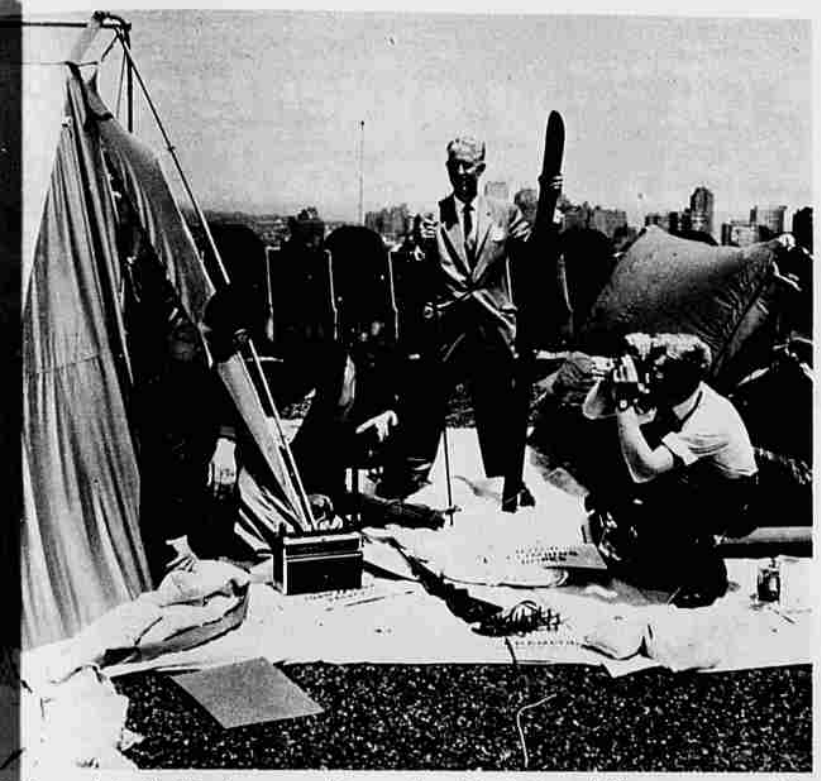

Getting ready for the Himalayan expedition are (L. to R.): Sir Edmund Hillary, conqueror of Mt. Everest; Barry Bishop, geographer; Marlin Perkins, zoologist; and Michael Gill, physiologist.

The creature Perkins may bring back alive has been described as a reddish-haired, ape-like mammal by natives who insist they have seen it—even witnessed it kill villagers on bloody rampages. The Snowman, or Yeti as the Himalayan people call it, reportedly stands upright like a man, but when excited lumbers on all four limbs like a bear. It is between five and six feet in length with a conical-shaped head and coarse hair falling over its eyes.

Natives have told Hillary and Perkins to listen for its call in the late afternoon or evening—a combination of yelping and wailing. Others, however, describe the cry as something like that of a sea gull and heard mostly between dark and dawn.

PERKINS ALSO has been told he will have to struggle up to the Himalayan snowfields between 13,000 and 19,000 feet to find the Yeti. But he disagrees. "I've never done any high-altitude mountain climbing," he says, "and don't think I will have to now. The track-maker, whether beast or fowl, must eat to live, and there is little to eat at great heights.

"We are pretty certain the 'thing' lives on small animals, large insects, and shrubs, especially rhodendrons. All are plentiful in the lower mountain valleys, say around the 10,000-foot elevations."

Perkins also points out that vegetation at lower levels affords the protective coverage predatory beast would seek. He explains its presence at snowline altitudes as forays and aimless meanderings.

Meager evidence about the Snowman has led experts to describe it as an imperial eagle, a sloth, a bear—even a priestly lama trekking to the upper world to commune with God. "There is something wrong with every one of these guesses," Perkins insists. "The Snowman's tracks are entirely different. I have definite reason for saying so."

Perkins took photographs of tracks made by the famous gorilla Bushman and compared them with the Snowman's. There was no resemblance. Only when comparing the mysterious tracks with those of the human foot did Perkins find many similarities. For example, the big toe of the Snowman is close to its other toes, as on a human foot; an anthropoid's toe extends away.

"We may be on the track of some sort of man-ape or sub-man, some creature which may be closely linked to the Neanderthal, Java, Peking, or Heidelberg man," Perkins told me. "In 1939, almost a complete skull of a Neanderthal child, together with parts of the skeleton, was found in a cave in Central Asia. The skeleton was anatomically between the ape-man of Java and the Heidelberg man."

Perkins does not say so, but he gives the impression that he thinks the track-maker of the Himalayas could turn out to be a type of prehistoric mammal more closely related to man than anything known.

But when he finds himself wandering too deeply into this possibility, Marlin Perkins stops abruptly and says: "Remember, we are not trying to prove any preconceived ideas. We just want to learn what is making those tracks and maybe make contact with it. We simply seek more information."

The coming weeks and months will tell how successful Perkins and Sir Edmund Hillary will be—whether their elaborate expedition means folly or fame.

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