

Across the Roof of the World

WILFRED SKREDE

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THE TRAVEL BOOK CLUB
121 CHARING CROSS ROAD
LONDON, W.C.2

FIRST PUBLISHED IN GREAT BRITAIN 1954

Originally Published in Norway under the Title of 'Over Verdens Tak'

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This Book is set in the 'Monotype' Baskerville series

Made and printed in England by
STAPLES PRINTERS LIMITED
at their Kettering, Northants, establishment

PREFACE

In a way it is due to the war that this book came to be written, but the reader will find in it little of what he usually associates with that.

My attempt to reach the training camp for the Norwegian Air Force at Little Norway in Toronto, Canada, took me right through Russia, into China where I broke my back, then through the desert of Takla Makan and across the Karakorum and the Himalayas to Kashmir and Singapore and New York. If anyone with a decent knowledge of ethnography and other such high-falutin' subjects had made that trip with the intention of writing a book about it, the result would have been darned fine, I am sure. But I was only just nineteen when I left the workshop in Oslo where I was apprenticed, and my only intellectual asset was the boundless curiosity of youth.

I know that I have no very valuable information to give either about geography or ethnography, but I did see a number of things I thought were strange and wonderful, and, with the help of some tattered diaries in which I recorded impressions in ungrammatical sentences, I have tried to write about them. I am not even sure that I have spelt the names of places correctly, still less the few phrases in foreign tongues.

Here, then, is my account of things as I saw them in all innocence and ignorance: of strange and distant lands, of times when my heart was in my boots and others when life seemed wonderful, of days spent among swarms of weird people, and of lonely nights beneath the stars.

WILFRED SKREDE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful thanks are due to the following for their kind permission to reproduce their photographs in this British edition:

SIR CLARMONT P. SKRINE

M. C. GILLET Esq.

COLONEL R. MEINERTZHAGEN

THE ROYAL NORWEGIAN EMBASSY

THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

ONTARIO HOUSE

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