THE
SCOTTISH HIMALAYAN
EXPEDITION

BY

W. H. MURRAY

With four pages of colour plates and
thirty-two pages of black-and-white half-tones.
Eleven maps and diagrams
by
ROBERT ANDERSON

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Glossary

Achchha, good.
Arête, thin ridge of rock, snow, or ice.
Ata, wheat flour. (Pronounce the first a long.)
Ath, eight.
Babu, clerk with a superficial knowledge of English.
Bandobast, arrangement or agreement.
Bergschrund, a long deep chasm where a glacier pulls away from the upper snow of a peak.
Bhagavad-Gita, the Song of God. Sacred book of the Hindus and focus of Indian religion. A clear and comprehensive statement of the Perennial Philosophy.
Bharhal, wild mountain sheep.
Bouillon gras, Swiss beef tea.
Chang, an alcoholic drink made from barley or rice.
Char, four.
Chaukidar, caretaker.
Chhe, six.
Chitthi, note or character reference.
Chupatti (Hindi: chapatti), pancake of flour and water; the native unleavened bread.
Cornice, edge or wall of snow overhanging the crest of a ridge.
Couloir, mountain gully.
Crampons, frame of ten metal claws strapped to sole of boot for climbing on ice.
Crevasse, deep chasm in the ice of a glacier.
Dal, pulse (lentils or beans).
Dhura, ground at high altitude; usually, but not necessarily, a pass or hill-top.
Doms, people of low caste.
Gad, glen or ravine.
Gendarme, rock tower, especially on a ridge.
Ghat, 1. mountain pass; 2. place at which a river is forded.
Himachal, Himalaya.

Himalaya, the Abode of Snow. From Sanskrit *him* = snow, and *alaya* = abode.

Hindi, the Aryan language of Northern India.

Hindus, the inhabitants of India originally described as 'Hindus' by the Persians because they lived on the other side of the Sindhu River (the Indus); now more truly applied to Indians professing belief in the Vedic religion as opposed to the Mohammedan.

Hindustani, language consisting of Hindi with a large admixture of Arabic and Persian words.

Jhibu or jhopa, a cross between a yak and a cow.

Karabiner, a steel ring with a spring clip.

Kharab, bad.

Kharak, herdsman's hut, and (by association) grazing ground. Now frequently used for the latter even where there is no hut.

Lakh, one hundred thousand.

Mantra, 1. short sacred text said or sung repetitively (Sanskrit: thought); 2. hymns of praise forming the first part of each of the four Vedas.

Maund, 80 lb.

Moraine, ridge of rocks, stones, and earth at the sides of a glacier.

Nala, watercourse or glen.

Nëvé, old hard snow in process of becoming ice (found in mass at the top end of a glacier).

Nullah (Hindi: nala), watercourse or glen.

Pahari, a hill dialect (also hillman).

Panch, five.

Pemmican, compressed and concentrated meat food for use in cold regions. It consists of fibrin of beef, animal fat, etc.

Punkah, long curtain fan suspended from roof and worked by pulling a cord.

Rasta, way, route.

Rishi, a wise and holy man; seer or sage.

Roding, display flight by male woodcock at dusk, when it repeatedly makes a regular circuit, flying fast but with slow
wing action. It gives out at the same time two notes, the
croak coinciding with a momentary hovering. Roding
usually lasts from sunset until dark.

Rupee, 1s. 6d.
Seer, 2 lb.
Sérac, pinnacle of ice on a steep and riven part of a glacier.
Shabash!, Well done!
Shiva (or Siva), the third of the Hindu Trinity of Gods (Brahma,
Vishnu, and Shiva), which are all one in Brahman. Shiva
is the Destroyer and Preserver of Life.
Snow-ice, very hard frozen snow with an icy surface, to be
distinguished from ice formed from water.
Swami, title given to a Brahmin or Hindu priest; often used
loosely to describe any devotee of the religious life who wears
the saffron robe.
Thar, wild mountain goat.
Thik, correct, right.
Tsampa, barley flour roasted.
Urdu, Hindustani.
Vedic, pertaining to the Vedas, the four sacred books of the
Hindus. These are the oldest scriptures known to man,
dating from 1000 B.C. or earlier.
Votive flag, strip of cloth nailed or tied to the top of a tall pole
as an offering to the gods. It is not to be confused with the
Tibetan prayer flag, which is a long strip of cloth nailed down
its long side to the pole and heavily inscribed with a Tibetan
prayer. The Hindu votive flags do not fly in token of prayer
or worship, but symbolize an offering. They always com-
mand some noteworthy scene or site.
CHAPTER ONE

Birth Pangs

At the end of January 1950 my friend Douglas Scott of the Scottish Mountaineering Club came to me: Would I, he asked, join him in a mountaineering expedition to the Garhwal Himalaya? It was by no means the first time that he had made suggestions of a like kind. He had talked before of our going to the New Zealand Alps, the mountains of the Chinese-Tibetan frontier, of sailing up (or it may have been down) the Hoang Ho River. I had known then not to take him seriously. He was anchored to a good job in Scotland and had no firm intention of giving it up—not just then. I myself, although free, was no more prepared to move than he, being fully occupied in my own profession of writing. But now, in late January, I was both able to move and willing. From the very tone of Scott's voice I heard (and this to my astonishment) that he meant what he said. He had already sounded Tom Weir and Tom MacKinnon, also of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, and they had agreed. A decisive step had been taken: they had booked berths on a P. & O. liner, appropriately named Himalaya, sailing from Tilbury to Bombay on 20th April.

This sudden turn of events gave a quick lift to my own spirits. I was overjoyed. Fellow climbers had sometimes asked me a wrongly conceived and stated question, to which there is no known answer: 'How does one get on to an expedition?' It is a matter for Providence. The question implies that this expedition is to be run by someone else—someone older and more experienced, preferably commanding wealth—and that the questioner wants to squeeze in if he can. Unless he is a very fortunate or outstanding man his hair will grow grey, life ebb away, while he waits for that to happen.
The correct question is: ‘How is an expedition organized?’ For that can be given a true answer:

Take the initiative. Organize one yourself. Only then can you get down to brass tacks. You must make time, and get companions, and face the brutal fact that if you want to go, say, to the Himalaya, you must first of all save up at least three hundred and fifty pounds, or else persuade someone to give it to you. Until that is done you cannot move.

The matter of making time was for myself relatively easy; not so for the others. It meant for Scott and Weir the throwing up of very good jobs—this no serious matter in my own more detached eyes, for they were capable of serving the community in new ways no less valuable than the old. MacKinnon’s position was less difficult. He was a chemist. He had to find someone to manage his own business in his absence. And this he did, succeeding only at the last moment. None was married. For three of us, the loss of seven to nine months’ income had to be set against the exploration of unclimbed mountains in Garhwal and Almora, the central districts of the Himalayan chain. We had to make a choice of values. Mountain or money? We chose mountains.

We were, of course, all mountaineers. The Scottish hills had given us our basic training in rock-, snow-, and ice-climbing, which had served us well in the Swiss and French Alps. MacKinnon, Scott, and Weir were in my judgment very strong climbers, not accident prone, and for my own part I could not have wished for men whom I liked better. This latter point is of extreme importance; for going on an expedition is like getting married—a man has to live with his companions over long periods when all are at their worst. Men are less good-natured than one would judge from meeting them in the social round at home or while spending a week-end on the hills or on short holidays. On such occasions they are temporarily keyed up, giving of their best, excelling themselves—unconsciously trying to be the men that they would like to be, and in fair measure succeeding. And by their best one should judge men. ‘Not what thou art, but what thou wouldst be, does God regard with his merciful eyes’; and
we have to try to do no less on an expedition. When the barrack life and its lack of privacy is lived for months on end in small tents, men no longer overflow with the perpetual goodwill that seemed to grace them hitherto. Rather it is their weaknesses that stand out, as mine do, dismal and made great. Our knowing of these things in advance does little to ease the situation when we are out in the field. It is absolutely essential that the members of an expedition start off by liking each other, and be never chosen primarily for skill and experience, or money contribution, or scientific knowledge: otherwise—disaster!

Fortune had been kind in bringing us together at the right time, and kind too in directing us where to go. Scott had paid a quick visit to the Garhwal foot-hills during the Second World War. They had enthralled him, as they do all men who see, uniting them in declaring Garhwal and Almora Districts of Kumaon Division to be the most beautiful of the world's mountain country. Semi-tropical valleys and terrific river-gorges wind in among a maze of snow peaks, rising over 20,000 feet and packed densely in clusters. The foot-hills swell seventy miles up from the plains, in green and brown waves that roll higher with the inward sweep as though to burst upon the cliffs of the great Himalayan peaks. The foot-hills are a colourful land, a gay land of flowers and rivers, of deep valleys, forest clad and full of birds—these latter of great account to Weir and Scott, who are bird-watchers. Our choice of area was unanimous and made without question or discussion. Our first craving, it appeared, was for beauty of scene.

The Himalaya, in Sanskrit the 'Abode of Snow,' stretch 1,550 miles from Afghanistan to Burma, in breadth about 200 miles, including the foot-hills. From west to east they run through the states of Kashmir, United Provinces, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Our chosen districts were in the United Provinces, very slightly west of centre, where a great angle is formed between the frontiers of South Tibet and West Nepal. This angle is the division of Kumaon. Its west half is Garhwal, its east half, Almora.
Before the rising of the Himalayan chain, the high plateau of Tibet had already established its river systems draining south to India. As the mountains folded and rose the rivers continued cutting down their beds, forming canyons, which have since become the slender trade routes between Tibet and India. In Kumaon, four of these great gorges are the Alaknanda, Dhauli, Gori, and Darma, all of which ultimately join the Ganges on its long eastward journey across the Gangetic plains to the Bay of Bengal. Up in the heart of the Himalaya, at eight to
fourteen thousand feet, it would seem as though no such union could be possible. There the rock-walls rise sheer for five thousand feet, then sweep back to the twenty-thousand-foot snow peaks of the main chain. By these gorges we should approach our chosen mountain groups.

Three famous mountains already climbed in Garhwal are Trisul (23,360 feet) by Dr. Longstaff in 1907, Kamet (25,447 feet) by F. S. Smythe’s expedition in 1931, and Nanda Devi (25,645 feet) by H. W. Tilman’s Anglo-American expedition in 1936. Much less work had been done in Almora District. The unclimbed mountains of Kumaon are numbered in scores, and no reconnaissance for mountaineering had been made of some of the clusters. This wealth of opportunity determined our purpose, plan, and strategy. Our object, we agreed, should not be that of ‘going high’ or breaking records—a most unrewarding goal—but of exploring mountain country, making reconnaissance of the groups still unknown to mountaineers, and attempting selected summits. This agreed, it was obvious that we should have to spend four or five months in the hills and must keep mobile. For us there could be no great army of coolies to carry ponderous stores; no real need for them, indeed, when we had no intention of applying siege tactics to one mammoth peak. Instead, it was clear that we must field a light party and live on the country, after the manner set by the pioneer of Himalayan climbing, Dr. Longstaff—a manner that subsequently lapsed but which had been again demonstrated by Shipton and Tilman in the nineteen-thirties. This meant that we must buy our food from small villages in the upper valleys, which are occupied only in summertime by Bhotia hillmen for the purpose of trading over the Tibetan frontier. We should have to recruit these men to carry our stores. Their foods were mainly a wheat flour called ata, lentils, rice, barley flour, and vegetables. In addition, we should have to take concentrated foods from Scotland for use at high-altitude camps, and to introduce ourselves, gently, to the native diet.

Thus, we need employ only some dozen or twenty porters for travelling through the valleys, and on the main peaks only three
or four. This mobility should allow us an elasticity of planning
denied to the cumbersome expeditions of the pre-Tilman era.
These general principles being agreed, our expedition, however,
was still very much in the air. Nothing had yet been done.
Certain difficulties beset us at the outset. For it must be
remembered that our proposed expedition was in one respect
unique and in several others unusual. It was the first Scottish
one, no member of the party had any experience of Himalayan
mountaineering, none could speak Hindustani, we had no
adequate maps (and indeed they were not to be bought in this
country), and we had only eight weeks' grace to sailing date.
The very food that we should require was strictly rationed.
How, in these circumstances, does one organize an expedition
to the Himalaya?

The situation appealed to my sense of humour. I sat back
and relaxed, waiting with no little interest to see what would
happen next. The initiative, I felt, was Scott's. He had spoken
first. A week of inaction passed. Then Scott jolted me out of
my benign idleness by asking me to take the lead and issue
orders. I must now make it clear that I knew my companions
well enough to realize that no leader in the old German sense,
no Bergsfuehrer, would be tolerated. If such a one should raise
his ugly head they would bruise it as the head of the serpent.
We were all, in our own ways, somewhat rugged individualists,
and from beginning to end my own constant endeavour was
never to issue orders. There were occasions when I went to
extremes in this direction rather than go to its opposite. I believe
that the benefits in the end far outweighed the disadvantages.

At the very outset, however, no such happy course was
possible. An organization had to be laid down promptly in the
form of battalion orders. But when I said that nothing had
been done I erred in one important matter. We had definitely
committed ourselves and were half-way out of our ruts. We
had put down our passage money—booked a sailing to Bombay.
This may sound too simple, but is great in consequence. Until
one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back,
always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and
creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe’s couplets:

Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.

Back to battalion orders.

I. Tom Weir. Food and Transport.

(a) List all food to be bought in Scotland; estimate quantities for 100 days. Submit lists for approval before 2nd March.
(b) Apply to Ministry of Food for authority to buy butter, cheese, sugar, dried egg, and all else needed.
(c) Apply to Board of Trade Export Licensing Branch for permission to ship rationed goods.
(d) Inquire from P. & O. Co. Ltd., the loading date for the Himalaya.
(e) Buy the food and arrange the crating in 40-lb. loads.
(f) Arrange transport of stores to Tilbury Dock.
(g) Estimate number of food sacks required on the march for grain.
(h) Weigh total food and gear when bought and estimate coolie-loads for the journey north from Ranikhet; then ask Mrs. Ferguson, of Essex House, Ranikhet (with whom we arranged to stay for three days) to get an appropriate number of Dotial coolies to meet us at Ranikhet on 8th May, and to arrange for a bus to meet us at Kathgodam railhead to lift us to Ranikhet by road.


(a) From the maps, when available, hatch out a mountain plan.
(b) List every item of clothing and equipment needed under
three main headings: (1) Porters’ clothing and bedding. (2) Our own equipment and clothing to be provided by the individual. (3) Common equipment chargeable to a common fund, e.g. tents, groundsheets, rope, candles, stoves, etc.

State not only items but also quantities. Send copies of list to Weir and MacKinnon and get their approval before 2nd March.


Draw up a full list of medical supplies and submit copies before 2nd March to Scott, Weir, and myself.

IV. Murray.

(a) Get authority from the Central Board of Revenue, Delhi, for the customs-free import of all our goods at Bombay.

(b) Get an import licence from the Deputy Chief Controller of Imports, Bombay.

(c) Get an Inner Line Pass to the Himalaya from the Deputy Commissioner of Garhwal.

(d) Get permission from the Indian Government to buy rationed sugar and paraffin oil.

(e) Get all possible information about our area from Himalayan climbers, namely, Dr. T. G. Longstaff, H. W. Tilman, Basil R. Goodfellow, C. E. J. Crawford and T. H. Braham (president and hon. secretary of the Himalayan Club), and Miss Mavis Bewick, who had been into the Rishiganga in 1949.

(f) Get half-inch to mile maps from the Indian Survey (no easy matter).

(g) Acquire four down sleeping-bags for porters, second-hand.

(h) Estimate number of coolies entailed by each move from one mountain group to another, and for each particular reconnaissance, and so estimate likely costs.

(i) Ensure that the work given to Scott and Weir is effected and help them as far as possible.

Weir’s job was a heavy one, but that was by deliberate calculation on my part. In business matters he had unusual energy
and resource. Scott I wanted to leave as little loaded by organizing work as I could, so that faced with his maps his imagination might give birth to ideas and plans, which, at first very sketchy and tentative, might grow and expand. Mac-Kinnon, for private business reasons, could not be given more work than he had already. His task was, in fact, one requiring a deal of research and common sense to reconcile our opposing demands—that medical supplies be light, yet that everything we should be likely to need be brought.

I could give Weir no advice about getting Board of Trade and Ministry of Food licences, and assumed that government departments would be out of sympathy with us, or at least hinder us with delays. But Weir soon showed that our fears of the much-maligned bureaucracy were ill-founded. Their approval and action were quick in coming and revealing of reasons. There creeps abroad throughout the land a grey spirit of shelter-seeking—a craving for security—the educated adult tending to ask of every venture he makes: ‘Is it safe? Is it useful? Does it keep the wolf from the door?’ Himalayan mountaineering so obviously is and does none of these things that even Civil Service departments show interest when they get application for help in breaking the deadly spell. The permits were granted, helpful suggestions contributed unsolicited. A bureaucratic benediction was upon us.

The main items of Weir’s food list (see Appendix) were Bovril pemmican, cheese, chocolate, barley-sugar, butter, dried egg, full cream milk-powder, biscuits, dried soup, rolled oats, suet, jam, honey, and sugar: total weight, 440 lb. I was advised by some people (not those mentioned) that this quantity was far too little. We should starve, they said, in the upper valleys; for even though we did find food there—which was doubtful so near the Tibetan frontier—we should never be able to stomach the native diet. Frankly, I did not believe that. Hindu hill-men are, like us, human. What they could eat, we could learn to eat. If men are hungry they can eat anything. In saying which I draw on my prison camp experiences during the Second World War. But in the Himalaya a great and daily output of
energy is asked and food fuel must be plentiful. Bearing this last point in mind, Weir and I were satisfied.

Scott's equipment list had now been agreed, and he and I began purchasing. All four of us already possessed the requisite mountaineering gear (see Appendix). None the less, we had still to equip at least three of our coolies for snow work. We must give them climbing-boots, socks, windproof jackets, and trousers, ice-axes, balaclava helmets, woollen and windproof gloves, snow-goggles, and down sleeping-bags. The cost of all these things is usually very high. Sleeping-bags alone cost about £10 each. By advertising in the press for second-hand bags I obtained four at prices between 30s. and £2. Scott, however, earned full marks for discovering the Gallowgate Barrows in Glasgow. The Barrows are an ancient Scottish institution, having much in common with Petticoat Lane. They do business on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. They have everything—everything that the human animal could conceivably want to buy, in great part old, or used and cheap.

Scott and I went there one Saturday afternoon, into a maze of side streets off the main thoroughfare of the Gallowgate. The Barrows lined the streets, for the most part invisible behind a solid barricade of humanity on the buy. Our own destination was a more venerable ‘house,’ graced by a roof, but which should not be called a ‘shop’ in any ordinary sense. We joined a speedily moving queue shambling round a narrow passage between walls burdened with every manner of weighty goods and a great rectangle of tables in the centre, whose groaning boards supported the bric-à-brac. A squad of barrow boys in the middle kept their customers active: ‘Move along, move along! Everything here’s for sale—everything here’s for sale. Move along now, move along! Everything here’s for sale.’ Behind the endless chant of the mantra their eyes were alert, scanning the stream and sizing up a likely buyer the moment he paused, shrewdly guessing what he’d be good for in hard cash. Scott and I were pounced on the moment we stopped, disgustedly, before some ill-made and ugly British ice-axes. These axes have a bad reputation for bursting near the
head, where the bolts have often been bashed through the wood and buckled. ‘Buy these axes quick, sir! They’re all for export—all going to Switzerland! Swiss mountaineers will use nothing else now. Wonderful stuff! Fifteen bob.’

We would not give such axes even to coolies. Axes would have to be raised elsewhere. But all the rest of the gear that we found was good, mostly ex-W.D. stock. We bought wind-proof jackets and trousers for 5s., excellent helmets for 3s. 6d., woollen gloves, gas-caples, fifteen kit-bags at 2s. 6d., clasp-knives at 1s. Snow-goggles, which were destined to prove as efficient for all practical purposes as our own Crookes’s lenses at 45s., cost 1s. Our best bargain was undoubtedly three pairs of army ammunition boots at 10s. per pair. The soles were stout and hobnailed.

Scott’s plan for the expedition had meantime been fluctuating violently. During the month of February advice and information coming in to me from the Himalayan veterans, and from our reading of the Himalayan Journal, caused amendments and changes. But by the end of March the plan had begun to take its final shape.

Starting from the hill-station of Ranikhet about 10th May, we should go forty miles north by bus to Garur on the Sarju River, and from there sixty miles on foot over the Wan and Kuari Passes to Tapoban on the Dhauliganga. We should then work from west to east over the roughly parallel river-gorges of the Dhauli, Gori, and Darma in this fashion:

(1) From the Dhauli, penetrate the Rishiganga gorge to the Trisul Nala and attempt the first ascent of Bethartoli Himal (20,840 feet).

(2) Move twenty miles north up the Dhauli to Dunagiri village. Reconnoitre from the south the ten unexplored peaks of the Lampak group, which are situated eighteen miles due north of Nanda Devi.

(3) Move eight miles north to Malari and climb on the Lampak group from their north side.

(4) From Malari on the Dhauli, try to force the gorges of the Girthi River thirty-eight miles eastwards to Milam on the Gori.
We could find no record of this move having been made. It would link two of the great trade routes between Tibet and India.

(5) From Milam, cross the Ralam Pass (18,470 feet) thirty-two miles eastwards to the Darmaganga near Nepal.

(6) From the Darma, reconnoitre the Panch Chuli (22,650 feet)—a difficult and shapely group of five unclimbed mountains, all above 20,000 feet. Attempt the summit.

Once made, the six parts of the plan were found to pivot on the arrival date of the monsoon, which in the Dhauli is normally the end of June. Thus the Rishi and Dunagiri moves had to
be completed before the monsoon or they would fail. When the monsoon did break, our strategy was to dodge it by the Malari and Girthi moves, which would take us across the main axis of the chain to the Tibetan side, where rainfall should be low and mountaineering possible. The Ralam and Panch Chuli moves were planned to come in the clear and settled weather of late September.

This six-part plan seemed ambitious for a first visit to the Himalaya, where so much has to be learned about a peculiar technique of travel. However, we were encouraged even by the doubters, who argued that although our plans were likely to collapse we should learn how to do better another time. No more stimulating an opinion could have been put to me. Instead of waiting to learn from our own experience we must do everything possible to profit now from the experience of others. I stirred up my imagination and tried to think of every possible snag that might arise in valley travel or in getting supplies and dealing with hillmen and coolies. The questions to which I could find no answer in books and club journals made a formidable list. For example: Will paper money be accepted by villagers in the upper valleys and by coolies, or must they be paid in silver? Do porters on snow need glacier cream for the lips? Do the Dotial coolies from Nepal understand Hindustani? These are just three out of thirty queries that I sent to Tilman, then in the middle of organizing an expedition of his own to Nepal, and to Goodfellow. Despite the pressure of their work they replied at once. Armed with a second list, I then went to see a red-bearded wizard who lives in a far-off land called Achiltibuie in Wester Ross. Dr. Longstaff was in tremendous form, speaking with such vigour that electric sparks seemed to fly from the point of his beard. Afternoon and evening he poured out vast stores of information about Himalayan life and travel—too much for me to remember all at once when I reported to Scott and Weir in Glasgow. But time and again during the following months I was to find myself quoting him. Every word he had uttered proved true.

After I left him, his most important counsel came from the proofs of his book *This My Voyage*. ‘Since happiness is most
often met by those who have learned to live in every moment of the present, none has such prodigal opportunities of attaining that art as the traveller.... So long as he loses consciousness of self and is aware in all his senses of the present scene, almost any part of the world is as good as another. Mountain or desert, it is all one.'

It is difficult for me to estimate just how great an effect these few words had in helping me to deal with the Himalaya, but a great part it was. Through my own mountaineering in recent years I had become very keenly aware of the providential energies that help men through life. Let us have what skill we may, and push our plans however strenuously, we remain utterly dependent on Providence for bringing them to their best conclusion—which may not be the end that we ourselves had hoped for them. We have to act as best we know and surrender the fruits: be not attached to them, but learn to accept the consequence of all acts serenely, knowing that all acts are turned to good as soon as they have come to pass: whatever seeming good or ill fortune comes in immediate result to ourselves. In light of which result, we act anew, no less strenuously than before, for the best as we see it.

One result of this knowledge is a glorious freedom from anxieties, but without diminution of energy. Longstaff’s counsel reduced hard-won knowledge to very simple words that could be borne in mind by the traveller. I should have ample opportunity of testing them.

Indeed, opportunities came there and then. The dispatch with which government departments had moved in Britain had not been equalled in Delhi, where negotiations proceeded at more oriental speed. After five weeks there had still been no reply to any of our applications: no import licence, no duty-free entry, no Inner Line Pass, no ration permit. Our application had been put forward for us by the United Kingdom High Commissioner at Delhi and again by the Commonwealth Relations Office, London. In these matters we had been greatly helped by Mr. Basil R. Goodfellow and by Major Hotz of Delhi, and then by Mr. W. A. Ward, who had them presented again through
the High Commissioner for India, and by Mr. J. A. K. Martyn of Dehra Dun. At the end of March no passes had reached me and there were only twenty days to sailing date.

The correspondence on this subject grew an inch thick on my desk. I had never realized how much work is entailed by the organization of even a small expedition. It was a full-time job lasting two months, despite the sharing of work—work lightened by the great goodwill and material help given us by mountaineers and other friends. Members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club gave three down sleeping-bags, several ice-axes, and funds for a base-camp tent, a spare groundsheet, kodachrome film, porters' clothing, and our own snow-goggles. From Thomas Black & Sons (Greenock) Ltd. came a high-altitude tent; from McVitie & Price Ltd., 50 lb. of biscuits; from Haythornthwaite & Sons Ltd., windproof Grenfell jackets and hats; from the Swiss firm of Maggi, a crate of dried soup; from the makers of Bioro glacier cream, twelve tubes; from Joseph Farrow Ltd. of Peterborough, jam.

We learned not to be unduly secretive in advance about an expedition. There are more people willing to help such a venture than we had dared to imagine. This preliminary work of organization had become a revelation to us: showing us how little we could hope to achieve without the help of great numbers of other men, by no means all personally interested in mountains, and how freely that goodwill is given. Our experience of the latter became enlightening. It made us feel that our expedition was less a purely private enterprise than a product of the community, worth attempting whether its final issue be success or failure.

By the first week in April the buying of food and equipment was completed. On Easter Saturday I went from my home at Loch Goil, Argyll, to Glasgow, and helped Scott and Weir with the final packing. That is the most enthralling part of preparation—at last one has something tangible to work with. The gear as it accumulated had so far been piled into two rooms at Scott's house, which were now in a wild and indescribable turmoil. By an occult intuition we knew what was there and
where to find each item. But all this gear had now to be listed in triplicate for the benefit of H.M. Customs, and, for their enlightenment, the cash value of each item estimated.

That morning we transferred all the gear to the warehouse of Robb, Moore & Neill in the Broomielaw, beside the River Clyde. They had supplied and packed our food in fourteen crates of approximately 40 lb. each. They had numbered these with black paint and given us a list of the contents. The crates were now stacked round us, and for the first of some fifty occasions were to serve as office and refectory furniture.

Six hundred pounds of climbing and camping gear lay scattered across the floor. Weir sat down as recorder, while Scott and I, browsing rapidly over the ripe pasture, snatched greedily at desirable handfuls, waved the treasure aloft for universal appraise-

‘Seven ice-axes.’
‘Twenty-one pounds,’ would say Weir.
‘Sack seventeen,’ I’d reply. And down it would go.
‘One pair climbing trousers.’
‘They’ve been good trousers,’ I would say impatiently, after a long uneasy silence.
‘Call it one and sixpence,’ Scott would mutter. But Weir, calling Scott to notice that the buttons were complete, might raise the price to two shillings. And so the work continued for two hours.

At eleven o’clock we opened up a crate of cooking gear and had our first cup of tea out of new enamel mugs. It was sergeant-major’s tea. It seemed odd, I remarked, to travel eight thousand miles to the central Himalaya when the pleasures of expedition life were all in this warehouse at the Broomielaw. Could anyone, I wondered, prophesy what greater pleasures lay in store for us? No one was rash enough to answer.

By midday everything was stowed and battened down. Weir and I typed the triplicate lists, to be dispatched with an export licence and the baggage to Tilbury Dock. To avoid heavy rail freights, Weir had the baggage shipped south by sea. Our total stores weighed out at 1,200 lb. in twenty-seven crates and
sacks, of which we reckoned that 1,000 lb. would be carried from Ranikhet. Weir wrote to Ranikhet immediately by air mail, asking Mrs. Ferguson to collect at least eighteen Dotial porters, as tough types as possible, and have them ready for us on 8th May.

Save for an unimportant multitude of odds and ends the British end of our work was finished. The baggage was away— but still no Indian import licence, no customs-free entry, no Inner Line Pass. A lingering death on the Bombay quay loomed menacingly ahead. We should die there, I had no doubt, of a surfeit of tea and sugar, 'The Last Brew-up,' for I could trust Weir to see that we died happy.

Ten days from sailing date word came from India: the Ministry of External Affairs had granted our goods free entry. Of the Inner Line Pass there was still no word when we reached London on 19th April. On that memorable day Weir gave us one last-minute and most fearsome alarm. The P. & O. Company told him that our twenty-seven crates and sacks, dispatched ten days ago, had not arrived at the ship—had not even been seen by H.M. Customs. And the ship was due to sail in twelve hours.

Just before embarkation, they were found in the hold.
CHAPTER TWO

Delivery at Ranikhet

After that eight weeks’ hustle and the nerve-testing climax, the voyage came as a welcome rest cure—six thousand miles of calm blue sea. We arrived on board without having had time to learn a word of Hindustani and set about to repair the omission. It is an easy language to learn in its Urdu form with Roman script. During the fifteen-day voyage we learned enough to run an expedition but not enough to hold conversation. I was discouraged from putting too much work into Hindustani, having been warned by two Indians that the language would not be understood either by our Dotials or by the Bhotias in the upper valleys. Only the odd man here and there would have a smattering, and we should have to rely on our good luck in meeting the right men at the right time. This entirely false information undermined my resolution to persist in face of that overmastering temptation of the floating hotels—sloth. We all slept in the sun, swam in the pool, ate our unrationed meals with a relish that soon changed to indifference, relaxed and read and slept again—and awakening occasionally to an active conscience, would stretch out an idle hand to an Urdu grammar.

My own method was then to stir up imagination, think of all the phrases I should be likely to need in the villages or on trek, then make and memorize translations. This method proved my salvation.

Scott and Weir, who were the expedition photographers, occasionally disappeared into some dark room in the bowels of the ship and cut film. They had film for three thousand exposures, of which one thousand were kodachrome colour. Their cameras were three Leicas and a Zeiss Super-Ikonta. In face of all this talent and equipment I had brought no camera of my own.
On the morning of 4th May we steamed into harbour at Bombay. Everything was as it should be. Behind the showpieces of the great sea front—the Gateway of India and the Taj Mahal Hotel—there lurked the promise of the Asiatic hinterland, brought to us by appropriate emissaries: flocks of brown and ragged pariah kites, which swooped around the ship, lifting garbage off the water with their claws.

We disembarked in the afternoon and were met by Mr. A. R. Leyden of the Himalayan Club and by Mr. Wilkie Brown, who had come to see us through the Customs. Before ever leaving England we had been warned by friends that although our customs-free entry and import licence had been granted at Delhi there was only a remote chance of the good news having filtered through to Bombay. Last year two other expeditions had been held up that way for ten days. And sure enough at Bombay the Customs had never heard of us. Leyden went into action. Armed with a thick wad of letters from the United Kingdom Commissioner, the Ministry of Commonwealth Relations, and India House, he exhorted the reluctant officials, who could not wave him aside. After two hours they passed us without inspection. Carried away by this triumph, and perhaps forgetting that the Bombay Presidency had 'gone dry,' Scott unwisely declared a bottle of brandy, which we had wanted for emergencies on the march. The bottle was seized.

We put up at the Taj Mahal Hotel, which seemed to us inconveniently large and busy, but tolerable for one night. We hoped to leave next evening by the Frontier Mail.

Mr. and Mrs. Leyden entertained us to supper that night, when we met fellow members of the Himalayan Club. We could not possibly have received a more friendly welcome to India in a more charming setting—a garden lawn lit by candles, for the air was breathless. We were given, too, much useful information about problems of photography, coolies, travel, and the identification of birds. One of our Indian friends disturbed us by remarking that he had trekked north from Ranikhet last year and had found that the quality of Dotial coolies had fallen away. They were no longer strong or reliable and were more
apt to mutiny when the way grew hard. This news was at variance with information given us by Englishmen and especially by Miss Bewick, who had also gone north last year from Ranikhet. Our Indian friend was much concerned at the prospect of our being stranded in the upper Dhauli, unable to move for lack of coolies, which he thought would be our likely fate. Food? Perhaps we should get food in the high villages; more likely not. Our lack of language would be a great handicap. This was a sobering conversation, but called for no action on our part—save prayer.

Next morning, with a car and driver mercifully lent to us by Mr. Wilkie Brown, we gave ourselves over to a prolonged dash all round Bombay, making last-minute purchases, arranging for the future development of monochrome film, smoothing the way for 'quay-jumping' a liner on our return several months later, and collecting maps and a high-altitude tent from the Himalayan Club.

MacKinnon was sent off on detachment to win back our bottle of brandy, the loss of which rankled. For two hours he fought a lone, heroic action through the widely separated halls of the old and new custom-houses, each a hot and complex warren of long corridors and wide lobbies seething with humanity, up and down endless staircases and across huge, high-ceilinged rooms packed densely and from wall to wall with white-gowned babus, a throbbing, untold host, none of whom knew anything about anything, except that they were paid to be there by a beneficent government. They did not, at least, know about the more important events in Bombay island, such as the seizure of a Mr. Scott's brandy bottle. But the same occult power that had guided us so surely amidst the confusion of Scott's rooms in Glasgow, crossed four seas to the aid of a lost MacKinnon, guiding him deep into the secret places of the Indian Excise. His arrival at the inmost sanctuary, his very threading of its hidden ways, was at once accepted by its priests as evidence that the gods must indeed have walked with him, so that his claim to one bottle was honoured after so little as an hour's debate.
Our train left Bombay Central at nine o’clock at night. After the luxuries of our eastward voyage, this two-day journey over a thousand miles of purgatorial plains was something we dreaded. Yet everything went well for the first day. The carriage was clean and spacious, although second class, and we had it to ourselves. The electric fans worked. The service from the restaurant car was good. We spent a comfortable night. Next forenoon was hot enough in all conscience, but we bought a great block of ice and sat round it enjoying ourselves, just as one sits round a bright red fire in Britain.

Despite the heat, Scott and Weir were continually scanning with their binoculars. From their exclamations I heard that the otherwise dull and scorched plains rejoiced in flocks of green parakeets, shrikes, drongos, minahs, egrets, and storks. At Muttra junction, where we changed trains, the heat smote us like a blow when we stepped out on to the platform. During the war I had known far greater heat in Iraq, and Scott had known the Indian, but Weir had not before had the chance of adjustment. During our long halt at Muttra he wilted visibly, although cheered by his first glimpses of hoopoes. He said that they seemed to fly right out of a book-plate, easy to recognize by the upstanding black and white crest and slender black beak. A handbook of Indian hill birds had been presented to us by the Himalayan Club and was most valuable. Scott carried an enormous volume of his own, weighing more pounds than I liked to think about in terms of coolies’ wages.

Our train to Kathgodam came in long after dark. There always seem to be waiting for Indian trains hordes of people far in excess of any train’s capacity. The fight to get on is correspondingly fierce and success goes to the strong or the cunning. The battle is hottest for the third-class compartments. For the second class we had only to be quick and firm in decision. No struggle was required in gaining entry; although at a later date I was to see boarders repelled and slung out by main force. Weir by this time had a bad throat and high temperature. Apart from the dust, we thought that the horrors of travel by Indian railways have been greatly exaggerated. The little that we
saw of the trains, on main lines only, gave us an impression of efficiency, cleanness, and punctuality.

We had all been looking forward to the Terai: the famous jungle that stretches under the central foot-hills five hundred miles eastwards from the Ganges. But we ran through its heart without glimpsing it—too much ground has been cleared to each side of the railway line. In the forenoon we arrived at Kathgodam, nestling at the very baseline of the foot-hills, which rose abruptly from the plain. Again the heat shocked us. A bus ordered by Mrs. Ferguson should have been waiting at the station entrance, but came two hours late. The delay gave us time to enjoy an excellent curry at the station restaurant, cooled by the labours of a small boy, who pulled a punkah. He stands out in my mind as the only Indian we ever met in the plains who took baksheesh gladly: obviously a beginner. The universal custom is to register the most bitter disappointment—a policy well considered, made with an eye to maintaining rates.

In the afternoon our bus transported us to the higher regions. A journey of forty miles in four hours. The road is good but hardly restful. So violently does it twist up the hills that the traveller is unremittingly thrown from side to side, his trunk muscles continually in corrective action, sometimes powerfully. Unless in good training and unsusceptible to road sickness, he will be a tired man at the far end.

Scenically, these lower foot-hills were not outstanding, well covered though they were by grass and trees. Their green was too uniform. And higher up, where entire hill-flanks were cultivated in long, shallow terraces—a mode of agriculture used everywhere in the Himalaya to counter soil erosion—the fields turned bare, brown faces to the sun, and waited patiently upon the rains. At last the bus panted over the top of the last hill-ridge near Chabattia at 6,000 feet and soon ran in to Ranikhet on the northward-facing slopes. We turned rightwards off the main road and nosed down a winding track to Essex House, where great and spacious vistas opened among the trees.

The house stood upon a hillside shelf, ringed by flower gardens and fronted by a lawn, from which we could look far
north-east across the valleys of the Kosi and Sarju Rivers, and over the forested hills between, to a vast belt of cloud at the rim of the world. Behind that silver curtain the Himalaya lurked, invisible, not to be imagined.

Mrs. Ferguson met us in the garden. She was a lady of great charm and dignity, blessed by an understanding of mountaineers. She had already helped us in laying on coolies and transport, but this was to be only the beginning of her kindness. Weir had a high temperature and exceedingly bad throat, so she packed him off to bed and for three days nursed him. That first night she rose more than once in the small hours to take him medicine. During the following days she was to help us in advising about rates of pay for coolies, getting stores from the bazaar and money from the bank, trying to trace the Inner Line Pass, arranging another bus to carry us, coolies and all, forty miles to Garur on the Sarju River, and so on. She kept us in good heart, too, and in fine fettle despite throats and temperatures, by the simple fact of her goodwill, which encourages men more than the giver can realize.

On that first night we relaxed and were early abed, but early afoot next morning in hope of seeing the main chain. It was a glorious morning of fresh, soft airs—it was spring!—and a season had changed overnight. It seemed as though our first view of the Himalaya was to be indefinitely postponed. Again the great cloud screen rose tall above the curve of the world. I was about to turn away disappointedly when a wild thought made me raise my head higher. They were there. An arctic continent of the heavens, far above the earth and its girdling clouds: divorced wholly from this planet. The idea of climbing over such distant and delicate tips, the very desire of it, never entered my heart or head. Had I been born among or in sight of them, I might have been led to worship the infinite beauty they symbolized, but not to set boot on their flanks, or axe on a crest.

We had expected the Himalaya to astound us, by their height if by nothing else. What is therefore so surprising is the fact that we were astounded. The nearest peaks were fifty miles
away and the main body seventy and more. It was their great height in relation to such great distance that really took us by surprise. Essex House looked directly out to the clouded spires of our ultimate goal, the Panch Chuli, and I thought that they were the most shapely cluster of all—perhaps the awareness that here was virgin ground, the unexplored, lent some especial enchantment.

Fever or no fever, Weir was out on the lawn in his pyjamas that morning. But not for long. He was genuinely ill and went back to bed. It was now quite clear that he would be unable to move for two or three days, at a minimum, but as events proved his illness held up the expedition not at all. For one thing we could not get the coolies to come to terms. The coolie contractor from the bazaar came to see me on our first morning, bringing with him Kuar Singh, destined to be our head coolie, and Perimal, his second in command.

Whenever I saw these two Dotials I prayed fervently that we might be able to get another sixteen men like them—especially like Perimal. He reminded me irresistibly of a brigand chief—a well-built, sturdy man of forty with a most mischievous twinkle in his brown eyes, and his broad frank face, occasionally reflective as he summed me up and glanced over the sacks and crates in the courtyard, constantly breaking into smiles. He looked most tough and energetic, but a man who would have enormous influence over other and younger coolies—a born ringleader. We should have to have his goodwill from the start. Kuar Singh, on the other hand, was a small wispy man with a black wispy moustache. Probably he was little older than Perimal, but his face had lined more quickly. It was an expressive face; and even more expressive were his hands—he could use them to register any emotion known to the human species. No Frenchman ever used his hands with such art as a Kuar Singh—despair, the extremes of tolerance or intolerance, reverential awe, anger, an amused indignation, a brisk efficiency—his hands flashed through the gamut with an ease and rapidity that held me wholly fascinated. It was a quite new experience. When to the work of his hands he added the use of eyes and
face, I could understand clearly most things that he meant without knowing a word uttered. Kuar Singh was head coolie. There could be no other while he was around: an outstanding personality. Perimal seemed the ideal second in command. He could not talk with his hands, but could use his eyes exactly as does a dog: he could plead with them, almost melt one’s hardened heart to water—an innocent piece of acting, which he would instantly discard when he saw that nothing was doing. Kuar Singh never pleaded with his eyes. They were penetrating and appraising eyes, shrewd and unfalteringly honest.

The coolie contractor was a nondescript person, with whom I dealt not at all. My concern was with Kuar Singh. He wanted Rupees 4 per day for all coolies and Rupees 5 for mountain work. The standard rate for road work around Ranikhet was Rupees 2/8, so this I offered, intending to compromise at Rupees 3, which was the rate paid for trekking by Miss Bewick (and four times the pre-war rate). They would hardly stop to hear me out. An indignation closely approaching wrath flashed from Kuar Singh’s hands and eyes, but the moment he saw me freeze he swiftly changed tactics; a sadness amounting to misery then pervaded the party. Perimal’s eyes brimmed over with a pained incredulity, and a black despair oozed from Kuar Singh’s finger-tips. Rupees 4 it must be, and 5 for the mountain, or no coolie would ever leave Ranikhet.

Promptly now, and without a word, they made the customary bow, raising clasped hands to the forehead, and departed. I was surprised at the speed with which they had broken off the discussion. I could see it to be good policy, however, to leave me guessing whether they would ever come back or not, and glad to come to terms when they did. They were bound to know that white men are usually impatient and loathe ‘wasting time.’ What they had yet to learn was that we had more time to spend than money.

Scott, MacKinnon, and I now set to work on our fifteen crates. The whole food supply had to be unpacked, spread, and repacked. Forgetting my instructions, the packers had put all foods of the same kind into the same crates. If left thus, at least half a
dozen of the crates would have to be unnailed and renailed daily. Neither we nor the wood could tolerate the strain. Accordingly, Weir on his sick-bed drew up a new packing plan. That same afternoon we tried to work to it, but intense sun heat beating into the enclosed courtyard defeated us. We were unacclimatized. Soon we should have to march in the noon sun, so the sooner we acclimatized the better. Therefore we strolled a mile through the trees and over the hill-ridge to its north-west side, where we found the bazaar and bank. We had to draw money for the expedition. There are some half-dozen private banks in Ranikhet, and of what worth they are we cannot say. We had been recommended to use Durgan Sah Mohan Lal Sah, who gave us efficient service and good exchange rates. We had each brought travellers’ cheques and now drew Rupees 9,660, of which we took Rupees 5,890 in small notes, which I calculated would see us back to Ranikhet. To meet unforeseen emergencies I arranged for the balance of Rupees 3,770 to be posted in mid July to the village of Milam in the upper Goriganga. The post office there opens in summer only, and is probably the highest in India.

Neither in England nor Ranikhet had we been able to get confirmation that villagers in the upper Dhauli, Gori, or Darma would accept bank-notes in payment. They would, we knew, take them in the lower Dhauli at Tapoban, but failed to contact anyone who had been farther north since before the war. In the nineteen-thirties silver had been essential. Our decision to take notes was in part an act of faith, but based on the commonsense view that if the upper valleys are evacuated in winter, then the people ought now to know the value of notes in the foothills. The decision was a doubtful one, none the less, which we made gaily enough because we dealt in doubts daily. They could not be avoided, so the only way of dealing with them was by common sense as they came. We no longer worried about anything; such days were gone.

For that we had cause to be grateful. When I moved back to Essex House, leaving Scott and MacKinnon to forage in the bazaar, I remembered that the Inner Line Pass had still not
arrived. I sat out on the lawn, rimmed by its vivid flowers, and listened to the monkeys go thumping over the bungalow roof. Straight before me, seventy miles away, the snows of Panch Chuli still hovered over the cloud carpet. I wondered if we should ever get there. Without a pass we could still carry on with Part I of our plan, for the Inner Line cut the Dhauli at Surai Thota, north of our entrance to the Rishi; the remaining five parts we should be obliged to scrap. No police or guards would stop our crossing the Line, but future expeditions might be barred to us, and for others made more difficult.

While I thought over this problem there came another of those unexpected interventions, a long string of which had favoured us since last February. Mr. Frapolli came to visit us. He was Swiss, and a resident of Ranikhet. He had climbed and ski’d in his youth on the Swiss and French Alps. Was there anything he could do to help us? Hesitantly, I told him about the Inner Line Pass. Ah! but the deputy commissioner at Pauri was his very good friend. A telegram should be sent at once. We visited the post office and a telegram went off in Frapolli’s name, asking that our pass be sent to Joshimath at the junction of the Dhauli and Alaknanda Rivers. This service given, he then vanished and we never met him again.

That night we worked on the stores. Henceforth, one of our most valued possessions was a pair of dental forceps, with which we drew nails out of crates. We worked by the light of oil-lamps, hammering, nailing, weighing, and writing out lists in penny note-books. These last are of great importance. It is the little things and the attention given to them that make or mar the smooth running of an expedition. Deprived of our pincers, or spring-balances, or penny note-books, or the painted numbers on crates, our daily life must have been exasperating. To such as these give close attention: the bigger issues, it would seem, look after themselves.

Next morning Kuar Singh and Perimal were waiting outside for me when I woke. They saluted with clasped hands.

‘Salaam, sahib,’ said Kuar Singh.
‘Salaam, sahib,’ said Perimal.
'Rupees four,' said Kuar Singh in Hindustani; 'five for snow.' The contractor, whom I had not noticed, popped up at my elbow. 'They will take no less, sahib,' he whined in English. 'We are all poor men and to you lakhs or rupees are as nothing.'

I had to kill that idea at once, lest it kill the expedition. 'Rupees two-eight,' I said. 'That is the standard rate. Three for snow. I will pay no more.' They began to persuade me, but this time I took the initiative in breaking off. I looked impatient and waved them away angrily, then half turned, fired a 'salaam' at them, and went to get my breakfast. The coolie situation would soon be serious, for although Weir had been worse last night we guessed rightly that that was the climax, and that in two more days he would be fit to move; which left us one more day to come to terms with the Dotials.

After breakfast I enlisted the aid of Mrs. Ferguson for a quick settlement. It was the kind of situation that she could handle well. In the afternoon she obtained from the district magistrate a declaration that Rupees 3 for the march and Rupees 4 for the mountain work was a fair wage. The contractor was hailed before him and informed of the arbitration, then sent down to Essex House with Kuar Singh. It was agreed: Rupees 3 and 4, the coolies to provide their own food.

In the course of the last two days several young Garhwalis had presented themselves, complete with chitthi (character reference), to offer service as cooks. We were tempted to take one, since they had English and the Dotials none. By good fortune I asked Mrs. Ferguson to get Kuar Singh's advice. 'No Kumaoni cooks!' he exclaimed. And the more he thought of it the more incensed he looked. 'All Kumaonis are dishonest . . . ' he went on, and waved his hands in a way that showed that if this was an exaggeration it was a modest one.

'But will any Dotial be willing to cook for us?' I asked.

'I will cook myself.'

'How much extra pay?'

'I will take no extra pay.'

I could hardly believe my ears. I could only assume that his dislike of Kumaoni cooks had carried him away. I did not
argue. We parted, having arranged that twenty-four Dotials would present themselves at ten o’clock next morning for selection and pay.

Throughout this conversation Mrs. Ferguson had been our interpreter, had given Kuar Singh an idea of our plans, and had confirmed that we could rely on getting a few men to stay with us for the five months’ journey. Her help eased our task in making the bandobast (agreement). This made, I felt confident that our own Urdu would be good enough to let the Dotials know what was wanted of them as we went along. It would certainly not be good enough to harangue mutinous coolies when things went wrong. They would have to be persuaded to work for us in rain, cold, and snow, not because they liked it (for no one ever does) or liked only our money (which will not move exhausted men), but because they liked us. In short, in the absence of a good command of language we should more than ever be reliant on goodwill. They must be made disinclined to let us down if they could help it, and they would feel that way only if we, in the first place, had selected each man because we liked him. If that were done, each coolie could not but help be aware of it, though not a word was said, and he would respond. The selection of men by an instinctive liking seemed to me the essential prerequisite in choosing coolies for an expedition. Any other way we should have trouble.

At 10 a.m. next morning they arrived and lined up outside Essex House. Twenty-one men had come. They wore loose jackets and tight-fitting trousers. Most had white, round caps. The very first impression I had, before looking closely, was good. So I started off with a note-book and asked each man his name. As he answered I looked him straight in the eye; if I liked him his name went down, but if there was any doubt on the score of age or physique a question mark followed. It is an extraordinary tribute to Dotials, or else to our local good fortune, that I ended up with twenty-one names and only seven question marks. There was none whom I disliked.

One man I rejected because he was too young (fourteen at a guess); one because I liked him less than the others; and one on
Kuar Singh’s advice because his eyesight was bad. That left us with four other doubtfuls, on whom I took advice all round. By the grace of God the vote went in favour of each, for they turned out to be excellent men. Zungia, who despite his smiling eyes looked too old, was to prove himself the best coolie of all, the wisest and most willing. Shivlal, a short, stocky lad, who looked too young—no more than fifteen—was retained only because he was so keen and because everyone, including the Dotials, liked him so well. Ring Badr, a tall youth with a coloured cap, seemed too frail of frame to carry heavy loads, and his sparceness was emphasized by his having an unusually intelligent face. Not until later did we know coolies well enough to learn that sparceness of frame is no bar at all to great carrying power. We kept him because he had a straightforward glance and reliable air. Toshi, a well-built youth like a great puppy, whose eye seemed too dull and expression too vacant, we kept by the advice of Kuar Singh, who said that he was a splendid carrier. We were to be glad of that advice in the end.

Our final choice was the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kuar Singh</th>
<th>Ring Badr</th>
<th>Narbir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perimal</td>
<td>Unra Singh</td>
<td>Gopi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goria</td>
<td>Prem Singh</td>
<td>Shivlal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung Bir</td>
<td>Karon Bahadur</td>
<td>Zungia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ram Badur</td>
<td>Matbir</td>
<td>Gulab Singh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munmir</td>
<td>Phakir</td>
<td>Toshi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They now received an advance of pay, Rupees 25 per head. Most of them had to buy clothing as well as food. It seemed a happy augury that we could hand over Rupees 450 without a trace of doubt that every single man would honour his obligation. They all promised to be back at eight o’clock in the morning for a 9 a.m. start. A much earlier start was highly desirable to avoid the heat of the sun, but this could not be. A motor road went forty miles to Garur; unluckily our hired bus would carry only sixteen men, so the remaining six would have to travel by service bus at 9 a.m. We preferred that the two buses should travel together, arriving Garur at one o’clock.
We should in consequence have a very short march in the late afternoon, just three miles uphill to the Dak bungalow at Dungoli. This short march would be of real help to Weir. He was already out and about, indulging in photographic prowls and bird-stalking. He would be able to march next day. But a short march seemed politic. So that as usual everything was working out for the best. . . .

And continued to do so. The rationing system at Ranikhet, I now discovered, forbade the coolies to carry away all the food that they needed on the long march out to the Dhauli. Almost simultaneously with this discovery there arrived out of the blue—out of the Indian Government of all unexpected places—instructions to the district magistrate to grant us every help and facility. The Dotials got their rations—plus a pep talk from the magistrate, who exhorted them to work well and never to dare appear again in Ranikhet if they defaulted.

At 6 p.m. the magistrate sent a messenger down to us—our Inner Line Pass had been granted by the deputy commissioner of Garhwal. It would be sent direct to Joshimath.

Truly the clouds that had been obscuring our way for so long were dissipating at the eleventh hour. All was made plain before us. Looking round our rooms at Essex House, one might not have thought so. We had a bedroom and sitting-room each and the floors were littered deep with all kinds of gear—books, maps, candles, shoes, padlocks—stuff thrown out at the last moment or brought in to await packing. We worked until 11.30 p.m., thrusting things into kit-bags and sorting out the mess. At the end, we sat down to the last letters home.
WE HAD WONDERED whether Dotial coolies, who at one inspection could be trusted with eight days' advance of pay, could also be relied upon to come in time in the morning. But the first thing I heard when I woke up on 11th May was the sound of their voices in the garden. I looked at my watch—six o'clock. It was a most beautiful morning, so I rose and went out to them. A full dozen enthusiasts had arrived. They salaamed and gave me such tremendous smiles that I felt quite overwhelmed. I had never in my life before seen so much goodwill so openly shown. I still remembered one or two names from the previous day, so I used them, and at once saw the men's eyes light up. Clearly the sooner we got to know all their names the better. In the meantime we could not have them over-running Mrs. Ferguson's garden. I asked Kuar Singh to send all except six to the bus station.

We enjoyed our last breakfast of bacon and eggs. We bade farewell to Mrs. Ferguson. The bus arrived and was loaded, went chugging and panting up the steep hill to the ridge, and at nine o'clock picked up another six Dotials and set off through the long bazaar.

Our road went eastwards twenty-one miles towards Almora—a road twisting more wildly than ever, giving splendid views across the terraced ridges—then dropped to the Kosi River and turned north thirty miles to Garur. This last stretch was thickly wooded country. We arrived at one o'clock and unloaded under a great tree, in the shade of which we rested awhile. There was still no sign of the service bus. We went in search of tea shops and selected one with a white-walled inner room, very clean and cool. A bench was brought in from outside.
I sat down unthinkingly and leapt up again, like the hen from the girdle. The wood was scorching. A carpet had to be spread on top. I was daily mystified, during this introduction to the foot-hill country, how it was that the sun could be so fierce and merciless while one idled in it, and yet, the moment one set about hard, active work, moving around under the full blaze of the sky, no handicap was felt, no loss of energy.

The second bus arrived. At once we set out eighteen loads under the big tree. Most coolies had two packages to carry: a crate and a kit-bag. These loads had been carefully weighed. None exceeded 60 lb. But we were soon to find that the Dotials had a system of their own, in which spring-balances played no part. Their own food was carried by one man, not eighteen; Kuar Singh, as head coolie, and with the acquiescence of the others, took no load at all. The loads had thus to be completely rearranged, and Kuar Singh did this with exceeding swiftness by eye and by feel. He thus dealt out the loads to each man, not necessarily on the basis of an equal load to each, but in some measure according to capacity. Thus, Shivlal, our youngest coolie, was never given more than 50 lb., while Perimal had a full 80 lb., although he and Kuar Singh were as thick as thieves. The main points were that no man had more than a maund (80 lb.) and that all accepted Kuar Singh's verdict without question. He had a very real authority over the other coolies. He reminded me more and more of an old Alpine guide—exceedingly brisk, tough and confident, and wise in the ways of men, but always ready to put his employers' interests before his own, and truly to serve. We were very lucky with Kuar Singh.

The coolies squatted against their loads, settled the head-bands across their foreheads, then one by one gave a heave and lurched upright. We were off!

Before us lay a nine- or ten-day march across the Wan and Kuari Passes to the Dhauli River. My mind was quite blank as we left Garur, but shortly afterwards we descended a steep lane through a village, where golden grain was drying in trays in the sunshine. Beyond and below, the Sarju flashed under
the next great rise of the hills. I had the sense of emerging from a long, dark tunnel. The hectic, bewildering weeks of preparation, the stupefying meals of the voyage out, the hustle at Bombay and bustle at Ranikhet—they were all like the wild waters of a subterranean stream, in the navigation of which we had been too busy to think. And now the stream burst from its tunnel on to the open slopes of the Himalaya. It cast us out into sunshine. For a moment dazzled, we suddenly saw spread before us a world made new. All the senses of the soul were not so much refreshed as reborn, as though after death. We were free men once again, for the first time in months really able to live in the present moment.

We crossed the Sarju by a suspension bridge to Baijnath. A couple of small temples on the bank of the river drew us aside. They were shaped like pine-cones, built of a beautiful grey stone, very old and clean. We noticed that one of our coolies, Ring Badr with the coloured cap, after washing himself in the river was now lingering in the background. We guessed that he was waiting for us to leave, which we did at once. He then entered one of the temples. I had noted that his face was unusually intelligent, but had nearly turned him down as a bit of a dandy. As he passed us now, I saw that he had a very level eye and good carriage of the head.

For Weir’s sake, we were glad to see that the track winding three miles up the hillside was not too steep and wound like an Alpine track among trees. Far below stretched a cultivated valley, much greener than the country around Ranikhet. The outstanding feature remained the terracing of the hill-flanks, like gigantic staircases; but now each flat step was pale green or gold, meaning rice or wheat. We passed a couple of tiny villages, at each of which we stopped for tea, served in brass tumblers at two annas (twopence). Scott had a large scarlet flask projecting from the pocket of his rucksack, and when this was seen at the second tea shop the tea-wallah offered drinks on the house in exchange for a pull at the scarlet flask. We did not respond at first. But in prohibitionist India, the chance of a drink out of a sahib’s scarlet flask does not come every day,
Kuari Pass "9 miles South"

The March Out
and was not to be let pass without a bid. When we rose to go
our tendered annas were waved airily away—the flask, just one
drink out of the flask, was all our humble tea-wallah would
have. There was nothing for it but to yield. Scott flung off
his rucksack and drew the flask. The tea-wallah held out a
tumbler, his eyes gleaming with alcoholic anticipation—while
Scott poured him out a noggin of tepid water.

We left hurriedly amid a roar of laughter from the onlookers,
in which I was happy to see that the tea-wallah joined; for,
bereft of his senses, he had let us get away with the annas. He
would kick himself later in the day.

Our carrying water-bottles on the march never developed
into a habit. Within a day or two we gave up the practice and
I would not again burden myself with a water-bottle in the
Kumaon Himalaya. One is thirsty for the first day or two—
when there are tea shops every few miles. And after that one
comes into training and water on the march is not needed. If
a ‘brew-up’ is desired, streams are plentiful enough.

The trees fell away and we came out on to a hill-top sward.
A temple crouched there at the very crest, cool and grey behind
a charmed circle of low grey walls, over which hung a cloud of
almond blossom. On each day’s march we were to find the day
made memorable either by some little incident, almost always
trivial, or by a sight so briefly seen that we could not have
imagined that any indelible record would be left on the memory.
But so it was. We moved daily through scenes of the most
splendid beauty; daily, on every hand and wherever we might
turn, there it was manifested, so that we became familiar with
beauty and took its presence very much for granted, and ceased
consciously to respond: until that daily, fleeting glimpse into
the heart of beauty’s very self came suddenly upon the inner
eye—flashed upon the soul—and was gone. The duration of
vision is of no consequence. To-day we passed by the grey
temple on the hill within a minute; and the glory of pale pink
blossom shading these ancient stones stays fresh in the mind
after a year: vivid as the Himalayan spring, and, like it, in-
vigorating.
We came quickly upon the Dak bungalow above Dungoli. It stood alone among a light screen of pines, high above a broad valley striped with green and gold and studded with houses. It faced the wooded tangle of hills and the white barriers of the north. One and all, these Dak bungalows and forest rest-houses are sited to command the snows and their vast green apron.

We had to wait around for ten minutes until the chaukidar (caretaker) could be found, and then our opinion of Kuar Singh received confirmation. He had already got a fire going outside, and almost before we could take stock of the clean, white-washed room and its single bed, he had served us with tea, sent Perimal out foraging for eggs and vegetables, and had the coolies briskly moving in search of fuel. Ring Badr climbed the tallest pines like a monkey to strike off dead wood.

The speed with which every one acted was justified by the arrival of a heavy thunder-storm, on which they had probably been keeping an expectant eye; for thunder was to prove a usual afternoon event. The valley filled up with curtains of torrential rain, into the grey heart of which tore enormous and jagged flashes of lightning. It made a spectacle of the first order and fetched us all out on to the veranda. Thunder-storms of such magnitude are rarely seen in Britain, and never in Scotland in course of my own experience. We went early to bed, now and henceforth not later than 9.30 p.m.; for we had asked Kuar Singh to have everyone up at five o’clock each morning. Our policy was to finish each day’s march by the early afternoon, so that we might all have time to relax in the sunshine, and enjoy ourselves at each day’s end. The Dotials, naturally, much preferred the early and cooler marching; rarely did they show disinclination to get up. But then, they lay hard and carried only one blanket. Whereas the four sahibs lay on inflatable mattresses (half-size, stretching from head to hip) and used down sleeping-bags.

In May dawn comes at half-past four. We could hear Kuar Singh prowling about alone at that time. By 5 a.m. prompt he had every coolie up; soon the crackle of fires and the flip-flap
of chupatty-making could be heard all round. Tea was delivered to us in our sleeping-bags. We rose then and introduced Kuar Singh to the mysteries of porridge-making. He was never to prove an apt pupil—always he would turn it out too thin or too thick, too lumpy or saltless. A man must learn to cook by eating his own work, and he will never learn otherwise. The Dotials cooked their Indian food excellently and we soon entrusted them with that only, unless for the straightforward boiling of soups or puddings prepared by Weir, who from start to finish was honorary chef to the expedition.

We were away at six o'clock. The day's march was seven and a half miles to Gwaldam. As we crossed the short turf on the brow of the hill, the scene below reminded us of Speyside, for the wooded valleys were filled with a Scotch mist. Cool air and ground wonderfully fresh after the night's rain or dew were to make all these early morning starts the most delightful hours of each day—when we were fresh too, and exhilarated, as now. The track dropped steeply into the first valley and rose again, twisting among scented pines on the long hill-ridges, and by the fringe of many a scattered village, where we sipped our last wayside tea for four months and met our first herd of goats, heading north for Tibet with iron bells tinkling, and laden with saddle-bags of grain.

A great part of the track was lightly carpeted with pine-needles and made excellent going for the Dotials' bare feet and for my own rubber-soled baseball boots, which I wore all the way to the Rishi. Leather boots are unnecessary for these tracks, especially when the day's march rarely exceeds ten miles; whereas sandshoes give the feet a delightful sense of lightness. Weir and I used baseball boots for their greater thickness of sole, which protects the feet from stones. The Dotials, when the track roughened, used sandals cut out of old motor-car tyres.

The coolies went fast that day. Everything seemed favourable: the bracing air, the softly carpeted track, its long gentle rise to Gwaldam shaded from the forenoon blaze by splendid trees, which on the upper stretch were deodars (a kind of cedar).
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TERRACED FIELDS BELOW GWALDAM
In background: Nanda Ghunti and Trisul

Photo by T. Weir
Amongst these, on the hill-top above Gwaldam village, we found the forest rest-house. A belvedere of lawn and rose garden fronted the building, commanding the great spaces over the Pindar valley and the Wan Pass to the snows of Nanda Ghunti and Trisul. These forest rest-houses are usually greatly superior to the Dak bungalows, being distinguished from them by well-kept gardens and perfect cleanliness inside, by a small extra charge and the need of a permit. They are sited always on the hill-tops and well away from the villages. Their beauty of setting is extraordinary, causing us to exclaim time and again that nothing like this could be seen in the Alps, and to bewail that so few Indians of the plains have any conception of the untold beauty of their own country.

We ourselves lacked a permit to occupy rooms, but a visiting official and the district forest officer were there and allowed us entry. When they heard that our next day’s objective was Bagargad, just under the Lohajang Pass, which we could now see eleven and a half miles across the Pindar valley, they warned us not to cross the suspension bridge over the Pindar River. It was in a highly dangerous state and likely to collapse. We must ford the river a hundred yards downstream. This sounded slightly alarming, for the source of the Pindar was thirty-five miles to our north-east among the glaciers of Trisul and Nanda Kot. The river at Gwaldam should be big and powerful.

Despite our height of 6,300 feet, the flies were worse than anything that we had known before in India. When we sat down to table, any article of food left for a moment unfanned was promptly blackened by raiders. I was engaged in telling my companions how Indian flies are as nothing compared to the flies of Egypt, when Tom Weir placed the first of two boiled eggs on the table.

‘Egyptian flies,’ I continued, not troubling to wave a hand over the self-protected egg, ‘darken the noonday sky, giants in fighting weight compared to this contemptible little army.’ At which words several squadrons of Indians made a simultaneous landing on the egg in front of us, coming on it with such weight of number that the egg rolled over the table. They had heard
Kuar Singh now announced that our bath water was ready. Once again we felt startled... and perhaps conscience-stricken; not one of us had thought of thoroughly washing for a long time to come. But Kuar Singh and his minions had gone to no little trouble and travelled no little distance to fetch us this water, so we trooped into the wash-house, at least to honour him by inspecting triumphant endeavour. Sure enough, a big zinc tub was one-third full of water, inhabited by a shoal of baggy minnows and a school of black water-beetles. Only Scott (who has loved animals ever since he was a small boy) chose to join them. The rest of us hastened out for a stroll.

It was to-day that the Dotials might be said to have 'discovered' us. They haunted the veranda and seized any good excuse for coming inside to look us over. It was Scott's camera tripod with the telescopic legs, our lilos and binoculars, that most fascinated them. One of the brightest Dotials was a young lad of seventeen called Ram Badur. He was small, with a face like a Gurkha, that is, broad and always smiling. He was quick in discovering how the binoculars worked—a problem that mystified most of the others until he showed them. From that night onwards he appointed himself one of our orderlies, his specially chosen task being to blow up the lilos, which he did with excessive gusto, leaving them tight as drums and with corks driven too hard to be drawn without employment of blasphemy. His willingness did not escape Kuar Singh's eye, who promptly harnessed his surplus energies to more sordid occupations, such as cleaning the kitchen gear. Before retiring for the night Ram Badur used to come in to us and salute smartly—a military salute, not the salaam. He would have made a magnificent soldier. He was full of enthusiasm. His one idea was to give service.

Our third day's march, Gwaldam to Bagargad, was a full day's work, but Weir was much better and the rest of us were feeling gloriously fit—and that applies to coolies too. I was specially interested in Toshi, whom I had wanted to turn down
at Ranikhet on account of his dull and listless eye and a mouth somewhat loose. His slouch had vanished. He was holding himself erect now and his eye had life in it. We were glad he had come with us. If this could happen so soon as our third day out, he ought to show a transformation later.

At 6.30 a.m. we descended two thousand feet to the Pindar River. MacKinnon and I went ahead here and travelled a mile upstream to the old suspension bridge. As rock-climbers we are accustomed to the idea of exposure on a cliff face, but this tottering contraption of broken beams, fifty feet above the white race of the Pindar, made our stomachs turn over. We turned hastily away and looked a hundred yards downstream for the ford, which turned out to be one half ford and one half log bridge. The bridge over the deepest sweep of the river had to be reached by a thigh-deep wade to an island of boulders. We crossed. On looking upstream to the old bridge, we were horrified to see an old woman and young girl already half-way over. That they could not have crossed where we did, without being carried, was certain; that they should choose to risk the old bridge testified to strong nerve. This was but the first of many enlightening proofs that we were to receive that young and old in the Himalaya show in daily life a fearlessness in face of danger that we should not expect of people in western countries. Of course, they have the occasion for it; and the peoples of the West always rise to their own occasions in war. None the less, my impression is that their attitude to the chances of daily life is braver than ours. Life is held more cheaply in the Himalaya.

The Pindar valley was the richest we had yet seen. Its broad wheatfields glowed in the sunshine, a gay and lively land through which the river wound snakily green, thrusting on and westwards into a maze of valleys and low hills. We turned north up the Kaliganga, which flows south from the Wan Pass. On either side the hills rose to 10,000 feet, heavily wooded, but never giving us a ‘shut in’ feeling, not even when we came into shaded Debal, a village in the forest at 4,200 feet; for the eye was at once drawn to a little promontory by the river and caught
there by the brilliant white of a temple spire. It gave a lift to the mind and heart, causing head and eyes to lift in sympathy, until—how unexpectedly!—they beheld the snow spire of Trisul shining bright and sudden through the right-hand branch of the Kali. Nowhere else have I seen a temple sited with such inspiring effect. It is small and humble, its white cone catching the sunshine and pointing up, up to where Trisul is, pointing too, pure white too, the one no more beautiful than the other and no less holy.

Beyond Debal the track began its two-thousand-foot rise towards Bagargad. The valley fell away deeply on the right as we mounted, its flanks still wooded, the trees crowding close under the path, so that we were walking among the tree-tops. It was a world I had never known before: the world of the bird and the monkey. The tree-tops undulated below us, rising and falling in cloud-like surges; sometimes blanketing the earth and isolating us betwixt the green waves and the blue sky, sometimes soaring round us in sun-filled glades, each leaf working, catching the light and speeding it around, here in a pale green blaze and there in glinting gold; every trunk of pine a thing of individual beauty as the sun washed across the bark; each red scale unique of pattern, margined in black. And amidst this scene there flew one verditer flycatcher, a heavenly bird clad in celestial blue.

As the track climbed it broke clear of the tree belt for a space, then rose quickly to a ghat in which Nanda Ghunti was framed. It stood so clear and bold and came upon me with such dramatic suddenness that I felt as though bludgeoned. I sat down to recover and then to admire this fury of a mountain, when a tattered shepherd wandered over from his flock of browsing goats. I knew why he had come—every man we had passed this day had stopped to beg a cigarette—but this shepherd came also for conversation. He spoke good English and had travelled more widely than I—the U.S.A., France, Egypt, Italy, and Japan. Like myself he had served with an Indian division. He was happy now to look after his flocks, but far more keenly interested in the welfare of the world than I should have sus-
pected of a Himalayan shepherd. It seemed worth inquiring into this blend of real content and concern. ‘You have a strenuous life,’ I said, ‘but much time to yourself each day on the hills. Do you not find that dull after so much travel?’

He grinned and shook his head. ‘There is a book,’ he answered, ‘which I know by heart, and I think about that.’

I took one guess. ‘It is the Bhagavad-Gita?’ He nodded.

When the Dotials at last came up I moved in among them, for there were still several whose names had failed to register on my memory. Each ten minutes or so I would stop one and ask: ‘Tumhara nam kya hai?’ This game was a most rewarding one, for I have never otherwise been able to give men so much apparent pleasure. As at Ranikhet their eyes lit up; they simply beamed, and answered ‘Phakir,’ and ‘Matbir,’ and ‘Narbir.’ These three with Shivlal were a young and particularly jungly type, lighting their own fire and cooking apart from the others (although on most friendly terms with all) and showing a marked spirit of independence. They all wore gold earrings and had an almost Tibetan cast of countenance. Their leader was Matbir, aged sixteen, whose confident, quite unaffected dignity of bearing, would single him out in any company.

After a ten-mile march we rose above Bagargad to the Dak bungalow. Its inside was inches thick in dust. Kuar Singh here gave one of his star performances. He drove us out to the garden to eat wild peas, while with lightning speed he made a broom of birch-twigs and scoured the room until all was obscured in a rolling cloud of dust, from the heart of which issued quick orders to Jung Bir and Ram Badur. By the time the dust settled fires were going and water was boiling, tea was served and curried potatoes were close behind. I had never seen a meal made more quickly.

Not until our meal was finished and the plates washed did Kuar Singh limp up for medical treatment. He was wearing a pair of good brown shoes, one size too small, and now he had a bunion. We had already seen that these shoes were worn to dignify his post as head coolie. They were prized as a mark of rank, and only the natural toughness of a Dotial’s feet had
made it possible for him to wear them on the march. There was one obvious cure. Tom Weir picked up the shoes and went through the motion of throwing them away. A look of incredulous horror crept into Kuar Singh’s eyes. He would die in his shoes rather than cast them. So MacKinnon opened up his medicine chest for the first time and dabbed some iodine on Kuar Singh’s toes, then on Prem Singh’s swollen knee muscles. This humble unveiling of the medicine chest was in reality a great occasion, although we knew it not, and should have been marked with rounds of musketry and airs on the pipes. The gradual unfolding of its mysteries was to fascinate Dotials, Kumaonis, and Bhotias daily for months hereafter, and to give MacKinnon many a metaphorical headache in diagnosis. Within a quarter of an hour the local headman had arrived for treatment. Everywhere we went henceforth, in every village near which we halted overnight, our expedition was to be valued chiefly on account of its medical stores and MacKinnon’s service—the more so the farther we went.

In the early morning the coolies discovered that our kettle was a whistler. The delight this caused was all the keener for its unexpectedness. Not understanding the cap, they had always taken it off until now. Suddenly it shrieked at them from the fire. It bowled them over with hysterical merriment. Henceforth it was to sound reveille for us every morning: a much more stirring call at 5 a.m. than the wailing pipes of a highland regiment or Professor Dyrenfurth’s notorious whistle. It issued warm reasons, not cold commands.

Shortly after 6 a.m. we climbed to the pass above Lohajang. I arrived last to find that all the Dotials had collected on the far side and were resting. And this was no wonder, for it was a magic place. A tall deodar grew on the pass and thrust high across the track a gnarled branch, from which a great bell hung. Facing it across the track was a little wayside shrine, and between the two, just under the bell, towered Nanda Ghunti. The sun flooded over the ground, over the shrine and the bell and the deodar, burnishing all with that wonderfully mellow light, which is the blessing of May mornings. I saw it shine over the raven
locks of the Dotials and draw out a blue sheen, a peculiar beauty not to be seen on a white man’s hair. They rose, several of them, having dumped their loads, and came back to ring the bell. Toshi went to the shrine first and prayed for a couple of minutes, then rang the bell afterwards, and sat down to watch Nanda Ghunti. It shone gently in the still air, flashing brightly only at the uttermost tip.

We descended a thousand feet or more and followed the left flank of the Wan glen seven miles due northward. The day stayed cool and marching was wholly delightful; most of the time we were shaded by pines, chestnuts, birches, and silver firs. The opposing flank lay close in to us, for the Kaliganga is here a true ravine. It was alive with birds: the flanks gave an impression of teeming life—an aviary on Himalayan scale. The glen was loud with their calling, for these birds were not warblers and we heard no song to compare with that of the British countryside. But they called, and the call echoed long across the high air of the glen, and the sound fell true to the ear, in perfect harmony with great spaces and the deep ravine, where the warble of a homeland bird must have been lost.

The most elegant bird of the day, and of all our days to come, was again a blue bird glimpsed gliding through the branches: a Himalayan tree-pie with a long slender body and blue trailing tail. Beside it the monal pheasant seemed crudely startling, always rocketing out from under us with hoarse cries like a grouse, a pale purple bird with a bright orange splash on its back and white on the tail.

As before, I questioned a few of the Dotials and could now claim to know all names. I have never before met all at one time so many men whom I liked so well. One and all they were upright men, high-hearted and straightforward in dealing. When tired at the day’s end they could still laugh and joke. Toshi I could hardly recognize as the lad I had doubted at Essex House. I came on him standing alone at the edge of a crag, looking down the sharp slope to the river, then north to the Wan Pass, which blocked the head of the valley. He was out in the sun; a cloth hung vividly blue from the back of his
head. He was a picture of alert vigour, and when I passed turned shining eyes to me. Involuntarily he stepped forward to speak, suddenly realized that he could say nothing I should understand, and fell back with a look of despair. However, I knew exactly what he wanted to say, and it was more than he would have been capable of expressing in words.

As we came down to the floor of the valley thunder and rain burst on us. The village of Wan lay close in front, in a bowl of the hills at 8,500 feet. Tops of 11,000–13,000 feet ringed the bowl, notably Jatropani on our left. Our immediate goal was the forest rest-house, a thousand feet above us, below and to the right of the pass. It was set among gigantic trees on a shelf.

The cloud blew over. At once we noticed a marked drop in temperature. It became positively cold as we toiled up to the bungalow and new snow lay on Jatropani. We found the giant trees to be cypresses and the shelf a lawn overlooking the Wan Gad. Below us were thatched cottages among terraced wheat-fields. Beside our bungalow stood a three-room cottage for the coolies. It lacked chimneys and dense clouds of smoke were soon pouring out of the doorways. The Dotials must have been thoroughly fumigated—I was unable to enter these rooms when I tried.

MacKinnon opened his dispensary. Three shepherds had arrived, asking treatment for an inflamed eye, a swollen hand, and asthma. Rather than disappoint the asthmatic shepherd MacKinnon gave him a Gelucil tablet for stomach trouble. This was the first of many times when we regretted not taking Dr. Longstaff’s advice to bring fizzy drinks, which give comfort where cure is impossible.

The Dotials were short of flour, and Perimal, after prospecting at Wan, came back reporting that although wheat was plentiful we should have to wait one day for the grinding of ata. This admirably suited our plans. We intended giving the Dotials a rest-day each week and Wan was an excellent stopping place. MacKinnon, Scott, and Weir at once made plans to climb Jatropani, 13,300 feet, but I resolved to have an off-day—or rather a day by myself. The effect of daily camping with a score of
others had already made me herd conscious, and even the smaller herd of char sahib was to be avoided when convenient opportunity offered.

That same evening I wandered off by myself through the trees behind the rest-house. A narrow track ran up the hillside and seemed to be making for a col above and to the right of the Wan Pass. After a mile it narrowed to a mere goat track through jungle, becoming grass-grown and difficult to pick out. The undergrowth thickened and bamboo-shoots sprouted to each side. The latter gave me pause: it was bear food, and this was ideal bear country. It occurred to me that I had not even a stick to protect myself. If one of the twists of the track brought me suddenly and too close to a black bear it would certainly panic and go for me. I slowed down my pace at the corners, but continued two miles, and had climbed two thousand feet, when a clearing of the jungle below revealed a view across the Wan Pass to rock peaks on the far side. They were ruddy in the sunset. At this moment a heavy animal began moving in the undergrowth behind me. The bush and bamboo were so dense that I could see nothing. I realized that if it came on the path below me my retreat would be cut off, so I started going slowly down. And the unknown animal at once began moving down parallel to me through the jungle. It sounded just a few yards from the path. It made no attempt to conceal its own noise, but padded boldly along, presumably intending to glimpse me without exposing itself. When I saw that dusk was gathering—that was the end. I bolted. A louder burst than usual came from the undergrowth, then a bend took me out of earshot. So many bends came so rapidly that quick backward glances gave no guarantee that I was not being hunted. I ran hard for a mile until clear of the jungle and out among more open tree-land, then strolled down to camp.

MacKinnon's dispensary had opened again. The shepherd with asthma had returned, not to upbraid us, but joyfully to declare himself cured. We could only stare in silent wonder. It was a mystery, for ever insoluble. He was so pleased that he had brought us another patient—a goat with a gashed neck.
Kuar Singh's bunion was next on view, and for the last time. He was quite unused to shoes, was wearing them out of vanity, and was thus learning wisdom the hard way. Henceforth we left him to carry on, confirming our ministrations to sound advice.

Weir, Scott, and MacKinnon left for Jatropani at six o'clock of a perfect morning. I went off alone shortly after them and returned at midday to find the Dotials waiting for me with a goat. Would I buy?—just Rupees 12. I said 'No.' Later I was to find this a modest price for Himalayan goat. But the beast was scraggy and we had not yet developed a craving for meat. To my utter astonishment, the Dotials then bought a rather fatter goat for themselves, still at Rupees 12. They led it over the lawns to the shade of the great cypresses, where the scene assumed the likeness of some immemorial rite of sacrifice. The officiating priest was Zungia, with a kukri, or long curved knife. He stood beside the trunk of the biggest tree. In front of him Perimal held the end of the halter, stretching it tight while the goat dug in its hoofs and bent its neck forward. The Dotials formed a wide semicircle round the tree, intent on the execution. Far across the glen the forested slopes were baking in white light, but over the lawn in the foreground only wide shafts streamed through the branches of the cypresses.

Kuar Singh stepped up and parted the wool at the back of the goat's neck. He stepped back quickly. Perimal gave a quick pull on the halter. Zungia rose on the balls of his feet. The knife flashed—thud!—and the head rolled away.

There could be no quicker death for a goat. The rest of the afternoon was spent carving. Himalayan goat is tough and needs mincing; this the Dotials did with our two hatchets, pounding and chopping the meat on blocks of stone or wood. Kuar Singh at length went round all the men, apparently getting their opinion on some matter of moment, at the end of which he came to me with the heart, liver, and one hind-quarter—a gift from the Dotials.

That coolies should on rare occasion get a goat from their sahibs was an old custom, which we intended to honour. But
that sahibs should get the best part of a goat from their coolies was something I had not conceived possible. One goat does not go far among eighteen coolies, so I reckoned the gift too generous and accepted only the liver.

This we enjoyed when MacKinnon, Scott, and Weir came back at 4.30 p.m. They had spent ten hours on Jatropani, climbing it from the Wan Pass and all finding altitude trouble near the summit. The route was easy and the view not outstandingly good. On the whole, they had enjoyed themselves, and Weir, who had had a high temperature on setting out in the morning, was at last thoroughly fit. Kuar Singh had catered for big appetites. Without saying anything to me, Perimal had acquired for us at Wan several pounds of potatoes. Kuar Singh curried them and served them with rice and fried liver. The meal was huge even by Himalayan standards. We have long remembered it; a more than usual amount of goodwill went into its preparation.

More rain at night brought another fresh morning. We reached the Wan Pass at eight o’clock. Through the branches of the trees we could see Nilkanta, like a blunt Matterhorn, glittering in the sun and flanked by the long Badrinath Range. I at once decided to climb Jatropani, just to be alone on a hill in the sun, with the Himalaya spread out northwards. The bagging of the peak concerned me little. So I handed over the ‘swag’ (Rupees 5,800) to Tom Weir and left the party to continue to Kanol, above the Nandakini River.

A lammergeyer, or bearded vulture, with a wing-span of nine feet, was soaring overhead. I climbed by the east ridge from the col. It was a broad, rolling ridge, tree-covered in the lower part, and my route along the crest led me into a broad green avenue between giant rhododendron trees and pines. The rhododendrons were in full bloom—pale purple, scarlet, and pink—not in a tangle of crowded bushes, but each a tall tree standing well spaced and apart from its fellow; each a blossoming of individual glory, encompassed by sunlit air. At the top of the avenue, where the trees began to thin out on the steepening hill, I sat down and watched them for a while.
I tried to let their beauty soak in, and when I did so a new beauty, something additional to all I had yet seen, seemed to shine out of them; out of the grass an added richness of green, out of the pines more fragrance of resin, from the blossom of the rhododendrons a glow of colour still brighter; unfathomable deeps and gentleness bloomed in the sky’s blue. This newness taken on by the world was like that of something freshly created. Its loveliness had youth and vigour and an immortality so obviously not of its manifested self, but of that ever new and ancient beauty, wherein all individual things have being and life, and which they serve. Five thousand feet under me, from the dark greens of the Nandakini Gorge up to the brown tip of the lammergeyer’s wing, turned to the sky where it wheeled in thin pure air, and in all that lay between, there was displayed the overwhelming harmony of things sharply strange and separate, that fully and from their beginning were entered into one another and oned. How clearly this integrating principle of the universe disposed and flung forth His power that morning. His name men called God, or the Infinite One, Beauty or Truth, according to the context in which His works happen to be seen.

I spent an hour at the head of my avenue on Jatropani. There were clouds gathering when I rose to go, still high and not threatening. But the summit of Jatropani was capped; nothing would be seen if I went there. Farther ascent loomed as an anti-climax. After a step or two I halted and turned down. A pair of lammergeyer were now circling the pass below me. They are one of the greater birds of the Himalaya. They seem to be particularly fond of bones, breaking them up just as a herring-gull opens mussels—by dropping them from a height.

From the pass I sped downhill to Kanol. It began to seem that my quick return was providential, for the expedition had not stopped at Kanol. MacKinnon was wearing moulded rubber soles (Italian Vibrams), and I could follow his spoor in the dust, going on and on, passing the village by detour and descending along the flank of the Mani Gad. The Mani was the deepest gorge I had yet seen. At the distant bottom of that immense V I could hear the roar of a torrent and sometimes glimpse a white
flash where the water shot down to the Nandakini. Both flanks were smouldering with reddened embers and the smoke curled blue at every yard. Had we not stopped that extra day at Wan, we should have been forced to stop at Kanol. The track must yesterday have been enveloped in flame. Everywhere on our march through the foot-hills we saw evidence of these fires, which the villagers start by plan to keep the undergrowth in check and to preserve the timber. If the bush is fired before it gets too high and dense the trees come to no harm; otherwise an accidental fire may destroy the forest.

Surrounded thus by white ash and red embers, the young pines stood clean of trunk and fresh green against the blackened earth. The sun filtering through the tops and tips gave them all a peculiarly live look. They were thrusting youngsters bursting with may-time energy. The very look of them revived my own flagging energies. The benefit was well timed. I was beginning to feel scared that a sudden typhoon of enthusiasm had seized the party in front and carried them off to distant Ramni, which ought to be next day’s march.

The track, descending now into the Nandakini Gorge, was extremely steep and stony. It punished the feet. This was the first and last time since Ranikhet that I regretted wearing rubbers instead of boots. At last, on the final and most abrupt descent of all to the Nandakini River, I saw on the floor of the gorge a flat meadow, and standing on it our green Base Camp tent.

Dak bungalows and rest-houses are a boon in the hills, yet I felt glad to be away from them now. This camp site reminded us of the wildest and remotest part of the Nevis Gorge in Lochaber, save that the river cauldrons were less dangerous. Scott and MacKinnon were bathing, so I promptly joined them. The pool was fast-flowing and deep, cold as a highland burn. One quick plunge and straight out was all we could take. MacKinnon and I spent an afternoon’s fishing in the Mani River, which swept into the Nandakini just below the camp. MacKinnon had a hook and a length of surgical gut, while Perimal produced bait from underneath stones—small, strongly wriggling worms. Alas, no fish honoured us with a nibble. All the
coolies tried in turn. But fish seem to be unnecessary to the joys of angling. Man asks only water.

Biting flies were especially bad in this camp. It seemed impossible to eat a meal unless to windward of a smoky fire. The moment the coolies saw our need they set about fetching wood without waiting for orders. In other ways too they seemed unable to do enough for us, and thus tempted us to respond by issuing cigarettes. This took them by surprise: at Ranikhet they had asked me for a cigarette ration as part of wages and I had refused outright. They had accepted the verdict and expected none, so now were delighted beyond measure. At this early stage the issue had some appearance of a psychological error; for my original idea had been to keep all the cigarettes for issue when spirits were low, as encouragement—and the day was fast approaching when such a psychological surprise might have helped to ease a difficult situation. On the other hand, Dotials have all the alarming subtlety of mind that goes with simplicity. If ever we issued cigarettes just to get extra work out of them, they would know it as soon as we. Instead, we gave them cigarettes when they were either in the full tide of happiness or short of tobacco, and so never by dark design. They enjoyed the cigarettes the more for this, and perhaps in the end such straightforward dealing in all matters gave them a sense of trust, which they might otherwise have lacked. However, that trust was not established yet. The foundations were still being laid. And the foundations consist of a multitude of little daily dealings, which only the foolish think of no concern or consequence. In the end they constitute a rock upon which the great events of later days will stand—or the sands on which they will fall.

Flowing westwards and parallel to the Nandakini River, and only six miles to our north, was the Bireh Ganga. We had now to cross the watershed between the two by the pass of Chechni Binaik, 10,510 feet. Our first stage led us to the village of Ramni on the south slope of the pass, by a march of eight miles rising along the north flank of the Nandakini. The trail became an airy ledge on a mountain wall, cutting deep into ravines and
out again to the open flanks, which were precipitous. The drop varied between one and two thousand feet. We had a narrow escape from falling stones.

Lammergeyers and griffon-vultures were out in force, patrolling up and down the gorge. The griffons are the largest Himalayan bird, larger even than the lammergeyer.

We passed through several little villages, where many houses had the same whitewashed walls and thatched roofs as the Scottish shieling. But outside them women wearing gaily coloured nose-rings were spreading grain in stone-flagged courtyards. We had never yet seen a man working.

In the early afternoon we entered Ramni and climbed three hundred feet above to a flat camping ground. After pitching the tents, Kuar Singh and Jung Bir—the latter seemed to grow more Chinese-looking every day and was now second in command of the kitchen—prepared soup and potatoes, raisins, and rice. We observed them peeling the potatoes with their fingernails, so MacKinnon walked over and gave them a knife. They accepted politely—and carried on as before. I then noticed Jung Bir stretch out a hand for the plates and begin polishing them with the end of his scarf. I went closer to inspect operations and must admit that all fingernails were spotlessly clean, perhaps cleaner than the knives, and the scarf was at least as clean as any dish-towel. So I made no protest. The coolies always washed their hands before cooking meals.

At midnight a thunder-storm wakened us. The rain began lashing the fly-sheet. Suddenly we heard a noise of digging round us and discovered that Kuar Singh, Perimal, and Jung Bir were out in their shirt-tails making a trench round the tent. They had left their own beds in a byre and accepted a soaking in order to do this for us. No sooner were they done than a heavy thunder-plump swished down. Had no trench been there the floor of the tent must have been flooded. A marked fall in temperature followed.

We made a late, seven o’clock start next morning. It was cold and dull and a mist clung round. For once the coolies lacked zest. They had spent a cold night, and now a long grind
lay before them to the Chechni Binaik. We plodded glumly to the pass to find mist sailing through as though the monsoon had broken. Eastwards and far above the cloud, Nanda Ghunti gleamed in blue skies, close enough now to show us the unmistakable glint of ice under the summit, which was less than twelve miles distant. We were drawing in to the high Himalaya.

As soon as we began the descent the sun broke through in strength and we entered the most delightful woodland. Sycamores and silver fir, Himalayan oak, holly, chestnut, and pine, stretched down the hillside to the rounded spur of the Sem Kharak, then dropped more abruptly to the Bireh Ganga. I felt loath to leave this woodland, and so did Kuar Singh. He pressed us to stop overnight. But the unreasoning hustle of western civilization was still too close to us, and the idea of a mere five-mile march to Sem Kharak, followed next day by another five miles to Kaliaghat beyond the Bireh, shocked our inexperienced souls. In truth, these hills should be lingered over, unless there is some very pressing reason for speed. We paid no heed to Kuar Singh, pressed on regardless, and aimed to make Kaliaghat in one day.

It was a long, hard descent to the Bireh Ganga, and a stiff climb of two thousand feet faced us on the other side. For the first time since Ranikhet the Dotials stopped for a midday meal in the river-gorge. Normally they take only two meals daily, morning and night. I followed this practice myself and found it sufficient. But to-day blue smoke sullied the noonday air and a great flip-flapping of chupatties resounded among the rock-walls of the Bireh. While we ate under the northern cliff, Perimal pointed out a dark brown object, hanging like a gigantic fungus from an overhang a hundred and fifty feet up. It was six feet across by four feet high. He called it a 'mowrah,' and was most excited—anxious that we should understand what it was. We think that it must have been a bees' nest.

Our day's longer march involved us in the afternoon thunder-storm, which caught and soaked us on the two-mile ascent. From the last shoulder below Kaliaghat we looked down the Bireh to a lake of pale yet brilliant green. It was the famous
CASTLES IN THE AIR
Nanda Ghunti from the Middle Hills of Kumaon
lake of Gohna, where the Bireh had once been dammed by landslide, the later bursting of the dam bringing disaster to the lower valley. A short way farther we came on the camping ground at Kaliaghat. So thickly was it covered with sheep-droppings that hardly any ground showed through. MacKinnon and I continued a few hundred yards on to the brow of a hill, where we came on a great crag, from underneath which—out of the very bowels of the earth—came the strains of a magic flute. While we listened, and the beliefs of childhood crept upon us once again, suddenly up popped three shepherds from the mouth of a cave and walked past us downhill, the leader still piping. We looked in at the cave. It was dry, would hold ten coolies, and beside it green grass awaited the tent. We camped there.

The kitchen staff moved into the cave. The rest of the coolies vanished, dispersing in groups among a variety of Cluny’s Cages on the abrupt and wooded slopes below. Wondering what their quarters were like I went in search of them after dinner, but in half an hour I had failed to find one. I returned to meet Unra Singh, a tall young Dotial with a fine face, whom we rarely saw around camp. He had come from his hidden lair to dig a trench for us, to the chagrin of the kitchen staff, who then dropped everything to help. We never again saw Unra Singh at work around the tent. These little touches, however, endeared the Dotials to us.

Between us and the Dhauliganga lay only the Kuari Pass, in all respects the pièce de résistance. It was 12,140 feet and would be snow-covered. We reckoned two days for the crossing, the first to Dhakwani grazing ground, twelve hundred feet below the pass, then over and down to Tapoban on the Dhauli. We prayed for good weather; the crest of the Kuari is known as one of the great view-points of the world.

Sunrise at Kaliaghat came with a clear sky, which had clouded again by seven. We contoured northwards at a height of nine thousand feet along the flanks of the Pui Gadhera, which flows from the Kuari Pass into the Gohna lake. From the first shoulder beyond Kaliaghat we could see below us the great scar
of the landslide, which still partially blocks the Bireh. We felt less surprised at the size of the slide than at the absence of others of equal calibre. Everywhere the slopes seemed to plunge at dangerous angles. The timber is carefully preserved for its binding value.

However, the combination of alarming slopes and binding woods makes for fascinating travel. Our path to-day came to its climax with a descent into a profound cauldron, where a giant waterfall lurked, almost invisible behind its own cloud of spray. I thought often that photographs could never give a true picture of such country. The deeps are too deep—the heights too high. They need a brush and paint artist, not a camera. In the valleys the peaks rise so abruptly that one can hardly take photographs without cutting off the tops, and tilting the camera gives an even worse effect. Luckily, Scott had a wide-angle lens, which he used more often than the normal lens. It is not too much to say that this was the salvation of his photography.

We toiled a thousand feet out of the cauldron, gaining a first close view of the Kuari Pass. It was a true mountain pass, high and bare, scooped below by a corrie, where Dhakwani lay. We crossed the Pui Gad in its upper reaches and followed the true right bank to a camping ground five hundred feet below Dhakwani.

We pitched the tent on a patch of gross-growing weeds, typical of ground on which herds of goats have been accustomed to lie. The coolies moved uphill to a great crag overlooking the camp site. Shallow caves yawned round its base. When all were settled I went round the lairs with a cigarette ration. One of the caves was an eyrie commanding the tremendous depth of the Pui Gad. Here I found the Matbir-Phakir-Shivlal-Narbir combine, whom we called 'the jungly wallahs.' This independent partnership had never given help around the kitchen or camp. They had none the less emanated an unmistakable friendliness and carried superbly. We liked them no less than those who gave us more personal service. In exchange for the cigarettes they asked me to sit down and share some roasted potatoes. I took only one, raked out from the red embers—
THE KUARI PASS

Photo by T. Weir
delicious!—white and floury, piping hot, the full flavour retained. This is the one and only way in which the most noble potato should be cooked. I did not have to feign my delight and rarely have I seen such gratification on a man’s face as on Matbir’s. This was one man who would have to stay on with us for the full five months. He would never let us down and would go anywhere. We held no conversation, but I stayed five minutes with them, then raced down the slope to the tent. Heavy and continuous rain fell that night.

The morning was dry but too cloudy for photography. An hour and fifteen minutes took us up to the pass, the broadest of all, sheeted by snow-fields. There was no view. Thus far everything had gone well. The Dotials had moved quickly and all of us were in good spirits. While we rested by the edge of the snows I tried lifting an 80-lb. load by its head-band, and, lacking the knack, failed to get it off the ground—it pulled back my head. The coolies chuckled. But when MacKinnon came along, picked up the load with ease and went trotting a hundred yards across the pass at a brisk pace, they rocked with laughter. The idea of a sahib running off with a load was a huge, incredible joke. I was relieved to see that altitude was affecting them not at all. But the moment we crossed the pass and started the long, gentle descent of six thousand feet to the Dhauli, everything began to go wrong. Thus far the routine of the march, our plans, our relations with the Dotials, and the health of the whole body—all had gone harmoniously. All things had worked in our favour. In one day the situation changed.

We were barely below the snow-line and still out on the open heath above the woodland area when Scott, who had been lagging, began to stagger drunkenly. He had quite suddenly developed a high temperature and felt ill. We did not take his plight too seriously at first, but when the sun came out and we moved down through fresh and delightful alps among the trees, he got worse instead of better. He had to lie down every few minutes, got up only with reluctance, and then moved like a snail. Latterly, MacKinnon gave him chlorodyne, which kept him going by easy stages. I began to fear that Scott was
destined not for the Rishi but for the hospital at Joshimath, where the Dhauliganga flows into the Alaknanda six miles west of Tapoban.

From the snows of the Kuari Pass we dropped to the dust and flies of Tapoban on the Dhauli, at 6,000 feet. The village spread over the last thousand feet of the hillside. As we came on to its fringe we had an excellent and most useful view six miles eastwards along the valley to the great wedge of Lata Peak (12,624 feet). To its right was the mouth of the Rishi Gorge, at the heart of which lay Nanda Devi, nineteen miles distant. But no entry can be made this way, for the route by the river is barred by a box-canyon, said to be impassable.

The heart of the Rishiganga is protected by an inner and outer screen of mountain ridges, which we had now to cross by two passes of 14,000 and 15,000 feet. The first of these, or its approximate whereabouts, could be seen on the ridge to the left of Lata Peak and situated eight thousand feet above the Dhauli. On its right-hand, Rishi side, Lata Peak fell in sheer precipices; but the left-hand, Dhauli side was an immense, thickly wooded slope. Somewhere under the slope lay the village of Lata, whence we should depart for the Rishi country and Bethartoli Himal.

This seemed to be a good place to let Kuar Singh know about our plan of action. So I took him aside and pointed out the Rishiganga, Lata Peak, and the pass. He recognized them all instantly. He had never been into the Rishi, but had come thus far once with Tilman. I told him then (after some laborious searching through my vocabulary) that we should probably spend seven days travelling through the Rishi, ten days in the Trisul Nala to climb Bethartoli, and six days withdrawing—a total of twenty-three days. After this had sunk in, and an understanding light had appeared in his eye, I went on to say that all eighteen coolies would go as far as the Trisul Nala, then twelve would be sent back and only six would stay. Did he think that six men would stay with us for mountain work? We wanted six men to stay with us for the full five months. Would we get them?
I was anxious about this last point. Friends in both London and Bombay had warned us that Dotials would not stay so long. Yet I felt certain that these men were as devoted to us as they very well could be: that wherever we chose to go, they would come too—and few questions ever be asked. To my consternation, however, I saw dismay written all over Kuar Singh’s face. He waved his hands in expression of sheer incredulity. He said that he did not understand me, meaning that he could follow my words but refused to believe their implication. Some misunderstanding had arisen and my Hindustani was inadequate to get to the bottom of it. Nor could I explain more clearly what we wanted of the Dotials. However, I tried again. I was satisfied then that Kuar Singh followed my words, but the worried and pained expression on his face was more marked than ever. I broke off the conversation.

We wound our way through the village to reach the main Dhauli track. There was no camping ground here, nor wood for our camp-fires, but a bungalow rest-house (wood-fuel supplied) stood at the eastern outskirts, beside the track and overlooking the river. There we stopped. The bungalow was locked and the chaukidar would not let us in without a permit, which we did not have. This chaukidar was tough; the fact that Scott was ill made no difference. We blew up Scott’s lilo and made him a bed on the open stone-flagged porch. His temperature was 103°. Flies hovered round him in clouds and a handkerchief had to be spread over his face. MacKinnon dosed him with various medicines.

The chaukidar took himself off.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Halt at Tapoban

We were convinced that after a decent interval the chaukidar would return with the keys; meanwhile, we sat around the door and waited. I calculated the loads for the move into the Trisul Nala, and prepared sentences to overcome the difficulties with the Dotials, or rather to find out what these difficulties were. This work took some little time, at the end of which we heard that MacKinnon and Kuar Singh had discovered some hot springs along the road, and there had met two Swamis, devotees of the religious life, one of whom spoke good English. He might be of help with the coolies. Weir and I hastened to visit him.

The hot springs were only three hundred yards up the valley, hidden from the track by rising ground. Into three square baths of grey stone a channelled stream spouted, the water draining away through the joints of the walls. It was clean water, its heat tolerable to the skin. At the edge of the upper bath were low stone huts. The centre room was occupied by the Swamis. In the dark interior we could just catch the gleam of saffron robes.

Within a few minutes one of them came out. He flashed a brilliant smile at us. He was a tall man of good bearing. I should guess his age to be thirty-five. His fine features were set off well by the carriage of his head. He seemed at first to have mastered that rare art of combining dignity with friendliness. But the smile was unnaturally dazzling. It was too good to be true. Where did we come from? he asked. And what were our plans? No sooner had we told him than he flew off into an exposition of elementary theology. He laid down the basic principles. But he was too enthusiastic; at first all the
more likeable on that account; but enthusiasm unbounded needs the more discipline and just a little restraint to make its impact on others effective. He went on and on. He did not know when to stop. The flash of his eyes and the dazzle of his smile became familiar play, to which we grew resistant. This man, we felt, is a most remarkable character, but he talks too much and is unbalanced. He is a happy man, but he laughs too much. He is interesting, but an exhibitionist. So that his seed fell on stony ground. And the tragedy of his energetic act was that his ideas were irreproachable. His central idea was the unity of man, the great cosmos, and God. All his other ideals and principles were rooted in that one, primary principle, and so were sound. From them could have sprung a doctrine that gave men real inspiration. Instead, he wrecked all by lack of self-control and restraint. He intended well and did harm.

We had to be rude to him to get away, none the less receiving from him a promise that later he would come to the bungalow and interpret the coolies’ troubles. This he duly did, arriving most fortunately at the same time as the chaukidar.

The chaukidar was still in aggressive mood, and would not, he said, settling himself on the low wall round the bungalow courtyard, let us use the bungalow without a permit from Ranikhet. This was the kind of situation in which our Swami revelled. His very vices now became virtues. He fastened on to the chaukidar and talked. Flashing eye and dazzling smile shone a thousandfold. We were, he said, turning up his eyes, the guests of India, and the chaukidar’s duty to his country was to honour us. He spoke of love and the unity of man—as always his ideas were good and true and his argument wrecked by self-display. The Dotials and chaukidar were laughing now, laughing at the Swami's too splendid performance, and we perforce were laughing also.

For the first time the chaukidar shot us a glance of fellow-feeling. It was clear that unless he gave way the Swami would be at his ear all night. Suddenly he rose, strode to the bungalow, jangled his keys authoritatively, and turned the lock. He stepped back and majestically waved us in, the picture of a
maharaja condescending to be persuaded. The egos of chaukidar and Swami were bursting with satisfaction, and we, the authors of all this happiness, crept humbly into our new home.

We made Scott comfortable, had a quick meal, and rewarded the Swami with biscuits and cheese and a cup of tea. Only with difficulty was he dissuaded from coming with us to climb Bethartoli Himal. At eight o’clock we turned him on to the Dotials. He got to the root of the matter immediately. I had told the Dotials, he said, that eighteen coolies must come to the Trisul Nala and then twelve must be dismissed. But they argued that the Ranikhet bandobast had been for all eighteen to stay with us five months.

There had been no such bandobast. If the contractor had told them that, he had done so on a misunderstanding. I asked the Swami to say so and to explain our plan of action. At each of several widely separated mountain groups, we should have long stops of ten to thirty days in order to reconnoitre and climb mountains, during which time we should need no more than six coolies. There would be no work for an additional twelve.

This was the kind of explanation for which my Hindustani was inadequate. Unluckily, it is also the kind of explanation that cannot be mixed up with a theological exhortation. The Swami talked and talked. Sometimes the coolies broke in. The controversy lengthened. The Swami was speaking far too much, never referring to us, and at length, and obviously, giving an altogether wrong impression of our plans. The coolies’ faces were getting more and more distressed. I stopped him and asked him to go away.

The day had been more tiring than usual, and especially exhausting after the long argument. I guessed that the Dotials must be feeling much as we did, and this was no time to press them further. So I drew Kuar Singh aside. Would the coolies come into the Rishiganga? He consulted Perimal. Yes, they would all come for seven days more, after which all must be retained or else all would go back.

That was a most enlightening answer. The truth was that they all were gasping to come with us. Our advisers who
THE THRESHOLD OF THE RISHI (LATA PEAK FROM TAPOBAN)
Dhauli ganga in the foreground. Rishiganga below and to the right of the peak. Pass over the outer curtain to the left of the peak. Lata village on the lowest left slopes of the peak.
promised that Dotials would not stay long with mountain travellers had been very wrong indeed. The coolies were grieved at our repudiating what they thought to be the true bandobast, and out of loyalty to one another were refusing to yield to us. It was an attitude that I felt to be altogether correct and admirable and I respected them for it the more. But their attitude was based upon an error for which neither party had been responsible. Had I been able to talk fluent Hindi, this trouble would not have lasted five minutes; for there was mutual friendliness at the back of it all. I smiled somewhat sadly at Kuar Singh. He salaamed.

The outlook seemed black when we went to bed that night. However, we must plan as best we could and act for the best in the ways left open to us. I calculated that next morning we must buy 200 lb. of ata, 50 lb. of dal (pulse), and 50 lb. of rice to feed ourselves and six problematical Dotials in the Trisul Nala.

Scott’s temperature was still 103°.

Weir, MacKinnon and I were up early on the morning of 21st May. Scott’s temperature had gone down at last, although how long it would be before he could cope with the Rishi country was another matter. We took the supremely optimistic view that to-morrow he could move to Lata, and planned accordingly. There was a heavy morning’s work ahead. Weir had worked out in detail the concentrated foods required for our mountain camps, so the immediate task was the extraction of stores from crates and kit-bags, followed by re-nailing and re-packing. We hoped to dump thirteen crates at Tapoban.

Before starting work, I offered eight days’ advance pay to the Dotials. To my joy they accepted. Having taken eight days’ pay they would give eight days’ service. Kuar Singh and I then went a hundred yards down the track to a merchant’s shop, where we ordered ata, lentils, and rice for delivery next morning. In this shop I was surprised to see such varied stores as salt, coarse brown sugar (gur), tea, cigarettes, matches, paper, pencils, and mirrors.

MacKinnon, Weir, and I then settled down to drawing nails
out of crates. There was only one small room in the bungalow, with a hard mud floor and whitewashed stone walls. We had to work inside because the flies outside were the notorious black *mora*, smaller than a house-fly. They bit. Every bite raised blood and inflamed the skin. I understood now why the Dotials usually wore long trousers, drawn tight at the leg rather like clumsy jodhpurs, unless on fly-free territory. At Tapoban we too gave up shorts in favour of long trousers.

Our work was lengthened by the confusion of gear, bags, crates, tins, all kinds of impedimenta, crammed over every inch of space. Every change in crate or kit-bag had to be entered in penny note-books. It was temper-trying work, finicky, requiring an output of energy—lifting, dragging, nailing, lashing—out of all proportion to the small product. Early in the afternoon everything was sorted out.

To get away from it all I walked a mile along the track towards Lata. The track rose steeply above the hot springs and turned a corner, giving there a good view of Lata Peak. On the hills behind the outer curtain there seemed to be an unconscionable amount of snow, which made me wonder if we should have trouble crossing the passes. And once we were in, with all our gear, we should have to spend our remaining time not climbing Bethartoli Himal but ferrying the loads out again—if the Dotials left us. On the face of it, the sensible course seemed to be to discharge the Dotials at once and engage fresh coolies either from Joshimath, Lata, or Surai Thota. When I made that suggestion to myself I loathed it; for I disliked parting with our Dotials. They were good men. I swore that we should stick to them and trust to finding ways unforeseen of winning them over during these next eight days.

I turned at that and walked back. On approaching the rest-house I saw a cavalcade outside. Several mules, bearers, and coolies stood beside the compound wall. Within the compound a group of four Indian officials were talking to Weir, Scott, and MacKinnon. I was a little taken aback by Scott’s appearance. He was talking with animation and interest and looked as though nothing had ever been wrong with him. Somewhere, it seemed
to me, a wand had been waved. Weir introduced me to our visitors. They were Mr. Hartwell P. Singh, an agricultural officer on tour, and a young Professor Chowfin of Allahabad University. With them were two scientific assistants. Singh was a most charming man. Moreover, he had taken his degree at Edinburgh University and was delighted to meet four Scotsmen in the Dhauli. His immediate job, he told us, was that of travelling north up the Dhauli to the Niti Pass on the Tibetan frontier, in order to test soil and introduce suitable seeds, potatoes, and fruit trees. We could hardly believe our ears when we heard that the potatoes grown in the Himalaya came from Scotland. He gave us various names, of which we recall only the Dunbar and the Arran Banner. We had been greatly impressed by the quality of Himalayan potatoes—white and floury, well formed, and of quality superior to anything I had ever tasted in Scotland. Himalayan soil must be especially favourable.

While the conversation was going on I could see the chaukidar out of the corner of my eye. He was hovering well in the background, terror-stricken lest he had committed sin by allowing us into the rest-house, thus depriving a government official of his proper lodging. But Hartwell Singh made us so welcome that the chaukidar's tense face began to relax. Singh arranged instead to occupy the school. The day was Sunday, which is observed as a rest-day by schools and post offices. His appearance could not have been a more timely aid to our own affairs. I told him of our lack of a good interpreter to clear away the coolies' misconceptions, and at once he agreed that after settling into the school he would come along and help. We parted then, to refresh ourselves with tea.

At nightfall Weir began calling in the Dotials. I fetched Hartwell Singh and we placed our chairs in front of the squatting group. Singh began. Straightaway he told them our plans, explaining that our long halts in different districts quite prevented our retaining coolies. Indeed, he asked them, what good reason could they suggest for holding and paying coolies when there was no work for them? As for the Ranikhet bandobast,
they had misunderstood the intention of sahibs who could have no interest in misleading them.

I asked him to add that we should love to take them all for five months, but that that could not be. He did so. In these two minutes the coolies' faces had completely cleared. They did not even consult together. Kuar Singh replied that six coolies would stay with us in the Trisul Nala. I asked for volunteers, but he said that all were volunteers. It was for us to choose.

The Dotials dispersed, but Kuar Singh stayed on to answer questions. For long we had been eager to hear how the Dotials live. Hartwell Singh could give most of the story himself, and only points of detail came direct from Kuar Singh or Perimal.

All our Dotials came from villages in or around the district of Doti in West Nepal. Nine of our eighteen were married. There is no legal restriction on the number of wives a man may have, and some Dotials have several, but for the most part they are too poor to maintain more than one. In this respect, I reflected, they were no worse off than the citizens of Britain, and better off than myself. Marriage under the age of fourteen is not allowed, but the point is not strictly observed.

Each spring the male Dotials of working age come out of Nepal into India by way of the Jhulaghat bridge over the Kali River, and so to the bazaars and railheads of Kumaon (which used to be a province of Nepal before the war of 1814-16). They work as professional load-carriers or coolies (the Hindi word is guli) at Ranikhet and Almora and the little townspheres of the foot-hill country; there especially during the summer. In late autumn back they go with their earnings to wife and family, stop just for a week or two, then are off again to the railheads, especially Tanakpur, for the winter. In early spring they return, stop briefly, and again are off. They have little enough home life. They are continually on the move. When they leave home they simply tell the local shopkeeper to feed their wives and families while they are away. And such is their known honesty that this is done without question. When they
return with their season’s earnings they ask what has been supplied and pay without fail or quibble.

Among themselves, dishonesty over money matters would seem to be almost inconceivable. If a Dotial on the march meets another Dotial from his own village returning home, he will often hand over his savings and ask for delivery to his wife. I met witnesses of this practice. It is not, when one considers, so much extraordinary as gladdening.

The Dotials are Hindus, and that was the limit of the information about their religion that we could hear from Hartwell Singh, who was Christian. To what degree they understand their religion we had no way of telling. To its better principles they gave every sign of being true. Their moral standards were in no way inferior to that of men of their own age in western countries. Nor did we find their intelligence lower. Indeed, there is no reason why it should be.

When we came to shrines or crossed passes, it was always the younger men who stopped and prayed—Matbir, Ring Badr, Toshi, and Shivlal—all men in their teens. The over-thirties passed on. One could draw several different conclusions: that the young Dotial is by nature more religious than his elder brother; that the old become sceptical; that the young are more demonstrative and the elder more reticent. But no one conclusion of mine is sure or to be preferred on the evidence. I favour the latter explanation.

The Dotials never lost their tempers with one another. We never saw them quarrel, or use violence, or show the inclination to use it. But they would, on provocation, quarrel with the men of another tribe and ‘fly off the handle.’ Such a quarrel would close as quickly as it opened, to be instantly forgotten. They never harboured a grudge. And in service they were not mercenary. Like all coolies they were not willing to move without an acceptable wage; but once a bandobast was agreed, they soon made it obvious that they served and followed us and not just the eternal rupee. On pay day they hoped for more than they got. On this score I sympathize; only Dotials do not hide their feelings.
We invited Hartwell Singh’s party to visit us that night. We gave them crates for seats and extravagantly lit three of our precious candles. The light reflected well from the white-washed wall. We drank tea—and talked: first about India and England.

Professor Chowfin cited examples to show and remind us how widely differing in natural talents were the two races, and how diverse in point of character, and therefore how much they had to learn from each other, if only they would. This same idea had been occurring to me ever since arrival in India. ‘No one nation of men,’ I said, ‘can ever manifest the full potentialities of Man. Not only does every individual man represent a unique aspect of Man, but each nation of the earth has something distinctive to contribute to the manifesting of Man in his wholeness—something that no other nation can give. The diversities of men and nations are needed for the showing forth of Man, with all his powers and attributes and beauty. The very differences of character are the essential things to be welcomed, honoured, and welded in commonwealth.’

Unanimously we agreed. The question arose whether Communism was a means to that good end. The Indians respected its efficiency and the urgency of its call in countries overtaken by famines and social miseries, but Communism appeared to demand forfeiture of the essential freedom of men and nations.

I suggested that Communism, allied to a philosophy such as dialectical materialism, could not be a practical ideal, and that ideals not practical are profitless. In its ideal form Communism attracts men of noble mind; it demands of men much self-denial and sacrifice in the service of their fellows. But such a demand ignores the fact that men are unregenerate and must first of all be changed. Selfless service and denial of self-interest can be attained only when a man transforms his character. The demand and need is for purification of soul, which is not afforded through dialectical materialism. I had heard of only one means to such purification. It is provided by one or other of the higher religions. I had heard of no other way to the kind of character change required. It is a means tried and proved and highly
practical. In divorcing Communism from a higher religion, its directors had made it an impractical ideal and ensured its abortion. Starting with good intentions, they had produced a monster.

Professor Chowfin pointed out the difficulty of getting starving refugees at Bombay to appreciate that truth, with which he and Singh fully agreed. The conversation naturally turned to religion. Our guests were Christian and Hartwell Singh thought poorly of Hinduism as understood in the hills. The Himalayan scene filled him with reverence, for the purpose of the natural universe, he believed, was to mirror God's attributes and perfections. The Himalaya displayed the divine beauty and power in unparalleled grandeur, commanding the awe of every man who beheld. But in the valleys, where the scriptures are not taught, understanding lags; the holiest awe felt by men is perverted by mistaken thought into superstitious practice. The gods in their multitudes are believed to inhabit the mountain-tops, and are worshipped with propitiating ritual.

I could not forbear reflecting that since diversity in men and nations, and in the natural scene, serve to manifest the infinite glory and attributes of the one God, so too might 'the gods' represent the host of divine principles and perfections that proceed from the Infinite One. To the integrating wisdom should men aspire. Only through it could they know truth.

Our talk ended at ten o'clock, which is a late hour in the Himalaya. We looked to an early start in the morning—if Scott stayed well.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Threshold of the Rishi

ON THE MORNING of 22nd May Scott was completely recovered.

We gave orders for the move to Lata. Our thirteen crates were deposited with the merchant near the rest-house against a receipt. Fortunately this was not the man from whom food had been ordered—at what I now discovered were extortionate rates. Kuar Singh learned that cheaper food could be had in plenty in Lata, so I cancelled the order—to find that ata for which I had agreed to pay Rupees 2 per seer (2 lb.) was promptly offered for Rupees 1/4. However, I agreed with Kuar Singh in again refusing; there seemed no point in making the coolies carry a needless 300 lb. up to Lata. In this decision we erred greatly.

The coolies moved off alone.

Only one thing remained to be done: the Swami had asked to be photographed. We called at the hot springs and there he duly revealed himself as the partial fake he was—greedy for self-display and full of vanity. He had himself photographed like a cheap entertainer in a variety of devout positions, robed and nude and with his eyes and hands turned up to heaven. I refused to stay and watch the performance, which brought dis-credit on things that are good. Yet, I insist that the man was only partially fake. He gave too much time to breathing and concentration exercises, did little or no work, and so had built up great energies, which he did not know how to control; consequently, they controlled him. He was verging on madness. There are probably more men of his kind in India than elsewhere in the world, because greater numbers follow the religious life, and of these more fall into the wayside traps.

At 9 a.m. I took the six-mile road to Lata. The track went
eastwards, high on the steep right-hand wall of the gorge. It seemed to me that morning wellnigh incredible that we had stopped just one day at Tapoban. I felt as though we had been there a week and rejoiced to be out on the open road again. And this road was very different from the roads of the foothills. We were truly on the threshold of the high Himalaya.

The scale of the whole scene had altered. Every feature of the landscape had grown big, or stark, or powerful. Far under me the glacial flood of the Dhauliganga rolled with grey and overwhelming force. No creature could have lived in it. Far above on the opposite side a long mountain-ridge exposed a crest of dark rock-needles—too sharp to be reached by any wingless creature. We should finally cross the threshold when we crossed the curtain ridge to the left of Lata Peak. The ridge was there, in front of me, and from behind it came a sparkle of remote snow mountains far in towards Dunagiri.
They were nameless, unclimbed; on their tops all the inhuman aloofness of the Himalaya seemed to be concentrated, and on them no living creature would find welcome.

At first sight it was not a world friendly to life at all, save to birds like the giant vultures, numbers of which were roosting at the edge of the track, so close that I could have struck them with a stick, and so much at home that they did not trouble to stir when I passed. In this world man's footing had to be made good by toil and in the face of physical risks squarely faced and accepted. As Hartwell Singh had remarked, it was a world that induced awe; and that not only in passing travellers but in the Bhotias who lived there and were familiar with the scene by daily use. Here a human feels very much the pawn or plaything of great and elemental forces, and if he would hold fast to the real greatness of his status in the universe he must needs be well and truly grounded in the God of his choice—in belief at least, better still in the practice of the spiritual life. Of this truth we were to find plenty of evidence in the shrines of the villages and grazing grounds.

Thus it was the greatness of power and feature that first drew the eye. It tended to obscure the underlying beauty, which was there, waiting, vivid on the mountain crests if more subdued down on the river's walls. It was a gloriously sunny morning after the night's usual rain. The track was thickly covered with mica dust shining like silver foil. More restful were the blue and yellow flowers blooming all along the edge of the path; and more enlivening the occasional waterfall foaming over the roadway. Nesting by the shores of these torrents were many plumbeous redstarts, little blue birds with vivid red tails.

At the second stream I came on the coolies, who were much inclined to idle, thus tempted by light loads and a short march. I chivied them on, for as near noon as possible I wanted to place an order for food at Lata, and so to-morrow make the first stage up towards the pass.

At the great northward bend of the Dhauli we crossed and re-crossed the river by two suspension bridges, made of wooden slats on thin wire rope. Between these bridges the Rishi burst
out from its mountain tangle to meet the Dhauli. It was flanked far back by peaks of 12,000 and 16,000 feet. Seven or eight miles up the gorge I could see the snow-plastered ridge of Bethartoli Himal's northern spur, but of the true summit nothing as yet. Opposite the junction of the two rivers a square, slated shrine of Tibetan character was ringed by a score of tall poles, from which flew strips of tattered cloth offered in honour to the Seven Rishis, who dwell in the sanctuaries of the Rishiganga.

We crossed to the Lata side of the Dhauli and turned north. On either wall bare yellow rock rose several thousand feet. A true canyon split the main chain. The path along the base of the cliff was much exposed to stonefall, and a large boulder or two on the track gave emphatic reminder that this happened. Risks are so common that no man worries in this land. Ever since approaching the threshold, I had felt the Hindu hillman's carefree attitude coming over me too. But I kept a wary eye aloft.

The rock-walls on our right eventually fell back, giving way to terraced slopes, until we could see that Lata must lie eight hundred feet above. Kuar Singh and I went ahead, climbing a winding narrow path among the wheatfields. The slope was remarkably steep and the noonday sun unusually fierce. We were streaming with perspiration when we came to the first houses. They were set back on stone-built terraces, one above the other. Each house stood in its own courtyard, was roofed with stone slabs, and was stone-built in its lower storey, of solid wood in its upper. In the upper wooden half, which normally had a balcony, lived the owner and his family. Women and children were already crowding these balconies, and one man of some thirty-five years came forward to meet us. I was much taken by his frank approach and firm hand-shake. His name, he said, was Murkulio. He wore a jacket and trousers of grey homespun. His whole bearing was so unassumingly confident that I wrongly guessed him to be the headman.

He invited us into the courtyard of his house, situated at the village centre. Rugs were spread for me on a bench and a
tumbler of hot sweet milk presented. The sun blazed on the outward half of the courtyard, but we sat in the shade of the house behind and looked over the gorge of the Dhauliganga, which from here seemed almost vertically under us. It was the most wonderfully sited village that we were ever to see in the Himalaya, a mountain eyrie at 8,000 feet affording a vulture’s prospect down the Dhauli. Directly opposite was the rock-wall of a 13,600-foot peak set far enough apart to let us savour the height and space and the air between, in which we were poised. The light and shade and contrasting colour in the courtyard grew fascinating, for all the inhabitants were gathering—except the younger men, who were working out of doors, engaged with flocks or trade or in other ways not known to me.

The working of such a hillside must make great demands on the vigour of the community. The people are Bhotias, but incorporate a small number of low-caste Garhwalis, called doms, who are the drummers, leatherworkers, and labourers.

The half-dozen principal men or elders had formed a cross-legged semicircle round Murkulio and me, and behind them were crowded men of lower status, not more ragged but more peasant-like. Behind them again came the women and children. Two hubble-bubble pipes were circulating, but only among the front-bench councillors. They put no questions to me. They just smiled, sucked swiftly at the pipe, and waited. The whole day was ours.

I told them where we came from, how many we were, and our immediate plan. They understood at once. We were not the first expedition to pass Lata. Murkulio produced a chitthi signed by the Swiss mountaineer, André Roch, testifying that Murkulio had served him well as a porter in his 1939 expedition. I saw now that Murkulio could not be the village headman, and was proved right by the latter’s arrival. He was a tall and energetic man of forty, dark-eyed, with a shrewd and friendly face. He heard our plans from Murkulio (who then retired), ordered two more tumblers of boiled milk, then took a quick but careful look at me. In that instant I knew that the price of my food had been fixed, unchangeably.
With this man there could be no beating about the bush. I ordered ata, rice, and dal for Rupees \( \frac{1}{6} \), 2, and \( \frac{1}{10} \) respectively. This was more expensive than Tapoban. Then came the blow. Our food could not be ready until to-morrow evening. The ata had still to be ground. Everywhere in Kumaon we found this same hand-to-mouth existence. The villagers keep no store of ata, but grind on one day only enough for the next. There may be some good reason, but it cannot be that ata quickly goes bad, for we were to get plenty of experience to the contrary.

Thus a day was lost through our not buying at Tapoban. But I could think of ways of turning this loss to advantage. The route from Lata up to the pass was notoriously difficult to find, and most previous expeditions had taken a Bhotia shepherd to guide them over the outer curtain to Durashi, a summer grazing ground for goats. I felt that we ought to do our own mountaineering. But each of the two stages over the pass would have to be reconnoitred in advance, and the first could be to-morrow’s work. So I accepted the news of delay with a happy sigh and drank down my second tumbler of milk.

The headman offered us the use of a house in the middle of the village, which I hastily declined. There were thirty-two families in Lata. Our hearts were set on privacy, so far as that could be had now that MacKinnon wore a bright red beard. I declared for a camp site outside the village. As it happened, there was only one level patch of field on the whole hillside, lying a quarter of a mile to the north-east. We went there at once and pitched camp. The field was of bare, crumbly earth, but the headman lent his best carpet, which, folded double, filled the tent’s floor space. The coolies faded away into the trees. Peace reigned, briefly.

An hour later Scott, Weir, and MacKinnon arrived. The dispensary opened and in no time the camp swarmed with patients. One or two of the young men came to offer themselves as guides. We had agreed among ourselves that next day two of us should prospect the route four thousand feet up to the Lata kharak (grazing ground). Accordingly, we refused
the guides. This greatly excited Kuar Singh. He had never seen us in action away from a good track. The thought of our adventuring all on our own up a mountainside worried him beyond measure. He appealed to me to hire a guide. I controlled myself and tried to tell him of our reconnaissance tomorrow morning—mistaken tactics; for in despair he appealed to the others. Weir got angry and banged the map, which was the right answer. Kuar Singh withdrew.

At seven o'clock in the morning Scott, Weir, and MacKinnon, accompanied by Perimal and Goria, set off for the Lata kharak. I stayed below to take in the food supply. It was a brilliant morning, which I spent sitting leisurely on a lilo and writing. From time to time Kuar Singh plied me with cups of tea, or sent up little vegetable dishes—unknown greens found by the Dotials, invariably good but overspiced. The 'jungly wallahs' were making a study of me to-day. Matbir, Shivlal, and Narbir sat by the door of the tent, for the blast of the forenoon sun had driven me inside. Inch by inch and one at a time, they edged through the doorway. Their expressions reminded me of Labrador gun-dogs, edging guiltily but hopefully into a forbidden drawing-room. But I was in fact delighted to see them. When they were all inside and inwardly rejoicing, I showed them the quarter-inch maps and explained the rivers, hills, and villages. They grasped the idea at once, and followed the river systems of the Alaknanda and Dhauli with their fingers, stopped at the principal villages, which I would name (since they could not read Roman script), and which they greeted with yelps of delighted recognition: 'Niti, Malari, Lata! Tapoban! Joshi-math!' They were so keen to learn and showed such a quick intelligence, that in the end they left me with a sense of the real tragedy that full exercise of the mind was to be denied them. Matbir, but for the accident of his birth-place, would have had a better brain than I.

Early in the afternoon our village ata was declared to be ready. Kuar Singh collected six kit-bags and the spring-balance, and with a tail of a dozen Dotials accompanied me to the headman's courtyard. The village elders were already squatting
round a coloured carpet and the hubble-bubble pipe was passing freely, when I arrived to take my prepared and be-rugged bench at the carpet's edge. The small boys were driven off and the ornamented wives and daughters hung out of the top windows. The first sack of ata was heaved forward. They dumped it before me on the carpet and the village scales were produced. They were the traditional type. Two iron chupatty bowls were suspended by old bits of string from a central wooden bar. A hole in the middle of the bar, threaded by a string, was the pivot. One of the bowls was heavier than the other, so a chuckie-stone wrapped in canvas had been tied to the string suspended on the opposite side. For weights there were produced before me several bits of stone and one old iron weight, which bore the printed legend Rupees 42½. The headman 'proved' the stones to me by balancing them against the iron. I had no doubt of the accuracy of this remarkable instrument. It had survived generations of Bhotia trading, and they deal as hard and close as Welsh farmers.

The task of weighing 300 lb. on pans holding only a seer would have held us there until evening. I signed to Kuar Singh. He presented my spring-balance to the headman. I told him that two notches meant one seer, that fifty seer could be weighed at one time, and that all was achchha and thik (good and correct). It passed from hand to hand and the notches were carefully counted. Then they took it away into a storehouse and made a test, returning it with a confirmatory nod and a terse 'Thik.'

We began weighing the dozen grain-bags, all of odd amounts. It was then revealed that no dal was available in the form of lentils, but only as a black-skinned split bean. I accepted twenty-five seer, feeling that here was good nourishing food. And in right conditions at low altitudes I suppose it must be. But we were soon to be disillusioned about its rightness now. The ata, too, turned out to be excessively brown and coarse. There was too much husk in it. The Dotials' faces were a study; down at Tapoban the ata had been snow-white. We were to find in our travels that good ata can be had only where
it is ground in water-mills, and that is happily in most villages of Garhwal and Almora. Where ground by hand it is always full of husk and grit, as at Lata. Kuar Singh was beating his breast in self-reproach, as well he might. I was glad to see that from his own men came no recriminations. They gave despairing moans, and were silent.

The noting and estimation of prices per sack were done by myself and a village youth of fourteen years. He spoke a word or two of English and was in charge of the village school. The schoolmaster at Tapoban had been likewise not more than sixteen years; he had spoken English passably well, given time. The Lata boy was unusually charming, for he was unspoiled. The other young schoolmasters we met in the Himalaya were too much on the defensive, unnaturally and laughably haughty in their effort to keep up appearances and to assume a rare dignity in dealing with us. They had my sympathy; they were doing good work without having been equipped. The Lata boy, however, was as natural as a Dotial. He gave me a friendly smile on meeting, then sat by my side and quite frankly cribbed over my shoulder, so that our estimates of prices were identical and our final additions agreed.

He got to his feet then and presented his paper to the headman, who studied the figure carefully, then cast an inquiring glance at me. I looked down at my note-book and read: 'Rupees 220 and 8 annas.' His face lighted up in apparent relief at my unexpected accuracy. 'Thik!' he exclaimed. 'Thik!' I rose solemnly and held out my hand to the boy, who grasped it firmly. I shook his hand and said 'Shabash!' which means 'Well done!' A deep flush of unaffected joy spread over his whole face. His eyes sparkled. It was a most wholesome sight.

A special grace was given me, so that I did not laugh.

I paid up and departed. We returned to camp in time to welcome the Lata kharak party. They arrived in high spirits. I had never seen them all in better form. The reconnaissance had after all been of real value, for the way had been hard to find and the best route discovered. From the kharak they had
been able to see Bethartoli Himal. The north ridge, by which we hoped to climb, had been clear, massively corniced, they said, and bearing an ice-cliff high up, which they thought might be turned on the west.

I was interested to hear, too, that Perimal and Goria had expressed great keenness to stay with us. They were a tough pair, inseparable friends, strong of personality. It seemed to us that we could ask for no better men, if we could be sure of them. Perimal especially I have already likened to a brigand chief, with merry and mischievous dark eyes. If we had his goodwill all would be well. If we lost it, he would be a troublemaker and have too great an influence over the others. On the other hand, if we made him head coolie, his responsibilities might steady him down.... That seemed to be the answer. We had wanted six Dotials who above all were of tough character. Two had chosen themselves, so we chose them too.
CHAPTER SIX

Into the Rishi Gorge

THE DOTIALS HAD looked after their own food supply on the march out, and I thought that they might safely do so as far as the Rishi Gorge. Consequently at Lata they had bought in their own food for eight more days—four days into the Rishi and four out. These arrangements I left to Kuar Singh. But just before setting off on the morning of 24th May I checked up, asking individual men: 'You have ata for eight days?' Each said 'Yes.' All seemed to be well. We began moving uphill.

We had a good track at first. It rose steeply for eight hundred feet and then contoured the hill-flank among trees for nearly a mile, finally petering out among crags where the route turned up in twisting curves to the kharak, still a mile away and between two and three thousand feet overhead. Its whereabouts remained screened by the forest and hill-slope, and by successive ravines and ribs and knolls. MacKinnon had yesterday built several tiny cairns; with these to help we made good speed. The route invited loitering, leading repeatedly on to promontories where great Dhauli vistas opened among the branches. If we kept steadily onwards it was only because so much work had to be done aloft; and we wanted to see Bethartoli Himal before the afternoon clouds gathered. In three and a half hours we arrived at the Lata kharak. The time was ten o'clock.

The kharak was a broad grassy saddle depending at right-angles from the main ridge above, and set between two wide and deep ravines. Eight miles south-south-east Bethartoli Himal was clear, a more splendid mountain than I had ever dared to expect. From this angle it towered above all peaks to our south, dome-shaped and shining white, presenting a north

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face thickly iced. From the dome's right-hand edge the great arc of its north ridge swept down to the north col. The instant I saw the line of our proposed route I admired its elegance but disliked it on two counts. First, and most important, the approach line to the north col from the Trisul Nala must go right through a great glacier basin close under the north face, which threatened avalanches. Secondly, high on the north ridge and just under the summit, a bit of the crest had been nibbled out. That tiny step might have escaped the eye of any one not a mountaineer. It was a blemish on the grace of a swift curve: it meant an ice-wall of three hundred feet at least.

Our distance was too great, however, for the drawing of conclusions. The glacier basin, seemingly so narrow, might really be wide enough to accommodate both ourselves and the avalanches. The ice-wall might be turned, as the others suggested, by the ice-slopes on its west side, although we should never see these properly until we were actually on them.

Bethartoli Himal adorned the inner curtain, which we had to cross much farther north and so get round behind our mountain by way of the Trisul Nala. Meantime, we had still to get across the outer curtain, now only two thousand feet above and only one and a half miles to our left, as judged by the map. I could see it to be true mountain ground, but not difficult in a technical sense apart from the matter of route selection. I remembered that Shipton and Tilman had experienced trouble in finding the route sixteen years before and been bogged down by deep snow. They had been forced to spend two days in crossing the pass from here. Accordingly, I resolved to profit and to make an immediate reconnaissance.

We pitched the tent. There was wood in plenty around but no water. However, an old snow wreath lingered several feet down the north slope, and Kuar Singh was soon boiling it down by the potful. I waited only long enough for a mug of tea, then snatched a few biscuits and set off alone. There was a rounded hill two thousand six hundred feet above the camp, and my half-inch map marked the pass immediately to its left. I took
no spare food or clothing, for I intended to be back for afternoon tea. The ground looked easy for a mountaineer. The scale had deceived me.

I climbed eighteen hundred feet on a leftward slant, then began contouring eight hundred feet under the summit. This was in fact the correct line of the summer route, but in May it carried far too much snow for laden coolies. Repeatedly I found myself crossing broad, shallow gullies, brimming with old, well-packed snow. A coolie who slipped there would slide several hundred feet and might easily strike one of the projecting boulders and so break bones or kill himself. Dotials, of course, are as sure-footed as goats, but I had still to see them at work on mountains. To-morrow, I decided, they must go by a lower route. We could not afford time to rope them over so long a traverse.

Other and no less cogent reasons for preferring a low route appeared when at last I had contoured round the hill to the slopes under its long north-easterly ridge, which embarrassed me by offering not one col but four. From each hung shallow gullies filled with soft snow. Between them were long, gently inclined rock-ribs. This whole flank, having a north-easterly aspect, bore far more snow than the westerly aspect above the kharak.

I had no choice but to try each of the four cols in turn and the true pass was the fourth. Up each I toiled several hundred feet in knee-deep snow, only to find myself on sharp rock-edges, from which cliffs dropped six thousand feet to the Rishiganga. Then back I had to go, scramble over the rock-rib lower down, then try the next gully. The drain on energy was immense. Driving myself hard, I spent five hours reaching the pass. The seven-thousand-foot ascent from Lata had been too much without a meal, and now I proceeded to pay the penalty.

I took my descent direct by a snow-gully, dropping a thousand feet or more and then contouring below the snow-line. I had hoped that this route might be easier, but the only advantage it gave was freedom from snow. It traversed in and out of the same gullies, which had now cut deeper into the hill. My pace grew slower and slower. I had made too high an expenditure
of energy for too low a fuel intake. Darkness fell when I was little more than half-way to the kharak. Halts became necessary every five minutes, yet if I did halt fits of shivering came over me, for at thirteen thousand feet the cold after sundown is around freezing point. In short, I was exhausted. I cannot recall ever having felt so exhausted on a mountainside before. To feel an urgent need to rest, in order to summon up energy for each hundred-yard move, and yet to be scared of halting because of the penetration of cold into the body, is a punishment to fit the crime of bad mountaineering tactics. But I had not thought to find myself mountaineering at all.

The situation was partially saved by the discovery, in the pocket of my bush-shirt, of a handful of sugar, in the form of sweets, which had been a parting gift to the expedition from Miss Jenny McNeil, of the old Tricouni Club of Glasgow. These got me back to the slopes above the kharak after a fourteen-hour day. I was still several hundred feet above camp, creeping down foot by foot in the dark, when suddenly I came on Kuar Singh and Ram Badur. They were wrapped in blankets and coming up the hill in the faint hope of meeting me. I have never heard such salaams! as I heard then. It did me as much good as a noggin of rum.

Scott, Weir, and MacKinnon, knowing me better than Kuar Singh, had bedded down, but had kept a potful of ‘hoosh’ simmering beside the fire for me. I could take no more than a spoonful or two. I had a high temperature and felt flat out and shivery. Just before falling asleep I heard Scott saying that Kuar Singh had brought us bad news: some of the Dotials had insufficient ata for the double journey. (Truly, I thought, this is one of my bad days.) He had sent Gulab Singh and Gopi back to Lata to fetch up more. But I knew that we should never see them again. To-morrow we should be over the outer curtain.

We had barely lain down, I felt, before we were up again. At half-past six we were moving up the hillside, climbing six hundred feet to clear the scrub on our left, then contouring well below the snow-line. My regrets about yesterday's reconnaissance vanished as we contoured, for the Dotials were inclined
to grouse at this low route; they wanted to go high as I had done. From below the snow higher up looked ever so much less than it was. It is an optical illusion common to all mountains that expose crag. But for the good fortune of my unfortunate reconnaissance, we should certainly have gone high and quite as certainly been benighted.

So, the Dotials toiled among rough heath and broken ground and called on Shiva to preserve them on their next birth from route-selecting sahibs.

At the half-way mark they set fire to the heath behind them, which I assumed to be a route-marker for the benefit of Gulab and Gopi. An acre of the hillside was burning well, and the smoke might well persist until the afternoon.

After four hours we entered the thousand-foot gully below the pass. We were now at thirteen thousand feet, the approximate height of Jatropani, and the altitude began to tell on the Dotials. MacKinnon went ahead and kicked the steps. He was the heaviest man we had (about 200 lb.). Where MacKinnon treads, no snow will again subside. Accordingly, the first ten Dotials enjoyed a staircase, but wear and tear left unpleasantly outward-sloping steps for the last half-dozen, who by natural process were the very men who needed good ones. For the men who were most ill at ease had modestly dropped to the rear. From a good strategic position on top I watched everyone coming up. Like myself, Scott and Weir were impressed by the strenuousness of Zungia. We could see now that he was a man of immense energy and could use it unsparingly. He was thoroughly happy on steep snow with a 50-lb. load. He arrived well ahead of the others, grinning widely. And we knew why. We had nearly turned him down at Ranikhet because we had thought him too old. He had then claimed to be thirty-six and we hadn’t believed him. This he knew well. Now and henceforth, until the end of the expedition, he proved himself the best coolie we had for mountain work.

A close second was Goria, aged twenty-two, who climbed fast and confidently despite a high-altitude headache. The men who did least well were the very young. They had heavy loads to
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contend with, were unfamiliar with snow, and not confident of their own capacities. It was obvious that Shivlal and Ram Badur could not be asked to go on high mountain work. The latter was such an excellent servant that we regretted ruling him out.

We rested on the sunlit col for half an hour and gazed across the chasm of the Rishi to the jagged miles of rock slabs rising six thousand feet on its far side. On the face of the highest and barest slabs clumps of stunted pines sprouted incongruously. Below us were seemingly bottomless cliffs ribbed by sharp edges and split by gullies. We could see the ledge of our route traversing the first wing of the cliff leftwards and vanishing at the edge. If the ledges were continuously snow-banked ahead, we might still not be able to make Durashi in one day, or be unable to send the Dotials back alone from the Rishi Gorge. We pressed on. The goat track went well round several wings of the cliff face, largely free from snow by grace of its south aspect, until at last we came on snow steeply banked on a long ledge. The crags below and above were almost vertical. We fetched out two hundred feet of nylon rope.

The snow being hard-packed, MacKinnon went ahead and cut a line of steps. The rope stretched exactly across the ledge and the Dotials used it as a handrail. There was no need to rope them. If any man slipped, he need just throw back his head and away the load would go, leaving him free. But Dotials, we could see, do not slip. They may go slow, and hesitate, but they stay on their feet. They all used the handrail. Matbir revealed himself as a first-class man on snow. He had confidence and made several journeys at speed to carry loads for his weaker brethren. Four of our permanent men were now fixed—Perimal, Goria, Zungia, and Matbir.

The line of ledges led downwards into the bed of a gully. To get the continuation we climbed two or three hundred feet up the bend then again struck a rightward slant up a steep and snowy ledge. Close to the top Munmir's head-band slipped off. His load went sailing over the cliff, never to be seen again. At one stroke he lost us five days' ata. His own bedding and
jacket were lost also. I felt exceedingly sorry for Munmir. He was the only Dotial we ever saw drop a load, and he clearly felt the moment's carelessness to be a professional disgrace. He had dismay in his eyes from then onwards. Our first reaction was profound thankfulness that we had lost a load and not Munmir. But the blow to our plans in the Trisul Nala was severe.

Shortly afterwards the ledges became much easier. When we had travelled half a mile from the pass we emerged on a broad, grassy gully, down which we dropped fifteen hundred feet, collecting juniper firewood as we moved, to the deserted kharak of Durashi. It lay in the fold between the outer and inner curtains. Several grey stone huts marked its entrance, doubtless to shelter the shepherds in summer, for the monsoon rains must be exceptionally heavy in the Rishi country. We passed on across a boulder-field to a meadow of wild, blue irises and garlic, watered by a rivulet from an old snow-bed. There we camped. The alp was a sun-trap. We sat back and relaxed, looking far across the Rishiganga to the great and gleaming ranges of Badrinath.

Everyone was exhausted. The Dotials had done nobly but we had never seen them look so weary. All had felt the altitude. To give them a hand, I fetched out the kettle and a canvas water-bucket and made the first of the fifty paces to the snow-bed. At once Kuar Singh, Ring Badr, and Ram Badur leapt to their feet, exploding with concern at the very thought of my doing camp chores in the presence of sixteen Dotials. Ring Badr ran up to me and pleaded in a horrified tone of voice for the kettle and bucket. I handed them over. Off he went to fetch water, while Kuar Singh got a fire going and the others helped to pitch the tent.

We gave them an issue of tea-leaves that evening, which pleased them mightily, and more cigarettes, for there was going to be frost at night and the firewood ration was too small to keep the cold at bay. They had only one blanket each. We allowed them to pitch the high-altitude tents, and these must have been warm enough in all conscience, with three men in
each. The remainder used caves and a tent made from the spare
groundsheets. For my own part, my high temperature was still
with me, so for the first time I took refuge in both of my duck-
down sleeping-bags.

As might well be imagined we made a late start in the morning.
At 8 a.m. Kuar Singh and Goria left us to return towards the
pass in hope of salvaging Munmir's load, and to see if they could
link up with Gulab and Gopi. A forlorn hope. We gave
them nylon rope and said that they must be back and across the
second pass and down to Dibrugheta before dark. This they
promised. Our day's work was indeed much easier, in terms
of physical strain, than yesterday's. Eastwards lay a gentle
slope of two thousand feet to the pass on the inner curtain.
We arrived there early.

As our heads rose above the rim we were suddenly con-
fronted by Nanda Devi. It filled the whole world. A vast
projectile bursting arrow-like from the bent bow of the Rishi
Gorge. Essentially it was a rock mountain, 25,645 feet, and
the greatest that we had ever seen or imagined. Circling round
its foot within the blue depths of gorge and chasm were the
great peaks of the Sanctuary Basin, raising at their iced centre
the broad, dark plinth, from which the peak fairly hurled itself
through thin air, tapering to a flame-tip, white upon blue space.

The main body of peaks due south of us were much closer
and more awesome in their detail of ice and rock. Bethartoli
Himal was only seven miles away (as against Nanda Devi's
thirteen). We looked straight on to its eight-thousand-foot north
wall, heavy with ice both from hanging glaciers and the cornice
cliffs of its ice-cap. The north ridge seemed from here more
feasible than from the Lata kharak, the ice-wall being worse,
but hope of turning it westwards somewhat better. On the
other hand, the glacier basin under the north col had become
still more intimidating as a line of approach. It looked certain
now that ice avalanches coming off the north wall would sweep
the basin from side to side. I accordingly favoured trying the
east ridge, which ran left from the summit. We should thus
avoid entering the north basin, but would need an additional
camp and take a day longer to make the summit. \textit{En route} we should require to traverse two minor tops of 18,110 and 20,730 feet; but the loss in height between the two would be only six hundred feet. I had no hesitation, then, in urging that we try this route in preference to the north ridge.

The Dibrugheta alp was three thousand feet below us, a bright green hollow tucked away in a fold of the opposite mountain, which was called Hanuman (the Monkey God). Between us and it a deep ravine cut southwards from the Hanuman glacier to the Rishi. Weir and I descended with the coolies while Scott and MacKinnon followed a ridge northwards from the pass to bag the peak 16,280 feet. Our descent went on good ground in a broad, grassy gully flanked by birch-trees and rhododendrons and much wild rhubarb of good flavour.

High rock-walls edging the glacier stream delayed us. On the near wall the Dotials gave a splendid display of rock-climbing. They showed ease of movement even when climbing at high angles. They climbed ‘on their feet’ in the best English style, using the hands only for balance. We have still to see a rock-climber in Britain capable of climbing with a 50-lb. load plus a Dotial’s grace.

We crossed the torrent by a snow-bridge. The farther flank of the gorge was marked by the scar of a long narrow landslide. The route up to Dibrugheta went by its left-hand side, then through pines to the alp. The route we had followed would not have been possible for goats, therefore it is certain that an easier passage must lie farther upstream—if indeed goats are grazed at Dibrigheta. We could see no trace of last summer’s droppings, whereas Durashi had offered plentiful evidence. It may be that Dibrugheta is no longer used.

The alp is a great bowl of grass and flowers shaped like a triangle, with its apex pointing down to the Rishiganga and its either flank demarcated by wooded ravines, these too rushing to the Rishi. Across each of these ravines soared mountain-walls, on the Hanuman side heavily wooded, on the Durashi side bare and culminating in vast sheets of shining mica, crested by a ridge of leaning towers. Across the Rishiganga the black
DIBRUGHETA
Rishi Gorge below

Photo by D. Scott
and white spires of the Nanda Ghunti group stared down at us, starkly hostile. And that made the alp itself all the more a heavenly spot. Carpets of irises and white garlic and forget-me-nots were spread across its wide lawn. At the lower end an ancient birch-tree sprouted from a great block of rock. In its soothing shade we all rested awhile.

We offered up praises to Dr. Longstaff, who made this alp famous after his entry to it in 1907, in which year he climbed Trisul.

But there is no water at Dibrugheta. Reluctantly we made reconnaissance into the farther ravine, then climbed down and crossed it to the jungle on the far side. We camped beside the stream among the blackened boulders of old camp-fires. Soon we had a smoke column ascending to guide in the parties on detachment.

Kuar Singh and Goria arrived first. They had had no luck. The failure of Gulab and Gopi to find and cross the pass was not at all prejudicial to our food position. The Dotials had been somewhat short of food for eighteen men for eight days, but now it was only sixteen men, of whom only ten would return, and I knew well that they could go back unladen in two days instead of four. The really serious matter was the loss of five days' ata for the Trisul Nala.

An hour later in came Scott and MacKinnon. The climb had gone well. Except for poor Munmir, everyone was now happy, including even myself, for my high temperature had subsided, leaving me with nothing worse than a bad cold in the head. Rhubarb was plentiful at the camp site and gave us an excellent dessert with rice and sugar. The freshness of fruit is doubly welcome on an expedition, and there seems no need to carry it in eastern Garhwal.

We were now truly within the ante-room of the Rishi Gorge. Next day was the great day. We had to force a way along the left flank of the gorge to approach the Trisul Nala—a distance of only three and a half miles, but which, judging from the records of our predecessors, would take us two days. We had no idea where the best route went from Dibrugheta, save that
we had to turn the wooded shoulder between the Dibrugheta stream and the Rishi.

At 7 a.m. we took a steep slant uphill towards this shoulder, climbing a thousand feet through a pine forest on softly carpeted ground. That move brought us on to the south flank of Hanuman, fourteen hundred feet up on the wall of the Rishiganga. At this average level we contoured for the rest of the day, rising and falling in and out of shallow ravines, scrambling up or down to turn crags. Underfoot was a fearsome tangle of dwarf cotoneasters, rose bushes, berberis, brier, laburnum, dwarf rhododendron, flowering currant, and plain thorn, which, literally, ripped the pants off the porters. Our climbing boots were scored and the backs of our hands scratched all over; I still cannot understand how the Dotials, wearing only flat rubber sandals, were able to cover the ground without tearing their feet. In any event, we had to go slow. MacKinnon did most of the reconnaissance, travelling ahead of us all the time and signalling back the best line to follow. Even with such help it was an arduous day for all—except Toshi. He was the outstanding Dotial, maintaining dash and vigour to the end.

At the end of eight hours' hard work we had travelled three miles. The easiest ground for travel lay high, well above the tree-line, but there was no ground here flat enough to give rest for the night. The only patch of flat ground that we could see in the gorge lay far below at the edge of the river, and was named Duti on the quarter-inch map. It was half a mile short of the Trisul Nala. We descended and pitched camp at three o'clock.

Again this was a jungle camp, set among birch and pine and flowering laburnum. Rhubarb was abundant. The ground, too, was warm in comparison with Durashi and Lata kharaks. The westering sun deluged the full length of the Rishi and the trees made great play with it, spraying it through the leaves in scattered showers or between the branches in pale cascades of gold, wherein our tents and sprawling bodies were bathed. From a hundred feet below came the million-throated roar of the Rishiganga. All around us were birch-trees from which the
bark hung peeling in huge sheets of several ply, like men dis-robing in the heat of the day. The Dotials—and we too when we saw what they were about—stripped off the bark in six-foot lengths and used them as groundsheets. They gave perfect insulation at night. I realized now why birch bark is used for covering canoes; it is as tough and light as several layers of good brown paper, and impervious to water. Only the surface layers of the tree peel in this way. The trunk remains wrapped in close-fitting undergarments.

After dinner we had to face up to the unpleasant task of dismissing ten Dotials. We hated this task. They all wanted to stay and we wanted them all to stay. We liked them. To myself fell the unpleasant task of informing the men. We decided to choose Perimal, Zungia, Goria, Matbir, Phakir, and Ring Badr. Kuar Singh we turned down because he carried no load and was getting too old for high mountain work. Toshi we rejected only with the most extreme reluctance, because the expedition work had transformed him out of all recognition from a vacant-faced bazaar sloucher into an alert youth of quite unusual strenuousness, who enjoyed every minute of the day. But we thought his enthusiasm ill-controlled, like that of a puppy, and we could too easily imagine him getting into trouble on mountains through excess of audacity. In this opinion I believe now that we erred.

I then called Kuar Singh into the tent and asked him whether he would recommend Perimal or Zungia as the new head coolie. He strongly urged Perimal on us. Then looked at us wonderingly and asked: ‘Ni Kuar Singh?’ I replied that we must have younger men. He nodded and laughed resignedly. All the Dotials were now waiting anxiously round the door of the tent. Without more ado I gave them the six chosen names. Perimal, Zungia, Goria, and Matbir broke into great smiles, but Phakir hung back and Perimal and Goria would not have Ring Badr. The six coolies would have to live together for several months, so that strong feelings could not be ignored. I asked Perimal to choose his sixth man. Matbir, meanwhile, was persuading Phakir, who made it clear that he hung back rather
than desert Narbir. Perimal promptly urged Narbir on us. We agreed. He was a good carrier, without the strong personality of the other five. He, with Matbir and Phakir, would be a unit independent of Perimal and Goria and not to be swayed by them in times of trouble. In Zungia we had an ideal substitute for a head coolie. But Perimal, we reckoned, would not be a trouble-maker—his unlooked-for responsibility would ballast him. Just how right we were became evident in succeeding days.

I now paid off the unlucky ten. Toshi in particular took his money with unhappy eyes; for him the world had this night come to a temporary end. We paid half rates for the return to Ranikhet. It was most noteworthy that not one of the ten asked for baksheesh. To Kuar Singh, none the less, we paid 10 per cent. As for Munmir, we asked him to put a price on his lost jacket. He said Rupees 12, which we paid. He continued sitting outside our tent, long after the others had dispersed, just watching us and waiting as though trying to think of something to say. Eventually he gave it up and wandered slowly off. It dawned on me, then, too late, that had we only chosen him he might have been our best coolie.

My high temperature was now back in full force. Foolishly enough, I said nothing about it, until at midnight it felt so bad that I woke up MacKinnon, who doped me with sulphadiazine. In the early morning I wrote a chitthi for Kuar Singh and said good-bye to the ten Dotials. We shook hands with each in turn. Then they were off, speeding up the mountain-flank, aiming to be at Joshimath in three days.
THE RISHI GORGE

The Trisul Nala comes in to the right of the peak.
BEFORE LEAVING DUTI on 28th May, Perimal and I dumped 80 lb. of rice and beans in a cave against the return journey to Lata. This left six loads of 80 lb. for the Trisul Nala—each a much too heavy load for mountain country. To-day’s journey, however, was only half a mile upstream. Thereafter we proposed to ‘ferry’ the loads in two halves into the Trisul Nala. At half-past eight everyone except me started steeply uphill to cross a forested spur, from which they would descend again to the Rishiganga, and there build a bridge. I stayed behind to look for my ice-axe, which had vanished. Ten Dotials had vanished too. But I refused to put two and two together. After half an hour’s search I was finally convinced that my ice-axe, to which I feel a sentimental attachment, was definitely not at Duti. The circumstantial evidence was so strong that I sat down to reflect which of the ten might have taken it. I was in no merciful or generous mood at that moment, but the inescapable conclusion to which I came was that no single one of these ten men was capable of theft.

I went on without the axe, feeling like death after last night’s high temperature treatment. It took me four hours to cover the half-mile, climbing a thousand feet up the spur, then forcing a way through dense scrub and thorn down to the Rishiganga, where I met the others. We were still below the Trisul Nala, though very close to it, and had now to find a bridging point. The river was here a bellowing flood. We made reconnaissance along the beach, scrambling on a jumble of stone, and chose the narrowest place where enormous boulders on either side could be spanned by saplings. We wanted three of these and fetched out our hatchets. They were seized by Goria and Matbir, who
selected and cut the trees. They had a birch and a pine down in half an hour. We tied ropes to the top of the birch, four men poised it on one end and four men on the ropes let it slowly fall. But the final drop was too sudden. The far end bounced on its block and the whole birch fell into the river. While we dragged it ashore the water tossed it about like a straw. Two more attempts failed in the same way. We were new to bridge-building in the Himalaya.

The art of bridge-making is to get a light birch across first to act as a guide rail for the heavier logs. The Dotials were first in realizing what was wanted. They cut a third, more slender birch, which was forced across by MacKinnon and three coolies, who sat down and pushed the butt with their feet, while Perimal and I pulled on a rope tied to its top. The heavier birch, its tip resting on the lighter one at a slight angle, was then forced over in the same way. The structure was most unsafe, because the face of the opposite block sloped like a roof and was much higher than that on our own side. Scott tied on a rope, took to his bare feet, and crossed gingerly. Matbir sped after him and together they adjusted the ends of the two trunks. Matbir was in tremendous form, romping like a monkey. He wanted to manage everything himself and to show off a little; for he had real powers of initiative and was young enough to be still freshly aware of them. The heavier pine was now pushed over the other two. All were straightened out and lashed at each end. Goria, Zungia, and Matbir were the dominating trio, and remained so always.

We now used two hundred feet of rope to form a double handrail and began crossing. The Dotials crossed on their feet, carrying 80-lb. loads, and only with difficulty could they be persuaded to tie on to a climbing rope. They were regardless of risk, when one slip on the two uppermost logs, which were wet, would otherwise have cost loss of life.

It was late afternoon, for the bridge-building had taken several hours. As the last man crossed, lightning streaked into the lower Rishi. Thunder rolled.

We pitched camp on ground as flat as a tennis court, raised
thirty feet above the river, and were no sooner in shelter than rain was hissing on the rocks and drilling on the roofs. Grey and dismal veils choked the Rishi.

As invariably happened in the pre-monsoon days, the morning was again dry. By the afternoon we hoped not only to have found a way up the Trisul Nala but to have established Base Camp at the foot of Bethartoli Himal. To lighten the Dotials' loads we offered to leave 120 lb. of food at the Rishi camp to be fetched up to base two days later. But Perimal waved an impatient hand, almost like Kuar Singh, and made it plain that each Dotial was ready to carry 80 lb. now. Right from the start of the Rishi trip we had had the correct psychological set-up with these men. They had known that only six of the best would be retained from Duti onwards, so they were all trying to be one of the six; and then, when the six were chosen, they were very proud of it and tried to show that we had chosen well.

We had two miles to go to reach the snout of the Bethartoli glacier, which we hoped might take not more than six hours. Our hopes looked like being dashed at the outset, for the route we chose across the shoulder between the Rishi and Trisul Nala turned out to be bad. From our camp we struck upwards too soon and too high, thus wasting time on steep and difficult ground, on which trees and scrub grew embarrassingly thick. We found it hard enough going pushing the body through this scrub and dodging under branches with only 20 lb. in our rucksacks. From the crest of the shoulder we could see that a better route would go lower down and farther upstream.

At last the Trisul Nala opened before us. A most unusual feature of its right-hand flank, by which our route must go, was at once evident. The four side ravines gashing the flank were all shallow near the foot, deep-cut only above: a reversal of the Rishi order of things. We accordingly descended into the nullah and took to the river-bank.

We were in birch forest and able to move freely among the trees. A small herd of musk-deer passed—a woodland deer like roe. In the Rishiganga the only animals seen had been thar
and bharhal (wild goat and sheep), and these few and at long distance. After another mile the trees thinned out and at 1 p.m. we stopped in a grassy hollow, a quarter of a mile short of the glacier.

I should have preferred a Base Camp within sight of the mountain. The summit lay at the head of a re-entrant on our right, screened from us by one of its own spurs. I went on alone to the re-entrant, down which flowed the Bethartoli glacier. A magnificent, sharp-crested moraine swept in a great curve up the right-hand side of the glacier. I climbed on to it and surveyed the scene.

I was looking straight on to the north-east face of Bethartoli, which was completely clad in snow and ice. From the east ridge on its left and from the north col on its right plunged two glaciers, which swung together and joined at 16,000 feet on the face, then flowed down to the Trisul Nala at 12,500 feet. As a route the glacier was quite impossible. It looked like the Géant ice-fall at Chamonix, multiplied by two and snow-covered. At that moment I was certain that our best line of approach was up the east ridge.

In the deep hollow between the moraine and the hillside to its right there was good camping ground, but when I returned to the lower site the tents had been pitched. As a base it had more firewood.

We now issued the climbing clothes to Zungia, Goria, and Matbir. The boots, all size six on Dr. Longstaff's recommendation, fitted them well. We could never quite understand this, for their feet looked of different shapes and sizes. The windproof suits and helmets gave them a lot of fun. On a first fitting they were all self-conscious, and at sight of each other had fits of laughter. The boots were the greatest prize, then the helmets, which had an almost Tibetan appearance.

Weir estimated and extracted five days' food for the assault on Bethartoli. It was agreed that to-morrow all four of us should go high into the north-east corrie, satisfy ourselves that no good route led to the north col, then study the east ridge from selected vantage points. Assuming that our choice did
fall on the east ridge, we should return by noon to move Camp II up to the Trisuli glacier, close under the ridge.

We had our first strong frost that night. Our height was 12,200 feet and the grass and shrubs were hoared in the morning. At eight o'clock, leaving all coolies below, we started up the moraine. Its high, narrow crest gave us fast going. In two and a half hours we had climbed to 14,000 feet. There was no need to go farther. From this situation the character of the great north basin was seen to be quite different from what we had dared to imagine. Running down its centre was a ridge of snow-dusted rock, rising a thousand feet above the glacier on its left. It was a perfect and fool-proof screen against ice avalanches falling off the north-east face. By its crest we ought to be able to approach the north col. The entire length of the ridge was in view and displayed no wall or tower capable of stopping us. Thus we scrapped my alternative plan for the east ridge and reverted to the original, myself concurring. And that was a most unfortunate decision.

We turned on our tracks and sped back to base. We packed up, leaving the Base Camp tent and food reserves. At 2 p.m. all six Dotials carried our gear to a fine grassy alp at 14,500 feet, nestling at the base of the protecting rock-ridge. Three coolies then returned to base with instructions to bring up firewood daily. Zungia, Goria, and Matbir remained. They had carried up firewood for the first night and morning and Weir soon had a meal ready: first Maggi soup and pemmican, then salmon and chupatties with butter, lastly, chocolate biscuits and tea. To-day (and henceforward) Goria cooked the chupatties and washed dishes. In this he was aided by two streams of pure water, which ran beside our three tents.

For the Dotials our situation was a completely new experience. Directly opposite us was the great ice-fall of the glacier, discharging its occasional avalanche in a puffing cascade. Goria exclaimed 'Pani!' (water) when he first saw one, and had to be corrected, to his wonderment. The Dotials had never before seen a big mountain close up with its hair down.

As we finished supper the sun set. Behind us a rich cream
light spread over the crest of Bethartoli Himal, and directly above it the clouds glowed too, peculiarly warm against the cold dusky blue of the sky. Outwards, we looked down the dark furrow of the Trisul Nala to the pit of the Rishi, then up the white highway of the Rhamani glacier to its col, the Bagini Pass—on the northern watershed of the Rishi country. Facing us there was a row of peaks crowned by the last light.

Neither here nor at any other time of our journeyings did we see colourful sunsets and dawns such as we can even begin to compare with the vivid beauty of those common to west Scotland in hard and frosty weather. The sky instead had a magic clarity peculiar to rarefied air, a dazzling darkness of outer space, a gargantuan emptiness like that under the dome of some long-deserted palace, where sound echoes hollow. From across the Rishiganga came a shining of peaks that flashed like sharks' teeth—Changabang, Rishi Kot, Dunagiri—their names wound a soundless thunder-note across the empty Himalayan skies.

We sat and watched; the Dotials too, who were baking chupatties at red fires. We, the Scottish contingent, presumably more used to cold than they, found the need of sweaters, wind-proof jackets and trousers, balaclavas and gloves. But the Dotials sat around in open-necked shirts and thin trousers and defied the cold. This was the first time we had ever seen them spellbound by the mountain scene. Their eyes were grave. The flip-flapping of dough from hand to hand went on as usual, but they all sat facing out, speaking no word, maintaining a watch, sparing only casual flickers of interest for fires and baking. They were seeing and recognizing the thing that we saw and recognized, and in their bearing paid reverence to beauty.

At dusk we issued them with down sleeping-bags. These they received with genuine pleasure, for the night promised to be bitter. We all retired then, but came out again at half-past eight—despite the cold. Moonlight bathed the peaks of the northern watershed. The Plough stood directly over the tent and the sky glittered frostily, a dark but distinct blue. The nearest of the great peaks, Rishi Kot, turned to us an edge like
SUNSET ON THE PEAKS OF THE RISHI

The shark’s tooth in the centre is not a snow peak, but milk-white granite with some snow on the very tip.
a cutlass but black as gun-metal, whereas Changabang, its neighbour, by day the most like a vast eye-tooth fang, both in shape and colour—for its rock was a milk-white granite—Changabang in the moonlight shone tenderly as though veiled in bridal lace; at ten miles' distance seemingly as fragile as an icicle; a product of earth and sky rare and fantastic, and of liveliness unparalleled, so that unawares one's pulse leapt and the heart gave thanks—that this mountain should be as it is.

We returned to bed, but again not to sleep. Someone had left the kettle on the embers of the fire. It began whistling. From all three tents came much laughter, so Scott turned out and made us hot drinks of Ovaltine. The rest of the night was made noisy by a couple of birds, perhaps woodcock or choughs, which repeatedly flew low above the tents making roding and drumming noises.

In the early hours of the morning more than an inch of snow fell, so that when I turned out at 5 a.m. the scene had completely changed. The firewood was buried in snow. I fetched out some old dry grass from under the groundsheet and tried to kindle a fire, but failed through using it parsimoniously. However, the noise fetched out Goria, whose skill and lung power soon produced a blaze. Zungia and Matbir rose promptly, but everyone was slow and sluggish in movement; the juniper wood burned badly, and so chupatty-making took an interminable length of time. It was eight o'clock before we were under way.

Our day's objective was the siting of Camp III as high on the protecting ridge as we could get it. The three Dotials would be sent back alone in the afternoon, then Scott, Weir, MacKinnon, and I would carry Camp IV next day to the north col at 19,000 feet, or to its near vicinity. Our protecting ridge ended on the point 19,130 feet to the north of the north col. We expected no technical difficulty on the ridge. How we should fare with the altitude effects was another question. None of us had before been higher than Mont Blanc (15,800 feet), save on the peak above Durashi.

On leaving camp we followed the old moraine-ridge for a
few hundred feet, then toiled up several hundred feet of abominable scree followed by slopes of snow to the great ridge. The Dotials were overloaded and went slowly. We ought to have had four men, not three. Matbir could go no farther after reaching the snow. I went back to him and found him carrying two kit-bags of 30 lb. each. This was far too much at 15,500 feet, especially when he had never been so high before. I took half his load and he then came on well. We traversed on to the crest of the ridge from one side and slowly mounted. The rock work was easy but never dull. It required no ropes but a frequent use of the hands to retain balance. The close view of the tormented ice-fall on our left, and the occasional roar of an avalanche down the upper cliffs, kept the Dotials alert and interested. They moved skilfully and at first with confidence. They were on rocks—and at home. But a thousand feet higher the ridge narrowed and became snow-bound, and at last, from about 17,000 feet onwards, very thin indeed. The Dotials were now much less at ease, being unfamiliar with snow. The treading of these exposed blades would have been beyond the untrained resource of most men of any nation. They went on because they had been hand-picked for toughness of character, which they now proved. To them the whole environment was intimidatingly strange—our rock- and snow-ridge arched through the too thin air a thousand feet above the parallel ice-fall, and hard under the still bleaker north-east face of the peak, on to which clung hanging glaciers, and ice-cliffs, and thick cornices. So the Dotials turned anxious eyes on us from time to time, as though inquiring how far we should ask them to go through this hostile world. Yet they neither protested nor hesitated in moving up. We all felt the altitude and a full breath was required to each step.

At two o'clock thunder clouds began blowing up the Rishiganga and over Dunagiri. At the same time the ridge was growing difficult. I roped the Dotials down a short wall to the continuing snow-edge. At that we halted. It had become necessary to send them back. We could not take them farther and expect them to get back alone. They had natural talent,
THE NORTH WALL OF BETHARTOLI HIMAL

from 16,000 feet on Hanuman, at 8 miles distance. The ridge followed up the face can be seen directly above MacKinnon’s head, and running up to the north top
but not enough experience of snow-bound rock; nor dared we hold them longer in face of the weather's threat. Accordingly, I waited with the rope at the mauvais pas, while the Dotials went only to the top of the next tower and returned unladen. I saw them safely up the wall and told them to be back in two days' time. We parted with many salaams, Goria at the last turning to Bethartoli Himal and raising his clasped hands to his forehead in a special salaam to the summit. They were glad to go.

I joined the others at the top of the tower. The situation there was unexpectedly bad. A short way ahead was a great gendarme, neither high nor steep on our side, but on the other dropping in a chasm. Beyond it the ridge led easily to the north top and so to the north col; but the chasm looked ugly. On the near side of the tower was a snow-saddle. On this Weir and MacKinnon began to hack out two platforms for the tents. Meanwhile, Scott and I roped up and went forward to try the descent of the tower.

We found it to be two hundred feet high. Scott belayed. I climbed down a wafer-like edge, where thin cornices of rock and snow overhung space on my right. A hold cut too vigorously on the left flank was apt to puncture the ridge and grant sudden, alarming vistas through the peep-hole. I dropped down a series of vertical steps and landed on a big block. I lay flat on my stomach and looked over the brink. Under my chin was a vertical wall of twenty-five feet, then, leaning out like a tilted pencil, a huge finger of rock with a clear drop of one hundred feet below. We might be able to go down on a doubled rope. But if we did, we could never climb up again. Nor was there any way of descending the left flank to the upper glacier, the angle of which was now easing off as it drew near to the col. I went back to Scott and reported: we were defeated. A ridge otherwise perfect to our purpose was marred by this one gap, which had been invisible from Camp II. Scott now climbed over the edge to look for himself and soon came back to confirm my verdict. We could do nothing more—save camp.

We climbed down to Weir and MacKinnon, who accepted our news calmly. We helped them pitch the tents. We had
to use axes for guy-rope pegs and drive them into the steep flanks, and place the tents door to door, with only a foot between. This made for ease of communication and feeding. Weir cooked. We had two primus stoves, one large with a high-altitude nipple, and one small without. The big stove worked well and economically, but the lack of a high-altitude nipple impaired the small stove’s efficiency; the flame was inclined to ghost away. After a long boiling down of snow we had soup and pemmican, sardines, biscuits and cheese, tea, Ovaltine, and chocolate. We filled thermos flasks with tea to save time in the morning.

The sun was setting and the cold growing intense. We had a quick conference. From our present position we saw two promising routes on Bethartoli Himal, of which our own ridge was not one. The first went to the north top up a ridge immediately to our north, then down to the north col and up the north ridge. The big ice-step eight hundred feet under the summit still looked impossible if taken direct. The second went up the east flank from the Trisuli glacier and over point 18,110 feet to the butt end of the east ridge. From that position there was a choice of route. If the butt could be climbed, then the route to the summit was sure and certain. If not a southward detour could be made on the upper Bethartoli glacier to the south of point 20,730 feet. At no time did we see the connecting link between that latter top and the summit. A ridge is marked on the map, but that might mean anything. In order to follow the north route five clear days were needed, or six for the east routes. That allowed nothing for farther reconnaissance. But as a consequence of the dropped load of ata, we had only three days spare instead of eight.

An ascent of Bethartoli Himal was thus no longer possible. My own wish was to complete the reconnaissance of the mountain by climbing the peak 18,110 feet and examining the east approach at close quarters. We should then know definitely if an eastern route existed and thus contribute something of value to help a future expedition. Weir preferred collecting the northern top, for the route to it was assured. Scott, on the
THE DOTIAL PORTERS NEARING 18,000 feet ON BETHARTOLI HIMAL

Note the head-bands
other hand, wanted to cut our losses on Bethartoli Himal and go to Hanuman, which rose above the junction of the Rishi and Rhamani Gorges. Hanuman was 19,930 feet, unclimbed, and displayed before us an east ridge that looked positively easy—easy at seven miles' range. Its ascent should need no more than our three days.

Our differences of opinion were unresolved when we turned in for the night. We did not sleep. We dosed and woke alternately. We were not yet acclimatized. Every effort, such as pulling on the sleeping-bags or wriggling inside them, made us gasp. Anything that upset even the rhythm of breathing, such as hearing an avalanche fall, caused panting. Our breath froze on the roof and fell on us (as snow-powder). I wore my balaclava helmet in bed; standard size sleeping-bags are not made long enough to pull over the head of a six-foot man. In this respect Weir and Scott had the advantage of MacKinnon and me. However, the night was no colder than many I have spent on Scottish mountains.

At 5 a.m. the sun struck the tents. It was a perfect morning. The snow was frozen hard. The uppers of our boots were frozen too, but only at the toes and insteps. Breakfast was not too successful—the tea in our thermos flasks was only luke-warm. We discussed our immediate plans once again, and this time the majority vote went in favour of Hanuman. We decided to return to-day to Base and to-morrow put a new Base Camp in the Rishli Gorge. Our Camp II would have to be placed about 16,000 feet on the south-east face and the summit attempted from there. Hanuman had two east ridges, of which the farther was the more direct and easier. We could see nothing capable of stopping us.

We packed up in leisurely fashion, for there were views to admire and photographs to take, and ample time on hand. Then, to save the labour of descending the whole ridge with a 40-lb. load each, we attempted a short cut down a thousand-foot couloir on the north flank. This would discharge us on to a parallel snow-field slanting to the toe of the ridge.

Down this couloir, although steep, we proposed to ourselves
a morning promenade in crampons (ten-pointed spikes strapped
to the boots). The snow had been iron hard at 5 a.m., also at 6
—but by 8 a.m., when we started down, the trap had already
been set. Such was the devastating effect of fierce Himalayan
sun on snow that the surface layer was already sugary and
sliding on the harder under layer. Moreover, this snow was
balling on the crampons. Consequently, Scott and MacKinnon
went down the ridge, but Weir and I continued, now roped,
and without crampons.

I felt sure that conditions would improve lower down on the
flank, which faced north; the sun had struck the crest only.
My judgment was right and wrong, because we had to go
farther than I dreamt—nearly half-way—before we came on to
relatively good snow. Meantime we went slowly, with long
bouts of downhill cutting. When we tried to dispense with
cutting we just slithered and slid. And I found that when I
slid with a 40-lb. load I had insufficient arm strength to be sure
of braking with the pick of my axe.

After the first too optimistic experiments we took all pre-
cautions. We devoted two hours to that slope. Lower down
the snow steepened and grew firm; at last no rock projected
from the bed. At that we took off our loads and let them slide,
which they did with disturbing pace, not stopping on the snow-
field but bounding and rolling onwards for several hundred feet.
No damage was done. Weir and I followed unroped.

At midday we reached camp just a couple of minutes behind
Scott and MacKinnon. The Dotials were delighted to see us.
We all spent another hour or two basking on the sunny alp,
brewing up and admiring the first wild hyacinths, which were
now breaking into bloom. Perimal arrived as we were leaving.
His visit was good work, for he was unwell (and had to get
chlorodyne that evening); it showed that he was accepting his
responsibilities.

Down at base a sprinkling of snow came overnight and sharp
frost in the early morning. We left after seven and struck an
excellent route, MacKinnon guiding. It was a good morning
and the woods of the Trisul Nala were charming. The ease of
descent allowed us freedom to enjoy. Near the river junction great trailers of moss or lichen swung in the sun from the branches of the pines. We flushed several monal pheasants.

In the lower part of the nullah we kept much lower than during the ascent and were rewarded with better going. In a three-hour march we came on our Rishi camp site beside the bridge.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Gifts from the God Hanuman

WE HAD ARRIVED back in the Rishi camp in the early forenoon. An easy day is most welcome in the Himalaya. We sewed and darned and wrote up diaries. Behind the roar and rush of the Rishiganga we could hear the song of a little black bird, its upper plumage lightly speckled white, called the whistling thrush. At all our camps in the gorge it sang to us daily, and each morning we listened in the still hour before reveille, until its voice became as familiar as that of the river. The song of the Rishi, to us, is the song of water—and thrushes.

Rain fell in the evening. At seven o’clock the sky cleared and sun shafts striking directly up the Rishi lighted all the dripping trees. It was a quiet light, and a haze of watery mist lingered all along the great length of the gorge, yet the leaves and trunks held a brilliant glint, revealing the trees in far receding vistas, fading into the haze and vanishing at last into the light.

Our height was again 11,000 feet. The drop of only 1,500 feet made a marked difference in temperature. We all slept better but did not get away until 8 a.m. We badly missed Kuar Singh and his early morning discipline. He had a way with the men that Perimal lacked—through inexperience. Perimal’s old, devil-may-care and mischievous manner had gone. We had hoped it would, but not to this extent. He was too subdued in exercising authority in the morning’s preparations. But he meant well and was invariably up early.

We arranged with Perimal that all six coolies should help to establish Camp II on Hanuman and carry firewood. Goria, Matbir, and Narbir would remain with us, while the others would return to base in the late afternoon and to-morrow carry the
big tent and stores to Duti, whither we ourselves should return in two days.

This agreed, we all crossed the Rishi bridge and climbed nearly five thousand feet, first by a rightward slanting gully full of boulders, then up an open hillside to strike over the rim of a small corrie on the south-east face. (We could now see into the upper Rhamani glacier.) At the lower reach of the corrie grew the last juniper. We crossed to the corrie's opposite side and climbed a slanting shelf to a col. We were now close on 16,000 feet, perhaps a trifle less. By this time it was sleeting. I had gone ahead of the coolies, who were to-day exceptionally slow, and now found them arriving without any firewood. I gave Perimal his first whole-hearted cursing and sent him off with Zungia and Phakir.

MacKinnon and Weir, meanwhile, sallied off into the murk to look for a better camp site. Scott and I waited for only a few minutes, then decided that the weather was too bad to go farther. With the aid of Matbir and Goria we began erecting our three tents.

Weir and MacKinnon returned. They had found no better site. Matbir and Narbir then went down into the corrie for firewood, where they met Perimal and company returning with juniper. They took the loads and arrived back, unaccountably in high spirits despite the now thickening sleet. Clad in their windproofs and boots, gloves and helmets, they crouched round the juniper fire, which burned with much smoke and little flame against the overhang of a crag. They cooked our meal of soup and tea and chupatties, and long after we had retired to bed they were still crouching there, still happy, barely visible in the dark and the still falling snow.

Late in the night a minor snowstorm developed. The wind seized and shook the tent. Powder snow began blowing through the east-facing ventilator and I had to rise to close it and secure the sleeve doors. As always in the early morning the sky cleared and hard frost came down. I rose at 5 a.m. My boots were frozen. I at length forced my feet into them and crawled into an arctic world. Nanda Devi rushed up from the V of the
gorge into luminous blue. It looked three miles away, and was
nine. Under my feet the snow crunched and crackled and the
roofs of the tents were sheathed in ice, which flashed mirror-
like to the first touch of the sun. The air was a joy to breath:
pure, crisp, keen, sun-flooded—the air of the Christmas morning
of legend.

Scott also was up. We kindled some slow-burning juniper
with meta-fuel, but could get no heat out of the wood, until
Goria’s presence inspired a few flickers of flame. We had made
a bad mistake not bringing the primus stoves for a quick get-
away. To save paraffin we had chosen to rely upon the
plentiful juniper and on meta-fuel stoves, but these were too
slow for melting down snow and ice.

After breakfast we contoured for two and a half hours east-
north-east, rising on an upslant of a thousand feet to reach the
base of our ridge. The route, traversed over boulder-fields,
crossed the lower end of the first of the two south-east ridges
of Hanuman, and so into the long narrow corrie between them.
We aimed at climbing the second and more easterly of these two
ridges. As we crossed the first one we noticed clouds already
beginning to gather on the peaks. I stopped at the edge of the
first snow-field to smear my face with glacier cream, and there
saw a remarkable mist effect on Changabang. It was
wholly
enveloped in pure white, diaphanous vapour, through which it
yet contrived to display its full form, more tall and slender, more
graceful than any other mountain form in a world where grace
abounded. As I looked and admired I reflected that if such
mists spread to Hanuman we should have great difficulty in
contouring this south-east face on the return journey. I at once

Our route across the lower corrie was mostly on snow. At
10 a.m. we reached the foot of a thousand-foot couloir on the
flank of the farther, south-east ridge. It ran up to the right of
a rock tower. We climbed it on good snow until the snow
thinned at two hundred feet against rock outcrops, whereupon
we took to the low rock-ridge on our left. This was slabby
and loose: an unpleasant combination. Latterly we came on to
open snow-slopes, in which we kicked a ladder of steps to the crest of the ridge. There we built a big cairn to mark the breaking-off point for the descent.

Our height was now little less than 18,000 feet. The ridge gave an excellent route. The crest was rocky and narrow but allowing us good and steady progress; as before, with one breath to one step. If anything broke the rhythm we had to stop and breathe twice to recover. Sometimes an abrupt wall would force us off the crest on to the precipitous flanks, but no rope was necessary—until we had climbed another thousand feet. There we came on a square-faced tower of fifty feet, which completely blocked the ridge. It had, of course, not been seen by us from Bethartoli. On a mountain of 20,000 feet a fifty-foot crag is as nothing, a nothing that came near to stopping us.

Wide, outward-sloping ledges allowed us to traverse rightwards, but we could find no good way there and came back. We roped up. Scott was in very good form to-day and took the lead. He attacked the cliff straight up its right flank by the line of a broken, inset corner. The angle was close to the vertical, especially on the upper passage where the rock was also loose, thus causing him acute difficulty in selection of holds and requiring the most cautious balance. At the very top an overhang had to be turned leftwards by an awkward contortion; a right foothold had to be taken high up under the overhang while the left foot made counter-pressure on a sloping stone three feet across the corner, thus lifting the body while the hands took no more than balance-holds on loose rocks above. He rehearsed these moves in their first half, and summed up the consequences. Then he took position and straightened himself, at last pulling his body on to the top. It was a good lead. I followed, then Weir and MacKinnon. We emerged on an arching snow-field in mist.

This short ascent had run away with an hour, but we must be close to the summit, perhaps nine hundred feet below it at most. The rest of our route should be a straightforward snow-ridge. One more hour would take us up.

We climbed optimism into the mist until a sudden gulf
opened up at our feet. It was the brink of a vertical chasm—a complete break in the ridge—there was no way round. Peering into the mist, we could just distinguish a col several hundred feet below. It is hard to gauge heights in mist, but we all agreed that the col must be not less than three hundred feet under us. Across the gap we could see the rock-ridge continuing, broken and stony and swiftly soaring. It loomed more fiercely difficult than it really would be and merged into the snow-slopes of the summit. A most tantalizing ridge, for it was climbable. As for the chasm—that was impassable.

Again, this gap had been quite invisible from our reconnaissance point on Bethartoli. We had now to return. If possible we had to find another way down the square-faced tower: not one of us would blithely volunteer to climb down it last, and there was no spike-belay for the rope. Accordingly, we looked over the north flank and thought we saw a way of linking the disconnected shelves and ledges there. To reach them we descended the face of our chasm for twenty feet, then turned a corner rightwards on to a shelf, which ran back along the flank in descending steps. This shelf gave us some awkward moments. The ledges tilted outwards and were partially covered with unsound snow, pure ice in patches, and much loose stone and grit. Tower, chasm, and shelf had between them eaten into the afternoon. The time was 2.30 p.m. when we regained the ridge.

The weather was deteriorating. We had now no time to lose and sped down the crest. It was interesting to note how fresh we felt whenever we began the descent. I had felt the altitude badly, had felt dull, tired, and listless on the way up, and so had the others in varying degrees. But our oxygen supply was apparently ample for the much less strenuous work of descent. I felt more alert, and this fact helped to save my life. As Scott and I rattled downwards well ahead of the others, a large and secure-looking block collapsed under me at the south edge and dropped like a plummet into space. As I dropped with it I suddenly thrust out my elbows and so jammed them on top of the corner, which had formerly been filled by the rectangular block. I swung myself back on to the crest and hastened on.
CAMP III ON THE NORTH FACE OF BETHARTOLI HIMAL
(18,000 feet)
My one and only reaction was gratitude. The fall had occurred far too quickly to allow me to see the top of that corner. Like the stone I had dropped like a plummet. The thrusting out of my elbows was done in a flash faster than thought; it was no conscious work of mine, based on no record of the eye or brain. My limited self, the whole sensuous apparatus, had been taken over by the true or inner self for an instant of extreme urgency. That is how it felt. And that is how it was. My whole being was tingling with the after-effect of gladness. And 'What is gladness without gratitude, and where is gratitude without a God?' And so I gave thanks.

In forty-five minutes we reached the cairn, waited for Weir and MacKinnon, roped up, and struck downwards. At 3.15 p.m. we reached the head of the couloir. The mist was now dense and we guessed correctly that the weather was going to follow yesterday's pattern. Snow-fall was imminent. We went down all on one rope to give more security, for the snow on a south flank would be unreliable. As before, we used the rock as much as possible. All went well. Near the foot we had a few bad moments on thinly snow-covered ice, but at last we passed the tower and at 4.30 p.m. moved out of the foot of the couloir.

For a few minutes a sense of pleasant relief pervaded the party, as we imagined our difficulties were behind us. We rested, ate much-needed fuel, coiled the rope, then realized that to get back to camp we must contour the south-east face for two hours or more by compass. The first sleet began to fall. At that we set off. Without a back-bearing we should now have been completely lost and had no hope of making Camp II. I was thus most thankful to find that MacKinnon had also taken a back-bearing and was able to confirm my 210°. Considering the nature of the ground—interminable boulder-fields, all alike, innumerable low ridges and banks, snow-field after snow-field—we made fairly good progress at first. Visibility varied from forty to fifty yards and new bearings had to be taken accordingly at quick intervals. But I could take the bearings quickly, sighting on any convenient boulder, without waiting for the
card to settle too precisely. When bearings are taken at speed and frequently the errors average out. This was something I knew conclusively from navigating on the Western Desert battle-fields. It saved much time.

At the end of one and a half hours we fetched up on a ridge with a precipitous flank beyond. We had certainly not climbed this cliff on our outward journey. It was hundreds of feet high. For a moment it looked as though I had lost the route, but MacKinnon had been checking up on me and swore that my angles had been correct. However, here we were, Weir envisaged benightment, for dusk was coming early and the snow was falling with an ominous steadiness.

There was only one solution, and at last it dawned on MacKinnon and me what we had been doing; our bearings were correct, but from the outset we had started taking them on too high a line. We descended four hundred feet on scree and continued at 210°. No more cliffs appeared. Instead, we came into a maze of gigantic boulders, as big as shielings, all lying piled on top of each other. The holes, caves, and caverns between them were fortunately big enough to be seen even through the dark and the whirl of the flakes, but the rock was heavily masked in white. This was a nasty passage. Again not one met on the outward trip. I reckoned that we were still a little high. We dropped a hundred feet. The boulders returned to normal size—a boulder-field like many another we had crossed this day, giving no indication of position. For the first time I too said 'We've had it!' and resigned myself to benightment. Then we came on to another ridge.

Judging by my watch, I reckoned that this ought to be the ridge on which stood Camp II—we had been going two hours and travelling faster than in the morning. The time was 6.30 p.m. A horrid thought occurred to me—our long contour had been over all a descending line, losing a thousand feet in height; maybe, then, we had lost height to excess, for descent would be our natural tendency. By a still farther descent we might well fetch up in the Rhamani Gorge. Rather than have that happen it might almost be better to accept benightment now.
NANDA DEVI
and the Rishi Gorge, from Camp II at 16,000 feet on Hanuman
At that a whiff of juniper smoke came to us. Undoubtedly juniper!

We turned into the wind—downhill. In five minutes shadowy figures emerged through the white gloom, each giving us a relieved ‘Salaam, sahib! Salaam!’

Not only did the coolies have two fires going—this in quite heavy snowfall at 6.30 to 7 p.m.—but also water on the boil. In no time we were in our sleeping-bags, Weir first of all giving Goria the dried soup and pemmican for our meal. Despite the grey and trailing snow veils, the raw cold, and the dark, the coolies sat out there in their windproofs and made us chupatties. Goria went round from tent to tent passing in the soup and pemmican, chupatties, butter, honey, and biscuits. I could hear the coolies occasionally laughing among themselves and chatting with animation. Again they were in high spirits. Truly they are excellent men. They were giving us this service of their free will, with only a few directions and without having to be hunted. They had never before been on an expedition. The climax to Goria’s performance came while Weir and I were lying back in our sleeping-bags, relaxing, sipping our final mug of tea, delightedly contrasting our present ease with the ugly promise of an hour ago, and listening to the grim blatter of wind-driven snow on the canvas—when a head suddenly thrust through the sleeve door. It was Goria’s. He gave us a charming grin. Could he go to bed now—?

As he withdrew he raised his clasped hands and salaamed. The god Hanuman in Hindu mythology represents the ideal of service. These three Dotials had partaken of his spirit that night and done him honour.

At intervals in the night I woke up, listened for a few moments to the snow drifting along the walls of the tent—a most soothing sound—and dropped off again into deep, refreshing sleep. On one of these awakenings I had a most vivid image in my mind, recollected from that moment on the long traverse when at 6 p.m. we struck the ridge with the precipitous flank. A great shaft had opened through the clouds around Nanda Devi, disclosing its stupendous arrow-head in the upper air, resting on a
base of white cloud—destitute of visible support. It was a mountain not of this earth, but infinitely high and beautiful—the epitome of Himachal. Clouds had again swirled round the peak. From this moment’s vision, instantly I had returned to a close-up of dreary boulders and writhing snow, and the anxieties of route selection, my mind apparently recording nothing.

But the vision had waited for me, fair as when first seen and nothing of it lost. It is always thus with beauty, eternally giving of itself to all things able to receive and to all persons willing, be they men or mountains.
THE DHAULI TRACK
Laden goats coming south from Tibet
CHAPTER NINE

Back to the Dhauli

THE FOUL WEATHER blew itself out in the night. The tents were again ice-sheathed and we were wakened by the sun shining through the glass roof. At ten o'clock we began the descent to Duti and in the early afternoon emerged from the lower thicket and came upon the green Base Camp tent just as the whistling kettle struck its highest note.

Everyone was laughing at this perfect timing of our arrival. Perimal, Zungia, and Phakir had crossed the Rishi bridge without incident. All were in good health and nearly invisible behind wide grins. Shortly I noticed Perimal cast a speculative eye on us and consult Goria. They seized an early opportunity of stitching badly needed patches on to Weir's sleeping-bag and mine. They stitched with unexampled speed and no sooner had Perimal bitten off the last thread than he put on his best spaniel eye, handed me my needle, and asked: 'Sigret, sahib?' They had not a cigarette between them. We issued twenty-five to each. Great was the rejoicing. Zungia's 'Salaam, sahib!' echoed across the Rishi.

There was less enthusiasm about food that night. We had only 34 lb. of ata left, but plenty of rice and split beans. Beans are a nourishing food, but no Dotial takes kindly to them as a substitute for ata. Like us, they found them laxative and so indigestible, unless cooked for many hours, that (still like us) they would prefer to go hungry rather than eat a good meal of beans. Fortunately the rice supply was fair, although not even rice compensates the Dotial for his much-loved ata.

Four days would take us to the flesh-pots of Lata, where we promised the Dotials a goat. We ourselves had begun to feel a craving for meat. Pemmican had already proved surprisingly popular. We had had it daily in soup or in 'hoosh' and had
liked it, and felt the better for it. Himalayan climbing conducted on a vegetarian diet, I should have said, was not to be thought of, were it not that our coolies could, on a diet of ata only, expend as much energy as we. Thus no conclusion can be drawn, except that in the Himalaya the Scotsman is a carnivore.

That night we had a bonfire before the door of the tent. Scott threw on armfuls of birch bark, its terrific blaze lighting the whole of the wood so that distant trunks were suffused with the golden glow. Each of the days that followed contributed a bead to the Rishi string.

On that first hard day from Duti to Dibrugheta, we were greatly aided by knowing the route, but the scrub had worsened, for new growth was coming. When I entered the old camp site below Dibrugheta the first thing I saw was my lost ice-axe. Kuar Singh had found it first and left it sticking upright in the centre of the site. Its presence there was final and fitting testimony to the honesty of Dotial porters.

At Dibrugheta next morning and again on the long slopes to the pass above Durashi, we clambered over new carpets of irises, ten-petalled forget-me-nots, red and white potentillas, hyacinths, and garlic. Nowhere had we seen edelweiss or gentians. Waiting up on the pass to welcome us were some whistling marmots and a cuckoo.

Rain met us there, and down at Durashi wood was short. Our beans that night were accordingly ill-cooked, so that we all had diarrhoea before morning and stomach trouble next day. Our departure was delayed by heavy rain and sleet. The weather all around the Rishi had been throughout very like that of a poor Scottish summer: cloudy and wet daily with long bright intervals—too cool unless the sun were shining. The weather cleared for four hours at nine o'clock, just long enough to let us cross the outer curtain. During the last fortnight much snow had melted from the ledges—we needed no ropes on the Durashi cliffs—while on the Lata side still more had vanished. It was now possible to follow the high route, and my first reconnaissance had shown me where to look for the start. Once found, the goat track among the crags and gullies was followed
easily and only occasionally blocked with snow and ice. Steps had sometimes to be cut. At one o'clock sleet overtook us, but that made the Dotials go faster. Not one of them was affected by altitude. We were acclimatized; not even beans could hold us down. We made the Lata kharak in five hours and a quarter.

In my own opinion the kharak was the best of all our camp sites thus far, and 9th June the most beautiful of all our mornings. It was the first spring-like morning we had had since arriving at the Rishi threshold sixteen days before. The sky was hardly more clear and blue than on Bethartoli or Hanuman, nor the sun as fiercely bright, but the air was balmy—it was life-encouraging, not wintry and death-dealing. The saddle hung like a perch in space between the ranges of Badrinath and the peaks of Bethartoli and Nanda Ghunti and Hathi Parbat, the latter exploding icily out of the gorge of the upper Dhauli. I caught myself gazing at the scene with a longing to live longer here and with a regret at having to leave. British scenery by comparison seemed miniature, cramped and crowded, flat, domestic. I had positively to shake myself out of that attitude and just enjoy the present.

Bethartoli Himal sparkled upon its blue back-cloth. Looking at it now with more experienced eyes, we considered the north ridge to be the much more doubtful route. The approach to the north col would have to go over the north top, the descent from which, down to the col, looked worse than the ice-wall under the summit. The east ridge appeared to offer the better route.

I make these statements with wary reservations. Our attempts on Bethartoli Himal and Hanuman had given us valuable experience in diverse ways: given us information of routes that could be useful to other parties; helped us to acclimatize; shown us that even the one chance in a thousand of a Dotial dropping a load must be guarded against while traversing cliff faces, by spreading as big a variety of food and gear among as many men as possible, and so never having, say, all sleeping-bags in one load. We had been, in fact, most fortunate in losing food; had we lost anything else—tents, sleeping-bags, climbing gear,
or stoves—the result would have been catastrophic. We had been alerted, also, to the Himalayan scale, and to the rashness of placing trust on the evidence of inexperienced eyes. Snow conditions had been revealed as alarming.

These last two matters, of scale and snow, are worth noting. We had learned not to estimate the difficulties of any Himalayan ridge by its average angle. On Hanuman especially our chosen ridge did look easy as seen through binoculars from seven miles’ distance. But the tiniest nicks and steps, rock or ice, which look trifling from the foot of the mountain and may be invisible at long distance, can turn out to be chasms and walls two or three hundred feet high or deep. Few ridges do look gentle. For the most part they are steep, thin, jagged, and raw. They are new mountains and wear a new look.

The swift effect of the fierce Himalayan sun on snow had taken us all by surprise. We had thought that the effects would be less around 18,000 feet than in the Alps. The reverse was the truth. In the Alps a mountaineer reckons that snow will not go bad on him before midday. In Kumaon it was getting dangerous at 8 a.m. and was bad by 9—in pre-monsoon days. Weir and I had been caught in this trap on that thousand-foot ‘short cut’ on Bethartoli. Our lesson had thus been learned rapidly and early on, to our profit.

The double defeat in the Rishi country we felt to be no failure. On first crossing the threshold we had felt well assured that come what may we should see great and curious things, work hard, meet beauty, encounter trouble, learn much and that of value. We came out of the Rishi well satisfied in soul if not in belly. Our apparent misfortunes had no sting.

Over breakfast on the Lata kharak we laid plans. Our first need was a goat for the Dotials, which we should this day buy at Lata. There also we must try to get ten more coolies to open Part II of our programme: the march from Tapoban to Dunagiri. The date was 9th June. It was essential that our Base Camp for exploration of the Lampak group should be established at Dunagiri village by mid June, for it lay on the south side of the group, where clear skies for reconnaissance would not be
Back to the Dhauli

granted when the monsoon broke. We had thus no time to waste. We reckoned to spend one day at Lata, for the sake of rest and for arranging a bandobast with the Lata men, and two days at Tapoban to reorganize.

The rest of this our 'off day' was spent in continuous, although leisurely, action. The descent from the kharak gave us the most stirring walk we had had in the Himalaya. Perhaps we enjoyed it so well because we were going downhill all the way, and thus had all the energy that full enjoyment requires. Nothing broke the enchantment. Always we were looking down and out between the branches or over the tips of firs and pines, where young cones were hanging ripening in the sunshine. As the morning sun strengthened the pine scent broke round us in moist, powerful waves. Everywhere there was given to us the impression of life in all its lustiness, breaking through the ground and the bud, pervading the air with its sight and scents, a life manifesting its power and beauty in a thousand familiar ways, all made fresh again by our abstinence on the heights.

Immediately on arriving at Lata, Scott and I met the headman and opened the bargaining for ten coolies. He wanted Rupees 5. I offered 3. There was now a long halt in the discussion, which I had anticipated. We sat back and relaxed and talked about other things. Yes, we could stop overnight at the school-house down by the Dhauliganga, and yes, we could have a goat for Rupees 20, but no ata to-day. At Dunagiri we should find ata in plenty and alu (potatoes). This was good news. Two or three of the elders collected and the old hubble-bubble went round. We were all enjoying ourselves, except Scott, who was in no bargaining mood and sat on the edge of the bench. After a decent, oriental interval, I again offered Rupees 3. They countered with Rupees 3 plus ration money (equal to Rupees 5). I refused and spent a little while watching the children. The younger ones were very pot-bellied, although otherwise healthy, and I could not help wondering whether Lata beans were the cause. I was fascinated by the flies clustering round their eyes and nostrils—for they never made any effort to brush them away.
At the end of half an hour we were no further ahead, so we rose to go. The headman refused a parting offer of Rupees 3 plus half-pay for return, but hesitated first, then promised to visit the school at night for a final bandobast.

Scott and I followed the rest of our party down to the roadside. The school was stone-built with a big veranda. Indoors the rooms had earth floors, mud walls, and well-timbered and slated roofs. We were glad of its shelter, for the flies were worse than three weeks ago.

The afternoon we spent industriously on our toilet: washing ourselves all over at a spring, trimming our moustaches, which were beginning to get entangled with our meals, and greasing our hair with coco-nut oil. This last was no lure for the ladies at Tapoban: our hair had gone very dry.

When the day died and the evening wore on, it became painfully clear that the Lata headman was disciplining us. No goat arrived. The headman did not come down to make his bandobast. He sent no messenger. I, on the other hand, was not going to go back up if I could help it. No coolies were available at Tapoban. Well, then, next morning I should go three miles up the Dhauli to Surai Thota, which was heavily marked on the map and must be a fair-sized village. There I should try for coolies while Weir waited for me at Tapoban and Scott and MacKinnon travelled west to Joshimath on the Alaknanda, there to buy food, post camera film back to England, and, above all, collect mail.

This resolved we went early to bed. But—shades of the Rishi!—it was too hot to sleep. We lay awake and watched fire-flies an inch long flitting round our beds. The altitude was 7,000 feet, yet mosquitoes were biting freely. Not until 3 a.m. did the air grow cool.

At seven I set off alone up the Dhauli, creeping like an insect along the base of those five-thousand-foot walls. Many herds of goats passed me, travelling south: goats laden with bulging saddle-bags and driven by woollen-clad Tibetans. Twice I passed encampments of Bhotias, in family groups on their way north to occupy the high villages around Niti, from which they would
carry the Indian trade over the frontier pass. They had the tent called the tarkeb—a fly-sheet of stout cloth without walls. Big carpets were spread upon the ground, surrounded by polished copper gourds and baskets, and by children, dogs, goats, mules, ponies, and hens. On the carpets sat the men and women, but no one was idle. Each party had a Singer sewing-machine, at which one man was always hard at work.

After one and a half hours I reached the metropolis of Surai Thota. It stood on a great expanse of flat ground beside the Dhauli River, and consisted of one small rest-house (key in Joshimath) and one old shack inhabited by a family. The men again worked a sewing-machine. No coolies were to be had here, but I inquired. They shook apologetic heads. ‘Ni quli—quli ooper,’ they answered. ‘Ooper’ meaning some place higher up, I found to be ekparao or one day’s march away.

I could only assume that Surai Thota was marked so heavily on the maps because it was flat ground in country where flatness has high scarcity value. There was nothing for it now but to go straight back to Lata and acknowledge defeat. The men there would be highly pleased with themselves, especially after making me climb that eight hundred feet up to the village at noon.

I arrived in the central courtyard feeling much exhausted. Food had been short last night and this morning—no ata, no British food, nothing but beans, for which there were no takers. I had breakfasted on tea. We had come out of the Rishi with not a day to spare, and the low fuel intake left me slow and weary all morning. I came into the courtyard expecting to find the headman. To my astonishment, and for reasons not yet known to me, the village was peopled entirely by young men. It was transformed. The elders had vanished.

I asked the men if ten of them would carry loads from Tapoban to Dunagiri in three marches, starting in two days’ time at seven o’clock in the morning. They were delighted. Eyes and teeth flashed with enthusiasm. What pay? ‘Rupees 3,’ I said. Instantly their leader countered; they had decided last night on Rupees 5. They would not take less. I accepted. Rupees 5—but I would pay no return money. They agreed
without a murmur. At this I could have kicked myself, for I would have agreed to Rupees 5 yesterday had I only known that, unlike Dotials, they expected no return money. They were agreeing now to what I had originally offered, plus half a rupee. I had been wasting energy at Surai Thota.

However, everything works out for the best. The men were young enough to be truly keen on coming and delighted at winning this victory over an apparently hard bargainer. From what I could see of them I rightly judged that they would now show an extra courtesy and give the better service. The first sign of it was a charming concern about my long walk to view the scenery at Surai Thota. To refresh me I must have a big tumbler of warm, sweetened milk. For this I really was grateful.

And so, five miles back to Tapoban. I turned aside at the hot spring and luxuriated in a warm bath. That was even more refreshing than milk. At the rest-house Weir gave me the first full meal that we had had since leaving Duti. We settled down to work. The crates had to be nailed after a lightning raid by Scott and MacKinnon, who were now speeding west to Joshimath with Narbir and Goria. I bought 40 lb. of ata. Weir, like a Boxer dog hunting a Siamese cat, chased off the false Swami who was round begging shoes. I made an advance of pay to the Dotials and gave them money for a sheep. We wrote articles for the press. And so time was consumed in a host of little ways for which there was little to show, and which yet kept us busy and feeling harassed. The flies were the frightful biting ones.

The conversion of a sheep into mutton was the second day's occupation. At dusk Narbir trudged in alone from Joshimath. He brought a load of lentils and a brief note from Scott. To-day being Sunday, the post office was closed and he must wait until 10 a.m. Monday. If we went on, he said, MacKinnon and he would catch up with us within two days. This news was a great disappointment. We were looking forward greedily to getting our first mail. We wanted that even more than mutton, with which we now consoled ourselves. It was tough to the
teeth but delicious to the palate. We determined to move on to-morrow to Surai Thota. The Lampak mountains called.

Now that the scurry of reorganization was over, we looked to the Lampak range with an interest that bordered perilously on excitement. It lies eighteen miles due north of Nanda Devi, bounded north and south by the Girthiganga and Dunagiri Gad. They were completely untouched mountains. No one had explored them before or made attempt on so much as one peak, of which there were ten. Five were over 20,000 feet. With our base at Dunagiri village, we should also have access to half a dozen unclimbed peaks to our south, outliers of the mountain of Dunagiri (23,184 feet).
T. H. Braham of the Himalayan Club had seen the whole group in 1947 when descending the Banke glacier on the west side of the Dhauli; he had described them to me as unusually beautiful. The first man to advise us to go there was Dr. Longstaff; only he had recommended a first approach from the north via Malari. He had seen their south aspect when crossing the Bagini Pass in 1907 and had not been tempted. They had looked hopelessly difficult.

However, we had sixteen mountains to choose from. Scott had read of Dunagiri village as being occupied by a friendly and delightful people. On the map it was shown hidden in a lofty fold of the mountains at 11,800 feet. We were not to be dissuaded, then, by the mere threat of excessive difficulties, because we felt sure of enjoying Dunagiri. When the time came to go north to Malari, the map offered us a high-level route through the western hills by two passes. That would be a most attractive alternative to the low route by the Dhauli. It would take us into remote, unknown places, and that is highly to be desired.

At 5 a.m. on 12th June we were up and working on the loads. They had all to be weighed to 60 lb. exactly—this for the first time since leaving Ranikhet. Dotials alone will divide loads equably without scales, but as soon as other coolies are brought in, then scales are demanded and the Dotial will not carry one seer more than his contract. In this matter there was no deceiving them. More than once we laid out loads in the morning, knowing that one or more loads were a couple of pounds overweight. Always and instantly the error was discovered at the first trial lift. They could gauge as close as two pounds in sixty. Matbir and Zungia, on the other hand, would lift any excess load within reason and not say a word, although they knew.

The Lata men were due in at seven o’clock. Just forty-five minutes after the hour we saw them coming along the track like greyhounds. We called them the Lata greyhounds ever after, and with good cause. They were most brisk and business-like on arrival. Unluckily they had only nine men instead of
the ten requisitioned, and we were short of a Dotial, Goria being in Joshimath. Moreover, we had half a load of food more than my original estimate (partly mutton). Two and a half extra loads were thus on our hands. The Lata head coolie made a swift appraisal of the stacked loads and tested several. Wild scenes of dispute followed. Loads were picked up and flung down. Dotials and Lata men raged furiously together, until by all European standards the end must have been bloodshed or a universal strike.

My own strength lay in the fact that I knew not a word spoken and could thus stand as aloof from domestic strife as a British monarch. All people could appeal to me and be comforted by a smile. In the twinkling of an eye, and for no reason apparent, the scene of wrath ended in sudden, all-round laughter. The Lata head coolie came to me. He and two others would lift the extra loads if I would pay them double wages and make the day's march to Lata, not Surai Thota. To-morrow we should get two extra men from Lata and go all the way to Juma, as already planned. I agreed. One Lata man then lifted 88 lb. and two others 120 lb. each. They took the loads on shoulder ropes, not on head-bands like the Dotials, then all nine set off at a great pace along the road, leaving the Dotials standing. The Dotials, however, were professional load-carriers. I knew what would happen, and so did Perimal, who looked highly amused as the Lata greyhounds vanished round the first bend. And sure enough, the Dotials arrived at Lata a full hour before the amateurs.

We stopped again at the school. By dark the Joshimath party had not arrived. Weir and I gave them up and went to bed—but not Perimal. Heart-broken that Goria should be missing his meat, he kept their mutton simmering by the fire, refusing to acknowledge the hour of the night. And he was rewarded. At nine o'clock they came in.

Straightaway they distributed half a dozen letters to each of us, then sat down to the mutton. Weir and I were now up too to hear the news. At Joshimath they had done much shopping, visited the Rawal, inspected the hospital, photographed pilgrims,
dispatched the colour film to England—and Scott had contracted dysentery. He had gone down with it badly, and in one day MacKinnon had cured him with sulphaguanidine. In the old, pre-war days Scott would probably have been knocked clean out of the expedition, or at the very least been left stranded at Joshimath hospital until early July. And now here he was, whaling into a Himalayan sheep, than which nothing could be worse for dysentery.

A second item of importance was the arrival of the Inner Line Pass. It could not have caught us more narrowly. Tomorrow, at Surai Thota, we should cross the Inner Line for the first time.

We pulled on our bags, set candles beside us, and devoted the rest of our night to the reading of letters. The most noble prose and poetry, written by great masters of craft, never gave us such pleasure. To me it was like being back in prison camps. Every word had its own peculiar and absorbing interest. If there were any mosquitoes that night they bit in vain, for we knew nothing.

The Lata men gave a repeat performance on the second morning. There came the brisk descent from Lata, the fierce wrangle over loads, the sudden settlement, the lightning getaway. One of the two new men was a boy of fourteen, slender and good-looking, who carried his 60-lb. load quite without distress. Later in the day we passed the Lata men while they lunched. Like the Dotials, I no longer felt the need of a midday meal while on the move. Idling in camp, one eats to fill in the time, or to give occupation; it is very often a nervous habit, like much cigarette smoking. The Lata men took a third meal at noon only because they breakfasted more frugally than the Dotials, who ate a pound of chupatties.

The twelve-mile track to Jumagwar turned out to be the most extraordinary one of our travels. It goes not through a valley, but a canyon; and as a canyon not even the Rishi can match it. For its walls are set close and soar sheer for many thousands of feet. It splits the Himalayan chain forty miles south from Tibet. In that distance the river drops ten thousand feet. It is thus
not to be thought of as a river in which men may swim or navigate any kind of boat. Fed by innumerable glaciers hidden far up the side-ravines, it is a Himalayan waterfall—a grey, rolling cataract of most awful power, moving huge boulders with a thunderous rumble deep down in the river-bed.

It was easy for us now to understand how the river made the gorge—and a trade route to Tibet. A more slender line of communication it is hard to conceive. It cannot be followed in winter. The track along the cliffs is an eight-foot ledge, usually a few hundred feet above the river, often with overhangs both above and below. In winter all the little villages of the Dhauli, above and including Jumagwar, are evacuated. Not only are they buried in snow, but the track becomes impassable; its line swept and broken by snow and rock avalanches peeling off the cliffs. I could think of few things so ugly-dangerous as an attempt to follow this track in midwinter. Much repair work must be needed in the spring. The engineers who made such tracks, and those who maintain them now, have done a great work and give a great service, and deserve great honour, which I suspect has never come their way.

The track was in excellent condition; every side-torrent bridged. In the monsoon period the passage will not be so smooth. In June we suffered only two inconveniences—mica dust, sometimes ankle deep, which the afternoon wind blew in our faces (the gorge acting daily as a gigantic funnel), and goats. Great herds of goats were moving day-long up and down the gorge. Traffic jams were numerous. I stopped one of the herdsmen and asked him what his goats carried and where he was going. He luckily spoke Hindi and answered: 'Ata, dal, chawal, satu' (flour, pulse, rice, and barley). He was going to Niti, one of the uppermost villages, before crossing the Niti Pass at 16,630 feet. He would bring back salt, borax, and wool and hides.

All this trade is by barter and no money changes hands. Most of the traffic was north-bound, but many Tibetans passed us heading south, usually wearing bush hats and long woollen boots, brightly coloured and soled with rope or hide. The hair
was invariably black, either in long pigtails or falling to the shoulder. Some of them came with mules or ponies, laden or unladen, but not once did we see a man riding his animal’s back as on the Pilgrim Route—not even downhill.

At intervals along the route were encamped whole family parties of Bhotias, still migrating north to the summer villages. In this setting they had a wild, gipsy-like appearance, which I think is misleading, for they work to a strict, annual system of well-planned and profitable trade. At most of these nomad camps were dust-smothered hens, which laid small but exceedingly well-flavoured eggs. We bought these for four annas each (4½d.), which was the standard price everywhere in the Kumaon Himalaya. Needless to say they asked a lot more—sometimes a rupee an egg—but always came down. They never sold us a bad one.

These encounters kept the photographers busy. Otherwise they would have had little to do. The Dhauli is not photogenic, except from rare situations. There is an air of gloom proper to canyons. When the sun shines at the right angle, the water brightens, but is never lit as though inhabited by light’s own self; instead it gives a glitter like wax, without sparkle. The walls are rarely bare, but nearly always peppered with trees growing straight out of the living rock, wellnigh regardless of angles. When quite bare the rock is fearsome. The Dhauli is not a pretty sight. But there is beauty in it, because everything is appropriate; if the harmony is wild it is still harmony, its discords not discordant. At wide-spaced intervals the walls give back where some ravine cuts through on one side or the other; then a broad shaft of sun beats down upon the track and river; foam and dust glint dully; and far above a snow peak stands sharp on the blue sky.

Such a place was Juma, where a great glen descends from the glaciers of Hathi Parbat. We stopped there at a little rest-house, standing among trees where the gorge widens. The chaukidar was an old man, white in the whisker, who began with the inevitable question: ‘Where are you going?’ Being tired, perhaps, someone asked impatiently why he wanted to know.
His calm reply, that he would like to give us any help we needed, was so effective a thrust that never again did we hold out on a questioner.

I asked him what hope we might have of getting twelve coolies at Dunagiri to carry for us to Malari. He said we should get them. This was great news, if true. For I was bearing very much in mind the gloomy forebodings of our Indian well-wisher at Bombay. The Lata men overheard this question. The young head coolie immediately came and volunteered to stay with us, or to come back from Lata at any future date. I asked if they would be willing to come on the attempt to force the Girthi gorges to Milam on the Goriganga. He answered ‘Yes’—they would go anywhere we led. This truly astounded us. We had never expected such enthusiasm of the Lata Bhotias, tough and speedy travellers though they were proving themselves to be.

We had to refuse them. We could not give them a date for return. If we had good weather we might hope to stay at Dunagiri for any time up to a fortnight. A journey back to Lata to fetch coolies would be too long unless in emergency.
CHAPTER TEN

Mountaineering and Medicine at Dunagiri

IT WAS 14th June when we left Juma on the last stage to Dunagiri. When we turned out in the morning I felt most uneasy on seeing the lower Dhauli full of northward-drifting cloud. It was a new phenomenon: our first early morning cloud and our first low down within a gorge in bulk. I hailed Zungia and asked: ‘Is it monsoon cloud?’ But he laughed and shook his head. The sky was normal above. Everyone was going briskly about his business, wholly unconcerned. And these were men who knew the country, which confounded me. I took on no renewed faith from their unconcern, for these were clouds of ill omen, auguring change, and I knew it.

The Lata greyhounds dashed off. This time they dashed to good purpose: travelling in their wake an hour later we found ourselves in the dusty rear of northward-moving goatherds. There had been no rain in the night and the morning was dry and sunny; in consequence, the dust nearly choked us. We forced a way past two caravans, then turned a hill bend to get a sudden, unexpected glimpse of Lampak, 20,280 feet. It appeared seven miles east-north-east at the head of the Kalla Gad. Only the final snow peak was visible: a clean-sided cone. It would be hard to think of a more graceful peak; it was bright and icy, bearing no mark of impossibility. If another dozen mountains like it lay around Dunagiri village, then a wonderful session of mountaineering awaited us.

A mile and a half up-river we crossed the Dhauli to its east side by a bridge deep down in the gorge. A steep northward slant of six hundred feet through forest brought us to the tiny and deserted village of Ruing, overlooking the Dunagiri Gad. Its six houses were exactly like Swiss chalets, set on a turfy clearing among woods. All was fresh and sweet-smelling, shining
DUNAGIRI VILLAGE (11,800 feet)

Photo by D. Scott

THE SCHOOL AT DUNAGIRI

Photo by T. Weir
and clean. The streams cutting the path now invited us to drink; trees and bushes were either noble of shape or blossom-bearing—deodars, wild apricots and walnuts, red and white rose-bushes. The gorge was more savage than the Dhauli, its walls being set still closer and the rocks more jagged. The path, as we proceeded, was often propped over big drops. Then, gradually at first, the gorge opened out as we climbed and became sun-flooded. Above 9,000 feet we met alpine flowers, and above 10,000 crossed the first pastures, where goats were grazing. There a huge flock of grounded doves took wing and flashed past our heads.

MacKinnon and I were now far ahead of the others, having passed the lunching greyhounds at Ruing. In six hours from Juma we walked by tilled fields close under Dunagiri. We could tell at once that this was going to be the most prosperous village of our journey. These fields were well cared for and the goats big and healthy, with long glossy coats.

The village was set in steps on the north slope of the glen, looking high over green terraces. It comprised some sixty houses, one near the centre having a large courtyard, which we singled out as the meeting place. We went straight to it. No more than one or two men were to be seen, but within a few minutes that courtyard was crammed to capacity. Rugs were spread for us on the wall and the schoolmaster came forward as host. He was a man of sixty.

I wasted no time. I gave a quick summary of past moves and future plans. Could we have twelve coolies in a week or ten days to carry loads to Malari? Pay, I added, would be Rupees 3 per day plus half-pay for return. He at once said 'Yes.' Such quick agreement nonplussed me. I suspected that my schoolmaster was a Scottish West Highland type, courteous to the death, who as a matter of high principle will never say no, however much he may mean no. When I looked round, however, all suspicions vanished. In men, women, and children we had not seen elsewhere faces more friendly or good-looking. They were free from all trace of trouble, whether of body or soul.

Having heard our tale and taken stock of us, the people called
forward the children, perhaps twenty. Each child came towards us in turn, without either haste or bashful hesitation, clasped both hands and salaamed, bowed, then stood back and sat down. Their ages varied between six and twelve; such excellent manners and bearing are not to my knowledge found in the western world in children of like age. The people are Bhotias and migrate south in winter to Pursari, at 4,000 feet. Their principal occupation in summer is the trade with Tibet, when sixty families occupy the village.

I asked a few more questions. We could have all the ata we needed and all potatoes. Then everyone dispersed, leaving us with one or two young men of fifteen years. When I laid out the half-inch maps on the wall I found that they could read them. Moreover, they could read names in Roman script, whether Hindi or English. This they did with some difficulty but without error.

Scott and Weir arrived followed closely by the Dotials. A great bout of photography ensued. The school had resumed work in a nearby yard, the children sitting on individual mats before a blackboard. They had slates on their knees, and over their faces that charmingly worried look with which the human animal learns something new. Outside many of the houses the women had returned to their weaving on primitive looms. Scott and Weir were in their element.

MacKinnon and I left them to it and went in search of a camp site. We found an excellent place a quarter of a mile away on the opposite side of the glen. The ground was steep pasture, save for this tiny level hollow beside a birch wood. A rivulet ran through it. Thus we had firewood within a stone’s throw and pure water within three yards.

After the Dotials had pitched camp the Lata greyhounds arrived. Their young head coolie, being full of energy and high spirits, went straight to the stream, and before drinking dropped down on his knees, prayed fervently, then scattered water in the air and salaamed. That done he drank. It was most refreshing to see how unselfconsciously he did all this. A man brought up in the European convention might feel as he, yet be
too self-conscious to act. To young Indians prayer can be as natural as breathing, and they will do the one in public no more self-consciously than the other. Done thus it is altogether good—good to do and to witness. Done otherwise, and in public, all is spoiled.

I paid off the Lata men. They were most reluctant to go, and warned us that all labourers of Dunagiri were engaged in building a new school in a field below the village. Now this was true. The schoolmaster himself had pointed out the building. It stood to reason that all spare local labour would be under contract. I still had faith in the promised help from Dunagiri but asked the Lata men if they would return should we need them. They said they would. And could they have baksheesh? This I refused. Their pay had been good. As coolies, I told them, they were 'bahut mahnga.' This sent them into roars of laughter. Perhaps the words were incorrect for 'too costly,' or else flattered them. But I could not have said better; it sent them off in high glee.

Goria, on the other hand, was giving us real concern. He had pains in his tummy and was crying like a child. We traced this illness (almost certainly) to a surfeit of coco-nut, which he had bought at Joshimath and consumed to-day at one sitting. Goria was a very tough gentleman, as we had seen at Camp II on Hanuman and many another place, and he was able to shed tears without shedding an inch of his manhood. He was Goria, in acute pain, therefore he cried; that was the natural thing to do. Truly these Dotials have few inhibitions. I began to feel that I had been leading a very unnatural life. MacKinnon opened his medicine chest. Determined not to pull his punch, he gave Goria in quick succession bismuth salicylate, chlorodyne, aspirin, and other items culminating in bouillon gras. In twenty minutes it was a cure. Within one hour Goria was laughing.

Our camp site view was a massive cloud screen. The upper part of the Dunagiri Gad was, we knew, filled by the Bagini glacier, which fell eight miles from the northern rim of the Nanda Devi basin. Flanking the glacier were great peaks of 20,000 feet, but of these nothing was visible. Our westward
view, down the Dunagiri Gad, went across the Dhauli Gorge to the mountains of Hathi and Gori Parbat (22,000 feet), which all day long had been thickly blanketed. At sunset these western clouds began to billow loose, as though giants beneath were shaking free. And at dusk Gori Parbat thrust out the whole of its upper mass, the clouds thinning along the flanks, but dense still about the foot. The towers and spikes of its high ridges and outliers had thus no relation with Asia and little enough with the sky as we normally understand it. Instead they occupied a realm of the stratosphere at heights beyond all estimate of human eye. In the darkening twilight the immense crests took an unearthly aspect like the mountain ranges of the moon.

There seemed to be every promise of a big-scale cloud clearance. We were now able to see the long hill-ridge that walled the north side of the Dunagiri Gad. This ridge comprised half a dozen peaks, which screened from us the still higher
Mountaineering and Medicine at Dunagiri

Mountains of the Lampak group. Our course of action was clear. We must climb one of the mountains of the screen, and from it reconnoitre the big game behind. None of these mountains had ever been named or attempted. We chose the nearest point, 17,830 feet, on which we could see a route slanting from left to right up the south flank. We should then strike the crest a mile west of the summit. What obstacles the crest might provide we could not see. We should have a climb of six thousand feet, for which Weir, Scott, and I resolved to rise at 4 a.m. MacKinnon wanted a rest day.

The three of us were away in good time and blessed by a clear sky. We crossed a grassy ridge behind and above the village and descended abruptly to the Bagini glacier stream. A bridge gave access to old terraced fields, on which herds of black sheep were browsing. Again we remarked the sheen of their coats. Beyond, the hill pastures were grazed by well-formed horses. They were beautiful animals, quite unlike those of the foothills. There a horse looked like a stuffed museum piece, every rib showing through tight-stretched hide; here a horse had flesh and shapeliness, and so with the people too. Dunagiri prospered.

Scott had now to drop out with a painful Achilles tendon. Weir and I went on alone, slanting rightwards up a grass shelf to a stony ridge, by which we climbed direct to the main ridge. We struck the crest at 15,000 feet at 10.30 a.m. Unluckily, clouds had already flooded up the Dhauli and the Dunagiri Gad and were beginning to boil around the tops. For the second day in succession the big Lampak mountains were veiled. Yesterday the clouds had rolled high only in the afternoon, but today were high by 9 a.m., thus defeating our reconnaissance. It looked to me like a new and persistent weather pattern. Mercifully it was dry cloud, giving no threat of precipitation.

The peak remained desirable in our eyes, being unclimbed. We followed the narrow and shattered ridge eastwards. Much snow lay on the north flank but none on the crest, on which great boulders were piled in depth, and poised. The blocks were loose and moved; they swung or subsided as the foot came
down. An easy enough ridge in appearance, it was ready to punish a moment’s carelessness with a broken leg.

At 17,000 feet the crest reared in massive gendarmes. They were unscalable direct over the tips and could not be by-passed underneath. Tentatively, we climbed forty feet up the rock-wall of the first and discovered a precarious line of traverse running rightwards high along the south cliff. The face was exposed and the rock unsound. Good holds helped us, but every one had to be tested and then used with a delicate touch. Thus we turned the gendarmes and arrived on the most exhausting slopes of running shale. For the first time we began to feel our elevation. To keep fatigue at bay, on the last eight hundred feet, we had to breathe deeply, once to each step. Our performance was greatly improved from the Rishi days.

We passed a last gendarme, climbed still more abominable shale, then arrived on snow. The final peak was a snow-dome. At 1.30 p.m. we stepped on to the summit. This was our first success on an unclimbed mountain, but no view rewarded us. In such heavy cloud the air, though windless, had been very cold above 16,000 feet. On the last thousand feet I wore a woollen vest, shirt, two sweaters, balaclava helmet, and gloves, and cannot claim to have felt warm.

Our descent we shall long remember as one of the most exasperating of our lives. We enjoyed the passage of the gendarmes, which was tricky and stimulating, but the shale and boulders gave as unstable and dangerous a journey at gentle angles as one could well imagine. On low-angle boulders the climber tends to plunge and go fast, but here we had to creep, not daring to put weight into a stride for very fear of the consequences. Even with care we had narrow escapes from crushing a foot or leg between toppling blocks. We became short-tempered and peppery.

However, we came into camp in the evening feeling cheerful again. The agonies of descent being ended, it seemed to us, looking back, that we had had a good climb. For Weir and I to-morrow must be a rest-day, but we earnestly hoped that Scott and MacKinnon would repair our reconnaissance failure. Scott’s
tendon was much better. For their first ascent he and MacKinnon selected point 16,690 feet, two miles to the south-south-east of Dunagiri. This would give them a view at six-mile range on to the south-west aspect of the Lampak peaks, clustering around the head of the Bagini glacier. In particular, they would look for the approach to peak 20,560 feet. They would look, that is, if the sky were clear. If... One thing was certain: they could no longer expect the morning to be clear after 9 a.m. They must be away by three. Perimal was warned to have the fire ready for breakfast at 2 a.m. He blinked. When evil tidings shattered him, Perimal always blinked.

We then heard that MacKinnon had spent one of the most useful days of his life. His remaining behind had been a stroke of good fortune. After a brisk morning's business at the dispensary he had been called into the village with Scott to attend to a girl's foot. She was only a two year old. And such a hideously septic foot neither MacKinnon nor Scott had ever seen before—puffed out like a football with old pus: encased by dead and blackened skin, which the mother had kept carefully wrapped around the putrefaction. It stank sickeningly. Even the toes had lost their separateness and were joined in a mass of infected flesh. At first sight it had looked like a case for amputation. MacKinnon had cut all the skin and stripped the foot down to its tissues, then washed with antiseptics until the blood had begun to flow. After that he had burst one of our few phials of penicillin. We were glad of that. It sounded a desperate case, but one of the very kind that would be most likely to yield to penicillin treatment. The question was whether we should be long enough at Dunagiri to see results.

That night we decided, now and henceforth, to pitch and use our third high-altitude tent down at base. The two others were in daily use by the coolies, who packed in three men to a tent. We ourselves were beginning to feel the need of an occasional night's privacy, as relief from the barrack-room flavour of the big Bungalow. Weir took the first night. This allowed me the extreme joy of lying warm in my sleeping-bag at 2 a.m. and watching through half-closed eyelids while Scott and MacKinnon
prepared. It was a dark, cheerless, and cloudy night, made discouraging by occasional drizzle.

Perimal had excelled himself. Without having to be roused, and having no watch, he had yet risen at 1.20 a.m. to get the fire going. Zungia and Goria were up also. We had sometimes cursed Perimal on account of his uncertain handling of his men and lack of decision compared with Kuar Singh, but in truth we had little to complain about. Kuar Singh had set high standards. To-night and for ever Perimal won my respect.

I knew no more until eight o’clock, then Weir and I spent a delicious morning doing nothing of importance. The sun was bright and warming below, but up aloft we could see that every mountain was in cloud.

At half-past one MacKinnon and Scott returned. They had had the climb of their lives on a long ridge of granite, narrow and spectacular, like the west ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean in Skye prolonged to two thousand feet. They had reached their summit and come down by a gully, which had given them the father and mother of all glissades—three thousand feet, they said, with never a stop. Weir and I listened agape, and cursed our ill fortune in missing this wonder. For a mountain that can really be enjoyed in the Himalaya—enjoyed while one is actually climbing it—is a wonder indeed. Not even the descent was tiring, but instead a climax to the day’s exhilarating thrills.

The sad fact remained that no reconnaissance had been made of the Lampak group. Not a hill had they seen all day; nothing but the everlasting cloud, getting daily worse. The date was 16th June. We ought to have at least ten days before the monsoon broke, if not longer. But of course we could never be sure. We decided not to spend more time on these attempts to reconnoitre, but at once to pitch Camp II on the Bagini glacier near the foot of peak 20,560 feet, stock it with seven days’ food, then try to put Camp III on the peak’s southern glacier at 18,000 feet, where the maps showed wide-spaced contour lines. I accordingly told Perimal to get twenty seer of ata. He came back to report that ata would be ground to-morrow and delivered at 5 p.m. This left us with one clear
day: a gift to Weir and me. We promptly agreed to repeat the ascent of peak 16,690 feet.

That same afternoon I accompanied MacKinnon into the village to dress the girl's foot. To me it looked a horrifying mess, but MacKinnon swore that it was so greatly improved that he could hardly recognize it as the same foot. He now managed to separate the toes. He washed, and applied more penicillin. I had fetched the schoolmaster along to watch MacKinnon dress the foot, for it was necessary, while we were away, that someone should know how to deal with it. We left him with a good supply of bandages and acriflavine tablets and told him to wash the foot every two days. He saw the performance; I think he understood. From the look in his eye my opinion was that he would not act. We could have no conversation with the mother, for she had no Hindi. But she loved the child and might get the schoolmaster to tell her what to do.

That night I slept alone in the high-altitude tent. Such peace I never knew. I read by candlelight until 11 p.m.—an intellectual debauch. I read most nights, but rarely for long. One always felt that other people were being kept awake by the light. My own reading matter was a note-book of highly condensed philosophy. Weir had Homer's *Odyssey*. Scott had the Four Gospels, and MacKinnon had forgotten to bring anything. We did not find our reading heavy. At this stage we had no desire of light reading. My own feeling was that my mind was getting no tough or weighty employment during the day and accordingly welcomed a stretching at night. At home, in the climbing huts, mountaineers read *Men Only* and *Lilliput*. I never see them read anything else for more than two minutes together. But that is short-term holiday fare, and for such soporifics we had no taste at all. We wanted meat, concentrated—but not in bulk, for that would be too expensive in candles.

Rain drummed on the tent roof at intervals during the night, but Perimal the Dauntless roused himself yet again, and I heard the crackle of his fire at 2 a.m. Weir and I were off at 3.30. It was a dark night with no moon. Thick mist was pouring up the Dunagiri Gad and sheet lightning flickered incessantly
among the clouds on the Bagini glacier. The little stream flowing through our camp site issued from the northern corrie of our mountain, its course a sure guide, which we followed by torchlight until a quarter-past four.

Close-growing rhododendron bushes at first greatly impeded us, then gave way to the dwarf variety. As we climbed up the lowest reach of the corrie the first grey light allowed us to switch off our batteries. Lightning still flickered in the heart of the cloud mass.

Our peak sent north to the Dunagiri Gad two long ridges enclosing the corrie. The route taken by Scott and MacKinnon went up the right-hand or westerly prong of the horse-shoe, then round to the summit at the top of the easterly prong. At the point where our guiding stream fell away to a trickle, we contoured on to the crest of the western prong, which was here grassy. After a few hundred feet we came on to solid granite, milky white like the rock of Changabang. There was never a loose hold anywhere. The ridge became a true arête, thrusting cleanly through the air. Many small towers had to be taken direct and long sharp edges traversed, sometimes on the crest, but more often by lower ledges.

The farther we went the more sheer fell the flanks. At one point the crest was gashed by a chasm, which we at last entered from the left side by a down-slanting crack, into which our edge-nails fitted nicely. At another gap, continued exposure to long drops at last forced us to rope up. Protected from above, Weir traversed into the gap by the corrie-wall, whereas I preferred to hitch the rope round a spike at the edge and slide down. Many such situations were spread over a thousand feet of airy rock-climbing. Near its top the edge became horizontal but sharp, riven into innumerable teeth, each encircled most emphatically by thin air, and all brightened by unexpected sun.

The clouds were below and around, still rolling ever onwards along the Dhauli and up the Dunagiri Gad, partly obscuring the peaks in cumulus. Occasional rents let the sun on to our ridge. Its level edge gradually broadened to give us easy walking where it swung round the corner of the horse-shoe, then narrowed
in a series of spikes and dropped to a col fifteen hundred feet under the summit.

Above were two buttresses, one above the other, their pale grey faces imposing another thousand feet of rock-climbing. At ten o'clock we laid hands on two rock points, which turned out to be twin summits.

On one of the points we built a little cairn, then settled down to see if the clouds might lift. After several minutes there had been no sign of change. This our third reconnaissance was doomed, we thought, to failure as before. There seemed no alternative to going blind up the Bagini glacier to-morrow, hoping for a close but foreshortened view of peak 20,560 feet.

We were just about to rise and go down when the whole mass of cloud at the head of the Bagini glacier swirled aside. One after another the Lampak mountains emerged shining from head to foot, the sky above them a stainless blue; such a sky, one might have sworn, no cloud had ever sullied, or ever would sully. All this in a trice. At the back of the Bagini glacier stood the unnamed summit of the range 21,770 feet. Its top was an ice-cap, shaped as a triangle thus: △ —slanting at the rock-base and looking like the turned-back cowl of a Cistercian monk. Slightly below and to the left the 20,560-foot top appeared as a shoulder of the main summit. And from head and shoulder, as though from the erect back of the Cistercian standing at his altar, there dropped six thousand feet to the Bagini glacier a mantle of white. This wide, snow-draped precipice was higher and more terrible by far than the north face of the Matterhorn.

The south-west glacier, by which we had hoped to make our ascent on peak 20,560 feet, was revealed as a hanging glacier scalable by no man, steeper, if anything, than the northerly ice-fall of Bethartoli Himal. The half-inch Ordnance Survey map for each mountain had shown contour lines well spaced, and these bore little relation to the reality. Mountaineers accustomed only to the accurate maps of the Swiss and French Alps should take warning. In face of the vastness and complexity of the Himalaya, the Indian maps represent a human triumph over great natural obstacles, and they are amazingly accurate.
The Indian Survey won our whole-hearted admiration. The map contours are sound guides to the shapes of the mountains, but their spacing is not reliable. Often they are right; often, as now, we found them wrong.

None of the other peaks in view was in any way more promising than the main tops—not at least from this their southerly aspect. We determined to go down at once and cancel the Bagini glacier trip. We descended north by the other, easterly prong of the horse-shoe. The sky clouded again as we left; all that fair array of snow peaks vanished as though they had never been; once more we looked on to dismal vapours of grey. Eight hundred feet down we came to a col, from which a broad snow-gully fell to the north corrie. This could be none other than the glissade. We embarked. It was an even slope. Down we sailed, a thousand feet into the mist—a thousand feet out of it—non-stop to the floor of the corrie. In two hours from the summit we covered the five thousand feet back to camp.

When Scott and MacKinnon heard our report they consented to give up the whole attempt to explore the Lampak group from the south. Not only were the bigger peaks inaccessible but the great invasion by pre-monsoon cloud, rolling day after day up the Dhaulí, was a totally unexpected phenomenon, which would embarrass our efforts to pick off even minor tops. Of these latter there were numerous summits between sixteen and nineteen thousand feet that would give good climbs. Judging by to-day’s mountain, it is at these heights that the most enjoyable of all Himalayan climbing is to be found. We could think of no better centre than Dunagiri for an introduction to the Himalaya. It is most beautiful country. Just to stay and live here for a while, in among the mountains, is bliss. Much exploratory work could be done over the northern and southern passes.

We ourselves had now set our hearts upon climbing a virgin mountain of over 20,000 feet. It was plainly evident that that was no simple matter in eastern Garhwal. We had thus far not set eyes on a peak of such height that did not offer a high degree of difficulty. In brief, they were challenging. What prospects would be offered to us by the northern aspect? The map
contours showed more inviting lines of approach—but we no longer trusted contour lines. However, to the north lay our only hope, for the western aspect was clouded daily as heavily as the south.

We had been prepared to operate from Dunagiri until the breaking of the monsoon. Now we resolved to put into execution, without delay, Part III of our plan. Our strategic move to the Tibetan side of the main axis should give us the relatively clear skies here denied us. But there would be more likelihood of this theory working out true if we could get there just before the monsoon and climb during its earlier stages, rather than wait until the heavier weather, delayed by the Nanda Devi massif, had had any chance to move north. We hoped that such heavy weather would never reach us, but hope is not knowledge.

It was decided. To-morrow we go north. I told Perimal. He replied enthusiastically, saying that instead of taking coolies from Dunagiri we should be able to hire jhopa. We had no idea what jhopa might be. A hurried search through a dictionary and two grammars made us no wiser. I tried other means. How many jhaps were at Dunagiri? 'Six,' said Perimal. What weight could each one carry? 'Two maunds' (160 lb.). How much did they cost? 'Rupees 10 per day.' The only conclusion we could come to was that they must be horses. We had seen no other pack animals save goats. They would be no dearer than coolies—indeed, a little cheaper. So I went into the village to find the jhopawala. But he and his jhaps were all 'ooper.' It was arranged that to-morrow morning he would visit the camp to make a bandobast.

Thus we were graced by another 'rest-day'—one of these exceedingly busy rest-days, which are the only kind that the Himalaya grant.

Our plan was simple enough, as it might appear on paper, but not so simple to carry out. We proposed to move just nine miles as the crow flies, from Dunagiri to Lampak grazing ground on the north-east side of the group. There was no house at Lampak. It was an alp like Durashi, utterly deserted except
when goats were driven over the Surans ka Dhura Pass in summer from Malari village on the upper Dhauli. It looked a very lonely place on the map, situated beside the snout of the Uja Tirche glacier, which flowed north to the Girthiganga. To reach it we should have to travel two days north to Malari, either by the Dhauli track or else by the high-level route over two passes of 13,620 feet and 14,790 feet, and then go eastwards two days over the Surans ka Dhura at 15,000 feet. The move thus involved nine thousand feet of ascent and four days' travel over sixteen miles. Two days more would have to be spent at Malari to buy in thirty days' food, to get coolies for the eastward move, and the promise of coolies for the still later attempt to follow the Girthi River to Milam on the Gori. Malari was the point on which the whole plan of the expedition pivoted, both as regards the strategy of monsoon dodging and in supply of food and man-power. Here alone our Bombay pessimist would be proved conclusively right or wrong.

Two jhopawalas appeared prompt at 8 a.m. I told them our needs: five jhopas for a two-day journey to Malari. For once no long bargaining was required. They asked Rupees 10 daily per jhopa. I agreed. And each jhopa would carry two maunds? They agreed. They were young shepherds with frank faces and friendly eyes, with hearts no more set on hard bargaining than our own. In our innocence we thought how pleasant and easy it was to deal with the men of Dunagiri, not yet realizing that behind the shepherds lay their master, a dragon with whom we had not reckoned. I asked them what route they would recommend. To our joy they chose the high route. The Dhauli, they said, was kharab (we heartily agreed—its dust and traffic seemed unattractive after the freshness of the 12,000-foot level), whereas 'ooper' was a thik rasta, which means a good route. This surprised us. On the map it looked a bad one from the standpoint of a jhopa—not that we knew what jhopas were—for the passes were exceedingly steep and the second had crag around the top. The men, however, were mountaineers to the bone; their jhopas would be trained accordingly.

They departed to fetch the jhopas down from 'ooper.'
Under Weir’s direction we spent all forenoon unpacking crates, taking stock and repacking. One crate was specially packed and set apart for the Panch Chuli, and pronounced untouchable until we reached the Darmaganga—if ever. The precaution was important; although the food was lasting well, we had made heavy inroads on biscuits, which henceforth had to be reserved for mountains only, and the oatmeal was running out. We hoped soon to be able to replace oatmeal with tsampa, a ground and roasted barley used by the Bhotias in the cis-tibetan Himalaya. Near villages or at base camp our British food was not essential, in the sense that we should never have starved without it, but at high altitudes it was essential. My own stomach, at least, would not accept a chupatty above 17,000 feet. If coerced it mutinied.

We shall always remember Dunagiri for its potatoes. It was the crop in which the villagers rightly specialized. Their potatoes were unblemished, white and floury when cooked, altogether delicious of flavour. Most people who received medical attention from MacKinnon gave him presents of potatoes—only a few pounds at a time, because, like all staple foods in Kumaon, they were more expensive than in Britain. (Potatoes were 2\text{d}. per lb., rice 15. 6d., and flour 11d.) From the poorer people the gifts represented a small sacrifice, which being self-chosen we gladly accepted, and an expression of thanks that we appreciated. It was important to them.

In the afternoon I accompanied MacKinnon into the village to attend to the girl’s foot. The bandage as usual was covered with mud and dust, but when MacKinnon unwrapped it the foot was disclosed as clean and healing. I can only assume that the penicillin must have worked this miracle. He had been dressing it for only four days. No less a word than hideous can describe its original condition; now it looked healthily raw. Cure was certain—if the mother kept it clean. We tried again to impress upon the schoolmaster the need for washing it in acriflavine every two days, and to-day we had the mother wash it herself. We both felt much concerned lest all the good work should now be undone. At the back of our minds lurked the notion
that MacKinnon’s work on that foot was of consequence greater than the expedition’s mountain plans.

He attended to a dozen other patients, including several young women, obviously in the pink of condition, who wanted anything he chose to give them. MacKinnon did not fly his red beard in vain. In the villages my general impression was that serious illness is limited to the very young and the very old. On a first arrival at a village these hill people seem to be gloriously healthy. The young men especially are full of vigour and initiative. They are as strong as horses and lead full lives. Therefore they are happy and overflow with good spirits. But indoors—hidden away—there is plenty of disease and trouble. It comes out for treatment only when a white man stops near by. Little of our medicines had ever to be used on ourselves or the Dotials, but we could have done with treble our supplies for the villagers. Medical mission work is badly needed in the Kumaon Himalaya, and nowhere could it be better justified. I have met no people in the world whom I respect or like more. They deserve to get help.

Our last evening at Dunagiri was celebrated in a manner befitting the ripening genius of Weir. He honoured us with a four-course banquet, nine-tenths of which (estimated by weight, not bulk) consisted of a steamed pudding made out of ata, suet, and raisins, wrapped in a bit of old pyjama and boiled one hour in a pot. This was a great and resounding triumph. We wanted to stay on at Dunagiri, surrounded by our dozen unclimbed mountains, and eat Weir’s puddings for ever. This night we can claim as one night of our lives when the desire of mountains did not afflict us, and when our books lay unopened and unheeded. There are things more weighty than philosophy and epic.
THE GRANITE RIDGE OF DUNAGIRI PEAK 16,690 feet
above the camp near Dunagiri village
(W. H. Murray climbing)
CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Journey to Lampak

THE HIGH-LEVEL ROUTE TO MALARI

AT SEVEN O’CLOCK on the morning of 19th June the long-expected jhopas plodded like a squadron of tanks into camp. To our surprise and joy we found not horses but a kind of yak, beautiful, long-horned animals with black and grey coats of deep pile. They were a cross between the yak and the cow; true beasts of burden, enormously strong, short in the leg, and broad in the hoof. I heaved a happy sigh, for there was no doubt that these jhopas would be able to carry two maunds. And their eyes, we had noted, were mild.

This morning, alas, the real jhopawala had turned out himself. He was a stern-mouthed man with a roman nose, long grey hair, and a lean and leathery cheek. His eye was fierce. He sucked fiercely at a hubble-bubble pipe. He gave quick, short orders to his shepherds, who then ignored the loads we had weighed out and just seized the boxes at random, lashed one on each side of each jhopa, and with a calculated lack of ceremony heaved a lighter kit-bag in between. The resultant load was barely one and a half maunds. I protested. A great mound of baggage was left over—very heavy loads for the Dotials. The jhopawala declared that one and a half maunds was the maximum (later I discovered that this was the normal load), but I reminded him of yesterday’s bandobast—two maunds at Rupees 10. He refused to listen.

The jhopawala was taking fiercer and fiercer sucks at his hubble-bubble. Perimal, Zungia, and Goria joined in a general argument, developing rapidly into a squabble. Each side turned on heat and tempers rose to bursting point. Taking one last and fiercest suck of all, the jhopawala rapped out an ugly sounding
order. All three Bhotias then threw themselves upon the jhopas, tore off the ropes, and hurled the loads back on to the hillside. They would carry no loads at all. We could carry the —— loads ourselves.

At this crisis I found myself curiously unable to register any sense of alarm. Failing jhopas, we must try to get coolies, which might be very difficult because so many were employed on building the new school—a work of which the jhopawala was foreman. But instead of starting to plead or argue further, I turned on my heel and started walking downhill to the village—intending to raise Cain if not coolies. I had not gone fifty yards before all the jhopawalas were running after me, salaaming with clasped hands. One and a half maunds, they pleaded, was the limit that a jhopa could carry. I agreed—one and a half maunds to one jhopa. Well, then, we should need six jhopas, not five. They nodded happily. ‘But,’ I went on, ‘yesterday’s bandobast was Rupees 10 for a two-maund load; to-day’s must be Rupees 8 for a one and a half maund load.’ They hesitated. I repeated: ‘Chhe jhopa—ath rupian.’ They very nearly agreed. Had they only done so they would have saved us money. At the last moment they saw this. Deadlock—mounting argument—raging tempers—everyone talking at once, except the sahibs. The scene was boiling up for another burst when I drew one man aside and said again, in a reasoning tone of voice: ‘Chhe jhopa—ath rupian.’ Zungia threw in a remark, which I did not understand.

Then suddenly it was settled. Five jhopas would carry two maunds for ten rupees. It was the original agreement. Everyone was happy and smiling; one would have thought that no breath of dispute had ever ruffled these serene and amiable faces. Nothing said in heat seems ever to be held against a man; neither defeat nor victory is ever gloated over; no doubt that explains why Indian hillmen are free to wrangle so vehemently.

The jhopas were loaded once more and away we went, heading north for the pass of the Kanari Khal at 13,620 feet. As soon as we crossed the river the chief jhopawala returned and shook hands warmly with me as he left. I noticed that he
had given his hubble-bubble to his two herdsmen. They were using the detachable stem as a droving stick. The jhopas carried the two maunds without trouble. They responded with discipline to pulls on the tail, slaps on the rump, digs in the ribs, and ear-splitting whistles.

On the upper slopes our attention was drawn to the ground around us by the delicious scents rising from the earth and plants. Grass was scanty but the soil was a delight to the eye; it was light and loose and well drained; it faced south. Innumerable alpine plants were scattered across the surface, few yet in bloom but many just bursting. Against that light grey soil they looked extraordinarily fresh. Red, blue, and yellow were the predominating colours, and green. Displays of rose-root were especially beautiful on the pass.

The descent into the Kalla Gad went easily. This glen runs westwards from a cirque of four 20,000-foot mountains. These were in cloud. The Kalla Gad was adorned by two widely distant alps, each an emerald oasis in that ice-worn ravine. The upper one lay in the bed of the glen directly under the south wall of our next day’s pass, the Kalla Khal of 14,790 feet. The pass looked a very tough proposition. We found difficulty in picturing to ourselves five jhopas crag-climbing around the crest. Meanwhile, we came down on to the alp before one o’clock. There were many flat places on the near side of the river, where rhododendron bushes were in full, pale pink bloom. Sparkling rivulets ran through the grass. But the herdsmen insisted on crossing the glacier stream to the north side. We should not allow that another time. The ford was easy (the water went only up to the thighs) but our camping ground was then a field of dockens—sure sign of an old goat haunt. Too late, we discovered the ground to be crawling with beetles and ants.

The whole sunny afternoon was before us for relaxation. Our young Dunagiri herdsmen were very well turned out in comparison with theragged Dotials. Their blankets were woven of good wool, like their jackets, which were well cut. Their harness ropes too were of wool, black, and neatly plaited. They carried carpets of thick weave and bright colour, which during
the day padded the jhopas’ backs. They even had mattresses. And they set us high standards in courtesy. Rather than sit on their own mattresses when we, apparently, had none, they offered them to us. We refused. I had to produce our lilos to convince them that all was well with us. And so too with food. We were surrounded with crates of food and kit-bags of Dunagiri ata; none the less, they offered us a little of their own food—tsampa. We had been greatly looking forward to tasting this elusive meal. It had been unobtainable in the lower Dhauli. It was rather like pea-flour in appearance, but less smooth and vastly more pleasant to the palate. We had some in our tea. Funnily enough, the Dotials looked down their noses at tsampa. They called it animal feed. Remembering that Dr. Johnson had had no better opinion of oatmeal, we took no heed. The two foods have much in common.

We ought to have been in a splendid situation for reconnoitring the west face of the Lampak group, but the glen was full of mist, which persisted into the following morning. Ten minutes after we started for the second pass I saw the clouds surge, and waited. I was rewarded. They lifted clean off the west face of Lampak (20,280 feet), showing me plainly that from this side no ascent was possible. I may be mistaken. I made a detailed sketch for future reference. There seemed to be no way of gaining access to the north or south ridges.

I followed on behind the labouring jhopas. The slope was an evil mixture of scree, high-angle grass, and juniper. The animals were (I admit) too heavy-laden. They were not unduly distressed. They simply went dead slow; one step at a time, responding reluctantly to whacks, whistles, prods, and whooshes. The herdsmen, wielding the hubble-bubble stem, worked harder than the jhopas.

Near the top the route became a ledge winding among rock. This was more than the jhopas would face, so the Dotials returned from the pass and carried the loads. The jhopas then made the grade with heaving flanks. The herdsmen were enormously relieved and shook hands all round, while we honoured them with many a ‘Shabash!’
JHOPAS (or JHIBUS)
at 13,600 feet on the high-level route to Malari

Photo by D. Scott
The Kalla Khal was cold and cloudy. As we passed over, our first Malari Bhotia appeared through the mist, heading south for Dunagiri. He looked strikingly intelligent, a man made wise by experience and goodwill. He was clad in coarse woollen trousers and jacket, much tattered, with long shirt-tails hanging outside. It seemed revealing of the freedom of a hillman's life that the moment he heard that we were bound for Lampak and wanted coolies, he cancelled his business with Dunagiri, offered his services, and turned on the pass to come with us to Malari.

As soon as we had descended out of the cloud, we saw the first clear evidence of our having crossed the main axis of the Himalayan chain; we were entering an entirely different kind of country. It was a more barren land. Over a wide moor and a lower grassland the soil was dry and the vegetation sparse. On all the northern slopes of the mountains the rock was crumbly and rotten, usually reddish brown in colour. The farther one advances north of the Nanda Devi-Dunagiri group, the drier, poorer, and more bare do these slopes become, until near Tibet only yak dung on the tracks can be found for fuel.

Malari Village

After descending two thousand feet we could again see the Dhauli, still a mighty canyon, and still twisting, more sharply now, among mountains. Malari was invisible, but we passed through its highest cultivated zone of bare, grey, and stony fields. The track narrowed on the side of an escarpment where the jhapas bashed our crates against the walls. For this reason, and the near certainty of its recurrence, we think that jhapas (called jhibu in most other valleys) should be used only when no alternative offers.

The path straightened along the top of a broad ridge, lined with white roses. From its utmost tip we saw Malari. It lay several hundred feet below. A hundred or more houses clustered above a huge, flat table of pale grey soil, elevated some five hundred feet above the Dhauliganga. The tableland seemed smooth as a billiard-table, prepared with a lavish care
and now crying to all the heavens for rain—rain—rain. I have rarely seen any work of man more appealing. This monsoon of which we were so scared was to Malari the one and needful friend, without which all life here must come to an end. The village was built in tiers. The roofs of grey wooden slats were set so close that we could hardly see any gaps between the houses, which had an air of antiquity. The formation was typically Tibetan, set upon the very brink of a precipice, which had been cut by a river plunging west to the Dhauli from the Lampak hills. The whole great cluster hung together like a bee-swarm on a bough.

In all this grey land stood one tree, startlingly green, at the centre of the great grey table.

We came down to the rest-house, which faced Malari across the westward-plunging river. The jhopas were unloaded and the Dunagiri men paid off, for they had to get the animals back to pasture before nightfall. The chaukidar arrived. A youth of fifteen years, he was also the schoolmaster. His bearing was dignified in the extreme and loftier than that of the loftiest lama that ever lived in Tibet. Where was our chitthi? he asked, looking down his nose. I produced our Inner Line Pass, which had nothing to do with forest rest-houses—but then he would not know that. He countered: ‘The keys are at Joshimath; you will not get in.’ We took his word for that and proceeded to pitch a tent, whereupon he just pushed the door of the bungalow open—the lock was broken.

To give the boy something to think about, other than himself, I ordered six maunds of ata and twelve coolies to go to Lampak. I knew well that such business was far outside his province and would bring him down to earth. It did. He sought how to help us and become more like a boy of fifteen. He took himself off muttering ‘Milega, milega’ (we will get them). He sent down a merchant who accepted the order. One hundred and seventy families live at Malari. Thus there is no lack of food or men.

We visited the village that evening and found fresh eggs in good supply. The narrow and twisting streets and the house
verandas gave deep, dramatic vistas into the gorges. The flat tableland had a surprise for us. It was in fact a very steep slope dropping north to the river, but terraced with vertical stone walls, so that from above it did look flat. Its form was a work of art and justifiably the pride of Malari.

The long awaited rain fell all that night and continued into the following morning. Scott and MacKinnon travelled seven miles up the Dhauli to Bampa, attracted there by a post office and two Canadian nurses. Our iodine was finished and we were anxious to get more from the nurses for Perimal, who had goitre, which had caused him shortness of breath ever since Bethartoli Himal.

Shortly after they were away the rain ceased. At once we could hear drums starting up like tom-toms in the village, and out marched more than a dozen Malari men, carrying kukris and axes. Headed by the drummers, they disappeared up the side-ravine. Two hours later they returned carrying green juniper and green leaves wound around their heads. We guessed that this ceremony prefaced some ritual to be observed later to-day or to-morrow, most likely to welcome and hasten the monsoon.

I had to spend most of the afternoon bargaining with Bala Singh, the head Malari coolie. He refused to allow his men to carry more than 40 lb. for Rupees 4. I agreed at once, demanding that they travel to Lampak in one march instead of two. He refused, so I said that they must carry 60 lb. And so the argument went on, interminably. At intervals I retired, to eat one of Weir’s steamed puddings or to write letters and diaries, while Bala Singh and his men argued among themselves, since they could not argue with me. But they always supported Bala Singh when I came out. Towards evening they agreed to carry 60 lb.—for Rupees 7. The Malari men, it seemed, had never heard of Scotsmen and were slow to learn. I cut all further discussion and they had to go home. This meant still another full day at Malari while our own Dotials sat on their behinds doing nothing for Rupees 3 per day. We determined not to allow Bala Singh to hold us up to ransom in this way. Tomorrow morning we should put on an act and stage a departure:
Scott and MacKinnon down-river to Kosa, Weir and I up-river to Bampa, in pretence of seeking coolies. That would bring the issue to a head. And if they still held out, then we should go in real earnest.

At this juncture Scott and MacKinnon arrived back. Most of the Bampa men, they said, had already left for Tibet. We might get one or two coolies there, not more. Otherwise they had had a most helpful day. The Canadian nurses belonged to the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, and were engaged in medical missionary work. Their field-leader was Leonard C. J. Moules, now at Milam on the Gori, whither we were bound next month. The nurses knew that Scott and MacKinnon were approaching some hours before they arrived. They had also known of our progress through the Dhauli from Tapoban to Dunagiri and the time of our arrival at Malari. Being innocent of Himalayan ways and unsuspecting of such an efficient 'bush telegraph,' we were astonished. Scott and MacKinnon reaped its benefits in arriving at Bampa to find tea just ready for them.

The nurses were living in a former pilgrims' rest-house. They had made a snug and charming home for themselves by stopping up a hole in the roof with a tent and then redecorating the interior. They had given MacKinnon iodine, with which he now began dosing Perimal, and given Scott the recipe for making biscuits and pancakes out of ata, which he now passed on to Weir.

Between Malari and Bampa Scott had seen and been greatly puzzled by a peculiar wading bird, in colour and habit quite unlike anything in the Indian bird books. It was the first rare bird that he (or Weir) had encountered—a wader with a red curved bill, and over its breast a black curved rib. Months later they identified it through the help of the Bombay Natural History Society—an ibis bill.

Early on our second morning Bala Singh and his men were again waiting for us in the yard. This was an excellent sign. They were keen to come. But they were as unrelenting as ever in demanding Rupees 7. The four of us then made preparations to leave. We packed our rucksacks, made chupatty sandwiches, consulted the maps. Perimal came in haste and asked where
we were going. In a voice loud enough for the Malari men to hear I said: 'Two sahibs go to Kosa and two to Bampa. There are plenty coolies at Bampa.' We could hear quick, agitated argument in the background. Bala Singh's men were in revolt against him. All that we needed now was an excuse for a few minutes' delay. But our rucksacks were on our backs and we must not appear to linger. Just then an old woman came to MacKinnon bearing a sick child—a naked baby, perhaps eighteen months old. He looked sadly underweight and bloodless; his head hung to one side and his stare was vacant. There was nothing we could do.

When the boy had been taken away Bala Singh stepped forward. His men closed round. They would carry 60 lb. at Rupees 4, plus Rupees 2 return. As usual it was our original offer. But now Bala Singh proposed that instead of twelve Malari men I should take seven. He would provide eighteen goats to carry the bulk of our 500 lb. of ata, these goats to be reckoned as the equivalent of five men for purposes of pay. I looked at his men's faces. They were in agreement. The smaller number of men would share more money.

Everything was now settled. Weir and I spent the rest of the morning juggling with stores and supervising the packing of ata, while Scott and MacKinnon visited the village. They had a great stroke of fortune. They arrived in time to see the long ritual dances in honour of the monsoon. These were held in a sunken square at the village centre. About one hundred people had gathered round the sides and still more crowded the roof-tops. In the square stood a stone altar, on top of which burned a charcoal lamp. Upon its glowing coals had been placed a twig or two of green juniper, from which blue smoke curled like incense across the square. A second juniper fire burned at the altar's foot.

The dancers were seven, one woman and six men, all in their prime, wearing long loose robes of green, orange, and deep pink. They wove a circle snake-like round the altar, to the time-beat of two drummers who stood in one corner. The drum skins were stretched tight over the ends of a long barrel, beaten by
the flat of the hand, and over a large metal bowl, beaten with sticks. The sense of rhythm shown by these drummers was exceptionally good, the drumming a genuine art, which they had mastered. They put heart and soul into the work; they gave themselves over entirely to the dance, their eyes staring and bodies swaying as it reached the climax.

All the dances, of which there were six in one and a half hours, were simple and very much alike. Each started with a circling movement round the altar, but developed a very different pattern with slight changes of step. The circle, for example, would develop into an S movement at one side rather than another, and the step become a shuffle not unlike a *pas de bas*; but most of the movement came from the arms and the sway of the shoulders. Indians dance with their whole bodies.

Each dance was accompanied by different combinations of ritual. From time to time the dancers would advance in turn to the altar and dab the forehead with charcoal from the fire at its foot; at other times go to a big palette at one side and dab the forehead with red pigment. Then—on with the dance. From bowl-bearers at the side-wall dancers occasionally drew handfuls of grain, which they scattered abroad or over their own heads or among the bystanders. They would pick up dust, or go through the motion of doing so, and scatter it likewise. At intervals they would drink from brass bowls; more especially the woman, who would approach women at the side and receive bowls of water, which she would throw down her throat, never touching the rim with her lips.

The tempo increased as each dance neared its end. Drummers and dancers were alike transported, as if they had drunk deep; yet they were not frenzied and contrived to end in complete command of themselves. To this orderliness but one exception showed, when the woman gave a solo. She was wild and witch-like with a great mane of black hair floating round her shoulders. At the close of the solo she did appear to slip into frenzy and to lose control, then to dance like one possessed of devils. But all was orderly thereafter.

The sky that night was heavy with cloud.
Eighteen goats arrived at 6 a.m. accompanied by two young shepherds, who attached the saddle-bags and set off. We and the thirteen coolies followed an hour later. The spine of the Lampak group runs south to north from the Bagini glacier to the Girthiganga. The last big peak at the north end is Kunti Bhannar (19,340 feet), from which the ridge slopes down to the Girthi (pronounced Geertee at 10,000 feet. To reach Lampak we had to cross this northern spur by the pass of the Surans ka Dhura (15,000 feet). Our day’s objective was a grazing ground on the Dhauli side of the pass. The ascent was exceedingly steep, but we came to the camp site well before midday. The coolies arrived driving a cow, which bore most of their bedding and many odds and ends. They had simply roped it in en passant.

I should have said that however excellent the camping ground might be—and the turf was clean and short—it was not for us. There was no water and no wood. Had we suggested such a halting place the coolies would surely have shaken sorrowful heads and stood about unhelpfully. Since this was their own suggestion they were as brisk as birds in the spring. Taking three empty kit-bags and an ice-axe, the Dotials sped three-quarters of a mile across the hillside to a gully in which they found a snow-bed. They brought back huge chunks of old snow, one of which, perched on a stone table, supplied a constant trickle of water into our canvas bucket. Meanwhile, the Malari men had scattered far and wide, and in the course of an hour or two collected huge bundles of juniper.

The camp site was a lofty terrace looking high across the Dhauli and straight past the huge cone of Bunga. The high hills were in cloud, sometimes dark and threatening, at others sunlit and dramatic. No rain fell and the cold was great after sunset. The Bhotias kept big red fires going until far into the night, and sat round them singing songs. The Dotials, on the other hand, had no time for community singing. An individual Dotial might often sing snatches of song to himself, but never would he join a chorus.
The two goatherds, having sat up all night round the fire to keep warm, were away at the crack of dawn. The main body followed two hours later. After reaching the main ridge, we followed the crest southwards for an hour to the pass, where a track wound among shattered crags. Then we slanted down and rightwards across hillsides everywhere covered in wild flowers. Many of the primulas were deep violet and large, all of them in great clumps. At one point we passed banks of ranunculi, far bigger than buttercups but as rich a yellow. Between the greater clusters every gap was filled by rose-root and alpine roses. They scented the air all the way down to Lampak.
CHAPTER TWELVE

The Ascent of Uja Tirche

WE HAD GONE half a mile from the Surans ka Dhura when the crossing of a rib gave us our first and urgently desired view into the Girthiganga. Next month's opening move for Part IV of our plan was revealed. We looked down into a monstrous gorge where it branched. The left branch, the Kio Gad, looked terrific—walled by rock peaks like the Dolomites. Ramba Kot, 17,150 feet, separated the two branches, its innumerable buttresses plunging straight into both rivers. The right-hand branch was the true Girthi, but we could not see into it. Access to it went from Lampak, low down across the northerly spur of a mountain called Uja Tirche, which faced us now for the first time. The route into the Girthi Gorge was clear, but all our thoughts of that future adventure were forgotten when we turned our eyes to Uja Tirche (pronounced Ooja Teerchay).

The day was sunny. As always clouds had spread over the Lampak group, which formed one side of a vast horse-shoe of ten 20,000-foot mountains. They fed a central glacier, which had its origin in the north wall of Tirsuli at the back of the horse-shoe, and which flowed seven miles north to Lampak grazing ground, thence sending a stream three or four miles down the Siruanch Ghat to the Girthi. On the quarter-inch map the glacier was called the Uja Tirche glacier, named after the mountain dominating Lampak, now facing us across the glacier with a seven-thousand-foot wall of cliff and hanging glacier, culminating in a peak of 20,350 feet. This mountain had been honoured with a name, in country where so many great mountains are unnamed, by virtue of its foremost position at the north end of the horse-shoe. Towards Tibet
and the pass of the Kungribingri La to India, it presented a sheer north-east face rising eight thousand feet out of the Girthiganga. To ourselves and the Surans ka Dhura, it showed a sharp north ridge of ten thousand feet, which we saw in profile. The entire mountain was clear.

As we looked at that north ridge a flicker of hope began to stir in every one of us. From Lampak a good route slanted right to left up the west flank, aiming towards the saddle by which we hoped one day to enter the Girthi Gorge. Well before the saddle we should have to turn rightwards, then strike straight up for the crest at 18,000 feet. There the ridge ran level for a half a mile, bearing on its edge nine gigantic pinnacles. The centre three were at least two hundred feet high. If these were possible—and we could indulge no fond hopes after our Rishi experiences—access would be had to a twisting snow-ridge of two thousand feet, twice interrupted by high steps of ice.

We determined to try this route at once. The first essential was to get our Base Camp established. As we dropped down towards the snout of the Uja Tirche glacier the clouds lifted from the north wall of Tirsuli. Probably we were the first mountaineers ever to see that stupendous face—a precipice of snow and ice three miles long and seven thousand feet high. Tirsuli had only once been attempted, by the ill-fated Polish expedition of 1939, and that from the Milam glacier on its far side. Not one of the other mountains surrounding us had ever been attempted or reconnoitred, or indeed ever been seen from the north except by officers of the Indian Survey. Let the mountains be climbable or unclimbable—in all Kumaon we could not have chosen a more inspiring base for exploration than Lampak. Whether our monsoon theory would stand its test was now to be put to the proof.

We descended steep grass slopes on to the moraine of the glacier. The grass was too steep to afford a camp site, but the moraine offered a pocket of flat stony ground under a cliff. About three-quarters of a mile above the cliff a minor glacier of Lampak Peak, out of sight, testified to its existence in a
The ascent of Uja Tirche

Waterfall, which came roaring down a big chimney in the cliff face. It seemed a noisy site, but in no time our brains ceased recording the roar. All seemed quiet and peaceful. We were well protected from wind, and wood was not far away. Our height was here 13,500 feet.

I paid off the Malari men. They promised to return whenever we sent for them and carry to Milam, provided that loads were cut to 50 lb. for the passage of the Girthi Gorge. I agreed.
Bala Singh then left saddle-bags against his return, for he pro-
posed to try to take seven goats through the Girthi. He and
his men left that same afternoon. I should not be surprised if
they went back to Malari non-stop.

Weir then selected food for the attack on Uja Tirche. I told
Perimal what our plans were. We prepared for the morrow.
Towards nightfall the cloud thickened all round us and we could
see that in monsoon weather Lampak must become a scene of
desolation. The entire glacier is stone-covered. Despite which
we liked Lampak. Each halting place has its own atmosphere
and Lampak was friendly.

On the morning of 25th June we set off with all six coolies to
put Camp II as close to the nine pinnacles as possible. Of this
we had high hopes, for the morning was sunny. Although we
had moved only nine miles from Dunagiri, that crossing of the
watershed had indeed wrought our mountaineering salvation.
The Lampak group to our south was still buried under its
familiar blanket, but the Uja Tirche massif stayed clear.

We crossed the snout of the main glacier and struck up the
flank, following old goat tracks among the juniper, until they
gave out on open grass. The coolies delayed here to gather
bundles of the last available firewood, MacKinnon going on
alone and travelling at remarkable speed. He was in first-class
condition. I myself waited for the coolies, who were to-day
in need of guiding and more in need of encouragement than I
had ever known them.

On the long north ridge of Uja Tirche, falling to the Girthi,
rose a minor peak of 17,280 feet. Between it and the main peak
lay a corrie, which we entered. We took to its right-hand
ridge. It became snowy and ran a thousand feet up to a great
scree-field, six hundred feet under the pinnacles. Here, at
17,400 feet, we pitched Camp II.

To our north and east, as far as eye could see, stretched the
bare lands of Tibet, roofed by shining skies and barred a
hundred and twenty miles away by a ripple of snows. Beyond
its first fringe of fiercely gashed mountains, it was a brown and
sun-baked country, spread over a greater space of the earth’s
CLIMBING ON THE FACE OF THE CENTRAL PINNACLE AT 18,000 feet
ON UJA TIRCHE
The route continues up the snow-tongue
surface than our eyes had ever beheld. Such was the purity of the sky’s blue that however often we saw it hereafter we never ceased to wonder. It is uniquely Tibetan.

MacKinnon had gone ahead to reconnoitre the pinnacles, which were clouded, but continually revealing themselves in whole or in part. We could see that the first four were detached, then came three huge ones all linked together, then two smaller ones, and finally a buttress lying against the start of the snow-ridge. The latter’s edge looked remarkably thin from Camp II. It twisted up to the summit, twice interrupted by high walls of ice. We were thus confronted with four points of doubt. Firstly, the pinnacles. They could certainly not be climbed direct; could they then be turned? Secondly, where the rock abutted against the start of the snow-ridge—might there not be a great gap? Of this we were much afraid after Hanuman. Thirdly, one thousand feet up the snow-ridge came the first ice-wall, shaped like a triangle and two hundred feet from base to apex. The true ridge ran up the left-hand (easterly) edge. We had difficulty in estimating the angle near the apex; might it not be too steep to climb? Fourthly, four hundred feet under the summit came the second ice-step, one hundred feet high, of the same shape and character and posing the same question. Each of these ice-walls was the apex of a hanging glacier falling four thousand feet down cliffs into the north-west corrie, which harboured a bright blue lake.

Despite all this doubt, each one of us felt curiously optimistic, and our feelings were soon heightened by MacKinnon, who came romping down out of the shifting mists. He had passed the first four pinnacles, had been unable to deal with the central three alone, but, having seen a possible route up their left flank, was full of hope for the morrow.

The Dotials had taken six hours for the four-thousand-foot climb, but much delay had been caused by the collection of firewood lower down. Perimal was still troubled with his goitre. We sent him back to Base with two others and retained Goria, Zungia, and Phakir, who were to-day’s fittest Dotials. They had enough firewood to cook all meals, so that we had no
need for our high-altitude stoves. To save time in the morning we filled our thermos flasks. We went early to bed but slept very badly. Light snow fell during the night.

That we should need daylight to deal with the pinnacles we took for granted. Rock-climbing would be necessary and not of a kind that we could deal with by torchlight. Accordingly we rose at 4.30 a.m. None of us felt too well and Weir and I ate virtually no breakfast, save tea and biscuits. We were away shortly after 5 a.m. in a gloomy twilight. A dull grey haze pervaded the long scree-slopes leading to the pinnacles, but there was no mist to embarrass the route selection. We roped up at the pinnacles in two pairs, Weir with MacKinnon and myself with Scott. The first pair led off. We had never seen pinnacles so fantastic. They stuck madly askew out of the ridge. Fortunately, the whole of the mountain's west flank (to our right-hand side) was bounded by horizontal strata, yellow, brown, and purple; these provided seams by which we turned four pinnacles.

Then came the central trio, sheer on the west and overhung in front. The first tower was one hundred and fifty feet high, its overhang being formed by a huge block balanced on top. We had no choice but to turn left, where fortunate ledges allowed us to traverse the east flank into the gap behind. Thence by a short scramble we gained the long narrow crest of the second, and by its airy edge the gap under the third. It was the biggest and propounded a riddle, so that ever after we called it the Sphinx. We had to turn again from the sheer west to the broken east and climb down a short snow-slope on to a ledge. The face of the pinnacle there exposed to us was furrowed by a groove, snow-filled in its upper part. Could we climb that groove, the crest of the pinnacle was ours. What we should be faced with on its far side, no man could tell.

MacKinnon led the first rope. His ascent with Weir forty feet up to the tongue of snow looked sensational in the dim grey light. When Scott and I came to follow we found this rock gave straightforward climbing; but the fifty feet of frozen snow above was banked almost vertically against the right-hand wall of the
pinnacle. Rock handholds taken to one side greatly helped us there; then came fifteen feet of easier snow and rock to the crest of the pinnacle. We looked quickly over the far edge—and the descent was a mere nothing.

There were still two smaller pinnacles in front, but we passed these by long thin ledges on the west. Rotten rock troubled us. Our next fear was the last buttress. Could we get up to it, and if so could we get off it? The front of the buttress had not looked too bad from Camp II, but as we drew near we could see plainly that no ascent was possible. It was, quite simply, too steep and smooth. We continued to traverse its western seams, on rock that continued rotten, along a face that continued impregnable. We now drew close to the edge of the first hanging glacier. Here we saw a chimney splitting the buttress directly overhead. We turned straight up. The chimney went well for eighty feet, leading us on to easy rocks, and so to the top. We looked hastily for the gap beyond. And there was none. The rock abutted against the snow-ridge. The bogey of the Rishi was laid.

The time was 8.30 a.m. Two thousand feet of snow and ice-ridge swept to the summit. Our greatest concern was the urgent need of getting high before the sun got to work on the snow. I felt not at all concerned about the ice-walls; either they would go or they would not—it was a technical matter; but if the snow deteriorated at the same speed as it had on Bethartoli Himal, then lack of time would defeat us. A great mercy was vouchsafed in the cloud that now wrapped the whole upper ridge. It would act as a protecting screen. But such a screen can only be partial. It is a great mistake, for example, to dispense with snow-goggles or glacier cream in cloud. Likewise, snow continues to soften by day despite cloud, which at most slows down the fatal process. For the moment the snow was frozen and the cloud our abetter. We strapped ten-point crampons on to our boots and hastened into action.

The ridge opened mildly with a great dome, over which we passed swiftly to a col, where the pulling away of the western glacier had opened small crevasses. These were snow-covered,
and, not expecting them on the crest of the ridge itself, we twice broke through knee deep. The ridge narrowed, swinging upwards this way and that in majestic curves. On our left-hand side cornices overhung the north-eastern wall, which dropped eight thousand feet to the Girthi. These cornices were discontinuous and so required all the greater attention. The true edge, when uncorniced, naturally gave the best route; it was appallingly easy to continue on the edge unwittingly after a cornice had developed. Scott and I were spared this risk by the good work of Weir and MacKinnon ahead. On that first thousand feet not a step had to be cut or kicked. We proceeded speedily to the first ice-wall.

The angle there rose from 40 degrees to 50 degrees throughout two-thirds of its two-hundred-foot length, then gradually steepened over the last sixty feet. The edge was that of an ice-pyramid; ice formed the flanking walls, but the edge bore snow. This snow was good near the foot, thin towards the middle; there the sun had begun its deadly work. We could find no support for our crampon spikes without cutting steps in the underlying ice. Towards the top the excessive angle prohibited a direct ascent. In Scotland we should have thought of it as an excellent ice-pitch, and rejoiced, but here we had no time to spend on it. MacKinnon, therefore, began a rightward traverse across the face of the upper wall to gain its west edge, which seemed to lie at a lesser angle. He made this move thirty feet under the apex. It imposed much axe work, for the face was clear ice and gave us all very hard climbing near the west edge, which was corniced. There were some tricky moves here. On a British or Alpine cliff I should have made them relatively gaily, but again I was impressed by the greater nervous strain of making them at the top of a hanging glacier, on the face of a four-thousand-foot cliff, at an elevation of nineteen thousand feet on an unclimbed mountain. Technical difficulties in the Himalaya are not enjoyed.

However, we pulled ourselves over the vertical wall of the cornice and found good firm snow-ice on the west face. The angle proved to be higher than we had imagined; slashed steps
were still required to take the edge spikes of crampons. We gained the apex. The ridge levelled.

I confess that I reached the top of that wall feeling a certain sense of dismay. The forenoon sun was already loosening the snow-skin; this we had taken for granted before ever starting. But our return route in the afternoon could not go back over the cornice, nor use the steps in the middle section of the true edge, which would become too dangerous. This meant that we must make our descent much lower down on the west edge, thus involving ourselves in hours of downhill and transverse step-cutting in ice.

Meantime, we were fully half-way up the ridge, and for that were thankful. In front of us the edge twisted up in huge, swinging zigzags, raw-edged and corniced, falling abruptly on the right into cloud. We balanced up, drawing two full breaths to each step. The work became most exhausting. None of us was able to refuel properly. We did manage to eat two biscuits and honey, but quite without relish. Chocolate we loathed above 17,000 feet and at 19,000 could not persuade our throats to accept any. We enjoyed barley-sugar.

At half-past twelve, after seven hours' climbing, we reached the second triangle of one hundred feet. We took it by the left edge and were again forced off the ascent of the apex and compelled into a traverse towards the right edge. This on exposed ice. MacKinnon cut the steps big, despite which the rounding of the cornice was again technically difficult, even for myself, who came last. The west edge, as before, was too steep to take in crampons alone, bearing as it did a loosening snow-skin. Sixty feet of quick cutting brought us back on to the true ridge. We were now above 20,000 feet. Ahead, the edge ran straight as a die for three hundred feet, and beyond any shadow of doubt the way to the top was clear.

At 2 p.m. we gained the summit. Its sickle of snow gave just enough room for four men. Clouds encircled us. The ascent had taken eight and a half hours and we reckoned that four or five hours should see us back to the pinnacles. But we feared the deterioration of snow. So at 2.10 p.m. we started
down, going all on one rope for greater security. I went first to do the cutting and MacKinnon went to the rear as anchor. We cramponed down to the second ice-wall. We noticed that the moment we turned down we felt delightfully reinvigorated. We were acclimatized. This did not mean that at high altitude the effort of ascent gave us pleasure. But the descent did, because then we had energy to spare, were thus more alive, and were even capable of appreciating beauty when it appeared.

On coming to the brink of the ice-wall I had to recut all the steps down the slope of the west face, and to my great surprise found myself wielding an axe speedily and without distress. Belayed by Scott, I climbed over the vertical edge of the cornice. MacKinnon asked me to drive a piton (a spike and ring) into the wall of the cornice on my way down. This would help to protect him later. Scott held me on the rope while I fished in my rucksack. I found a hammer and piton, but when I tried to nail the wall the piton would not stay in—it split the ice. The ice was true ice, which had once been a white névé and was newly formed into the clear. It was curiously brittle, and this point is worth noting in retrospect. I was deceived by its hardness.

Meantime, I discovered that most of the hand and foot holds cut for the ascent had been sun-wrecked. I had to recut them for most of that fifty-foot traverse, until near the far edge they looked sound, so I used one without reshaping. At once the step broke off and I fell, braking with the axe until the rope tightened. The rope checked me at ten feet. I took a short rest then cut back to the line of steps, made the main ridge, and the rest came cautiously on.

Below, the snow greatly worsened. It balled on the crampons. I stopped and suggested removing them, but the general opinion seemed to be that we could still save time by retaining them, if we cleared them at each step. We went on, but despite all precautions were finding it impossible to prevent slips and slithers. This whole north ridge was basically an ice-ridge, covered at the crest only (for the flanks were too steep) with a thick skin of snow, which it was now only too ready to shed. Progress was safe so long as we kept to the true edge, but
frequently the crest was corniced on the east side, thus forcing
us on to its steep west slope. The descent of rotten snow in
exposed situations is, in my opinion, the most unpleasant and
unnerving experience one may have in mountaineering. The
retention of crampons only makes it worse, and the truth of that
fact was borne in on the party on one of those traverses under
the crest, when Weir shot off one yard westwards, to be stopped
by the rope. We called a halt then and removed crampons. We regained control of our feet. We edged slowly down.

It was half-past four when we reached the top of the first ice-
wall. We did not even take a look at our original route over
the cornice and under the apex. The very thought of it was
bad for morale. Instead, I began cutting steps down the ice-
slope of the west flank, reflecting how much pleasanter it was to
cut down than to cut up, if only the angle be not excessive.
We were aiming now for a crag one hundred and fifty feet
below on the west edge of the triangle. If we could then climb
down the crag for eighty feet, we should be able to cross the
base of the triangle to rejoin the true ridge.

After a sixty-foot descent we came on to some broken rock,
mixed with snow and ice, on which the greater speed of climbing
movement was offset by the need of moving singly from belays,
so that we took one hour to reach the crag. The rock there
was exceedingly rotten, but we climbed easily enough to its
foot. We untied and joined both our ropes together. The
full two hundred feet would be needed to get the first man
across the ice-wall. The time was then six o'clock. A thin
mist hovered round us. I calculated that we still had nearly
two hours of daylight on hand, which seemed adequate to see
us down to the pinnacles.

I began cutting. At once came the first disappointment. I
had been hoping that so far below the apex we might be blessed
with snow-ice, which would cut easily. The white and granular
surface encouraged such a hope. But a few whacks with my
pick soon proved the ice to be pure: neither clear nor grey nor
blue nor green, but a dark neutral colour compounded of all
others. Although hard, the ice was thoroughly wet and inclined
to be brittle. Steps had accordingly to be large and time-consuming. About fifteen blows were required for each. After cutting one quarter of the way, I returned to rest and MacKinnon went out to cut the second quarter. He wore crampons. As he too came back the edge-spikes of his crampons split off the base of a step. He flashed down the slope, braking with his pick as hard as he could—with a nil effect. The rope twanged tight. Scott stopped him. Since the ice-sheet fell a thousand feet to a precipice of five hundred feet, followed by a second hanging glacier of a thousand feet, then more ice cliffs to the corrie of the blue lake, it was a situation to test the nerve of anyone with thought of falling. MacKinnon showed no discomposure. He still had his axe and so cut steps back to the crag. On Alpine ice in the afternoon his use of crampons would have been fully justified. On Bethartoli Himal the speed of the sun’s effect on snow had taken us all by surprise. On Uja Tirche its effect on ice caused less surprise than shock.

Scott now went on the traverse, cut a third of the second half, and returned. Then Weir went out, cut, and returned. I took his end of the rope and again tied on. As I did so I saw that the sun was setting. The sky had entirely cleared. Northwestwards there was the most wonderful and fiery glow behind Kamet. I exclaimed and drew the others’ attention. It was the first truly spectacular sunset that we had seen in the Himalaya. To my disappointment the others were unmoved. In fact, Scott looked at it gloomily and made no move even to level a camera. This was passing strange. I ascribed their failure to the dulling effect on the brain of high altitude, plus the growing likelihood of benightment. However, there was still a chance that we might complete the traverse before dark.

I started off. Weir had returned from a big bulge on the slope. I cut vertically down below it and in ten minutes more, with two hundred feet of rope dragging heavily at my waist, reached the main ridge. That was a glorious moment when I stepped on to its steep but comforting edge. There was no cornice on the far side, so that I could descend there a couple of steps and thus ensure the party’s safety. The sky was frostily
clear. A first prickle of starlight was just beginning to creep into it. North-westwards, the spikes of Kamet and Mana Peak stood black upon the afterglow; eastwards, the risen moon swung to the top like a thrown orange.

The question now before us was how to bring across the party. Our whole two hundred feet of rope was stretched across the ice-sheet. MacKinnon at one end, I at the other. And we had no more. We had earlier dismissed the idea of crossing on two ropes of two men, because no one man could have held the other. We now also dismissed the idea of three men crossing at once; such a notion gave me the horrors. Instead, Scott tied a spare loop round his waist, then clipped the loop on to the two-hundred-foot rope with a karabiner. He came slowly over the line of steps, sliding the ring along the rope. The only weakness I could see in this method was the need of giving him a good deal of slack rope, so as not to pull him away from the face, which was concave. He arrived safely. Weir followed. And at last came MacKinnon—just in time; only a last pallor lingered on the snow.

The west sky-line still held a long red streak. Not until then did I remember that I was still wearing my snow-goggles and that the glass was red. I slipped them off. In the west I could now discern no trace of colour—nothing but a band of white light, out of which, and far above which, thrust those black spikes of the Kamet group. The moon was no longer orange, but its normal, pale cream self. My companions, having long since removed their rose-tinted spectacles, had lost the sunset of the expedition. I had the day's first laugh.

We split the party into two ropes. This lower thousand feet of the ridge had already begun to freeze and give us firm footing. We could go down gaily, without the nervous tension of the upper half. The sky darkened to navy blue, while the snow below our feet brightened to the moonlight, softly, its surface ruffled like the wings of a swan. As we plunged downwards our gaze went infinitely far below to the Dhauli and Girthi and their host of tributary valleys, which were a blue still deeper than the sky, the mountains soaring out of them blue also, but
shadowy; like our own mountain cut off from all contact with earth by long streaks of cloud, stretching thin but jet black below the peaks, and by the unfathomable gulfs glimpsed between. We ourselves moved in and belonged to a world quite other than that of earth—the Himalayan world of space and frost, through which this swerving snow-edge projected, coming from nowhere and going to nowhere, encompassed by the stars and arched by the speeding moon; a world sufficient unto itself, not made for man's purposes.

In one hour we reached the pinnacles. The moon had most obligingly moved over to the west side of the ridge, where we had greatest need of it. MacKinnon went first, for he knew the way better than anyone. His route selection was to-night unerring. One after another he hit off the turning points that led rightly through the maze of spires. The descent of the Sphinx was the crucial move, for that was in shadow. I went down first and found the light good enough to let me see the holds. No torchlight was necessary. We knew that the rest of the route was easy, and at once felt incredibly weary. Before and after each little rise Scott and I had to stop and rest; none the less, we knocked an hour off the morning's time for the pinnacles. We walked into Camp II at 11.15 p.m.

So bright was the moon, that on looking back we could see the frail black line of our steps below the great ice-wall and the full length of the vast ice-slope below. They looked terrific; we had not realized our position at the time.

Goria and Zungia rose from bed and relit the fire. Hot sweet tea was all that we desired. Eighteen hours on a Himalayan ridge had left us all too tired for food.

As we turned in Uja Tirche still thrust its silver wedge to the moon, and the great north ridge rose jagged against the stars.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

High Camps at Lampak

BREAKFAST AT CAMP II next morning was the latest of the expedition—10 a.m. Only then did we discover that MacKinnon had gone snow-blind during the night. In the cloud of the preceding day he had risked removing his goggles when they steamed up, for the sun had never shone directly on to the snow. It was clear that he could not move down to-day. The cure for snow-blindness is a couple of drops of castor oil in the eye every two hours, six times repeated. The capsules, however, were down at Base, so Weir and I started down at once. Scott stayed with MacKinnon.

The fine weather was continuing. Despite the Malari dancing rite, no sign of the monsoon could be seen. And the Lampak hills were clear. For the first time we saw their north-east faces. Across the Uja Tirche glacier stood a six-mile row of six peaks. At the north end Kunti Bhannar and Lampak could at once be ruled out as inaccessible; likewise the three most southerly mountains (21,770, 20,560, and 21,340 feet). But in the centre rose an unnamed mountain, which we called South Lampak, 20,750 feet. It threw eastwards, five thousand feet down to the Uja Tirche glacier, a parallel row of three rock-ridges. The farthest of these looked climbable. Indeed, the upper seventeen hundred feet of that ridge was low-angle snow; its lower four thousand feet rock, neither gashed nor pinnacled. Around eighteen thousand feet, however, the rock-ridge was interrupted by a buttress of eight hundred feet, about which we could form no firm opinion, save that it looked formidable in front but more inviting on its south or left-hand wall. Our resolve was made. We should try South Lampak.

Our immediate need was more rest. With Zungia and Phakir, Weir and I descended to Base Camp in one and a half hours and
sent up Matbir with the castor oil. Then we relaxed. I cannot remember ever having had so much enjoyment out of consciously doing nothing. This seemed a plain indication that we ought to lie low for two days, and deal with South Lampak thereafter. On the other hand, the settled weather called for action.

There was still no sign of the monsoon when Scott and MacKinnon came down on the second day. MacKinnon could see, but wore goggles, and would be fit to climb within twenty-four hours. Our first rain at Lampak came that night and flooded Weir out of his high-altitude tent. All morning the cloud and mist hung over the glacier and the day became unusually warm at noon. This might not be the monsoon in all its infernal glory, but definitely its harbinger. It brought us to our planning senses. For the attempt on South Lampak by its far east ridge we agreed to put Camp II some three miles up the Uja Tirche glacier, Camp III on the ridge below the doubtful buttress, Camp IV above it if need be—so to the top. To this end Scott and I would get away next morning to reconnoitre the camp sites, while Weir prepared stores. On 1st July the whole party would begin moving up the glacier.

This point settled, I had occasion to wash Matbir’s feet with acriflavine. He had cut them on Uja Tirche. A little later I saw him take the hatchet and go out for firewood. It was one of his daily duties at Lampak. As usual he was bursting with energy and went straight to the big cliff above camp. I watched him admiringly as he made a swift round-up of juniper on the less accessible parts of the face. He brought back his load and went off again. But this time he took no hatchet. After zig-zagging with pace and precision over the cliffs he came back with a bunch of alpine flowers. I had noticed before that Matbir loved flowers, and he had gone back for them now from a need to give them to someone. Accordingly, he came to the tent door and gave them to me. No doubt he knew that I would not laugh. I accepted them thankfully—blue primulas and rock geraniums, anemones (both the small blue ones and the large white with five big petals and a yellow centre), forget-
me-nots and red potentillas; they were indeed most beautiful and I did not hide my admiration. Matbir hovered round the door for a minute to enjoy our enjoyment, then went off to join the coolies. I placed the flowers in a can of water in the centre of our table—a stone slab on crates—where Matbir and we would see them. Before long he whisked off again and presented a second bunch.

A Scottish or English youth of eighteen would not have dared such an act; he is too self-conscious. The charm of a Matbir is that no thought of self enters into the act. It is such freedom that alone makes it good and possible. Altogether, it was a revelation to me of what a man can be like when he is unspoiled: at once firm of eye and bearing, yet unhesitating in his love of the world and men and unembarrassed in showing it. I tried to think of men whom I had met outside the Himalaya, who in unaffected grace of manhood could stand comparison with Matbir. I was unable to think of any.

In our experience of the high Himalaya there occurred nothing to make a more lasting impression on my mind than this trivial incident. Again and again it recurs, accompanied by one or other of its witnessed opposites: Italian sentries at Tobruk staving in a prisoner’s face with rifle butts; one pundit of British mountaineering disparaging another; the corpse-like face of a Gestapo agent interrogating me at Mährisch Trubau. From these I can turn to Matbir at Lampak and feel a respect for man.

Not until the third morning was our return from Uja Tirche properly celebrated. At 6 a.m. the Dotials bought themselves a goat for Rupees 20 and sold us two legs and the liver for Rupees 6. During these last three days the first flocks had arrived from Malari and were grazing the alps on each side of the glacier. Each evening at seven the shepherds drove them into the shelter of the cliff behind the camp, and every morning at seven drove them out again to a great whistling and whooshing and tinkling of bells. This morning the goat’s head was off before we rose. Intense Dotial activity continued all day, skinning and cutting, and mincing with hatchets, getting
firewood and cooking—eating was a quite minor operation, not comparable to the preceding delights.

At ten o'clock Scott and I set off to reconnoitre the route up the glacier. Like the lower part of all the Himalayan glaciers we had seen, it was invisible under a great depth of scree. There were few crevasses, for the ice flowed straight at gentle angles. We followed the true left flank and were able to avoid the worst horrors of boulder-hopping, at first by the ridge of a moraine, then by marginal snow-strips. At one passage of a hundred yards we were exposed to avalanche threat from a side-glacier. A thousand feet above, its ice cliffs overhung the lower rock cliffs. But no fall had occurred this summer and would surely not occur within the next ten minutes. We passed with a quickening pulse but a good conscience.

By the time we came level with the far east ridge of South Lampak, we had travelled three miles and risen only fifteen hundred feet. And there, for the first time, the flanking cliffs yielded an easy climb to an alp on top: one hundred and fifty feet up. The alp was ablaze with wild flowers, flat and fed with water from old snow-beds: a perfect camp site. It commanded an extraordinary, close-up view of the north wall of Tirsuli: seven thousand feet high, three miles long, laden with hanging glaciers and immense sheets of ice, topped by fluted snows. Avalanches growled down its precipices at long intervals. It gave us the sharp, vivid sense of unbounded power and awfulness; it seemed appropriate that out from its upper cauldrons should issue the superlative ugliness of that stone-hidden glacier. This was mountain nature in the raw seen close; a fascinating comparison with the Himalaya seen from Ranikhet, so loftily elegant from there, as delicate as a painting on Japanese pottery. But here was the crude reality. So does a man look back momentarily from a bloody day on a battle-field to the memory of a drawing-room, where he once sipped China tea with ageing ladies.

In one matter we were disappointed: South Lampak was in cloud and no reconnaissance could be made of the east ridge. Thereupon we returned to Base and arranged that to-morrow
CAMP II
SOUTH LAMPAK PEAK

Behind the tents is the 7,000-foot wall of Tirsuli, its three-mile-long summit crest rising to over 23,000 feet.

Photo by D. Scott
two men should get away early to reconnoitre the ridge while the main body moved up in the forenoon after the coolies had collected firewood. We could not ask them to collect to-night, for they were full of goat—as we soon were ourselves. The meat was tough but of good flavour. Tom Weir fried the liver. That was the most tender and delicious liver that ever was cooked. We were entranced. We have never again eaten liver without a moment’s silent recollection. In the Himalaya meat to the mountaineer is like good grass to the goat, or the monsoon to Malari. It is the honey-dew and the milk of paradise.

On 1st July Scott and MacKinnon set off early on the second reconnaissance. Weir and I followed with the coolies three hours later, and after four hours on the glacier established Camp II. Scott and MacKinnon came in at four o’clock. Cloud was thick by then, but they had crossed and climbed the upper glacier in time to look back on to the east ridge. They gave a gloomy report, describing it as steep and doubtful with only one camp site visible, fifteen hundred feet up, which was not one half high enough. Before taking up the coolies, therefore, we thought it best to spend one more day making a reconnaissance climb on the ridge itself.

The heaviest rain we had had in India fell that night, but the cloud began clearing in the early morning. The seething and toiling vapour gradually streamed off the overwhelming face of Tirsuli, and Goria’s eyes were awestruck while he watched this revelation for the first time. When its three-mile length was at last clear he clasped his hands and salaamed. Very shortly an ice avalanche burst from the upper wall and fell in slow motion cataract down and down the seven thousand feet of ice-clad rock. We watched the torrent pour for minutes into the upper basin. I told the Dotials that Milam lay on the other side of this mountain, and that we must go there, thirty miles around the mountain, by the Girthiganga and the Unta Dhura Pass. They understood that; they obviously liked the idea.

Before long the sun was shining on to our ridge. We went straight to it and climbed a thousand feet on a narrow and shattered edge. Many alpine plants grew among the rocks.
We continued a second thousand feet on scree, until we could see that no difficulty barred the way to the upper buttress. Yesterday's appearance of difficulty had been an optical illusion. We halted.

The whole of the Uja Tirche glacier stretched sinuously below, no longer ugly but unmistakably a living glacier clad in a bronzed and glowing skin. Five peaks were ranged on its far side. Two routes attracted my attention as seeming feasible. The most southerly peak, 20,200 feet, looked climbable by its south-south-west ridge, and Tirsuli by its north-north-east ridge—if access could be gained to the col below it. No line of approach to the latter from the mountain's north-west basin was visible (this we never checked by entry to the basin), but there might well be a possible approach to the col from the farther side. If the other peaks are climbable, they offered no evidence.

At noon we returned to camp and basked in the sunshine among wide beds of buttercups and other ranunculi, primulas, white and yellow anemones, and a host of alpines. The gentian and edelweiss were still noticeably absent. The alp was frequented, too, by a great variety of birds, which Weir named glandara, a thrush-like bird of cobalt blue and black, and plain-backed mountain thrushes, and white-browed rosefinches. Scott was most delighted by the sight of a wall-creeper, flying in a flash of grey and crimson over the ridge. Its fluttering flight made it look like some large butterfly or humming-bird. Weir's happiest moment was listening to the song of meadow-pipits while they made their love flights. They made him think of the Scottish highlands in May or June. My own less observant eye and ear caught only the big and obvious things, like the lammergeyer, yellow of head and white of body, which flew over us like a Flying Fortress, and the alpine choughs, which circled the ridges up to eighteen thousand feet, and the whistling of monal pheasants in the early morning. I count that day at Camp II as the most care-free we had had in the Himalaya. Our use of it for reconnaissance had been quite unnecessary; one might have said a waste of time, had it not been for us all
BASE CAMP
AT LAMPAK

Left to right:
Scott, MacKinnon,
Murray, and Weir

Photo by T. Weir
a day of unadulterated enjoyment. Few indeed were the days of which we could say the same without some qualification.

At these Lampak camps, and always henceforth, the Dotials were busily engaged in either spinning or knitting. They had first bought the wool and spindles at Malari. Sitting round the camp-fires, and even on the march, one or other of them always had a hank of fleece twisted round his forearm. One end of the fleece would be teased out and spun into yarn on the spindle, which hung from it, and was kept whirring by an occasional flick of the middle finger and thumb. Even on rough ground, like the Uja Tirche glacier, they would carry the spindle and use it—at halts if at no other time. It is simply a bobbin on a long stem, common all over Asia, and identical with that used at the present day in north-west Scotland. If man spins yarn from wool, then this is the simplest instrument, and so like the wheel it is universal. From the yarn the Dotials knitted scarves, blankets, and pull-overs. They knitted well to simple patterns. They were never idle.

The morning of 3rd July dawned unpromisingly. Rain cloud was blowing up from the north, although the main mass of the weather continued driving across from the south-west. At seven o’clock we began climbing with four coolies. Beyond the initial shattered ridge and the central scree-slopes, we came on to a third thousand feet of mixed snow, scree, and ice, where step-cutting was required, and so to the rock-towers below the eight-hundred-foot buttress. The coolies were exhausted and would not go past the first tower. We were in mist, and the weather was breaking into a drizzle of sleet. But they had done well; carried to 18,000 feet. We said ‘Shabash!’ and told them to return in two days, starting from Camp II at 6 a.m. That we could trust them to do so was high testimony to Dotial virtues.

It was with confidence, too, that we watched them fade downwards into the mist; they had an observant eye for ground and would not lose themselves. We had left cairns at three doubtful points.
We shouldered the loads and carried them two hundred and fifty feet past the towers, using shattered ledges on the left flank. Below the buttress we found a big blade of snow. On this we spent an hour excavating platforms, then pitched the tents, MacKinnon and I in one and Scott and Weir in the other. The weather was now foul. All cooking was done by Weir in the other tent, which meant that soup and tea had to be collected when ready—a miserable process, for it meant our struggling out of sleeping-bags and emerging into the sleet. Before long the excessive movement on the floor of the tent caused the platform to subside over the steep south slope, so that MacKinnon had to keep to the far side while I lay in the middle.

We agreed to start at four-thirty next morning. But the morning when it came brought no improvement. The rocks were covered in new snow, the clouds dense and sleet ing. We decided to hang on in the hope of a third-day clearance. There could be no doubt now that the monsoon had broken in real earnest, and for these two days it gave us hell. I do not exaggerate. The word ‘hell’ denotes a very real mental state. Our tents were sited on a narrow arête, on either side of which drops yawned a thousand feet to glaciers. In their grey gloom avalanches roared day and night, like stags bellowing at our ear-drums; sleet hissed angrily on the canvas; and we, in the moist interior, were like Queen Victoria, not amused. We did not even have appetites to satisfy. Nor sleep to pass the time. No hearty curse stimulated the conversation, for that implies a deeply personal interest in something that is happening. We just lay, and occasionally wished we were dead. My diary records that MacKinnon and I discussed atheism, literature as a profession, the interpretation of history, and sulpha drugs. This sounds well, but should not obscure the truth.

At three-thirty on the third morning I looked out: sleet, dense mist, rocks snowed up and icy. We lay back. At 6 a.m. conditions were no better, so we breakfasted and packed up. We were scraping the snow- and ice-sheaths off the tents when a shaft of sun struck us. The clouds swept aside, ex-
posing mist-wreathed spikes across the valley, shining with new snow, crests glowing in the slant of the light. An Alpine brightness clothed the finest of them all—Uja Tirche. Then mist and sleet swallowed them whole.

We roped up for the passage of the pinnacles. The 50-lb. loads made us less steady than usual. Soon we dropped below the snow-line, to be met half-way by Zungia and Goria. They had left Matbir and Narbir to gather more firewood and seemed quite happy to carry 100-lb. loads downhill. At Camp II we rested only an hour, then returned to Base with all gear and equipment. Base seemed extraordinarily warm, roomy, and comfortable. We could not imagine why we should ever have thought it bleak. Perimal was waiting for us with yet another haunch of goat, which inspired Weir to make a dumpling to match it and pancakes to precede it. To the Dotials the pancakes were a revelation of the higher life; they called them henceforth 'Bampa memsahib's chupatties.' Goria learned to make them, but the dough had always to be mixed by Weir, for a Dotial's hand was far too thrifty in dispensing the rich ingredients.

That night I had my best sleep since coming to India. I suppose that we had wellnigh a hundred camps in the Himalaya, and I slept well in no more than one or two. Provided that the body is at rest, sound sleep seems unimportant on mountains. It certainly means nothing to my own health. At home I sleep soundly, on mountains never, and most men say the same. But always one feels refreshed.

We were also well fed. The old luxury expeditions, disdaining native food, were harassed by piles; but on this expedition none of us had ever before eaten so much roughage. It came in the ata, rice, and lentils, and now also in tsampa. This ground and roasted barley made a perfect substitute for porridge. Indeed, we preferred it to post-war porridge-oats. No cooking was needed—one simply stirred in boiling water. Chupatties made a satisfying bread substitute, although some kind of British spread seemed essential. Eaten hot and puffy from the fire we liked them; cold, they were unappetizing. Thick, they were tolerable; but thin, as made by the hand of
Goria—who, starting them as little balls of dough, would flip-flap them from palm to palm, then from fingers to fingers and finally from finger-tips to finger-tips, until he had them as thin as wafers, maintaining them unpunctured only by some miraculous sleight of hand—as made by such a craftsman we would normally eat between the four of us sixteen to a meal.

Living on the native diet, then, was proving to be a great success, but for one matter. For three months on end we were destined to move above 10,000 feet, and the reduced boiling point of water made for slow cooking—a full hour for potatoes. Lentils defied us; their adamantine hearts never softened, however long Weir might woo them with fires fierce or languorous. In consequence, they had consistently given us indigestion, until now, when we learned to eat them in small quantity.

We had seen little opportunity of shooting for the pot and were thankful to be unburdened with a rifle and ammunition. The stalking of these swift and high-climbing bharhal would have consumed more time and energy than we had to spare. Whereas domestic goat or sheep could be bought. But in camp next day we did have pangs of regret. In the afternoon three bharhal appeared at the brink of the cliff just four hundred feet above and began descending the ledges of the face. Their bodies were clearly outlined against the dark crag; we could not have missed. They would have fallen to our feet. It was the first time that bharhal had ever come so close. Phakir rushed off to make a detour to the top of the cliff, for he could almost certainly have cut off their escape had he got there. He was two-thirds of the way up—when they saw him. They turned, leapt up again from crag to crag, and vanished for ever.

The cliffs were busy that day. A lammergeyer kept sailing in and out among the corners, and we could see an immature shahin falcon perching there in the evening—and snow-pigeons roosting under the overhangs.

The weather had improved. We allotted the next four days to a second attempt on South Lampak. On 7th July we all went up the glacier again and pitched Camp II as before.
CAMP III. SOUTH LAMPAK
(18,000 feet)

Photo by D. Scott
Whether we should succeed or fail on this climb, the time was getting ripe for Part IV of our plan—the forcing of the Girthi Gorge. Accordingly, we arranged for Perimal and Zungia to go to Malari on 10th July, whether we had then returned from South Lampak or no, and fetch back ten Malari men and seven goats, all to be at Lampak on 12th July. Perimal and Zungia returned to Base that afternoon in pouring rain. And there was rain again that night. But the morning turned good and we put Camp III at 18,000 feet shortly after eleven o’clock. This time Goria carried all the way to the snow-saddle, travelling at high speed. He is a most splendid coolie. The others, too, gave a greatly improved performance. In part this was due to better acclimatization, and in greater part to the knowledge that this would be our last climb at Lampak. They looked forward to getting on the move again.

On the main Lampak ridge, and seemingly close above to our left, was a spear-like peak of 21,340 feet, from which unusually wild ice-ridges fell to the col connecting with our own peak. This col was nearly at our own level. In the evening mist kept forming and dispersing around the two summits, which loomed and faded, often revealing short sections of their leading ridges, whose steps and turning points then appeared to be wild and isolated mountains.

When South Lampak cleared the ice cliffs of its summit were seen to tumble down a short way like a stubby glacier and overhang the east face. Our east ridge just turned them with a southward sweep. We could see our ridge to be corniced but easy. As we looked now our ascent seemed assured if only the weather would hold.

We had a good meal that night: soup, pemmican, and tsampa (all these go well together), sardines, digestive biscuits, honey, and butter and cheese. We felt in fine fettle; outside was starlight and frost: propitious signs. At midnight our good hopes were dashed. A thin sleet began pattering on the canvas. It continued hour after hour. However, at 3.30 a.m. I gave a shout to Weir, who began making breakfast. Everything outside was veiled in mist so that we could not be sure how bad
conditions were. I went out. Snow lay thinly on the rocks, but the sleet was light. We breakfasted at four-thirty. At five the weather had become so threatening that we agreed to wait for a final decision until six. By which time there came in the east a faint, watery glow. Thus the weather could no longer be called bad. We roped up in two parties, myself with Weir and Scott with MacKinnon.

We climbed the upper curve of the snow-saddle to the foot of the buttress, myself leading. Its east face was good rock, but smooth as a concrete dam. We traversed leftwards. The south flank revealed itself to be a series of bright brown and shattered ridges, divided by still more shattered scoops and gullies. The first ridge was so unsafely rotten that we pressed on across a chute lined with clear ice, moving as fast as we could to escape stonefall. Three minutes sufficed for the step-cutting. Beyond, we edged round the awkward ledges of the second ridge to its broad back.

I climbed straight up and ran out a rope length. So unsound was this rock that I was willing neither to go on nor to bring up Weir. It was even more rotten than the first ridge. The angle was not high, but the rock was peculiarly hard, yet none of it sound; holds were small and all of them sloping, and the whole broad back of the ridge was littered deep in sharp-edged debris, delicately poised. Throughout the several hundred feet ahead, I could see not one belay, so that neither of us could protect the other in event of a slip. Wind action alone could at any moment cause stonefall.

Accordingly we retired with difficulty to the gully in time to stop Scott and MacKinnon. Had we gone still farther left we should have fared worse. Scott proposed climbing the gully on its left wall, but desisted after trial. Similarly, I tried the first ridge. One brief experience of its slaty crest brought me to my senses. At every step I was looking anxiously ahead, expecting a ricocheting stone, and looking anxiously around, in search of a non-existent stance for Weir. We then gave up and returned to camp.

Despite the obvious dangers, the decision had been a hard
one to make. The snow-ridge above joined the top of the buttress without a gap between, and the final ridge went easily to the summit. It is just possible that a party disposed to disregard all danger might have forced the buttress and gained the summit. In my own judgment the rock gave no reasonable hope of such a party's survival. To conclude the matter, snow showers were now a daily occurrence; a party descending on to the buttress and finding it lightly snow-covered would enter a death-trap.

We packed up and descended to Camp II, evacuated the latter at midday, and were down at Base by two. Once again it seemed a home from home, even though rain was falling. And once again there was to be feasting. We had not been long back when Perimal brought us another two legs of goat. He refused all payment. Goria had seen a stray lamb and captured it. Never had I seen the coolies in such great good humour, which persisted through the next three days. 'Lampak is cold,' they said, 'but the Girthi will be warm.' They were alert to serve. Goria spent much time sewing our torn clothes. Each time it rained Matbir raced round to whip in our shirts and socks. Zungia, when he and Perimal returned on the third day from Malari, brought a parcel of colour slides, which, on the strength of a Malari rumour, he had gone to collect at Bampa post office. Perimal brought chang. It is a colourless, alcoholic drink made from rice or barley. As made by the Bhotias it is poor stuff. We had one sip and hastily returned it. Goria could lower a big draught at one gulp; and that, we learned later, is the correct technique. Chang is not meant to be tasted. Chang sipped offends the palate; chang gulped intoxicates.

Zungia had done better than he knew in getting the slides. Scott and Weir had sent the film from Ranikhet to Bombay for processing. It was an experiment that failed. The transparencies of all their Ranikhet photographs had been spoiled—in the processing. Henceforth they knew to send colour film to England.

Close behind Perimal and Zungia came the Malari Bhotias, descending on us with the swooping speed and briskness that
distinguishes the Bhotia way of movement from the Dotial. The goats and two shepherds came in later. Fires were lit everywhere; the saddle-bags filled; the loads weighed out; twenty-two meals cooked and eaten. The chang was circulating. And everyone was happy. We were on the move.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Through the Gorge of the Girthi River

THE BRIGHTEST IDEA that Scott gave to the expedition was, to my mind, the eastward traverse from Malari on the Dhauli to Milam on the Gori by way of the Girthi River. If only we could make it we should thus link two great trade routes of Central Asia, and if only it were not too difficult the route might ultimately prove of value to travellers. From the broader viewpoint, this passage would be of greater importance than the ascent of any mountain, and for that reason we had been puzzled by the lack of records.

The entire crossing, Malari to Milam, would be thirty-eight miles. We should have to follow the full length of the Girthi-ganga to its source, the lake of Gangpani at 16,570 feet, under the Unta Dhura Pass. The pass, a thousand feet higher, is a double watershed between the Dhauli and Gori and between Tibet and India. The trade route from India goes over it, turning sharply north-eastwards to cross the frontier at the Kungribingri La. So that once we gained the pass we were 'made'; there would follow a descent over glaciated country to reach the Goriganga. Our estimate was seven days from Malari to Milam.

The Girthi was twenty-two miles long, but our Lampak base was already seven miles along the Girthi track—a track worn by Malari goatherds to the eastern grazing grounds. Six days, we thought, should therefore be sufficient time allowance, and ten days' ata sufficient food supply. The ata had been stored these twenty days in the saddle-bags. At first I was unhappy about the goats. They are magnificent rock-climbers, but the difficulty that we most feared in the Girthi Gorge was the fording of swollen glacier streams rushing in from the south. In this gorge we should have no trees to fell and the monsoon
was upon us. Rain had so far not been excessive, but the glaciers were bound to be melting faster. Jhibus in glacier streams are magnificently tank-like, but goats—surely they would be swept off their feet? Bala Singh swore that all would be well. At streams the goats would swim unloaded. They were his goats, worth five pounds apiece, so that I knew that he must be right.

As usual the goats were away early and the rest of us delayed by a fuss about loads. The Malari men had found one or two overweight. Much readjustment was required, and in the end we were delighted to see that Perimal was driven to exercise authority. He at last entered into his head coolieship, made the changes himself, distributed the loads, silenced the querulous, damned the grouasers, and ordered all with a brisk, commanding air. Through awakening too late, however, he had been landed with one of the heavier loads. But he was learning. All that Perimal had been needing was practice and experience, and now development followed.

That morning of 13th July was a perfect summer day. For
the first time in weeks all monsoon cloud had vanished and every hill leapt up in the sun. We crossed to the far side of the glacier. To get into the Girthi Gorge we aimed to strike over the north ridge of Uja Tirche by a grassy saddle called the Mukhtiar kharak, at a little over 14,000 feet. The route there was a long, easy walk up the grassy flank—and then—we knew not what would happen. It was an enlivening sensation to be setting off thus into the unknown, all plans and provisions duly made, so that nothing was left to do but to hope for the best. It gave us a keen awareness of freedom—the being able to concentrate on the present moment—to enjoy—to be doubly alive. This is the true reward of the mountain traveller.

In brilliant sunshine we slanted up across the flank of Uja Tirche. Since our last visit this hillside was transformed. Its broad acres were covered thickly in alpine flowers, especially above the lower juniper. Great tracts of the slope, when seen close, looked as if tilled, for the soil was light and loose and had a ‘cultivated’ surface. Over this soil spread enormous beds of alpines; they grew densely in fields sweeping a thousand feet down and across the hillside—a manifestation of pure colour seen through a sun-drenched mountain air, incomparable thus with anything to be seen at low elevations. Blue, white, red, and yellow were the names of these magic colours—yellow from the buttercups and dwarf broom, red from the potentillas and rose-root, white from the big-petalled anemones and the saxifrage, blue from the rock-geraniums. The primulas of our first visit were over; in their stead neat and rounded clumps of moss had filled out like footballs, thickly studded with tiny blue and pink flowers. Everywhere were delicious and heady scents.

At the saddle of the Mukhtiar kharak we rested and looked back for the last time to Lampak. Banks of cumulus had formed low down on the far side of the Uja Tirche glacier, lending splendour of height to a fortress wall of six white mountains; buttressed by ranked ridges, armoured with serried glaciers between, hollowed above in a row of corries, and on top lined by sparkling towers. Against the snow-white background of the cumulus the very grass beneath our feet took an
emerald burnish in the low slant of the sun. All space had become unusually translucent, as though hitherto we had looked through windows of thick glass, which now on the Mukhtiar kharak had opened to the light of the world.

Then we crossed the saddle and began contouring into the Girthi—and what a change of scene confronted us! At the junction of the Kio Gad and the Girthiganga, the naked rock of Ramba Kot, 17,150 feet, sprang straight up in a chaos of jumbled towers and spires. It was colourful rock, warm brown and yellow, but it walled the opposite side of the gorge for six miles and to us looked stark and fearsome after those flower-thick alps on the Lampak side.

On our own flank the gorge was less steep and the goat track continued, presumably towards the farthest grazing ground called Girthi, which even on the maps of last century is marked as 'deserted.' We were in reality contouring round the foot of Uja Tirche's north-east face. Thus the walls of the gorge were eight thousand feet high on our side, seven thousand feet on the other. On Ramba Kot no traverse would have been possible; the face there was regularly banded with horizontal strata, but fell bare and splintered to the river, free from any trace of vegetation. So stark and arid a scene might have been imagined of another planet, although at no time was it ugly. The colour in the rock redeemed all.

Our goat track contoured a full thousand feet above the river, passing from Garhwal District into Almora. We picked our way along rock-walls lying at angles gentle in relation to the lower precipice, and bedecked with countless flowering shrubs and plants. Most prominent among them were a yellow sweet pea, purple stonecrop, purple thistle identical to the Scottish variety, and a thistle (Morina longifolia) bearing yellow flowers shaped like tiny honeysuckle.

Far ahead, perhaps three miles away, we could see that our flank of the gorge was buttressed by a projecting cliff, which hung like a curtain across the route. It was impossible, from this distance, to see any feasible way of getting round its outer edge, but beyond it the bed of the river rose and the gorge
seemed to open out encouragingly. We could not hope to go so far to-day. Already we had been travelling five hours from Lampak.

Occasional silver birches thrust out of the rock, their bark shining, and often a dwarf pine stood among them; always the scent rose rich, warm, and fragrant to the path. Each turn of the many bluffs brought us new scents and new colours, until the route reached its climax by running in among red rosebushes: a Hanging Garden of Himachal.

And far aloft clouds flitted among the wild pinnacles of Uja Tirche.

Towards one o’clock, when we had covered a total distance of four miles, we came on a sudden, steep descent, first on scree then across bare slabs. It was an exposed situation, but our goats seemed to have no nerves. Humans had to use handholds. The final traverse went across a waterfall—the first of the day, although ten streams had been marked on the map—and down to a shelf where a cave yawned a welcome to the coolies. In front of it was a patch of flat ground, just big enough to take the floor space of one tent; elsewhere the slope was precipitous. We pitched camp.

That cave was most fortunately sited—a good day’s march from Lampak, the only bit of flat ground we had seen, and beside the only water. Our host was less fortunately a black scorpion, whom we had to kill. This was ideal scorpion country: dry, bare, and stony. On the other hand, this very dryness had nearly removed our fears about trouble at river crossings—unless when they drained glaciers. Dryness in the Girthi Gorge was not, we soon discovered, to be matched by prohibition in camp. As soon as the camp-fires were burning briskly in the caves—for still another cave had been found and occupied by the Bhotias, beyond and above the first—the bar opened. In sign of which Bala Singh presented us with a full bottle of chang. This was generous, but not kind. For appearance’s sake we had a sip all round, sharing with the Dotials, then set the rest aside as scorpion medicine. Bite for bite, no scorpion would beat chang.
On our second day we had hope of getting through the toughest part of the gorge to the Girthi kharak. Eight great ravines had to be crossed, one of which drained a glacier. We got away early in fine weather. As Perimal had promised, we slept warmer on the rocks of the Girthi than beside the ice of the Uja Tirche glacier.

We crossed the first ravine shortly after leaving camp, and then began a most astonishing day's journey. From the first craggy corner the track plunged like a belfry staircase, arched by red roses, down into the second ravine. I paused there to watch the coolies and goats traverse across the face of the opposing cliff to its outer edge, which overlooked the river. It looked a sensational move, yet when I followed proved to be quite simple.

I arrived at the edge to find the sun shining straight down the gorge. The huge face of Ramba Kot was now lit from one side, and along its cliffs a thin mist floated; sun and mist together picked out and revealed for the first time the incredible number of towers and pinnacles and crazy spires into which that seemingly flat face had in reality been weathered. It had suddenly become a dream world of spires, like the land of the Wizard of Oz.

The track doubled back into the third and greatest ravine of all. Again I stopped on the near side. The bed of the ravine was filled with old hard snow, which troubled the coolies, for if any man slipped he would shoot down at high velocity over the lower lip, then straight down the smooth jaws of a gully. Weir came to the rescue and cut a line of big steps for them, after which they were at ease. On the far side was the great projecting cliff, which we had seen yesterday as a hanging curtain. Gradually the entire party emerged on to its face, twenty-seven black and white dots winding across invisible seams, the goats nose to tail like a beaded string. Not even in the Rishiganga had I seen anything so spectacular.

As before I followed without difficulty, but rarely have I trod more cautiously, for a stumble meant loss of life. It is safe enough on that same account, for at such places no man does
stumble—instead he becomes alert. At the curtain’s outer edge
the rocks above the seam overhung unpleasantly, so that I had
to crouch under them, placing the feet slowly, with that twelve-
hundred-foot drop an inch from the boot’s welt—a track so
dramatic that all I lacked was a black bear coming round the
next corner.

Beyond this edge I could see the Girthi Gorge open out and
become sunny far ahead. The height of the path was here
12,000 feet, the river-bed just under 11,000 and rising to 12,300
feet at the Girthi kharak. We were beginning to draw away at
last from Ramba Kot, but not from Uja Tirche; high up on its
flank pinnacles taller by far than the Dolomites of Italy pricked
through the circling mists.

In the fourth ravine I bathed. It was sun-flooded, the water
clear and tempting, so I stripped and had my first enjoyable
bath since the hot springs at Tapoban. Glacier streams are
muddily white and always freezing; I had forgotten that water
and sun could be kind. Beyond this stream I crossed a scar
where a huge mass of conglomerate had stripped off the south
wall and dammed the Girthiganga, which had tunnelled a gut on
the north side, issuing thence with fascinating power. The
dam’s upper edge spanned the river with a hair-line arch.

There was no longer a track to follow; one held to the only
promising line, which was rarely hard to discover. It led me
round many a bluff and across garden shelves shaded by trees;
it plunged me several hundred feet down to the river, a dark
slate-grey, in this respect quite unlike other glacier rivers; it
raised me up again to the passage of more crags and ravines,
than to a final climb of six hundred feet, into the eighth and last
ravine. This one drained the upper glacier of Uja Tirche.
The snout was four thousand feet above and the stream in
consequence unfordable. A bridge was essential, and a bridge
there was. Three pines had been lashed together. I edged
my way over thankfully, reflecting on the unwisdom of letting
the main party get too far in front.

I descended through a wooded alp to the river, there cut
steps along a wall of hardened mud, rounded a bend, and saw
on flat grassy ground by the river the tents and camp-fires. Lunch was ready and the time 2 p.m. We had travelled three miles in seven and a half hours.

Our camp was a mile short of Girthi, but made a good, strategic halting place. The others had interesting news for me. On the far side of the river was a flat plateau where two Malari men had adventured to grow potatoes. This was the farthest point to which Malari colonizers had penetrated. They had made a house, and had their wives there and some children. A hundred yards upstream was a bridge, which Perimal had already crossed to buy potatoes. We had these now for lunch. They were good. Everyone visited the plateau that afternoon, but I had work to do and delayed my own visit until the morrow.

It was wet in the night; clear in the morning. At seven o’clock we began filing upstream. Scott and I broke off at the bridge. On each side of the river were big crags, only twenty feet apart, and three pines had been laid across. On the far side a long thin ridge of glacial mud and conglomerate curved one hundred yards up to the plateau, its crest a knife edge and the flanks steep. Projecting stones helped our footing. We emerged on to the flat top.

The cultivated area was oval shaped, two hundred yards long, and one hundred and fifty yards at the widest part. Above it lay an almost equal area of uncultivated ground, mostly covered with dwarf broom. On either side the plateau was demarcated by deep gullies, cut by two streams flowing from the hills behind. The entire area was diamond-shaped. The fields had been carefully prepared in terrace formation and irrigated from the stream on the right. No aqueduct was necessary, other than a long trench cut along the flank of the upper plateau for a quarter of a mile, then led over on to the lower surface. The irrigation channels were complex, all carefully thought out and thoroughly devised.

At the centre of the lower part were two semi-detached houses. They had been solidly built of the local stone. The floors were of hard mud and the roofs thatched. I thought the thatching poor, but in the upper Himalayan valleys no great
THE GOATS
which carried for us through the Girthi Gorge
store is set by good thatching. The houses are occupied for a brief period only in the summer, evacuated and snowed up in winter. A house without a roof signifies neither ruin nor desertion, but only that a family is away for the season.

We came down to the houses after inspecting the fields and found there two young women. They had three children. Their husbands had gone to Malari. In all India there could be no more isolated a family than this, nor any with a more enterprising courage. As one might well imagine, the women looked cheerful and of noticeably good health. The crops they grew were phaphar, pul, barley, and potatoes. The phaphar is buckwheat, producing a grain that is ground into flour (inferior to ata). The leaf is ivy-shaped and the flour either red or yellow. Here it was yellow. The pul grows on a long stalk and produces a grain for goats and jhibus. Potatoes were the most valuable product, for the quality was excellent. They stored them in a deep, stone-lined pit.

The more I looked round the more stirred I felt at thought of the energy and hard work that must have been directed into the cultivation of these fields. The clearing out by hand of the broom and roots and stones was in itself a triumph of determined effort, quite apart from the construction of irrigation channels. The soil was fourteen inches deep on top of hard glacial mud, the top three inches looking very good indeed. We could see these heights distinctly where the left-hand gully sheered the wall of the plateau.

A hundred yards behind the houses, at the fringe of the rough upper ground, we could see votive flags: strips of cloth fluttering from the tops of tall poles. I walked over to them and found two stone-built shrines, semi-detached like the houses below—each family presumably having its own. In size and shape they were not unlike big dog-kennels; just a little too small to allow anyone to crawl in. The roofs were ridged and slated with stone slabs.

The siting of the shrines had been well judged; they stood in front of a great rose-bush, now in full flower and bending over them in dense white sprays, as though in sign of their God’s
blessing. And the doorways faced outwards to the snows of Tirsuli and Uja Tirche (at present in cloud), where the gods dwell. Within each shrine a broad platform at the back had been raised one inch high, its left-hand half being screened by a flat stone. Behind each screen lay a tray containing the ashes of juniper. On the unscreened half a rough stone stood on end, marked with a daub of red pigment. On one platform there also stood a small hand-bell, painted gold, with a handle carved into the bust of a winged god; on the other platform lay a large sea-shell. In the foreground of each shrine a metal incense tray and stand still contained cinders and burnt twigs of juniper. At the outside wall of each doorway the shoot of a plant was plastered to the stone with dung.

At its best the Hindu religion is a pure and most practical mystical religion, its practice therefore drawing out of a man all the good works that attend the growing union of a human soul with God. But to what degree the people of the hills understand and practise the true religion they profess, we had (thus far) no way of telling. We guessed rightly that being peasants, traders, and nomads they are cut off from the sources of instruction and that worship is irregular and divorced from real understanding. None the less it is worship given freely, and so likely to be sincere. It is certainly defective, but is surely not without avail.

As we turned to leave the Girthi settlement, I was full of a most enthusiastic admiration for the enterprising spirit of Hindu hillmen. I felt that they brought honour to the race of man.

Scott and I returned to the Girthiganga, which we crossed and followed for more than a mile to the Girthi kharak, where a wide valley broke in on the right. A dazzle of tumbled snow and ice at its head showed where the Girthi glacier flowed down from the unclimbed peaks of Chalab and Kholi. A route over that col would have led straight down to Milam. We were not tempted to try this icy short-cut, for which the Bhotias were not equipped. Our immediate purpose was to try to follow the Girthiganga.

We walked over broad fields to a ridge overlooking the glacier
stream, and found on its crest another shrine and a pole from which hung a bell. I looked into the shrine. A great variety of treasures left by herdsmen lay inside—three or four remarkably fine fossils of sea-shells, four daggers with carved and moulded hilts, several steel knife-blades, a long and shapely whetstone, and several small coins. Twelve bells hung along the lintel. I watched our own coolies passing and saw several place coins inside, salaam, and briefly pray. One Malari man added a small bell to the collection.

The alp was a wide one, at first sight better and more open than the lower settlement, but a closer examination showed the soil to be hard, stony, and dry, and the grass of thin, poor quality, even though no flocks had been browsing. The reason for the desertion of Girthi was all too evident.

I descended alone to the glacier stream. This was the first of the big ones and would have been unfordable later in the day. After careful selection of a fording-line, the Malari men had formed themselves into a chain across the river and driven over the goats upstream. My delay at the shrine brought me to the river-bank after they were well up the opposite hillside. The result was that I landed in trouble. I stripped off my trousers but took the wrong crossing point, and found myself up to my waist in an icy channel near the centre. After several narrow escapes from being swept away I withdrew, found a lower thigh-deep passage, but failed to get safe footing—the boulders were moving on the bed of the stream. The force of the current prevented me planting my feet by choice—always the current swept the leg lower than aimed, imperilling balance. Again I withdrew. Perimal and Goria then came up behind me and gave me a demonstration of how to deal with a fast glacier stream. I had been groping with my feet too tentatively. One should lift the feet high and plunge them down hard and boldly and go fast. I did this at last, coolies escorting, and crossed without capsizing. It would seem important always to cross this stream in the morning; never in the afternoon.

We climbed eighteen hundred feet up a grassy hill, then made a long traverse across treeless and now flowerless slopes to
another alp called Talla Khanda. We had marched three and a half miles in six hours, and rain was imminent. We camped. The alp was flat, covered knee deep in rock-geraniums and blessed with a clear stream. Our seven goats, instead of resting on the grass or cropping it, sought out boulders, on which they preferred to perch, however awkward the hoofholds. They would remain thus for an hour on end keeping an alert survey, but unmoving. Our camps were daily graced by their outstanding beauty—the long silky fleece and vigour of attitude, the curved and twisted horns, the long white ears drooping down to either side of eyes brighter and more knowing than those of any sheep, the strong legs and firm stance of the hoofs—they were a constant source of delight.

Our height was 14,000 feet, a rise of two thousand feet since morning. Juniper had now become scanty and the coolies had to search far and wide for firewood. An hour’s work brought in several big bundles. The Malari men had made a tent from our spare groundsheet, but despite a grey drizzly mist they sat out late into the night round a huge bonfire. It was a hundred yards away, yet lit the entire alp and made of it a weird oasis amid the outer blackness and the barren gorge. When we dropped off to sleep in the big tent we could still see their lighted figures crouching round the blaze and hear the soft patter of rain on the fly-sheet.

Our fourth day’s march brought us into new country. From the moment we left camp our feet were rarely off grass. Travelling high above the river in gradually strengthening sunshine, we crossed a series of hollowed alps where we discovered our first edelweiss, forded a third glacier stream, and then scrambled five hundred feet up to the col of a barrier ridge. The coolies were there before me. As they breasted the saddle a great shout of joy burst from them. I was startled. They had never done that before. They had thrown off their burdens and were now standing on the crest gazing east, like pilgrims at sight of the Celestial City.

I joined them. Ahead of us the gorge broadened into a strath, and long, rich pasture fringing the Girthiganga stretched
a mile to the alp of Matoli. The alp was occupied by flocks from Milam. Shepherds had pitched three tents. We were through the gorge. Beyond Matoli gleamed the ribbon of a fourth glacier stream; beyond that again, at higher elevation, the greater alp of Topidunga awaited our camp-fires. Far to the back of Topidunga circled great and clouded peaks, somewhere in the midst of which must lie the Unta Dhura Pass.

The Malari men were already pleading for a sheep as bak-sheesh, and since they had carried exceedingly well we were not disposed to refuse—if prices were reasonable. They gave a performance, then, reminiscent of the Lata greyhounds. Dashing helter-skelter down the slope they left us far behind and made straight for the three tents. They had been squatting in a circle there, explaining our presence to the astonished shepherds, for several minutes before we arrived. Some two hundred sheep were gathered to one side. As I approached two big Tibetan mastiffs came trotting out, tails in air, apparently bent on giving a friendly welcome. Suddenly, at a few yards’ distance, their attitude changed. The foremost dog went down on its haunches and took one spring at my throat. Luckily I had my ice-axe. I jabbed the dog in the chest and whacked its flank. It turned and circled, getting ready with its mate for a joint attack.

At once the outraged shepherds ran up with stones and beat the dogs into abject, trembling submission. They stood over them, hurling stones down on top. The wretched animals lay flat, making no show of resistance, utterly inert in face of the severest punishment that I have ever seen a dog receive. I was sorry—but the scene ended quickly. The dogs were carried away by their scruffs and thrown into one of the tents.

That was my first lesson in the care required when approaching a Tibetan or Bhotia flock. I was lucky. Two of these dogs can bring down a black bear. They are trained as watch-dogs to attack any man or animal nearing the flocks; for any weakly protected caravan on the Tibetan side of the frontier is likely to be plundered by brigands. The golden rule is never to approach a Bhotia flock without first attracting the shepherd’s attention, and never to move at night in a Bhotia village.
A rug was spread and I began bargaining for two sheep—one for the Malari men and one for the Dotials. The shepherds brought forward two splendid animals with good flesh and shining eyes, for which they wanted Rupees 25 each. I offered Rupees 40 for both. They refused, and we moved on.

The fourth and last glacier stream was the widest and most formidable of the Girthi valley, but we were fortunate enough to get there by 9.30 a.m. We stripped off our pants and fought our way over. The goats were unloaded and knew what was expected of them. They went at the stream with dash, swimming furiously on a down-slant. Beyond, we struggled up an escarpment on to grass slopes, which led to a fine flat pasture of brilliantly green turf. This was the alp of Topidunga, at 15,000 feet.

Once again there was no firewood. We could see juniper across the valley, only to be reached by climbing five hundred feet up from the river and then traversing a mile downstream across screes. It would be two hours’ work to go there and back. The drooping spirits of the Dotials were roused by Perimal, who had stayed behind to talk with the Matoli shepherds and now arrived with 10 lb. of mutton, which he had bought on his own responsibility for Rupees 5. This was good work. It inspired Matbir, Phakir, and Narbir to go and get the juniper. Perimal was graduating as a first-rate head coolie. Meanwhile, we used primus stoves to cook our mutton, soup, rice, and rhubarb; this last presented to us by the Malari men. The Dotials waited for the juniper, and, when it came, spent the afternoon sitting happily round the fire in thin drizzle, chatting, laughing, even chanting a song. They had no interest in food before the evening meal hour.

The journey’s longest and toughest day started next morning. We had to cross the Unta Dhura Pass at 17,640 feet, then descend five thousand feet and cross two glaciers in search of a camp site. For this move above all others we wanted clear weather to help find the pass. But the morning was too clear too early. We travelled fast up a long ridge high above the river, which had now changed direction rightwards.
mile we descended to the side of the stream. The scene ahead was a desolation of grey scree; ragged patches of snow lying in hollows loomed cheerlessly through low mist. After a second mile the once mighty Girthi had become a minor hill torrent, which we were able to cross on boulders in order to strike leftwards and upwards to a vast corrie between the passes of the Jandi Dhura and the Unta Dhura.

A steady drizzle had begun when at last we came to the shores of Gangpani at 16,570 feet. The lake was frozen. It looked unspeakably bleak. Cloud pressed down upon the ice and looming at the back was the snout of a small glacier: the source of the Girthiganga. Cold and rain forced us to put on balaclava helmets and gloves.

It was impossible to tell from the ground in what direction we ought to go. We consulted the map and took a bearing. As a result we bore leftwards for a while until the ground levelled out. We halted. We were uncertain of our whereabouts and no distinguishing feature could be seen through the cloud. Suddenly, a slight lifting of the murk showed us caravans of yaks, goats, ponies, sheep, and jhibus moving in endless procession along the flank of a hill on our right, then bearing left across the top of the great corrie. We had to watch them for five minutes before regaining a sense of direction. Obviously we had happened sooner than we had expected on the main trade route to Tibet. The Kungribingri La must lie far away to the left, and the Unta Dhura somewhere above on the right.

We waited there for the coolies. There followed a climb of several hundred feet up steep scree. At last we glimpsed the caravan again, streaming through the mists like dismal, migrating ghosts. Henceforth we shared a snow-lined track, deep in mud, with the endless herds, all driven by long-haired Tibetans, wearing big smiles and ex-W.D. bush-hats. Most of them had long cloth boots with rope or leather soles, and were dressed either in woollen homespun or skin clothing, often coloured blue or red. The track was noisy with the jangle of bells, the bark of dogs, and the whistling and clucking of drovers.
I stopped on the small pass only long enough to see that Perimal was approaching. He was going well, in front of the Malari men, and seemed quite untroubled by goitre. Mac-Kinnon’s daily dose of iodine had worked a cure. One month ago Perimal could not have carried a load over the Unta Dhura.

The south wall of the pass was much steeper than the north slope. We went straight down to the Safed glacier, passing many Tibetans, all friendly and naively curious, but radiating cheerfulness—a virtue especially noticeable in cloud, gloom, and drizzle. We were untroubled now by herds; the last for the day had passed upwards. We sped onwards to Bamlas. This halting place was marked on the map; accordingly we had hoped to find firewood, but a bleaker place we never saw. On we went, two and a half miles more to Dung, where firewood, we were assured by a passing Bhotia with a sword, could certainly be found.

We continued two miles down the crest of the moraine to the Goankhha River, which came in on the left from the glaciers of the Tibetan frontier (only four miles distant). The river was bridged. Resting by it was a troop of splendid horses, gay with bells and red trappings. They had passed us earlier, heading south unladen at speed—the Indian drovers had been running hard alongside. (We had still to see a horse ridden.) We edged past and went half a mile to Dung. It was a flat alp with an empty stone hut, lying on the other side of the river well away from the busy track. But no trace of juniper could we see. The grass was so short that starving goats could not have nibbled another blade, the higher hillside bare, bleak, and stony. Dung was a place long since used up and discarded.

Everyone was very tired, but the coolies requested that we go one mile to Shutpani, which we did—then three-quarters of a mile to Shillong, which we did—and still no juniper. The hills were stark and scree-strewn, wrapped in mist. We plodded on—one mile—two miles—three miles. The coolies were nearly exhausted. But they could not cook ata without fires and were grimly determined not to stop until they could get one. We had covered thirteen miles and were just three miles
short of Milam when at last we saw juniper. It tufted a shelf
two hundred feet above the track, just half a mile from Samgong.

We climbed to the shelf and camped. Not until a hot meal
was inside us did we fully appreciate that our Girthi journey
was ended. Since the start of the expedition we had walked
our way right through three half-inch maps and were now
starting on the fourth. On one matter we could all agree: the
passage of the Girthi had been the most wonderful journey we
had ever had; we could expect nothing to compare with it in
the future. These six days alone had made our coming to the
Himalaya worth while. One thing puzzled us. Why had no
one before us forced the Girthi Gorge? Not until we returned
to Britain were we to learn that this had in fact been done in
1893 by Dr. Kurt Boeckh. Our reopening of the route after
nearly sixty years will, we hope, be of service to travellers.

On the morning of 18th July we strolled the remaining three
miles into Milam.
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Milam and the Men of Bhot

Tom Mackinnon and I were first down the track on the morning of 18th July. Just before the Goankhha flowed into the Gori, the track broke rightwards over a low ridge. At the crest were a cairn and votive flags. We halted. Milam lay below on a broad spit of land between the rivers. There were nearly two hundred houses set among green fields—and these were a delight to the eye after the desolation of the Unta Dhura. Beyond them the Goriganga swept down fast from the Milam glacier, and beyond that again towered the mountains of the Gori-Dhauli watershed. It was an open, sunny situation, for the hills were set back.

We walked into the village, bent upon finding Moules the missionary. We remarked the neatness of the houses and the cleanness of the courtyards. Every man, woman, and child looked healthy and well clothed. As we passed through the narrow lanes we saw Moules hastening to meet us. He was in shirt and shorts, an Englishman of thirty-eight years, and we had only to look once at his face to realize that we had met a man with a purpose, and therefore of abounding vigour, disciplined by a keen sense of humour. His first words astounded us. 'Are you Murray?' he asked. But we might have known it—not only had he heard of our arrival at Samgong last night within two hours of our getting there, but he had also traced our route up the Dhauli all the way from Tapoban to Bampa. The Milamwals (inhabitants of Milam) have long ears.

Moules escorted us down the lane to his house. It had the usual courtyard with a low stone wall in front. The house was in two storeys, the ground floor a dispensary and the top floor a living-room, which ran the length of the house. The first thing we saw on entering was an ice-axe on the wall. Moules
was a member of the Himalayan Club! His knowledge of mountain routes and weather was soon to be of high value to us. Meantime, we drank tea and talked of the Girthi until Scott and Weir arrived, whereupon Moules had us stop for lunch.

But first of all we had to pitch camp, for the goats and coolies were crowding the courtyard. We went out and picked a grassy site a quarter of a mile away, between the village and the Gori. The hill-slopes above Milam were thickly covered in juniper, but alas! we were forbidden to cut any for firewood. It bound the slope and prevented landslide. Moules gave us a maund of wood as a present, but thereafter we had to buy it from the Milamwals daily—at Rupees 2. For they cut their wood a day’s walk up the Gori.

We pitched the tents and paid off the Malari men. Then came the lunch. Moules gave us nothing less than a banquet. On each plate was heaped a mountain of rice, on top of which we piled goat and curry. In these days we had Himalayan appetites, which few hosts could lightly challenge. But Moules did not underestimate. Sweetmeats, originally destined for certain governors of Tibet, followed with coffee. This was a worthy conclusion to the passage of the Girthi River.

After lunch, and before he began his afternoon’s work (his first case was an eye operation for cataract), Moules showed us through the low-roofed dispensary. He worked there from six in the morning to six at night. This year there were three hundred families at Milam (less than usual), which gave him every kind of trouble. He had a second dispensary seven miles down-river, which he visited weekly, and another at Mansiari nearly thirty miles south, whither he accompanied the Bhotias at the spring and autumn migrations.

Moules was an evangelical missionary, not a doctor, but his training in medicine had been thorough. Apart from dispensing medicines, he pulled teeth, set bones, dressed wounds, operated for cataract, amputated limbs—and he did all this on the stone wall outside his house, without the antiseptic devices that we are apt to think so necessary. The admiration in which he was held by the Bhotias was plain to see, and their gratitude made
evident in the course of the next few days. It is a great reward for any man to be held thus by his fellows, in honour for a service given in Christ’s name. Moules’s life was no easy one here in the summer. He had little or no peace or privacy save when sleeping.

The rest of our day was wholly absorbed by mail. The cash forwarded by our bank at Ranikhet had arrived safely. A great stack of letters awaited each of us, and in bed that night we were still re-reading them.

At five o’clock in the morning the Malari men began to move off and Bala Singh looked in to say good-bye. I shook him by the hand and asked: ‘How long to Malari?’ ‘Five days,’ he answered. Without goats they could certainly have done it in four. We were sorry to lose them. These Malari Bhotias had been splendid and high-spirited porters. We could only pray that the Milam Bhotias might be no less energetic.

A still sadder parting lay ahead of us that morning. MacKinnon’s three months’ leave had now expired and he had to go home. His medical work in the villages of Garhwal had revealed to us all how many small services an expedition like ours can give to the chance-met people of the country, and that made our travel seem more worth while.

Moules had been good enough to lay on a porter for MacKinnon, whose total baggage weighed 40 lb. He hoped to reach Ranikhet inside a week by crossing Traill’s Pass between Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot, and so descending on to the Pindari glacier, thence to Gwaldam. The pass was 18,000 feet. No crossing had been made for some years and Moules reported rumours that the ice-fall on the far side had considerably altered, so that the presence of a passage through it was now doubtful. However, MacKinnon is a first-class mountaineer and would not be stopped easily. We encouraged him to go. At eleven o’clock we saw him off, together with Moules, who had to go down-river seven miles on a one-day visit to his second dispensary.

Thereafter we returned to camp and luxuriated in the sunshine and the green fields and the bird-song. We were several
hundred yards from the river, yet the deep-noted rumble of boulders along the bed could be heard unmistakably. Some of the women were down at the water’s edge with poles, fishing blocks of glacier ice out of the stream. The bird-song entranced Weir. He heard and saw greenfinches, much more yellow than the British bird, goldfinches, blue-fronted redstarts, white wagtails, meadow-buntings, rufus-backed shrikes, and a host of others. Milam, at 11,200 feet and treeless, had birds in unusual number.

In the afternoon we each made brief, independent reconnaissances of the village. The summer trade caravans were not yet ready for Tibet, so that there was no lack of man-power for our next move to the Darmaganga. When we studied the faces of the Milam Bhotias we remarked at once how light-skinned they were compared with our Dotials or other hillmen. Many men and women were really white, and of fresh complexion; they could not have been distinguished from people of the Latin races, and the women could assuredly have been seen to blush.

Moules had given us to understand that his evangelical work did not greatly prosper if measured simply in terms of conversion statistics. Although Hindu, the Bhotias, Moules had sworn, have in reality no religion save a superstitious polytheism, and the survival of the race is menaced by gonorrhoea and chang (the latter contributing to the former indirectly). We had been astounded to hear that ninety per cent of the Bhotias have venereal disease and that some families are being decimated by tuberculosis. They all looked healthy and we most certainly knew them to be men of vigour, tough in travel, full of resource and enterprise; they could endure hardship and brave danger, and give in abundance of their goodwill to men needing help. These virtues were never the sign of a dying race, but of abounding life. Venereal disease can be reconciled with that if one bears in mind that through the centuries they have built up a certain resistance to its effects. The fertility of the women is none the less affected: miscarriages are common, a wife giving successful birth only to the third or fourth baby. It seems
likely that a campaign against the disease conducted with peni-
cillin and sulpha drugs would quickly wipe it out of these valleys,
for there can be no doubting the innate hardihood of the Bhotia
people, or that they are more worth helping than other Indian
hillmen. At the present time there seems little hope of that
aid reaching them.

The fact is that we liked the Bhotias—even though they
were as hard-dealing as Welsh farmers (and that beats any
Scotsman). They were free and frank of manner, upright, and
high-spirited. They commanded respect. It was especially
noticeable that young men of seventeen or eighteen years had
matured in point of character to a degree not attained by men
of the same age in Britain or Europe. I mean here a mental
maturity of the kind won not through bookwork but through
experience of other men and the natural world, both of which,
in the Himalaya, are hard teachers. The result is a knowledge
of oneself and others won at an earlier age than is possible in the
West, giving assurance, poise, and firmness to character.

The Bhotias’ way of life necessarily encourages that swift
development of manhood, for it is semi-nomadic yet disciplined.
They carry all the trade of Kumaon between Tibet and India.
The name Bhotia means Man of Bhot (or Tibet). There are
three Bhots, named Johar, Darma, and Byans. These were
formerly in Tibet and there is still a stone thirteen miles down
the Goriganga at Ma Pong marked: ‘All land north of this
stone is Tibet.’ The Byans group of Bhotias occupy the valley
of the Kali River, which is the west frontier of Nepal; the
Darma group occupy the Darma valley; the Johari group the
Gori valley; and all these are in Almora District. In Garhwal
there are two other groups: the Niti group in the Dhauli and the
Mana group in the Alaknanda. But these two latter are not
‘Bhots.’

The Bhotias are held to be of Aryan and then Rajput origin.
They came to India and settled in Kashmir in pre-Vedic times,
until the Mohammedan invasion under Mohammed Ghori in
1191 and 1193 scattered the Rajputs to the hills. Some settled
in the three Bhots, which were Tibetan (Milam, Burphu, and
Laspa were the three original Tibetan villages of Johar Bhot). Intermarriage with the Tibetans brought out the Mongol type, and made the present Bhotia people. India, meanwhile, drove the Tibetan frontier up to the watershed and so the Bhotias again became Indian subjects.

The Milamwals of Johar, the most prosperous of the Bhotias, are relatively wealthy and do little manual labour. They are traders. Their fields are tilled, sown, and harvested by employed men. We discovered that several spoke a little English and owned rifles, guns, and expensive luxuries like binoculars and cameras. Law in the villages is administered by five elected men called the Panchayat. The headman's job is a government appointment not sought after, for he has to accept responsibility on a small pay. Thus he is not of necessity the wealthiest merchant or the biggest landowner.

The Milamwals have three villages, which they occupy in rotation. Milam is the highest depot for the Tibetan trade. From here the men leave for Tibet on or about 25th July with grain, cloth, and hardware, which are carried over the Unta Dhura in two 'ferries,' principally to Gyanima, but also to Gartok and Tolingmath, which are three cities of coloured tents. They spend approximately eight weeks in Tibet, returning with bartered wool, salt, hides, and borax at the end of September. In October they migrate thirty miles south to Mansiari (at 5,500 feet), because the upper valleys become uninhabitable. The snowfall in winter is very heavy north of the main axis of the chain—much heavier than to the south. Avalanches sweep the tracks and Milam itself is snowed up to roof level. None the less a chaukidar stops at Milam all winter. He lives with his dog in the top floor of a house, surrounded by food supplied by the Milamwals. The snow is his only source of water. He is alone there for the five months November to March inclusive. In January and February he is completely snowed in, but during the other three months he can usually get out and about.

Back at Mansiari in November the Milamwals are busy selling their Tibetan goods at fairs and bazaars. One of the biggest fairs in the Kumaon foot-hills is held annually at Jouljibi on
15th November, when fifteen thousand people attend. Merchants come up from the plains and the bulk of the goods is disposed of before the last migration on 30th November. The Milamwals then withdraw from Mansiari nineteen miles southwest to Tejam. In December the men travel to the railheads for trade, some of the richer merchants proceeding to Bombay and Calcutta. By the end of March they are all back at Tejam again, having bought in next season’s goods for the Tibetan market. A last clearance sale of the previous year’s Tibetan stock is held at Thal on 10th April, immediately after which they begin to reoccupy Mansiari in a series of movements, the stores going up first on the backs of ponies, mules, jhibus, and carrier flocks, then, last of all, the families. The migration to Mansiari is completed by the end of May, and to Milam by the end of June.

The size of the migration may be gauged by the fact that at Milam alone there are normally five hundred and forty families (about three families to each house). This year only three hundred families had come up due to great losses in transport animals through disease, requiring that families be sacrificed in the migration for the sake of transporting merchandise.

The same pattern of nomadic travel and trade is followed in all the other Bhotia valleys. In the Dhauli the Bhotias make only one migration, evacuating the upper valley between Niti and Jumagwar and completing the migration to Chamoli District by the end of November. The return migration to Niti starts in the first week of May and is completed by the last week. Lata and Tapoban do not migrate.

These dates are of great importance to travellers, and especially to mountaineering expeditions. Food and coolies cannot be obtained in the upper valleys before and after such dates. In the Darmaganga, whither we were next bound, the first and last dates were early May and late October. Earlier or later still, food could always be had at Darchula on the Kali River, about nine miles below the entrance to the Darma valley.

The Bhotia trade, therefore, although compelling the people to a nomadic life, is conducted with discipline, works to a
MILAM ON THE GORIGANGA (11,200 feet)
system, and is exceedingly valuable. Western Tibet is not self-supporting. Her people are dependent on the Indian trade for cereals, tea, sugar, and tobacco, and all kinds of hardware. And to India the importance of Tibetan wool can hardly be exaggerated. Some is exported to Britain.

Each Bhotia has a mitra or correspondent Tibetan, who normally remains unchanged from year to year. Their partnership is marked at its initiation by the splitting of a stone, each man taking half; henceforth the Bhotia or his representative will carry the token and deliver his goods in the Tibetan market only to the mitra or his representative who can fit his half of the stone to the Bhotia's. The Tibetan is usually in the Bhotia's debt and gets a year's credit. That is, at Gyanima the Bhotia will not deliver merchandise until he has received payment for last year's quota. Apart from the big-scale private trading, there is an open market at Gyanima.

The Bhotia's work, it can be seen, keeps him continually busy. It requires a shrewd skill and unremitting activity; it needs foresight and much planning ahead; he has to deal with many varieties of men and speak at least four languages: Tibetan, Hindustani, Pahari, and his own. Such varied human contacts develop his good humour and friendliness. The accidents of travel make him resourceful and swift in decision. The trade and movement exercise his intelligence. And thus it is that the young men are marked by strength of character. A Bhotia looking unhappy or frustrated was a phenomenon we never saw.

The women have a less exciting life; but their lot is not to be compared with that of the women of the foot-hills, who are given heavy agricultural labour and treated little better than live-stock. The Bhotia women, especially at Milam, devote much time to the weaving of rugs and carpets, in traditional patterns that are handed down from mother to daughter. (Unhappily, they now use aniline dyes instead of the old vegetable dyes.) They have little of the back-breaking field work that so oppresses the women of the lower hills.

During the long periods when the men are away trading, the girls and young unmarried women of Byans and Darma organize
a club, called a *Rangbang*, to the meetings of which are invited the youths of their own and neighbouring villages. Either indoors or on flat ground outside, they sit round a fire and eat, smoke, drink, sing, and dance. Their principal object is to make love, and here marriages are decided. This freedom of the Darmi and Byansi woman to choose her husband is worthy of note. In India generally children are usually betrothed at the age of thirteen or fourteen. The parents select what in their opinion is a good girl or boy for their son or daughter. If marriage is delayed until a girl is over sixteen years, then she will rarely be a virgin. In Moules’s opinion the hot climate is a sexual stimulant. Unless of quite exceptional character, a woman seems to be incapable of preserving her chastity beyond sixteen or seventeen years. If this is true, it would seem that marriages by parental arrangement can be justified. A girl of sixteen is too inexperienced to judge a man’s worth; or thus it may be argued. But the free Rangbang system of the Bhots has done much to spread disease and is now extinct in the Johar, Niti, and Mana groups. There marriages are by arrangement. At Milam this means that horoscopes are compared while the children are young, but the marriage ceremony awaits their coming of age.

The Bhotia husband never calls his wife by her first name, or indeed by any name at all. Often he does not know her name, because he has forgotten it. He names her in relation to the names of her children—as Jack’s mother or Jill’s mother—or else just as ‘the wife.’ Terms of endearment he reserves for use in private. In public husband and wife must never display their affection. All expressions of love must be reserved for evening, behind closed doors.

However, life for the women is not all weaving and gaiety. In the men’s absence they have to take responsibility in domestic and village management; and again, not all Bhotia women are the wives of wealthier Milam traders. Those working in the fields and gathering firewood sometimes have need of a self-reliant courage excelling that of mere man. Just fifteen miles down-river the bear country begins, and every year women of the valleys get mauled. The villages have been established for
generations; firewood is not to be found close at hand but out in the scrub and jungle. And bears are poor of hearing. It is only too easy to come on them by surprise—suddenly to round a bush or cross a ridge and so be within fifteen yards—at which the bear panics and rushes in to attack. The women collecting firewood are sometimes caught this way. They always carry a sickle in one hand and a forked stick in the other. They try to jam the stick into the bear's open mouth. As the head goes back they step sideways and slash the exposed throat with the sickle. The bear may sometimes be killed, but more usually the woman gets mauled, and perhaps half her face is torn away. Moules's work in this valley has no little variety.

He dined with us next day. To us his presence in Milam seemed as fortunate as Hartwell Singh's arrival at Tapoban in May. We had now to decide on our next move, and Moules's good counsel was to prove invaluable.

Part V of our plan had from the beginning given us a certain amount of apprehension. This was the six-day crossing of the Ralam Dhura, 18,470 feet, from the Goriganga to the Darma-ganga near Nepal. The purpose of this move was to bring us into position to make a reconnaissance of the Panch Chuli from the east and to try the ascent of the main peak, 22,650 feet. We had originally intended leaving this latter attempt for the clear and settled weather of late September or early October; instead, we had found the costs of the expedition mounting too high to allow us further delay. We must go now, in the thick of the monsoon cloud, consequently with smaller hope of success on the Panch Chuli. We knew from photographs and travellers' descriptions that they are an extraordinarily beautiful cluster; all difficult, all shapely and icy. None had been climbed. Moreover, they are surrounded by a far-flung screen of thirty or forty other unclimbed mountains, through the heart of which we had planned to travel by way of the Ralam Pass.

But this traverse of the watershed between the Gori and Darma was thirty-two miles long and involved our crossing three passes and four glaciers, which to us were unknown.
Consequently, the difficulties of route-finding in heavy cloud promised to be serious. The Ralam Dhura had not been crossed for nine years; so far as we could discover, never before in the monsoon. Dr. Longstaff, moreover, had warned us that the pass was rather dangerous through stonefall even in pre-monsoon condition.

Accordingly, we had abandoned hope of the pass before ever coming into Milam. Instead, we had made plans to take the longer and more southerly route by Mansiari and Sobala, which would take us in ten marches to Sona village in the Darma. We now put these plans to Moules. He at once dashed them. Our route, he said, took us into one of the very wettest regions, where the monsoon floods had already carried away three bridges. That route was closed to us.

We had therefore either to go by the Ralam Dhura or forfeit the Panch Chuli. The latter was not to be thought of. Moules then gave us unexpected encouragement. He swore that we should get less cloud on the Ralam route than the southern one. The upper Gori and Darma are well north of the heavy rain belt. In July, August, and September Milam gets only five inches of rain. The usual weather is a dry morning and drizzly afternoon, or vice versa; and the Ralam route lay only twelve miles to our south-east.

The question was whether we could persuade Milam men to cross such a pass at such a time of year. But Moules had another surprise in store. Milam men, he said, had never been willing to carry loads over the Unta Dhura. They have an obsession about the difficulties of the northward routes. Moules himself, when crossing the Unta Dhura to reach the Dhauli by way of the Bara Hoti and Chor Hoti passes, had always been forced to use jhibus. The men would not carry. But there would be no trouble in finding men to carry over the Ralam Pass—despite the fact that it is higher, tougher, more dangerous, and goes on snow, rock, and ice. It lies south, therefore it is good. To cap this counsel, Moules told us that a Bhotia named Delib Singh, who had once been over the Ralam Dhura, was at present in the village and would be willing to go again.
All that remained for us to decide was the date of the move. We chose 25th July—five days hence. Moules then fetched down the leading Bhotia merchant, Ira Singh, to conclude a bandobast. He was a man we liked at first sight: lean-cheeked and friendly, quiet of manner but having a ready and genuine smile for us. He agreed to provide eleven coolies at Rupees 4 per day. The crossing would take six days and the men would get half-pay for the return. They would not carry more than 40 lb.

This matter settled, we relaxed for two days. We wrote letters (Milam had the highest post office in Kumaon), watched birds, photographed most things, read Moules's old newspapers, and prowled around. Scott discovered a Himalayan Woolworth's selling pens and ink, pencils and paper, coco-nuts, buttons, oil-lamps, and every kind of hardware, including electric torches and batteries. All these things were ultimately destined for Tibet. At the outskirts of the village he also discovered the famous Mani Wall, where great flat slabs, inscribed with sacred texts in low relief, are laid against a bank as an offering of piety. They are Tibetan. The name derives from the commonest text, Om mani padme hum; meaning 'Om, the jewel in the lotus, hum.' Om is the name of the Godhead and hum is a defiance hurled at evil; the jewel is the precious Doctrine of Buddha, and the lotus is variously held to mean the soul, the universe, or the spiritual reality in which truth is. The words are a mantra, to be repeated often and meditated upon. The Mani Wall at Milam is a relic of ancient days, for the Bhotias are now officially Hindu. Hinduism, however, is tolerant and all-embracing. The Bhotias revere the wall, which has spiritual value even to-day.

While we idled Weir plied us with his plum-puddings and Bampa memsahib's chupatties, in which arts he was now turning out daily masterpieces; for each in turn was so acclaimed. Cooks in the Himalaya must never be allowed to languish from faint praise, even when the pudding-bag bursts in the pot and the missionary has come to dinner. Ira Singh supplied us with food excelling in quality anything that we had had in the Dhauli
valley. Rice and tsampa were especially good and clean. Fresh eggs were plentiful. But not until our sixth morning did we manage to buy a goat at a reasonable price.

Zungia had its head off just in time to let us present Moules with a leg. He was departing that morning for a fortnight’s visit to the dispensary at Bampa, travelling by the Unta Dhura and Chor Hoti Passes to the upper Dhauli. From Bampa he would return to his headquarters in the foot-hills, at Abbott Mount, Almora District. This then was his departure for the season, and the Bhotias, who loved Moules dearly, had staged a magnificent send-off. There was to be ceremonial sword-dancing and singing, to which we were all invited. By midday his seven jhibus were loaded and word was sent down to us.

Although Milam is a crowded maze, its tangle of narrow and twisting lanes repeatedly open out on to little squares, where men and animals can gather. The ceremony was arranged to start at the square nearest Moules’s house. We arrived after the first dance had begun. The square and all surrounding walls, roofs, and windows were packed with onlookers. Moules stood in one corner, his loaded jhibus in the lane outside. The other corners were occupied by the band: four drummers, a heavy string instrument like a violoncello, but which had a score of strings at least, and a kind of piano accordion with a keyboard, the wind for which came from a flap in the back. For the moment the drums only were in action. They accompanied the two dancing girls, whom we already knew by repute. They were dancing now at the centre of the square, but movement was confined to sinuous movements of the arms and the wrists in harmony with song and drum beat.

The girls were no more than seventeen years, but the use of the eyes showed precocious experience in all feminine wiles. Each had black hair with a long plait down the back. They were dressed to kill. Each wore a nose-ring, one a gold horseshoe, and the other a red jewel, heart-shaped and rimmed with silver. On one wrist only, each swung a score of bangles, the one with alternating pink, green, red, and white, the other all silver. Both wore the silk sari, one chequered black and white
THE MALARI BHOTIAS
who carried our loads through the Girthi Gorge

Photo by T. Weir
in big squares, the other covered with a design of green and blue flowers. They had each a blue blouse, but one had a waistcoat as well, scarlet behind and black in front.

Upon the unprepared male of their own race, the effect, I imagine, was enlivening. For they sang love-songs and spread glamour with every delicate move of the arm and glance of the eye and subtle tone of voice. They sang well. Superficially they were good-looking. Definitely they were attractive—until one looked close. Then one saw only too well that unlike the young weavers in the courtyards they were neither sweet nor simple. Meantime, they were still managing to remember that they were here to honour Moules.

The drummers, we thought, lacked the Malari doms' mastery of rhythm, but kept good time. The four drums had each a different pitch, two being barrels and two bowls.

When the girls had done two men flew into the square brandishing long, curved swords. A Bhotia sword-dance consists not of intricate little steps around a sword placed genteelly on the ground, but of mighty sweeps with the blade, back and forth and round the head, accompanied by huge leaps as the dancers turn and twist, advance and retire. The swords were held in the right hand; in the left one man had a pink cloth and his partner big green leaves. The girls came on again; then the swordsmen, who wore homespuns, but offset such sobriety by a mad abandon of movement. As the drum tempo increased all caution in using the blades vanished. I was already feeling alarmed for the onlookers when the pace reached its climax. Suddenly one swordsman lost control. The blade flew from his hand. It struck two small boys across the head. One had a slice of skin cut off his forehead, which bled profusely; the other a deep gash in the neck. They howled. The accident marred the conclusion of the first act, which was the hanging of a garland of mountain flowers around Moules's neck. They were thrown over his head somewhat hurriedly. Then he patched up the wounded and we all fled out of the square.

Act II was a procession through the streets. This went very
slowly, for the lanes were congested and halts frequent. First went the drummers and one dancing girl, then came Moules and the principal Bhotias, followed by the string and accordion players with the second dancing girl. Before and behind these principals straggled the main mass of onlookers. The two girls were the central figures and sang without flagging. Every twenty or thirty yards they would halt, and each accompanied by her own musicians give song and dance before moving on again, still singing. The procession song went somewhat like a coronach, for the drums were sonorous and gave out no variations of rhythm. But their regular beat was drastically enlivened by an occasional round of blank fired from a rifle. This startled the seven jhibus, which came close in the rear. One had to be wary when passing them. At each sudden shot the toss of their horned heads threatened to spike the multitude.

The drum tempo increased swiftly as each song or dance came to its climax and always a halt was required to let them work up to it. Before long, I fear, the two girls had forgotten to act; they had become their natural, seductive selves. Their swaying arms and half-closed eyes exuded sex and sensuality. The hard fact of the matter is that they were young harlots dressed up. That they should have been chosen to grace the departure of an evangelical missionary appealed to our sense of humour. Perhaps it appealed to Moules’s too.

As we drew away from the village, aiming towards that final departure point for Tibet where the flag poles stand on the ridge between the Gori and Goankhha Rivers, the former sword-dancers put on a comedy act—without swords. They danced to the drums with frantic gestures, jerking the eyebrows, thrusting out the tongue, protruding the eyes, jerking the thighs. Encouraged by the laughter, the older sword-dancer, who was too full of fun, lapsed into vulgarity, at which Moules rightly showed wrath. Then we all reached the great cairn at the ridge.

The two men gave a final dance to the drums, the two girls a final song to the strings and accordion. To all players, dancers, singers, and drummers, Moules distributed baksheesh. He
shook hands with Scott, Weir and me, while his jhibus passed on—and then he was off.

Ira Singh walked on with him one mile.

We returned to camp feeling that at last our Milam days were numbered, and that we too must be off. Everywhere about the village that afternoon were the signs of further imminent departures. Back at camp we were taking stock of food and repacking the crates into 40-lb. loads. Up at the village the men were cleaning their guns and rifles in the sunshine, in readiness for the first summer caravan across the Kungribingri La. Our new Bhotia porters came down at intervals in little, lingering groups, just to look us over and draw conclusions and to cast calculating eyes on our gear. The Dotials pegged their fourth goatskin out on the grass and carried on with the eternal spinning.

Ira Singh came to see us at night. He brought a note from MacKinnon, who had written from Bugdiar, sixteen miles down the Gori, and given the letter to a passing Bhotia. He had been beaten off Traill's Pass by foul weather. The first night he and his coolie had slept in a cave five miles up the Lawan Gad, which runs up from the Goriganga to the pass. They had been washed out. On the second night they had continued to within six miles of the col, slept in a goatherd's hut, and again been washed out. The Bhotia had refused to go on in such rain, so they had retired to Lawan for a third night and Bugdiar for the fourth. MacKinnon now aimed to reach Ranikhet by way of Mansiari, Tejam, and Bageshwar on the Sarju River.

When I read this note my first reflection, after commiseration with MacKinnon, was that Traill's Pass was no farther south of Milam than the Ralam Dhura. They lay at almost exactly the same latitude on either side of the Gori. Why, then, should the Ralam route be spared the appalling weather of the Lawan Gad? There was no reason that I could see. And the Ralam route was higher, longer, and more complicated than Traill's. In other words, this hasty and blurred pencil scribble meant that our hopes of ever reaching the Panch Chuli had considerably
diminished. Yet I cannot remember any of us expressing concern on that account. As with every move of the expedition we felt that our own part was limited; we had to plan as best we knew and organize as efficiently as we could, and then push on, freely accepting the end vouchsafed us. If that were success or defeat, in either event, and day by day, we should enjoy what came our way, so far as we were able.

The Himalayan traveller who cannot swiftly acquire such a philosophy and apply it, will find that however short his life may be it will not be gay.
THE DANCING GIRL AT MILAM

Photo by T. Weir

THE WEAVERS OF MILAM

Photo by D. Scott
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Ralam Pass

ON 25TH JULY, eleven Milam Bhotias were down at the camp at six in the morning. Ira Singh came to make two introductions. The first was to one Tirlok Singh. Tirlok had a face both shrewd and honest. He had been a porter on the 1939 Polish expedition to Nanda Devi East, had carried to 20,000 feet, and badly wanted to go with us to the Darmaganga. He was big and solid of build, and looked a stronger porter than any of the other eleven. Ira Singh pressed us to take twelve men so that his young nephew, Zaspar Singh (who, we now learned, must be our head coolie) could carry a light load. Zaspar was then introduced—a mere lad of sixteen. We were very disappointed. He was a likeable lad, a pure Bhotia, and as such not a load-carrier. He was obviously keen to come, for the sake of the adventure. It was a sentiment we could appreciate. But we refused to take twelve men. That would have cost us another Rupees 36. Dearly should we have liked to exchange Zaspar for the tough and experienced Tirlok, but this, we realized, could not be. Ira Singh had contracted to give us eleven men, had now produced them, and his own nephew was one. Tirlok was the extra, to whom we said ‘no’ with a real regret. Tirlok then announced that he would accompany the party unladen, and take what opportunity offered for giving service.

Zaspar was thus the Bhotias’ nominal head, their true leader being Delib Singh, who had crossed the pass many years ago. Delib was a tall, powerful man, grave and calculating and very quiet, probably in his late thirties. He had a more commanding presence than any of the others.
There was no quarrelling about loads that morning. The crates had been weighed by Weir and me, but Perimal had weighed several of the kit-bags and set out the loads with surpassing cunning. He had ostentatiously reserved the very smallest load for himself, so that every suspicious and ill-natured person, including me, rushed up to test its weight, intent on creating hell—only to find that Perimal’s load was by far the heaviest of all. The shock sent each agitator quickly away, ready now to take up his own lighter load without venturing another murmur. Perimal was grinning from ear to ear. Unlike the Dhauli Bhotias, the Milam men accepted quietly what Perimal had set out, and moved off without fuss. But Perimal, with his new, hard-won experience, had not been sitting at Milam for a week without taking thought for the morrow. When the Bhotias were away I made a few testing prods on the outside of his kit-bag. As I thought, he had packed it with 50 lb. of ata—ata only. This meant that every day it would get at least 12 lb. lighter, and the first day was in any event nearly all downhill on a good track. In the arts of head coolie-ship Perimal was not lagging as a learner. All that he had to learn now was how to carry it off without the sahib’s knowing. Meantime, I said nothing. This was one of Perimal’s happiest days.

We crossed the Gori and travelled down the right-hand bank. Our destination was Tola, nine miles south, from which we should begin our big eastward break to the Darmaganga. Whenever we pulled out of the Milam flats the valley was again flanked by bleak screes and continued so seven miles to Martoli. There we had a glimpse rightwards up the famous Lawan Gad, where MacKinnon had been defeated. The lower part was green as an Alpine valley, and tree clad. Cloud wrapped the upper part and all hills on either side of the Gori.

Two miles lower we recrossed the river and climbed about three hundred feet to Tola. It was a pleasant little village, snugly set under some cliffs, at the top of which stood an unexpected temple. I could see no way of reaching that temple without rock-climbing. Never had I seen such an excellent
site; truly, we were moving in a land of mountaineers. We passed half a mile along a terrace towards two tall trees, prominent at its far end. There we had hoped to camp. Above the terrace ran a line of cliffs, holed along the base by huge caves. But neither there nor round the trees could we find water, so continued down into the Tola Gad, the right-hand branch of which fell from our first pass. We camped at the water's edge. Scott made our evening meal a feast by producing mushrooms, which he had collected in the Gori. We fried them with two fresh eggs each, followed by soup, goat, and a Weir steamed pudding—by far the best he had ever boiled. We refuelled for the morrow. Our present elevation was 10,300 feet and to-morrow we must cross a 15,300-foot pass to Ralam village.

After a wet night a brief clearance allowed us to strike camp in comfort. Zaspar Singh sought me out to say that yesterday he had found his load too heavy. Would I lighten it? I could well believe him. He was no more used to carrying loads than I. He should never have been here as a coolie. He spoke firmly and with a straightforward glance, but without a trace of aggressiveness or of pleading, so had my sympathy. I relieved him of two pairs of crampons, which I handed to Perimal. Perimal blinked, but was silent.

We crossed the river to mount a long ridge on to open alps. It was very damp under foot and before long rain was falling—a steady Scotch drizzle out of low, thin cloud. On the hillside in front a bright display of flowers and rhododendrons rejoiced our Gori-conditioned eyes. The day's journey introduced us to a complete change of scene—especially after we crossed the pass, which was miserable in snow wreaths and rain—for then we dropped steeply to take a long descending traverse of 3,000 feet through pastures packed with tall-stemmed flowers. Especially big was the Morina persica, a thistle with pink flowers growing from the axils of the leaves in eight or ten tiers to the stalk. Many were new kinds, which we had not seen around Lampak. Their rich variety of colour and shape and leaf made me deeply regret my ignorance of botany and aspire to learn.
I wanted to know them all by name and the life history of each. Had I only brought a book on Himalayan plants I should have learned a lot on this expedition. A text-book by itself is dull, but when the flowers grow before one's eyes their beauty is dynamic, inspiring action.

We came into Ralam in the early afternoon. It was a tiny village in a mountain cul-de-sac: twenty stone houses on the side of a green glen. That valley was the most fertile we had entered and many cows were grazing the lower pastures. The fields just under the village shone golden yellow with flowering buckwheat—shone even through the rain, impressing upon us how beautiful a valley this must be under blue skies.

Scott, Weir, and I arrived first and went straight to the village square, where we met only women and children and old men. All men in their prime were off to Tibet. There was one Bhotia lad, however, named Padhun Singh, aged seventeen, whom I thought to be the best set-up young man we had seen in India. The beauty of his face and body were enhanced by intelligent eyes and by a manliness of bearing that appears only when a youth is in control of his own energies. He wanted to come as our porter, he said, all the way to Almora.

Had money been no object we should have engaged him straightaway. But we did need four men to carry firewood for two days to the foot of the Ralam Dhura. For this we engaged Padhun Singh (already we had Tirlok from Milam) and asked the elders for two more. One of the men they put forward was another Padhun Singh, aged fifty at least. He had been no less than thrice over the Ralam Dhura and could show us three chitthis—one from Hugh Ruttledge dated June 1926, the second from Finlay in June 1935, and the third from Oliver in June 1941. However thick the mists might be we now felt sure of being able to find the pass. Only storm or stone-fall should be able to stop us.

The coolies arrived and we pitched camp on a field a hundred yards beyond the village. The people of Ralam were even more hospitable than those of Dunagiri. They presented us with milk, supplied the Dotials with hot water, and gave the
Milam men shelter in a building. The children, however, were more numerous than usual and small boys abounded—than which there is no creature of God more ripe for the tortures of hell fire. From Ralam to Loch Goil they are alike in dearly loving to be chased. This duty was Perimal’s and all the time we were at Ralam their squeals of delight rang around the tents. To Himalayan children our expedition was in truth a travelling circus, and especially did they love to watch the animals feed.

In the evening the Milam men came to us with long faces. To our wrath we heard that they had not after all brought food for six days from Milam. They had relied upon picking up more at Ralam, but now discovered that they would have to wait one full day to get the grain ground. I could have told them that myself and feel satisfied that they must have known it. We could certainly not go on without food and so controlled ourselves. A day was neither here nor there provided that we paid no extra wages. I told Delib Singh at once that we should pay only for six marches to Sipu, and to this he agreed. Whether he told his men is doubtful, in view of later events.

We regretted that wasted day, for the next morning was dry and sunny—an ideal day for the crossing of our second pass. But the day was not really wasted. We enjoyed it. Scott and Weir vanished early on photographic missions, while I opened the dispensary to deal with cuts and headaches. Then I fled, knowing what would happen. Thus, when Weir returned alone around noon, he found a queue of waiting patients. We no longer had the stores or the skill to deal with more than very simple troubles. Most of the medicines, and especially the sulpha compounds, had to be strictly reserved for emergencies.

On my way home in the afternoon I was much taken with the idea of Ralam as a climbing centre, especially upon a first arrival in the Himalaya. On either side of the glen were numerous unclimbed peaks of sixteen and seventeen thousand feet, notably Shivu and Tihutia to the south-east. Beyond them to the north and east were a host of the big and glaciated mountains of 20,000 feet and upwards. I thought that Chaudhara
CHAUDHARA (21,360 feet)
from the Yankchar Glacier. The Ralam Pass is round the corner to the left
(21,360 feet), which overlooked the Ralam Dhura, might be climbed from Ralam by its west ridge, to which access might be had from the Shivu glacier. Northwards, an approach could be made to the unexplored Chhiring We (21,520 feet) and its attendant group by way of the Shankalpa and Kalabaland glaciers. But there is no end to what may be done, or at least attempted, in this great and complex range between the Gori and Darma.

I returned to find the camp bustling with activity. Perimal had got merry on chang and was chasing the children again, whose squeals were shriller with joy than ever. Weir and Goria were composing Bampa memsahib’s chupatties, and the Padhun Singhs were dragging in a goat for medical treatment. I cleaned the goat’s sores with acriflavine. Our medical methods in the villages were mostly quite inadequate, but made everyone happy.

The villagers in the morning presented us with free milk. Like so much Himalayan hospitality, given in goodwill, a return in baksheesh was none the less expected, and this amounted to much more than the price of the milk. An unexpected and more costly honour then overwhelmed us. The porters had lifted their loads and we were all ready to set off on our third stage, when four drummers and fourteen boys marched out of the village. They came into camp and beat a tattoo, after which the boys sang in unison, sweetly and without affectation. Then they preceded us for a full mile along the path, drumming and singing, and at intervals halting to dance, after the Milam order. Both dancing and singing, however, were superior to the Milam performance in skill, though shorn of garlands, guns, and gorgeousness.

The boys at first danced together, holding flowers in one hand and docken leaves in the other. Before the final parting several boys between six and ten years gave solo exhibitions. Truly they were excellent, more especially one lad of six; he wore red and black beads on his neck and had no seat to his pants—not a vestige—and one leg in tatters up to the hip. He and then two other boys first of all did a comic dance in which
they made frightful faces, and, in time to the drum beat, searched hair and arm-pits for vermin—this by co-ordinated jerks and scratchings and quick production between forefinger and thumb of imaginary insects. Straight dances followed, always with a simple step and strenuous body and arm work. The leaves and flowers were waved aloft and down-pointed in harmony with jerks of the head and trunk. The performance had been well rehearsed; the boys moved fast and fairly let themselves go. At each climax they gave a general impression of being out of control, yet never set a foot wrong and always ended in complete command of balance. We had seen such ecstatic skill at Malari, but that boys should be able to imitate it so well convinced me of something I had always believed but heard doubted: that the state of ecstasy reached so often by Indians in dance is due not to a priming of chang but to a genuine emotion evoked by rhythm of disciplined movement. Quite as much emphasis must be given to the discipline as to the ecstasy.

The whole procession of song and dance had been initiated and controlled by an old man with badly inflamed eyes, whom Weir had been treating with eye ointment during those last two days. The Ralam men did not give us this honour to exact baksheesh. Yet we knew that if we gave none they would think that we had not liked the performance. And we had liked it even more than the Malari and Milam shows. So I handed out Rupees 6 and they gave us a grand, farewell roll on the drums.

Our day’s objective was the Yankchar Pass. We had now to go up the Ralam Gad to the Shankalpa glacier, then break hard right across the spine of a long mountain-ridge and down to a second glacier. Our pass was just under 16,000 feet. It would be necessary, said Delib Singh, to camp below the crest.

A rough track led us to the glacier snout. Close above it a great crag projected out of the ice, and this we turned on the left-hand moraine, then crossed the glacier. The best line on which to strike up the opposite hill-flank will always be hard to determine when the route is unknown. One should keep well to the right of the scree that descend from the rock-ridge
of point 17,080 feet. We started from a grassy dell beside a gully.

This hillside was again deep in flowers. Here for the first time we saw the blue Himalayan poppy. We saw two. It is the most beautiful flower we have ever seen; extraordinarily delicate in petal, its shade blue as Tibetan skies, its centre large and yellow like the moon from Uja Tirche, made brilliant by an inner eye of black. We never saw the Himalayan poppy again. It seems to be a rare flower in Kumaon.

At noon we came on the first grassy crest of the ridge. The true rock crest was still a thousand feet above in the clouds. But the weather was about to break, and although the march had been so short we raised no objection when Delib Singh urged a halt. We set up the tents on ground covered with gentians and edelweiss. The gentians were the first we had seen in ten weeks’ travel. My contemplation of the alpines was abruptly interrupted by Perimal, who dangled before my eyes a piece of stinking goat. This, it appeared, was an offering from the young Padhun Singh. He had lacked the nerve to offer it himself. Perimal’s eyes were twinkling. I said ‘Ni!’ loudly and waved a disgusted hand. Perimal faded away. Indoors I told Tom Weir of this joke. His eyes popped with horror at my too hasty rejection. He hastened out, calling for Perimal, the goat, maggots and all. So the goat was again passed round, and sniffed from judicious distances. The more subtly sensitive nostrils of Weir and Scott declared the goat to be gamy but good; if cleared of maggots it would make excellent soup. They were right. The soup was like a supercharged hare soup, leaving imperishable memories, to be ranked in time with the liver at Lampak.

Heavy rain fell, afternoon and night. Wet firewood and drizzle delayed the morning’s start until 7.30, by which time the clouds cleared. We climbed south-east into a corrie, then up steep scree to the left of a rock peak with a double top. We reached the col in two hours. The Milam men were strangely slow in arriving. They were lagging, I would have said, with deliberate intent.
The col was a valuable viewpoint. Three or four miles away on our right a cirque of great mountains curved from Chaudhara to Suitilla, between which were sandwiched two lesser 20,000-foot peaks, and between these two the saddle of the Ralam Dhura. It was hidden by cloud. From out of this cirque poured the Yankchar glacier, flowing directly under us, until a few miles north it took a hairpin bend leftwards and became the Shankalpa glacier ending in the Ralam Gad. At the hairpin bend a still greater glacier flowed into it from the north. This was the Kalabaland, ringed by Suli Top, Chhiring We, Burphu, and others. That looked a most fascinating and difficult area for exploration, but although the Kalabaland glacier was heavily crevassed the angle was not daunting. It looked possible to penetrate the seven miles to its head.

Looking back the way we had come, we could see on the far side of the Shankalpa glacier a long ridge of rock peaks, unnamed and unmarked on the half-inch map, all probably between 17,000 and 18,000 feet. These would give excellent climbing during the monsoon season, and the same might be said of the line of peaks strung between the Yankchar Pass, on which we stood, and Chaudhara. All looked climbable (with difficulty), including the latter peak from its Shivu glacier.

Our route for to-morrow, then, was to go south up the Yankchar glacier and follow it eastwards into the great corrie of the Chaudhara cirque, so up to the Ralam Pass and down our third glacier on the far side—if the weather would hold. At the moment the weather was good enough down at our own level, but dark and heavy up on the tops, where it seemed more than likely that hell prevailed. We were thankful, indeed, that we were not trying to cross the pass to-day. I think that Matbir was too. When he arrived and saw the magnificence of the mountain scene ahead, into the all too mysterious heart of which we were bound, he prayed. He did so aloud and at some length, salaaming many times.

Then we descended on to the Yankchar glacier. The drop was only five hundred feet on fine loose scree. We rattled down at speed and walked a mile up the bare ice of the glacier,
crossing over its back to the far side, where we at length came on a wide, scree-covered hollow beyond the moraine. At this point we surprised a fox. It was big and fawn coloured. The altitude was 15,000 feet and the ground bare of all food supply. To our astonishment the fox turned not downhill but uphill, climbing rapidly into the screes and mists that hung from peak 20,480 feet. Delib Singh now declared for a camp. We had done precisely three and a half miles in three and a half hours, all on relatively easy ground. I was angry. There was, indeed, no point in going farther to-day, for we should in any event cross the pass in one more day and make Sipu in two (weather permitting). But we ought to have been here yesterday. We had pitched camp at midday when three more hours would have brought us to this site. In other words, the calculating Delib had misled us to get six days’ pay when it should have been five. The day’s slow pace was explained.

He did better than he knew. For we pitched camp at 11 a.m. and shortly afterwards the weather broke. The warm sunshine of an hour ago changed to cloud and drizzle, so damping the firewood that the coolies were unable to cook chupatties. The weather thickened to hail, sleet, thunder and lightning, and finally damp snow. Avalanches came thundering off the surrounding mountain-walls. Our future prospects could hardly have appeared worse. Would the coolies go high to-morrow? Would they face an 18,500-foot pass in dirty weather? Supposing they would, could they make such a crossing without full mountaineering equipment? We expected the worst. Our salvation required a miracle.

That dismal afternoon and evening forced us early to bed. During the night it became remarkably cold. At last Scott looked out. The needed miracle had happened. The wind had swung 180° from south-west to north-east, bringing frost and clear skies. At midnight we found our camp ringed by virgin mountains, the presence of many unsuspected during the day, all sharp-pointed and snow-draped, gleaming in the light of a full moon. That was the hardest night’s frost we had had since Rishiganga days.
The sky next morning remained clear and cloudless, and the wind still north-easterly. A glaze of ice lay on the scree round the tents. The sun blazed relentlessly from a sky almost black. Festooned with hanging glaciers and ribbed with fluted ice, Chaudhara sparkled mightily, the noblest mountain of them all. Such good fortune at the height of the monsoon was scarcely to be believed. We had urgent need now of making a quick get-away, lest the weather break in the afternoon. Instead, great delay was caused by wet firewood and frost, so that an hour had passed before the coolies could coax flame from the juniper. Our own chupatties were again made by Goria on the primus, which had been invaluable in the mornings since the break of the monsoon. Paraffin supplies were still good—two gallons remained out of four. I paid off the Ralam men and Tirlok Singh.

At half-past seven we began moving up the moraine to the eastward bend of the glacier, where there was an ice-fall of several hundred feet. Still mounting by the moraine, we were able to by-pass the ice-fall until within a hundred and fifty feet from the top, where we were forced to traverse on to it. A bout of step-cutting followed on bare wet ice. The work was done by Tirlok Singh, who was still with us. He had carried one of our ice-axes and leapt to the front at the first sight of ice work. And he cut well, without hesitation. Then followed Delib Singh and Goria, the latter enlarging the steps cut by Tirlok. They made the beginner’s usual mistake of cutting the steps too far apart, so that coming fourth I had to cut more for the laden men behind. But we were impressed by Tirlok’s confidence in step-cutting, and by the competent climbing of all the Bhotias, who showed no dismay at the shining plunge of the ice-fall and the waiting crevasses.

Before this glacier passage we had felt some concern at the likelihood of the Bhotias getting snow-blindness in crossing the pass. We had snow-goggles for our own Dotials, but for the Bhotias nothing save an advance warning. But we need not have troubled ourselves. The Bhotias know snow. They simply produced a hank of goat’s fleece and laid the strands over
CLIMBING THE GLACIER TO THE RALAM PASS

(Photograph much foreshortened)
the eyes, ends tucked behind the ears or held by the hat. The protection proved adequate. It had not occurred to us that anywhere in the world men do, literally and for practical ends, pull wool over the eyes.

We soon gained easy walking on the upper glacier, avoiding the right-hand side, which was menaced by hanging glaciers lining the flank of Chaudhara. After three and a half hours we had risen nearly three thousand feet into the upper basin. Looking back to the west we could now see far across the Goriganga to the whitened horns of Nanda Devi, and to Tirsuli’s barrier reef at the back of Milam, and for the first time realized what a vast tract of country we had covered in these last two and a half months. At the head of our glacier basin stood two sentinel mountains of 20,000 feet, between which swung the ridge of the Ralam Dhura. Its wall rose six hundred feet from the glacier. It was a rock pass, no more than dusted with new monsoon snow. It looked much more formidable than we had imagined. Even without loads I doubt if we could have climbed straight up its face.

We crossed the basin on snow, luckily thin, so that crevasses were open and easily avoided. At the extreme left of the wall we found a shallow gully, up which we climbed two hundred feet, then traversed rightwards on to a ridge of loose rock, which led up to the left of the pass. Great caution was required. A careless upsetting of stones in the front would have dealt dire injury to the party’s tail.

Scott, Weir, and I reached the pass at noon. We had travelled as fast as we could, because the north-east wind had apparently changed again right round to south-west. During the last hour clouds had been forming round the base of Nanda Devi and filling the Goriganga; now they were billowing up the Yankchar glacier. We feared we were going to lose the view, but gained the pass in the company of the first flitting wisps. Facing us north-east across the Nipchukang glacier and the valley of the Lassar Yankti were rows and groups of unnamed mountains, snow- and ice-plastered. Clouds surged round them and spun ten thousand feet above.
Our more immediate interest was the state of the glacier directly under us. It rolled gently for several hundred feet, its wide ice-sheets covered with an inch or two of wet snow, then plunged in ice-falls to the invisible fourth glacier, the Nipchukang, which cut across it at right angles, 4,000 feet below. From the pass there was a short steep descent on rock and scree (which must be a difficult passage in June when snow-covered, especially if a cornice has formed), then smooth ice at a moderate angle leading on to the glacier. In the centre the glacier was badly crevassed, so that our route must go towards either the right or left margins.

We resolved that we must not go right, for that would bring us within range of ice-cliffs suspended from the peak 20,640 feet; these looked ripe for discharge. We had no choice but to go left, and perceived that this necessary move must expose us to the lesser evil of intermittent stone fall from a row of rotten buttresses depending from the peak 20,480 feet on the north side of the pass. They were already discharging both heavy guns and light, and we could occasionally see the bigger projectiles raking the marginal ice of the glacier. Yet we had hopes of a not too unsafe descent there, by skirting the fringe of the danger area and entering into it only at brief passages.

At half-past twelve the last of the porters arrived—five hours up. They had given a fine performance. We were especially pleased with Perimal, whose iodine cure could now be held well proven. We rested. The recently gathering mists were already vanishing again, for the new south-west wind was revealed as only a local valley wind, now dying away from the continued north-easterly breeze. The sun returned roasting hot. It baked us on a pass where yesterday we might have been in most serious plight from exposure, if ever we had got thus far.

We turned appraising eyes on the unclimbed peak 20,640 feet on the south side of the pass, and rejected any future attempt as impossible. Its two-thousand-foot ridge was too steep and pinnacled.
After half an hour we all scrambled down to the edge of the snow-covered ice. We had mentally prepared ourselves for an hour's step-cutting and rope-work to get the coolies down to a better surface, but almost before we knew what was happening Delib Singh and several of the Bhotias had tipped their loads over the edge and gone flashing after them on their backsides. They left in their wake tracks of clear ice. They went much farther and faster than they had imagined, but came to a safe enough halt above the first wide crevasse, which stretched right across the glacier. Scott, Weir, and I followed in the same way, then came the Dotials. But as one followed another the pace became too great and they lost control. Crates and sacks went spilling over the slope, and at last one, the medicine chest, split and cast the contents.

After that crate-rolling was barred. The medicine chest was successfully salvaged, nailed, and repacked. To avoid the long crevasse we then bore leftwards into the danger area. We were in it only five minutes, in a rather trying situation, descending ice that was too steep to permit one to run if stones fell. But not one stone did fall. We came rapidly on to the flatter part of the glacier and walked farther towards the middle, where we were safe. Soon we came to the lip of this upper basin. The glacier made the first of two swift plunges; none the less the descent went well, for we could still keep to the middle and use steep boulder patches to avoid step-cutting. But the angle continued to steepen, soon threatening extreme difficulties if we persisted. Just a few hundred feet farther the glacier dipped again to the head of an ice-fall. To continue on the ice was impossible, but the left-hand moraine gave us hope. We traversed on to it, at a point where the ice flattened out in a hollow. As the last three Dotials descended on to its floor some huge stones fell from a northern buttress. One ton-weight boulder came straight at them. They had good warning, ran hard at the right angles at the right moment, and the stone whizzed past behind. I think that the danger of this route looks (and sounds) worse than it really is. Only twice does one touch the danger fringe, then only for a few minutes.
keeps alert escape should always be possible. That opinion would not hold if a very big rock-fall occurred.

We were able to follow our promising moraine for a short way only. It suddenly ended at the edge of a cliff. We looked cautiously over the brink, down a face falling sheer for several hundreds of feet. On our right was the ice-fall, now seen as a thousand feet high. Its slopes were polished by stones, which were continuously toppling over the top edge and sweeping the surface until swallowed by a crevasse.

If we were to go any farther it was clear that we must leave the glacier. It was now that Delib Singh redeemed himself by saving us perhaps several hours' reconnaissance. He remembered the old route. Above the moraine on which we stood was a line of cliffs, and a hundred yards farther back a steep, indefinite shelf ran up the face on a slant from left to right. It was not an obvious route at first sight, but turned out to be quite easy. We followed it upwards on to the crest of a wide buttress, which sloped towards the lower glacier. We traversed leftwards around this buttress and so came to a little neck, connecting it to a lower ridge. The ridge had a small top, on which the party collected.

On our right the ridge curved steeply but quite easily downwards for seven hundred feet to the lower, level part of the glacier. We lost no time in descending. Holds were plentiful, so that we never had to use a rope. Down below, on the glacier, an old medial moraine provided a mile-long highway on to the Nipchukang glacier, the ice of which was completely hidden under masses of red and brown stone. Up and down we toiled over the rollers of this monumental chaos, aiming on a down-slant for the far side, where the green of grass blazed a welcome. At the end of an hour we reached these alps and rested gratefully among the flowers, but there was no firewood or water there, so we continued down through narrow pastures. After a quarter of an hour we emerged on to open, well-watered ground. Juniper showed on the hill-slopes above. There we camped at five o'clock, at an altitude of 14,000 feet.

To Delib Singh, and his greediness in making a five-day
AT THE RALAM PASS (18,470 feet).

FACING EAST.

The Darmaganga lies in cloud below. The peak is unnamed and unclimbed. The farther hills are in Tibet.
journey into six, we owed the perfect weather for the crossing of the pass. It was a pleasing irony.

The coolies were exceedingly tired, but not more than half a dozen had headaches. To them we gave aspirins. One Bhotia had inflamed eyes, which we treated with castor oil. Within half an hour of arrival several of the Bhotias came to me, saying that they wanted to stay with us for the climbing on Panch Chuli. Their spirit was uplifting—deliberately choosing this moment, when we could not but know that they were tired, to show how keen they were to come. It made us doubly sorry to say 'no.'

Early next morning we went all the way down the Nipchukang glacier by a good path on the left bank, first through long alps, then on the crest of a moraine, and finally contouring grass slopes, which fell from cliffs on the left. There the big red bluffs lifted the eye up to a remote comb, where thin, pale blue mist picked out a score of pinnacles. The flowers perfumed the path and were soon reinforced by dwarf rhododendrons and cotoneasters, then by wild roses, at the last by birch and pine. In the valleys one quickly becomes used to the delightful scents of vegetation. The brain ceases to distinguish perfumes, just as it no longer records the tick of a clock in a room. Our days spent among rock, snow, and ice had been few, but were enough; on coming down from the Ralam Pass we were aware of entering into what seemed to be a newly God-given sense—smell. And we revelled in its wonders.

The snout of the glacier dropped behind—a slope of wet and shining ice three hundred feet high. A mile beyond we crossed the stream by a snow-bridge and at last dropped to the floor of the Lassar Yankti. Unlike the grey Gori valley it is green. The river is the left branch of the Darmaganga. The right-hand branch is the trade route to Tibet over the Darma Pass, whereas the Lassar Yankti leads nowhere, save to the glaciers of its source. There being no through route the path is slender and wild.

We turned down-river and came in a mile and a half to Sipu. The village was set two hundred and fifty feet above the river
on a little plateau. Around and above it were neatly terraced fields ablaze with red buckwheat. We saw none of the yellow variety grown at Ralam. Below the plateau and between it and the river stretched a hundred yards of perfect meadow. A clear and tiny stream wound through it. Close inspection showed it to be flat and clean, unspoiled by goats, the turf good and yielding. There was firewood on the slopes above.

We pitched camp.
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Flight from Sipu

We settled on the meadow below Sipu on the forenoon of 31st July, and in the afternoon climbed to the village in search of rice and ata. Although very small, Sipu was expanding; several new houses were going up, better built and dressed than those of Milam. The grey stone was square-cut and the walls thick. Floors were of hardened mud and the roofs of young birch trunks slated with stone slabs. All houses had well-carved doors and window frames and many showed whitewashed fronts.

The men of Sipu were away and the women very much in charge. They were quite unlike the Milam women in seeming of fuller and managerial character. Obviously they were accustomed to taking responsibility, yet were the most colourfully decorated women we had seen in the hills. Great skill and patience had been lavished on their hair, which was parted in the middle and laid to each side in countless and beautifully plaited strands, each slender as a shoe-lace, oiled and arranged to show the plaits to advantage. All wore several necklaces of red beads and silver ornaments. These latter were weighty and curiously wrought. Their gowns and garments were home-spuns, pieced in multi-coloured bands of alternate red, green, yellow, brown, grey, and blue. A few of the women had faces heavily lined, giving an appearance of extreme age rarely seen in Britain. All seemed vigorous and well clothed. They sold us our rice and ata at Rupees 1 per seer, the lowest price we had paid in Kumaon.

When we returned to camp I paid off the Milam men. At first all went well; the men accepted the money with happy salaams. Then Delib Singh asked for an extra day’s pay for all, on account of the stop at Ralam. I refused. Long arguments followed,
at the end of which tempers were at high tension. Every man handed back his money. Neither party renewed the topic that night.

In the morning the weather was again sunny. Scott and Weir went on reconnaissance up a glen directly behind Sipu. It ran westwards towards the northernmost top of the Panch Chuli. Somewhere up this glen they had hoped to find an accessible point on its south ridge from which to view the approach to the main top behind. I stayed below to cope with the Bhotias.

They were not unfriendly in the morning. Half a dozen came to get dressings on sores, cuts, and scratches. After which Delib Singh made the same demands as before. I referred him to the Milam bandobast—six days to Sipu—pointed out that it ought to have been five days, and refused to pay seven. I reminded him of those four men from Ralam, whom we had had to pay for two absurdly short marches instead of one. He tried to wrangle. I cut him short. The situation then became ugly. Delib took his men apart and agitated. He seemed to be successful, for the glances directed towards me were so hostile that I began to speculate on the possibility of violence. Then argument started among themselves and continued fifteen minutes. At last young Zaspar Singh walked away from them and came over to me. He threw up his hands as though in disgust with his own men and exclaimed: 'Rupees! Rupees! Rupees!' He lay down on the groundsheet beside me. He seemed to be searching his mind for words, and at last said in English: 'We take rupees—six days.'

He had spoken with surprising firmness. Zaspar had decided to be a puppet leader no longer. I could hardly believe my ears and wondered how a lad of sixteen would ever manage to carry the day against tough, adult Bhotias. By great good fortune Delib now left the group and started climbing up to the village. Zaspar at once walked over to them and calmly told them his decision. He was perfectly at ease. As when asking me a few days ago to lighten his load, so again he spoke without timidity or aggressiveness; with a straightforward simplicity that won a respectful hearing. Not a man questioned him.
astonishing alacrity they all came up to me and sat down. Zaspar alone stood. He repeated: 'We take rupees—six days.'

I looked on Zaspar with a new admiration, and silently blessed his uncle, who in sending him had probably known what he was doing better than we had imagined. I fetched the money, sat down, and paid. They took it cheerfully. No sooner had I done than Delib returned. His was a sad and wrathful face. After he realized what had happened he sat down in front of me and held out his hand. I gave him his money. Without counting it he then detached a note, laid it on the grass at my knee, and rose: 'Bakhshish,' he said.

The insult was so extreme that inwardly I quaked with laughter. Never, I should imagine, had Delib Singh scored a neater hit. The story would lose nothing in the telling round the Bhotia camp-fires. Outwardly, I acted as one deaf and blind. I did not look at the note. I contemplated the scenery with an amiable expression. After a few moments of inaction I rose and turned away. Delib Singh then spoiled his act by swooping down on the unheeded note before the wind claimed it. He stuffed it in his pocket. 'Sahib,' he said, 'I go with you to climb Panch Chuli.' I looked at him in surprise. This was a day of surprises. I do believe that all the demanding, threatening, and ill will were forgotten. He seemed in good enough humour. Once again I said 'no'; this time without regret.

The Bhotias now set off on the return to the Gori. Seven, including Zaspar and Tirlok, headed north to recross the Ralam Dhura. The others, mostly the older men, turned south to go sixty miles or more to Askot. All as they left waved and shouted: 'Salaam, sahib.'

During the rest of the forenoon I was fully occupied giving medical treatment to villagers. In the afternoon heavy rain fell and caught Weir and Scott on the mountain. They returned soaked. It was the first and last time that any of us were soaked to the skin on the main range, despite that our climbing and travel included two monsoon months. They had had an abortive day. They strongly urged that we go south to Sona, at the foot of the main peak, rather than delay here longer when
daily cloud would almost certainly nullify our attempts to reconnoitre. It was decided.

The next morning, however, was thoroughly bad. We were tent-bound until late afternoon. I had then to go to the village, having promised to give medicines to several women. Although the rain was teeming down I could delay no longer, and, calling Goria to carry a rucksack full of medical gear, climbed the now slippery track. The village squares had become quagmires, and were deserted by all save a mastiff, which we eyed warily as it licked its chops. For a minute or two we were at a loss where to go. Then a young girl came and ushered us into an empty barn. She rushed off to warn the patients and in five minutes the work began.

First came a young mother bearing a naked boy of two years. His umbilicus was a huge septic sore, which I had treated yesterday. He seemed in real pain and in bad health. To-day his umbilicus was a little better. I called for hot water and cleaned it out again with acriflavine and put on a new dressing. The second patient was an old woman, who had skin trouble on the tongue. It was dry as leather and rough as a towel. This was a common trouble in the Darmi villages. Having no idea of its cause or proper treatment, I put on a skin paint (Castillani's) and gave her a strong vitamin pill. Several women presented themselves with 'headaches,' which in all villages are inexplicably rife. However, we had big supplies of aspirin. One woman had inflamed and running eyes, to be treated with eye ointment, another earache, and received Sedonan ear-drops. An old man came with malaria, and for him I had paludrine. A girl of four years had a scab on the top of her head, which had been partly picked off and gone deeply septic. This I cleaned and dressed, and left acriflavine, lint, and bandages with the mother. All these had been typical village cases, of the kind that MacKinnon had dealt with so often in Garhwal. And they had been satisfactory, in the sense that one could do something. But now came a quack's downfall.

An ancient hag had a loose back tooth in the lower jaw. Unhappily, I had forceps with me and fell into temptation.
Until now I had used them only for drawing nails out of crates; I knew nothing of their application to human teeth and the need of forcing the pincers down below the gum margin. Thus I gripped too high. At each wrench hits of the tooth broke off—while the root stayed firm. After a few trials I lost my nerve and had to give up. The hag was so tough that she never winced. Goria was in fits of laughter.

To turn my defeat into a rout, half a dozen women came to me, of all ages from twelve to thirty, showing me stomachs pitted all over with clean scars, curiously like old vaccination marks. I thought that this must be some obscure skin disease, so I painted six stomachs with Castillani's paint—a deep, imperial purple. It was a wonderful colour to look at; it gave everyone immense satisfaction. We parted, all hoping for the best. Not until a long time later did I discover what these strange marks really were. It seems that when Bhotia women have tummy trouble—bad indigestion, dysentery, or the like—they lie down, place a red charcoal on their stomachs, then get a kind friend to blow it red hot. What I ought to have given them was a pill (Gelusil or bismuth salicylate), not a skin paint.

I had been very conscious all this time of Goria lurking in the background. The white and spiky crescent of his grin seemed to stretch across the horizon. He was convulsed. And the moment we got back to camp his head was in each of the Dotials' tents in turn, telling of events at Sipu. He must have told the story well, for while they greeted the opening with discreet and smothered laughter, at the end they brayed like donkeys.

Lest the women find us again, next morning we fled Sipu. To let us make a quick getaway, the Dotials lifted all the baggage themselves. It weighed 610 lb. We hit the southward trail to Sona.

The Dotials were in gay mood that day and fairly strode along. Two miles down we passed one of the Milam men idling near a village. He raised both eyebrows at the sight of the 100-lb. loads and the pace, despite which he still offered service. After three miles the Lassar Yankti flowed into the
Darmaganga. We crossed by a bridge to the right bank and passed the villages of Tidang and Dakar, both noticeably richer than Sipu, having more fields and many water-mills. Dakar looked especially picturesque, the house fronts snow-white and the carved woodwork dyed brightly in the colours of the red and green fields around. The outstanding feature of the Darma

compared with the Dhauli and Gori was openness to the sunshine and fertility of ground. It is a beautiful valley, and for the first time we could say this unreservedly. I had not enjoyed a walk so well since the day we entered the Girthi.

At last we came to a little saddle, where the path crossed a great ridge that fell from the north peak of Panch Chuli. Beyond was the side-glen of Sona, descending several miles from the main summit. The peaks were in cloud, but we could see the tremendous ice-fall of the Meola glacier at the glen's head. At the glen's foot, directly under us, were two little villages facing each other across the Sona River: Sona on the far side, Yansu on the near. On the saddle were cairns, votive flags, and a shrine; for this was a worthy place at which to make offerings

![The Panch Chuli](image_url)
to the high gods. The Panch Chuli are in Hindu mythology most holy mountains, and in clear weather they must be seen from here to great advantage, set high and icy above the depth and breadth of the Darma, where a multitude of red and terraced fields spread warm and encouraging around the villages.

We descended through the steep lanes of Yansu and spent an hour prospecting the Sona Gad for a camp site. At length we pitched our tents on the north or Yansu side, about a quarter of a mile upstream. The weather had been dry all day, but low cloud was now pouring up the Darma and like a deploying army fanned out in a dozen long columns, which swept majestically up each separate furrow of the opposite mountain-flank. It was the typical and daily weather scene of the Darma valley, the hour of its arrival fluctuating from early morning to late afternoon. Accordingly our hopes were high; it made for dull but fair climbing weather.

Part VI of our plan now opened on our greatest mountain.
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Panch Chuli

The name Panch Chuli means the Five Fires. The word ‘Fires’ is used here in the sense of fire-places. They symbolize the home fires of five famous brothers of Hindu mythology, saints and heroes who all married an Indian princess called Draupadi. In defence of their kingdom they had once to take up arms against invading relatives. Arjuna was their leader in battle, and just before going into action he became conscience stricken. Could the shedding of his relatives’ blood ever be justified, even though they sought to seize the kingdom? He turned for guidance to his charioteer and friend—Krishna: who is to Indians what Christ is to us—God incarnate. Krishna’s answer is that inspired Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Song of God.

At the close of long and adventurous lives, the five brothers and Draupadi travel into the Himalaya, climb up to the Abode of the Gods, and are there symbolized by these five peaks, called the Panch Chuli.

On a first reconnaissance in the monsoon the ascent of even one of the five was more than we could expect; for they are difficult even by Himalayan standards. But we did hope, by trial and error, to discover a route that might take some future party to the top. Our task was to explore and help distinguish bad ways from good. If lucky we might gain the summit.

In the morning of 4th August the Panch Chuli were clear. A semicircle of four sharp snow peaks thrust out of thinning cloud. They were craggy and ice clad, grouped around the head of the vast Meola glacier. At one glance we could say that the three southward peaks were inaccessible. We had no later cause to revise that opinion. The summit was the right-hand peak, 22,650 feet. It soared far above all the others, none
of which was under 20,000 feet. The fifth and northerly top was invisible. My first reaction was to make a pencil sketch before they vanished again—a sketch later destined to serve a useful end; my second to admire. One could not in this world find mountains more worthy of ascent. Their beauty of shape and situation are quite unusual. The north and south ridges of that summit peak, by one of which any ascent would have to go, were thin, steep, and icy. From seven miles' distance we could not decide whether either were possible, only that they were worth trying, if they could be reached. That east wall of the Panch Chuli was ten thousand feet high.

It was the way and means of approach that now engaged us. To each side of the summit great glaciers descended: on the left the Meola, on the right the Sona, each ending up in ice-falls four thousand feet high. Up one of these glaciers we had to find a way. Their lower halves were impossible; the upper halves, leading to the south and north summit ridges respectively, looked climbable. But how to get there? Here we had a stroke of luck. Between the two glaciers a great rock-ridge dropped from the summit five thousand feet eastwards. Below
it, and still dividing the glaciers, stood a wide cliff. In its right-hand half the cliff was three thousand feet high and towards the left two thousand. If only we could get up that cliff and so gain the east ridge, we should be able to turn the hopeless ice-falls and use one glacier or the other where the angle began to fall back.

Yet again fortune favoured us. We could see that a very steep grassy shelf slanted up the cliffs, starting just to the right of a prominent waterfall and then rising leftwards. We agreed on our plan of action. We should put Camp II at 12,400 feet on a green alp under the cliffs, follow the grass shelf (if we could) to the cliff-top and then strike up and rightwards to gain the Sona glacier at 16,400 feet, where it protruded a little branch glacier. Somewhere near its snout we should put Camp III. Camp IV would then be carried to the upper glacier basin at 19,000 feet, and Camp V to the north col at approximately 20,000 feet. Thence to the summit by the north ridge. We preferred the north to the south approach: access to the Sona glacier appeared easier than to the upper Meola. Moreover, the north ridge appeared slightly less steep in its upper half, and northward-facing snow ought to be sounder and safer than southward.

We decided to establish Camp II next day, 5th August. Weir then estimated and set apart ten days’ food supply for the mountain. He and Scott reconnoitred a route up the Sona Gad while Perimal and I went into Sona village to buy ata. In Sona we met women only, as at Sipu, heavily ornamented, dressed in bright homespuns. Not a man was visible save two passing merchants, one of whom I was delighted to find spoke good English. He was a young Milam Bhotia. He gave me much local information and told me that British troops had been sent to Korea. I asked for his opinion about the rights and wrongs of the Korean war. He proved well informed. First he gave me the basic facts of the outbreak (which I subsequently found to be correct), the events leading to the United Nations’ intervention, and finally his own opinion: had the United Nations shrunk from fighting, he said, they would have forfeited the respect of mankind, as did the League of Nations. This was
CAMP II.
PANCH CHULI

Photo by T. Weir
neither the first nor the last Hindu hillman we met to show keen interest in the welfare of the West (and to declare regret at the passing of the British Raj).

At Sona I had difficulty persuading the women to accept paper money in exchange for the ata. They wanted silver. There had been similar trouble at Sipu. The Darmi Bhotias are much more conservative than the Johari. They accepted the paper only after Perimal and my Milam friend had assured them of its worth. This trouble would not have arisen, said the Milam merchant, had I been dealing with the Darmi menfolk.

On the following morning the Dotials carried Camp II three miles up the Sona Gad. The Meola and Sona glaciers join below the dividing cliffs, and continue under the name of the Sona glacier. Up the moraine of its true left bank we followed an excellent path through deep grass. In three hours we had risen two thousand feet. We then descended slightly across the glacier junction on to the alp below the cliffs. On this alp we were astounded to find an occupied shieling. It contained a herdsman, three women, and four children. A herd of jhibu were grazing the alp behind. We passed beyond them half a mile and camped under the farther cliffs. A waterfall came down the rocks to our left; abundant juniper decorated the face. As soon as our tents were up Matbir and Phakir fetched in the wood, rock-climbing in exposed positions a hundred and fifty feet up. Then we all settled down to the camp chores.

Our alp lay like a nest on the mountain-wall, the great Meola glacier underneath, a ring of pointed snow peaks nine thousand feet above, and, behind us, cliffs set like a screen. The camp made a most peaceful scene when I walked away in the evening and looked back—the cluster of tents, the bright juniper fire, the Dotials sitting contentedly around, spinning, knitting, smoking, and chatting.... It was a scene that grew more dramatic at night. Then the stars stood out above the peaks. The Dotials' fire became a red splash in the dark, lighting up the smoke as it curled in tall columns against the black cliffs behind. In the big tent there was just one candle burning, but it seemed incredibly bright, lighting the whole tent pale green.
Out of the fine night came a fine morning. We were up at 4.30 a.m. and away in two hours. The shelf up the cliff face gave us no difficulty. Its first four hundred feet were covered not in grass but waist high in flowers, amongst which were strawberries in profusion. The berries had no especially tempting flavour. We passed on across a little down-tilting alp, following vestiges of a previous season's goat track, and so to a second tier of the cliffs. There we had a little rock-climbing to gain lodgment, after which we bore left and upwards by a barer, bleaker shelf to another alp and another tier. This latter was exceedingly steep. We found a gully towards the extreme left, not too easy for laden men, and scrambled several hundred feet to the top of the cliffs. Our height was then about 15,000 feet.

We came out on broad grass slopes falling a thousand feet from the butt of the east ridge. Fortunately the gathering mists lifted, revealing that a long rightward traverse must be made across a rib to gain the slopes leading up to the snout of the Sona glacier. This we did. The ground was quite easy. At noon we arrived on a small flat snow-field directly under the rock-ridge. It was an ideal camp site, but the hour being early and everyone still fresh we wanted to get on to the glacier above the snout. Unluckily, the mist had thickened again and no sign of the snout could we see. The snout hung on the right-hand side of the rock-ridge, but until we saw it we dared not risk a close approach for fear of falling ice. We hovered undecidedly for an hour, by which time it was too late for farther advance. We pitched Camp III on the snow-field.

We had now only two high-altitude tents. The big Bungalow tent was at Camp II and one high-altitude tent at Base. We disposed the coolies in pairs. Matbir and Narbir were returned to Camp II with orders to supply Camp III with juniper. Perimal and Phakir were returned to Base, with orders to supply Camp II with ata. Goria and Zungia we retained: they had proved themselves to be the best coolies for high-altitude climbing. To encourage them still further, Weir gave them a talk on the importance of this our last high climb.
We pitched the two tents side by side and spread the twelve-foot groundsheet on top. It is a weakness of high-altitude tents that the makers do not proof them. No tent should ever be taken to the Himalaya unproofed. Monsoon rain and sleet fall as high as 18,000 feet. Only two of our high-altitude tents had been proofed, and the third, a new one made of excellent material, leaked so badly that not even the coolies would use it. A groundsheet cover was thus indispensable on Panch Chuli.

At half-past three the wind blowing up the Sona Gad unveiled the glacier snout. It was an ice-fall of fifteen hundred feet. No direct ascent was possible. But there was a rock-ridge on the far side as well as the near, and this farther one merged into the ice above the fall. We made reconnaissance of both routes, Scott and Weir taking the great east ridge and I the farther. My traverse under the snout occupied half an hour on slabs. Then the ridge, so encouraging a sight from our camp, proved at close quarters a bristling monster. I tried a direct ascent of the ice instead but soon desisted. I returned gloomily to camp. At half-past five Scott and Weir came back with better news. They had climbed four hundred feet up a snow-slope between the snout and the east ridge, and then continued by the rock far enough to see that the ice-fall could be turned and a traverse made on to the centre of the glacier.

That night the three of us slept for the first time all in one tent. The air mattresses had to be laid lengthwise across its breadth, but even so we found ourselves exasperatingly crowded. Each man had a sense of losing his independence. Every move he made affected the others. Lack of privacy makes prolonged camp life a test of self-discipline. After several months of living in tents, if men commit no murder it is entirely through fear of public opinion. Throughout the expedition I should cheerfully have slain every one of my companions at quite frequent intervals but for the need of tiresome explanations to relatives. Yet, although we damned each other heartily on occasion, the party never quarrelled once in five months. This was because we had started off by liking each other, however critical we might be now, in the crowded tents of the Panch Chuli.
Cloud and drizzle delayed our morning’s start until 7.30. At the top of the snow-slope we moved leftwards on to the rocks, which we found exceptionally loose and scree-strewn. We could maintain a steady plod-plod, but for the Dotials, each carrying 50 lb., a thousand feet of such rock was gruelling. Our first concern was to know where we should strike away from the ridge. The mist was thick. We had been moving one and a half hours when at last the clouds rolled off the glacier. Several hundred feet above a long rock spur projected sideways from the ridge on to the ice; under that spur we must make our traverse.

The ridge rose much more steeply now and the flank overhung the glacier. It continued thus for four hundred feet, then, just where we required to leave the rock, it fell back—at a great bay under the spur.

We roped up. The glacier was snow-covered. Although we had risen above the ice-fall the slope remained steep. I cut a long line of steps through the marginal crevasses, which were set very close together, so that our passage had to cross a narrow bridge between two. Weir followed. But when Scott tried to coach Goria and Zungia across they dithered at the edge, unwilling to come. The use of a rope always seemed to rob the Dotials of their natural confidence. They are happier without. I unroped and traversed back three hundred feet to assist. I think that the sight of me walking easily across the steps, despite the long ice-slope below, gave them the necessary reassurance. Goria at once went across on the rope with Scott, while Zungia, waving the rope aside, followed on his heels.

Out in the middle of the bay we were on easy ground, but proceeded henceforth on two ropes, myself and Weir going first. Our first move was to reach the main Sona glacier. We made a long, sloping descent to turn the spur, then rose three hundred feet to a prominent snow-dome. Below us, descending rightwards, the Sona glacier fell in a riven chaos of ice-cliffs and séracs. Above, three-quarters of a mile wide, it was split down the middle by an outcropping rocky ridge. To the right of the ridge the ice was heavily crevassed and broken by falls, but to
CAMP IV.
PANCH CHULI
at 19,000 feet
on the Sona Glacier

Photo by T. Weir
the left sped a smooth and shining highway, only once barred by an ice-fall, through which a central corridor rose invitingly. We had just glimpsed this good route when the clouds again rolled over all. The Dotials had begun to feel the altitude, so we gave them each a bar of milk chocolate (the first that they had ever had from us), which they ate without question and greatly enjoyed.

We started again at noon. Our way went a mile and a half up the glacier. Behind the clouds the sun burned intensely. Its heat became overpowering and the Dotials were enervated by glacier lassitude. We ourselves had too much to think about to be enervated. The glacier being snow-covered, we had to keep wide awake to spot the hidden crevasses. It was flanked, too, by great mountain-walls, from which avalanches poured at five-minute intervals. In such thick mist we had to advance with caution, lest we stray too far leftwards into the danger area.

When we came under the central corridor of the upper ice-fall, Goria stopped and said that he could go no farther. We rested for five minutes, after which Zungia said that he was willing to go on, whereupon Goria followed. We rose slowly up the corridor. Towards the top we had to thread a way among the crevasses, which were much bigger than we had expected, and cross snow-bridges, surprisingly sound for such a time of day. At the top of the ice-fall Zungia and Goria stopped of one accord. Their limit had been reached. In such oppressive, windless heat they had done marvellously well. They had carried to 19,000 feet. We sent them back alone to Camp III, warning them to keep strictly to the steps made on the ascent. We could trust them, for they were men of resolution and good judgment, and not less intelligent than ourselves.

Scott, Weir, and I now carried the loads by a tortuous route in among long, transverse crevasses, until we came to a patch of flat snow, spread like a magic carpet at the very brink of the hugest crevasse, which gaped blue and hazily profound, as though it were a hole in the surrounding clouds. This would be the ideal camp site—if safe. We hung around undecidedly,
until the mist lifted for a few seconds. We were just out of range of the debris falling from a great ice-cliff on the flank of the east ridge.

After the tent was pitched the clouds lifted. Since our work for the next day was to carry Camp V up to the north col, Scott and I set out in the late afternoon to reconnoitre. Level snow-fields led easily into the glacier basin. The col came into view.

And great was our dismay. It was buttressed by cliffs. A few minutes’ very silent study showed them to be eight hundred feet high and close to the vertical. We should be incapable of carrying loads up them. On the left, under the north ridge of the summit peak, were bare and hopeless ice-slopes, crowned by enormous cornices. Towards the right, under point 20,850 feet, the wall was lower and less terrifying—perhaps six hundred feet. But all these cliffs were ringed below by a bergschrund, above which three hundred feet of polished ice swept up to the rocks, and that ice was raked by stone fall. We were beaten.

However, we were given no cause to regret our ascent thus far. The final peak of the Panch Chuli stood right before our eyes, a shining chisel blade of ice. So thin were its upper edges that over a stretch of a thousand feet we could see the sun shining through. The entire basin was of undulating snow, ringed by satellite peaks, whose long skirts were splayed out fan-like and fell silkily to the basin’s floor. At the outer rim perched our tiny tent, a pin-point on the brink of the first great fall, where the Sona glacier plunged to the Darmaganga, now ten thousand feet below among the clouds. Beyond its bottomless gorge the ranked snow-ranges of an unknown mountain land, all topped by towering cumuli, receded into the everlasting blue that roofs Tibet.

Truly that was the Abode of the Gods and the Five Brothers, worth much sacrifice of the flesh. It is worth reflecting that we should never have seen or entered this sanctuary of the Panch Chuli, never have had the experience at all, had the summit not drawn us just to beat us.

We resolved to stay up here for two more days. As events proved, the decision was not a wise one. There was frost at
THE SUMMIT OF PANCH CHULI (22,650 feet) 
from Camp IV on the Sona Glacier

Photo by T. Weir
night and the morning came cool and fine. We all three moved into the basin again and confirmed our opinion that the wall was unclimbable, and that stones fell from all parts of it. By the early forenoon the heat on the glacier was fast becoming unendurable, even though we kept on filling the crowns of our hats with snow. We retired to camp for the day—the tent our sunshade, upon which the fierce sun beat—beat and reflected back with all the heat and glare of a furnace. Rather too late, we realized the need of wearing snow-goggles indoors, so that despite resort to them in the early afternoon our eyes grew inflamed.

At half-past four the temperature became cool and bracing for an hour. So that again we had perfect views. The tops of the peaks flamed to the last rays. The chill, blue depths of the giant crevasse beside our tent, and the blaze of the Five Fires above, seemed extremes enough to compass the height and depth of all Himalayan beauty, although it be infinite. At half-past five frost drove us into our sleeping-bags.

We had lost our appetites by day and now lost our sleep by night. All night long avalanches fell loud, near, and often. Some were enormous, but these came off the north wall of the glacier, from which we were safe. Our tent was much nearer the south wall, but a hundred yards beyond the farthest debris marks. None the less, we could not help wondering whether some greater fall might not sweep the camp site. By daylight we judged it safe; no further fall could be great. But in the dead of night every new crash and rattle made us wonder.

These, our high camps, had often introduced us to a beauty wellnigh overwhelming in its splendour, but always in circumstances that demanded the sacrifice offered. To get the one we must give the other. I should be the last man to argue on this score against the attempt on great mountains. They give no man pleasure, but we must distinguish pleasure from enjoyment, which has a psychological basis. They make high demands on skill and resolution. They are exacting to a degree. We have to give our best to them. They may give us a retrospective joy, but if it gives pleasure at the time I have never experienced
it. Except in momentary flashes of unexampled glory the high-altitude game rarely seems worth the candle at the time. Its values are realized only later, after a descent to the levels on which man is intended to live.

We were thankful to get away next morning. Snow had fallen overnight and white hoary mist shrouded the glacier at dawn. It made a scene like dead of winter. We breakfasted on tea and three biscuits: none of us could eat more. Our lack of appetite and the curtailment of our time on the mountain left us with heavy loads to carry down. The tents were especially weighty with ice and water. However, descent in the Himalaya is always a pleasant change of direction. We went down in four hours to Camp III, halted one hour to brew up, then continued with Zungia and Goria to Camp II—a descent of seven thousand feet in seven hours. It was delightful to occupy a big tent again. That night we had our best sleep of the expedition.

Over breakfast on 10th August we discussed the possibility of a second attempt on the mountain by way of the south ridge. Weir and I had had enough for the moment and wanted rest, but Scott was keen to try at once. I remembered my pencil sketch, and said that while drawing it I had felt sure that there might be a point of easy access to the upper Meola glacier around 16,000 feet, that is, above the ice-fall and approximately level with our Camp III, but on the opposite flank of the east ridge. Access granted, I thought that the upper Meola should by Alpine standards not be difficult. Scott pressed for a reconnaissance that very morning. I agreed. For it was now or never, I felt. The fact was that our expedition was drawing to its proper, psychological end. We had travelled far, climbed much, and were satisfied. The lineaments of gratified desire could be traced on our faces.

At nine o'clock Scott and I set off upwards again while Weir returned to Base with the four Dotials. My only recollection of that ascent is a feast of strawberries on the cliffs, and then my arrival at 16,000 feet beside a great bay of the Meola, backed by the precipice of the east ridge. At this point (it is the only point) we could walk across a snow-field on to the glacier.
The snow-field was very occasionally raked by stone fall, but a rapid crossing could be made. It was safe enough. The glacier then rose four hundred feet to the top of the ice-fall in two great waves. By this route the south col could certainly be reached. And if the summit of Panch Chuli is ever climbed, I think that this will be the way.

The two waves were of bare ice. In June or October they would be under snow and more easily climbed. Meantime, I could not imagine our Dotials dealing with them or being able to establish the higher camps. The work would require Sherpas or Bhotias who had more experience than our Dotials of high-altitude climbing on ice. Unfortunately, cloud veiled the scene before Scott arrived. The decision had perforce to be left to myself. The reconnaissance had been successful, and my decision was that no attempt should be made. We returned to Base.

We fixed our withdrawal down the Darmaganga for 13th August. Our preparations for the long trek south were completed by the engagement of two local Bhotias, and made easier by the dark wall of rain cloud that filled up the back of the Sona Gad. The Five Fires were smoking and the pall hung low.

Never again, from Darma Bhot, did we see the Panch Chuli.
On our last day in the Sona Gad the villagers of Yansu fêted us. We had been invited to attend the celebration at the unconscionable hour of 8 a.m., and arrived in thick drizzle through streets covered in mud and dung. The headman welcomed us indoors. He led us up a flight of stairs to a small room, where carpets were spread. An inner circle was reserved for the men, while the back of the room and stairhead filled up with women and children. Having packed the room, our host’s second step was to organize a ‘whip round’ for our entertainment. Since donations were collected before the eyes of the guests the menfolk had no option but to grin and pay. There followed a very long and painful wait. They had no idea what to say to us, and we dared not try on them Weir’s special camp language, a fusion of Hindi, Nepalese, Pahari, and English, pronounced with a Scottish accent and understood perfectly by six selected Dotials, but by none other of God’s creatures. I had a command of pure Hindustani sufficient to buy food, engage and direct coolies, and describe mountain routes, but my three subjects had no place at a Yansu cocktail party.

Our party opened, very sensibly I thought, with grey, luke-warm milk, so that extreme and expensive pangs of thirst might be quenched before stronger drinks were offered. The milk was served in silver cups, together with a bili (a cigarette of rolled, dry tobacco leaf, not wrapped in paper). A second long wait came to a happier ending when a jug of chang circulated. This we drank out of much smaller silver cups. The party then showed signs of livening. A small hand-organ was produced: a thing like an accordion with keys and bellows. It turned out

Chapter Nineteen

Down through the Middle Hills
to be kharab. All keys except two were broken and the bellows burst. However, it could wheeze in two notes, and with that much can be done when the spirit is willing. But no one seemed able to sing.

By the mercy of Shiva the rain ceased. We all escaped to the village square. Chairs were placed for us and more rugs spread. A huge sheet of matting was laid down and a gramophone reverently set on top. Our spines straightened hopefully. Unhappily, the gramophone's spring was broken and there were no needles. We had been shown, however, that the Yansuwals would have entertained us right royally had the gods that govern springs and bellows allowed. It became apparent, shortly, that although Yansu had been favoured with young women in abundance, none would dance for us; they were too bashful. But something had to be done. We could see that the headman, even he, was beginning to perspire gently. So the drummers were called forward. They squatted on the mat and drummed on their drums until they could drum no more. To conclude the fête Weir took over all four drums and gave a solo.

The four drummers drummed us back to camp.

Talent had been thin at Yansu. But so obvious a lack made all the more touching the genuine effort to show friendliness.

Next morning, 13th August, we began the march back. Our goal was the little town of Almora, one hundred and thirty miles south, a journey of thirteen days in two markedly different halves. The first six days were of valley travel down the Darma and Kali Rivers to Jouljibi (2,000 feet), at which point we should break west to Askot (4,000 feet), and for the second half walk hill-ridges to Almora. Thence to Ranikhet by bus.

Cloud enveloped the mountains, yet we had much sun in the Darma valley. In even one day's march from Sona the speed with which the vegetation thickened seemed remarkable. Sona had been rather bare of trees. A few miles south we passed under the Baling glacier of Panch Chuli, which flowed in among woods. Thereafter, the glen cut deep through jungle, but often the track emerged on to open slopes, where it was built
out over the face of the gorge on iron stanchions, or rose and fell in stone staircases several hundred feet high, each step cut and laid in honour of Tibetan intercourse.

Daily we lost height, dropping eight thousand feet through the Middle Hills. Since we never strayed from the tracks we saw nothing of the bear and panther in which this country abounds. As early as our third day we entered hothouse heat at Khela (5,500 feet). Cactus plants appeared along the track, and grey and red monkeys browsed among the banana palms. This was true India, and we enjoyed the heat, for our bodies were spare and in good training, and so not embarrassed. It occurred to me that since leaving the plains we had not once set eyes on a fat man. The people of the hills are lean, hard, and active without exception.

At Khela, where the Darmaganga flows into the Kali, I was asked at night to give medical aid to a girl of eighteen years who had fallen over a cliff. I found her in the room of a nearby house. She lay, padded with blankets, on the clean, mud floor. A red fire was burning in one corner, without a chimney. An oil lamp supplied light. The girl’s skull had been perforated at both temples, and the scalp gashed. She could not move her legs and screamed when I tried to move them myself. Yet there was no outward sign of injury. It may be that she had fractured her spine or pelvis. I was able to clean and bandage the head injuries, but for the rest could do nothing. The girl would lie there until she either died or recovered. And such is the fate of people who get seriously injured in the upper valleys. They have no medical service.

Our route now went thirty miles by the Kali River along the frontier of Nepal. In the morning we marched ten miles to Darchula (3,000 feet), which had no less than thirty open-fronted shops, mangoes in plenty, and our first Dak bungalow. We reached that shelter not a day too soon; we had entered the heavy rain belt. In the night came a torrential downpour, which would have swamped the tents. Next morning it worsened. We delayed one day and thus had the unexpected happiness of receiving a letter from Dr. Longstaff. Its closing paragraphs
could not have been more appropriate to the end of our expedition:

There is no more lovely country in all Himachal. You have seen the best—and now will understand what I mean by ‘living in the present’; just forget all before-and-after and soak the moment into you so that it will never come out. Just travel is the thing. Number your red-letter days by camps not by summits (no time there).

Ask the Dotials to get you green maize-heads on your way back through Kumaon; also wild honey with plenty of grubs in it. Regard the butterflies. I hope you will see the millet red round the villages of the Middle Hills and hear the francolins (black partridge) calling. But BOIL all milk or water there. You should try ‘goor,’ solid loaves of molasses.

You had good climbs in the Rishi. You will have completed ascents east of Malari. Perhaps you have forced the Girthi gorges and had a glimpse of cis-himalayan Tibet with whistling of marmots. Enjoy—and for always, as you can through concentration.

Y’ts,

Tom Longstaff.

In these four months in India we had attempted nine mountains and climbed five. An outstanding feature of all Himalayan mountaineering is the great amount of time that must be spent on travel in proportion to time spent on the peaks. And that is no disadvantage. Longstaff had spoken truly. When I asked myself what we had learned from it all, apart from the technique of Himalayan travel and climbing, I saw that no brief answer could be given, nor yet a full and true one. We had all learned and observed different things in different ways according to our personal needs and interests. But there are some things that we had all learned together, and which we feel a need to state.

One is a deep respect for the hill people of Nepal and India and for the nations that produce them. They are excellent men. Our knowing them has been a rare honour. A second thing, which they have taught us, is a proper humility in regard to our expedition’s success. To that success their own peculiar virtues had contributed and their services been indispensable. There were occasions when so much depended on the energies and goodwill of our Dotial and Bhotia comrades that our own efforts had seemed of quite secondary importance. Likewise, in England and Scotland the aid and encouragement given so
generously to us at the outset had made us feel that our expedition, while a private enterprise, was also a product of the community. A third lesson had been brought out in Longstaff's letter. The art of Himalayan travel—and indeed of all adventure—is the art of being bold enough to enjoy life now.

We resumed our journey. Behind us the track from Khela had been cut by unfordable side-streams and blocked by a landslide. But the southward route remained open. We set off in sunshine. Those red fields of buckwheat, which had spread quilt-like around the high villages, now gave way to the pale green of rice and to maize standing twice as tall as a man. Roasted corn-cobs appeared on our daily diet; mangoes quenched our thirst on the march. Enormous, bright-hued butterflies danced round our heads and water-buffaloes wallowed in pools. At last we heard the francolins calling! In that one day Scott and Weir saw the pigmy owlet, small as a thrush, the greyheaded flycatcher, a most brilliant sunbird that fluttered like a moth while it sipped nectar from the blooms of a shrub, a sober-coloured falcon, and the black and yellow grosbeak. The birds, as we descended, were a great and growing multitude.

We spent that night (our last by the Kali River) in the Dak bungalow at Balwakot. *En route* to Jouljibi next morning, we stopped at the first of a long chain of jungle tea shops extending at intervals of several miles all the way to Almora. The usual 'shop' was a straw roof on poles. At the back water boiled on a wood fire. The tea was invariably good, served in brass tumblers with milk and sugar. At the first shop we fell in with a Swami on his way back from Mount Kailas in Tibet (where he had been on pilgrimage) to his Ashram or monastery at Rikhi-kesh. He was young and good-looking, with clear, lively eyes and the body of an athlete. His face had the infectious spiritual purity missing from the false Swami's face at Tapoban. Like all Swamis he spoke good English, for there are two hundred and twenty Indian languages, so that English is used as the common tongue in the Ashrams (and also in Parliament House, Delhi). He gave us much enlightening information about the Hindu religion.
We continued the march together and I questioned him about the Bhotias’ polytheism. He confirmed that the high gods were to be rightly understood as the powers and ideals proceeding from the Divine One. For ease of understanding men had given to them names and personalities. The essence of Hinduism, he said, is the unity of all things. The one God is in no way bound or limited. He is impersonal, yet to each soul is personal. He is within all things and yet is above and beyond them, not limited to His manifested universe. He is the deep foundation of every human soul, and the purpose of each man’s life on earth is to learn that and to realize union with Him now, in this life and for ever. He can have this immediate experience only by deliberate and conscious purification of his soul, accompanied by prayer in which he daily dedicates himself to God’s service, and by meditation on spiritual ideals—for as a man thinks, so will he act, and as he habitually acts and thinks so is his character transformed and fashioned. He is thus led into the divine life of service, love, and the growing awareness of Truth. The beatific vision comes in a contemplative act, which by grace arises out of meditation. At the end he finds the full joy and abounding Life of Union with God. Then he is a free and fulfilled man.

As explained thus by the Swami, while we walked by the shores of the Kali River, the practical method of the Hindu religion seemed to me no different from that of the Christian. I questioned him directly on this point. ‘Is man’s goal, and his way of achieving it, then, the same whether he is a Hindu or a Christian?’

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘We differ only in the inessentials, and in these differences have what is no doubt best for us.’

We parted company at Jouljibi, where he stopped overnight. His Ashram forbade begging and had furnished him with funds for the journey. Ten days later I was to meet him again at Ranikhet, when he had been robbed by a Kumaoni and left destitute of the means to travel to Rikhikesh. He neither complained nor asked money, but I lent him Rupees 25.

‘And what is your address?’ he asked.
'Loch Goil, Argyll, Scotland.' He looked a little worried, so I wrote it down.

'My friend,' he said, 'my Ashram will send you that money.' And they did.

Meanwhile, we turned off the Kali River and climbed to Askot. Thenceforth our way went for seven days along the ridges, westwards in rain and sun. All sense of 'expedition work' had long since been shed off. We travelled free and lightly. These were magic days, each one yielding an especial enchantment. There was the morning when we turned out to find the world wrapped in the silvery-grey of cobwebs: all the fields, every bank and shrub, veiled by spiders' lacery, drenched with dew and shining in the low sun. There was the night on the hill-top at Barechina, when the full moon hung over the forest; and the evening at Didihat when we were granted our last sight of the snows. The clouds rose off the spires of the Panch Chuli, as always they used to do at the sun-settings when we watched from our tents by the glaciers. But now as never then we saw the slender summit leap like a flame from the Five Fires, lightening the darkness of the cloud pall. While there are men alive to read that sign in the skies, the mountain will draw their hearts... and the sacrifice will be offered, and will be accepted, and the expedition will set out.

And men like Perimal, Goria, Zungia, Phakir, Matbir, and Narbir will give service.
Appendix

LISTS OF MOUNTAINEERING equipment, camping gear, food, medical supplies, and photographic equipment carried on the expedition; notes on deficiencies and redundancies; and an Abstract Account of expenditure:

MOUNTAINEERING EQUIPMENT

Common Pool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nylon rope, 200 feet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nylon line, 200 feet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemp cord, 100 feet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope slings, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karabiner, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitons, aluminium, 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps, 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1. The hemp cord, used for lashing tree trunks in the construction of the Rishi bridge, and for lashing crates, lasted two months and was insufficient by 50 feet. 2. The aluminium pitons were too soft.

Porters’ Equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ice-axes, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windproof trousers, 3 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anoraks, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boots, 3 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather laces, 6 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clasp-knives, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socks, 6 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloth helmets, lined, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woollen gloves, 3 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windproof gloves, 3 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow-goggles, 6 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down sleeping-bags, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The ammunition boots, bought at 10s. per pair, lasted well. At the end of the expedition Matbir sold his pair at Ranikhet for 15s.

Personal Equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boots, 1 pair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice-axes, 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trousers, 1 pair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windproof trousers, 1 pair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenfell jacket, 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anorak, 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anklets or puttees, 1 pair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balaclava helmet, 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woollen gloves (mitts), 2 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windproof gloves, 1 pair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socks, 4 or 5 pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarf, 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweaters, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX

Crampons, 1 pair
Snow-goggles, 2 pairs
Rucksacks, 2 (1 large, 1 light)
Water-bottle
Sandshoes or baseball boots, 2 pairs
Down sleeping-bags, 2
Air mattress, 1
Shorts, 2 pairs
Sun-hat
Waterproof cape
Binoculars
Compass
Whistle
Glacier cream
Dubbin
Pocket-knife
Electric torch and 6 batteries
Housewife
Woollen vest
Underpants
One plate, mug, knife, fork, and spoon

Notes: 1. One pair of sandshoes or baseball boots would have been sufficient. 2. The crampons were used to good purpose once only—on Uja Tirche—when they saved us perhaps one hour out of eighteen spent on the upper ridge. We carried them 17,000 miles to save that hour. But the hour was vital. 3. A water-bottle was unnecessary. 4. Three of us wore boots soled with moulded Vibram or Itshide rubber. One man wore nails. Rubber and nails wore equally well, and behaved with an equal efficiency on rock, snow, and ice. The rubber was superior in dealing with long, stone-covered glaciers and with mountain tracks, on which they act as shock-absorbers. The nails were superior in descending high-angle grass-slopes in wet weather—and we had a great deal of such work. Thus the choice between nails and rubber remains open: it is a matter for personal preference.

Camp Equipment

Base-camp tent (a Bungalow by Thos. Black & Son of Greenock; 18 lb. with fly-sheet; no groundsheet)
High-altitude tents, 3 (1 Yak tent by Robert Burns of Manchester, 12 lb.; 1 by Black of Greenock, 12 lb.; 1 imitation Yak from Himalayan Club store, 18 lb.)
Spare groundsheet, 12 feet by 12 feet
Hatchets, 3
Paraffin oil, 4 gallons
Quart aluminium bottles, 2
Funnel filler, 1
Thermos flasks, 4
Empty aluminium tins with screw-on lids, 10
Primus stove No. 221, with high-altitude nipple
Primus stove No. 96
Meta fuel, 150 bars
Tommy cooker with 8 refills
Whistling kettle
Half-gallon canteen of pots
Matches, 24 boxes
Gilwell canteens, 2
Candles, 50
APPENDIX

Spring-balances, 2
Kit-bags, 15
Auger, 1
Dental forceps, 2
Tin-openers, 2

Spare nails
Pot-lifters, 2
Large empty tins with press-on lids
(20 lb., 15 lb., and 7 lb.), 3
Canvas water-bucket, 1

Notes: 1. The paraffin oil was carried in a 4\(\frac{1}{2}\)-gallon ‘jerry-can,’ which took hard knocks and changes of pressure without leaking. The four gallons were ample for four months because the primus stoves were never used below 18,000 feet until after we had passed through the Girthi Gorge in mid July. At Base Camp heights (12,000 to 13,000 feet) juniper firewood was always available, and the Dotials always carried wood to our Camps II between 15,000 and 16,000 feet, so that only at Camps III and upwards were primus stoves employed. After mid July we occasionally used them at Base Camp level on wet mornings or afternoons. 2. A pressure cooker would have saved time and firewood during our three months above 10,000 feet. But one is never short of time in camp. More important, it would have ensured the proper cooking of rice and lentils. 3. Our thermos flasks were not successful. They failed to keep tea piping hot at high altitudes. They were carried to aid quick morning departures from high camps, but we soon decided to rely on the primus stoves, which were most efficient. If snow were melted down in the evening the water froze overnight only on the surface, and quick boiling next morning could be ensured. Thermos flasks were of greater use in the low valleys, where they kept our butter solid. 4. The spare tins with screw lids were invaluable for holding butter, jam, salt, sugar, tea, etc. 5. Candles were 25 too few. 6. The auger, for boot repairs, had never to be used. 7. Ordinary pincers would be much better than dental forceps for drawing nails. 8. An additional 24 boxes of Indian matches had to be bought at Joshimath. They were of very bad quality. British matches are worth taking.

It will be seen that the mountaineering equipment, as distinct from the camp equipment, was the same as that normally used on the Scottish mountains in winter, with the addition of glacier
cream, snow-goggles, and crampons. It proved to be perfectly adequate for our purposes. The tents were excellent and stood up to very hard usage. One high-altitude tent had not been waterproofed and leaked badly in heavy rain or prolonged light rain. It is essential that all tents be waterproofed, despite the reluctance of the manufacturers.

**FOOD CARRIED FROM BRITAIN**

- Dried egg, 7 lb.
- Dried milk (Klim), 7 lb.
- Pemmican, 30 lb.
- Cheese (St. Ivel), 30 lb.
- Chocolate, 30 lb.
- Barley-sugar, 20 lb.
- Sweets, 20 lb.
- Rolled oats, 30 lb.
- Sugar, 120 lb.
- Butter, 26 lb.
- Suet, 4 lb.
- Salmon, 3 lb.
- Sardines, 6 lb.
- Ovaltine, 6 lb.
- Honey, 15 lb.
- Jam, 6 lb.
- Biscuits, 50 lb.; MacVita, 24 lb.; MacVita chocolate coated, 10 lb.; Digestive, 16 lb.
- Maggi Instant Soup, 250 packets
- Maggi Bouillon Gras, 50 packets
- Brandy, 1 bottle

**Notes:**

1. Pemmican was 12 lb. too much. 2. The proportion of jam to honey should have been reversed. The honey was high-quality heather honey, yet we tired of it very quickly. A fresh fruit jam is what the palate craves. 3. The sugar estimate was precisely correct. 4. The cheese was processed and tinned, yet proved to be of good flavour. We did not tire of it. 5. At Milam we obtained supplies of marmite and cocoa from Moules. These were welcome additions. Marmite goes well on chupatties, and cocoa mixed with Ovaltine gives a better drink than either by itself. 6. We carried 14 lb. of tea from Ranikhet and still had a pound left at the end. 7. The brandy was decanted for safety into an aluminium water-bottle, which was accidentally placed upside-down in a rucksack and the brandy lost by leakage through the screw top. The disaster occurred during our first week out. The pocket of the rucksack was entirely burned away; in consequence we thought that our escape had been narrow and providential. Later we discovered that the brandy had shared the pocket with some permanganate of potash.
SAMPLE OF FOOD CARRIED TO HIGH-ALTITUDE CAMPS

Three-day estimate for four men on Uja Tirche

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Butter, 1/4 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pemmican, 1/2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar, 2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea, 1/4 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey, 1/2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate, 2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup, 5 packets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscuits, 2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweets, 1/2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oatmeal, 1/4 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried egg, 1/4 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried milk, 1/4 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardines, 2 tins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, 1/2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ata, 6 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsampa, 1 lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt, 1/2 lb. (shared with 3 coolies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MEDICAL SUPPLIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paludrine tablets, 500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethyl chloride spray, 50 mgm., 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedalan ear-drops, 1/4 oz.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codeine compound tablets, 250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gelusil tablets, 250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soneryl tablets, 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castor-oil capsules, 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bismuth salicylate, 5-grain tablets, 250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc sulphate and adrenalin eye-drops, 1/4 oz.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anusol suppositories, half-dozen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haemorrhoids ointment, 1-oz. tube</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glycerine and thymol pastilles, 4 oz.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glycerine and blackcurrant pastilles, 4 oz.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alophen pills, 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thermotabs, 250. (These should be discarded.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium permanganate, 1/4 oz.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlorodyne, 1/4 oz. (Quantity should be doubled.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium chlorate pellets, 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insect repellent, 2 oz., 4 bottles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.D.T. with pyrethrum, 4 drums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaseline, 1-oz. tin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandl's paint, 1 oz.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphia sulphate solution, 4 ampoules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulphaguanidine tablets, 500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulphadiazine tablets, 250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulphacetamide ointment, 30 per cent, 1 oz.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penicillin crystalline, 1,000,000 units, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penicillin crystalline, 500,000 units, 6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distilled water, 12 vials</td>
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</table>
Benzine iodine, 4 oz. (Quantity should be doubled.)
Whitfield’s ointment, 2 oz.
Castillani’s paint, 1 oz.
Acriflavine soluble tablets, 100
Tannic acid jelly, 1 oz.
Gauze, 12 yards
Cotton wool, 12 oz.
Boric lint, 3 oz.
Oiled silk, ½ yard
Crêpe bandages, 3-inch, 3
Crêpe bandages, 2½-inch, 3
Elastic adhesive bandages, 3-inch, 4
Adhesive dressing strips, 1½ inch by 1 yard, 3. (Two more were required.)
Adhesive tape; 1 inch by 1 yard, 2. (One more was required.)
Bandages, 2½-inch, 36
Halibut oil capsules, 500
Capsules Vitaminorum, 200
Vitamin B capsules, 200
Ferrous sulphate tablets, 3-grain, 200
Surgical scissors, 1
Splinter forceps, 1
Artery forceps, 1
Dental forceps, 2
Scalpel, 1
Suture needles with gut in sterile tubes, 3
Clinical thermometers, 2
Hypodermic syringe, 2 c.c., 1
Hypodermic needles, 3

Notes: MacKinnon says that he would add four items to the list on a future occasion. These are:

Plaster of Paris bandages, 4-inch, 2
Triangular bandages, 3
Dover’s tablets, 50
Tabloid ophthalmic cocaine hydrochloride, 20-grain, 1 tube

The most used medicine was Codeine tablets for headaches; to ease the drain on them supplies of aspirin had to be obtained from Joshimath. Bismuth salicylate and Gelusil were in demand for indigestion. Members of an expedition, who are subject to headaches or indigestion, would be well advised to carry additional supplies of their own. In malarial areas we took Paludrine prophylactically and thus caught no infection. On one or two occasions sulphadiazine was effective in reducing
fevers. But the most important sulpha drug on an expedition is sulphaguanidine. For enteritis and dysentery it is quite invaluable.

It was the majority opinion that halibut oil and vitamin pills were unnecessary in Kumaon, where the native foods were good and plentiful.

We regretted the absence from our medicine chest of Basilicon ointment—a resin ointment for drawing septic sores. It acts rapidly and saves the fuss of poultice-making.

Our list as amended has been proved satisfactory as a minimum supply. It should not be forgotten, however, that where possible a modest increase should be made in supplies for the sake of giving aid to the hill people.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

Cameras and Film

One Super Ikonta, with film for 320 exposures, Kodak Panatomic X
One Leica Model I. Film for over 1,000 exposures, Pan F and FP3 (Ilford)
" " II. Kodachrome colour film for 600 exposures.
" " III.

Leica lenses: 9 cm. narrow-angle lens
3.5 cm. wide-angle lens
supplementary lenses 1, 2, 3 for close work

Wray Universal view-finder
Two Weston Master photo-electric exposure meters
Filters for monochrome: yellow X2, yellow-green X2, orange X4
Filters for colour: Wratten No. o (clear ultra-violet)
Spectron CTC No. o (pale yellow)

Two tripods

Accessories

Silica Gel, 12 oz. (Agent for absorbing moisture.)
Tins and adhesive tape for storing film after exposure
Waterproof bags

Notes (by Tom Weir):

Cameras and films proved adequate and storage precautions for the films were satisfactory. Silica Gel was not used until
after exposure of film in monsoon conditions. Films after exposure were then packed in tins containing a little of the Silica Gel, which had firstly been reactivated by heating it over a primus stove. The lids were sealed with adhesive tape.

Development of films should be done by the expedition's photographers and not entrusted to any commercial firm. Careful examination of the first two or three films will determine the correct gamma of development and avoid excessive contrast or excessive grain.

Kodak Laboratories, Wealdstone, developed the Kodachrome colour films, results from Bombay laboratories having proved unsatisfactory. The former made an excellent job and produced a high proportion of good transparencies. The Spectron CTC No. 0 (pale yellow) filter proved unsuitable for colour, effects being too autumnal for cold landscapes.

No processing was done in the field. Films were flown to Bombay and Britain.

The electric exposure meters proved satisfactory but did not register in bright sunlight on the glaciers. The needle swung past the graduated window until stopped by the bakelite case. Otherwise this was an excellent meter.

The Leicas with their additional lenses for long-focus and, especially, wide-angle work, plus the supplementary lenses for close-ups of flowers, etc., proved a good all-round equipment. For general photography the Ikonta was well worth its weight, both for an added sharpness in landscapes and ease of printing at the end of the expedition.
### Expedition Accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s.</th>
<th>d.</th>
<th>Cost per head</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Feb.</td>
<td>Food and equipment by Murray to Film and equipment by Weir</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Apr.</td>
<td>Film and equipment by Scott Medical supplies by MacKinnon Snow-goggles Primus stoves</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>Air mail stamps</td>
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<td>1</td>
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**Bombay:**

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<tr>
<td>5 May</td>
<td>Maps</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Baksheesh</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Padlocks</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Taj Mahal Hotel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Flour bags</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Customs fees</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Baggage fees</td>
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<td>Train tickets</td>
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**Bombay to Ranikhet:**

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<tr>
<td>7 May</td>
<td>Train meals to Ice and baksheesh</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bus to Ranikhet</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telegram</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Essex House</td>
<td>178</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baksheesh</td>
<td>20</td>
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\[ \text{\textdollar}260 \div 5 \approx \text{\textdollar}65 \text{ 1 6} \]

**Ranikhet back to Ranikhet:**

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<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>Bus to Garur to Coolies' wages</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 Aug.</td>
<td>Food on march Rest-house fees Baksheesh Firewood Postages</td>
<td>700</td>
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<td></td>
<td>106</td>
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\[ Rs. 5967 \]
APPENDIX

Cost per head

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Rs.</th>
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<td>Carried forward</td>
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<td>65 1 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road toll</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus: Almora to Ranikhet</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baksheesh to 6 Dotials</td>
<td>165</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor’s fee</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rs. 6262</strong></td>
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At MacKinnon’s return the above amount was shared thus:

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<td>Milam</td>
<td>4209</td>
<td>£30 4 0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remainder</td>
<td>2053</td>
<td>£170 16 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1736</td>
<td>£130 4 0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rs. 6262</strong></td>
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Ranikhet to Bombay:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rs.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 Aug. Telegrams, letters, baksheesh, and sundries</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sept. Baggage to Bombay</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxis</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing film</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire of tent</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Hotel</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping agents</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortage in cash</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rs. 366 ÷ 3=</strong></td>
<td>£9 3 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement of groundsheet in Yak tent, £5 3s. ÷ 4=</td>
<td>£1 8 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£205 16 9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Personal Expenditure:

Example from W. H. Murray’s accounts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and gear</td>
<td>19 10 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. &amp; O. Co. fare to Bombay</td>
<td>58 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return fare to Tilbury</td>
<td>48 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail fares and other travel expenses in Britain and at sea</td>
<td>16 3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian expenses at Essex House in September, travel to Bombay, etc.</td>
<td>21 14 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£163 8 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s total expenditure</td>
<td>£369 5 1</td>
</tr>
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THE MOUNTAINS OF KUMAON

As though seen from an altitude of 60,000 feet above Baijnath, looking north-east