Henry Osmaston: The First Chapter

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This volume is dedicated to Henry Osmaston in celebration of his contribution to the International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS). Henry first visited Ladakh in 1980 as a member of the Bristol University expedition to Zangskar led by his colleague John Crook. Since then he has made regular visits to the region to pursue his research into its agriculture, geomorphology and wildlife — and to maintain contact with his many friends. In 1987 Henry was the prime mover behind the formal establishment of the IALS at the third international conference on Ladakh at Herrnhut (former German Democratic Republic), and served as the organisation's honorary secretary, editor and treasurer for the following decade. He resigned from these posts in 1997 at the eighth international Ladakh conference in Aarhus (Denmark). On the same occasion, he was unanimously elected IALS president, both in recognition of his past services and because no one was willing to envisage the future of the association without him.

Henry has brought to IALS the benefits of his experience across a range of different professions, countries and interests. This experience includes the following:

- He was born in India, but has worked for extended periods in Egypt, Uganda and Britain, and has also taken part in scientific expeditions to countries as diverse as Jamaica, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, China and Tibet.
- His career includes service as an army officer, colonial forester, university lecturer and farmer.
- His wider service to the community has led him to become at various times president of the Uganda Mountain Club; a committee member of the Alpine Club; vice-president of the Winford Stock Society (his farm belonged to the village of Winford, near Bristol); a member of the local deanery synod of the Anglican church; and a governor of Brathay Hall, which through its Exploration Group introduces young people to outdoor activities both in the English Lake District and much further afield.
- Henry's love of mountains is a constant leitmotif — both the study of their geomorphology, but also the pleasure of climbing them. He combines this with a genial capacity to make friends with all manner of people in and around those mountains, as well as a fortunate knack of surviving hazards ranging from Ugandan elephant traps to Himalayan blizzards.

Henry has been able to draw on all these areas in his contributions to Ladakh studies. This essay therefore begins with an account of his earlier career before focusing on his activities in the Himalaya.

Childhood, education and military service (1922-49)

Henry Arthur Osmaston was born in Dehra Dun, then a pleasant town in India's Himalayan foothills, on 20th October 1922. His father, Arthur Osmaston (1885-1972), was an officer in the Indian Forest Service, and many of Henry's subsequent enthusiasms reflect his family inheritance. Arthur spent all of his career in the United Provinces (now renamed Uttar Pradesh), notably the Himalayan district of Kumaon. He wrote the first account of the birds of Garhwal and deposited some 1,500 botanical specimens in either the Dehra Dun or Kew herbaria. Two new species were named after him: *Berberis osmastonii* Dunn and *Cymbopogon osmastonii* Parker. Among other adventures, Arthur Osmaston had 'successful encounters with a man-eating tiger and a woman-killing bear, besides capturing an armed *dacoit* with the aid of only a walking stick' (1989a).

Arthur was one of three Osmaston brothers to serve as foresters in India. Another brother — an earlier Henry Osmaston — was a respected missionary in Travancore (South India) until his career was cut short by a fatal encounter with a crocodile while trying to photograph a waterfall.

A fifth Osmaston brother served in the British army in India while a first cousin, Gordon Osmaston, rose to be Director of the Indian Military Survey and conducted a series of expeditions in the Himalaya with Tenzing Norkhay, the Sherpa mountaineer who subsequently climbed Everest. Henry Osmaston the younger did not reach Ladakh until his late 50s, but his uncle Bertram — one of the three foresters — had preceded him half a century earlier and prepared two works on the region's bird life.[1]

1. B.B. Osmaston 1925, 1936.

Henry's earliest memories are of riding on an elephant through an Indian forest, and asking the *mahout* to get the elephant to pick interesting flowers and fruits. However, like other Indian-born English children of his generation he was dispatched back to Britain at an early age to ensure that he received a *pukka* education first at a prep school in Sussex and then, from 1936 to 1940, at Eton College.

At Eton Henry was a member of the Shooting VIII, but also enjoyed less organised activities such as bird-watching on Slough sewage farm and fishing for pike in the Fellows' Pond. His interest in natural history proved advantageous when he came to apply for admission to Oxford University. According to his own account, the decisive part of his interview with the Provost of Worcester College ran as follows:

> 'Can you tell me what those birds are on the lawn?'
> 'Yes, Sir, they're moorhens.'
> 'How do you know?
> 'Because their tails are white underneath, and they keep twitching them up and down.'
> 'Good boy! You can come up here next term.' (1990a).

Henry's Oxford studies between 1940 and 1942 were complicated first by his decision to switch from chemistry to forestry at the end of his first term and, more importantly, by the exigencies of wartime. Before focusing on forestry, he had to study 'Honour Mods' in geology, botany and zoology. Because of the war, this two-year course was compressed into one year and — in Henry's case — two terms. However, it had the lasting benefit of arousing his interest in geomorphology — which he later pursued both in Uganda and Ladakh — as well as in botany, even though he passed his exam in the latter 'only through the strained generosity of the examiners'. Having passed that hurdle, he had to spend the rest of his first stay in Oxford combining the study of forestry with an intensive electronics course as part of his preparation to join the army.

In 1943 Henry was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). He describes his military career as 'relatively uneventful'. It consisted of a year in Suffolk, mainly engaged with nocturnal anti-aircraft duty, followed by three years in the Middle East. By the time that Henry arrived in the region, the main theatres of the war had passed on to Europe and South-east Asia. His posting indulged his taste for foreign travel and ended 'with a cushy job at GHQ and a flat in Cairo'.

In 1947 he was 'demobbed' with the rank of major and returned to Oxford to complete his forestry training.

Henry's genetic impulses might have disposed him towards a post as an imperial forester in India but, by the time he graduated in 1948, India was no longer part of the Empire. So, having earlier rejected Sierra Leone on climatic grounds, he now successfully applied for a post in Uganda. Shortly before leaving in early 1949, he 'had the presence of mind' (in the bride's phrase) to marry his wife Anna. Since clothing was still rationed, the wedding dress was made out of an old parachute.

Uganda 1949-63

Their stay in Uganda proved to be a particularly happy time for both Henry and Anna Osmaston. Uganda was then a peaceful and relatively prosperous protectorate. Both the colonial authorities and the local people agreed on independence as the ultimate political objective, and there was as yet no inkling of the political turbulence which plagued the country in the 1970s and 1980s. Anna later wrote an engaging personal memoir of this period, *Uganda before Amin* (1991), in which she described the Osmastons' family life and adventures on safari.

Henry's job as a forestry officer proved stimulating and fulfilling with 'only a hazy boundary between work and play'. Together and separately, the two Osmastons were able to develop a taste for mountaineering in the Rwenzori (formerly spelt 'Ruwenzori' and also known as the 'Mountains of the Moon'). At the same time, Henry embarked on the scientific researches which later led to his Oxford doctorate. The Osmastons' children — Amiel (1951), Janet (1953), Nigel (1957) and Charlotte (1959) — were born in Uganda. Despite the hazards of snakes, scorpions and tropical diseases, all four thrived. Henry contrasts his own good fortune with the sufferings of an uncle who had lost three children in India earlier in the century when tropical medicine was not so well developed.

Henry's first posting was as a District Forest Officer (DFO) in Busoga. He comments on his work that:

> I was lucky to serve in the Colonial Service at a time which in some ways was the best, sandwiched between the romantic but hard life of 'Sanders of the River', and the modern peripatetic consultants of international agencies, who now make brief forays into the starving or oppressed countryside from their base in the local Hilton (1990a).

He subsequently served in most of the other districts of the country, including a brief stint as Principal of the Forest School at Nyabyeya, and a more extended period as Working Plans and Mensuration Officer. He finished as Regional Forest Officer, Eastern Region, before retiring in 1963 shortly after Ugandan independence. Henry's work involved surveying, protecting and managing the natural forests, besides making plantations to supplement their production of timber. At the same time he and his colleagues played an important part in training the first generation of Ugandan professional foresters who were able to take over after independence. He continues to be a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Foresters.

Alongside official forest safaris, mountaineering quickly became part of the Osmaston lifestyle. Over their first Whitsun holiday in Uganda, Henry and Anna organised a trip up Mount Elgon on the border with Kenya, and a subsequent posting to Toro brought them to the base of the Rwenzori range. Henry took every opportunity to explore and climb there. In several places the mountains rise to over 16,000 feet and the peaks are covered with snow, even though they lie close to the equator. In 1952 he took part in a British-Belgian expedition and collected over 1,000 plants for the British Museum and other institutions. Among other distinctions, Henry was a founding member of what he describes as 'one of the most exclusive clubs of the world', the Uganda Ski club, which has only ten members. Mountaineering impinged on family life in at least one other respect. The Osmastons' eldest daughter Amiel is named after an egg-shaped, granite *Inselberg* which rises a thousand feet above the level plains of Acholi. Henry and Anna climbed part of the way up Amiel early in their stay in Uganda, and Henry later completed the first recorded ascent.

Anna Osmaston accompanied Henry when she could, but frequently found herself waiting alone for his return from some longer or shorter expedition. A possible alternative subtitle for her memoir on Uganda might have been 'Waiting for Henry', an occupation which gave ample grounds for anxiety:

> Another day when Henry was walking along a forest path he suddenly disappeared into an elephant trap, a pit covered over with sticks and leaves. Luckily his forest guard was with him to pull him out. I always found waiting in rest camps for Henry a nerve racking experience. Even if no calamity befell him he was invariably late back, always finding fascinating things to investigate, oblivious of time. (A. Osmaston, p. 34)

On another occasion, Henry came into rather closer contact with Ugandan wildlife than he might have intended:

> He was late returning for supper but gave no particular reason. However, after supper when he got up I noticed a rip in the seat of his shorts, and at my enquiry he admitted he had been 'prodded' by a buffalo. After more prodding I elicited the true story. He had been walking along a narrow winding path through elephant grass, and on rounding a bend came face to face with a buffalo. Instead of lying down and nonplussing the beast (said to be the right procedure for buffaloes) he turned tail and ran... He raced back to the edge of the patch of elephant grass where there was a bank which he tripped over, and at the same instant was aware that the buffalo was beside him. Amazingly it only pushed him with its nose and nicked his shorts with a horn before swerving back into the grass. It must have known the rules about leaving a victim who is lying down. (A. Osmaston, p. 48)

Both Henry's official work and his personal interests led to an interest in the natural history of the region. His early publications include a discussion of the gastronomic properties of termites and their economic potential (1951); a study of the behaviour of Kalinzu Forest fruit bats (1953); and notes on aspects of tropical forestry (1956). However, his main interest became the geomorphology of the Rwenzori. As Anna Osmaston records:

> Henry was becoming interested in pollen analysis on Rwenzori as a means of identifying past vegetation and conditions on the mountain, and when on safari up there he took a peat borer which he would plunge into the bogs drawing up a core of mud for future analysis. I think porters considered all climbers more or less mad, but Henry madder than most for adding plastic bags of mud to their loads. (A. Osmaston, p. 37)

The pollen analysis provided evidence of changes in vegetation since the glaciers last retreated from their maximum extent 15,000 years ago. Henry supplemented this by mapping the glaciers' moraines showing how — as in other mountain ranges — glaciation had expanded or retracted according to changes in the world's climate. His early enquiries in Uganda and on Kilimanjaro on the borders of Kenya and Tanzania foreshadowed subsequent research on related subjects in Ladakh and Tibet.

After retiring from the Uganda forestry service in 1963, Henry maintained his links with the country in his capacity as a prominent member of the Uganda Mountain Club in exile. He also made a brief return journey in 1974 during the unhappy period when the notorious military dictator Gen Idi Amin was ruling the country.

A more significant renewal of old contacts came in 1996 when the Department of Geography at Makerere University invited him to give the keynote address at an international conference on the Rwenzori Mountains

which had just been declared a World Heritage Site. On the same occasion, Henry was made an Honorary Warden of the Uganda National Parks, a distinction which he describes as 'a kind compliment to a colonial dinosaur'. His account of his return visit to Uganda is full of wonder at the changes which had taken place in the country, notably the population explosion and the growth in prosperity over the previous five years (1998f). Happily, he was able to see some of the fruits of his forestry work, while also gaining a powerful sense of the passing of time. When inspecting eucalyptus trees which he had planted in Fort Portal, he found that these were now 150 feet high, and ten feet in girth.

'Changing horses': Oxford, Bristol and Finsthwaite

Henry's retirement from Uganda led him to 'change horses in mid-stream' (1990a), switching from life as a colonial forester to a new career as university lecturer and dairy farmer. In 1963 the first stage in this transition took him back to Oxford where he wrote up his D. Phil thesis on 'The past and present climate and vegetation of Rwenzori and its neighbourhood', using material gathered in Uganda over the previous decade. Following Oxford tradition, he wrote most of his thesis 'huddled in a cold garret in Old Marston wearing an overcoat', and only met his supervisor once — a few weeks before submitting. More modern aspects of the thesis included the use of a computer to analyse his research results.

In 1965 he moved from Oxford to Bristol, and took up a post at the University's Geography Department, partly as a result of a fortunate encounter in Uganda some years earlier with Ronald Peel, the Professor of Geography. Henry stayed in Bristol until 1992 when he moved to his present home at Finsthwaite in the Lake District following his retirement from the Department. Henry's duties at the University involved lecture courses in geographical concepts, tropical geomorphology, glacial and periglacial geomorphology, tropical ecology, hydrology and quaternary studies. He had to give weekly tutorials with first, second and third-year students, as well as organising practical work in network analysis, sediment analysis and photogrammetry. His research students worked mainly on geomorphology and satellite remote sensing.

Not content with one new career, Henry simultaneously took up a second, as the new owner of Regil Farm in the village of Winford, near Bristol. This involved much hard work modernising the farm's dairy production in addition to coping (in later years) with the bureaucratic mysteries of the European Union (EU) milk quota.

Henry — and one presumes his students — took particular pleasure in vacation field courses, particularly the regular expedition to the Mediterranean island of Mallorca which took place annually over a period of 25 years. The main purpose of these expeditions was to study the geomorphology and geography of the island but, on one notable occasion in 1978, Henry and five students hit the national headlines when they were marooned in the Torrente de Pareys gorge for two days. The gorge drains a catchment of 40 square kilometres in the most mountainous and wettest part of the island. Henry thought that a visit there would provide:

> an interesting and stimulating geomorphological and hydrological excursion for students, looking in particular at evidence of abrasion and solution on bedrock, boulders and pebbles and at change in discharge and solute content downstream. (1978)

The excursion proved more interesting than intended when the water level in the gorge suddenly rose on account of heavy rain, leaving Henry and his students marooned in a narrow cave above the river. For two days they subsisted on a meagre diet of a bar of chocolate and two pats of butter and jam shared between them, before they were extracted by the combined efforts of the *Guardia Civil* and a local rescue team. Professor Haggett of Bristol University may have had this incident in mind when he commented at Henry's retirement party: 'No other member of our staff is so likely to land his students in an awkward situation on a field trip, but no other is so likely to get them out of it safely.'

Bristol provided a base for many other foreign excursions. These included a visiting lectureship at the School of Geography at the University of Havana (Cuba), as well as visits to academic and research institutions in Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Australia. Henry served as deputy leader of the University of Bristol Karst Hydrology Expedition to Jamaica in 1967; and in 1977 he joined the Royal Geographic Society expedition to Sarawak (West Malaysia) to investigate limestone weathering, and did independent research into geomorphology on Mount Kinabalu (Sabah), and in Indonesia and Australia.

In 1986, Henry partly retired from the university, 'though mainly in the hope of having more time to do the things I most enjoy doing and the many things I have never got round to doing before' (*Koi Hai* family newsletter 1986). In that year these activities included leading an expedition in China with a group of English and Chinese students, and travelling back to Europe by the Trans-Siberian Express. Henry formally retired from his post as Senior

Lecturer and Deputy Head of the Joint Geography-Geology School in 1988, but continues his association with Bristol as an Honorary Fellow. Together with Anna, he has now retreated from Bristol to Finsthwaite in the Lake District where they have refurbished an old cottage with a barn-like study. From this vantage point he has been able to write up his researches and make new forays to — among other regions — Ladakh and Tibet.

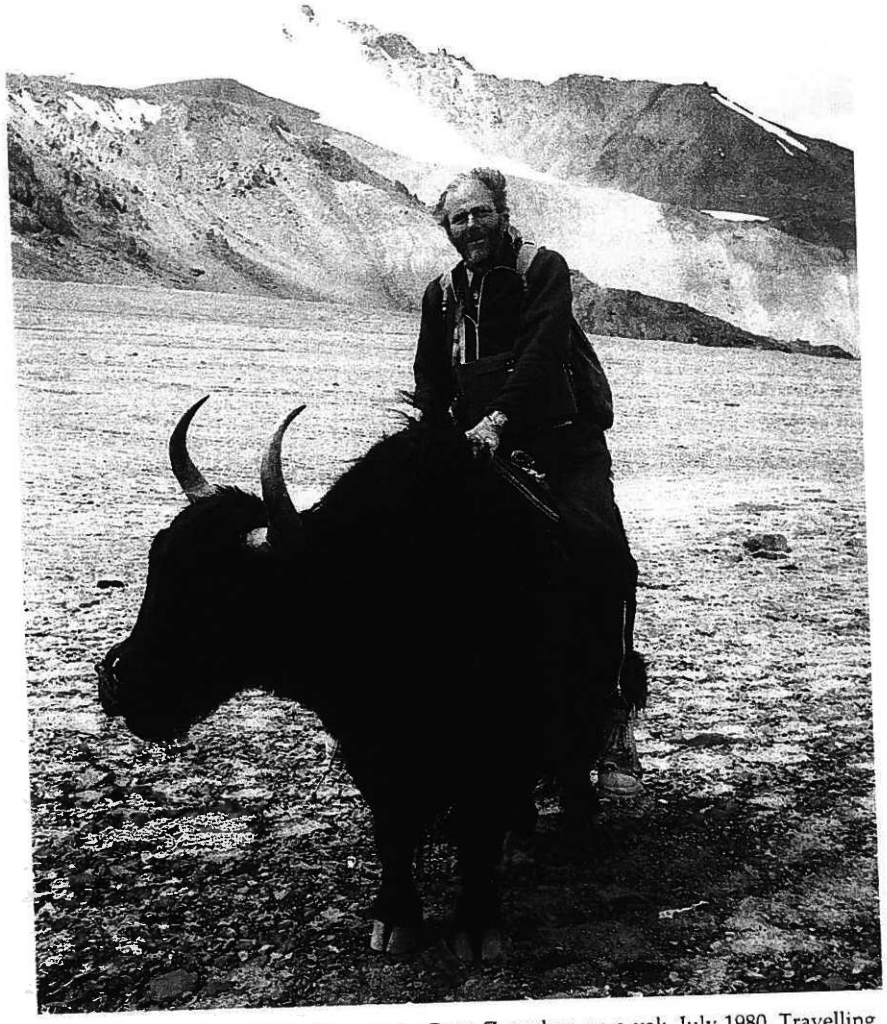
Ladakh and Tibet

Henry comments that the demands of his dairy farm reduced the time available for geographic research. However, his farming expertise led directly to his involvement with Ladakh. In 1977 John Crook of Bristol University's Psychology Department had made a preliminary visit to Zangskar, and in 1980 he led a multidisciplinary team of Bristol specialists and Indian colleagues to conduct a comprehensive study of life in the Zangskar valley before conditions were changed for ever by the construction of a new motor road from Kargil. Henry joined the team as a farming expert.

Together with his British and Indian colleagues, Henry spent the summers of 1980 and 1981 in Zangskar, counting and measuring field and animals; taking samples of grain, milk, blood, wool, faeces and parasites; trying to treat such human and animal ailments as they could; and climbing in the mountains both for their own sake and to conduct geomorphological research. He was the second-oldest member of the expedition, and his age — no doubt highlighted by his venerable grey beard — earned him the universally accepted Zangskari title of *Meme* (Grandfather) Henry.

Henry's principal research contributions to Ladakh studies are contained in *Himalayan Buddhist Villages* (1994) which he co-edited with John Crook. This extensive volume (more than 900 pages of texts and photographs) consists of the combined researches of the Bristol team and their Indian colleagues. It gives a thorough portrait of Zangskar, including topics ranging from the valley's geological background to its people's farming practices and religious beliefs; and drawing comparisons with other Himalayan regions. Henry's particular contributions are the chapters on geology, agriculture, the Tibetan calendar, weights and measures and the environment.

Himalayan Buddhist Villages was many years in preparation, but even before it was published Henry was able to share his work with a wider audience in several arenas but most notably at a succession of international Ladakh studies conferences. The first of these — which Henry was not able to attend — was organised by Detlef Kantowsky and Reinhard Sander in Konstanz (Germany) in late 1981, and the two organisers subsequently published the



Henry Osmaston crossing sTongde La Pass, Zangskar, on a yak, July 1980. Travelling with Sha-de villagers and John Crook to welcome the Dalai Lama on his first visit to Zangskar and to hear his teachings.

proceedings as *Recent Research on Ladakh*.[2] Four years later Claude Dendaletche and Patrick Kaplanian organised a second symposium in Pau (France) and together published the results in *Ladakh Himalaya Oriental. Ethnologie, Ecologie*.[3] The Pau conference was the first in which Henry participated, and he read a paper on Ladakhi agriculture, drawing on comparisons with the productivity of his own farm in Winford (1985a). His conclusion was that Zangskari farmers had skilfully adapted to their environment, and were able to secure much higher yields than might have been expected. Any 'modern' experiments in new farming techniques or crop varieties would need to take this into account.

Henry made a second appearance at the third international conference on Ladakh which took place in 1987 in the East German village of Herrnhut, the original headquarters of the Moravian church which had sent so many missionaries to Ladakh. This time he read a paper on 'environmental possiblism' (1990) discussing the extent to which Ladakhi culture had been determined by its environment. He pointed out that, while environmental constraints imposed obvious limitations, successive generations of Ladakhis had succeeded in taking advantage of Ladakhi geography — for example by building long irrigation channels to water their fields in the areas where the soil was most productive. Human factors were as important as environmental ones.

It was at the Herrnhut conference that Henry proposed the formal establishment of an International Association of Ladakh Studies (IALS) as a vehicle for keeping members informed of one another's activities and for raising funds for future conferences. Henry's suggestion was partly inspired by his earlier experience with the Uganda Mountain Club, which had proved an effective vehicle for obtaining and applying grants for improving access to the mountains.

His proposal was happily accepted, and Henry himself took on the duties of Honorary Secretary, a post which simultaneously involved acting as treasurer and the editor of the *Ladakh Studies* newsletter. Henry has performed all these functions with enthusiasm and good humour and in doing so has provided immense assistance to students of Ladakh from all manner of disciplines, not just geomorphology or agriculture.

His immediate task was to organise the fourth Ladakh conference, which took place in Bristol (following a day in London) in 1989. Henry himself

2. Munich: Weltforum Verlag, 1983.

3. Pau: Centre Pyrénéen de Biologie et Anthropologie des Montagnes, 1985.

contributed a comparative study on 'Farming, nutrition and health in Ladakh, Tibet and lowland China'. The fifth Ladakh conference was supposed to take place in Ladakh but for a variety of reasons this proved impractical, and an interim Ladakh colloquium took place at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 1991. This was organised by Philip Denwood and a local committee. At the suggestion of Peter Marczell it was dedicated to the memory of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, the Hungarian scholar who had begun his Tibetan linguistic researches in Zangskar in the 1820s. The sixth Ladakh conference finally took place in Leh (Ladakh) in 1993; the seventh in Bonn (Germany) in 1995; and the eighth in Aarhus (Denmark) in 1997. It is hoped that a ninth conference will take place in Ladakh in 1999.

At all these events Henry has served as a guiding spirit and reference point, both when directly responsible — as in Bristol in 1989 — and when providing assistance to the organisers of the other conferences since then. His *Ladakh Studies* newsletter has helped advertise the conferences as well as including news, short articles and bibliographic updates. Henry has answered queries by letter and e-mail from a wide range of students, librarians and established academics across the world. At the same time, he served as co-editor of the proceedings of the fourth, fifth and sixth colloquia.[4] This task included the tortuous process of producing photo-ready text on his word processor, as well as conducting protracted negotiations with the Indian co-publisher.

Alongside his academic activities, Henry still managed to find time for mountaineering. One of his more notable Ladakh expeditions took place in 1985 when he took part in a joint British and Indian expedition led by Stephen Venables to a set of peaks at the head of the Terong glacier, a tributary of the Siachen glacier. The Siachen lies in the far north of Ladakh, close to the border with China in the Karakorum range. Since the early 1980s, control of the glacier has been disputed by the Indian and Pakistani armies. Access to outsiders is restricted, and one of the Indian government's motives in granting an international expedition access to part of the glacier may have been a desire to demonstrate that India — not Pakistan — was in control.

Although Henry was now twice as old as the average age of his expedition colleagues, he managed to win their confidence at an initial climbing meet at Stanage Edge in northern England. However, the demands of exam-marking meant that he was unable to leave for Ladakh with the rest of the

4. Osmaston and Denwood 1995; Osmaston and Nawang Tsering 1996.

expedition at the beginning of June. Anticipating bureaucratic problems, he set out for New Delhi armed with a letter of introduction from his cousin and godfather Gordon Osmaston (the former head of the Indian Military Survey) as well as a set of satellite photographs of the Siachen produced by the US based Landsat Agency. Landsat photographs were publicly available, but Henry correctly guessed that — at a time when US/Indian relations were somewhat cool — the Indian authorities would not actually have obtained any. The letter and the photographs — combined with several days of patient persistence in government offices scattered across Delhi — eventually enabled him to secure a restricted areas permit to join the expedition.

After further negotiations in Leh, he was eventually allowed to travel by military lorry over the 5,600m Khardong pass to Nubra. Henry was confined to the back of the lorry, ostensibly to reduce the risk of his seeing anything of military significance. After arriving in the Nubra valley, he was ordered to sit by the roadside until nightfall before being transported after dark to the military base at the head of the valley, and despatched up the glacier before dawn the following morning.

Even then, his problems were far from over: he still had to find his expedition colleagues in the mountains. This does not seem to have been a source of major concern. As Henry reports:

> I pottered up the glacier in glorious weather for four days with some biscuits and dried apricots, fascinated by the scenery and all the forms and processes on the glacier surface (1985 typescript — 'Godfathers and remote sensing can both be useful').

Eventually, after walking past the base camp, which was hidden by a large rock he did manage to meet up with the rest of the expedition and enjoyed himself engaging in glaciological research while his younger colleagues managed to climb a series of new peaks.

The end of the expedition proved almost as daunting as the beginning:

> Our final walk down the Siachen snout teetered between fear and farce. We had been warned that sentries at the bottom would shoot at sight, taking us for Pak guerrillas. Our L.O. [Liaison Officer] failed to keep a rendezvous arranged for him to escort us down, so we advanced into the gathering dusk shouting and waving white hankies tied to our ice-axes. Finally, long after dark, we walked unchallenged into the army camp mess, to be greeted once more with astonishment and disbelief. (Ibid.)

Undaunted by his Siachen experiences, Henry set off again in 1987 to another mountaineering expedition, this time in the Xixabangma (Shisha-pangma on some maps) region, just inside the Tibetan border from Nepal. This was another expedition which combined 'pure' mountaineering with scientific investigations, and Henry led a group of the younger participants in a glaciological research project. This was enlivened by the discovery of a set of mysterious footprints in the snow at 6,000m. Henry comments that he had an 'open but somewhat sceptical mind about *yeti*', and initially assumed that the prints had belonged to a bear. However, he quotes the assessment of Professor Michael Day who, having seen the photograph, commented that he could see 'no reason why they could not have been made by a manlike biped, but being a sceptic prefers to attribute them to snow leopard or some other known animal...'

This expedition included a rather more dangerous episode. Henry and his companions were descending from a high camp when they were caught in a blizzard in which members of other nearby climbing parties died. His account of this misadventure is characteristically brisk:

> By dusk we were crossing a steep moraine ridge and I decided that it was time to bivouac. We dug a small ledge in the snow, partly sheltered by a big boulder, and settled down for the night. At midnight the sky cleared and we found that we... were looking out over a part frozen lake at the steep face of Nyanang Ri, soaring black and forbidding in the starlight. The wind, however, freshened and drove snow along the surface, which continually threatened to bury us as we huddled together in our bags. Orion crept at a snail's pace up the eastern sky, but eventually the sun struck the top of Nyanang Ri, a memorable dawn to my 65th birthday...

Following this initial expedition in Tibet, Henry subsequently made two further journeys there in his capacity as a Research Associate of Oxford University's International Development Centre. Working with Dr Graham Clarke, his main task was to advise the local authorities on various projects to improve and develop agriculture and pastoralism. He commented that the main problems were overstocking, over-grazing and trampling on the upland pastures, which were leading to serious soil erosion.

Some of the results of his researches have been published in two specialist articles (1998a, b).

Looking forward and back

Henry's appetite for travel and new discoveries remains unchecked. At the time of writing (November 1997) he is completing his work on the IALS accounts before handing them over to his successor as the association's treasurer. He is also busily engaged in editing no less than five books: the proceedings of the Makerere University conference on the Rwenzori; a revised edition of his *Guide to the Rwenzori*; a history of Winford (his former village in Somerset); a set of geological studies of tarns in the English Lake District; and the memoirs of one of his relatives in India. In addition, he has recently prepared draft papers on the glaciations of the Markha and Indus valleys; and the weathering of grave stones in a Cambridge country churchyard. He hopes to publish these in appropriate journals.

At the same time Henry is planning a two-month excursion to Uganda in December 1997 and January 1998, only mildly disturbed at reports of guerrilla activity in the Rwenzori. Although he has resigned from the IALS secretaryship, he will maintain his connections both with the association and with Ladakh itself. A study of his family tree provided in Osmaston 1989a indicates a commendable tendency to longevity. Henry should be contributing to future conferences on Ladakh, the Rwenzori — and perhaps other, as yet undiscovered, topics — for some time to come.

The final word goes to Henry himself who, after reading this account of his life to date, reflects on the lessons of experience:

Some things I have learned? The smallest chances may have remarkable effects on one's life. In a bored moment at a committee meeting, I watched my neighbour John Crook doodling in Tibetan characters and asked him why. Without that, I should never have been involved in Ladakh or Tibet; never had many memorable experiences; never met so many good Ladakhi and other friends; and maybe the IALS would never have been formed.

Conversely, what seem at the time to be some of the worst blows can turn out well. I was once greatly put out by being passed over for the headship of the Joint Geography-Geology School in Bristol. In retrospect, the cares of a school that already showed signs of dwindling (it has since closed) would have seriously limited my freedom to go to Ladakh, Tibet and China.

My faults? I am an ardent pursuer of red herrings. A former boss said that I had a 'butterfly' mind though I prefer to call it a 'catholic' one. Unfortunately, combined with a demanding perfectionism, it makes me miss deadlines; be late for appointments and, with old age, increasingly forgetful. My greatest regret? That I have seldom kept a diary — there never seemed to be time!

My genetic inheritance has made me what I am, and especially endowed me — like Kipling's elephant child — with an insatiable curiosity about both people and things. This has sometimes got me into trouble, but more often had a happy outcome. I have benefited from my experience of a stable and close-knit family, spanning from my grandmother to my ever-tolerant wife and nine grandchildren; and from many kind and helpful friends. Looking back on 75 years, I am grateful for my good fortune in so many ways.

Henry Osmaston: Publications

1950 'Photogrammetry without funds', *Empire Forestry Review* 29, 361-362.

1951 'Termites and their uses for food', *Uganda Journal* 15, 80-82.

1953 'Kalinzu Forest fruit bats', *Journal of the East African Natural History Society* 22, 74-75.

1954 'Vegetation of the Queen Elizabeth National Park' (With I.R. Dale). *National Park Handbook*. 20 pp.

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