

BRUCE, CHARLES GRANVILLE (1866 - 1939), mountaineer and soldier

Name: Charles Granville Bruce
Date of birth: 1866
Date of death: 1939
Spouse: Finetta Madeline Julia Bruce (née Campbell)
Parent: Nora Bruce (née Napier)
Parent: Henry Austin Bruce
Gender: Male
Occupation: mountaineer and soldier
Area of activity: Military; Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: Ioan Bowen Rees

Born 7 April 1866 in London, youngest son of [H.A. Bruce, 1st Lord Aberdare](#) and his second wife, Norah. He went to Harrow and then Repton schools but unlike his brother [W.N. Bruce](#) he did not continue his education, obtaining his commission in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in 1887 through the militia rather than Sandhurst. After joining the 5th Gurkha Rifles in 1889 he mastered the skills of mountain warfare on the n.-west frontier of India. He was mentioned in dispatches three times and had been promoted major by 1913. In May 1914 he was appointed commander of the 6th Gurkhas and he was again mentioned three times in dispatches before being seriously wounded in Gallipoli. He was then sent back to India to lead an independent frontier brigade. Before being obliged to resign, as brigadier, in 1920 on health grounds, he had been twice mentioned in dispatches and had served in the Third Afghanistan War. He was appointed Hon. Col. of the 5th Gurkhas in 1931.

The basis of Bruce's success as a soldier was his remarkable mastery of the languages of the Gurkhas and their neighbours, his zest in their company and his proverbial strength. He is mainly remembered as one of the foremost pioneers in the Himalayas. He accompanied Conway on the first expedition to the Karakoram in 1892, and was with Younghusband in the Hindu Kush in 1893 and with Mummery on Nanga Parbat in 1895. In 1898 he explored the area around Nun Kun with his wife and 16 Gurkhas.

Bruce's true delight was in mountains under 20,000 feet, but having expressed a desire to see Everest since 1893, he arranged to make an attempt through Tibet with Longstaff and Mumm in 1907. The British Foreign Office blocked this and they went to Nanda Devi, succeeding in ascending Trisul (7,100 metres), the highest ascent until 1931. Bruce visited Nepal and Sikkim in 1908 and began to plan an ascent of Everest from the south. Permission again was refused but he planned and led the first two assaults (from the north) in 1922 when (General) John Geoffrey Bruce (born 4 December 1896, his cousin, son of Sir Gerald Trevor Knight-Bruce of St. Hilary, Glamorganshire) broke the world record with an ascent of 8,300 metres, and in 1924 when Mallory and Irvine were lost on the final slopes. Bruce himself was unable to climb to great heights by now but according to Longstaff he was an 'ideal leader'. In his time technical skill was not as important in the Himalayas as was the ability to be quite at home in the inaccessible highground and among the various groups of inhabitants. Bruce's greatest contribution, perhaps, was to discover the value of the native mountaineer, especially the Sherpa. From the beginning he insisted on training Gurkha soldiers to be mountain guides, and he brought some home to Cwmdare and to the Alps. He was elected president of the Alpine Club in 1923 and an hon. member of the Alpine Club of Switzerland (and of other clubs). He received the Gill memorial prize of the Royal Geographical Soc. in 1915 and the Founder's gold badge in 1925. He was awarded hon. doctorates by the universities of Wales (D.Sc.), Oxford (D.Sc.), Edinburgh (D.C.L.) and St. Andrews (LL.D.). He was appointed M.V.O. in 1903 and C.B. in 1918.

He published: *Twenty years in the Himalayas* (1910), *Kulu and Lahoul* (1914), *The assault on Mount Everest 1922* (1923), and *Himalayan wanderer* (1934). In this (p. 7) he says of his boyhood in Dyffryn, Cwmdare: 'I spent all my time running about the hills, and sucked in from my earliest time a love and understanding of mountain country without appreciating it at the time, my father being a most complete lover of his own valleys and hills.' Before joining the army he had walked with (Sir) Rhys Williams of Miskin 'from South to North Wales' and had become a 'worshipper of the wild Welsh mountain scenery' (p. 25). His teacher in rural matters was a farmer from the valley and according to Longstaff, Bruce used to sing Welsh airs with gusto.

He married Finetta Madeline Julia, third daughter of Col. Sir Edward Fitzgerald Campbell in 1894. Their only child, a son, died young. Mrs. Bruce died in 1932 and Charles Granville on 12 July 1939. A memorial to him was placed in Abbottabad (Pakistan) church in 1942 by the 5th and 6th Gurkhas.

Author

Dr Ioan Bowen Rees, (1929 - 1999)

Sources

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Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-40, 107

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T. G. Longstaff, *This my voyage* (London 1950)

Claire-Éliane Engel, *Les batailles pour l'Himalaya, 1783-1936* (Paris 1936)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Charles Granville Bruce](#)

Additional Links

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