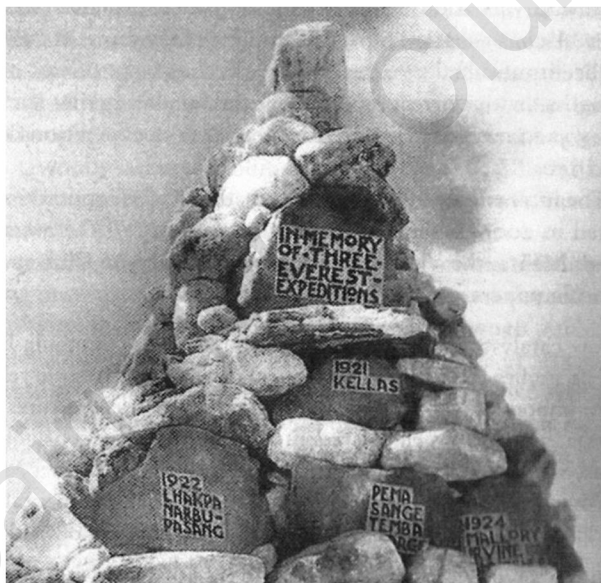
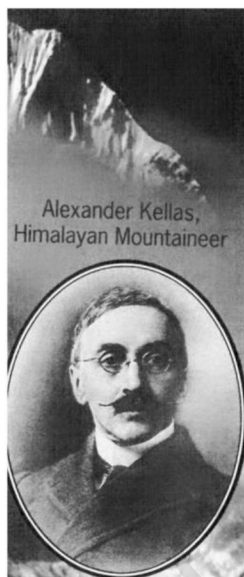


THE LOST MOUNTAINEER

DUNCAN L. MACRAE

The man I am writing about had strong Ballater connections and first travelled to the remote Himalayan peaks of Sikkim and Garwall in 1907. He achieved several first ascents in the High Himalayas, the most notable being Pavhunri, at 23,500ft the highest summit then ascended by man.



Photographs of Kellas and the Rongbuk Memorial

The lightweight style of his small expeditions and explorations, unlike those thereafter, his intimate knowledge of the Sherpa and high-altitude physiology made him one of Scotland's greatest mountaineers. He was the first man to die on an expedition to Everest, not an achievement to be proud of! In 1921, he had a mountain in North West Sikkim, named after him; Kellas Peak at 21,917ft, still unclimbed as far as I know. He is buried in the Rongbuk Glacier at Kampa Dzong within sight of the Sikkim Peaks he had climbed. I visited his memorial in 1967 (see above).

His name is Alexander Mitchell Kellas, and he was born in Aberdeen in 1868. He was one of nine children and lived with his

parents at 28 Regent Quay. His mother, Mary Boyd Mitchell hailed from Ballater. Her brother Alexander farmed at Sluivannichie. The



Sluivannichie Farmhouse

house still exists a hundred yards or so from where I now sit writing. (see above) The farm of some 90 acres which was rented from Invercauld Estate was sold off and is largely occupied by Ballater golf course. The farmhouse continues to be occupied by descendants of Alexander Mitchell, namely Sandy and Lindsay Mitchell.

Alexander Kellas was in some ways a lucky young man. He could look out from his house on Regent Quay to “clipper” ships such as the *Thermopylae*, built in Aberdeen, to bring tea from China – streets, or perhaps oceans ahead of the Glasgow built *Cutty Sark*. Alex’s family prospered and they moved in 1878 to No 48 Carden Place. Incidentally I was born in No 32 Carden Place, not a stone’s throw away. Alex was enrolled in Aberdeen Grammar School and instead of becoming a lawyer, a doctor or a clergyman, he became a very successful research chemist.

Alex, through his many visits to his uncle at Sluivannachie fell in love with the Cairngorms. He served his apprenticeship as a climber and survivor in those very mountains. In 1885 summer-holiday time, he and his brother Hendry decided to head for the Shelter Stone at Ben Macdhui. They left Sluivannachie at 7.45 am arriving at Braemar at

mid-day. In Braemar they purchased a loaf of bread, a packet of biscuits and a bottle of lemonade. With this substantial fare they made their way through Inverey, up Glen Lui to Glen Etchachan and eventually reached their objective – the Shelter Stone. They had walked a total distance of 35 miles in around 12 hours. Such are heroes made of. Alex Kellas subsequently joined the Cairngorm Club and became a close friend and climbing partner of Professor Norman Collie of Ferlie Mor fame – the Long Grey Man of Ben Macdhui.

In 1907 Alex headed for India. It was his first trip to the Himalaya. He was 39 years old. His party was small. He left Sprinigar with three Sherpa and two ponies. His exploits and achievements at that time were something to behold. They are far too extensive to record in this small article. He was a shy and lonely man, known only by his immediate family and his beloved Sherpa.

He was a better man than me

Gunga Din.