TENZING NORGAY who as the Institute's Director of Field Training is a great source of inspiration to young mountaineers. Below: The Base Camp at Chaurikiang (14,500 ft.)

The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute

A BAND of enterprising young men have been the toast of the country these past few weeks, and Annapurna and Nilkantha have become familiar names. While all recognise the daring of these mountaineers, few understand and appreciate the role that the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, has played in their success. For this Institute has pioneered mountaineering in the country. It has trained scores of young men—and women!—in recent years and has provided them with the equipment, guidance and inspiration so very vital for climbing, trekking and exploring in that most valuable of our heritages, the great Himalayan range. Indeed, almost all the young mountaineers who have won recognition of late are ex-students of this Institute.

On a clear May morning in 1953, two men stood on top of the world, flanked on one side by Thyangboche and Nepal, and on the other by Rongbuk and forbidden Tibet. Probably, the most fruitful result of this triumph of persistent human endeavour was the decision of the Bengal Government to commemorate Tenzing's feat in a permanent and befitting manner—it was decided to set up a mountaineering institute at Darjeeling, where young people could be taught the fundamentals of the sport, and an effort made to instil in them a love for the mountains and a desire to explore and know them as friends and benefactors of mankind.

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THE Institute was formally inaugurated by Prime Minister Nehru in September 1954, with Nandu Jayal as Principal and Tenzing as Director of Field Training. Leading the Indian assault on Cho Oyo in 1958, Nandu was fatally stricken with pneumonia. The Institute lost its first principal and Indian mountaineering its most colourful personality. Brig. Gyan Singh took over where Jayal had left off and the Institute as it stands today is largely the result of his labours. Situated on the densely wooded Binch Hill, it has its own hostels, hall, library and museum. Work is also progressing on a Himalayan zoological park where animals may be seen in their natural surroundings.

The Institute runs in a year four basic courses, each of six weeks' duration. The students range from servicemen to surveyors, students and civil servants. They come from all parts of the country and provide a perfect example of happy communal living.

On arrival, the students are issued with the clothing and equipment needed at high altitudes. The first week is spent

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A VIEW OF YOKSAM VILLAGE, situated at a height of 6,000 ft., in Western Sikkim.

ENTRANCE TO THE INSTITUTE that has pioneered mountaineering in the country. Above, right: On the way to DzongriLa. Below: Early in the morning, Frey's Peak (19,600 ft.) presents a picturesque sight. (Photographs by author)

LEARNING TO CUT STEPS IN THE ICE OF A GLACIER

The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute

(CON' INUED)

in Darjeeling, attending lectures on physiology, geology, Himalayan flora and fauna, mountain hazards and other subjects of interest. The trainees also go for long walks to toughen up. And then one morning, their rucksacks weighing upwards of thirty pounds, they are off to the training area at Chaurikiang, in Western Sikkim.

The heavy luggage, including supplies and tents, is carried by a host of cheerful sherpa men and women. The journey takes about seven days and represents perhaps the most enjoyable part of the training. The way lies at first along the Rangeet river valley through the steamy jungles of the Sikkim hills. The setting is tropical. Brightly-coloured birds flit from tree to tree and an old man by the newly-built road sells tiny hill oranges and pineapples.

Slowly, the path becomesa climb and the air turns cool and crisp till, coming around a bend one day, one is face to face with the snowy mountains! The cl8:ustrer phobic suffocating feeling of the Jungle disappears and there is almost a sense of liberation.

What is the routine of a typical day on the march? The camp is active long before daybreak and, by the time we bestir ourselves for a wash, the sherpas have finished their simple meal. The tents are quickly rolled and the kit-bags packed. There is a sharp whistle from Thondup, and then a mad scramble to be first in the queue for breakfast

After a quick roll-call to make sure of the lazy-bones, we are off. Time literally stands still and there is not the slightest senseof urgency. We jog along in leisurely fashion, watching birds and flowers, sometimesstopping to take a photograph or talk to a traveller. As and when we feel like it, we down our rucksacks, lie on the grass, close our eyes, and let the overpowering silence of the hills seep into our souls.

By about 11.30,the last straggler is in the camp,which issituated in a quiet grove by some wayside stream. The cook greets each arrival with a hot cup of tea. Tents are pitched, lunch partaken of and then we get absorbedin our individual pursuits -....ome wash clothes, others write diaries, and still others merely sit and muse over the day's happenings. Dinner is taken early, after which a few make a bee-line for the radio, while some of the party choose to play bridge around a petromax.

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AS we climbed higher and higher, the claustrophobic feeling disappeared and was replaced by a sense of exhilaration which can come only of the sharp mountain air and a view of the lovely Kanchenjunga ranges. On the seventh day, we topped Dzongrila and looked into the massive snow-filled cauldron, with its jagged edges,out into the lovely peaks where we were to train for the next ten days. The sight was breath-taking! How it reminded me of Hilton's Shangri-la! But my eyes searched in vain for the monastery above

THE pARTY ner,otiates a difficult terrain in the course of the trek. Right: Crossing the .Rangeetriver during theapproach march in Sikkim.

the cliff, and no monk came down to greet us.

Tenzing pointed out Chaurikiang, our Base Camp, situated at 14,500 ft. The word literally means "place of yaks" and, in summer, herds of yaks come up to graze on its lush green meadows. The next ten days were spent in intensive training. We learnt the use of ropes on ice and rocks—going up to the Ratong glacier to learn step-cutting, crevasse rescue and the various techniques of safe movement on ice. On the last day, we tested our new-found skill and stamina by having a go at Frey's Peak. Tenzing supervised all training, nothing ever escaping his sharp eye.

Back in Darjeeling, a week was spent in going over the lessons learnt in the mountains. And, finally, the glitter of the passing-out parade, with the Prime Minister pinning the silver-ice axes!

Why do men climb mountains? Or, for that matter, why do men cross the Atlantic on a raft or the Antarctic on foot? The question was asked once of Mallory about Everest, and pat came the reply: "Because it is there!" As Mr. Nehru said recently, the human spirit longs to measure itself against the elements, to test its endurance and will-power. So long as such a spirit prevails, life will be worth living. If Everest is conquered, the stars remain. The motto that Tennyson gave the Victorians is a motto for all people for all time: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute has now come of age. May it climb from peak to peak in the spirit of its motto: "*Sanoh sanumaruhat*"!

M. S. GILL

A CLIMBING LESSON in progress on the Tenzing Rock in Darjeeling. Below: Pitching tents at Dzongrila, the last stop before the Base Camp. (Photographs by H. P. S. Ahluwalia)