

93 and Not Dead Yet: However Did They Manage To Lose An Empire?

by [Reg Green](#) (October 2022)



Wilfred Thesiger, 1934

Readers of this column will remember (I hope) last month's description of the torments of two amateur English mountaineers who tried to climb Mir Samir, a supposedly unclimbable 19,000 ft. peak in the Hindu Kush range in Afghanistan in 1959: days like furnaces and handholds like broken bottles, endless upward slogs and terrifying descents, sunsets almost blotted out by clouds of stinging insects, nights of endless freezing, diarrhea and dysentery, mealtimes of slops or starvation, and so on and on, a cup made more

bitter by having to turn back 700 ft. from the top.

There is a postscript. On the way down they met and camped for a night with Wilfred Thesiger, the rock-hard English explorer who, among much else, crossed the dreaded Empty Quarter of Arabia on foot and by camel. Twice.

Eric Newby, author of the book that tells the tale, *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, describes the scene as bedtime approached: "The ground was like iron with sharp rocks sticking out of it ... We started to blow up our airbeds."

Thesiger watched in disbelief. "God," he said finally, "you must be a couple of pansies."

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