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Thinking Like a Mountain

The Life and Career of E O Shebbeare

Bengt Berg's warm portrait of E O Shebbeare, taken during the early 1930s. Shebbeare facilitated Berg's pioneering camera-trap expedition to photograph the wildlife of Bengal. All the pictures of Shebbeare that accompany this article are reproduced with the kind permission of Sue Morton, Shebbeare's granddaughter. Berg was a Swedish ornithologist and one of the first natural history filmmakers.

Near the start of Percy Wyn-Harris's official documentary film of the 1933 British Everest Expedition, members gather around a table in Darjeeling.[1] Each one is profiled, their name appearing in intertitles. Most of us would be hard pressed to name any of the expedition members today, let alone identify them from the archive footage. One face in particular remains deep in shadow beneath a broad-brimmed tropical hat, the title announcing 'E O Shebbeare'. The deputy leader and transport officer for the 1933 expedition, Shebbeare appears again 12 minutes into the film in footage shot in Phari, Tibet, smiling and talking to the camera, supervising porters, posing with the other expedition members for a group portrait, the scenes intercut with shots of snow streaming from the sacred summit of Chomolhari.

A founder member in 1928 of the Himalayan Club[2], Edward Oswald Shebbeare had been the transport officer on the 1924 Everest expedition. He was subsequently transport officer for the Germans on Kangchenjunga in 1929 and 1931. His knowledge of Sikkim and of the indigenous peoples of the region and their languages was central to the logistical success of this and other expeditions. Despite this, his contribution has largely been downplayed and ignored by historians of Everest and Himalayan mountaineering, in part because practical knowledge in a colonial context formed no part of the contemporary archetype of the mountaineering hero. Lacking a degree or any university education, Shebbeare had joined the Indian Forest Service in 1906, eventually becoming chief conservator of forests for Bengal. Class and colonial experience differentiated him from most of the mountaineers selected by the Mount Everest Committee.

Look at any British mountaineering or expeditionary photograph from the period. A small group of sahibs stares impassively back at us. Out of shot a vast army of indigenous labour toils on the mountain: high-altitude workers, porters, cooks, mail runners. Indigenous expeditionary labour was seldom accorded due recognition in subsequent expeditionary accounts, published and unpublished. In sharp contrast, E O Shebbeare's recognition of indigenous autonomy and agency was exemplary for the period, a sympathy derived from his long experience of the subcontinent and his innovative approaches to forest management. In both his 1924 Everest diary held at the Alpine Club and in the two albums of photographs from the 1929 German expedition gifted to him by Paul Bauer [Editor's note: see p189 in this edition of the *Alpine Journal*] and now in a private family collection, Shebbeare has annotated every photograph of Sherpas, recording their names. Few of his contemporaries could have named more than a handful of the indigenous workers they encountered on the way to the mountain; very few bothered to systematically record them. Exploring Shebbeare's life and career shows us the hidden histories of mountaineering and exploration, highlighting the colonial official's role in traversing imperial and indigenous cultures, framing colonial encounters, mediating the culture shock experienced by

1. P Wyn-Harris, *Fourth Everest Expedition*, *https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-fourth-everest-expedition-1933-online*
2. G Corbett, 'The Founding of the Himalayan Club', *Himalayan Journal*, Vol 1, 1929.

Shebbeare acted as transport officer for Paul Bauer's Kangchenjunga expeditions and also for the British on Everest in 1933, where he surprised Shipton, seen here on horseback, by reaching the North Col. As a seminal member of the Himalayan Club, few expeditions in this period made it into the field without his help.

mountaineers from Britain and making expeditionary knowledge possible.

Shebbeare's relative obscurity is, in part, related to the nature of the British imperial obsession with Everest and its symbolic importance, particularly in post-war reconstruction of imperial masculinity and British rule in India.[3] The Everest expeditions of the 1920s and 1930s were high-profile events designed to create enduring archetypes. The subsequent focus on a few individuals, in particular George Mallory and his mythopoeic disappearance, has left a legacy of hypertrophied heroism and endlessly repeated, highly simplified stories. As Charles Lind observed in the notes to his poem *An Afterclap of Fate*, 'Mallory has taken on an almost mythic status in our time,' doomed to the incurious attentions of 'the reverential monument builders & the debunking demolition squad' alike.[4] All too often, the history of mountaineering has become 'monumental history', Nietzsche's term for the history of outstanding individuals imagined as a series of isolated mountain peaks.[5] Monumental history was a reaffirmation of Carlyle's 'Great Man'

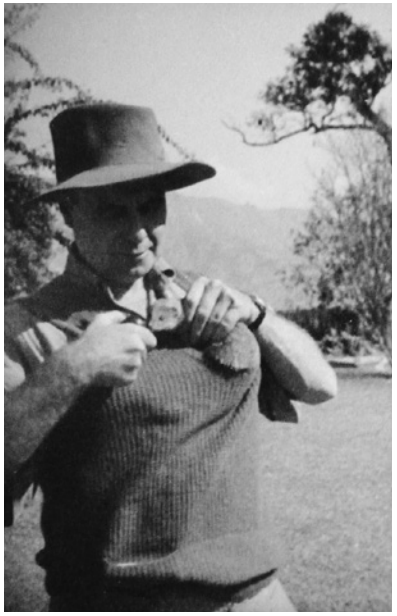
3. W Davis, *Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest*, London, The Bodley Head, 2011.
4. C Lind, *An Afterclap of Fate: Mallory on Everest*, The Ernest Press, 2006, p120.
5. P Hansen *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering After the Enlightenment*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 2013. J Westaway, review of 'The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering After the Enlightenment', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol 32, 2, 2015, pp393-5. DOI:10.1080/09523367.2014.963960

theory of history, intentionally aristocratic and rhetorically reinforced by the cultural capital of idealised mountain landscapes and the power of mountains as metaphor; what historians call 'history from above'. Postcolonial perspectives on Empire have enabled us to begin to undertake a 'history from below' approach to Himalayan mountaineering and expeditions. Felix Driver's work on the hidden histories of exploration brings into focus the importance of indigenous knowledge and agency in exploration.[6]

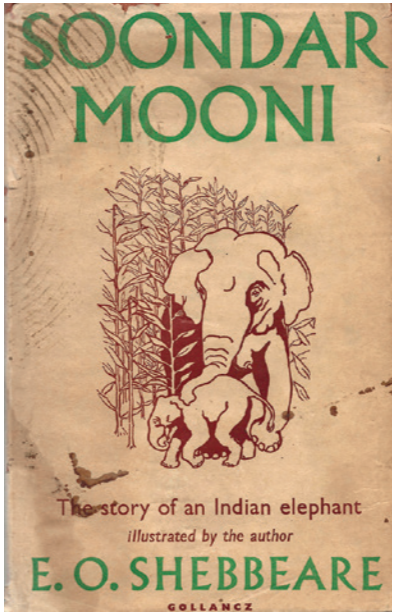
As well as issues of race, ethnicity and the subaltern, the influence of class in a colonial expeditionary context has also been an under-examined area. The Mount Everest Committee in the 1920s clearly thought character and class every bit as important a mountaineering ability in its selection process, the 'Everest Mountaineering Archetype' being well attested to: public school, university degree, medical degree, army officer, middle-class professional, sportsman. Take a good look at those expeditionary photographs again. The figures in the photographs share many affinities as a ruling imperial class but can be divided on the basis of their experience of the Indian subcontinent. Most of the sahibs in those photographs only visited India, Sikkim and Tibet briefly, returning to Britain or elsewhere in the empire. There has been very little research undertaken on the lives of colonial officials involved in Himalayan mountaineering: the British political agents in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet who negotiated diplomatic access to the mountain, the Gurkha officers and NCOs, Survey of India officers, Indian Forest Service officials, acting as transport and liaison officers. Few have analysed the importance of colonial knowledge and expertise to the Everest expeditions, where success depended on a vast logistical pyramid of indigenous labour that demanded language skills, intercultural understanding and sympathy, good working relationships, command structures, and the deployment of geographical, political and diplomatic knowledge and authority to succeed.

Shebbeare was undoubtedly part of the Raj, the white colonial ruling class in British India but at the same time he was far removed from the 'Everest Mountaineering Archetype'. Whilst most historians treat him as a footnote to the Everest expeditions, he developed a legendary reputation amongst south-east Asian conservationists.[7] In the mountains, jungles and forests of the Himalaya, E O Shebbeare became a pioneering naturalist and forest conservationist, eventually becoming chief conservator of wildlife for Malaya. Captured by the Japanese in 1942 as part of F Spencer Chapman's first 'stay behind' party, he was interned in Singapore, retiring to Oxfordshire in 1947. As well as significant contributions to the scholarly literature on the flora and fauna of south-east Asia, in his retirement he wrote *Soondar Mooni: The Story of an Indian Elephant* (Gollancz, 1958), a book that explores non-human subjectivities and agency, providing us with evidence of Shebbeare's deep sensibility for the natural world and the non-human lifeforms we share

6. F Driver, *Hidden Histories of Exploration: Researching the RGS-IBG Collections*. London, RGS & Royal Holloway, 2009.
7. 'A rare combination of outdoor ruggedness … with an aptitude for scholarly observations of fauna and flora, Shebbeare became almost a legendary figure in eastern Asia.' E P Gee, 'Edward O. Shebbeare', *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, Vol 7, 6, December, 1964, p274.



Shebbeare and friend, India. He spent 32 years in the Indian Forest Service. Though known to climbers for his exploration, he would more accurately be described as a deep ecologist.



The cover of Shebbeare's remarkable natural history work *Soondar Mooni: The Story of an Indian Elephant*, published by Gollancz in 1958.

it with. Despite this, there is an almost complete lack of accessible biographical information about him. This is in large part because Shebbeare was notoriously diffident and self-effacing.[8] He never sought out fame and his experience on Everest and Kangchenjunga was only ever a small part of a life devoted to the imperial forestry service and wildlife conservation.

Shebbeare was born in 1884, the son of the Rev C H Shebbeare, vicar of Wykham, Yorkshire.[9] He was educated at Charterhouse and then the Royal Indian Engineering College at Cooper's Hill near Egham in Surrey 1903-06. Set up by the India Office to train engineers for the Indian Public Works Department, a forestry school was established in 1885.[10] Shebbeare spent the next 32 years (1906-38) in the Indian Forest Service, eventually becoming chief conservator of forests for Bengal in 1925.[11] His application to become a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1940 indicates quite how extensive his experience of the Indian subcontinent was: he records

8. H Champion, 'Mr. E. O. Shebbeare', *The Times*, 19 August 1964, p12.
9. 'Obituary: Mr. E. O. Shebbeare', *The Times*, 14 August 1964, p10.
10. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Indian_Engineering_College*
Secretary of State for India, *The India List and India Office List for 1905*, London, Harrison, 1905. 'Compiled from official records by direction of the Secretary of State for India in Council', 'Royal Indian Engineering College, Session 1904-05, Forest Students, Second Year, Shebbeare, E. O.', 5.
11. H Champion & F Osmaston (eds), *The Forests of India, Volume 4: Being the History from 1925 to 1947 of the Forests Now in Burma, India and Pakistan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962, p287.

30 years in the 'E. Himalayas and hill tracts (Bengal and Assam)', 'W. Himalayas (U.P.) 1 year', 'Madras, Ceylon – brief visits. Burma, 3 or 4 short visits'. He claimed

> *'to have got to know the Eastern Himalayas and their peoples fairly well from Tibet to the Terai and Duars (roughly Nepal to Kamrup) and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Khasi Hills and Lower Bengal less well.'*

Under 'linguistic knowledge', he indicates he can read, write and speak Bengali and Nepali, has fair Hindustani, rusty German and very poor Tibetan. Of degrees awarded, university education and 'other theoretical training' Shebbeare records: 'Nil'.[12] It was exactly this practical knowledge won over decades on the Indian subcontinent that secured Shebbeare the deputy leadership of the 1933 Everest expedition. Col Eugene St J Birnie, the other transport officer on the 1933 expedition, recalled:

> *'Dealing with the rough mountain men of Thibet, who supplied us with our yaks and donkeys, was a task which needed immense patience and good humour. Any sign of irritation could be disastrous. Shebbeare surmounted all these difficulties with ease. His sense of humour captivated these tough hillmen and ensured the safe passage of the expedition to the Base Camp.'* [13]

His humour was mixed with legendary toughness. On 3 June 1933 and against expedition leader Hugh Ruttledge's express orders, Shebbeare reached the North Col on Everest, Birnie commenting that Shebbeare:

> *'had his tea and a pipe, looked at the magnificent panorama of mountain scenery, and returned safely down those precipitous ice slopes, achieving an ambition of years! The North Col is 23,000ft in height and this was a superb effort for a man of 49 years of age.'* [14]

Raymond Greene in his memoirs, *Moments of Being*, called Shebbeare 'the most loveable, imperturbable and knowledgeable of men'[15] and continued to visit him in his retirement after 1947 at his home near Banbury, Oxfordshire.[16] It is probably fair to say that all the major expeditions undertaken through Sikkim between 1924 and 1938 benefited from Shebbeare's expertise, either directly or indirectly via the Himalaya Club's role in marshalling porters, Sherpas and Bhotias and managing their pay, welfare and lading. Shebbeare was also assistant editor of the *Himalayan Journal* 1930-3, vice president of the Himalayan Club from 1933-4 and committee

12. Shebbeare's membership application, 19 July 1940, MS A71-336, Royal Anthropological Institute.
13. Anon, 'Shebbeare', *The Carthusian*, December 1964, p101.
14. Anon, 'Shebbeare', *The Carthusian*, December 1964, p101.
15. R Greene, *Moments of Being: The Random Recollections of Raymond Greene*, London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1974, p155.
16. E Birnie, R Greene, K. Biswas 'Obituary: Edward Oswald Shebbeare (1884-1964)', *Himalayan Journal*, Vol 26, 1965.

member 1936-8.[17] Paul Bauer records that in 1931, Shebbeare 'sacrificed his whole year's furlough to our undertaking and led the first body of porters a fourteen days' march to the Zemu glacier.'[18]

We can perhaps characterise Shebbeare's mountaineering as a mixture of the voluntary and the semi-official, all travel in Sikkim and Tibet requiring political clearance and assurances on behalf of indigenous communities and labour. Shebbeare was particularly trusted by indigenous communities, partly because he had instigated a revolution in Indian forestry by successfully introducing the Taungya system, a traditional system of agroforestry originating in Burma that utilised intercropping to improve forest regeneration, an experimental programme that had already been widely adopted when he summarised it's benefits in the *Empire Forestry Journal* in July 1932.[19] 'He advocated combining this with the tribal swidden cultivation and bringing the indigenous people back into the forests' and managing regrowth through the application of fire regeneration, and is now the model for 'almost every agro-forestry system in the tropics.'[20] Seow, writing in the journal *Malaysian Naturalist*, recorded that 'anthropologists working with hill peoples of India noted that the names of Shebbeare and some other officers have entered the oral histories of these people who praised them for their management of forests and stopping illegal logging.'[21] Sir Harry Champion, professor of forestry at Oxford, writing to *The Times* in 1964, indicated that under Shebbeare, the Forest Department in Bengal developed

> *'a high reputation for its technical progress, fostered by an exceptional camaraderie among its officers which was equally due to him. His deep and wide knowledge of the forest and forest life made him a valuable critic, … The toughness, which a few who did not know him well thought he deliberately exaggerated as a pose, was an inherent part of a man than whom it would be hard to find a better companion, however difficult or uncomfortable the circumstances.'* [22]

As conservator of forests for Bengal, Shebbeare also pioneered both botanical and game reserves.[23] His work was already being acknowledged in 1932 when the Swedish naturalist Bengt Berg chose to dedicate his book on the Indian one-horned rhino and the Indian elephant to Shebbeare.[24] His obituary in *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, records that 'it was due to his untiring pioneer efforts that legislation was passed for the protection of the Indian rhinoceros.'[25] Due to Shebbeare's representations, 'the Rhinoceros

17. E Birnie, R Greene, K. Biswas 'Obituary: Edward Oswald Shebbeare (1884-1964)', *Himalayan Journal*, Vol 26, 1965.
18. P Bauer, *Himalayan Campaign: The German Attack on Kanchenjunga, the Second Highest Mountain in the World*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1937, p118.
19. E Shebbeare, 'The Sal Tangyas in Bengal', *Empire Forestry Journal*, Vol 11, 1, July 1932, pp18-33.
H Blandford, 'Assam: Progress Report of Forest Administration for the Years 1940-41', *Empire Forestry Journal*, Shillong, Government Press, Vol 21, 1942, pp72-3.
20. A Seow, 'Shebbeare: On the Shoulders of Giants', *Malaysian Naturalist*, September 2010, pp34-6.
21. Seow, 'Shebbeare', p36.
22. Anon, 'Shebbeare', *The Carthusian*, December 1964, p101.
23. Anon, 'Shebbeare', *The Carthusian*, December 1964, p101.
24. Bengt Berg, *Meine Jagd Nach Dem Einhorn*, (Frankfurt: Rütten & Loening Verlag, 1933).
25. E. P. Gee, (1964) 'Edward O. Shebbeare', *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, Vol.7, issue 6

Preservation Act came into being and the Jaldapara Game Sanctuary, in the Duars, was declared a special Reserve for the preservation of the Rhinoceros.'[26] Section 4a of the Bengal Rhinoceros Preservation Act of 1932 made it illegal to kill rhinos and trade in their body parts.[27] It was this legislation, as well as the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 that cut off the illegal demand for horn, securing the survival of the rhino in India.[28]

In 1938 Shebbeare accepted the post of as chief game warden of the newly established King George V (subsequently the Taman Negara) National Park in Malaya, the only substantial national park in Malaysia for the next 64 years and therefore hugely important for conservation purposes on the peninsula.[29] Shebbeare became both a founder and president of the Malayan Nature Society (1940-2) and founding editor of the *Malayan Nature Journal*. He established a strong working relationship as a field naturalist working with Frederick Chasen, the director of the Raffles Museum in Singapore and supported 'Chasen's efforts to get the remaining wild areas of Singapore declared a wildlife preserve.'[30] All of this work was cut short by the Japanese advance through Asia in World War Two. In January 1941 Shebbeare, on his own initiative, raised a special secret unit of the 1st (Perak) Battalion of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Forces (FMSVF) to improve intelligence and mapping in Upper Perak on the Siamese frontier.[31] Known as Frontier Patrol 'it consisted of five Europeans with jungle experience, who were each given a section of the frontier for which they were responsible.'[32] Shebbeare's command included

> *Herbert Deane 'Pat' Noone, govt. ethnologist, protector of Sakais; with brother Richard (temporary at Perak Public Health Dept. he was formally under G2(I) – intelligence – 3rd Indian Corps, mapping), with own Temiar aborigines and Malays … Richard's patrol operated from Kroh. Pat from Grik area with elephants.*[33]

Shebbeare's command involved training in jungle warfare, running intelligence networks on the border and making forays into Siam to assess the Japanese military build-up and to develop cross-border supply routes in

December, 274, notes that the legislation 'resulted in the creation of Jaldapara as a sanctuary in northern Bengal in 1941'.
26. E Shebbeare, A Roy, H Tyndale, 'The Great One-horned Rhinoceros (Rhinocerus Unicornis L.)', *Journal of the Bengal Natural History Society*, Vol 22, 1948, pp88-91.
27. *Bengal Act VIII of 1932: The Bengal Rhinoceros Preservation Act of 1932.*
28. E O Shebbeare, 'The Bengal Rhinoceros Sanctuary', *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of Empire*, Vol 56, 1948, pp33-5.
29. Seow, 'Shebbeare', 36. E Shebbeare, 'Malaya. Annual Report of the Game Department, Federated Malay States, for the Year 1938', *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire*, Vol 38, 1939, pp32-5. J MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, p278.
30. B Luyt, 'Collectors and Collecting for the Raffles Museum in Singapore: 1920-1940', *Library and Information History*, Vol 26, 3, September 2010, pp189-90.
http://www.maneyonline.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1179/175834810X12731358995235
31. B Farrell, 'High Command, Irregular Forces, and Defending Malaya, 1941-1942', *Global War Studies*, Vol 8, 2, 2011, p58.
32. D Holman, *Noone of the Ulu*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1984, p80.
33. Audrey Holmes McCormick *http://www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk/node/58*

preparation for the defence of Malaya.[34] Frontier Patrol seems to have been disbanded late in 1941, its members being called up for regular deployment in the FMSVF and regular army units. In January 1942 Shebbeare was part of F Spencer Chapman's first ill-fated 'stay-behind party'[35] cut off by the rapid Japanese advance; he spent the remainder of the war interned in Changi prison, Singapore. Amongst the horrors of Changi he embarked on a lecture programme with other Malayan Nature Society members and contributed to the first edition of *An Introduction to the Birds of Malaya*.[36] Chapman later found Shebbeare's 'bungalow ransacked and both Shebbeare's scientific papers and the Society's early records were destroyed.'[37] Chapman did find 'several copies of the *Himalayan Journal* and one of his 1924 Everest diaries'[38] which he rescued and is now in the Alpine Club Library in London.

Upon his release from internment, Shebbeare returned to England via Bengal where he organized a tiger hunt for Richard Casey, governor of the Presidency of Bengal 1944-6, still sporting the rawhide boots he had commandeered from his Japanese prison guard. He re-established the system of game wardens in the King George V/Tamara Negara National Park[39] but by 1947, with India on the brink of independence and Malaya destabilized by communist insurgents, Shebbeare retired. In May 1947 he paid one last visit to Jaldapara, 'the Rhino sanctuary near Nilpara, in Northern Bengal'[40], before settling into retirement near Banbury, Oxfordshire, devoting his remaining years to his family, his writing and bee keeping. In retirement he attended the annual meetings of the Empire Forestry Association.[41] He was a council member of the Fauna Preservation Society between 1954 and 1958 and again from 1959 until just before his death in 1964,[42] with many of his articles appearing in the society's journal *Oryx*. Amongst conservationists he was perhaps best known for a 1953 article in *Oryx* on the 'Status of the Three Asiatic Rhinoceros'.[43] He achieved a small measure of wider fame in 1958 with the publication of his book *Soondar Mooni: The Story of an Indian Elephant*, a book that explores non-human subjectivities and agency, providing us with evidence of Shebbeare's deep sensibility for what some scholars have termed the 'more-than-human' world. In the words of one

34. M Shennan, *Out In the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960*, London, John Murray, 2000, pp215-6. D Holman, Chapter Seven: 'The Frontier Patrol', *Noone of the Ulu*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp80-9.
35. B Hembry, *Malayan Spymaster: Memoirs of a Rubber Planter, Bandit Fighter and Spy*, Singapore, Monsoon Books, 2011, p131. F Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral*. London, The Reprint Society, 1950, p49.
36. *http://myrepositori.pnm.gov.my/bitstream/123456789/2339/1/JB1899_ITMB.pdf*
37. Seow, Shebbeare, p36. '… the *Malayan Nature Journal* about 1940. Unfortunately, all spare copies of this publication, together with most privately owned copies, were probably lost during the Japanese occupation.' See E Shebbeare, 'The Senoi of Malaya', *Man*, Vol 47, 168, November 1947, p152.
38. F Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral*. London, The Reprint Society, 1950, p94. See also 53.
39. J MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, p280.
40. E Shebbeare, 'The Bengal Rhinoceros Sanctuary', *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire*, Vol.56, 1948, p33.
41. Lord Milverton, 'Report of the Thirty-Second Annual Meeting of the Empire Forestry Association, held at the Assembly Hall, Royal Empire Society, Northumberland Avenue, London WC2, on Friday, 24 Sptember, 1954', *Empire Forestry Review*, Vol 33, 4, December 1954, pp352-61.
42. E Gee, 'Edward O. Shebbeare', *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, Vol 7, 6 December 1964, p274.
43. E Shebbeare, 'Status of the Three Asiatic Rhinoceros', *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, Vol 2, 3, November 1953, pp141-9.

reviewer, Shebbeare:

> *'describes most of the life history of an individual female elephant of north-east India. He thus lays on record a vast amount of valuable, first-hand, authentic information on elephants in their wild state, how they react to various natural and man-made events, and how they submit to capture, training, and working for man. The story is mostly told through the eyes and mind of the elephant, and the author appears to have what is probably a very accurate idea of the real thoughts of an elephant-without any undue tendency to an anthropomorphic approach to the subject.'* [44]

Richard Casey, governor of the Presidency of Bengal 1944-46 and subsequently Australian minister for External Affairs, in his foreword to *Soondar Mooni*, described Shebbeare as 'an unusual and rather remarkable man. He has spent the greater part of his life in jungles. He'd be lost and unhappy in a big city, but he is completely happy and at home in the jungle.'[45] The very last published piece Shebbeare wrote, a review of P D Stracey's book *Elephant Gold*, published in *Oryx* in August 1964 confirms Shebbeare's deep affiliation with the jungle biome:

> *'I enjoyed this book, partly because its author, like myself, acquired his taste for elephants against a background of undeveloped parts of Assam. Here the jungle got into his blood, as earlier it had into mine, and made him feel that days spent on game-paths through wild country, and nights in grass huts with the smell of wood smoke were the only life for him.'* [46]

Dr K Biswas, editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, described the virtue of Shebbeare's jungle affinity: 'His was a character by itself – fearless but amiable, enduring all who came into contact with him, simple due to his constant association with natural surroundings of the forest.'[47] *The Times* obituary of Shebbeare reiterates this:

> *'In a varied life in the east his name became a byword. He would disappear for periods into the forests he loved and the results would appear in technical papers on forestry, on the fishes of northern Bengal, on botany, and on zoology.'* [48]

Shebbeare, it seems to me, understood that to affiliate with nature first requires that we must occasionally disappear, encountering nature and immersing ourselves in the wilderness. His mountaineering expeditions

44. 'E P G', 'Soondar Mooni. By E. O. Shebbeare', *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, Vol 4, 6, December 1958, pp385-6.
45. E Shebbeare, *Soondar Mooni: The Story of an Indian Elephant*, Illustrated by the author, London, Gollancz, 1958, p5.
46. E Shebbeare, 'Elephant Gold. By P. D. Stracey'. *Oryx: The International Journal of Conservation*, Vol 7, 5, August 1964, p262.
47. E Birnie, R Greene, K. Biswas 'Obituary: Edward Oswald Shebbeare (1884-1964)', *Himalayan Journal*, Vol 26, 1965.
48. Anon, 'Shebbeare', *The Carthusian*, December 1964, p101.

were in part driven by his enthusiasm for natural history. His short films shot on the 1933 Everest expedition are remarkable for their focus on the wildlife of the Tibetan plateau, particularly the bird life, featuring shots of alpine chough, Tibetan blue rock dove, brown accentor, Adams' mountain finch and the ubiquitous raven.[49] In retirement he corresponded with the pioneering animal behaviourist Konrad Lorenz and met and corresponded with the Scottish naturalist Seton Gordon, writing an article on the 'Birds of Everest' for *The Field* in 1959-60.[50] His granddaughter still has a letter from Smart's Circus in Oxfordshire granting him permission to visit their elephants any time he chose to.

Shebbeare's life exemplified a profound biophilia, the term coined by the evolutionary biologist E O Wison. Wilson defined biophilia as the 'urge to affiliate with other forms of life'[51]. Let me illustrate my point by outlining a journey Shebbeare undertook, one that seems to challenge the assertion made by many environmental historians that, during the 20th century, imperial forestry officials increasingly demonstrated a loss of intimacy with the environment.[52] In the very first issue of the *Malay Nature Journal*,[53] Shebbeare describes a journey he made between 27 April and 21 May, 1940[54] to deliver a cow and calf elephant from Jalong in Kuala Kangsar District to the Taman Negara National Park,[55] a month-long journey, 60 miles as the crow flies, into the *ulu*, the deep jungle clinging to the main watershed between the states of Perak and Kelantan. No reason is given for the journey or justification provided for the decision to avoid the main roads, although it is possible to come to some reasonable conclusions about his motivation. Shebbeare set off with 'three Tharu Elephant-men' and 'Yeop Ahmad (our guide)'.[56] It takes a while for the reader to adjust to this new world Shebbeare presents in the article, where elephants are named as friends, where men are defined by the animals they share their working lives with ('elephant-men'). They become bewildered and lost and increasingly dependent on animal agency: 'we had to find our way as we went' Shebbeare tells us, 'using such paths and elephant tracks as existed.'[57] The terrain was so steep that the elephant spent 'almost as much of her time climbing on "nose and knees" or sliding downhill on her quarters'.[58] At the Luwak Jalak pass, at 3,700ft the highest point on the watershed before the drop down into Kelantan, Shebbeare noted that:

49. Royal Geographical Society Film Archive, *Everest – Shebbeare* 11 minutes, *https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-everest-shebbeare-1933-online.*
50. Shebbeare Letters, Alpine Club Archive.
51. S Kellert and E Wilson (eds) *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, Island Press, 1995, p416.
52. B Weil, (2006), 'Conservation, Exploitation, and Cultural Change in the Indian Forest Service, 1875-1927', *Environmental History*, Vol 11, April 2006, pp319-43. K Sivaramakrishnan, 'Science, Environment and Empire History: Comparative Perspectives from Forests in Colonial India', *Environment and History*, Vol14, 2008, p56.
53. E O Shebbeare, 'An Elephant Trek', *Malayan Nature Journal*, Vol 1, 1940, pp9-14.
54. The first issue of the *Malayan Nature Journal* was published Vol 1, 1, August 1940. See Anon, 'Malayan Nature Society and Journal', *Nature*, No 3711, 14 December 1940, pp711-2.
55. *http://www.taman-negara.com/park_info.htm*
56. Shebbeare, 'An Elephant Trek', p9.
57. Shebbeare, 'An Elephant Trek', p9.
58. Shebbeare, 'An Elephant Trek', p10.

'At first sight it looked awkward country for a loaded elephant but we were luckily on the three-day-old tracks of a small wild herd which led us by a traverse across the face to the rather steep head of a side ridge. The gradient of this eased off rapidly into an excellent elephant path.'[59]

As well as a reliance on animal agency, Shebbeare is scrupulous in acknowledging the indigenous contribution to the co-production of knowledge that made the journey possible. He acknowledges:

'Yeop Ahmad the Perak Museum Collector whose knowledge of the Temiar, their language and their country made the trip possible. The excellent "Reconnaissance Map of parts of the Ulu Kelantan and Ulu Perak," from which we set our course, was largely built up from his field sketches and observations during earlier treks with Mr. H. D. Noone.' [60]

H D 'Pat' Noone, the Malayan government protector of aborigines, was already a legend for his anthropological studies of the Temiar and along with his brother Richard was part of Shebbeare's Frontier Patrol the following year in 1941. Noone's work emphasised the 'highly communal, violence-avoiding' character of Temiar society. Noone presented his theories in lectures in England in the late 1930s and in an extended radio talk broadcast from Singapore, he described the Temiar as 'communistic, or rather, co-operative'.[61] Guided by spirits, animal familiars and dreams, Temiar dream-songs and ceremonials mapped the jungle they lived in. According to Marina Roseman, their theories of existence and of the self indicated that they believed in 'a collegial permeability between entities that post-Cartesian Western cosmopolitan philosophy hierarchically differentiates as "human" and "nonhuman".'[62] Noone's work subsequently resulted in a great deal of anthropological controversy over Temiar and Senoi 'Dream Theory'.[63] Noone was also instrumental in the setting up of 'Temiar reserves in Perak state and for the enacting of protective legislation'[64] for aboriginal populations in 1939,[65] the very country through which Shebbeare's elephant trek took place. The *Malayan Nature Journal* that Shebbeare edited clearly saw its remit as wider than just natural history, incorporating an anthropological article in its first issue, and one suspects Noone's influence is behind Shebbeare's application to become a member of the Royal Anthroplogical Institute in 1940. Shebbeare published an article on 'The Senoi of Malaya'

59. Shebbeare, 'An Elephant Trek', p13.
60. Ibid, p14.
61. G Benjamin, *Temiar Religion, 1964-2012: Enchantment, Disenchantment and Re-enchantment in Malaysia's Uplands*, Singapore, NUS Press, 2014, pp25-7.
62. M Roseman, 'Singers of the Landscape Song: History, and Property Rights in the Malaysian Rain Forest', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol 100, March 1998, p110.
63. G Domhoff, *Senoi Dream Theory: Myth, Scientific Method and the Dreamwork Movement*, Chapter Two 'What Do We Know About the Senoi?', 2003. D Holman, *Noone of the Ulu*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1984. R Noone & D Holman (1972) *Rape of the Dream People*, London, Hutchinson, 1972.
64. Benjamin, *Temiar Religion*, p25.
65. D Holman, 'The Frontier Patrol', *Noone of the Ulu*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1984, p66. M Burkitt, 'Herbert Deane Noone, 1907-1943', *Man*, Vol 49, May 1949, p55. T Harper, 'The Politics of the Forest in Colonial Malaya', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 31, 1, February 1997, pp1-29.

In 1947, following Indian independence, Shebbeare retired to Banbury, Oxfordshire. Raymond Greene, who knew him from Everest, continued to visit him: 'the most loveable, imperturbable and knowledgeable of men'.

in the anthropological journal *Man* in 1947 in which he stated that 'Mr. H. D. Noone' introduced him to the Temiar 'and accompanied me on some of my journeys among them; and when I crossed their country from west to east, his museum collector Yeop Ahmad, came with me as interpreter.'[66] Shebbeare clearly wanted an encounter with the Temiar (as described by Noone) and was frustrated on his 1940 trip in his goal of finding a 'simpler people' on his journey concluding rather glumly: 'If I wanted to meet simpler people I must look for them up side valleys.'[67]

66. E Shebbeare, 'The Senoi of Malaya', *Man*, Vol 47, 168, November 1947, p152.
67. Shebbeare, 'An Elephant Trek', p12.

Disappearing, getting lost, relying on indigenous knowledge, opening yourself up to animal agency, seeking out the primitive: techniques and encounters Shebbeare actively sought out in his journeys into the ulu, techniques not wholly dissimilar from the shamanistic practices and animist belief systems of the aboriginal Temiar,[68] techniques that break down oppositions seemingly inherent in imperialism: between culture-nature, colonist and colonised, the human and the non-human. The anthropologist Michael Taussig, in his book *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993) theorized that colonialism entails at its core a 'dialectic of civilization and savagery',[69] facilitated by the human mimetic faculty which enables the traverse back and forth between these ways of being. This faculty is 'the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other.'[70]

In his openness to this process of 'othering' through wilderness encounter, Shebbeare seems to signal a new form of modernity, his biophilia entailing a loss of selfhood and a rejection of nature-culture binaries. Hard as some of us may find it to believe, our modern conservation sensibility has its roots in the work of late-colonial officials like Shebbeare, who moved beyond game-preservation policies designed to support hunting to a fully realised conservation ethic based on the value of all life.

As mountaineers, perhaps we know so little about Shebbeare because, in his encounters with the mountains, jungles and forests of Asia and the subcontinent he moved away from the unending struggle for the summit and learnt instead to 'think like a mountain'. The conservationist Aldo Leopold coined the phrase to 'think like a mountain' to express the sense of deep time and interconnectedness implicit in all ecosystems. To 'think like a mountain' is to understand the trophic catastrophes that cascade through an ecosystem when a key predator or prey species is lost. To 'think like a mountain' is to see far into the future and understand the unimaginable loss of a world of silent forests and dried up riverbeds. To 'think like a mountain' is to rediscover our affiliation with the community of life on earth. Anthropogenic climate change finally nails the illusion that we are somehow outside of nature, that we are its conquerors. The historian Peter Hansen has made the case that the emergence of mountaineering in the late 18th century was symbolic of Enlightenment attitudes to nature, that 'the summit position' symbolised both self-mastery and the human mastery of nature.[71] The summit position enabled us to believe that we were somehow outside of nature, looking in from above. The life of E O Shebbeare suggests a way back down from that particular summit.

68. M Roseman (2007) '"Blowing 'Cross the Crest of Mount Galeng": Winds of the Voice, Winds of the Spirits', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol 13, Wind, Life, Health: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives, 2007, s55-s69.
69. M Taussig (1993) *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, London, Routledge), xiv.
70. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, xiii.
71. P Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering After the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 2013.