Of all the Hong Kong hills Ma On Shan is my favourite; its steep wooded slopes falling straight to the sea and the graceful curve of the skyline between its two peaks make it the most beautiful of our mountains. It is a fine climb by any route, and on a clear day the view from the summit is unsurpassed; to the west Tai Mo Shan shows its full height; to the east, seeming almost beneath one's feet so steep is the slope, lies Port Shelter, and beyond it are blue hills and blue water along miles of coast to Bias Bay in the distance. Even on a cloudy day it is worth a visit; a mountain never looks so impressive from below as when its slopes disappear into the mist, and the imagination is left to picture fantastic peaks above.

The mountain has been happily described in an article by Mr. Gibbs in H.K.N. Vol. II, p. 214; his sketch map shows all the paths referred to below.

The Hunchback Ridge.—The south and west sides of Ma On Shan can most easily be reached by taking a sampan from Lok Lo Ha, about a mile and a half beyond Shatin on the Tai Po road; the voyage across Tide Cove takes twenty minutes or so, and is a pleasant way of beginning and ending a day's scrambling. The sampan lands us at Tai Shui Hang, and we take the path which turns uphill to the left behind the last house in the village; the path winds along the side of a valley some distance above the stream until it joins the Iron Mine road near Ma On Shan village. The road is followed for a few hundred yards westward to the foot of the Hunchback ridge; a faint track can be discovered winding steeply up the ridge, which provides a most airy and exhilarating climb to the summit. The top of the first hunchback is a delectable place for the lunch halt; here the climber can recline on sun-warmed rocks, while dangling his feet over the edge of the cliff a hundred feet or so above the tree-tops. The way up the second hunchback is steep and slippery; nailed shoes give a sense of security which the handholds of straggling grass fail to provide. The third and highest hunchback (2,226 feet) is reached in about 2½ hours from Tai Shui Hang, and 20 minutes more are needed for the walk along the narrow ridge of the saddle to the top of Ma On Shan.

The short cut directly down the S.W. face towards Ma On Shan village looks simple but is not to be recommended; I have vivid recollections of a nightmare struggle to reach the stream through thick scrub, where spiders of incredible size would appear with startling suddenness a few inches in front of my face. A better way is to continue along the ridge and so down to the Iron Mine by the route described in the next paragraph.

The South Ridge.—The easiest way up the mountain starts from the Iron Mine about half a mile S.E. of Ma On Shan village. Fortunately for the walker there are at present no signs that this secluded bit of country will become a smoky industrial area. Peace reigns, and the lorry which used to jolt up and down the road between the mine and the jetty appears to have made its last journey. Beyond the mine a path crosses a shoulder of the hill into a narrow valley which descends from the high ground im-
Ma On Shan from the south-west.

A—Path from Tai Shui Hang to the Hunchbacks.
B—Path from the Iron Mine to Ma On Shan.
Kong Hills

107

mediately to the south of the summit. The path crosses the stream and zig-zags up a grassy spur on the far side, eventually reaching a high pass on the ridge between Ma On Shan and Pyramid Hill. The ridge is followed to the top, passing close to the fine crag which falls sheer from the summit on its eastern side. Time, 2½ hours from Tai Shui Hang.

The East Face from Sai Kung. — Seen from Port Shelter the bold eastern face of Ma On Shan looks almost impregnable, yet there is an easy path up the mountain from this side. Rather less than a mile north of Sai Kung a long wooded spur comes down to the coast, and a paved path leads up it to the village of Wong Chuk Yeung, about 700 feet above sea level. I reached this village one cloudy evening with about two hours of daylight to spare; in the still air the blue smoke from the cottages was rising into the grey blanket of mist which lay close above the roofs. A villager, whom I asked the way up the mountain, evidently thought that this mad Westerner should be discouraged from wandering on the hills so late in the evening in so thick a fog, and told me that no path existed. Not wishing to worry the kind man, I retraced my steps until out of sight, and then plunged through the bushes to an obvious path on the hillside behind the village. This took me up on to a spur and along a hummocky ridge towards the face of the mountain, with fine glimpses through the mist of the cliffs below the summit away to the right. The path turned to the left where the ridge joins the face, and finally reached the top of the south ridge about 500 yards from the summit. This climb takes about 2 hours from Sai Kung; the path is well shown on the R.A.F. map, sheets 15 and 16.

So much for the easy ways up Ma On Shan; those which can be climbed (almost) with the hands in the pockets.

The North East Face. — This splendid mountain wall is thickly forested and difficult of access, but the botanist or scrambler will find it well worth a visit. Through the kindness of a friend in Tai Po our party was given a lift in a launch, which landed some of us in the bay to the east of White Head. It was a cloudy day, and most of the party scorned the delights of scrambling in the mist, and landed further down the coast for a long walk over the lower hills. We started along a track which led hopefully up the glen behind Cheung Muk Tau; unfortunately it was only a cow track, and after meandering between the bushes as cow tracks do, it disappeared completely in the deep gorge at the head of the glen. We burrowed our way up through a jungle, where wild pigs had evidently been grubbing for roots, and rather to our surprise managed to find a way out on to the ridge to the east. Here to our joy there was a path; it would probably have been better to start the climb from the foot of this spur, where it comes down to the sea at Nai Chung.

For another 500 feet of ascent we followed the path up the steep crest of the spur, until the latter merged into the N.E. face of the mountain. The path dwindled away, and the rest of the climb was through thick scrub, up a slope which was everywhere steep and in places precipitous. We took comfort from the thought that had we slipped on the damp and greasy rocks, the bushes would have prevented us from rolling far. Finally we emerged, breathless and triumphant, on the highest point of the Hunchbacks.

July 1935.
The North West Ridge of the Hunchbacks.—Like the route just described—very steep and bushy; a wearisome ascent, but admirable as a quick way off the mountain. The ridge plunges straight down from the summit of the Hunchbacks almost to sea level. A narrow track follows the edge of the ridge, like a long rabbit-hole through the bushes. When it reaches a big shoulder about 1,000 feet above sea level, the track diverges to the right and descends towards White Head. If your sampan is waiting for you at Tai Shui Hang, you will be tempted to take a short cut to the left, across the lower slopes of the mountain, where a path is shown in Mr. Gibb's sketch map. But the path has disappeared, the hillside is thickly forested and almost impassable, and the shortest way will take the longest time. It is better to come down to the sea near White Head, and to follow the shore to Tai Shui Hang.

Other ascents, more or less legendary, have been made on the north and north-west sides of Ma On Shan, but it would be a pity to describe them and so deprive the reader of the joys of exploration on this fascinating mountain.

Kowloon Peak to Ma On Shan.—There is a charm in a long walk on a high ridge; the uphill grind is finished early, and all day long you are walking in the cool air of the hilltops, with wide views on either side. And when at last you reach the final point of the ridge and look back on the long rank of peaks and passes which you have crossed, you feel that the day has indeed been well spent. Perhaps the finest walk in the Colony is from Kowloon Peak to Ma On Shan, along the watershed which divides Port Shelter on the East from Tide Cove and Hong Kong Harbour on the west. The ridge is never less than 1,000 feet above sea level; from end to end it is five miles as the crow flies, and the whole walk, returning by Sai Kung and over Customs Pass, is about 16 miles in length. A peak-bagger, who delights in climbing as many summits as possible in the day, will of course walk over every point on the ridge; this would involve over 5,000 feet of ascent—rather too enormous an expedition for an ordinary walker. We started at 9.30 a.m., and took an easier way, missing Kowloon Peak itself, and reaching the ridge by the Jat Incline. This excellent path starts from the Customs Pass road a short distance above the Kowloon Dairy, and climbs for 1,800 feet at an easy gradient across the flank of Kowloon Peak to the top of the ridge a few yards S.E. of Tate's Cairn. Time, 13½ hours from the bus stop at Kai Tak.

A few steps down the far side of the ridge put us out of sight of the town, and we might have been a hundred miles from civilization. This is certainly the place for a halt, to gaze on the lovely view over Port Shelter; but not a long one, for Ma On Shan, standing up nobly at the end of the ridge, is still far away. The next obstacle was the little hill obscurely named One Rise More. Perhaps this hill has no Chinese name, but in cases where native names exist it is surely better to stick to them. There are too many absurdities such as Pottinger Peak and Mount Butler in the Colony, however worthy their namesakes may have been. It is fortunate that the English name for the highest mountain in the world sounds so well, but the native name Chomolungma, “The Goddess Mother of the Snows,” is perhaps more beautiful and certainly more appropriate.
2. Ma On Shan and To'o Harbour. The nearer point is the summit of the Hunchback with the North-West Ridge to the left, and the highest point of Ma On Shan showing behind the Hunchback Ridge to the right. The white streak on the lower slopes of the Hunchback is the scar of the disused road leading to the Iron Mine. In the foreground can be seen the single track of the Kowloon-Canton railway.
Musing thus on the whims of surveyors, we decided that we could do with one rise less, and refused to clamber to the top of the hillock with the odd name. It was avoided by skirting it to the west along a path which passes just above Tiu Tao Ngam village, and so down to Heather Pass. A few yards below this pass to the east is a spring which is always running except in the driest of seasons; here we did justice to a magnificent thirst.

A paved path runs eastward from Heather Pass across the slopes of Buffalo Hill to Buffalo Pass. As far as I know, there is no path to the top of Buffalo Hill (1,987 feet), but this glorious viewpoint can be reached fairly easily by a steep scramble of 400 feet up from the pass of the same name. After this digression we returned to the pass and continued along the ridge; the route was a little vague, for the good path had descended into the valley on our left, and we had to trust to cow tracks. In clear weather there is no difficulty in following the watershed down to Delta Pass; unfortunately, however, we were by this time shrouded in thick mist. It soon became obvious to the rearguard that the leader, although he continued to plod obstinately ahead, had lost the way; in a little while some cows loomed up out of the mist; they looked strangely familiar, and closer examination proved without any doubt that they were the very cows which we had passed a quarter of an hour previously. After this chastening experience we pulled ourselves together, and found our way to Delta Pass without further mishap. Here we halted for half an hour for lunch.

On the far side of the pass is a short steep rise to Ngong Ping. This remote little village has a charm of its own; it stands on a high plateau, hidden from the rest of the world; a grove shades it in summer, and shelters in from the east wind in winter; in front are a few paddy fields, and beyond them are only the mountain tops and the wide sky.

The path crosses the paddy fields, goes over a pass west of Pyramid Hill, and descends to Ma On Shan village; we left it a few yards below the pass on the far side, and took an easy short cut across the hillside in the direction of the summit of Ma On Shan, until we struck the path up from the Iron Mine. The route from here to the summit has already been described. We reached the top in thick cloud at 2.45 p.m., halted long enough to eat an orange, and turned back to descend to Sai Kung. It was pleasant to come down out of the cloud on to lower ground; the greens and browns of the hillsides were good to look on, for colours never seem so rich as when the eyes have been attuned for hours to a grey monotone of mist.

The fishing fleet was anchored in the little harbour of Sai Kung, and from the junks came a cheerful clack of voices, like the contented sounds from a rookery in the evening. If Sai Kung were transplanted to the south coast of England, it would become a "beauty spot"; artists would inhabit the cottages; "Ye Olde Ship Inn" would inevitably make its appearance, with its ruinous prices and sham antiques, and at its doors charabancs would unload their hordes at week-ends. But away with such horrid thoughts; Sai Kung is still cut off from civilization by six miles of footpath, and if you cannot get beer to revive you for the long trudge home, at least you can get delicious oranges for next to nothing.

Thus refreshed, we strolled home in the dusk over Customs Pass, and at 7.10 p.m. reached the car waiting at the bottom of the hill.

July 1935.