

THE GERMAN EXPEDITION IN THE ELBURZ RANGE, N. PERSIA

IN 1936 a German expedition was active in the Elburz range. They climbed Demavend (18,549 ft.) and discovered on its N. face a hitherto unknown glacier. They also made various important ascents in the Takht-i-Suleiman group. The exploration of this group may now be considered completed, and it seems advisable that a note on the climbs made by the expedition should be published in the JOURNAL in order to bring up to date the two previous articles in Volumes 45. 334 and 47. 299.

This article has been compiled from material generously furnished by Dr. Hans Bobek in private letters and from an article by Herr Ludwig Steinauer in *Der Bergsteiger*, November 1936, from which the author has kindly allowed me to quote.

No attempt is here made to describe the scientific work accomplished by the party which seems to have been very successful.—D. L. B.

The expedition which received financial support from the D.u.Ö.A.-V. was under the leadership of Dr. Richard Lusk. In the Takht-i-Suleiman region, however, Dr. Bobek assumed the leadership on account of his unique knowledge of the group. It is with this portion of the expedition that this article is designed to deal, ascents of Demavend being now too frequent to merit a lengthy description. In one respect, however, the German ascent of Demavend was unusual, in that a night was spent on the summit.

The party reached Persia *via* Russia and landed at Pahlavi on the Caspian coast. After the usual infuriating difficulties with Persian officialdom, including the confiscation of most of their film, they motored along the coast to the mouth of the Sardab Rud, which flows down from Takht-i-Suleiman. Here they loaded their equipment on to mules and followed the stream up to its source, at first through mosquito-infested, malarial jungle and then over the barren uplands.

A camp was established on the N.E. ridge of 'Alam Kuh, on the pass just S. of Siah Kaman (see map in *A. J.* 47. 299) from which a magnificent view was obtained (photo No. 1) of the great N. wall of 'Alam Kuh (15,819 ft.) and the unclimbed peak of Takht-i-Suleiman (15,154 ft.). On the following day the party descended from camp to the glacier at the foot of the peaks, ascended this to its head and climbed the small peak (christened 'Punta Martha') lying almost midway between 'Alam Kuh and Takht-i-Suleiman. From this they followed the S. ridge of Takht-i-Suleiman to the summit (first ascent). The descent was made by the N. ridge and E. face.

The next expedition was a complete traverse, in part over new ground of the N.E. ridge of 'Alam Kuh (right-hand skyline in photo in



Photo, Hans Bobek.]

VIEW OF N. FACE OF 'ALAM KUH (1), AND TAKHT-I-SULEIMAN (2).



Photo, L. Steinauer.]

N. FACE OF 'ALAM KUH FROM TAKHT-I-SULEIMAN SHOWING ROUTE OF ASCENT.

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A. J. 47. 309) with descent by the S. face. Dr. Bobek states that the first ascent of 'Alam Kuh, the culminating point of the group and the second highest mountain in Persia, would appear to have been made by two German botanists, the brothers Bornmüller, in 1902. The second ascent took place over thirty years later (D. L. Busk and a native by the E. ridge, 1933) and the third in 1934 (Hans Bobek and D. L. Busk by the S. face).

After this climb the party proceeded to Tehran by devious routes and then made for Demavend, the ascent of which is alluded to above. On the return from this climb the unlucky Dr. Bobek camped beside the Lar river, usually the most placid of streams. In the night a 10-ft. spate came down and carried away the tent, notes, equipment and photos, Dr. Bobek himself only escaping with great difficulty.

After the ascent of Demavend, Herren Steinauer and Gorter returned to the Takht-i-Suleiman group in order to attempt the huge unclimbed N. wall of 'Alam Kuh, the greatest and probably the only really serious mountaineering problem in the Elburz (see photo No. 2). Needless to say it is described as the 'Persian Jorasses.'¹

They again chose to approach the region from the Caspian, instead of taking the easy and healthy route over the Hazarcham Pass, and in consequence have a sad story to relate of their unpleasant experiences in the primaeval jungle that fringes the coast. Mosquitoes, horseflies, snakes and scorpions combined with endless morasses to make their progress painful and exhausting, and it was only after the greatest efforts that they were able to establish a tent on a moraine block on the Sarchal Glacier at the foot of the 3000-ft. wall.

The wall (see photo No. 3) consists of one huge series of slabs, steepening towards the summit, in the middle of which a slightly defined rib offers the only protection against stonefall. The party started at dawn and for an hour made swift progress. Their way was then barred by an overhanging 10-ft. belt of cliff extending right across the face. This obstacle was overcome only when the rope had been thrown round a projecting rock above the overhang. Higher up the party was forced to retrace its steps for a considerable distance owing to the difficulty of finding the correct, indeed the only possible, route. Much time was thus lost, and it was late afternoon when they found themselves facing the most difficult part of the climb, just below the summit. This section was conquered by means of a pendulum movement from a piton, in the course of which the leader was badly cut in the thigh by a stone which he dislodged, the same stone narrowly missing the second man. It was only at dusk, after 17 hours' climbing, that the party reached the summit.

The descent was made by the glacier to the N.W. of 'Alam Kuh which left the party on the wrong side of the 'Alam Kuh-Takht-i-Suleiman ridge. In order to reach their tent they were in consequence forced to make a second ascent of 'Punta Martha.'

¹ Herr Steinauer took part in the third ascent of the N. face of Grandes Jorasses, *A. J.* 48. 76-80.—*Editor.*



Photo, Hans Bobek.]

'ALAM KUH (1),

PUNTA MARTHA (2),

AND TAKHT-I-SULEIMAN (3), SHOWING N. WALL OF 'ALAM KUH AND SARCHAL GLACIER.

The climbers are to be congratulated on a very fine ascent. The uniform steepness of the wall and its great height make it one of the most impressive rock faces known to me. The time taken for the climb gives some measure of the technical difficulties that had to be overcome by a competent party, and it must not be forgotten that the altitude of the peak (higher than Mont Blanc) is such as to make difficult rock climbing a severe effort.

D. L. BUSK.