

Everest's Conqueror Tracks Abominable

**Hillary hunts the unknown
animal that leaves the world's
most mysterious footprints**

By Gardner Soule

THE most experienced Himalayan expedition ever to pursue the Abominable Snowman takes up the chase this month under Sir Edmund Hillary, the man who conquered Mount Everest.

"I'm keen to find out if the creature exists," Hillary told me a few weeks before he set out. "I'd like to examine it—it may be a missing link."

Hillary, who followed up his Everest expedition of 1953 with an overland trek to the South Pole in 1957-8, is well aware that the Snowman may prove his most difficult triumph. Though men by now have entered most Himalayan valleys, and though they frequently find big man-like footprints in the Himalayan snows, they rarely glimpse a Yeti, as the natives call the Snowman. When they do, they



Snowman

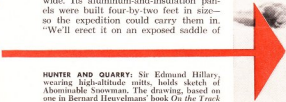
see little more than a wraithlike shadow. The animal has thus remained uncaptured—and one of the major mysteries of zoology.

"We'll be extremely fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to find one," says Hillary. But he counts heavily on something no other expedition has ever had: plenty of time. He'll search the Mount Everest area four months for the Snowman, and he can continue for five months more—as seven of his men will winter in the high Himalayas and his party, next spring, will attempt to climb nearby Mount Makalu.

To stay out four to nine months, and over the frigid Himalayan winter, requires new and improved provisions and equipment—better shelter, more-appetizing food (and more of it), and warmer clothing.

Clothing. Underwear will have four layers. Long johns will have a layer of cotton next to the skin, one of wool and cotton, one of plastic-foam insulation, lastly an outer layer of nylon knit. There are air spaces between all layers. Down-padded pants and jackets and windproof parkas will be outer clothing. On their climbing boots, Hillary's men will wear overboots—a sort of huge, padded sock.

Shelter. The highest home on record will house the expedition men who winter over. At 20,000 feet, they'll be at the highest point where men have ever passed the winter. They'll live in a prefab, Quonset-like house 10 feet long by 20 feet wide. Its aluminum-and-insulation panels were built four-by-two feet in size—so the expedition could carry them in. "We'll erect it on an exposed saddle of



HUNTER AND QUARRY: Sir Edmund Hillary, wearing high-altitude mitts, holds sketch of Abominable Snowman. The drawing, based on one in Bernard Heuvelmans' book *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, was made from best evidence of its appearance. Snowman's mysterious footprints in Himalayan snow are shown at right.

CONTINUED

The world's best human mountaineers will be pitted against another champion—animal-man or man-animal

snow and ice," Hillary said, "and anchor it to 'dead men'—canvas kit bags filled with snow."

Down lower, another hut will be built of tree branches, wire netting, and tar paper. This one will be complete with fireplace. For temporary use, high-altitude tents and draw-tight Himalayan tents will be used.

Besides watching for the Snowman, the wintering-over party will study the effects of high altitude on the human body—a major purpose of Hillary's expedition.

Food. At below-zero heights, where men must eat ravenously to keep going, Himalayan explorers for decades have been plagued by diminishing appetites. "When you climb to high altitudes," Hillary says, "you need something to titillate your appetite. A can of apricots appealed to me at 28,000 feet."

The research laboratory of an American firm (Armour) has developed a new kind of food that the expedition will eat. It's produced by "freeze-drying"—a process that removes 98 percent of the moisture from frozen food without thawing it. The food can then be kept, wrapped in aluminum foil, at any temperature. Removing the moisture reduces the weight: A hundred pounds of fresh meat, freeze-dried, weighs 20 to 30 pounds. Two-thirds of Hillary's 18-ton load will be food.

To prepare these foods for eating, you dunk them in water. In a short time (a steak takes 20 minutes) they pick up the water lost in freeze-drying and are ready to cook. The soaking restores the food to approximately original color, shape, and taste.

In Chicago I sat down with Hillary and others of his party and sampled his forthcoming freeze-dried Christmas dinner: shrimp (in a cocktail), Salisbury steak, French green beans, and glazed apple slices for dessert. "This is very tasty food," Hillary commented. I agreed. Other freeze-dried foods he'll have along: lamb chops, chicken, ham, steaks, carrots, and mixed meat and vegetables for stew.

Besides allowing enough time for the job, Hillary is giving his team every possible advantage:

- He's picked the best time. In fall and winter, the Snowman is believed to come down from the greatest heights. It's possible that it does so in search of food: mouse hares (a kind of rat) and plants that grow below the tree line.

Almost all other Himalayan expeditions have set out in the spring. But Hillary thinks winter may actually help him. "There may be lots of fine weather between blizzards," he says, "and hard snow surfaces we can work on."

- He's selected the most promising place. In the Menlung Valley near Ever-



FAMOUS MOUNTAINEER Sir Eric Shipton, who took photos of Snowman's footprints (including one on previous page), will be with Hillary.



CHECKING FIELD RADIO are Michael Gill, left, of New Zealand; Marlin Perkins, right, of the Chicago zoo. Hillary is sitting between them.



SOFT OUTER BOOTS for climbing will not clatter on rocks or ice. Expedition will be most silent ever—to avoid frightening away Snowman.



LIGHTWEIGHT FOOD is freeze-dried. Small chunk of beef (right, and in wrapper above) becomes plate-filling slice when water is added.

est, according to the World Book Encyclopedia, sponsor of the expedition, many Snowman footprints have been seen over the years. Hillary will stretch his men out over the valley. "We'll have a base camp," he explains. "Then we'll set up a string of three lookout posts, each 17,000 to 19,000 feet up. Each lookout post will have one or two Britishers or Americans plus two or more native guides—Sherpas. They'll keep in close touch by radio.

"If men at a lookout post sight something—tracks or a Snowman—they'll radio us at the base camp, and we can then concentrate our efforts on their area."

But the base camp can't answer a call like a fire department rushing to a blaze. "It'll take us maybe two days to reach a lookout post," Hillary says. "Meanwhile, the men there will have to carry out their own search, photograph the tracks before they deteriorate, and do all they can to identify the Snowman."

● He may use a "capture" gun. This



HIMALAYAN TENT, pitched atop Chicago's Merchandise Mart, holds Hillary, Perkins, Barry Bishop (an expedition glacier expert), and Gill.

weapon uses compressed carbon dioxide to shoot a hypodermic syringe as far as 100 yards. Hillary would like to render the Snowman unconscious at least long enough to find out what it is. If there's a chance to bring it down from the mountains, the men will construct a cage of wood and wire netting.

● His secret weapon is silence. "We think the animal has much keener hearing than ours," he says. "Human noises frighten it away. We've found by experience that if you hit the steel of an ice axe against a rock, you can hear it for considerable distances. So we'll enter the region, not by the Menlung Valley, but instead by the next-door Rolwaling Valley. Then we'll tiptoe through passes into the Menlung."

● Above all, he is counting on the experience of his topflight team. Their names read like a Who's Who of Himalayan mountaineering, and include: Dr. Griffiths Pugh, an old Everest hand;

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Tracking the Abominable Snowman

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Michael B. Gill, like Hillary a New Zealand mountaineer, with the fastest ascent of Mount Cook (New Zealand) to his credit; George Lowe of Hillary's Everest and Antarctic teams; Peter Mulgrew, another Antarctic veteran; Barry C. Bishop, glaciologist. The expedition's zoologist will be Marlin Perkins, director of Chicago's Lincoln Park zoo. Perkins will attempt to photograph the Snowman by having it trip wires that set off flash-bulb cameras.

Black-and-white proof. The most experienced Himalayan mountaineer of

Next Month in PS: *The inside story of political polls. Can they really tell—in advance—who will be elected President of the United States?*

them all, Sir Eric Shipton, also will be along. Shipton, in 1951, took close-up photographs of footprints of the Snowman that startled the world and convinced zoologists there really was such an animal. They inspired three expeditions (two American, one British) to hunt the phantom of the snows. None saw a Snowman. The pictures also convinced someone else: Edmund Hillary.

"They made it quite clear," he says, "that some large creature, apparently walking on its two hind legs, had been crossing a glacier at 19,000 feet."

Shipton's photos, plus observations of the tracks, show that the Snowman is itself an expert mountaineer: It can climb or descend a slope with the skill of an Everester. It can leap crevasses. It may be able to speed across the heights far faster than a man.

So Hillary's expedition will pit some of the world's best human Himalayan mountaineers against another champion mountaineer—man-animal, animal-man, or whatever it is—in a chase across the world's rooftop. Hillary starts his trek with an unbiased mind.

"I believe there is sufficient evidence to warrant a closer search for the maker of these tracks," he says. "We are seeking only to find some tracks and then to discover what is making them—bear or Yeti, monkey or man."