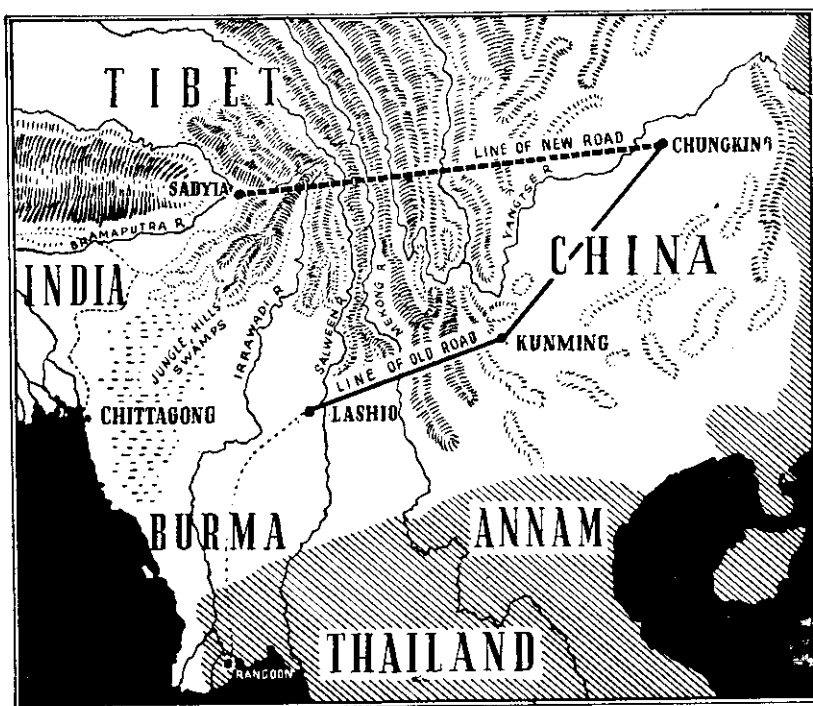


THE "INDIA ROAD" TAKES OVER

Across Ranges Twice As High As Cook: Over Gorges Two Miles Deep

(Written for "The Listener" by A.M.R.)



----- RAIL CONNECTIONS ■ JAPANESE OCCUPIED TERRITORY MOUNTAIN RANGES

THE OLD AND THE NEW ROADS TO CHUNGKING are shown on this sketch map. A line joining Chittagong and Lashio would show the probable direction of the temporary "elephant track" mentioned in the cables the other day. What happens in Lower Burma will decide what "temporary" means

IT is Chungking's darkest hour. China's coasts are at last effectively blockaded, if only because there are no non-Japanese ships left, outside the "occupied" Philippines, within a thousand miles of them. The short-legged barbarians (we are the long-legged ones) who once seemed likely to collapse for sheer want of food and resources, are renewing their strength from the rich southern islands. Russia has for months been unable to send supplies, while her troops who formerly kept immobilised in Manchukuo half the Japanese Army are needed to relieve Leningrad. And now the approaches to the Burma Road are in enemy hands. The siege is complete. The Chinese giant is bound.

But his courage and resourcefulness are undaunted. "We shall build" announces Chiang. "We have been building these last two years, another Road."

Asia's No-Man's Land

The original Burma Road was a feat. It joined two sides of the continent, two races, two civilisations, sundered by geography and practically without contacts since the world began. It was dug out by the crude hoes and wooden ploughs of impressed peasants and filled in by endless lines of hill savages each carrying his bamboo-and-banana-leaf basket of spoil, all working under the rifles of reformed bandits themselves under the lash of Necessity and Time. Its thin red line of overheating lorries and shivering coolie-carriers for three long years held at bay the Divine Destiny of Imperial Japan. But to build and keep open a Bengal Road or an Assam Road will be an even greater, a vastly greater, task. And this is why.

There is a no-man's-land in Asia. You will find it on the borders of various maps, where the "up-country" of China, India, Burma, Thailand, Annam, and Tibet approximately meet. It is the home of the ponderous, but fortunately vegetarian, Panda, only recently seen by European eyes. In its alpine meadows grow the fabulous Black Rhododendron among eternal snows and primroses of indescribable colours. In its canyons, some so deep that they are always hot even in winter, others such funnels that the winds tear boulders and travellers off the hillsides, are known to dwell tattered savages with cross-bows who prefer tea and salt to money, and there also are reported to dwell naked savages "in trees like monkeys." "Civilised" Tibetans are there too, in places, who normally have one wife to several husbands and who spend much time in mechanical prayer—by carving formulae on rocks, inscribing them on wheels, and even harnessing waterpower to keep prayer-mills turning. Further afield yet other people hold tournaments in which horsemen charge each other whirling bags of pebbles (as lances) and hold annual "exhibitions" of "painting" and "sculpture" in butter!

Caverns Measureless to Man

Geographically this region consists of seven close and parallel mountain ranges, nowhere falling as low as Mt. Cook (12,349ft.), often twice as high, and averaging 20,000 feet. Into the canyon-valleys between them—gorges up to two miles deep and so narrow that, though they are barely outside the Tropics, the winter sun leaves many pockets unvisited—flow rivers from unknown sources in Tibet and Central Asia

called Sok-chu, Chan-do, Luntsan, and Ka-kiang. Out of them, three hundred miles or so to the south, emerge presumably the same streams, but now known to the world as the Yangtze, the Mekong, the Salween, the Irrawaddi, and the Brahmaputra. ("Presumably," because no human foot has passed through such gorges as that where the

normally broad Yangtze is squeezed to something less than the width of our streets—22 yards—in a cleft 13,000 feet deep, and the greater part of each river course appears accordingly on maps as a dotted line.) At one place all except the Brahmaputra race along within forty-eight miles of each other as the mole burrows. But once out into sunlight and jungle and human knowledge again they part, to flow finally into different seas on opposite sides of the continent thousands of miles apart. Only the Salween and Irrawaddi continue straight south to Burma and the Indian Ocean. The Mekong wanders off twice as far to seas opposite Borneo. The Brahmaputra turns due west and finally enters the Indian Ganges. The Yangtze after a spell of heading alternately north and south parallel to itself at a distance of a few miles, makes off east across China and at long last (long—3,000 miles) makes the Sea Yellow opposite Japan.

Only One Way

The Chinese government has refused all details of its new Road-under-way. But there is only one way it can go. And that, unfortunately, is dead across these "Great River Trenches of Asia," as the geographers call them.

To attempt to by-pass them to the north would mean heading into regions unexplored. To skirt south, as did the former Kunming-Lashio (Burma) Road, has become useless. To reach the first port not occupied by Japanese, Chittagong, it would have to be continued more than its original length again right through India's Maginot Line—the 2,000-mile-wide belt of literally trackless hillside jungles, and swamps that is Eastern Assam. (At least, when five

(Continued on next page)



CITIZEN of the Forbidden Land: A bright Tibetan boy, who uses his hair as a quiver for his arrows, was photographed on the bank of the Mekong



THE BURMA ROAD: It was a feat indeed, but "to build and keep open a Bengal Road or an Assam Road will be a vastly greater task"