

ahead to report on the pass. They returned at night to say that the pass which used to be practicable for ponies was now quite impassable, owing to ice having collected, and that the only thing now was to go by the other pass (there are two separate passes, the real Mustagh Pass and the one ten miles to the west of it, which had once been practicable for ponies), and bring back a number of men from the upper valleys of the Skardu district to make a road for the ponies.

"The pass is over the main axis of the Himalayas, and divides the Chinese dominions from the British dependencies. It is also on the watershed between the rivers which flow into the Indian Ocean and those which flow towards Turkestan. So one might expect something of a pass, and it is, in fact, one of the highest and most difficult in the Himalayas.

"The ascent was easy enough, leading over smooth snow, but we went very slowly on account of the difficulty of breathing. On reaching the summit we looked about for a way down, but there was nothing but a sheer precipice, and blocks of ice broken and tumbled about in such a way as to be quite impracticable.

"I freely confess that I myself could never have attempted the descent, and that I—an Englishman—was afraid to go first. Luckily my guides were better plucked than myself, and, tying a rope round the leading man's waist, the rest of us hung on while he hewed steps across the ice-slope which led down to the precipice.

"Step by step we advanced across it, all the time facing the precipice, and knowing that if we slipped (and the ice was very slippery) we should roll down the icy slope and over the precipice into eternity. Halfway across, my Ladaki servant, whom Colonel Bell had sent back to me as a man thoroughly acquainted with Himalayan travel, turned back saying he was trembling all over and could not face the precipice. It rather upset me seeing a born hill-man so affected; but I pretended