

LHO LA

BY N. E. ODELL

THE fine work of the two Swiss Expeditions to Mount Everest in 1952 was acclaimed by all, and it has been admirably recorded in such books as *Avant-Premières à L'Everest*, and its English rendering, *Forerunners to Everest*, as well as in *The Mountain World*, 1953. Moreover, these books are splendidly illustrated and provided with sketch-maps and panoramas, which leave few grounds for criticism. There is, however, at least one serious defect in orographical nomenclature, that will, I feel sure, be noted with surprise and apprehension by all members of earlier expeditions to Everest, as well as many other mountaineers. I refer to the well-known and time-honoured feature of the Lho La, c. 20,013 ft., first attained and so named by the Reconnaissance Expedition of 1921, which name it is now proposed either to suppress or to transfer to the South Col of Everest.

Quite arbitrarily, it would seem, the sponsors of the Swiss Expeditions have changed the well-established Lho La to 'Khumbu La.' This new name appears on the route-maps, the local sketch-maps, and the beautiful photographic panorama by André Roch attached to the account in *The Mountain World*, 1953. In the preface in the latter volume, over the initials 'O. G.', a commentary on the panorama explains that 'in this some new Tibetan names are published for the first time, and names which had been forgotten are recovered from oblivion. There is one adjustment that seemed especially important—Lho La means 'South Pass,' so called because explorers from the north named the pass from their own viewpoint; but those pioneers have vanished and Everest remains. Since Lhotse, moreover, means 'Southern Mountain,' the Lho La, relative to Everest, should be situated between Everest and Lhotse; the orphaned col west of Everest (formerly Lho La) has therefore been renamed 'Khumbu La.' Again, in the new book, which has just reached me, *Everest: the Swiss Everest Expeditions*, published by the Swiss Foundation, 1954, with Introduction by Othmar Gurtner, the commentary on Plates 41 and 72 states 'Khumbu La . . . originally called Lho La ('South Col'), but has now been re-named in order to avoid any confusion with the South Col on Everest.' But here, and especially in the other Swiss books, there is inconsistency, since the text throughout refers to the actual South Col.

The latest attempt to substantiate this unwarrantable change in nomenclature comes from Marcel Kurz, who in *The Mountain World*, 1954, pp. 190-1, footnote 2, argues along the same lines, and hopes

that 'the English will agree to it,' adding that 'it was necessary before it became too late'! As a very experienced topographical surveyor, surely M. Kurz should appreciate that it is dangerous to 'monkey with' established place-names 'out of respect for symmetry,' and with entire disregard for precedence.

Now, firstly, it should be emphasised that the pioneers of Everest by the northern approach have by no means 'vanished.' Secondly, however illogical in the light of later events the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research may deem the term 'Lho La,' it is desirable that some consideration should remain for the earlier 'forerunners to Everest' in respect of their adopted nomenclature. There would appear, indeed, to be no justification, in view of the long period of earlier British activity, including surveying and cartography, for such unilateral alteration and suppression of well-established nomenclature as is now proposed in the case of Lho La, 'out of respect for symmetry.' In addition, arbitrarily to transfer 'Lho La' to the position of the South Col, and thereby displace the latter name is clearly unjustified; such an innovation could only lead to confusion. One is, perhaps, reminded of a somewhat parallel case, in another context, of the unfortunate and untimely 'mis-naming' of the South Summit of Everest, the 'South Peak'! (*A. J.* 59. 367).

But there is another, and perhaps even more valid, objection that can be made to the use of 'Khumbu La' in place of the time-honoured Lho La. Khumbu La is, or was, the term frequently used locally for the Nangpa La, lying west of Cho Öyu, namely the well-known and well-used Sherpa pass from the Sola Khumbu¹ district to Kyetrak in Tibet. During the Everest Expedition of 1924, when we passed through Kyetrak en route to the Rongshar valley, traders and yak-drivers often spoke of the Khumbu La as an alternative for Nangba (or Nangpa) La. And well they might, for this pass at an altitude of 19,050 ft., provides the easiest, if not the only, route for yaks or coolies into Sola Khumbu over the main Himalayan chain. The newly proposed 'Khumbu La,' on the other hand, does not provide a practicable trade route into Sola Khumbu; even climbers have not yet negotiated it.

Consequently, the suggested change in the name of the Lho La would appear to be inadmissible. In this opinion I have the support of Sir Edmund Hillary and others with whom I have discussed the matter. On the other hand, we are in agreement that certain new names for prominent unnamed peaks which have been included in the Swiss maps are not only justified, but are desirable: *e.g.* Khumbutse (the south-east peak of Lingtren group, *not* 'Lingtrentse'!); Chumbu (situated west-north-west of Pumori); and some others, will no doubt be acceptable to many. The proposed shifting, however, of the well-known Nup La to some other locality will be in no way acceptable.

¹ Or, perhaps preferably, Solo Khumbu: *vide The Mountain World*, 1954, p. 191, footnote 3.

Finally, it seems regrettable that the editors of the *Schweizerische Stiftung* did not discuss these proposed amendments with the Alpine Club and R.G.S. before committing themselves to print. In the absence of agreement, a confusion in orographical nomenclature in this area is bound to arise in the future, thus involving precision and clarity of description on the part of the many mountaineers, travellers or scientists who will be attracted to this, perhaps, the most spectacular district of the entire Himalaya.

Research may derive the term 'Lho La' it is desirable that some con- sideration should be given for the earlier 'Lho La' in the context of their adopted nomenclature. There would appear, indeed, to be no justification, in view of the long period of earlier British activity, including surveying and cartography, for such unilateral alteration and suppression of well-established nomenclature as is now proposed in the case of Lho La, 'out of respect for symmetry'. In addition, arbitrarily to transfer 'Lho La' to the position of the South Col, and thereby displace the later name is clearly unjustified; such an innovation could only lead to confusion. One is perhaps reminded of a somewhat parallel case, in another context, of the unfortunate and ultimately 'mis-naming' of the South Summit of Everest, the 'South Peak' (1865, p. 307).

But there is another, and perhaps even more valid, objection that can be made to the use of 'Khumbu La' in place of the late-honoured Lho La. 'Khumbu La' is, or was, the term frequently used locally for the Nangpa La, lying west of Cho Oyu, namely the well-known and well-used sharp pass from the Solu Khumbu district to Kyetok in Tibet. During the Everest Expedition of 1951, when we passed through Kyetok en route to the Kongkar valley, traders and yak- drivers often spoke of the Khumbu La as an alternative for Nangpa (or Nangpa) La. And well they might, for this pass at an altitude of 10,000 ft. provides the easiest, if not the only, route for yaks or coaches into Solu Khumbu over the main Himalayan chain. The newly proposed 'Khumbu La', on the other hand, does not provide a practical trade route into Solu Khumbu; even climbers have not yet negotiated it.

Consequently, the suggested change in the name of the Lho La would appear to be inadmissible. In this opinion I have the support of Sir Edmund Hillary and others with whom I have discussed the matter. On the other hand, we are in agreement that certain new names for prominent unascended peaks which have been included in the Swiss maps are not only justified, but are desirable: e.g. Khumbun (the south-east peak of Lingtren group, not 'Lingtren'; and some others situated west-north-west of Purnoch); and some others will no doubt be acceptable to many. The proposed shifting, however, of the well-known Nangpa La to some other locality will be in no way acceptable.

On previous proposals, see *The Himalayan Journal*, 1954, p. 101, footnote 2.