



## IN THE WESTERN CAUCASUS.

BY ALEXANDER VON MECK.

**M**R. DOUGLAS FRESHFIELD in his classical book 'The Exploration of the Caucasus' has given a map of the Klukhor group, and made the remark that a visit to this region would well repay a climber. The combination of glacier, snow and high rock peaks with beautiful pine woods and rushing torrents affords such luxuriant landscapes, that when I crossed the Klukhor pass in 1901 I became so enthusiastic with regard to the scenery that I firmly resolved to pay a longer visit to these enchanting mountain glens. A detailed account of our travels, with full description of the few results of our scientific observations, mainly topographical, must perforce be reserved for the Annual of the Russian Mountaineering Society, and I shall here confine myself to a brief sketch of our route and the few first ascents that we made.

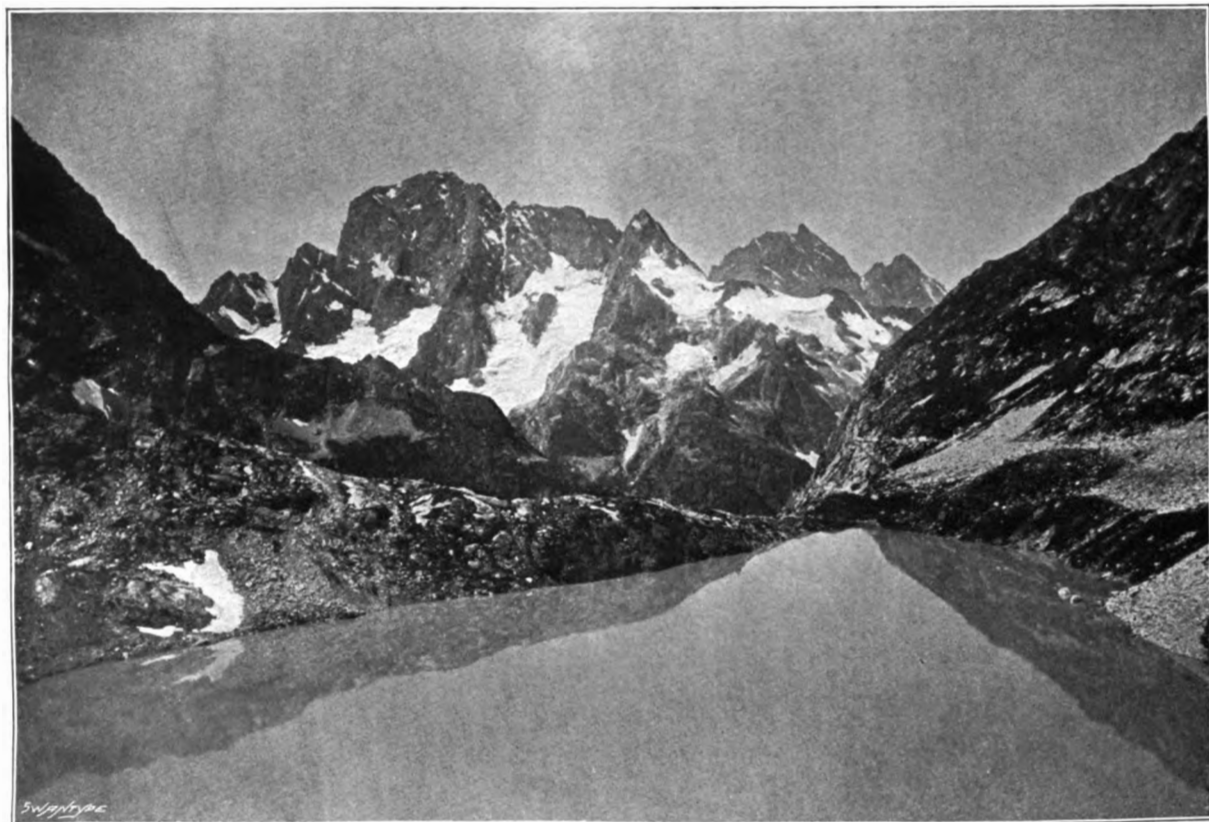
My companions for the summer were Dr. A. Fischer, now of Basel, the brother of Mr. Donkin's companion, who had already been to the Caucasus on the search expedition in 1889, and Ch. Jossi (junior) of Grindelwald. I also took one of our Russian Club guides, Jani Bezurtanoff, of Gwilyty, who proved a most useful camp superintendent, and an able mountaineer, and who is fast becoming versed in the use of rope and axe, and not less acquainted with the dangers of mountaineering. We four left the railway station Nevino-mysskaya on July 29, stayed the night in Batalpashinsk, and arrived late the second night in Aul Teberda. We did not escape the usual delay in hiring horses, but managed to make a start a little after ten along the Klukhor path. At the junction of the rivers Gonatchkhir and Amanauz we crossed the former and rode for some time on its right bank, and then forded the Amanauz to its left bank. The fording was rather unpleasant, but we managed it without a hitch, and towards sunset reached the Amanauz glade at the junction of the Alibek (left affluent) and the Dombai-Ulgen (right affluent) with the Amanauz. Our horsemen refused to move any further, so we pitched our camp. Rain then began, and we soon sought shelter under our tents.

The next day we reached the Alibek glacier (a distance of about 7 kilos) early in the afternoon. The sky was cloudy, mists raced in every direction, and we occupied ourselves in arranging our camp. The place was chosen at the foot of the

left moraine in an old lake bed. The Alibek river has its sources on the eastern slopes of the Alibek pass, which connects the valley of the Alibek (E.) with the valley of Aksaut (in the W.). Naturally, the principal volume of water is supplied by the glacier, and this volume is so great that the Alibek river is unfordable even at the mouth of the glacier, which was rather an inconvenience for us, as we had to tramp for two hours on the grand but uncomfortable moraine, and cross the glacier every time we wanted to get to its eastern bank. The next few days it rained during every night. On August 2 we started for a first reconnoitring tour up the glacier. Along the left moraine we reached a spot where a secondary glacier (named by us the 'Double-tongued'\* glacier) descends towards the Alibek. In a recess between two perpendicular moraines we found a nice little tarn, peacefully lying at the foot of a snow slope. We much admired the beautiful ice-fall of the Alibek glacier, and then crossed it to an eastern glacier descending from the crest of the right bank of the Alibek with the intention of reaching some summit on the watershed between the Alibek glacier and its eastern neighbour the Belalakaya glacier (wrongly named on the map Amanauz glacier). The ascent of this eastern glacier's ice-fall took us some time. From the upper plateau we forced our way through a chimney to polished rocks at the foot of the crest, but could not ascend directly, and were forced to go round to the N. and only at 2 p.m. reached a spur running S.E. to N.W. For a very short time we had a splendid view of the surrounding mountains, but clouds very soon obscured the panorama, and a thick fog followed. We made the descent (to the N.E.) on very steep rocks, and the fog made it rather difficult, as we had not the faintest idea where we were going to nor what ground we might find in front of us. We crossed some snow, then came to rhododendron bushes, then reached the top of the wall above the Alibek glacier, found a way along the bed of a waterfall and safely reached our tents. On August 4 we all four left camp at 8 a.m. to pay a visit to a high rocky summit, well seen from every surrounding height and which has no name, but bears the topographical mark of 1,697 sajenes (Russian fathom equals 7 ft.). Along easy grass slopes, over a stony desert, we reached the arête at 1.10 p.m. and the highest summit at 3.15 p.m. I named this summit Semenoff-bashi in honour of the Vice-President of the Imperial Russian

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\* I always use the orographical terms.



*A von Meck, photo.*

*Swan Electric Engraving Co.*

TEBERDA LAKE, & MOUNT BULGEN.

Geographical Society. We enjoyed a good view both on the main chain and on the glacier basin of the Khutyi, which lay to the N. and at the foot of our summit.

I mentioned above the tarn on the left bank of the Alibek glacier; it lies at the foot of a lateral valley which is occupied by a good-sized glacier, the end of which at present is less than one kilometre distant from the edge of the Alibek glacier. This glacier runs from S. to N., and makes a turn towards the E.; we named it the 'Double-tongued' glacier. The two ridges forming the banks of this glacier are represented as culminating in a high summit of 1,818½ sajenes (12,694 ft.). This is not quite correct, as the said summit lies a little to the W., and is connected with the western ridge by a sharp snowy arête. This summit was the object of our excursion on August 6. We left camp at 4.30 A.M., and reached the left bank of the Double-tongued glacier at 7.25 A.M. We found some difficulty in forcing our way through the séracs of the icefall, but safely reached the upper plateau, and at 8.55 A.M. we were on the watershed between the Double-tongued and the Djalovtchat glacier (Djalovtchat pass 10,171 ft.), scrambled along the arête to the S. upon easy rocks, and at 12.45 P.M. reached a summit marked on the map as being 1,687 sajenes (11,809 ft.) in height. As it had no name we christened it with the high-sounding name of 'Sunakhet,' which in the Ingoosh language is equivalent to 'hope.' But from this summit we saw that the highest point at which we were aiming was a long distance away from us, and had an imposing snowy arête to defend itself from unnecessary intrusion. We were somewhat disappointed in not attaining our goal at the first attempt, but had to console ourselves with the idea that first ascents materially differ from subsequent ascents. We had more proof of it the very same day. Not wishing to expose ourselves to the risks of passing through the lower icefall of the Double-tongued glacier with its very insecure séracs, we tried to find a way along and over its left bank, and from the Djalovtchat pass climbed over some loose stones into a 'rectangle' glacier lying to the N. of the pass, crossing it lengthways to a saddle between two rocky ridges (the one forming the bank of the glacier and a parallel ridge with a summit marked 1,612 s. on the map). A jolly glissade over two patches of snow soon brought us to a rivulet, and thence to a glen along which our Alibek torrent was rushing down to our camp. We even found a path on its bank, and sent our Caucasian follower (Jani Bezurtanoff) in front to prepare some food. But alas!

this path very soon disappeared. We searched high and low for a continuation, each of us in his own way. Jossi very soon disappeared in the woods, Dr. Fischer and I kept together. The continuation of the path was lost, and we decided to force our way through the forest, which we knew extended to the moraine. We were certainly not more than an hour's walk from our camp, and I shall not relate all our troubles, as we were nearly lost in the dense undergrowth. Darkness came on, the slope increased, we stumbled and rolled over hidden stones. In a word, it took us nearly three hours to get to the camp, and I do not know whether we should not have spent the night in the forest had our man Bezurtanoff not sent one of our followers with a lantern, who followed our shouts and led us back to the path, faintly traced through this primeval forest. The weather on the 7th was threatening, but on creeping into our tents at night it was decided that if it looked fine we would make another attempt on our summit; otherwise it was our intention to pay a visit to a pass on the neighbouring Belalakaya glacier (wrongly called Amanauz on the map). The weather, however, looked promising, and we left camp at 3.20 A.M. (August 8), followed the moraine to the Double-tongued glacier, and ascended its *right* bank, which was reconnoitred the day before by Jossi and proved easy. From the plateau we turned south, aiming at the corner summit, from which ran the arête to our summit. It was useless to follow the ridge we had used on our ascent of Sunakhet, because between the summit and the 'corner' summit lay a nasty gap with perpendicular walls. The glacier in the upper parts proved rather troublesome, and the bergschrund seemed to run along the whole base of the rocks in front of us, and great credit is due to my Swiss companions for finding a way.

The slope of the 'corner' summit was ice. The sharp arête, however, proved to be snow, and at 12.15 we reached the summit, to which I propose to attach the name Djalovtchat ( $1813\frac{1}{2}$  s. = 3869 m. = 12,694 $\frac{1}{2}$  ft.). We returned to camp by the same way, but had rather an exciting afternoon 'breakfast' on polished rocks below the glacier. We were sitting comfortably near a pool of crystal water when we heard a crash, and a block of melting ice above our heads came tumbling down a few yards in front of us. Our siesta was brought to a hasty conclusion, and we rushed precipitately to a safer place. We reached camp before dark.

The next day was a day of rest; we marked the glacier, repaired our shoes, took photographs, &c.

On the 10th we started for the neighbouring Belalakaya glacier and made the ascent of a pass at its head, which I propose to name Djessarà pass (1,764 s.=12,368 ft.=3,763 m.), as a glacier of this name reaches on the south side to this pass. J. Bezurtanoff and I returned to camp, and Dr. Fischer with Jossi camped at the foot of Belalakaya, and made on the following day the successful first ascent of this very steep granitic summit. This was our last day in the Alibek region. On the 12th we left our camp and followed the same path down the Alibek river to its junction with the Amanauz, then forded this torrent and ascended the valley of the Dombai Ulgen, and entered the valley of Ptysh.

Here our good luck failed us. We made the ascent of the Dombai Ulgen pass; and turned our faces to the Ptysh, but thanks to my personal inexperience turned back within 25 to 50 yards from the summit. The following day it rained hard, the day after we made an excursion to reconnoitre an approach to the Dombai Ulgen summit, and on the 16th made an unsuccessful attempt to reach the highest point of this mountain. Our failure was but natural since the only approach, the northern arête, proved to be a steep, broken rock ridge with powerful gendarmes, and all the rocks were glazed, while a cold wind was hampering our progress. Our next movements were over a low pass (Chuchkhur pass) into the Bulgen glen, down it to the foot of the Klukhor pass (2,816 m.), and over it to the foot of the Nakhar pass (2,869 m.). On the top of this pass we separated; Dr. Fischer and Jossi went to the summit of the Nakhar peak, and I followed with the caravan to a kosh some three hours down the valley, where they joined me late at night. Next day (August 21), we reached the village of Utchkulan. Here we again separated. I rode to Kislovodsk, and Dr. Fischer with Jossi went to the Buruntash pass, and from there reached the top of Elbruz (5,630 m.), and descended to the Azau Kosh, making the complete traverse from north to south. On arriving in Kislovodsk I found bad news from home and had to shorten my visit to the Caucasus.

Dr. Fischer, however, went to Vladikavkaz, and from the Kistinka glen made the first ascents of Kuru-Tau (4,091 m.), Schino-Tau (3,928 m.), and two nameless snowy summits above the Kibischa glacier (3,668 and 3,713 m.). Thus ended our Caucasian trip of 1904.