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**THE YUNNAN-BURMA
HIGHWAY**

BY LOWE CHUAN-HUA

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As Publicity Director (1934-38) for the China International Famine Relief Commission, Mr. Lowe has had to do a lot of travelling in many parts of the world.

The present pamphlet is the fruit of his trip, made in March, 1940, from Hong-kong to Chungking, first by air to Rangoon, then by rail to Lashio, thence along the Yunnan-Burma Highway by motor-car to Kunming, and lastly by air again to Chungking, China's wartime capital.

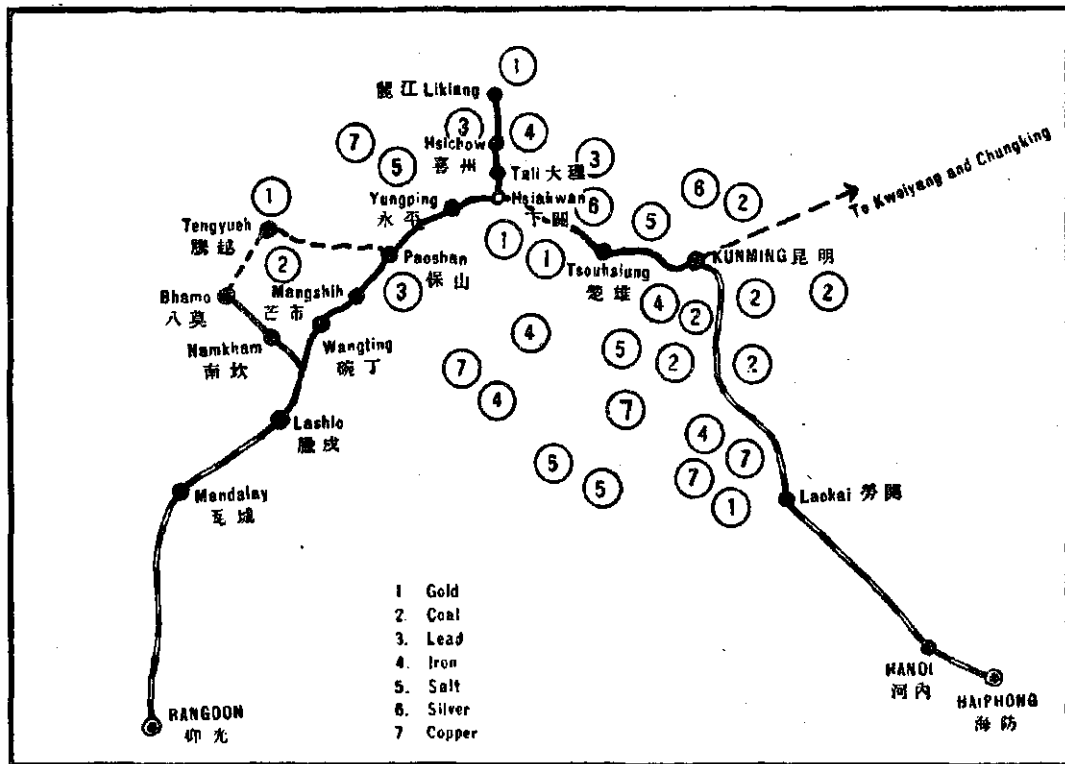
THE YUNNAN-BURMA HIGHWAY

By LOWE CHUAN-HUA

While Japan has slammed the Open Door in China during the last three years of war, she has by no means been able to stop the Chinese from building new life-lines and improving the network of highways all over Free China. In fact, the war has made the Chinese redouble their road-building efforts. To counteract the effects of the Japanese blockade, the Chinese have been working day and night to rebuild and keep their ancient trade routes open. At least three trunk lines still link China with the outside world: the Northwest route to Soviet Russia, the Kunming-Haiphong railway, and the Yunnan-Burma highway.⁽¹⁾ Through these channels, China has managed to keep her foreign trade moving and her armies supplied with war materials from abroad. Of these life-lines, the Yunnan-Burma highway is a typical wartime achievement. Connecting the capital of Yunnan province with the northern terminus of the Rangoon-Lashio railway and the Burmese highway system, this new motor road is not only meeting a vital wartime need but is also destined to influence the economic development

(1) A fourth road is now being built from Yunnan to French Indo-China, and is expected to be finished by the end of this year.

ROUGH SKETCH OF THE YUNNAN-BURMA HIGHWAY



of southeastern Asia.

How the Road Was Built

The proposal to connect Burma and China was mooted as early as the 1860's. Attempts to explore the old caravan routes between Bhamo in Upper Burma and western Yunnan had been made by a number of people, notably by Col. E. B. Sladen in 1868, Augustus R. Margary in 1874, and Major Davies in 1895 and 1899-1900. But it was not until very recent years, particularly after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, that the Chinese Government began seriously to consider the construction of a modern highway from Kunming to the Burma border to replace Shanghai as China's front door.

Like many other provincial governments in China, the Yunnan authorities had been interested in road building years before the Japanese invasion. It was said that about 40 per cent of the Yunnan-Burma road had been built before the Lukouchiao Incident. By July, 1938, the eastern section of the highway (between Kunming and Hsiakwan) had been widened and surfaced for motor traffic, while the western section from Hsiakwan to Wangting on the Burma border was made available for light motor traffic beginning from December, 1938. Since then, continuous efforts have been made to widen and shorten the entire highway. Up to the spring of 1940, the road has been improved to such an extent as to be almost entirely fit for heavy transportation the whole year round,

rain or shine. At the peak of its construction, the Yunnan-Burma Highway Bureau employed nearly 1,000,000 workers; it still has 75,000 men on its pay-roll for improving the road-bed, reducing the hairpin bends, building more permanent bridges and culverts. It has organized numerous flying squads for emergency repair work, and these squads are distributed at strategic points along the whole highway.

It may be recalled that the Yunnan-Burma highway was completely modernized (including the building of some 300 bridges and nearly 2,000 culverts) in less than a year by manual workers without the assistance of a single piece of modern machinery. It is only within the last few months that the highway bureau has been able to secure some modern machinery to level and strengthen the road-bed. Little wonder it is that the highway has been widely regarded as the greatest engineering feat the Chinese have achieved since the building of the famous Great Wall.

How the Journey Can Be Divided

Present conditions of the highway make it possible for one to drive as fast as 35 miles an hour in good weather, but in certain parts one cannot get along safely at more than 20 miles an hour. The eastern half of the Yunnan-Burma highway is definitely better, less mountainous and not so winding as the western section. It is estimated that the entire trip from Kunming to Lashio, totalling 1,146.1 kilometres or about 715 miles, can be made comfortably

in six days by truck. For a truck the journey can be divided up thus:

1st day—Kunming to Tsouhsiung	192.3 km.
2nd day—Tsouhsiung to Hsiakwan	219.3 „
3rd day—Hsiakwan to Yungping .	118.9 „
4th day—Yungping to Paoshan ..	137.4 „
5th day—Paoshan to Mangshih ..	205.1 „
6th day—Mangshih to Wangting .	86.4 „
and Wangting to Lashio	186.7 „

Total distance 1,146.1 „

The entire highway from Kunming to Lashio can be done in two full days by a private car (barring breakdowns) *if* drivers are changed at intermediate points and *if* driving is possible at night time. At an average speed of $25\frac{1}{2}$ miles per hour, a good car can make the whole journey in about 45 hours. While this is impossible at the present moment, it is not unlikely that eventually the highway will be so improved that the time needed for the entire trip can be greatly reduced—from one week to only a few days.

Indeed, many sections of the highway are still being straightened out while hairpin bends are being reduced. A few chauffeurs are beginning to make the 411-km. trip from Kunming to Hsiakwan in one day instead of two. The journey from Mangshih to Lashio can easily be made in one day, too. Thus in case of necessity, urgent materials can be shipped from Lashio to Kunming in three to four days, and allowing another two or three days for loading

and unloading at Rangoon and the railway journey to Lashio, goods can be transported into Kunning from the Burmese coast in less than a week.

Physical Features

Going through the Yunnan-Burma highway is a fascinating experience. It is not often realised that Burma is almost five times the size of England, with 14,600,000 people. The country presents a great variety of scenery and a wonderful display of colour, particularly Upper Burma which is quite mountainous. The same is true of Yunnan (meaning south of the clouds), where one has to climb up more than 9,000 feet above sea level before reaching the provincial capital. One also crosses two well-known rivers along the road, the 800-mile-long Salween that flows into the Gulf of Martaban near Moulmein and the 2,800-mile-long Mekong that starts in the Tibetan highlands and flows through Yunnan, Burma, Siam, Cambodia and Cochín-China before it empties into the South China sea. The new suspension bridges over these two waterways are remarkable engineering accomplishments, one of which was built with funds contributed by overseas Chinese.

Along the Yunnan-Burma highway, particularly between Lashio and Mangshih, there are numerous aboriginal tribes—as many as 60 different tribes. Some of them look very much like Chinese, notably the Kachins, the Shans, and the Payis; but others are more strange-looking, especially the primitive mountaineers.

Many of these people work on the highway, carrying medieval weapons and wearing quite picturesque clothes. They provide a rich field for ethnological studies.

Yunnan is often called the Switzerland of China. With an area of 146,000 square miles, the province has no more than 12,000,000 inhabitants. Its average elevation is about 4,000 feet above sea level, and its climate is healthful. In spite of its numerous high mountain ranges, it has good grazing lands. Yunnan soil is fertile, and the crops are usually good. Between Tali and Tsouhsiung, for example, one can get oranges as big and delicious as the famous Californian sunkists. In Shunning, Fuhai and Iliang the China National Tea Corporation is already getting good results in its experimental stations. Grown over 6,000 feet above sea level, the tea leaves in Shunning and Fuhai have a flavour and quality reported to be superior to Formosan and Japanese tea. A training school for tea workers has been established in Iliang, southeast of Kunming, and it is hoped that sufficient quantities of tea will soon be cultivated in the province to meet some of the demands of England and Soviet Russia.

Moreover, Yunnan is famous for its mineral wealth such as tin, antimony, coal, copper, gold, iron, mercury, silver and tungsten. Figuratively speaking, one passes through a coal mine in the morning, a gold mine about mid-day and a tin mine before dark while travelling in the province. In the eastern part of Yunnan, there

are many rich salt fields. But most of these mines and fields are using antiquated methods of production, and if they are given modern leadership and modern machinery their productive capacity can be immeasurably increased.

Usefulness of Highway

The Yunnan-Burma highway is undoubtedly serving a vital need during China's war of resistance, but its usefulness is bound to grow as time goes on. While the highway is now one of the three main routes for China to obtain war materials from abroad, it has not yet been used to the fullest extent. This is because (1) the road has not been made an all-weather highway until very recently, (2) the connections between Lashio and Rangoon and between Rangoon and the outside world have been slow in developing while the shipping service at Rangoon has not been as regular and speedy as in Hongkong and Haiphong, (3) the Chinese and Burmese authorities have not been able to complete their transportation arrangements until about a year ago, and (4) the Burma route is still too expensive for commercial transportation. With the highway becoming better and better everyday and with important Chinese offices and depots organized in Rangoon, Lashio and other intermediate points along the road, it is expected that an increasing volume of goods will be carried into China through this channel from now on.

As already mentioned, the cost of transportation through the Yunnan-Burma highway

is fairly high. It is estimated that of every hundred drums of gasoline taken into China about 25 per cent must be consumed on the way. In addition, the driver's wage, wear and tear of his vehicle, and other overhead expenses must be included in the total cost of transportation which, it is reported, runs into N.C.\$1,000 per ton from the Burmese coast to Kunming. Another 80 rupees must be added to this figure if the transportation extends as far south as Rangoon. At the rate of five Chinese dollars per rupee, the total cost of transportation per ton of goods from Rangoon to Kunming amounts to approximately N.C.\$1,400. But in spite of all this, the Yunnan-Burma highway is now the safest way for China to get war supplies from the West. Since the Japanese began their bombing of the Kunming-Haiphong railway, large quantities of materials, piled up in the Haiphong godowns, have been diverted to Rangoon and from there sent into various parts of China through the Burma railway and the Yunnan-Burma highway.

As a whole, the highway is made good use of. Certainly sufficient goods are being transported into the interior to make up China's deficiency in heavy war materials.

Some day, the Yunnan-Burma highway will become one of the world's great attractions, and one may safely predict rapid increases in foreign trade and tourists through China's back door as soon as the Sino-Japanese war is over. For one thing, the trade route from Europe to

Rangoon and thence to the rich Yangtze valley is much shorter than the one *via* Shanghai. It is true that as yet the facilities on the highway are not adequate, nor comfortable enough, to attract foreign tourists and that the rest houses set up by the China Travel Service leave much room for improvement. But the highway, besides being a remarkable engineering feat, has such interesting features that travelling from sunny Burma into scenic Yunnan through this new route will be an exciting experience which few tourists to the Orient will want to miss.

From Rangoon to Lashio

The 561-mile railway journey from Rangoon to Lashio takes about 28 hours, though often 30 or more. There is a saying in Burma that the trains always leave on time, but never arrive on time. The first part of the railway in Lower Burma goes through dull and level territory, but beginning from Mandalay the terrain becomes more interesting and more mountainous. Thus, on the second day, one passes through the old Burmese capital, Mandalay, and the famous summer resort, Maymyo, which is situated on the Shan plateau about 3,400 feet above sea level. Maymyo is also the trade registering station between China, the Shan states and Burma. North of Maymyo, one crosses the Gokteik viaduct, a noteworthy engineering achievement. The Gokteik gorge reminds one of the Grand Canyon in America, though it is on a smaller scale.

Upper Burma is a much richer country where one may see thick teak forests, green farmlands, rice fields, vegetable gardens and orchards. Here one also sees the different tribesmen—the Shans, the Kachins and some Karens—selling foodstuffs at the railway stations. Travellers should, furthermore, remember that going from Rangoon to Lashio means changing from summer into heavy winter clothes.

Contrary to the popular impression, Lashio, though the nearest railway station from the Chinese border, is not a border town. It is at least 75 miles from Yunnan. Lying about 2,700 feet above sea level, Lashio has a population of less than 5,000. Here one finds a Chinese primary school, a Chinese benevolent association, a number of Cantonese, Fukienese and Yunnanese stores catering to the needs of commercial travellers. As the Yunnan-Burma highway has been opened to traffic only recently, Lashio has not yet had time to build up sufficient facilities to take care of its increasing tourist trade. There are only two places where travellers can get accommodations: the China Travel Service guest house and the P.W.D. bungalow.

While not exactly a border town, Lashio has many of its outward features. Caravans, mule carts and modern trucks all make a point of stopping here to replenish their supplies. In the market bazaar, one sees Burmese, Indians, Chinese, Shans and Kachins, and many varieties of mixtures thereof. The shops in Lashio have

their signboards in Burmese and Chinese, and sometimes in Hindustani.

Lashio is now put on the China National Aviation Corporation map, and once a week the C.N.A.C. plane stops here briefly on its way from Rangoon to Kunming and Chungking.⁽²⁾ Because of the likelihood of increased business, several Chinese banks have either opened or are about to open branch offices in the town.

To digress, it may be added that from Lashio one may make a very interesting side trip to Bhamo by motor car, *via* the picturesque border town of Nankham. The total distance between Lashio and Bhamo is 204 miles, which can be covered in one day. The journey is famous for its breath-taking hairpin bends, 640 in all! Bhamo lies east of the muddy Irrawaddy river, about 900 miles from Rangoon, and for many centuries it has served as the central meeting point of trade routes to China, the goods being carried by pack trains of mules and bullocks. The old caravan route from Bhamo to Tengyueh in western Yunnan is being converted into a motor road, which will eventually be extended to Paoshan. When the whole motor road is finished, goods can be transported by truck directly from Bhamo to Paoshan, thus diverting a portion of the Lashio-Paoshan traffic into the northern and possibly shorter route.

Bhamo is also the terminus of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company service. Most of the bulky

(2) One may now fly from Rangoon to Hong Kong *via* Chungking in one day.

and heavy stuff is shipped into Bhamo and northern points through the Irrawaddy river instead of by train to Katha, which is 70 miles down the river and 605 miles by rail to Rangoon.

But to return from our digression, it is from Lashio that most people make their start to the interior of China through the Yunnan-Burma highway. The first stopping place within the Chinese border is Wangting, and from there one drives on to Chefang, Mángshih, Lungling, Paoshan, Yungping, Hsiakwan, Tsouhsiung and Kunming.

Leading Towns Along the Highway

Before the completion of the Yunnan-Burma highway, few people have ever heard of a town called Wangting. But since then, it has become better known and has assumed a new significance. Here one goes through passport and customs examinations, car registration, etc. Here one also finds the branch offices of the Yunnan-Burma Highway Bureau and the very useful Southwest Transportation Company. To prevent the spreading of cholera and malignant malaria, the National Health Administration has recently established a quarantine office and clinic on the main street in Wangting. Beyond these features and the conspicuous display of Chinese flags on the northern side of the boundary bridge and British flags on the southern side, Wangting is very much like any other small town on the Yunnan-Burma highway.

About an hour and a half's drive from Wangting, one reaches a slightly bigger town

called Chefang, which is the headquarters of the local Sawbwa or chieftain. From Chefang one goes on to Mangshih, traversing high mountains and very sparsely-populated territory. Mangshih is the headquarters of another Swabwa, and the population in this region is almost entirely Payi. The local chieftain is a man of about forty, small-statured, speaks Chinese and some English. An enterprising fellow, he is deeply interested in developing the Mangshih area, and has been encouraging and helping the tribesmen to plant thousands of wood oil trees during the last two years.

East of Mangshih the country begins to look more and more Chinese, and as one approaches Paoshan one hardly sees any more Burmese people, certainly fewer aboriginal tribesmen and fewer Buddhist temples. Paoshan is located on a rich plain, surrounded by high and beautiful mountains on all sides. It has a population of 45,000, with its city wall still intact. The China Travel Service rest house is located in an old temple, where one can get a wonderful view of the entire city and plain. Paoshan is also about the first "civilized" town one sees after leaving the Burma border, and it has its quota of primary and middle schools and even a Chinese newspaper twice a week.

Next to Kunming, Paoshan is supposed to be the most prosperous county in Yunnan province. It produces plenty of rice, yellow sugar, native cloth, silk, tobacco, lead and other minerals. It is connected with Tengyueh (and

thence to Bhamo) by an old caravan route, which can be made by mules and coolies in three to four days. But when the Paoshan-Tengyueh motor road is finished, the trip will require but a day or so.

After Paoshan, the next important town is Hsiakwan which is regarded as the middle point between Lashio and Kunming. Here the Yunnan-Burma Highway Bureau has its main office, and of all the China Travel Service guest houses along the highway, the one in Hsiakwan is definitely the best.

At present, the bus runs from Hsiakwan to Kunming every two days and from Paoshan to Kunming every three days. There is yet no bus service west of Paoshan, and there is an apparent shortage of passenger vehicles and gasoline.

From Hsiakwan one can turn northward for a very interesting side trip. Less than an hour's ride from Hsiakwan, one will find the ancient trading metropolis of Tali, right on the edge of the famous Erh Hai. Erh Hai is one of the two largest lakes in Yunnan, and the natural surroundings, made of snow-capped mountains and dotted with temples and pagodas, are like a piece of beautiful painting. Tali itself is a small medieval town (estimated to be a second-class *hsien*), with only one wide street running from the south to the north gate. But it is the centre of a considerable fur and marble trade, and every April it holds its famous inter-racial fair and bazaar, with hundreds of Tibetans and mountain tribesmen coming down from Sikong.

Tibet, and southern Szechwan for the festival. A new road is being built from Tali northward, towards Tengchwan and Likiang (on the old road to Tibet) and at this time of writing the bus service may have already started from Tali to Hsichow, 45 kilometres up the lakeshore. The commercial importance of Tali and Hsiakwan will be further increased upon the completion of the motor road to Likiang, which is a gold producing centre and is famous for fine horses, medicinal herbs, hides and leather.

The New Railway

Going eastward from Hsiakwan and near Yunnanyi, one may see the embankment work being done by the Yunnan-Burma Railway Administration. And as one gets near Kunming, one can even see some of the bridge and tunnel work that is being done along the newly mapped out railway. Contrary to the popular conception, the new railway will not be parallel to the highway throughout. For east of Hsiakwan, the projected railroad will turn southward and follow a much shorter line towards Lashio.

However, since the Yunnan-Burma Railway Administration is unable to secure heavy machinery for its construction work, it is doubtful whether the new line can be completed according to schedule. The Chinese are anxious to see the Burma section of the proposed railway completed first, so that it would enable them to obtain the necessary building equipment and materials.

Tsouhsiung is the last big stopping place on the last stretch of the motor journey to Kunming. Most people stop in Tsouhsiung for the night on the way from Hsiakwan to Kunming or *vice versa*, since it is still too strenuous and risky to try to drive the 411-km. between the two points in one day. Besides the rich salt wells in the vicinity of the *hsien*, Tsouhsiung is becoming an important silk experimental centre. Tens of thousands of Chekiang mulberry trees have been planted, and a school for sericultural workers has been established. It is expected that within a few years, the silk industry in Tsouhsiung will have developed to such an extent as to recoup some of the losses caused by the Japanese invasion in East China.

From Tsouhsiung one may count on comparatively smooth driving all the way to Kunming, except the last ten or fifteen miles which have been impaired by too much heavy traffic. This last stretch of 192.3 km. can be covered in six to seven hours. Just before reaching Kunming, one will see some very delightful scenery, including the T'ien Lake, and in getting into the city of Kunming one feels as if one were enjoying a moment in Peking, for the city is laid out and built somewhat like the glorious northern capital.

Since the outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities, Kunming has become the most important city in Southwest China. It is not only the northern terminus of the French Indo-China railway and the eastern end of the

Yunnan-Burma highway, but also the centre of a network of highways spreading into Szechwan, Kweichow and Kwangsi and the crossroads of several airlines. Thus Kunming is fast becoming the commercial and financial metropolis of Free China, though Chungking remains the centre of political affairs.

The eventual completion of the railway line to Lashio will give this capital of Yunnan province added importance and bring Free China still closer to the outside world.

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