

about 13,300 ft., included some interesting alpine plants of local interest: *Cerastium elbursense* (Boiss.), a little white flower; a ranunculus which is probably *Ranunculus persicus* (DC.); and *Dianthus crinitus* (Sm.) (var. *crossopetalus* Fenzl.) all formed patches of colour. *Oxytropus persica* (Boiss.), a little leguminous plant which makes pretty patches of reddish-purple, well set off by silvery leaves, appears to have been collected only once before, by Kotschy in about 1843 at the same place. *Alsine juniperina* (Fenzl.) (var. *lineata* Boiss.) formed patches of green and white; and two little veronicas (*Michauxii* Lam. and *Kurdica* Benth.) were also seen. *Thymus Kotschyanus* (Boiss.), *Erysimum Nanum* (Boiss.), and *Dracocephalum Aucheri* (Boiss.) were collected. A patch of a beautiful gentian (*Gentiana verna*, var. *obtusifolia* Boiss.) was found about 1000 ft. below the top of the pass, on the Mazanderan side. Further down towards Mazanderan a pretty little allium (*Allium capitellatum* Boiss.) grew in abundance; and a yellow crucifer with such a beautiful scent that the local guide said it was called 'nargis' (narcissus): it has been identified as *Anchonium elichrysofolium* (DC.). Other plants near by were *Lotus Gebelia* Vent., *Vicia persica* Boiss., and a curious dark purple composite *Asyneuma amplexicaule* (Hand. Mazz.).

On the way back towards the Chalus road a species of *Michauxia* and a curious bush, *Cynanchum funebre* (Boiss.) (otherwise *Vincetoxicum medium* (Boiss.)), were collected.

I am indebted to the authorities at Kew for identifications.

HOHE TATRA.

BY H. E. L. PORTER.

THE idea of a visit to the Hohe Tatra this summer owed its inception to a bad investment. A goodly sum of 'Blocked Pengoes' had been accumulating to my credit in a bank at Budapest, not transferable to this country by any fair means, but theoretically able to be withdrawn for use in Hungary itself. To judge by the official rate of exchange, my fund should have been ample to cover the cost of a mountain holiday. We decided to fly to Budapest by the new Imperial Airways route, and dissipate the pengoes to the last filler. Having thus resolved, we consulted the map and the new volume of the Lonsdale library to discover what mountains Hungary could still boast. The search was vain; modern Hungary appears to have no attractions but historical ruins, spas and bathing resorts. Disgusted I flung the pengoes on the market at a ruinous loss, and so severed the only link but sympathy, which bound me to that unfortunate country. Our search of the map¹ had brought the Hohe Tatra to our notice. Study of the rather scanty information

¹ *A.J.* 37, to which reference should be made.



Photo, H. E. L. Porter.]

TATRASPITZE AND CZORBAER SEE.

[To face p. 311.]

about it in the JOURNAL revealed it as an attractive range save for the one drawback of excessive rain in August. But we meant to go in June, and in any case it would take a lot of rain to damp the enthusiasm of a party, inured of late years to the downpours of Skye and New Zealand.

We flew comfortably to Prague and, after a day's rest in that noble city, during which we gleaned much useful advice from the most efficient firm of Cedok, spent 11 hours in the train traversing the fertile plains of Czecho-Slovakia eastwards. It rained all the way, but cleared as we approached our destination towards sunset, and we had the delight of seeing the range at a distance towering proudly out of the plain. The high peaks showed far more snow than we had expected, making us thankful that we had not left our ice axes behind to save weight. Darkness fell as we arrived at Stry-Smokoveč, and transferred ourselves to the funicular to Hrebienok, which had been kept waiting for us by telephone. This rises in twenty minutes to the Sports' Hotel Pavla, standing on the site of the more primitive hostelry, where Dr. Roger-Smith's party stayed in 1925.² Whereas he had to walk five minutes to get a bath, we had a suite with bathroom attached at quite a moderate charge, a perfect luxury but for the perversity of the water which was too often cold when we wanted it hot and *vice versa*. This hotel, besides having a lovely view down on to the plain, is undoubtedly the best general centre for those who like to combine comfort with reasonable accessibility to the finest valleys and many of the best peaks on the S. side of the Tatra. Our expeditions occupied as a rule from 9 to 10 hours, and we found no monotony in wandering several times up the beautiful Gross- and Klein-Kohlbachtäler to the foot of our climbs. I follow Dr. Roger-Smith in giving the German names of peaks and valleys for the reason that they are easier to spell and pronounce than the corresponding Czeck and Polish names. The shops on the Czeck side only sell Czeck maps and guide-books, but by a lucky accident I procured a copy of the German edition of Dr. Komarnicki's *Hochgebirgsführer*, an accurate and exhaustive book, which enabled us to dispense with a local guide, rather to the horror of our hosts. Most of the natives seemed to understand German, and I did not find the prejudice against its use, which I had been led to expect.

The Kleinkohlbachtal is a gem, particularly in early summer, when abundant snow still diversifies the wide expanses of scree. Rising out of the main valley in an abrupt step, clothed in pine, larch and spruce and enriched with tumbling waters, it opens out into a three-mile level, on which Krummholz (*Pinus Mughus*) forms a labyrinth of interlacing boughs, while the river-bed expands here and there into a *Blumengarten* gay with Soldanella and a small form of *Anemone montana*. Above is another step, outflanked by the

² *A.J.* 37, 269.

path to the left rising in zig-zags on a vast cone of débris from the Mittelgrat. On top of the step is the stoutly built Téry Hut, much frequented by skiers and tourists. Beyond it lie five small glacial lakes and a wide snowy cirque leading to the watershed. The highest peaks of the valley are the Lomnitzer Spitze (2635 m.) and the Eistaler Spitze (2630 m.), which give interesting ascents of no great difficulty. The Lomnitzer Spitze is from every point of view the most imposing peak at the E. end of the chain. It is a superb sight from Tatra Lomnitz on the plain at its foot. Seen from there it forms the left point of a symmetrical flat bracket, the other tip of which is the Kesmarker Spitze, while the middle cusp is the Gabelscharte, a narrow snowy nick set between high vertical walls of rock, as remote but not as inaccessible as the Col Dolent. Here I longed to stand, and would have stood, had not one of those bewildering mists, so notorious in the Tatra, enveloped me, as I entered the cauldron 1000 ft. below it after crossing the Lomnitzer Kamm. The Scharte and the route to it remained invisible. I was alone and did not persevere against my better judgment. The ascent of the Lomnitzer Spitze by the ordinary route has been fully described by Dr. Roger-Smith. I will only add, that in June and in mist the way is not at all easy to find above the historic spring, known as Moses' Quelle, which when we saw it was a gushing torrent sufficient to wash as well as water an army. The iron chains and the boot-scratches were all buried in snow, and we could only see a few feet ahead of us. We found ourselves climbing steep and quite difficult rock ribs in the general direction of the unseen summit and were pleased when we arrived on the main ridge only a few feet from the ugly block of concrete, which usurps the function of a cairn. On the descent we spotted some of the iron contraptions which disfigure the route and followed their line till we could stamp our way down a long slope of good snow to rejoin our tracks of ascent.

Our other expeditions from Hrebienok were the Polnischer Kamm with traverse of the Kleine Vysoka into the Gross Kohlbachtal; the Schlagendorfer Spitze, a rather dull walk on a bony path where mist again robbed us of our summit view; the Eistaler Spitze; and a jolly traverse of three small peaks, Majunke Turm, Petrik Spitze and Döri Spitze. From the latter we studied with interest the great N. face of the Mittelgrat, a fine precipice which provides two face-climbs and a steep ridge-route of evident attraction.

Above the snow-line and off the beaten track, from which we seldom diverged for fear of the ubiquitous entanglements of the Krummholz, we had the mountains to ourselves except for chamois and marmots. These were present in surprising numbers. The chamois took very little notice of us, even less than they do in New Zealand. For the first time in my life I heard one whistle, and it seemed to me a very incongruous noise to issue from the wind-pipe of a goat. Marmots were everywhere; in one favourable locality,

as I topped the brow of a hillock noiselessly, I saw three standing sentinel on their hindlegs within a few yards, and a little farther was startled by a Klaxon-like blast at my very feet, which made me jump as if I was a pedestrian on a motor-road. Below the huts holiday-makers swarmed. It is the habit here for schools to go on holiday before their examinations in charge of their masters (it struck us as curious that we never came across a mistress) spending a day or two at each beauty-spot at very cheap rates in special dormitories. Elementary English is a popular subject in the Czeck schools, and often when we met a party of boys or girls on their way to a hut for a picnic, we were greeted, being instantly and infallibly recognized as English, with trivial copybook remarks, such as 'I love you and you love me,' delivered with a disarming smile. Being the only British visitors in the hotel, we were made much of. On one occasion a friendly schoolmaster, to do us honour, lined up his pupils after dinner and conducted them through a series of Czecko-Slovakian national songs, which they sang with the zest of thrushes. All the staff of the hotel seemed to be philatelists, and Jubilee stamps were in great demand: our mail was eagerly awaited by manager, waiter, scullion and kitchen-maid, and I often found myself cutting off the stamps before I read the contents of a letter.

We were sorry when our ten days at Hrebienok came to an end, and the regret seems to have been mutual. At our last dinner we found our table tastefully adorned with flowers and ornamental leaves, arranged by our waiter who was busily occupied from dawn to dusk without any such works of supererogation. In addition a large bouquet of garden flowers was pressed on my wife, who, fearful to offend, carried them outside her sack wrapped in wet paper the whole of a grilling day to our next stopping-place. This was the Grand Hôtel Hviezdoslav on the Czorbaer See (Strbské Pleso) towards the other end of the chain. There is a good high-level route all the way along the hillside for those who prefer to use their legs rather than go by train or motor along the excellent highroad connecting the numerous health-resorts dotted along the foothills. The walk takes from 7 to 8 hours and does not lack interest. The first two hours take you across to the Felkertal, a central valley which contains the biggest hut, the Schliesierhaus, and the highest peak, the Gerlsdorfer Spitze (2663 m.), of the whole chain. The path then dips valleywards, before ascending through a wide zone of encroaching Krummholz to the ghostly waters of the Botzdorfer See. From here it traverses a long stretch of barren screes to the little peak Osterva. This is a noted view-point, of which we were quite ready to take advantage, being hot, hungry and footsore. Far below us lay the still waters of the Popper See, the most lovely of all the countless 'Eyes of the Sea,' as the glacial tarns are picturesquely named. To the left the Mengsdorfertal, to the right the Trummental, and between them the fine massif of the twin-headed

Tatraspitze (2565 m.) supplied a feast for the eyes, which atoned for an unusually dull lunch. We were soon forced to our feet, however, by the obvious imminence of a thunderstorm. We plunged down a steep and incredibly loose path to the Popper See, and toiled on with hot and weary feet towards Czorbaer See, which we thought was in the valley directly below us. Before long we found ourselves rising steadily, much to our distress, in order to cross a spur into the next valley. That last hour in the sultry heat was trying to the temper, but we cheated the storm which broke in torrential rains while we were enjoying a more agreeable form of wetness in a perfectly appointed bathroom in the hotel.

Talking of storms, I have to record a very different experience of Tatra weather to that of other British parties. We started with a wet day, and on several others the ridges were obscured with clouds or drifting mist, but in the valleys sunshine poured down day after day till the late afternoon, when heavy thunder-rain often crashed down after we had comfortably finished our expedition. We actually enjoyed two complete days without a cloud in the sky, an event so rare as to call forth comment from the natives. It is curious that Dr. Komarnicki's *Führerbuch* makes no mention whatever of the blinding mists which have so exasperated previous British parties in the district. He regards June and September as definitely fine, and recommends the period from the middle of July to the middle of September as the most suitable for 'Hochtouren.'

The hotel was very modern, beautifully furnished and spotlessly clean. From our window we looked down on to the lake, its boats, canoes and bathing-establishment. Far away in the distance shone the queenly Tatraspitze, now the chief object of our desire. Two days later we achieved it. Three hours sufficed to take us past the Popper See up the Mengsdorfertal to the Hunfalvy Joch, which divides the popular view-point of the Meerangsspitze (Rysy) from the Tatraspitze. It was a day of fierce heat, and as usual we met one or two ladies clad in bathing-dresses and boots, apparently immune to the effects of sunburn or snow-scorch. At the Joch one turns to the right, ascends the ridge for a bit, then contours across the face and mounts to a little nick, the Kogutek Scharte, on a subsidiary ridge of the Martin Roth Spitze. This was the only passage we met in the Tatra, where Alpine experience was decidedly helpful. A traverse on steep snow was followed by a section where loose snow masked a rocky recess in which we could see a number of iron stanchions half-buried in ice. Where not cemented by ice, the rocks were very rotten, and the passage cost us double the guide-book time. From the nick a straightforward traverse on rock and snow landed us in the great snow couloir leading to the col between the two peaks. This being in good order we soon attained the col. The two peaks are exactly equal in height and, on this occasion, were equally shrouded in thick cloud. We chose the S.E. peak and spent just enough time on it to curse the clouds comprehensively.



Photo, H. E. L. Porter.]

FROM DORISPITZE. TATRASPITZE IN CENTRE BACKGROUND, GERTSDORPERSPITZE
ON LEFT.



Photo, H. E. L. Porter.]

TATRASPITZE FROM OSLERVA.

[To face p. 314.



Photo, H. E. L. Porter.]

HEAD OF KLEINKOHLBACHTAL. LOOKING BACK AT TERY HUT ON WAY TO
EISTALER SPITZE.



Photo, H. E. L. Porter.]

THE POLISH BEAUTY SPOT: MORSKIE OKO.

Returning to the Hunfalvy Joch, we next sped up the path to the top of Rysy, from which we should have seen the Polish ' Morskie Oko ' sheer below us and a wide prospect of all the Tatra around. Again we were disappointed of the promised feast for eye and camera. The only amusement we got was from meeting on the path a family party of all ages, shapes and costumes, serpentine along behind a venerable guide of charming appearance, whose shoulders were draped in countless coils of a rope that looked as old as himself, while in his hand he carried a miniature snub-nosed ice-axe of a pattern peculiar to the Tatra. Both rope and axe were clearly nothing but badges of office. The family had chartered a guide and wanted one who looked the part, even if he had no opportunity to put his gear to its proper use on the fool-proof track along the ridge of Rysy.

There followed the two cloudless days previously mentioned. We spent the first idling in the valley and wishing ourselves back on the summit of Rysy. The second was better employed in exploring two other delightful valleys, the Mlinical and the Furkotatal and traversing the Gross Solisko from the one to the other. Once again we had the company of schoolchildren in the valley and of chamois and marmot above.

Climbers, like soldiers, may be said to march on their stomachs, and it remains for me to tell how we fared in this important respect, especially as there seems to be an impression in this country that one is likely to dwindle away in the Carpathians from lack of food. This is certainly not true of the Tatra. The hotels there offer pension terms according to one of two scales. If you choose the scale which allows an extra course at lunch and dinner, you quite reasonably pay more. The food was uniformly good in quality and well cooked. The one objection we had was to the undue amount of caraway seed, which seasoned almost everything we ate. Even the staple bread of the country is full of it, and we seldom met a salad or vegetable or dish of stewed fruit, into which it did not enter largely. Our chef's *magnum opus* in this line was a rich mixture of brains and buttered eggs copiously inlaid with the universal seed. We had no occasion to test the fare provided in the huts, except for a glass or two of the pleasing wine of the country. All those we entered were in charge of a friendly guardian and seemed clean and comfortable.

It will be seen that our activities were almost confined to the ordinary routes up the most attractive peaks. I cannot pretend to have added much to the information contained in Vol. 37 of the JOURNAL, except the assurance that the sun can shine in the Tatra as in the Alps. Bearing in mind the vastly greater scale, one might say the Hohe Tatra has many points of resemblance to our own home hills. Though built throughout of excellent granite, it can boast of no Grépon or Requin. Every major peak has a comparatively easy way up it, and it is only natural that a British party

on its first visit should climb as many peaks and explore as many valleys as it can. It will not have time or inclination to tackle the countless difficult rock-problems and ridge-traverses elaborated by the Continental climbers. I do not know if the bacillus of the 6th Grade delirium has infected the local experts: perhaps there are no vertical faces of sufficient horror to attract it: but it is a pity that ironmongery is so plentiful on the easy routes wherever a step occurs that would puzzle an active cow.

The Tatra is far away, and distant travel is expensive. For this reason alone it is unlikely that its undeniable attractions will ever compete with the still greater merits of nearer ranges in the affections of Britons. But those who do go there will find plenty to interest and amuse them, and may be sure of a very friendly reception among a charming people.

PASSES—NORTHERN YASIN.

BY REGINALD SCHOMBERG.

THE following paper gives an account of two passes in Yasin (Gilgit Agency) which were crossed in July 1933. There would appear to be no record of previous visits, and the natives of the place were quite positive that no European had ever traversed these passes. Darkot, which lies in the centre of the routes, besides being the most northerly village in Yasin, is the scene of the murder of George Hayward on July 18, 1870.

The people of Yasin are very fair mountaineers. They are not so good as the Hunza men, who are conspicuously the best for pluck, activity and endurance of any of the tribes in the N.-W. Himalaya, nor are they as active as their neighbours of Punyal. They are, however, a good third; moreover, we found that they improved very much on further acquaintance. As I had Hunza men with me, the behaviour of the Yasin men was judged rather critically.

The mountains behind Darkot, that is the range between Chitral and Yasin, are described as the Hindu Raj, which as a name for a subordinate mountain system is satisfactory enough, but I do not see how they can escape classification as part of the Hindu Kush. The narrow gorge of the Yarkhun river (identical with the Mastuj and Chitral river) divides the Hindu Kush and the Hindu Raj, the valley slope on the right belonging to the former, while on the left it is the latter's property. As a handy label, the name may therefore stand.

Our journeys were made in July under favourable conditions, but the flowers were disappointing. We were too late for most alpines at lower levels, but even in the higher ones we failed to find any. I certainly expected to meet with primulae near the top of the passes, but failed to notice a trace.