

JOHN ANGELO JACKSON

Adventure Travels in the Himalaya

Adventure Travels in the Himalaya



JOHN ANGELO JACKSON
(Jacko)

Sketches by
GEETA KAPADIA

Foreword by
HARISH KAPADIA



INDUS
PUBLISHING COMPANY



Foreword

You can't kill the spirit
Its like a mountain
Its old and strong
It goes on and on
-Willie Unsoeld

Few months ago we had organized a lecture by John Jackson, Jacko to friends, in Mumbai. While arranging his transparencies he was murmuring about the voltage of the projector little lower than his liking and we were wondering he may be too meticulous and particular. But no sooner he started his presentation one could see that his pictures span more than five decades and it was very high voltage stuff. He regaled the audience with a wide kaleidoscope of events, different regions, and incidences from his life.

John Jackson has been in mountains for as long as one can remember and particularly he has been lover of hills and Himalayan range of India. He started almost immediately after the Indian Freedom in 1947 and his last visit was this year in 2005. One can imagine the range of areas and timeframe that he has covered, allowing him to witness the changes in the range. After that lecture he literally cajoled audience to ask relevant questions and like someone who is used to replying any queries, dealt with them appropriately.

This is the second facet of Jacko. He had been the Director of Plas y Brenin in Wales, a major outdoor institute, for several years. His experiences while dealing with students and novices is what makes him an exact person. Under him several students have learnt how to enjoy hills and be good at it. During his early days Jacko climbed in Kashmir and the Sonamarg area, in particular and was teaching several para-military forces in India about skiing and safety in mountains.

I happened to meet Jacko in Delhi as he was on his way to Darjeeling for a trek. He had both hips replaced and he was tattering around as he picked up a large plate from the buffet of the Indian food. Looking at him I marveled at his independent nature and chemistry to handle the rough with good. As we said goodbye, I simply mentioned that "Jacko you may be staying over in Darjeeling" implying that he will not be trekking. Looking at me he replied quite routinely, "Why Darjeeling, I will be trekking with everybody?" Rather sheepishly I asked, "But with your kind of hip, would you be able to manage a trek?" He made a gesture, "I got two sticks and with this I can go anywhere" and with a chuckle he added, "Don't worry, I limp but I limp quite hard and quite fast". You cannot suppress a person with this spirit and enthusiasm to be in the hills.

Jacko has been a regular contributor to the *Himalayan Journal*, and as the editor, I have exchanged much correspondence with him. He dug up his store of memories and always came up with something useful to print. His association with leading mountaineers of his generation is a storehouse of knowledge. Talking with him about Tom Longstaff, Noel Odell, Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman, with whom he has rubbed shoulders, is a liberal education. He was the member of the successful Kangchenjunga expedition in 1955 and as we know, no summit is climbed without teamwork and Jacko played an important part. For the Everest 1953 expedition led by Lord Hunt, Jacko was in the reserves but he has no regrets for any missed opportunities. Hills have given him plenty and he accepts them with grateful thanks.

Eileen, his energetic wife, should get much credit for doing almost everything that Jacko has done. She has accompanied him to hills every time, looked after him when John was not well and stayed with him through thick and thin. The present book is just a part of John's larger experiences with Eileen, which he calls it "The Dreams We Won". John has dreamt with eyes wide open and has made them come true.

It is indeed my good fortune to know Jacko, and I count him amongst my friends. Quite rarely a person, whom you admire and who is your hero, becomes such a good friend. I have though one complaint against him. Many times when I return from an unknown area, and having gone into different valleys, as I talk to Jacko, he makes a hole in any ego that I may have gathered. Like recently, I returned from Assam Himalaya and Jacko promptly said that "Well, I was there in 1940s". Such is this man and such is his experience.

HARISH KAPADIA

Mumbai
15th April 2005



Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the enormous amount of help and assistance that has been given by Harish and Geeta Kapadia in the production of the book. Without it, it is doubtful if it would ever have seen the light of day. To Geeta also go my grateful thanks for the wonderful black and white drawings she has done for me. They are so beautiful. I would also like to thank my wife Eileen who typed the whole of the manuscript.

JOHN ANGELO JACKSON



Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	5
<i>Introduction</i>	11
1. Burmese Hills and Kashmir Himalaya	13
2. Overland to India: Facets of a Journey	17
3. The First People: Kashmir	31
4. Sonamarg and the Valley of Glaciers	35
5. Himalayan Traders and a Blue Poppy	41
6. Yatra: A Pilgrimage	44
7. Canadians in Kashmir	48
8. Pass of the Goddess Zoji	58
9. Little Roof of the World: Ladakh	62
10. Prophecy of the Head Lama of Mulbek Gompa	69
11. Zaskar: A Journey in Time	75
12. Kullu: 'Valley of the Gods'	86
13. Skis in the Kullu Himalaya	93
14. Lahaul: An Unplanned Visit	101
15. Vishnu and the Source of the Ganges	110
16. Nanda Devi and Trisul: Trident of Shiva	116
17. Everest and the Elusive Snowman	135

18.	Return to the Land of Sherpas	153
19.	A Sherpa Village and Hospitality	161
20.	<i>Om Mani Padme Hum</i> and Soldiers on Everest	169
21.	Sherpas on Ski	177
22.	The Pass of the Wolf	180
23.	The Wolf-Hunters of Pangboche	185
24.	Everest to Kangchenjunga: Thoughts about a Long Walk	195
25.	Kangchenjunga: The Five Treasures of the Great Snow	212
26.	"Five Treasures": To the Summit or Nearly!	222
27.	Sikkim: Tenzing and a Sacred Valley	232
28.	A Curious Trouser Button	243
29.	Nangpa la: A Kind Act and an Amber Bracelet	247
	<i>Index</i>	253



Introduction

"Your glance is kind as we step slowly forth from
your valleys. We are always welcome at your feasts.
We have loved you well and you have rewarded us."

—Julius Kugy

The following selection of memories span a period of sixty years and are intended to give an insight to the fascination and immense satisfaction of expeditions and travel in the Himalaya. My companion with whom I have shared many of the journeys for over fifty years is my wife Eileen. They are some of the "dreams we won".

In the millennium year, we left footprints on the plains of Rupshu in south-east Ladakh. Geographically it is a part of Chang Thang where the harsh winds whip through the dry grasslands creating a very cold environment.

We camped at 15,000 feet by the shores of Tso Moriri—a lake that is a glittering blue diamond surrounded by rolling whale-backed mountains of snow and ice. Nearby is the village of Karzok inhabited by rugged semi-nomadic Changpas. Because it was mid-September and the start of their long harsh winter, flocks of goats, sheep and herds of Dzo and Yak were being rounded up for shelter. Harvest time had ended, so each morning a steady line of Karzok inhabitants walked past our tent to visit the local monastery where at this time of changing seasons, a visiting Rimpoche gave each

of them his blessing for a future of peace and plenty. It was the year of our golden wedding and fitted well with our mood, so we named our journey the 'Golden 2000'.

Once again the Himalaya with its rich diversity of people, cultures, religions and environment gave us its own blessing for the present and the future.

It has always been so and the writing of this book will have been fulfilled if you, the reader, agree with the truth of those lines of the poet Edward Thomas.

"Often and often it comes back again
To mind, the day I passed the horizon ridge
to a new country."

JOHN ANGELO JACKSON
Anglesey



1

Burmese Hills and Kashmir Himalaya

(May 1944)

"From here on up the hills don't get any higher
But the valleys get deeper and deeper."

—Folk song

THE BEGINNING

Up draughts of hot humid air made the aircraft buck and bounce as it lost height and the dark green jungle of Burma seemed to be reaching for the aircraft in which five of us were quietly working. But all was not quiet for every extraneous sound was drowned by the pulsating throb of the two giant piston engines of a DC3 taking us to our rendezvous. Tree-topped hills skimmed by and we sank yet lower. Then soon we could see hill-paths like snail tracks twisting and spiralling down into the enveloping depths of tropical vegetation. Fleetinglly we caught a glimpse of a clearing and of many tiny ant-like figures rushing away from newly prepared and clearly marked DZ—dropping zone. The aircraft banked and turned tightly lining up on the DZ and inside there was a great activity as air gunners and navigators heaved and stacked supplies by the open door. These were jute

sacks filled with rice or sugar, *atta* or *dal* and weighing 100 Pounds apiece.

Red light on!—get ready—green light on—heave—and the pile of sacks offloaded 100 feet above the ground hurtled to the earth at high speed. For over half an hour the operation was repeated until all the supplies were dropped to the isolated detachment of a long range penetration force in the Chin Hills. Finally we made a last flight round the clearing, waved from the door and dipped a wing in friendship and support to the gesticulating figures below. We climbed higher and on reciprocal course set off back for the air strip several hundred miles to the west in steamy Bengal.

By now down in the dark and deep cut valleys it was already night but at 12,000 feet the sun still shone and lit up the surfaces of clouds that in this cooler part of the day were condensing and forming along the ridges of the mountains. Katabatic air currents caused the silvered surfaces of the clouds to curve and flow into huge greying streamers of mist that seemed like gigantic waterfalls, their veils of spray pouring down into the jungle. Over in the east, the sky was darkening to a deep Prussian blue with a base of yellow greens and lilacs, whilst in the west the sun sank to the horizon and changed from gold to a blood red orb that was rapidly being eaten by the devouring earth. At first the propellers and the leading edges of the aircraft wings held a glint of burnished copper, followed by a fiery red that was finally quenched as the sun disappeared and the mountains, valleys, jungle and low-lying mist slipped into the cool embracing arms of night. Very high cirrus clouds still caught the rays of the sun and once more reflected back the colour changes—pale gold, changing to orange and bloody crimson whilst inside the aircraft a blue fluorescent glow from instrument panels provided a small but encouraging area of light. Following the half hour burst of furious activity at the DZ we again worked quietly, oblivious to the roar of engines, content with the success of the mission, and pleased that back in the Burmese jungle, men would be cooking nourishing meals over tiny jungle fires because of what we had done. I knew that my companions were glad to be leaving the hills behind. For them the hills were not friendly but a constant threat. They knew that within seconds,

they could render our giant craft and its powerful engines of many hundreds of horse-power into a screeching tearing mass of mangled metal.

None of us wanted to be a part of that! Even so, I felt sad that my companions could not feel as I did about the hills. For me, they were friends not enemies and the evening sunset among the Chin Hills had been a beautiful and inspiring end to a successful mission. I found it to be the same on all such flights so that the mountains of Burma became familiar friends that regularly uplifted my heart with their interesting shapes, complexity of ridges and dark mysterious depths of valleys. Time and again they held out a promise for the future and longed for journeys along dusty trails in unknown lands.

The journeys began for me on September 3rd, 1939. Several of us were climbing on the gritstone crags at Widdop on the Bronte Moore when Midgley Barrett, the water bailiff at the reservoir walked across the embankment and called up to us that war had been declared. At the same moment a drone in the sky made me look up to see a lone aircraft heading east. Where was it going? Where would we all be going? That was a question among so many that filtered through my mind and I felt bewildered, wondering if I and my companions were soon to part, never to see each other again. Having discovered the freedom of the mountains and the moorlands it seemed such a waste of time at the age of eighteen to have to go and fight in a war, but I treasured that freedom and so felt defiant. Perhaps that aircraft overhead had been an omen, for early in 1940 I joined the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve and became a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner.

Eventually, I flew in Burma and on finishing my first tour of operational flying was granted a short leave and went to Kashmir. There I first looked into the Great Himalayan range.

My view point was from a 9000 feet hill named Chergand from which I looked down on to Dal lake in the Kashmir valley and across to the Pir Panjal mountains to the south. North of me line after line of snow-clad peaks stretched far away and beyond Nanga Parbat sixty miles away.

Watching the clouds that in the late afternoon were dis-

appearing below ridge after ridge I was reminded that in a few days I would once again be flying over the Chin Hills of Burma. These peaks and valleys were different to those jungle-clad mountains but they stirred my mind in similar fashion.

Here were areas where perhaps man had never trod and for me there was a strong pull at the heart and in the mind. A cold land maybe where in the evening the snows would be turning pink then suffusing into purple shadows and I longed to trek into them, to get to know their environment and come to know the people who lived among them. That is what it was like seeing the Himalaya for my first time and I knew immediately I must return.

I have done so many times on treks and expeditions and on most of them with the best companion of all. This was my wife Eileen. Together we shared so many adventures and experiences and what follows is a part of the "The Dreams We Won".

