

ahead to meet me and Ram Singh, whom this first climb after more than a year's ease had wellnigh exhausted. Covered with soft snow and half wet still from wading in glacier mud and slush, I reached my tent by 8 P.M. cheerful enough. I had snatched my visit to the Darkot from the obstacles created by an exceptional winter snowfall, the early season, bad weather, and want of adequate time, and could take my rest at its close with the comforting assurance that none but unavoidable risks had been run. A sheep and ample libations of tea, this time sweetened by that cherished luxury sugar, provided a great feast for those who had shared the day's climb. The songs from the camp fires told me that contentment reigned supreme this night in spite of a steady fall of snow and the great glacier's chilly vicinity.

On the morning of May 18th I was up before sunrise, with a face so badly blistered and swollen that I thought even my best friends could not have recognized it; but the sight of a gloriously clear sky made up for all discomfort. The snow which had covered my tent in spite of repeated clearings was hard frozen. So the baggage could not be sent off towards the Baroghil until 8 A.M., when the sun had melted the hard crust. The ponies and spare men had been employed the day before to clear a track through the soft snow covering the Rukang Pass to a depth of three to four feet. Yet in spite of this pioneering it took more than three hours to get the baggage over the four miles of otherwise easy slopes separating our Vedinkot Camp from the open Maidan known as Baroghil-yailak, where the route for Wakhan strikes off from the main valley of the Mastuj river. Here, at an elevation of some 11,000 feet, snow still covered the greater part of the easy Pamir-like valley which during the summer forms a favourite grazing-ground for Wakhi shepherds from Sarhad.

Pushing on to Chikmar-robot, one of their usual camping grounds, we had no more than four miles of open valley between us and the Baroghil saddle, that remarkable depression of the Hindukush range where the watershed between Indus and Oxus drops to only 12,400 feet.