years, has come to the Himalayas only recently. Some three years ago an American runner completed the journey from Kathmandu to Kala Pathar near Everest Base Camp, in a little

over four days — about twice the speed of a mail runner.

In early 1983 two young brothers from Britain embarked on an ambitious project of running across the length of the Himalayas from Darjeeling to Rawalpindi via Kathmandu, keeping as close as possible to the ridge line of the Himalayas.

It is a fascinating journey covering mountain passes and endless valleys, raging rivers and dense forests, Sherpa families and Buddhist monks. But personally I would prefer a leisurely walk, when you can enjoy your surroundings much more than those who run.

Runners have to be careful on steep and precarious slopes. Running downhill could be fun but one has to master the technique. To avoid falling a runner must take short strides and strike heel first with knees slightly bent. Logistic support in these runs is not quite easy and it is desirable that runners get used to live off the land.

In running, the problems of high altitude illness are very vital. In running or hurried walking one may not get properly acclimatised; in such cases there could be serious risks of pulmonary oedema and in such cases it is desirable to descend to lower altitudes as rapidly as possible.

For running in the Himalayan terrain, proper shoes are an absolute must. Ripple-soled running shoes are preferable to waffle-soled shoes which wear quickly and cause blisters. Running without socks may not be comfortable but it helps in preventing blisters and in wading through Himalayan streams.

Runners are bound to sweat a lot. To avoid dehydration one should consume as much liquid as possible. On completing the run, and during stopovers, one should immediately put on a pullover or down jacket to conserve body heat. Exposure in the mountains can be serious.

Seasons for Trekking and Climbing

Mountaineers often blame the weather for failure, and more often than not they are right. The major enemies in the Himalayas are violent blizzards, high winds, and intense cold. The first are rarely predictable and may cause disaster to the careless, but high winds and low temperatures follow more general rules, and trekkers and climbers should know that there are seasons which are more favourable than others, and these may vary according to the altitude of the climb.

Knowledge of Himalayan weather has been gained by analysis of experience in the Himalayas during the last few years.

During most of the year, the prevailing wind at high altitudes throughout the Himalayas and Tibet is westerly and strong, often blowing at gale force. On Everest, especially at South Col, we

have experienced winds well over a hundred miles an hour. Towards the second half of May, the monsoon sets into action winds from the east. And just before the monsoon hits the Himalayas there is a period of comparative calm known as the pre-monsoon lull, which is ideal for attempts on high peaks. Most of the climbs in the Himalayas have been made during this period.

In general, the season from mid-September to the end of May is ideal for trekking and climbing in Himalayas. Broadly speaking the four seasons are:

Winter : December to February

Spring : March to May

Monsoon: June to September

Autumn : October to November

Monsoon: The rainy season in the Himalayas is associated with the summer south-west monsoon. The eastern Himalayas come under its influence in the first week of June and the western Himalayas, by July. There are spells of intense rainfall separated by periods of comparatively clear weather. This situation depends on the position of the monsoon trough over the Gangetic plains. Whenever the axis of the monsoon trough runs close to the Himalayas, heavy to very heavy rains occur, leading to flooding of some of the tributaries originating in the Himalayas. The reverse is true when the trough moves southward away from the Himalayas, and heavy rains occur over the plains. The duration of each rainy spell is generally three to four days. The monsoon withdraws from the western Himalayas by the first week of September and from the eastern Himalayas by the first week of October. During these three and a half months of rain, the weather is characterised by low and dense clouds, high temperatures and humidity, muddy and slippery trails and an abundance of leeches, especially in Nepal and the eastern Himalayas. The rainfall is higher over the eastern Himalayas and Nepal to the order of 100-250 cms. with the higher ranges in the north receiving about 50 cms. The western Himalayas receive 100-150 cms. along the lower ranges with rapidly decreasing rainfall over the higher ranges in the north which record 10-20 cms. of rain. Ladakh receives just 5 cms. of rain during this season and in Tibet the monsoons are non-existent. Travel is by no means impossible or hazardous during this season, but the general absence of clear views of the Himalayan peaks makes trekking unsatisfactory. In the Kulu-Manali sector and Kashmir rainfall is milder compared to the Himalayas and Nepal.

Autumn: Post-monsoon or autumn (October to November) is a fair weather period, ideal for trekking. The sky is a clear blue and the views of distant peaks in the Himalayas are absolutely unclouded. There may, however, be a few days in October when the eastern Himalayas and eastern Nepal have cloudy weather with

thunderstorms, due to the retreating monsoon. The temperature begins to come down, with the minimum dropping to 0°C. At high elevations of about 10,000 ft. the temperatures drop below zero. Rainfall over the eastern Himalayas and Nepal varies from 10-30 cms. and over the western Himalayas from 5-15 cms., with the higher ranges in the north receiving less than 5 cms. Ladakh receives about 1 cm. of rain or snow during this season.

Winter: The winter season which extends from December to February is characterised by fair weather on most days. However, low pressure systems from the west called "western disturbances" move across the Himalayas four to six times a month. The weather is characterised by extensive cloudiness, rain or snow and occasional hailstorms or snow blizzards. This is also the period when the wind is very strong and avalanches occur in avalanche-prone areas. The temperature during this season generally remains very much below 0°C. Rainfall in the form of snow varies from 15-30 cms. over the western Himalayas. During these coldest months of the year, the clearest views are available and the trekking is probably the most comfortable during this season, except for days when the western disturbance is active.

Spring: During spring, March to May, the Western Himalayas and western Nepal are still prone to two or three western disturbances. Eastern Nepal and the eastern Himalayas may experience thunderstorms late in the afternoon on a few days in a month. During this season the temperatures begin to rise although temperatures over higher ranges continue to remain below 0°C till mid-April. The eastern Himalayas receive from 40-100 cms. of rain whereas it is 15-50 cms. over the western Himalayas and Tibet. Ladakh receives only 5 cms. of rain. Early spring is characterised by excellent views and beautiful flora in the Himalayas. The rhododendron begins to bloom at altitudes of over 1,829 m. (6,000 ft.). These two months are suitable for trekking in Nepal, a start in early February being as good a compromise as any for an Everest trek. Distant views in March may become rather hazy, and the days towards the end of the month are warm in Pokhara Valley and at altitudes below 1,524 m. (5,000 ft.).

For trekking in the Manali area and even in Nepal, April and May are excellent months, after October and November. But at altitudes lower than 2,134 m. (7,000 ft.) these two pre-monsoon months can, at times, be oppressively hot. The aspect, however, may be hazy, a mixture apparently of dust and smoke blown up from the plains, and may conceal views of high mountains, and even the closer wooded hills, for days on end. These months are, however, very good for several species of plant and animal life.

One year in every two or three, on an average, is marked by heavy snowfall above 3,963 m. (13,000 ft.) in late October and

November, and in such a year snow melting may not take place until spring. For climbing expeditions there are normally two suitable seasons — pre-monsoon and post-monsoon. For climbing in the Nanda Devi Sanctuary and further north, where the monsoon has no effect, the entire period from May to October is suitable.

During the winter months there are frequent snowfalls in the outer Himalayas down to below 5,000 ft., in most years, and roads to hill stations may be temporarily blocked. Passes are closed and inhabitants move down from the summer grazing grounds to the valleys.

In some parts, deep in the Himalayas and the Karakoram, there are advantages in winter travel. In Hunza¹ and surrounding areas, for instance, where in the late summer and autumn travellers are driven high up the valley walls, the river-beds and flood-plains become passable, and it is possible to explore regions that earlier in the year are inaccessible; but the cold can be too great for high climbers.

The monsoon is stronger in the east, and its effect is greater on Kanchenjunga and Everest than on Nun Kun or Nanga Parbat; some places where there is a broad valley, as the Vale of Kashmir, there is a marked drop in the rainfall.

There is hardly any rain beyond the Great Himalayas, except in Kashmir, but the main axis is a climatic divide between India and Central Asia, particularly in the east. Tibet is not seriously affected by monsoon conditions, so that an approach to the Great Himalayas from the north can be most deceptive.

Dras, beyond the Zoji-La in Kashmir, and Leh have negligible rainfall. Incursions of the monsoon are infrequent into the Karakoram and Gilgit¹ Nanga Parbat; the extreme western end of the Great Himalayas, however, is somewhat affected by the monsoon.

With regard to avalanches in the Himalayas it may be added that during almost any season in the high Himalayas they are an ever present danger. Snow slopes at inclines of over 40° are usually prone to avalanches within about 48 hours of fresh snowfall.

A Word of Advice

Trekking in the Himalayas does not require any special technical ability. The trails used are generally safe and anyone with a little trekking experience and in a physically fit condition can undertake a trek without fear. Age is, in itself, no bar although persons over 60 should normally avoid strenuous and long treks.

An average day may entail eight to 12 miles of trekking, lasting six to eight hours including halts for rest and meals. Medical

¹ Under the illegal occupation of Pakistan.

facilities in most trekking areas, except in towns such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, Kulu, Manali, and Darjeeling, are unavailable. It is, therefore, desirable that a small first-aid kit be carried by intending trekkers. It will also be wise to consult your physician before you finalize your trekking plans.

While in the mountains, always make an early start. This has many advantages. Early morning is the best time for trekking, the air being fresher and more invigorating than later in the day. It has a clear, crystalline quality which adds to the beauty and colouring of the mountain-scape. Photographs taken in the forenoon are usually better than those taken in the afternoon. Streams are easier to ford in the morning, before the melting snows have added to the volume of water. Further, afternoons in the Himalayas are usually cloudy and gusty with drizzle or snowfall. Perhaps the greatest advantage of an early start is an early arrival, for this enables you to rest at the end of the day's march, look around and make a good start the next morning. To begin the day's march when you are fresh, it is desirable that you march steadily for the first two hours and rest for about 15 minutes. Thereafter take a ten-minute rest every 50 minutes or so and don't forget to carry some hot tea or coffee in your thermos flask!

Whether you ride or walk, the man who carries your lunch must have strict instructions to stay with you. He can also carry your spare jersey or windbreaker, which you may need when you stop for a breather.

A good mule will normally carry a load of about 120 kgs. (2,461 lbs.), but on high altitudes and some difficult routes, they may not carry more than 75 kgs. (164 lbs.), as the paths are narrow, the passes steep, and the streams (which have to be forded), treacherous. The only thing to do is to assign a reasonable load to each muleman. The Himalayan muleteer is essentially a cheerful man; he likes his job and is not one for belly-aching.

Riding ponies is a different business. You cannot do anything about their load. If you are a lightweight the pony will smile; if you are not, he will just have to grin and bear you. Of one thing you may be sure — the hill pony will not run away with you. If he does not like you, he will sit down and refuse to go further. When this happens, you must finish the journey on foot or go back for another mount.

The Himalayas are very photogenic. At every step you come upon the breathtaking beauty of a colourful valley, a lake, a mountain, a snow bridge or a roaring cataract. Take a camera and plenty of films. Do not skimp on films. You may never be able to pay a second visit to the place and very often an unpromising scene gives a prize photograph owing to its peculiar composition

or some unusual feature. Colour photography is an expensive hobby, but if carefully and judiciously practised, it yields correspondingly greater profit.

If you are a collector of wild flowers you will find here a hundred varieties. Buttercups and daisies, kingcups and wild roses, forget-me-nots of a dozen different colours, violets, anemones, irises, columbines, harebells, blue poppies, primulas, verbenas, lilies of the valley, and cactus roses are all there. Tall, white lilies, ferns of many varieties, wild jasmine, bright blue larkspur, campanula, monkshood, honey-suckle and white clematis delight the eye. You may see a whole bank of white peonies, a cluster of tiny brilliant blue gentians. The alpine flower, edelweiss, grows in such abundance that you will see entire fields covered with it. Goats and sheep feed on it and shepherds use its fluffy wool to catch the sparks from their little fire-making contrivance of flint and steel.

June and July are the months for lovers of wild flowers. At lower heights there are rhododendrons which bloom in March and light up the forest with their scarlet flashes till the middle of April. There is yet a third and rarer variety of rhododendron found on windswept meadows at 3,658 m. (12,000 ft.) also. This is no more than a low scrub clinging to the ground, bearing diminutive flowers of a pale cream colour. On the meadow, you will find anemones of indescribable beauty in shades of light yellow and sky blue. A whole mass of march marigolds growing near a streamlet lights up the grassy bank. An occasional spring crocus winks at you and potentillas in red, salmon, pale pink and orange astonish you by the diversity of their colours. Primroses and rock-roses grow in abundance and the tiny flowers of the wild garlic intrigue you till you crush the stalk and smell it. Take a book on wild flowers with you and add to the fun of the trek by picking and identifying the flowers you see.

The bird-watcher can spend many fascinating hours in the Himalayan forests. The golden oriole with its colours of golden yellow and black, the blue magpie with its long tail performing low-flying acrobatics, the white-cheeked bulbul, the paradise flycatcher and the scarlet minivet, perhaps the most beautiful bird of all, will make you crazy with delight. The effortless soaring of the golden eagle rising higher and higher with the help of air currents it seeks instinctively, the static pause of the kestrel in mid-air before it swoops on its prey like a flash of lightning, the haunting call of the cuckoo and the cries of the whistling thrush rising above the dull roar of a mountain torrent are joys you can experience only in the Himalayas. Whether you are an experienced bird-watcher or a complete novice, you will make your holiday richer and more rewarding if you take with you a pair of binoculars and a book on

Himalayan birds.

Both in India and Nepal stepping over the feet or body of a person is not done; always walk around the person. Also do not offer any food which has already been tasted or bitten into.

In the eastern countries, specially in India and Nepal, it is customary to cleanse oneself with the left hand after a bowel movement. It is, therefore, desirable that you do not offer anything with the left hand only. Either do it with the right hand or perhaps with both.

It is also customary with the local people to take off their shoes before they enter their homes. It is, therefore, desirable to follow this or at least keep this in mind and act according to the situation; particularly in regard to the kitchen or cooking/eating places, one must follow this rule strictly. Most of the villagers often eat squatting on the ground. It is proper not to stand in front of them while they are eating.

On various trekkings you will come across *chortens* and *manewalls*. It is always customary to pass these from the left side in a clockwise direction. Similarly, in case of prayer-wheels around the *chortens* and *manewalls* and also outside the monastery, turn them in a clockwise direction.

Some trekkers inadvertently pick up stones from the *manewalls* with the inscription "Om Mani Padme Hum" and take them home as souvenirs. This is considered a sacrilege and should not be done.

At some crossroads you may come across bits and pieces of a coloured cloth box, a bamboo framework with coloured threads woven in an intricate design lying on the ground. You should be careful not to touch them or step on them. These are the offerings made to various deities. These should also be passed from the left.

In Nepal avoid touching a local person dressed completely in white clothes, white shoes and white cap — this signifies a death in his family.

Equipment, Clothing and Food

Provision of proper clothing and equipment on a trek or an expedition is of vital importance and cannot be over-emphasised. Requirements of clothing for the Himalayan journey are quite different from a weekend backpacking trip. Some items of personal clothing such as down clothing, boots and sunglasses are not very easy to get in the Himalayas, and it is desirable that you bring these along.

Many items of clothing are available with a few mountaineering firms in Delhi, and some good second-hand equipment may be available in Nepal. For Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tibet one should

make full arrangements before departure. In the case of mountaineering expeditions it is wise to make complete arrangements for your entire requirement of clothing and equipment before departure.

For both climbers and trekkers, the most important single item is footgear. Blisters and sore feet can ruin a trip. Boots or shoes must be well worn and comfortable.

Shorts are more comfortable in warm weather. In winter and at heights of above 10,000 ft., in all seasons, climbing trousers or warm ski-pants should be worn.

Whatever the time of the year or the altitude at which you are hiking, a considerable range of temperature is experienced during the course of a day. Even in the winter you may, in warm sunshine, be comfortably clad in shirts or a T-shirt at one moment, and be hunting for a warm sweater and windproof coat moments later, should the sun get obscured. It follows that spare clothing must either be carried or be readily on hand. It is as well, too, to be prepared for rain or even snow.

On no account overburden yourself, but, on the other hand bear in mind that the porters carrying the beddings and tents may reach camp an hour or more after you in the evenings and it would be annoying to be without, for instance, a small towel if bathing facilities are nearby; and extremely trying to be without warm clothing if the sun sets or a cold wind springs up.

You should be careful to choose your personal clothing keeping in mind that while trekking through the valley it can be warm during the summer and very cold in heights, particularly in bad weather. The following list of personal clothing should serve you as a guideline:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Light rucksack | 1 |
| Sleeping bag | 1 |
| Shirts | 2 |
| Hard-wearing trouser/slacks | 1 |
| Woollen trouser for the evening | 1 |
| Cotton shirts | 2 |
| Pullover (light) | 1 |
| Pullover (heavy) | 1 |
| Windproof jacket | 1 |
| Feather jacket | 1 |
| Light raincoat | optional |
| Sun hat or French beret | 1 |
| Woollen mittens | 1 pair |
| Scarf | 1 |
| Under-garments | as required |
| Nylon/woollen socks | 2 pairs |
| Thick socks (woollen) | as required |

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| Handkerchiefs | as required |
| Toilet requisites | as required |
| Bathing suit | as required |
| Sunglasses | as required |
| Trekking boots (properly fitted) | 1 pair |
| Camp shoes/ <i>chappals</i> /flat sandals | 1 pair |
| Light nylon duffel bag lined with polythene | 1 |
| Polythene bags for cigarettes, books, camera and films | as required |
| Pocket-knife-cum-tin-opener | 1 |
| Torchlight with batteries | 1 set |
| Plastic water bottles | 1 |
| Binoculars (optional) | 1 |

Food: Except on popular trails you will not be able to obtain food along the trekking routes. It is, therefore, desirable that you carry adequate supplies with you from the starting point. Tinned or packed food including dehydrated pre-cooked items are available in most places in India and Nepal. Through the Defence Laboratory in India even freeze-dried items can be obtained with adequate notice. In Ladakh, Zaskar and Tibet it is essential that a stove, etc., be carried on the trek.

Food available on the trekking trails depends on the area and season. Generally, rice, lentils, eggs and tea are available in all parts of the Himalayas. In most villages in Nepal and India chicken is also freely available. Mutton may be available only in bigger villages or towns. It would be handy to carry some powdered drinks, soup packets, biscuits, jams, nuts and sugar with you. Vegetables are also available in most places in the Himalayas. For larger groups it would be desirable to take along a skilled cook. Many Sherpas are great experts in cooking.

Specialised travel agencies, who look after trekking arrangements, usually arrange freshly cooked, piping-hot food.

Health and Medical Care

Although trekking in the Himalayas does not require any special technical ability it is important that one should be in good physical shape. Apart from major towns like Srinagar, Pahalgam, Darjeeling, Manali, Leh, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Abbottabad, Karnal, Paro and Lhasa, most of the villages and small towns with trekking trails do not have medical facilities. It is, therefore, desirable to carry a first-aid kit and also have simple protective inoculations against cholera, typhoid and tetanus.

While on the trek it is important to avoid faster ascents of over 2,5000 m. and spend four to five days acclimatizing oneself before attempting to ascend places of over 3,000 m.

Before embarking on a trek, a few days of jogging and deep-

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| | of the eyes |
| Chloromycetin Applicaps | 10 for eye infection |
| Cholomycetin Topical | 1 bottle for ear trouble |
| Crepe bandage — 6" wide | 1 for sprains |
| Relaxyl ointment | 1 tube — for sprains, muscle pulls, etc. |
| Sticking palster — 4" wide | 1 roll — various uses, medical and non-medical |

Small scissors

Anything you fancy. (But remember you are going to have to carry it!)

N.B.: Blisters — do not open or puncture them.

Apply tight-sticking plaster.

Acute mountain sickness: Mountain sickness depends entirely on individual susceptibility: physical fitness is not a factor. The two main forms of the disease affect (a) the lungs, causing breathing difficulty and blue lips, and (b) the brain, causing drowsiness and unconsciousness.

Rescue Facilities in the Himalayas

In the event of any accident in the Indian Himalayas requiring ground or air evacuation, the Indian Mountaineering Foundation takes suitable action. Air evacuation is arranged with the assistance of the Indian Air Force.

All foreign expeditions to the Indian Himalayas have to take along a liaison officer appointed by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. The officer is fully briefed regarding the action to be taken in such an eventuality. The nearest police or army post is used for sending telegraphic messages to the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, who promptly get in touch with the Indian Air Force.

Helicopter lifts in the past have been organised within 24 to 48 hours after receipt of the message. At times the local Army posts while sending the message to the Indian Mountaineering Foundation simultaneously inform the Indian Air Force. This expedites evacuation arrangements.

The expedition has to pay the actual cost of the airlift which it can meet from insurance funds. Expeditions are therefore advised that prior insurance must be taken to cover such cases: The usual cost of an evacuation comes to US \$2,500.

In Pakistan also similar arrangements for evacuation are organised by the authorities.

In Nepal the Himalayan Rescue Association looks after the rescue work. The HRA is a voluntary non-profit organisation which strives to reduce casualties in the Nepal Himalayas. The Association runs a Trekkers' Aid Post at a height of 14,000 ft (4,300 m.) in Pheriche, with the cooperation of the Tokyo Medical

breathing exercises help a lot. Cycling, swimming and cross-country runs are also useful in this respect. About a month or two of such training is of considerable help in toning up the body and muscles.

A thorough medical examination by your physician, prior to your departure from home for the trek, is very desirable. Persons suffering from diabetes, asthma and pulmonary hypertension should not travel to high altitudes.

People till the age of 60 and 70, who are physically fit and with some experience of trekking and mountaineering, will have no problems. Those who are not used to it have to be careful and should at no cost rush about.

For precaution against infectious hepatitis, it is generally useful to take a Gamma Globulin injection before departure. This certainly lessens the risk.

To prevent stomach and intestinal problems it is helpful to keep your hands clean and eat in clean places. The following items are useful for inclusion in a first-aid kit:

Chloroquin, Paludrine or Fansidar tablets for malaria.

Sleeping pills for use at high altitudes.

Pain-relieving tablets with codeine for high-altitude headache.

Lomotil or other tablets for diarrhoea.

Moleskin or Telfa pads for blisters.

Tape and band-aids.

Decongestants/antihistamines for high-altitude congestion.

Throat lozenges and cough drops.

Aspirin for mild pain and discomfort.

If you are allergic to any medicine (penicillin for example), bring your own substitutes.

Any special medicines you require. Have your doctor prescribe them on the medical certificate.

In the case of organised treks, these medicines will usually be available with the group leader. For expeditions and very high altitude treks the following medicines may be carried:

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| Aspirin tablets (5 gms.) | 100 for headaches, bodyaches |
| Mexaform tablets | 50 for diarrhoea |
| Strepto-Paraxin | 30 for severe diarrhoea |
| Stemetil (5 mgms.) | 20 for vomiting |
| Largactil (10 mgms.) | 10 for severe vomiting |
| Penitraid (if you are not allergic to penicillin) | 30 for mild infections |
| Terramycin SF (250 gms.) | 20 for severe infections |
| Baralgan | 30 for colicky pains |
| Nebasulf powder | 2 tubes for dressing all wounds |
| Bandages (preferably sterile) | ½" & 4" — 3 each |
| Cotton (sterile) | 1 kg. |
| Locula solution | 1 tube for redness, irritation |

College. It is manned and equipped to treat Mountain Sickness (MS). A new post high up in Manang is also planned.

The following procedure may be adopted in case of emergencies in Nepal:

If a trekker becomes sick or is injured, and is incapable of walking out from the trek, the following options for evacuation are available:

- (a) Carriage of patient by porter or pony (if available) to the nearest town, roadhead, or STOL airfield. Airfields are listed below:
- (b) In the case of more serious injury or illness needing early hospitalisation, a helicopter may be called.

Whilst the medical requirement and location of the patient will naturally determine the course of action chosen, very serious consideration must be given to calling for helicopter evacuation. For example:

- (a) Whilst RNAC and the army helicopter service normally react with urgency to a request for helicopters, there are times when they are not immediately available, and it can be a number of days before a rescue flight can be initiated.
- (b) The patient's location may not be suitable for a helicopter evacuation because of altitude, terrain or adverse weather conditions.
- (c) The cost of helicopter evacuation is extremely high and payment is solely the responsibility of the patient. Under no circumstances will your travel agency accept liability.
- (d) Calling for a helicopter for a case that is shown subsequently to have been unnecessary, jeopardises the chances of future rescue for real emergencies.

The decision to call for helicopter evacuation will start with the despatch of a Sherpa runner with a message to the nearest radio station. A list of these stations is given below. A list of STOL landing grounds is also given.

Radio Stations in Trekking Areas

Jumla Treks

Jumla, Simikot, Gum, Pokhara, Kusma, Rara, Baglung, Beni, Dunahi (checkpost west of Tarakot).

Kali Gandaki/Manang

Pokhara, Kusma, Baglung, Beni, Jhomson, Hongde, Chame.

Between Pokhara and Kathmandu

Gorkh, Kuncha, Trisuli Bazaar (roadhead and telephone to Kathmandu), Jagat, Namlung.

Langtang
Rasua Garhi, Dhunche.

Helmu
None (Kathmandu).

Everest Treks and Rolwaling Valley
Jiri, Mache Bazaar, Salleri (south of main route: close, if on trek near Junbesi).
Charikot (south of Rolwaling), Lamobagar (Dudh Kosi Valley).

Everest-Biratnagar/Dharan Treks
Chainpur, Taplejung, Phidim, Bhojpur (one fast "Sherpa day" south of Dingla).
Tehrathum, Dhankuta, Dharan (British Army Depot linked to British Embassy).
Kathmandu (civil radio station), Ilam, Chandragarhi (in Terai, south of Ilam).

Arun Valley and Kanchenjunga Treks
Khandbari (three hours north of Tumlingtar), Chepua (Arun Valley, northern checkpoint).
Chainpur, Taplejung, Phidim, Bhojpur, Tehrathum, Dhankuta, Dharan, Ilam, Chandragarhi.

Airport/Steel Landing Grounds

Jumla Treks

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| Jumla | Regular STOL schedule service, radio in town and airport. |
| Dhorpatan | Pilatus Porter aircraft only, no radio. |
| Rara Lake | Pilatus Porter aircraft only, airstrip often snowbound in winter. |
| Simikot | Pilatus Porter aircraft only, no radio. |
| Dunai | Twin Otter. |

Kaligandaki Treks

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| Balewa (near Baglung) | Regular STOL schedule service once or twice a week. Radio. |
| Jhomsom | Regular STOL scheduled but often cancelled due to high wind. Radio at police post and at town airport. |

Between Pokhara and Kathmandu

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| Pokhara | Regular AVRO scheduled service. Radio. |
| Gorkh | Regular STOL service. |
| Manangbhot | Pilatus Porter aircraft only. Radio. |

Helmu-Langtang Treks

Thangjet

West of Trisuli River, roughly opposite Syabru Bensi. No radio.

Langtang

High altitude strip, marginal, for serious cases only. No radio.

Everest Treks (all STOL strips)

Jiri

Scheduled flights once or twice a week. Radio.

Lukla

Regular RNAC scheduled flights. RNAC SSB communications at strip.

Tyangboche

Regular flights October to May. Radio at Namche checkpost and Tyangboche.

Phaplu

Lamidanda

Fairly frequent scheduled flights. (South of Aisyalukharka and Rawa Khola.) Regular scheduled flights once or twice a week.

Phaplu is one day and Lamidanda three days south of the regular route from Kathmandu to Everest.

Everest-Biratnagar/Dharan Treks

Tumlingtar

Between Dingla and Chainpur on the east bank of Arun River, scheduled flights once or twice a week, radio at strip.

Bhojpur

Scheduled flights once or twice a week.

Dharan

Helipad inside British Army Camp. Radio.

Biratnagar

Lamidanda

Daily AVRO scheduled flights. (South of Aisyalukharka and Rawa Khola.) Regular scheduled flights once or twice a week.

Arun Valley and Kanchenjunga Treks

Tumlingtar

Between Dingla and Chainpur on east bank of Arun River. Scheduled flights once or twice a week. Radio at strip.

Bhojpur

Twin Otter scheduled service once or twice a week.

Taplejung

STOL Pilatus Porter/scheduled service once or twice a week. Radio

Chandragarhi

Twin Otter scheduled service once or twice a week. Radio.

You can roughly calculate that a runner will cover three normal day stages in 24 hours provided the total distance does not exceed five or six normal day stages.

If on a Pokhara-based trek or when Kathmandu is reasonably close (such as during the early stages of a walk in an Everest trek or on treks to Helambu or Langtang), and Pokhara to Kathmandu is only slightly more distant than some minor radio station, then send the runner directly to Pokhara or Kathmandu.

Address radio messages for helicopter to HELICOPTER SERVICE, ROYAL NEPAL AIRLINES, TELEPHONE 14511, or to your travel agent.