

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

I. FOOTPRINTS OF 'SNOWMAN'

I was on the fourth trip to Rupkund on September 16, 1956, and was camping in the rock-shelter of Baguva-vasa, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles before reaching Rupkund. It began to snow from 2.30 p.m. with terrific thunder-claps at intervals, and fine hail bigger than mustard seed fell. By 5 p.m. the snowfall stopped; the sky became completely clear by 6 p.m. and there was bright moonlight. The depth of snow was 4 to 6 in. in front of the rock-shelter, but it was less towards Balpa-Sulera, a hundred yards on the east of Baguva-vasa and on the windward side.

On September 17, 1956 at about 4 a.m. the whole region was enveloped in thick mist; at 4.30 a.m. it began to snow intermittently; at about 9 a.m. there was a hailstorm for about 15 minutes. Thereafter the sky began to clear up, and the sun could be seen shining on the neighbouring hilltops, but there was mist still here and there though Rupkund was seen clearly.

Leaving the luggage in the rock-shelter, I started with my two porters at 10 a.m. towards Rupkund. We had hardly proceeded a hundred yards to the place called Balpa-Sulera, with Nanda Ghunti, Trisul, and Chananiya Kot peaks, and Rupkund in front of us, when I suddenly saw some footprints on the ground. Casually I enquired of my porters if there were any panthers or hyenas in that region; they said that there were 'lakad-baggha'. On a close examination of the footprints, after removing my goggles, I found them to be like those of a human being. The elderly porter immediately burst out: 'Footprints of Chananiyas, the doliyas or palanquin-bearers of Nanda Bhagavati'.

The trail of footprints was seen coming from the direction of Rupkund and going towards the ruins of Balpa-Sulera, and then up over the Baguva-vasa rock-shelter. I could not follow the trail, since the animal had travelled over a steep track from one rock to another, and since the footprints were not in one plane. The footprints measured $5\frac{3}{4}'' \times 2\frac{3}{4}''$ and one to two inches in depth, on fresh snow. The impressions were quite clear and fresh with all the five toes and heel distinctly seen; black spots of bare ground could also be seen in some footprints. They were just like those of a human boy. The animal must have passed that way after the fall of the last hail before the mist cleared at 9 a.m., since there could not be seen any hailstones in the footprints, whereas small pearl-like hail was lying about on the surrounding snow. So, the animal must have passed that way at the most an hour before I saw its footprints. At places there were three, or rather $2\frac{1}{2}$ footprints; and so the animal must have been on all fours, at least at those places. Unfortunately I could not pursue the trail for more than 50 yards on either side, first because the trail led up a steep ascent and secondly because the porters were in great haste and fear as it had begun to snow again at about

10.45 a.m. Reluctantly I had to return to Wan, giving up all chances of a fuller investigation.

I am of opinion that the footprints I saw could well be those of a baby Brown Bear, which might have come down from Rupkund side or Gingtoli plain. It had snowed heavily on the previous day as well as the following morning and the whole slope from Kailva-vinaik to Rupkund was one continuous white sheet. The animal might have come down this slope in search of food. If not a Brown Bear it may have been an ordinary Black Bear from the near-by jungles, which are situated within a radius of four miles on all sides.

It may be mentioned in this connection that in the year 1905 Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, visited Jetha Kharik, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Ali Khal and about 6 miles from Baguva-vasa (where I found the footprints), for shooting brown bear. A road was specially constructed at that time from Wan to Ali Khal, which still exists and which has been repaired by Shramadan. So it would not be surprising for the footprints I noticed near Balpa-Sulera, at a height of about 14,000 ft. above sea level, to be those of a brown bear cub, with its mother sitting somewhere near by; or perhaps even of a black bear, which is very common in the neighbouring jungles. I came across a solitary male bharal near Chedi-nag midway between Baguva-vasa and Rupkund on August 25, 1956, on my first trip to Rūpkund.

When I was on my fifth trip to Rupkund, on October 7, 1956, I came across a trail of footprints, a little beyond Patar-Nachauniya (about a mile before reaching Baguva-vasa), which were round at one end and tapering at the other. They were 4 in. long, 3 in. wide, and $\frac{7}{8}$ in. deep. They were found on snow which had fallen four or five days previously. The upper part of the snow was encrusted so hard that my feet were not sinking in it at all but were skidding at several places. Several of the footprints were found in the middle of human footprints, that were left two days previously by an advance party who had gone up to Baguva-vasa. On enquiry from the elderly people of Wan village I was told that the footprints might be those of a tharua (Snow Leopard) or a lakad-baggha (hyena).

Some villagers of Wan reported that the footprints of Chananiya (footprints like those of human beings) were noted occasionally in winter at Bagchho and Kukin Khal ($3\frac{1}{2}$ and 8 miles respectively from Baguva-vasa). So the strange footprints of the so-called snowman are apparently known in the Rupkund region from long years, though the villagers do not suspect them to belong to a bear. They believe them to be those of Chananiyas, whose abode is said to be the peak Chananiya Kot, situated on the northern side of Rupkund.

In the paragana of Danpur of Almora District and in Badhan and adjoining paraganas of Garhwal District, Chananiya is a Vana Devata or deity of the forests. She is said to have the feet reversed, i.e. toes pointing backward and heel in front. So, this deity is also called Ediya (heeled one). When lone women go to the jungle for cutting grass they are said to be frightened and affected by the evil influences of this deity. To get rid of these evil effects, the afflicted persons propitiate this deity. So far as my knowledge goes, there are two

shrines dedicated to this deity, called Ediyaka Than—one between Gwaldam and Garur in Almora District, and the other near about Karnaprayag in Garhwal District.

Langurs or Blackfaced Monkeys are very timid and I never heard of one biting a man, excepting perhaps at Jagannath where they are fed freely by pilgrims and where they often become bold enough to snatch away food from their hands. No doubt Redfaced Monkeys attack man and even bite, assault, and injure very badly. I have never seen the Blackfaced Monkeys beyond the tree line or at heights above 10,000 feet; as such there seems absolutely no possibility whatsoever of either the Redfaced Monkey or the Blackfaced Langur having left the footprints at Baguva-vasa, which is at an altitude of 14,000 ft. Besides, the footprints of a langur monkey are in fours, quite different and distinct from human footprints. The footprints I saw were just like those of a human being. Monkeys and langurs do not go beyond Wan and Sutol in the Rupkund region.

I would be much obliged if any of your readers could tell us the height and place in the Himalayas, and the year, in which the two Norwegian engineers Age Thorberg and Jan Forstis had an encounter with the two langur-like animals, one of which is alleged to have bitten Forstis.

ALMORA, U.P.,
November 6, 1956.

SWAMI PRANAVANANDA, F.R.G.S.

2. HAIRLESS LION CUBS IN THE TRICHUR ZOO

(With a plate)

At the first meeting of the Zoo Wing of the Indian Board for Wild Life, held at Mysore in last May, I had occasion to point out the existence of a litter of three lion cubs in the Trichur Zoo, of which the two males are practically hairless while the single female is covered with hair and normal in every respect. They were born on March 6, 1955 and during growth even the scanty hair the males had was shed, developing at the same time a tendency to accumulate dark pigment in the skin, probably as a protection against excessive heat. The entire skin is now somewhat rugose, the rugosity being more marked on the head and neck. The few hairs still left are confined to the chin and the inside of the ear lobes. The absence of hair on the body is certainly a handicap to the two cubs, causing abrasions in the skin especially at the haunches, where even small callosities have been formed. The present condition of the lion cubs looks like alopecia with a tendency to melanism.

Being the first instance of its kind in this Zoo, where lions have been breeding in captivity for over thirty years, the deficiency could not be traced to any known cause. On the advice of the local veterinary surgeon, Murnil, a preparation of Bayer with vitamin H, was given to the cubs continuously for several months but without any effect on the growth of hair. All the three cubs have normal health and have grown remarkably well with their usual ration of mutton and beef.



Pranavananda, S. 1957. "Footprints of 'snowman.'" *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 54, 448–450.

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