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An Expedition to the Caucasus.

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At the winter dinner of the Club in 1887 the members were encouraged to go to the Caucasus, and were warned against going. I was disposed to take the encouragement more seriously than the warning, and I was specially induced to attempt to organise an expedition in the summer of 1888, because I discovered that there was a young Armenian then studying at the Owens College who gave me to understand that he spoke Russian, Tatar, and several of the Georgian dialects, and who, moreover, would rejoice at the opportunity of joining me in the proposed expedition, and acting as interpreter to the party. It may, perhaps, be as well to state here that, when the time for completing the final arrangements arrived, my Armenian friend was unable to accompany us. However, with the hope of securing so valuable an ally, I had little difficulty in persuading my friend and fellow-citizen, Mr. Hermann Woolley, to make one of the party. We then tried to secure another companion. I asked Mr. Harry Fox. He declined, his reason being, as he explained afterwards, that he was pledged to accompany Messrs. Dent and Donkin, should they discover that circumstances admitted of their undertaking the journey. One or two other attempts at securing an additional companion having proved futile, Mr. Woolley and I resolved to start by ourselves.

We obtained the services of Ulrich Almer as leading guide, leaving the decision concerning our second guide or porter to a later date. We then made all arrangements for a party of four (ourselves and two guides), and shipped tent, blankets, sleeping-bags, a liberal supply of provisions, &c.,

for Taganrog. Before we ourselves had actually set out, however, we were introduced to Mr. J. G. Cockin, and invited him to join the party, an invitation which he gladly accepted.

We had carefully read and studied the papers published in the Journal by Messrs. Dent, Donkin, and Freshfield, and, as my time was limited, decided to proceed to Bezingi as expeditiously as possible, pitch our tent as high up by the Bezingi glacier as we might find convenient, and continue the explorations of our predecessors in this district. As neither Mr. Cockin nor Mr. Woolley was under the necessity of returning to England by any fixed date, it was quite understood that in all probability they would both, after I was compelled to leave, and should the conditions prove favourable, remain for a longer period in the neighbourhood, and cross over to the south side of the chain. As is now well known, Mr. Woolley was compelled to leave with me, on account of the disablement of his arm.

Messrs. Cockin and Woolley proceeded by way of Grindelwald (where they picked up Almer, and engaged Christian Roth as second guide) to Vienna and Odessa. I started from London on the morning of August 4, travelled by the Queenborough and Flushing route to Berlin, and thence without delay to Moscow, where I arrived on the evening of August 7. Spending only one night in Moscow, I pushed on to Rostov, where on the evening of the 9th I met my companions, the two guides, and an interpreter (Hermann Rehfeldt), who had been engaged at Taganrog.

On the afternoon of Friday, August 10, we started in a crowded train for Kotlarevska. This station was reached about 1.45 on Saturday afternoon.

Our experiences, after leaving the railway, were very similar to those described by other travellers in this district. We drove in three tarantasses (rude four-wheeled travelling waggons without springs) across the flat uninteresting steppe, almost smothered by the most dense clouds of dust that I have ever seen. At the first station, about half-way between Katlarevska and Naltchik, we had some difficulty in procuring horses. But I flaunted before the postmaster a letter from the Russian Ambassador in London, with which, through the courtesy of Sir James Fergusson, the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, I had been provided, and this, with the promise of an extra rouble, had the desired effect. It was getting dark, however, as we started, and before we had been an hour on our journey it was absolutely impossible to distinguish any objects on the road. It rained hard, but we

infinitely preferred the rain to the dust we had experienced in the first half of our journey. Soon after ten we arrived at Naltchik, and obtained admission at the house of a certain Michael Sergevitch Michaelov. A couple of good rooms were placed at our disposal, but there was only one small bed, and so the bulk of the party were compelled to spread out their blankets and sleep upon the floor.

In the course of the next day we called on the Nachalnik (an act of civility which should not be omitted by visitors), and repacked our goods in saddle-bags and bundles for conveyance to Bezingi. We engaged as guide a Tatar named Muhammed Abajevoh, and, having agreed with him for the provision of horses for the next day's march, strolled about the little Russian town, enjoying the views of the distant snow-clad mountains, which now sparkled in the brilliant sunshine.

The next morning we found the need of that 'infinite patience' which Mr. Donkin had pointed out as the 'greatest requisite of all' for visitors to the Caucasus. We had ordered ten horses. They had been promised for 4 A.M. At four punctually Abajevoh appeared. I was sleeping soundly, and when aroused expressed my doubts about the punctual fulfilment of the contract. Woolley upbraided me as a laggard whose faithlessness was inspired by sloth. 'The horses are there,' said he, 'tethered to the railings.' I looked through the window and in the dim light saw that his assertion was true. We all got up, gulped down our coffee, hurriedly finished our packing, and prepared to start. Then we discovered how shamefully we had been deceived. There were only four out of our ten horses. After a little while two or three more appeared. Then a mule. Woolley demurred to regarding this as a *horse*. But remembering Mr. Dent's 'Garlic,' I suggested it should be allowed to count. It did not disappoint us. But after our tale of horses was complete there were the almost interminable discussions concerning the apportioning of the loads—the Tatars quarrelling amongst themselves and urging upon us the necessity of additional horses—so that it was 8.30 before we had fairly started.

The journey to Bezingi was not pleasant. The saddles were not comfortable. The stirrups were strapped up at shorter lengths than we found convenient, and the buckles were so stiff that the evils could not be remedied. Cockin soon decided to abandon his horse and walk. There were frequent halts, ostensibly for the purpose of rearranging the loads.

But we were suspicious of other motives, and considered it prudent to be always present when such rearrangements were carried out. We most of us walked and rode alternate stages. Our interpreter had a sorry time. He was unaccustomed to walking and ill provided with boots, so that when he tried walking he was soon footsore and weary. He was equally unaccustomed to riding, and when he rode the results were not of a more satisfactory nature. A heavy thunderstorm came on just as we were at the steepest part of an ascent through a dense wood. When the storm was at its worst the horse carrying the tent fell, and its burden rolled off. There were growls and mutterings besides those of the thunder.

About 6 P.M., however, we arrived at a picturesque glen called Kara Su, charmingly situated at a point where a stream from the west joins the river Urban, and here we decided, or rather it was decided for us by the inability of the horses to proceed further, to spend the night. There is a cowherd's 'kosh' or shelter at Kara Su, where we got buttermilk, fresh milk, and a bed of hay. The proprietor of this 'kosh' desires us to recommend it to our English friends. Well, the milk is good, the charges are not high, and the shelter is quite as well constructed as, say, the hut on the Weisshorn. By all means, if you get benighted at Kara Su, stay there. There is nowhere else to stay.

The next morning there was the same delay in getting off—the same need of infinite patience. The natives will chatter. 'I see,' said Ulrich, 'these men always talk two hours before they walk.' But they can go when once you get them started. We did get off at last, and after innumerable halts for the readjustment of the loads, and for the purpose of giving Rehfeldt (who was by this time in a most unhappy frame of mind) frequent rests—the tedium being, however, relieved by the grand character of the ravine through which our way for a considerable distance led, and by fine views of the 'Saddle Peak' in the distance—arrived at Bezingi about noon.

Civilisation is beginning to exercise its influence at this Tatar village. The spirit of competition has crept in. The tall Starshina expected to entertain us, and waited, with his retainers, to receive us on our entrance to the village. But we were beguiled to the house of another important man (Doulet-Kari-Süjunshef), whose son, a youth of seventeen or eighteen years of age, had accompanied us from Naltchik. His house boasted a wooden floor and an iron roof, and

the accommodation provided for us was certainly of a more satisfactory character than that obtainable from the Starshina. All arrangements had been made for our reception, young Süjunshef having ridden on home the previous night. Carpets were laid upon the floor; cushions and mattresses were brought into requisition. There was a profuse display of the art treasures of Bezingi, and every appearance of comfort. We were hospitably entertained, though, as we regaled ourselves on the verandah with the buttermilk, tea, cakes, butter, and cheese, and later in the evening with the mutton which had been specially provided for us, we discovered that the natural vigour of the curiosity of the Bezingese was not abated.

In the afternoon we called on the Starshina, who had donned his robes of state, and was evidently expecting the visit. At our request he sent for the hunter who had been engaged by Mr. Mummery a little earlier in the season. Then, having arranged for porters and horses for the continuation of our journey on the morrow, we turned in for the night. I will not enter into details concerning our experiences, but will merely suggest to all who propose to visit Bezingi that it is of the utmost importance that they should carry with them something more effective than the best insect powder obtainable in England.

At eight o'clock on the morning of August 15 we started from Bezingi, having settled, as we understood, that we should be conducted to Messrs. Dent and Donkin's second camp. We followed the left side of the stream till we reached the snout of the Bezingi glacier. Then the loads were transferred from the horses, which had been able to get to this point without difficulty, to the porters. A mule and a donkey, however, crossed the glacier with their loads, and went with us as far as the porters were willing to go.

Following the moraine on the right of the glacier, we arrived about four in the afternoon, in a thick mist, at a cave or 'kosh,' called by the natives the 'Misséss Kosh,' which we were assured was our destination. Had the afternoon been clear, we should probably have insisted on being conducted to a much higher position, as we regretted frequently afterwards that our head-quarters were so low down. The 'kosh' was about 8,400 feet above the level of the sea, and some 500 feet below (and on the opposite side of the glacier to) the camp of Messrs. Dent and Donkin in a previous year. We pitched our tent, and after our first evening meal in our new quarters I proposed that, as we intended

to try Messrs. Dent and Donkin's route, and consequently need not waste time in reconnoitring, we should sleep out the next night and try Koshtan Tau. The proposal was greeted with enthusiasm and unanimously adopted. For we were all keen to try this peak, in which our interest had been aroused by the description in the Journal. We thought it a virgin peak. And I am sure all readers of the Journal, including the gentleman to whom the credit of the first ascent belongs, will not be surprised that we experienced some disappointment when we learnt from the hunter—so far as we could understand him—that Mr. Mummery had been there not many days before, 'had slept out one night and had climbed Koshtan Tau; had slept out two nights and had climbed Dych Tau; and had slept out again one night and had climbed Gestola.' The hunter's assertion seemed to derive some confirmation from the discovery, the next morning, of a label bearing Mr. Mummery's name. This, however, did not deter us from the execution of our project, and so at 2 P.M. on the 16th we started as we had arranged.

We moved somewhat slowly over the level glacier, leaping the few crevasses which came in our way, drinking in the wonderful indescribable impressions of the majestic mountain scenery of this district, and experiencing more and more as we rose higher and higher the exhilarating influences of the magnificent climate. About 4 P.M. we passed Messrs. Dent and Donkin's camp. Then we took to the 'long and level' moraine on the glacier's right, and soon got a view of the whole range of mountains from Shkara to Gestola. We pushed on past a slight shelter on the moraine which the hunter assured us was Mr. Mummery's sleeping place, and, taking to the right moraine of the Koshtan glacier, and ascending its screes, came at 6 P.M. upon a place of rest very little above the ice-fall at the junction of the Koshtan with the Shkara glacier. There was little shelter. But a huge boulder afforded some protection from the wind. And by the erection of a low stone wall we secured a fairly comfortable place in which to spend the night.

The next morning (August 17) we made a good start, getting off at 3.30. We proposed, as I have intimated, to follow the route taken by Messrs. Dent and Donkin. We had accomplished the 'easy bit of rock climbing,' and got 'out of the range of the séracs of the small hanging glacier,' to

which reference is made by Mr. Donkin,* by 5.15; but we made no stop till we reached, at 5.45, some rocks which lie a little below the schrund. Here we made a short halt. From this point we met with no serious difficulty till we reached the belt of 'ochry-red' rocks. But here our troubles began. For some little distance we worked steadily up the south-western arête. Then a gendarme, covered with ice, blocked our way. We successfully turned this, but then another came into view. There was suspicion of others still. Ulrich unroped and reconnoitred, to save the whole party a fruitless climb. Shortly he returned with the gloomy intelligence that further progress in that direction was impossible. We moved towards the right on to the south face of this south-western arête, and ascended again. The white granite rocks lying immediately above the ochry-red layer were good for a short distance, but soon large smooth slabs covered with ice compelled us to descend. Another ascent, and another check of the same kind. Then we attempted a traverse, though from the character of the rocks and the size of our party it was a dangerous experiment. But all was of no avail. There was no help for it but to descend some hundred feet and try a longer détour to the right. We probably lost at least two hours in these fruitless efforts. At last, however, after bearing some distance further to the east, we hit upon a promising line of ascent. A small couloir helped us somewhat, though as it was full of ice we could not spare the time to cut our way up it. We kept to the rocks on its true right as much as possible, though these were generally very loose, and sometimes difficult. Still we had hopes of reaching the summit. But our work did not seem to tell on the great peak above us. Gradually our pace grew slower. The day wore on, and we began to wonder whether after all we should not be unsuccessful. We crossed to the left of the couloir, and soon reached a ridge west of the peak, and about, at the point at which we stood, on a level with the summit of Gestola (about 16,000 feet). We looked up and saw at least 1,000 feet of rock above us, whilst a difficult traverse must be effected before we could make a fair start, and the true top might, moreover, be some hundred feet behind the highest point in view. 'Can we do it?' I asked. 'It will take us at least three hours,' said Ulrich, leaving us to draw the inference. It was 1.30 P.M. We had been hard at work for ten hours,

* *Alpine Journal*, xiii. p. 247.

and, it being the first climb, we all showed indications of fatigue. Although the weather was fine there were clouds floating about, and we remembered the experience of our predecessors as they descended the same mountain. Three more hours! It would then be 4.30. And even then there might be stiff climbing to be done. It would be dark by 7. Evidently, if we reached the top, we could descend but a very short distance before nightfall. And suppose those clouds meant mischief? I don't know who was bold enough to be the first to say, 'I think we had better return,' but we all recognised the wisdom of the suggestion, and commenced to retrace our steps. Slowly and sadly we descended, the loose stones, which it was impossible to avoid dislodging, making progress dangerous. We reached our sleeping place at 9.30 P.M., and now were the victims of a misplaced confidence. When we started in the morning, we thought the splendid rocks of the face towards us would 'go' anywhere. 'We can make the summit in seven hours,' was Ulrich's prophecy. So we had sent the hunter back to the tent with our sleeping bags and cooking utensils, being certain that we should get back to the tent before nightfall. So here we were, with night upon us, at a height of about 11,000 feet, without bags or rugs, and with very little food. There was no help for it, however. We lay down under the shelter of our boulder and wall, huddled together, and for three or four hours slept peacefully and soundly. Then, at earliest dawn, we started somewhat disconsolately for our tent. What had we gained? We had learnt, what Mr. Donkin had tried to teach, but which only such an experience would make us realise, how great were the distances and how deceptive the appearances amongst these huge mountains of the Central Caucasus. We had learnt something of the character of the work before us. We had discovered that mountaineering in the Caucasus, at least under existing conditions, was a very different thing from mountaineering in the Alps.

But we were not to be daunted by one failure. We did not, however, like the 'fag' round to the foot of the Koshtan glacier, and so had all been on the look-out for a more satisfactory route. It was suggested that the northern arête might be more feasible. Consequently, on the morning of the 19th, Almer, Woolley, and I crossed the glacier to reconnoitre. We came to the conclusion that though here and there we might meet with serious difficulties, yet these difficulties would probably not be insurmountable if only the

real top were not cut off from the northern ridge. And this could only be tested by making the attempt.

So at 2.30 in the afternoon we started. Following the moraine on which our camp stood, we soon came upon the Misséss glacier, and at once struck up the middle of it, finding the ascent steep but easy. At 5.25 we had arrived at a ledge of rocks on the right of the glacier, which seemed to be a convenient place at which to spend the night. I may perhaps state here that this ledge can be more easily and more quickly reached by ascending a couloir which is passed before the glacier is struck. Only, in a wind, the couloir is raked with stones. We descended by this route, and did not enjoy the experience. Our sleeping place was, as registered by the aneroid, 500 feet higher than our sleeping place by the Koshtan glacier. This was so far in our favour. As we were by this time getting accustomed to the luxury of a hard bed, we spent a better night, and in consequence were somewhat late in getting away on the following morning, not leaving till 4.45. We crossed the glacier to our right and arrived quickly at some screes and rocks, which lay immediately under the depression in the arête which we hoped to gain. We worked straight up these, having now and then a short bit of really good rock climbing, and then, to avoid the séracs of the ice-fall, which did not look promising, kept close to the rocks, which bound the ice-fall on its right. We were really in a sort of cleft, with ice on the right hand and rocks on the left. This was the most disagreeable part of the whole climb. Step-cutting was frequently necessary. Though early in the day, water came trickling down, causing considerable annoyance. Occasionally the steps gave way as the second or third man got on to the rotten ice. Ultimately, however, all difficulties were surmounted, and we gained the snow-slope above the ice-fall. The slope was very steep, and steps had to be cut the whole way up to the depression in the arête. We reached the depression at eight, and stopped for breakfast. Below us was the Mishirgi glacier. To the right arose the precipitous north face of Koshtan Tau and the 'extraordinarily steep range connecting it with Dych Tau.' Directly opposite to us was Dych Tau itself, though the mists prevented our forming any opinion as to its accessibility on this side. And to the north of Dych Tau lay Mala Tau and Uku.

After breakfast we commenced our attack on the arête. First we ascended a snow-slope to the right of the actual ridge. At the lowest part of the slope, where the gradient

was slight, we experienced no difficulty, as the snow was hard and easily traversed. Then, as the gradient became steeper, steps had to be cut. As we neared the arête again the snow became light and powdery, and climbing was difficult and tiring. Clouds collected and concealed all the summits, and a cold wind began to blow. Cockin's hat had been carried away on the Misséss glacier, and before we gained the ridge Woolley's had also taken flight. The ridge was reached at 9.35. We worked steadily up the arête for nearly 1½ hours, and then at 10.55 halted at the foot of a snow-slope for a short rest. The guides left the sacks, and we began to plough up the loose snow. At the top of the slope a steep bit of rock presented itself. It was smooth, steep, and really difficult, but fortunately free from snow and ice. There was only about one hundred feet of it, but we all treated it with the greatest respect. Above this the rocks of the arête were half covered with snow, and needed care the whole way. A little after one o'clock we sighted a peak covered with snow, which we at first thought was the true top. We pressed on and came upon it. Then we discovered that the true top was still farther on, and was separated from us by a depression of from fifty to one hundred feet. This was composed of jagged dark rocks, almost free from snow on the side turned towards us, and surmounting the highest crag was a slender cairn. The hunter was right, then—Mr. Mummery had first climbed Koshtan Tau. We hurried on, scrambled up the rocks, and at 2.5 P.M. stood upon the top of this noble peak. But we did not stay long. The wind was bitterly cold. The clouds looked more and more ominous. For a moment the top of Dych Tau was visible, and by the clinometer was seen to be somewhat lower than the peak on which we stood. We hastily gathered a few stones, scribbled on our cards an intimation that on August 20, 1888, we had climbed the mountain by the northern arête, deposited them in a sardine box, and then began rapidly to descend. By 6 P.M. we had arrived, without special incident, at the place of our morning's bivouac. We rested for a short time, and then started down the snow-slopes. But how were we to get over the ice-fall? Our morning's route was certainly impracticable so late in the day. Our best course, probably, would have been to have descended by one of the couloirs to our sleeping-place. But certain garments and other articles had been left on the glacier at the foot of the cleft, and this fact led us, in an evil moment, to decide on venturing down the rocks to the north of the cleft. It was possible these rocks would prove

practicable, and if they should they would serve our purpose admirably. For a short distance all went well. Then, as the darkness deepened, our difficulties and our dangers increased. The character of the rocks was, of course, unknown, and we had nothing to guide us as to the best line in which to move. We were compelled to use the utmost caution. The rocks proved loose, and huge stones, dislodged by members of the party, frequently went crashing down hundreds of feet. Twice it was necessary to bring into requisition a smaller cord to steady us over steep faces of rock on which sufficient hold could not be found. It would, doubtless, have been bad enough in daylight, but in the dark the peril was extreme. More than once it seemed doubtful whether we should not be compelled to halt, resting on some narrow ledge, and wait for dawn. We did, however, steadily continue to descend. By-and-by we reached a couloir filled with snow. There were indications that in this couloir we were by no means safe from falling stones. But we lost no time, and soon, without accident, reached our sleeping-place at 10.45 P.M. and turned in for the night. Our camp was regained by the couloir to which I have referred at 10.30 on the following morning.

At the tent we found Süjunshef, our Bezingi host, and another Tatar of unprepossessing appearance, who had brought in a couple of chamois. These they skinned and ate, and though they unhesitatingly made use of our cooking utensils we were not invited to share in the feast. In the afternoon the wind dropped, but a thunderstorm with heavy rain came on, which lasted all the evening, and we experienced certain disadvantages of life in tents and Tatar 'koshes.'

The morning of the 22nd was fine but misty. We caught occasional glimpses of the summits of the mountains immediately opposite to us, and were impressed by their rugged outlines and their weird fantastic appearance through the veil of mist. As the aneroid had gone up, and as there did not seem to be much fresh snow on the mountains, we thought of starting from camp early the next morning and trying a new peak, or the pass now known as the Shkara col. The mist, however, increased, and the execution of the project was deferred.

The morning of the 23rd was gloriously fine, and we discussed the desirability of sleeping out for the Saddle Peak (which we had decided on trying, inasmuch as we were under the (erroneous) impression that Mr. Mummery had

climbed Dych Tau, and as we thought it possible that Djanga, or Shkara, or both, might have been done by Messrs. Dent and Donkin's party from the south), or of making the attempt from the camp. The appearance of clouds and mist in the afternoon led us to adopt the latter alternative. So at 2.25 A.M. on the 24th we started. The moon shone brightly, and we had no difficulty in making our way along the glacier. But light clouds were floating about, and even at the time of our start we were uncertain whether to try the peak or the col.

At four we passed Messrs. Dent and Donkin's camping place, and at 4.35 we were at the foot of the rocky N.E. face, up which we had now tacitly decided to try to force our way. For ten minutes we mounted a slope of avalanche-snow which fills a bay in the rocks at the head of the very centre of the Bezingi glacier, then turned an easy corner and took a short jump on to good firm rocks on the left. We went straight up these rocks, which for a short distance afforded fair climbing, then over loose stones and up a short steep snow-slope to more firm rocks, where at 5.45 we breakfasted at a height of 11,800 feet by the aneroid. The weather was still cloudy and unpromising, and we had no great hopes of success. However, after a short halt we struck up the rocks, and for $1\frac{3}{4}$ hours were working alternately up steep snow-slopes, where steps had to be cut, and good-going rock. Then after forty minutes along a snow arête and over a little moraine, and we had come upon our first serious obstacle in the shape of a big schrund, overhung by masses of ice broken as usual into fantastic séracs. At this point five chamois and a steinbock which had retreated before us up the rocks circumvented us by scampering down the avalanche débris on the slopes to the left, and so regained the rocks up which we had climbed. The schrund gave us a little trouble. But Roth cleverly conquered all difficulties. A few steps up a steep wall of ice landed each member of the party successively in a kind of ice grotto. At the entrance to this grotto there stood a strong column of ice supporting huge bosses above, and by holding firmly on to this column with one arm and swinging forward, the first step on to the upper lip of the schrund could be reached. It was then only a question of two or three steps round an awkward corner to a place of safety. It needed caution and showed skill and enterprise on the part of the leader, but by 9.20 the last man was over; and, after another twenty minutes' step-cutting over hard snow, we halted again for about half an hour.

From this point we worked straight up, step-cutting being necessary the whole way, by a succession of snow-slopes, under arches and between séracs of rotten glacier; Almer, who was now leading, preferring this shorter and more interesting, though more difficult route, to a long détour to the right, over what seemed to be only a monotonous snow-slope.

At 12.25 we had reached the top of the first plateau, and saw before us snow-slopes gently ascending to the south-east and south towards the summit of the Saddle Peak; whilst to our right they first sloped downwards, and then ascended towards the cone of Gestola. We turned to the left, and got well on to the second plateau at 1.10 P.M. Cockin remained on this plateau till our return. From this point the snow was deep, and very soft and powdery, and our progress was slow and wearisome. For three-quarters of an hour we toiled up the western face of the ridge; finally, we got on to the arête, where we found the rocks generally covered with the same kind of snow; and in half an hour more, at 2.25 P.M., we reached the summit. But it was very cold, and there was no view beyond occasional glimpses of the Adish glacier, the southern ridges of Djanga, and Gestola. Tetnuld and all other peaks were entirely hidden by the mist. We only stopped long enough to build a cairn and take some food, and so at 3.5 we were on our way down again. Comparing the summit with that of Gestola, we estimated that the height would probably be about 16,500 feet. We varied our route but little on the return journey, excepting that we kept to the snow as much as possible, it being now in admirable condition for the descent. We reached the Bezingi glacier at 6.45, and, with the aid of a lantern, arrived at camp at 10.10, having had some trouble with the séracs near our tent. I cannot be certain about the local name for the Saddle Peak. Young Süjunshef, our most intelligent informant, called it Kartuntau, or perhaps Katyn Tau, a name which appears in Koch's map of the 'Caucasian Isthmus.' But he, with all the other natives, had previously referred to the whole of the range from Gestola to Shkara as Djanga Tau.

On Saturday (25th), Woolley was suffering from a swollen wrist and arm, which caused us some alarm, but our anxiety was for a short time dispelled by the excitement caused by the receipt, at Bezingi, of the following letter from Mr. Donkin —probably the last, alas! that he ever wrote :—

Bezingi, Friday, August 24.

DEAR SIR,—Having arrived here this afternoon from Chegem, and hearing from your interpreter that you are in camp on the glacier, and that some one is going up to you to-morrow, I send a line to say how much interested I am to hear that you have had some success, and I hope that the weather may mend and that you may be able to do all you wish. I am here with Mr. Fox only; Mr. Dent was unfortunately obliged to leave us at Betsho, not being very well, and is returning home *viâ* Moscow. We have climbed Dongussorun, and traversed a new and splendid pass from Uruspieh to Chegem—both in perfect weather. We are bound for Balkar and Gebi, and thence home by Batoum, hoping to see something of the Dych-su glacier on the way. If we cross the pass on to the head of the Bezingi glacier, we may perhaps meet; but probably you may not stay so long. Our guides are Kasper Streich and J. Fischer, of Meiringen. We leave this to-morrow. With kind regards, I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

W. F. DONKIN.

At Betsho we had two good tries at Ushba; the first time we were driven back from the great couloir by avalanches; the second time we reached the vertical cliff by the S. arête. We could see no way up without more artificial aid than we had; indeed, I never saw a more forbidding precipice. Under good conditions the N. peak should be accessible by the couloir.

W. F. D.

H. W. Holder, Esq., Bezingi Glacier.

We arranged provisionally to start the next morning for the Shkara col, but owing to the unsettled state of the weather (there was a thunderstorm on Saturday, very high winds on Sunday, followed in the evening by rain and snow, rain and snow again on Tuesday), and the unsatisfactory condition of Woolley's arm, it was Wednesday (29th) before we got off.

On the 29th Cockin and I, with Almer, started at 4.30 A.M. for the Shkara col. We went quickly, arriving opposite Messrs. Dent and Donkin's camp at 5.45. Here, instead of taking to the moraine, we struck up the middle of the glacier, and in half an hour had got well behind the small ice-fall which is situated here. Above the ice-fall our route was practically over a level snow-field, down the centre of which coursed a small stream of water in a shallow channel of ice. At 7.7 we stopped for breakfast just below the main ice-fall of the glacier, and immediately opposite the junction of the Koshtan glacier with the Shkara glacier. We could clearly see the Mishirgi Tau on our left, though the tops of all the other high peaks of the neighbourhood were covered with clouds. On the face of the Mishirgi presented to us were three great couloirs, apparently filled with snow, and after some dis-

cussion we came unanimously to the conclusion that if we made an attack upon this mountain our best plan would be to work up the couloir on the left, then by a short traverse to the right to gain the main central couloir, which stretched up to a depression on the arête to the west of the summit. It seemed as though the top could then, without serious difficulty, be reached by this rocky arête.

After breakfast we tried to work up the true right of the glacier, on account of the soft snow on the left. The left was, however, much the less crevassed, and we were compelled again and again to work towards it to make a way. Ultimately we got off the glacier on to gentle slopes of snow-covered rocks on its right bank. The head of the glacier expands into a large snow basin, whilst before the summit of the col can be reached a steep, almost vertical wall of ice, about 150 feet in height, has to be surmounted. We gained the summit at 9.45. Below us was the S-shaped Dych Su glacier, a branch of which seemed to run down between a spur of Shkara and the wild-looking Nuamquam, up which latter peak we could detect no possible route on the side visible to us. To our right rose abruptly the cliffs of Shkara, commanded by huge overhanging bosses of ice. Any attempt on Shkara by these rocks would evidently be madness in the extreme. We descended a short distance on the east side of the col, looking for traces of Mr. Donkin's party, as in his letter he had suggested that they would probably look at the Dych Su glacier, and might possibly cross this col. We found no traces, and as the descent upon the Dych Su glacier was evidently perfectly easy by means of loose but not unsatisfactory rocks and a tongue of snow, we retraced our steps to the top of the col, and then spent some hours in reconnoitring on the arête to the north-east, which constitutes the rim of the basin of snow to which I have referred. We were particularly anxious to examine Dych Tau, but the mists perversely obstructed our view, and we were compelled to descend with our desires ungratified. On our return we kept to the snow on the right bank of the glacier, and cleared the ice-fall by passing close under the ice-fall of the Koshtan glacier. Then we took to the moraine, and, though a heavy fog rested on the Bezingi glacier, we reached home, without any serious delay, at 5 P.M.

The morning of the 30th was gloriously fine, and the mountains were entirely free from cloud and mist. The opportunity was too good to be lost, and so it was resolved that

we should sleep out for Mishirgi Tau. This mountain is misplaced in Mr. Freshfield's map. It lies but very little to the S.E. of Koshtan Tau, and to the west, not to the east, of the junction of the ridge from Shkara with that shown in the map as extending from Koshtan Tau. During the day a magnificent avalanche swept the N.E. face of the Saddle Peak. It fell from the plateau to the Bezingi glacier, a distance of probably 5,000 feet, and as it broke into its myriad atoms of ice and dust presented the appearance of a great cloud rolling down the mountain side. At 2.40 P.M. we left the tent, and at 6.40 we reached the sleeping-place from which our first attempt on Koshtan Tau had been made. A start was made the next morning at five. On a nearer view of the mountain the guides did not like the route which two days before we had fixed upon as the most likely, so we aimed in the first instance for the S.E. arête of the peak. For a quarter of an hour our way led over moraine. We then went up the middle of the lower glacier, and on to the left of the higher, the snow being good, and there being fewer crevasses on this side than on the other. The first ice-fall was surmounted with little difficulty, only a few séracs at the top giving any trouble. Above the ice-fall we crossed a snow-field to the left, and bivouacked on the first rib of rock at 6.55. Above this our route lay for a quarter of an hour over very loose rock, or screes, to a snow-slope immediately below the highest ice-fall. It was clearly possible to surmount this ice-fall by a long détour to the left, but it seemed feasible to force our way right through the middle of it, up the left of two vertical ice-walls, which formed the boundaries of a huge cleft at right angles to the general line of the crevasses. Without trouble we got well into this cleft, then crossed to a narrow ledge on the left wall by means of a sort of flying buttress, and here tried to zigzag up the almost perpendicular wall. We were completely brought to a halt about ten feet from the top. We were returning somewhat disconsolate, as the détour would now mean the loss of some hours, when Ulrich conceived the idea of attacking the wall a short distance to the left of our buttress. Here making use of Roth's back as the first step, and with the ice-axes driven up to the hilt into the snow (which by this time we were able to reach) as the remaining three or four steps, we were soon out of danger, and at 8.55 were on the last snow-slope we had to traverse. By 9.15 the schrund was crossed and we had reached the S.E. arête. From the point where we reached the arête we, for some

distance, effected a traverse though moving steadily up all the time, crossing two or three patches of snow till we arrived at a couloir on the south face of the mountain. We worked partly up this couloir, step-cutting being necessary, and partly over rocks mainly covered with fresh snow, through which, on to the harder snow beneath, our footing had to be made secure, so that progress was tedious and not entirely safe. To vary the monotony we turned to the right and reached the arête again. But after a short advance a gendarme necessitated a descent of some fifty feet or so, and a traverse. We turned on to the arête again, and, finding the rocks good, made rapid progress. We were in high spirits, as we now had every reason to believe we should easily complete the climb. There was the top certainly, and not more than two or three hundred feet above us. Suddenly Roth, who was leading, having clambered to the top of a buttress which lay in our path, muttered something which I could not catch. But I knew there was something wrong. As hastily as I could I followed him, and then, to my intense chagrin, discovered that between us and the final peak there was a cleft probably at least two or three hundred feet deep. It was most tantalising. Across the cleft there was but a short distance ere the pinnacle constituting the summit would be reached, and this pinnacle looked as though it would prove a splendid climb. But we all recognised at once that we were beaten. It was 2.25 P.M. To descend and reascend over such rocks as were here would mean probably two hours' work, and then we should not get across the schrund before nightfall. We dared not face the prospect of scrambling down that mountain side in the dark. As it was, there was not much time for rest. By the clinometer we ascertained that the point we had reached was almost exactly as high as the summit of Gestola, so that the mountain will probably turn out to be a little over 16,000 feet. We descended by the same route which we had taken in the ascent. But the utmost caution was necessary. Our morning steps were partly obliterated, and partly filled with ice from the snow which had melted during the heat of the day and been again frozen. It was 7 P.M. and growing dark ere we had crossed the schrund and reached the snow-field below. Here some change in our route was necessary. It was impossible to descend by that vertical ice-wall at night, so we kept to the right of the slope, trusting there would be no serious obstacle in our way. But by this time it was quite dark and bitterly cold. The

gradient of the slope became steeper, and the snow gave place to ice. Steadily we cut our way down this slope, groping for the steps the leader made, till suddenly Roth, after peering into the depths below, growled out 'Schrund,' and we were compelled to beat a retreat. We turned further to the left, and after some experimenting found ourselves on a snow-slope, down which we rapidly kicked our way, and ultimately found ourselves on the screes immediately above the resting-place of the morning. But if these screes had seemed bad in the morning, they appeared ten times worse at night. Every stone seemed on the move, and there was of course no chance in the dark of picking one's way. However, without serious mishap we reached at 10 P.M. a ledge of rock; and here, though we had neither bags, nor rugs, nor food, we thought it wise to wait awhile. But it was too cold for sleep, and after attempting for three or four hours, each in his own fashion, to fight against the cold, we started again, on the first appearance of the moon, Ulrich leading down the right side of the glacier as far as the lowest ice-fall. The deep shadows thrown by the blocks of ice in the moonlight made it prudent to defer the descent through the séracs till daybreak, so for three-quarters of an hour again we halted. At four it was light enough to proceed, and at five our sleeping-place was reached. Fearing that Woolley might be anxious on our account, we only stopped long enough to warm up and eat some soup which we had left, and then hurried to our tent, where we arrived at 9.30 A.M.

We had rain on Saturday and Sunday night, and, as I had calculated that I must leave camp on Tuesday morning, the only chance for another climb was to attempt something which could be accomplished in a single day.

On our ascent of the Saddle Peak we had been impressed by the fine rugged outline of Salananchera, and had decided on what seemed to be a practicable route. From this peak we could, if unsuccessful, retreat and reach our camp some time before nightfall.

So at 4.55 A.M. on Monday (September 3) we started. We crossed the glacier in thirty-five minutes, and in an hour had left the grass-covered moraine on the left of the Bezingi glacier, and were climbing the grass and shale-slope down which apparently Mr. Freshfield moved when descending from the Zanner Pass. A tedious climb brought us to the top of the col at 7.52, and from this point we had a grand view of the northern arête of Koshtan Tau. Half an

hour's walk across the gently rising snow basin brought us to the schrund. This was crossed at the foot of a couloir which leads up to a depression in the western arête of the mountain. As the snow was in a very unsatisfactory condition, we took to the rocks on the left of the couloir. These rocks were very loose, but with care a fairly good going track was found, and at ten we had reached the depression to which I have referred. We clambered up a few rocks covered with snow of the light and powdery character to which we were now becoming accustomed, then up a snow-slope, the snow being still of the same character, and were fairly upon the rocks of the western arête. These rocks were generally good, the best on the whole that we had found in any of our Caucasian expeditions. There was occasionally some really good climbing, and we reached the dome of snow constituting the summit at 11.30. We had from the top the best view we obtained during the whole of our stay in the district. This was partly owing to the remarkable character of the weather. Almost every day opened fair—the early morning was bright and clear—then about noon clouds began to gather, and frequently in the evening there was thick fog and a suspicion of snow or rain. As we had never reached any of our high points of view before till after mid-day, the panorama was generally quite obliterated or we could obtain but very partial views. But here we were before noon on the top of a peak separated entirely from all the giants of the district, and the view was consequently of the grandest character. Immediately opposite—across the Bezingi glacier—S.E. by E. rose the magnificent Koshtan Tau; a little further to the east, almost due east from us, was Dych Tau, with its Silberhorn-like summit. To the south-east we could discern the shoulder of Nuamquam, whilst to the south arose, from east to west, the noble range of Shkara, Djanga, the Saddle Peak, and Gestola. Gestola lay S.W. by S. from us, and in a line a little to the west was Tetnuld in its shroud of the purest white. Immediately behind us was Tiutiurga, at the head of a fine snow basin, and away in the distance were Uschba and the western mountains of the central group. 'This mountain is to be recommended,' said Ulrich. And, indeed, such is the case. It is not so high as the mountains near; but as its summit seemed to be just on a level with the plateau from which the final cone of Gestola springs, it cannot be much less than 15,500 feet, and, with the excep-

tion of the hour or two's grind over the shale or screes, it is as pretty a climb as one can well desire.

We descended by the same route, excepting that we took to the couloir about half way down, and glissaded over the avalanche snow. Now and then we were chased by stones which came flying down a couloir to the left, but we either outran them or dodged them, and so reached the camp without mishap. We were delayed in crossing the glacier somewhat, not reaching our tent till 5.10 P.M., owing to a thick fog which absolutely hid all our landmarks from view.

The next day Woolley and I started for home, leaving Cockin to win new laurels in these fascinating regions.

I have but little space left for giving my impressions of mountaineering in the Caucasus. I do so with diffidence, for they are subject to revision by a confident critic who has already expressed his views as follows * :—'The difficulties of the expeditions to the Caucasus have been unduly overrated and magnified. . . . That there are difficult peaks in the Caucasus no one can deny; but they are still unascended. The guides who have been taken from the Alps to this "great field for exploration" have usually been called upon to display those qualities we associate with a Dragoman.' No one, I venture to assert, with any real knowledge of the Caucasus could have penned the last sentence, and from all that I have read and experienced I have been unable to find any warrant for the first sentence.

I do not think that in any of the work we did there was any part so difficult that many climbs in the Alps could not be found to match it. But the difficulties do not lie in the nature of the climbing. They are found in the fact that it is continuous and strenuous for so long a period. They are intensified by uncomfortable sleeping-places, and sometimes insufficient or unappetising food. The unknown character of the mountains keeps the whole attention more intensely on the alert, and makes a greater drain upon the system. The conviction, too, that in case of accident there is no help near, adds severely to the strain. And the off-days are, I think, less restful; they are certainly far less luxurious than the off-days in the Alps.

Through the kindness of Mr. Cockin I have been favoured with the following account of his expeditions after we left :—

* *The Pioneers of the Alps*, second edition, p. 29.

SHKARA.

Our route may be traced on the photo-print, 'Panorama from below Guluku,' published in the *Alpine Journal* for March 1887 (vol. xiii. p. 242); the mountain is there called Koschtan Tau. The great buttress shown in the photo-print runs up to the top of the mountain. We went up the side glacier shown to the proper right of this buttress, and, turning to our left, struck the ridge at the point where the photo-print shows much snow, below which is a sharp break-down in the ridge. We followed the ridge to the top.

At 4.55 A.M., September 7, we left our sleeping-place at the foot of the rocks shown in the left corner of the photo-print, crossed the Bezingi glacier, and went up the side glacier at first to our right of it, then passed through the upper ice-fall with little check. After a halt from 7.33 to 8, we crossed to our left the unbroken upper part of the glacier, and then having our backs to the buttress Roth cut up a snow-slope, not clearly shown in the photo-print, until we struck the ridge at 10.25. We halted till 11.12, and then went on with not more than five minutes' halt until we reached the top at 3.42. Up to the foot of the final ascent the ridge was sharp in several places of some length, the edge not being wider than the thickness of one's finger. Almer cut the steps three or four feet below the edge on one side or the other as suited. The wind was bitterly cold, but fortunately not strong; a high wind would, I think, make the ridge impossible. We reached the foot of the final ascent at 2.20, and had thence an easier climb, with less step-cutting. At last we came to a small space of nearly level snow a few yards beyond which rose two snow humps. The further of these was the top, the ground falling in every direction. We had only momentary views, but could see the ridge falling for a long way. The actual top was snow, and we were too cold to build a cairn on the nearest rocks. We descended after five minutes to the small space of level snow just below the top to eat; and while here the top of Koshtan Tau (Guluku) cleared, and I found by the clinometer that it was below us.

The descent was made with little halt, and we reached the sleeping-place by lantern-light shortly before 10.

We were not on rocks more than fifteen minutes all the way. The guides had at least five, probably six, hours' step-cutting.

Salah-nancharah Pass.*

This pass is on the north side of, and the top of it is close under, the highest point of the range on the left side of the Bezingi glacier. A glacier comes down from it, the foot of which is opposite to Misséss Kosh (close to which was our tent); the 'kosh' is on the right moraine of the Bezingi glacier, some little distance above the point marked by a red star on the map facing page 258 of vol. xiii. of the *Alpine Journal*. The native hunter in my pay called this glacier 'Salah-nancharah,' and when I told him by signs that we had been at the top of this glacier, he said 'Booloongoo,' which I supposed to be the name of the valley on the other side. There was a large track of glacier on the Bulungu side. The descent on that side from the pass seemed easy.

We went to the top of this pass on September 11, following our right side of the Salah-nancharah glacier. We were two or three minutes under nine hours in going from the tent and back, including a long stay at the top. We put up a stone man.

Second Peak of Djanga.

We left the tent at 2.45 A.M. on September 12, and walked up the Bezingi glacier until 6.10, when we breakfasted near the foot of the rocks shown in the photo-print before referred to. We then went up the ice-fall and unbroken névé there shown, between Shkara and Djanga, until at 8.15 we came to the foot of the narrow glacier coming down from the ridge between two lines of rocks. We took to the rocks to our right of this glacier at 8.43. They were very sound, and, except in places avoided in the descent, easy. We halted from 10.10 to 10.52, and reached the top of the rocks at 12.18. Step-cutting followed all the way to the summit, which is at the Suanetian end of a short nearly level snow-ridge, and was reached at 2.46. We had a clear view, and found ourselves well above the Saddle Peak, and still more Gestola, well below Shkara, and a little below another point of Djanga. Our point is the one nearest to Shkara; the point further away, and appearing in the photo-print to be lower, is higher. Tetnuld had a cloud all to itself, but through a film of mist I saw the top long enough to fix the clinometer on it. I took no note of the angle, but remember estimating

* Mr. Cockin prefers this form to the one I have used in my account of the ascent of the mountain. I see no objection to leaving both forms and inviting critics to decide which is the more accurate (H. W. H.).

that Tetnuld was very little below me. From the flashing glimpses I had of its summit, my first impression had been that it was higher than the point I was on.

Above the rocks we passed near to the wry-necked rock well seen from the Bezingi glacier; close to this is what looked as if it might be a pass into Suanetia. The Shkara ridge was clear; it looked a fine climb, but Almer thought one part of it would not go. Near the foot of the rocks we went up is a good sleeping-place.

After putting up a cairn on some rocks near, we left the top at 3.12, cleared the last rocks at 6.29, and reached the tent by lantern-light at 10.30.

Adine Col.

We left Misséss Kosh with six porters at 7.40 A.M. on September 17, taking our way up the slopes on the other side of the Bezingi glacier. When we came to the rock ridge with stone men, we bore to our left across the nearly level glacier; then, following a shale slope to the right, we came to the névé of the Bezingi glacier, and on it to the col lying close to the main Bezingi wall. This we passed at two. The porters stopped often on the ascent to talk. We found no difficulty on either side.

We camped for the night on the right bank of the glacier, near its end, and went on in the morning to Mulakh. The porters demanded 5 roubles each for the 'course' from Misséss Kosh to Mujal, and another 3 roubles for going on to Mulakh. I paid both demands, but thought the latter unreasonable, especially as their own delays prevented our reaching Mujal the night before. I gave them 2 roubles for provisions. At Mulakh was a man called Kosta Devidrian who speaks a little French. He made a good purveyor.

The North Peak of Uschba.

I tried Uschba three times, always by the couloir. On the first attempt, September 22, we had to turn back after four hours through Roth's illness. Severe rheumatic pains disabled him for more than a week after. Almer spiritedly agreed to go alone with me, and on the 24th he and I tried again. We lost time by going on to the ice-fall, finding what looked an easy way stopped by a schrund; and after Almer had cut steps for over five hours in ice, had to turn. There were then two days of bad weather, in which much fresh snow fell.

Almer and I left our tent, pitched just beyond the last

trees, at 3.8 A.M. on September 28. The fresh snow was in a safe condition, but soft, especially below the schrund at the foot of the slope beneath the rocks of the north peak, and above the ice-fall. We passed the schrund at 8.3, having breakfasted on the way. Above the schrund we kept on the slope close to, but never going on, the ice-fall. An avalanche had swept off some of the fresh snow from the slope, and the going was a little better. Almer had in the upper part to clean out some of our old steps. When near to the rocks of the north peak we turned to our left. This brought us to the top of the ice-fall, right in the couloir between the rocks of the two peaks. We halted here, 10.5–10.45. The slope above was very steep, and the snow very soft. At 1.10 Almer broke through the edge on the neck. We were near to the south peak, but as the ridge leading to the top of this had much frozen snow and ice on it, whilst the rocks of the north peak looked easy, we turned at once to our right. Almer had some step-cutting before we could get off the neck and reach the rocks of the north peak. These were not difficult. The top, which we reached at 3.45, was snow, the highest point being an overhanging cornice; this we looked over, but did not venture to tread upon. Almer put up a small stone man a few feet below. We stayed on the top till 4.22, but were in mist all the time and could not ascertain whether the north peak was the higher or lower one. We had only a short look at the ridge from the neck to the top of the south peak, but were both inclined to think it would go, at any rate when clear of ice. At 4.22 we began the descent, and reached the tent at 11.20 by lantern-light.

I saw the forests of Suanetia later in the year, I believe, than any other English traveller has yet done. When I reached Betsho on September 19 the birch furnished the main mass of colour. But by the time I left, October 1, the deep red of the mountain ash and wild cherry was predominant. At sunset the woods seemed, in places, on fire.

A Winter Quartette.

By Mrs. E. P. JACKSON.

EITHER the days of witchcraft are at an end or I am a very degenerate descendant of the once powerful Lancashire witches. No ancestress of mine, taking her midnight ride, ever came to warn me of the fate the weird sisters were