

This report showed clearly the limits which existing conditions imposed on any attempt at ascending Muztagh-Ata from this side. I realised that without the possibility of camping higher up for one night all that could be aimed at was to penetrate the gorge which had stopped my men. The discovery of this formidable obstacle was in itself an interesting fact; for Dr. Sven Hedin, who in 1894 had ridden on yaks to a height estimated at over 20,000 feet, seemed to have remained wholly unaware of its existence. At the same time the report showed that the ascent up to that point was only a question of endurance and fair weather. I accordingly determined to use the chance of the next day keeping clear for an ascent by the track which my Hunza men had followed.

This chance seemed doubtful indeed, for clouds settled around the summits, and violent gusts of wind made us glad to seek the shelter of the tents below. I found them pitched by the side of the great moraine wall and Ram Singh duly arrived from Karasu. The sky was cloudy when I turned in, and when I rose on the 19th at 3.30 a.m. there was every indication of a storm. It did not take long before the snow, driven by a hard gale, came down. Wrapped in furs I was sorrowfully watching this atmospheric interference with my plans when by 6 a.m. the sky began rapidly to clear. I saw that it had been only one of those short-lived gales which, according to Dr. Hedin's testimony, almost daily visit one or other face of the great mountain. The yaks were kept ready, and when the sun broke through, a little before 7 a.m., I gave the order to start. Instead of the Kirghiz who had proved so useless on the mountain-side, only my Hunza men and Ajab Khan, the Punyali orderly, were to accompany me and the Sub-Surveyor. The latter's instruments were to be carried as far as practicable by honest Hai Bai, a Turki 'Kirakash' (pony-man) from Kökyar, who had accompanied Captain Deasy's caravan to Ladak and Kashmir,