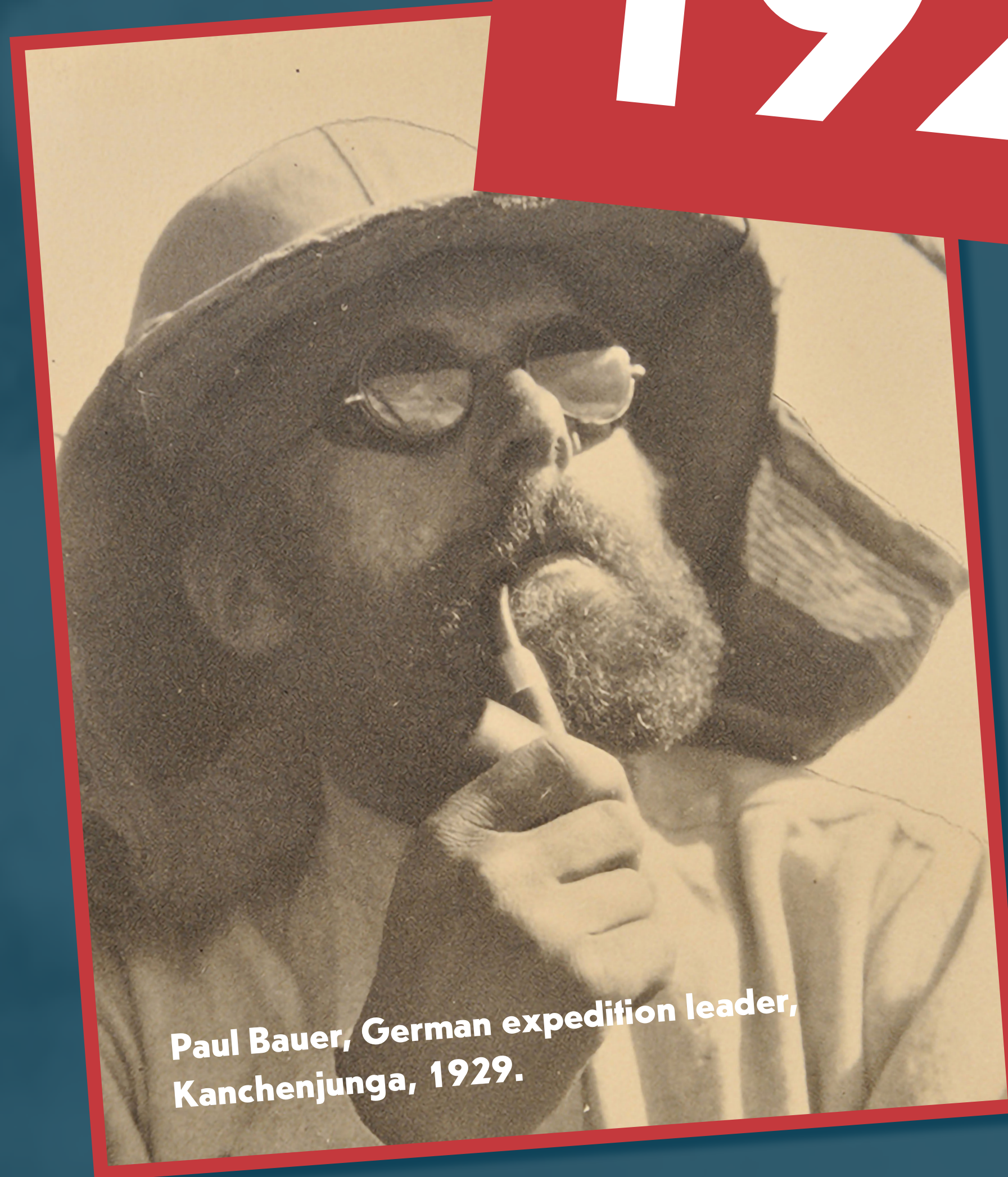


# MOUNTAIN OF DESTINY KANCHENJUNGA 1929

## STORM AND STRUGGLE

In 1929 Germany launched its first post-war Himalayan mountaineering expedition to Kanchenjunga under the leadership of Paul Bauer. Its goals were explicitly nationalistic, motivated by a desire to rebuild a faith in German manhood and to finally leave behind the defeat and humiliation experienced in the First World War. Bauer's various accounts of the Kanchenjunga expeditions in 1929 and 1931 are shot through with the language of struggle and military metaphors, the celebration of mountaineering comradeship harking back to the camaraderie of the trenches. Underpinning it all was a sense of German national destiny expressed in the language of racial theory and 'struggle' (*kampf*). Mountains as sites of struggle, renunciation and death were increasingly a feature of German culture in the *fin-de-siècle* and early Twentieth century, the nation's fortunes increasingly seen as embodied in mountaineering achievement.

In 1924 the German film director Arnold Fanck premiered his hugely popular film *Mountain of Destiny* (*Der Berg des Schicksals*), a phrase that subsequently became associated with German mountaineering attempts on Nanga Parbat after 1932.



Paul Bauer, German expedition leader, Kanchenjunga, 1929.

Writing in 1934, Bauer noted that the German participation in the struggle for the world's highest mountains had been decisively influenced by the experience of war:

The German ... soldier has learned to accept everything without hope of any payment other than the awareness of having fulfilled his duty. To do something for its own sake, even when it was hard and bitter, was not foreign to him ... for them, the struggle for struggle's sake was nothing new, the loyalty towards the greater objectives a matter of course. Out of this attitude the first German Himalayan expeditions of the postwar era were conceived.

H. Höbusch, *Mountain of Destiny: Nanga Parbat and its Path into the German Imagination* (2016), 3

Starting in the post-monsoon season, the 1929 expedition approached Kanchenjunga from the east via Sikkim. Establishing camps on the Zemu Glacier as they went, the Germans were still under the impression that Kanchenjunga was the second highest mountain in the world, that its ultimate conquest would re-establish German standing on the world stage. On the Upper Zemu Glacier they established Camp VI at 5200m and contemplated their objective, the North East Spur, a dizzying series of pinnacles that they hoped would lead to the North Ridge at about 8000m. All throughout September 1929, the Germans inched their way up some of the most difficult terrain that had ever been tackled at these altitudes.

The weather was appalling, with frequent snowstorms and avalanches that cut short a parallel attempt on the summit from the Zemu Gap. Steps had to be cut through dizzying terrain to facilitate the passage of heavily laden porters. On the evening of 3rd October, six mountaineers and four porters were at Camp X (7100m) ready to make the final push to the North Ridge when it started to snow. It snowed all day on the 4th October:

On the 5th it continued to snow heavily and uninterruptedly. Kanchenjunga became practically impossible. Beigel and Aufschneider broke camp on the 6th, and, as the weather had improved, Allwein and I decided with the porters Keddar and Pasang to move the camp higher up. It was a hopeless task. In two hours we only gained 80 metres. We stood with the snow half up to our thighs. The crust was extremely thin and breakable. Leaving our rucksacks behind we persevered for another hour and a half. The view was overwhelming. Even our porters stared in amazement with shining eyes. Then at last we turned back. We had to wait till crust got a little harder. In the evening it snowed again, and by 7 o'clock the snowfall was very heavy. Within 24 hours we had had at least two metres of fresh snow. This was the grave of all our plans.

Paul Bauer, *The German Attack on Kanchenjunga, 1929, The Himalayan Journal*, 1930.

Kanchenjunga remained the focus of intense mountaineering scrutiny over the next few years. In 1930 Prof. G. O. Dyhrenfurth led an international expedition to the mountain and in 1931 Bauer returned for another German assault on the North East Spur. Establishing Camp XII they were again turned back just below the North Ridge at an altitude of 7940m. Kanchenjunga, it seemed, had nothing to offer but hard and bitter struggle with little hope of reward. The focus of German Himalayan ambitions shifted to Nanga Parbat in 1932 and over the next seven years a further four German expeditions were to attempt Nanga Parbat. Kanchenjunga was finally climbed in 1955 by a British expedition, Joe Brown and George Band leaving the last few metres of the mountain untrodden out of respect for indigenous religious beliefs in Nepal and Sikkim.

## Patmos

By Friedrich Hölderlin  
Translated by Tony Brinkley

God is near  
And difficult to hold,  
But blessings grow  
Where danger is—  
A hawk in the abyss—  
While mountain children walk  
From edge to edge on fragile bridges—  
Time heaps mountains—  
Those we love are near  
But far apart,  
Worn down on isolated summits.  
Give us  
Water. Give us flight and faithful  
Thoughts to seek and to return.



But before the deadly focus on Nanga Parbat, two German expeditions attempted to forge their way to the summit of Kanchenjunga and establish it as the German nation's first Himalayan 'Mountain of Destiny'.

Bauer's 1929 expedition report was published in 1931 as *Im Kampf um den Himalaja: Der erste Deutsche Angriff auf den Kangchendzönga 1929* (Struggle for the Himalayas: The First German Attack on Kanchenjunga 1929), the book winning a gold medal for literature at the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. With Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Bauer became head (1934–1938) of the newly formed *Fachamt für Bergsteigen und Wandern im Deutschen Reichsbund für Leibesübungen* (Specialist Office for mountain climbing and hiking in the German Reich Federation for Physical Education), an organization that centralized all of Germany's and Austria's pre-war mountaineering bodies under the ultimate control of Reichssportführer Hans von Tschammer und Osten. Bauer enthusiastically propagated the notion that high-altitude mountaineering could contribute to German national renewal under National Socialism, arguing that mountaineering was the equal of armed conflict in terms of its power to forge the national character.

