

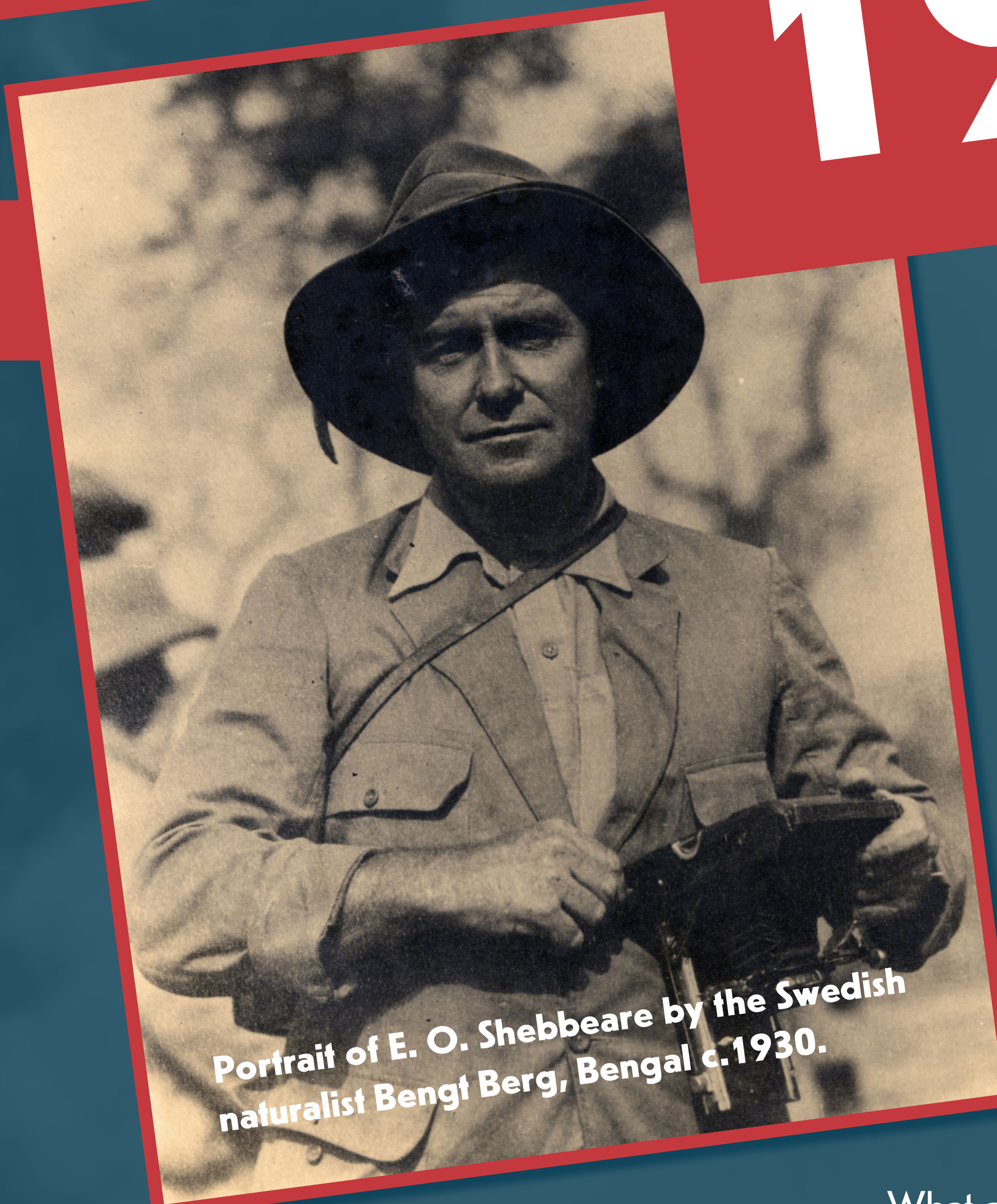
# MOUNTAIN OF DESTINY KANCHENJUNGA 1929



## SEEING LIKE A MOUNTAIN

If the 1929 German expedition's goal was to establish German mountaineers on the world stage it also brought them into contact for the first time with the multi-ethnic world of the Himalayas. The photographs in this exhibition taken by Bauer and his colleagues Julius Brenner and Dr. Eugen Allwein all exhibit a strong ethnographic sensibility, sensitive to the ethnic diversity of Sikkim and the region. These photographs capture the distinctive features of indigenous Sikkimese Lepchas and Lhopo, as well as the many Nepalese groups drawn to Darjeeling in search of work. Sherpa and Bhotia high-altitude workers are accorded special attention. They featured in group photographs and individual portraits. In Bauer's published books he frequently named high-altitude workers in photograph captions, a highly unusual practice for the time, where representations of indigenous expeditionary labour are usually limited to 'types' – Sherpa, porter, Tibetan, cook. The albums also show group portraits of high-altitude porters with the title 'Tigers', the name used by the Himalayan Club to indicate the strongest Sherpas capable of operating at high altitude.

One remarkable photograph features the expedition cook, Tenchedar, seated outside a tent, praying in the Lotus position. The sublimity of this image is underlined by the fact that, all too often, Western



Portrait of E. O. Shebbeare by the Swedish naturalist Bengt Berg, Bengal c.1930.

What also marks these photographs out as unique is that they were carefully annotated by Edward Oswald Shebbeare, the British transport officer on the 1929 Kanchenjunga Expedition. In the albums on display, which were given to Shebbeare by Paul Bauer, Shebbeare was able to name most of the Sherpas featured in the photographs, preserving for us their individuality and unique identity. Shebbeare had joined the Indian Forest Service in 1906, eventually becoming Chief Conservator of Forests for Bengal. A founder member of the Himalayan Club (f. 1928), E. O. Shebbeare had been the transport officer on the 1924 Everest expedition. He was subsequently transport officer for Bauer's German expeditions to Kanchenjunga in 1929 and 1931 and he was deputy leader of the 1933 Everest expedition.

It is probably fair to say that all the major expeditions undertaken through Sikkim between 1924 and 1938 benefited from Shebbeare's expertise, either directly or indirectly via the Himalayan Club's role in marshalling porters and managing their pay and welfare. Shebbeare was also Assistant Editor of *The Himalayan Journal* 1930–1933, Vice President of The Himalayan Club from 1933–1934 and a Committee member 1936–1938. His knowledge of Sikkim and of the indigenous peoples of the region and their languages, was central to the logistical success of this and other expeditions.

Shebbeare also developed a legendary reputation amongst S.E. Asian conservationists. In the mountains, jungles and forests of the Himalaya, E. O. Shebbeare became a pioneering naturalist and forest conservationist. As Conservator of Forests for Bengal, Shebbeare pioneered game reserves. His work was already being acknowledged in 1932 when the Swedish naturalist Bengt Berg chose to dedicate his book on the Indian one-horned rhino and the Indian elephant to Shebbeare. His obituary in *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, records that 'it was due to his untiring pioneer efforts that legislation was passed for the protection of the Indian rhinoceros. Due to Shebbeare's lobbying, 'the Rhinoceros Preservation Act came into being and the Jaldapara Game Sanctuary, in the Duars, was declared a special Reserve for the preservation of the Rhinoceros.'

This was the first legislation anywhere in the world that specifically protected rhinos. Section 4a of The Bengal Rhinoceros Preservation Act of 1932 made it illegal to kill rhinos and trade in their body parts, securing the survival of the rhino in India.

In 1938 Shebbeare became the Chief Game Warden for Malaya. He became both a founder and President of the Malayan Nature Society (1940-1942) and founding editor of the *Malayan Nature Journal* (f.1940). He established a strong working relationship as a field naturalist working with Frederick Chasen, the director of the Raffles Museum in Singapore and supported 'Chasen's efforts to get the remaining wild areas of Singapore declared a wildlife preserve.' Captured by the Japanese in 1942 as part of F. Spencer Chapman's first 'stay behind' party, Shebbeare was interned in the notorious Changi prison in Singapore, eventually retiring to Oxfordshire in 1947. As well as significant contributions to the scholarly literature on the flora and fauna of S. E. Asia, in his retirement he wrote *Soondar Mooni: The Story of an Indian Elephant* (Gollancz, 1958), a book that explores non-human subjectivities and agency, providing us with evidence of Shebbeare's deep sensibility for the natural world and the non-human lifeforms we share it with.



mountaineers ignored and belittled the indigenous religious practices of the expeditionary labour force they relied on. Bauer describes the moment the photograph was taken at Camp III in almost transcendental terms:

When one stepped out of the tent in the early morning, there was Tenchedar sitting or standing on his kitchen rock, performing his morning devotions. It made a deep impression on me to see him, amid this region of ice and frost, gazing across in rapture to the distant summit of holy Kanchenjunga lit by the first rays of the sun. It is a noble and elevating practice, fitting a land whose extent passes our imagination, that lonely wanderers and shepherds in the icy valleys of high Tibet should turn their faces to the dawn-lit summit of the sacred mountain. All eyes meet there, and day by day knit afresh the bond that holds these folk together as a community, yes further, as a cultural body. It is true that Tenchedar was not quite an ordinary man, he was a leader among his compatriots. A man of astonishing religious knowledge, he wrote and spoke English, he led the religious festivals of the porters at the full moon; his orisons were a mixture of piety and gymnastics, which on the latter ground alone would have aptly served as the basis of a school of physical culture at home. He was not only a good cook, but a conscious, educated representative of the buddhist-lama world philosophy, and he gave us a splendid impression of this sociable, happy people.

Paul Bauer, *Himalayan Campaign* (1937), 75-76.



In one tender portrait in these two photograph albums a group of seven Sherpas lies in the grass, smiling at the camera, twirling Edelweiss in their hands. The flowers, a symbolic link with the Germans' own Bavarian homeland, signal a tranquil moment before the fruitless struggle on the North East Spur, a still point in which to contemplate alternative outcomes. In this photograph in particular, E. O. Shebbeare has attempted to name all the Sherpas who took part in the expedition, restoring to them their identity, individuality and agency which was so often denied them in expeditionary accounts: 'Nima Tondrup, Pasang, Sonam Tobgye (?), Gami, .....?, Babulal, Sonam (?)'. *Mountain of Destiny: Kanchenjunga 1929* captures a unique moment in German Himalayan mountaineering history when German mountaineers first became enchanted by the world of the Himalayas, before the deadly focus on Nanga Parbat consumed so many mountaineering lives and before German and Austrian mountaineering organizations became subsumed into the Nazi Reich.

