

THE PARABLE OF

# MAURICE WILSON

THE MAN WITHOUT A PLAN

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# THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE LEGEND



Maurice  
Wilson & his  
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1933

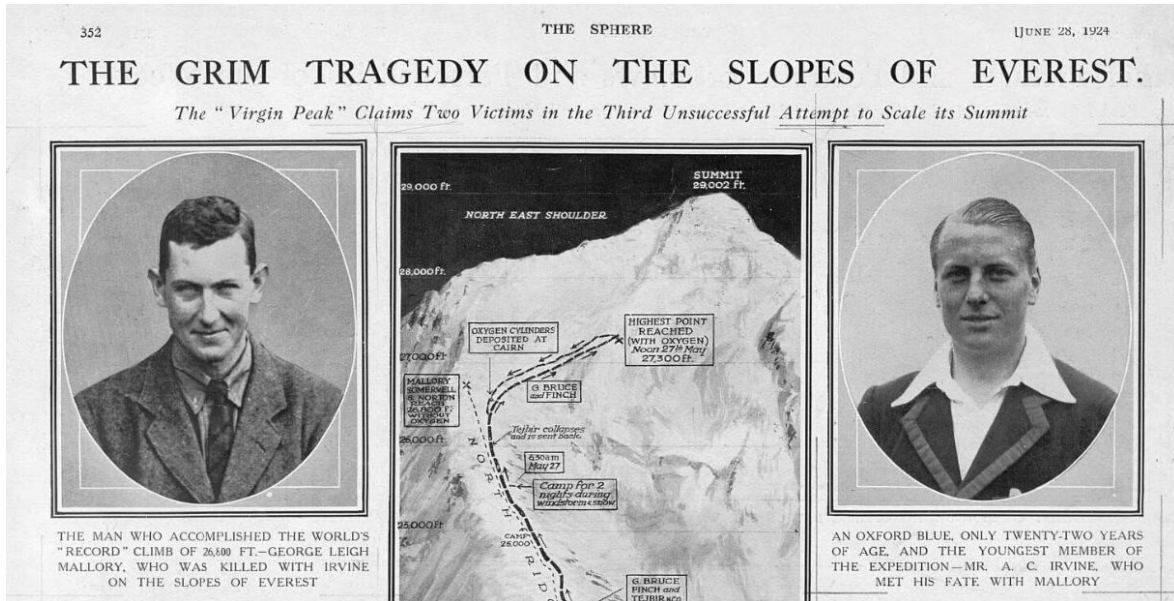
**Maurice Wilson was by any standards an unlikely candidate to be first on top of the world.**

Born in Bradford England on April 21 1898, Wilson was a decorated British WWI soldier and recipient of the Military Cross who was shot and badly wounded in the arm, before he was demobilised in 1919.

Like so many others who had experienced the hell of the French trenches, Wilson was unable to settle after the war. He had a penchant for aimless wandering— travelling to America and New Zealand and leaving in his wake a scattering of unfinished jobs and abandoned wives. But despite achieving the financial success that would make his future adventures possible, he struggled to achieve real happiness. His war injuries were an ongoing painful reminder and he suffered a devastating bout of tuberculosis and a nervous breakdown, before booking sea passage to return to England in 1932.

Fortuitously it would seem, on the journey home he was attracted to a group of Indian Sadhus (Sages) and together they engaged in lively, robust discussions about religion and eastern mysticism. After arriving in London, Wilson claimed to have met with an Indian Guru based uncharacteristically in Mayfair, who had guided him through a mysterious process of prayer, fasting and special diets for 32 days that completely cured him of his ailments.

# A DREAM WITHOUT A PLAN IS JUST A WISH



**Upon healing, Wilson’s belief in the power of prayer and fasting became absolute, and spreading word of his recovery became his vocation in life.**

While recuperating in the Black Forest, he came across an old press cutting detailing Mallory and Irvine’s failed Everest expedition in 1924. This, combined with radio bulletins about the upcoming Houston Everest flight, awoke an all-encompassing desire in Wilson to demonstrate his beliefs.

Where others had failed, Wilson was certain his unswerving faith would ensure his success and he announced his intention to be parachuted onto the top of Everest. Then, when the logistics of the adventure were called into question, he resolved instead to fly to Tibet, proposing to crash-land on the upper slopes of Everest and simply walk the rest of the way to the summit.

It was a grandiose dream to say the least - even for the most experienced pilots and mountaineers of the day, a solo flight halfway around the world would be reckless and ill-advised, and no climber would have considered a solo ascent of Everest at that time. However there were much more obvious problems with realizing Wilson's fantasy - Wilson had never flown a plan nor had he ever climbed a mountain

**...Wilson had never flown a plane, nor had he ever climbed a mountain**



# PROPER PREPARATION IS KEY

**Wilson's dream was not just misbegotten, it was akin to madness.**

He had no mountaineering experience, let alone the resources of an expert team to back his assault on the world's highest peak. He avoided tools like ice picks and crampons and intended to overcome the high altitude and icy cold by sheer willpower, meditation and fasting.



Gentlemen's  
hiking clothes  
as featured in  
Life Magazine,  
circa 1930

Being unable to fly did not deter Wilson either. Unable to afford a state-of-the-art plane, he settled for a 1925 Gypsy Moth he aptly named the Ever-Wrest.

An open-cabin biplane, the Ever-Wrest was more reminiscent of what the Wright brothers had used in the early 1900's, than the slick and sturdy Spitfires that characterized the time.

And while notably slow to pick up the basics of flying, after just two months of lessons at the London Aeroplane Club, with a serious crash and several minor accidents behind him, Wilson's attention turned to the Mountain.

Not surprisingly, Wilson's preparation for the mountaineering challenges of Everest, were even worse than his preparations for the flight. He made no real attempt to learn technical climbing skills and spent five weeks walking around Bradford and London and hiking the local hills of Snowdonia wearing lightweight hiking clothes before he declared himself ready.

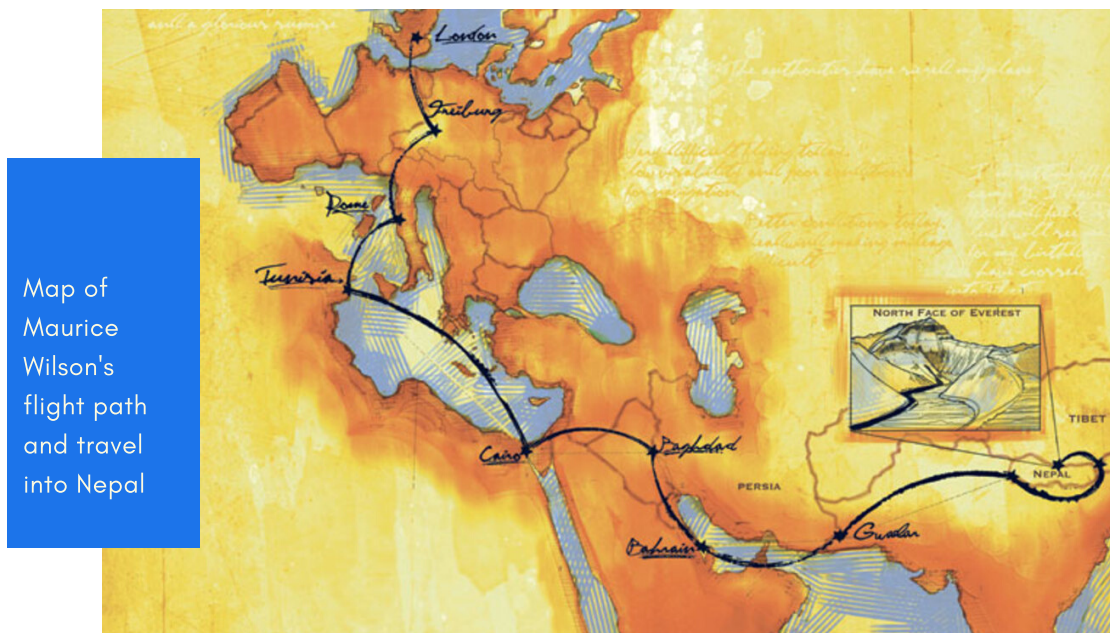
# "CAN DO" WILL GET YOU SOME OF THE WAY

**Mad as he may have been, Wilson's courage and pluck was undeniable.**

Between 1933 and 1934, The Times alone published nearly 100 articles on his quest - He claimed to interviewers that he was not only an experienced climber, but that he had locked himself up in an airtight container to learn the effects of high altitude and that he could likely win a challenge with Mahatma Gandhi at fasting.

On 21 May, 1933, seen off by friends Leonard and Enid Evans, Wilson flew to his destiny. With a 620-mile fuel range, unfamiliar geography and variable weather to consider, his route wove all over the map: From London to Freiburg; Freiburg to Passau; an aborted attempt to cross the Alps; a retreat back to Passau and Freiburg. Eventually Wilson flew over the Western Alps to Rome, where the news of his endeavor preceded his landing and a large and enthusiastic reception greeted him.

A few days later, while flying across the Mediterranean toward Tunisia, Wilson was forced to fly through complete cloud cover, a serious aviation challenge he somehow managed to pull off. Finally, one week after leaving London, Wilson reached Cairo and then Baghdad, and the newspapers went wild.







Wilson's flying route should have taken him over Persian territory and ultimately into Nepal or Tibet and previous expeditions had relied on high-level British diplomatic bullying to force reluctant countries to grant the necessary permits. In Wilson's case, however, the British Indian government and the Air Ministry would not co-operate and gave him only their stern assurances that they would offer no support, the implications of which dawned on Wilson only once he arrived in Baghdad. With no Persian permit forthcoming, he was forced to turn south along the Arabian Peninsula—an eventuality he had refused to plan contingencies for, and for which he had no maps. Unperturbed, he consulted a children's atlas before setting off in scorching summer temperatures from Baghdad to Bahrain where he managed to land, just before running out of petrol.

But his adventures were not to stop there. In Bahrain, a police officer invited Wilson into his office and informed him that the Royal Air Force had declared the air space ahead "closed to civilian air traffic"—he was to turn back immediately to Baghdad or face arrest. Ever the opportunist, Wilson used his police interview as an opportunity to sneak a glance at a large map on the officer's wall, jotting down some notes on his hand while the officer was distracted. Following the caution Wilson immediately took off, initially feigning a flight back to Iraq, before turning his plane straight east toward British India and landing safely in Gwadar just as the sun was setting.

From Gwadar, Wilson needed only a few days more of leisurely flying to reach the last airfield in India before the Nepali border. As the press was quick to note at the time, he had traveled some 4,350 miles in 17 days. But whatever joy Wilson might have taken from this accomplishment was quickly dashed when the local British Constable promptly impounded his plane.

# CREATIVE BRAINSTORMING CAN HELP

**Once grounded in Gwadar, Wilson was placed under surveillance, but he refused to give up and abandon his dream.**

With the monsoon in full swing, he traveled 186 miles by road to the Nepalese border, where he tried in vain to make a direct phone call to the King. Un-swayed by Wilson's rhetoric, the Kathmandu bureaucrat on the line decreed there would be no permit for flying into, hiking to, or climbing Mt. Everest from the Nepalese side.

Undeterred, Wilson then sold his plane and moved on to Darjeeling India, where he attempted to secure a permit to approach and climb the mountain from the Tibetan side, but again to no avail. He spent the fall and winter in Darjeeling plotting and scheming, all the while doing his best to convince the vigilant local authorities that he had abandoned his Everest plans.

Early one morning in late March 1934, disguised as a deaf and dumb Tibetan Monk and accompanied by three Everest Bhutia porters, Wilson snuck out of town and set off through Sikkim toward Tibet.

Traveling at night, the men made good pace and by April 14th, they reached the Rombuk Monastery, just below the traditional Everest basecamp. There Wilson was warmly received and given access to the equipment left behind by Ruttledge's 1933 expedition however he stayed only two days before setting off alone to scale the mountain.



Rombuk Monastery, near the north side of Mount Everest



# DON'T EXPECT TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

**Most of what is known about Wilson's activities on Everest, come directly from his diary entries.**

He continued to insist that faith and fasting would give him the means to overcome the brutal conditions on the world's highest mountain but his first attempt failed, and he retreated back to the monastery to regroup.

On the 21st of April, Wilson set off again, this time up the imposing Rombuk Glacier, hoping to tag Everest's 8,848-meter (29,028-foot) summit. Completely inexperienced in glacier travel, the route was very difficult and he repeatedly lost his way and had to retrace his steps. After five days of worsening weather and still two miles short of Ruttledge's Camp III, his diary entry reads "It's the weather that's beaten me - what damned bad luck" It was here, alone in his tent, that he celebrated his 36th birthday.

Later that night when the storm let up Wilson made a break for it, beginning a 4 day retreat down the glacier, arriving back at the monastery exhausted, snow blind, with a sprained ankle and in great pain from his war wounds.

It took Wilson eighteen days to recover from his solo ordeal and while recuperating, he convinced two of his Bhutia guides to accompany him as high as Camp III. On May 12th, the group left the monastery and with the help of the experienced guides made quick progress up the mountain, reveling when they were able to locate the gear Wilson had left behind after his previous attempt.

Unfortunately, bad weather also set in once more and the party was stranded for several days, allowing Wilson time to conceive new routes to climb the icy slopes above. A telling diary entry reveals how Wilson assumed that steps cut into the mountain 12 months before may still be there and is often cited as evidence of his ignorance of the mountain environment, and his unwillingness to listen to expert advice.

When he finally made his first attempt to climb the North Col on the 21st May, he was extremely disappointed to find no trace of the rope or the steps he was relying upon..

**"Not taking a short cut to Camp V as first intended as would have to cut my own road up the ice and that's not good when there is already a hand rope and steps (if still there) at Camp IV"**

# BLIND FAITH IS NOT ENOUGH



**Although Wilson’s attempts to scale Everest continued, it became evident that he had learnt little from his failures, refusing to change his approach or use proper equipment, let alone abandon the endeavour.**

In the final weeks of May, he ploughed through days riddled with slow progress, worsening weather, camping on exposed ledges and with the effects of altitude taking their toll. The Sherpas, though undoubtedly loyal were certain that continuing would lead to their death, begging Wilson to abandon the quest and return with them to the monastery. He refused and their parting was the last time anyone saw Maurice Wilson alive.

On May 29th, he wrote in his diary “this will be the last effort and I feel successful”. Wilson set off again alone, however, he was too weak to attempt the Col that day and camped at its base, just a few hundred yards from the Sherpas. The next day he stayed in bed, but on May 31st he had regrouped once more and his final diary entry simply read “Off again, gorgeous day”.

The following year, the Shipton expedition found Wilson's body at 22,703 feet, lying on its side in the snow and surrounded by the remains of a tent torn apart by the elements. A rucksack containing his diary was found close nearby.



# THE MAN WITHOUT A PLAN

**It is unclear how high Wilson climbed before succumbing to his lonely death, some 6,300 meters below Everest's peak.**

Driven by unflagging belief, yet technically inept and with an immobile left arm, he most likely made his best attempt at the ice wall, gave up then returned to Camp III to find his porters missing. The mystery as to why Wilson was found without his sleeping bag, just a short distance away from the camp with its copious food supplies, has never been explained.

Perhaps most unnervingly, an attempt was made by the Shipton party to bury Wilson's remains in the snow in a nearby crevasse, but the skeleton has shown a capacity to reappear from its icy encasement at regular intervals (1959, 1975, 1985, 1989, and 1999), perhaps to remind climbers what Wilson had accomplished, if not stood for.



Artist's  
impression of  
Maurice Wilson

# THESE ARE UNCERTAIN TIMES

**The threat to future business posed by the COVID-19 virus, is very real. No business is immune and no-one has all the answers.**

Even those who were on track with a strong company vision, robust strategic plans and a healthy bottom line have been ground to a halt and forced to reassess. And with Sales Teams around the world 'up on blocks', customers scratching their heads and leaders floundering to motivate employees into a semblance of productivity from home, the question of 'what next' is daunting at best.

The tale of Maurice Wilson, although often ridiculous and most certainly tragic, is a living example of the business truism - failing to plan, is planning to fail. If we're all going to get through this current phase of business survival, successfully pivot and go on to thrive in the new world, his lessons bear heeding.



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## PERHAPS WE CAN HELP?

If Maurice had heeded the advice of his Sherpas and returned to the monastery to regroup, he may have lived to attempt Everest again. From the very beginning his destination was never in question, however, his lack of planning, contingencies and preparation was always his downfall.

**Covid-19 has created an almighty business avalanche but your common goal and vision, need not waiver - it's the same mountain to climb, you just need a new path to the summit.**

At Sales Shift we have engineered our own pivot and have adjusted our consulting framework to allow us to work most effectively with customers during this time. Salespeople are feeling uncertain, with a likely loss of purpose as they sit on their hands at home and we are confident that we can move them to a hopeful, energized space while assisting management to reset sales strategy for the post COVID-19 world.

And for those who are unclear about their summit...perhaps we can help with that too?





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