

HIKES AND HIKING

Even while sitting on the door-step of the most magnificent mountains in the world we all but ignore them. Simla in the summer is the sum total of our knowledge of the hills. The ultimate in pleasure lies in pushing people about at Scandal Point, and gorging ourselves, at a popular restaurant. The so-called hikes of Punjab University have a curious habit of ending up on the Ridge.

We Punjabis pride ourselves on our manhood and daring, and yet to take but one example, Gujarat boys and girls have come all the way, every year, to climb 21,000-ft high peaks just nextdoor to us. The Bengalis are doing the same. This is the spirit of new India; a spirit of striving and seeking, of measuring one's self against the elements, of the discovery of the true, beautiful and eternal India, outside the pale of the pimpled that we call cities in this vast land.

Seeing 'Ole Man River' at Rupar, placid and relaxed, one would hardly suspect its roguish past. The Sutlej at Rupar is old and wise in years; the blood no longer threatens to burst out of its veins with the sheer joy of living. If mere mortals put

come, and where the climate is described as better than anything since Eden: we shall see.

Chini in Kunawar, June 30th, 1850.
We arrived here yesterday, after a fortnight's travel. The track, for it hardly could be called a path, was desperate and for women terrific. It is simply the native track, neither engineered nor formed. Flights of stairs formed of loose stones are the chief ascents, and sometimes stairs of trunks of trees. In rounding the corners of the precipices I have seen the track not 3 feet wide, and the Sutlej 3,000 feet or so sheer below you! My lady was carried in a thing they call a dandy, like a hammock slung on a single pole. It is carried on two men's shoulders, and long rope-traces are attached by which they pull up the ascents where the zig-zags are long enough to allow it, and lower you down the steep descents on the other side. Near to this place you cross a face of rock several hundred yards

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little obstacles to check its majestic course to the Sea, it ignores them with a gentle lapping of the shore. But if you want to see the young Sutlej, go up the valley to Kinnaur and Shipki La.

The birth and adolescence lie in forbidden Tibet, but at Shipki the Sutlej glorying in its manhood hurls itself against the real Himalayas. His Promethian river God cuts its way through rocky battlements and snow-rimmed mountains, jumping from rock to rock, cascading over sheer cliffs, hurling itself down the valley in gay abandon, and carving the very mountains, into voluptuous shapes. And yet like a young man confident of his strength he is not all impetuosity. Sometimes you find him dozing under the pines, with one eye half cocked for a petty Kalpa maiden, that may be passing by.

I don't blame him. Anybody would fall in love with Kinnaur and its people. A gently sloping valley stretched out at 9500' opposite the snowy peaks of the Kailash range, with thick pine forests, and every variety of fruit and flowers — Kalpa is a veritable paradise on earth. The excitement and fun of a holiday in Kinnaur was discovered long ago. Let me quote Lord Dalhousie who spent a whole summer in this Shangri-la:

Simla, June 9th, 1850.

In a few days we go to Kunawur. It is a province near the snow, where the rains do not

long, and as many high, by continuous flights of these steps, and rude wooden platforms supported on pegs of wood driven into the clefts of the cliffs. The descent is direct to the river. I should say nearly 5,000 feet below! It was very grand but really funky. We passed from thence into the valley situated between the ranges of the snowy mountains, but filled with luxuriant vineyards of the finest grapes, with orchards of apricots, and with pears, peaches, walnuts, and chestnuts. The Raldung, one of the eternal snows, rises to 23,000 feet in height opposite to us—the avalanches are daily audible, roaring down its sides, and yet the valley is covered with rich corn crops, and adorned with forests of deodars high up, and green hardwood trees below. It is a strange mixture of beautiful contradictions, and on first sight appears charming. I shall be able to tell you more about it next month. The mail will be only 46 hours from Simla, and I can get there in four days, so that I am ready if wanted. On the road I saw the deodars in glory. I measured a good many in one grove in which we were encamped—several were between 18 and 21 feet in girth, and one veteran measured 36 feet round.

July 6, 1850



A view of Kailash peaks from Kalpa.

The valley has been very agreeable. We had had occasional light showers during the week, but the air is dry, mild and clear.

The rains, we find, reach this valley but only in the shape of English April showers—falling gently and at intervals. A field in front of this house, just under my house, was reaped of a fine crop of spring wheat last Tuesday week; it was irrigated next day, sown on the Thursday, ploughed on Friday (for the sowing precedes the ploughing in Kunawur husbandry), and today, nine days afterwards, there is a fine braird of buckwheat, which will be reaped in October. The whole valley is yellow with ripe apricots, and the grapes below near the river are just ready. Both my Lady and myself are perfectly well.

to walk slowly up the Ravi to the Beas, to commune with, and to know, the provenders of sustenance to Punjab. Go anywhere in the wide Himalayas, but for God's sake, not from Tara Devi to Tattapani. If you must then at least don't tell anyone about it!

CHINI, September, 16 1850
The time is at hand when we must leave this charming valley, and I groan over it. Business has gone on so regularly and smoothly—the quiet has been so enjoyable, and it is so pleasant to be able to ride out in a shooting-jacket, or walk out without any packet at all, that I dislike the return to a frock-coat and civilisation. I have had neither ache nor pain, to speak of, since we left Simla, and my wife has gained greatly both in health and strength. Thus it is no wonder that I like the place, and shall desiderate it when we go.

The vineyards are now in full bearing, and the vintage in full blow. The rites of Bacchus are by no means extinct even among the Kunawurees, and they carry about their god, toos him up in the air, like the chairing of a city member at Norwich, blow their conchs, and beat their drums, and conclude the service by getting excessively drunk in the most classical manner.

There are 18 different kinds of grapes in the valley; and one vineyard has supplied us with grapes both purple and green as large as any I ever saw in a hothouse, and very juicy, though they gather them too soon; and having no skill in the management, neither thinning nor pruning them, they produce fruit less fine than it ought to be. Those that they do not sell they make into wine, or make them into raisins, which with dried apricots, walnuts, and the seeds of the pine, form a great part of their food in winter.

So why not venture out beyond Dalhousie and Simla some time, to see Kinnaur or the even more beautiful Sang La? Why not climb the Shipki pass and see the terrifying grandeur of the inner Himalayas, or take a closer look at the Kailash peaks? Who knows you may be tempted to climb them. Maybe you would like