

Swiss Everest Climbers

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SWISS EVEREST CLIMBERS.

Members of the Swiss Expedition to Everest who, though they just failed to reach the top of the highest peak in the world, have succeeded in climbing higher than anyone else, have returned to Switzerland to meet the unrestrained congratulations of their fellow-countrymen. Many tributes have been paid to their magnificent feat, carried out despite unheard-of difficulties.

The party — Dr. Wyss-Dunant (leader), and René Dittert, Raymond Lambert, René Aubert, Ernest Hofstetter, Léon Flory, Jean-Jacques Asper, André Roch, Dr. Chevalley, Augustin Lombard and Zimmerman — flew from Bombay to Geneva, where they were welcomed by representatives of the cantonal and municipal authorities and a large, enthusiastic crowd, (as mentioned in our last issue).

André Roch, who is a writer as well as world-famous climber, confirmed that Raymond Lambert and the Sherpa Tensing had reached the height of 28,200 feet, but had to retrace their steps when their oxygen apparatus refused to function. "It was impossible for them to inhale oxygen while moving", he said. Lambert added that meteorological conditions were not in his favour. Accompanied by his Sherpa, it took him six hours to attain the record point from Camp VII, itself at an altitude of 27,550ft. "We had really reached the extreme limit of human endurance", he said. "At such a height the body quickly weakens, even if you are making no physical effort."

After Lambert's attempt — he had reached a point only 780 ft. from the summit — the climbers had planned to make further efforts the following day, but the weather was so bad they had to turn back. Asked what he thought of the chances of a successful climb in the future a member of the expedition said it would depend on a chain of circumstances. Above all it was necessary to have men perfectly fit at a time when the weather was favourable. He added that on occasions the wind could blow at 75 miles an hour.

Reaching the highest peak in the world was not the sole object of the Swiss climbers. Their aim was also to solve several scientific problems. They have finally succeeded in clearing up the mystery surrounding the "Abominable Snowman". Even at the comparatively low level of 10,800ft they found huge footprints, 11 inches long and 6 inches wide, which they claimed belong to a four-legged animal of the ursidae family.

Professor Lombard said he returned to Switzerland well satisfied with the results of the memorable expedition. He was able to make numerous observations in a region where no geologist had been before. The specimens he brought back with him will be studied this autumn at the University of Geneva. Mr Zimmermann, who is head gardener at the Geneva Botanical Gardens, himself went as far as 21,000ft. Even at that height he found flowers were still growing, and returned with more than 4,000 plants, of which 800 were orchids, which he had arranged to be forwarded by plane. He said that eagles and crows were seen at a height of 22,900 ft.

According to a preliminary report by Dr. Wyss-Dunant, the base camp was established on April 23rd on the Kumbu glacier at 17,200 ft. The time it took to cover the next stage, to 18,000 ft. gives an idea of the

difficulties that beset the route of the expedition. It was, in fact, not until April 30th, seven days later, that they could set up Camp II. Then followed Camp III at 19,200 ft., Camp IV at 20,600 ft., and Camp V at 22,900 ft., which was only established after the climbers had overcome exhaustion and what seemed like never-ending dangers.

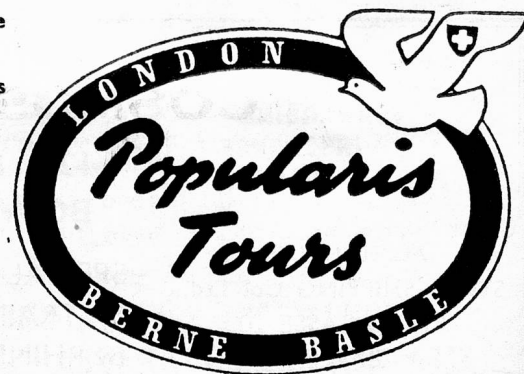
Camp VI, 3,300 ft. higher, was erected on the southern summit of Everest. At this altitude, they had reached the normal limit at which existence was possible. All the members of the expedition got as far as this point. Then a last camp, which consisted of a solitary tent perched on a narrow rocky platform, was set up on the southern ridge, at 27,500 ft., by four climbers, and it was from there that Raymond Lambert and the Indian guide Tensing tried to cover the last few hundred yards separating them from the summit. It was on May 28th, that the two men, using almost their last ounces of strength, got to an altitude of 28,200 ft., the highest point man has ever reached on foot. Then the dreaded summer monsoon began to blow with great violence and they had to return, especially as the breathing apparatus, made to order for the expedition, proved to be insufficient. Five days later the entire party was back at the base camp safe and sound.

Moved by the warm welcome of the authorities and the population, Dr. Wyss-Dunant paid tribute to his comrades who had risked their lives in the venture. In particular he declared how happy he was that no accident had occurred, that no-one had suffered from frostbite, and expressed the wish that the results of the Swiss expedition would help other climbers to make the last three hundred yards that remained to be covered before standing on the uppermost peak of Everest.

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research after studying the reports brought back by the recent expedition under Dr. Wyss-Dunant, has decided to finance and equip a further expedition to Mount Everest this autumn after the monsoon period.

The new expedition should be ready to leave for Nepal early in September. It will be led by Dr. Gabriel Chevalley, who took part in the pioneer climbs up the South Col at the end of May. The leader of the assault group will be M. Raymond Lambert, who reached the highest point (28,210 ft.) below the south summit of Everest on May 28.

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