NANDU JAYAL
AND
INDIAN MOUNTAINEERING
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A Tribute to
Major Narendra Dhar Jayal
Major Narendra Dhar Jayal—“Nandu” to all his many friends—died of pulmonary oedema on Cho-Oyu in 1958. Very early in life as a boy at the Doon School he made his mark as a mountaineer and when he died seventeen years later he was unquestionably the most experienced and skilful climber among Indian amateurs. From 1941 onwards, whenever the opportunity offered, he led or was a member of Himalayan expeditions and his name will long be associated with some of the finest peaks in India—Nanda Devi, Kamet, Abi Gamin, Saser Kangri and Bandar-Punch.

His brief life of thirty two years was crowded with endeavour and success in the closely related fields of soldiering and mountaineering. As a soldier he did well and showed every promise of going far. He was commissioned in the Corps of Engineers in 1946 and joined the Bengal Engineer Group at Roorkee, within sight of the Garhwal Himalayas. In 1948 he became chief instructor of the Winter Warfare School in Gulmarg. In 1952 he qualified as a paratrooper and was promoted Major to command the Engineer Para Field Park Company.

As a climber he impressed other experts in the field of mountaineering. He visited the European Alps at the invitation of the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research and was awarded the Swiss Guides Diploma and Badge, a unique distinction for one who was not a Swiss. And the Australian Alpine Club honoured him by awarding their Ski Teachers’ Certificate.

In 1952 he was the obvious choice for first principal of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, founded to mark Tenzing Norgay’s success on Everest. In this appointment, which he held till just before his death, he played an outstanding part in founding and developing the Institute. The many young Indian climbers who had their first lessons at his hands owe their skill and enthusiasm to his dedicated life.

In one more field too he excelled. Soon after his death R. L. Holdsworth called attention to his marked gift for the English language and its literature “What he has written from time to time for Indian journals of his mountaineering trips is in the highest traditions of Alpine literature and worthy of ranking with Leslie Stephen and Geoffry Young and it is hoped some attempt will be made to collect and publish his articles on the mountains.” And so a few of his friends have brought together a selection of the articles he wrote about mountaineering, and have added others by those who climbed with him, as a tribute to “Nandu”, the gay and gallant and very loveable mountaineer and as a record of early Indian mountaineering which he did much to encourage and develop.
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CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS AT THE DOON SCHOOL

By R. L. Holdsworth

This chapter needs an apology for the angle from which it has been written. Modern amateur Indian mountaineering is so largely bound up with the tragically short life of 'Nandu' Jayal that, it seems best to give an account of his early days at the school, where the spark of his consuming passion was first lighted and grew into a substantial flame. If it becomes partly biographical and rather over-impregnated with the Doon School, our explanation must be that it was there that 'Nandu' Jayal, his cousin Nalni, Gurdial Singh, who joined the School as an assistant master in 1945, and his younger brother, Jagjit, and many others first learnt to love and grapple with the 'high hills.'

Boys at the Doon School cannot help being brought into touch with the Himalayas. From every part of the Doon the long line of the outer Himalayas, from the Simla Hills to Lansdowne, is visible, and from some points in the valley an occasional glimpse can be had of the glistening summits of Bander-Punch and Gungotri as also of the Kedarnath and Badrinath peaks, while on a favourable day the whole range of giants from Jamnotri to Nanda Devi can be seen from Mussoorie or Chakrata. It would be strange if some boys did not answer to their challenge and feel their inspiration.

A. E. Foot, the first Headmaster of the Doon School, was a member of the Alpine Club before his appointment. With him came out to start the School, another keen mountaineer in J. A. K. Martyn, while J. T. M. Gibson and I joined the staff later. In such a soil, positioned at the very foot of the Himalayas, and with gardeners who were ardent to cultivate it, some sort of seed was likely to germinate.

I found myself appointed house-master of the house of which 'Nandu' Jayal was a junior member. On the day of my arrival, at lunch, I found myself being interrogated very keenly and very intelligently about the Kamet expedition of 1931 of which I had been a member. I learnt later that my interrogator was one Narendra Dhar Jayal, son of Mr. Chakra Dhar Jayal, a late Chief Minister of Tehri-Garhwal State, and that he was born in Pauri in the hills above Deva Prayag, the junction of the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi, the main streams of the Ganga.
The Headmaster had started an institution known as the 'Mid-term Break', about the middle of each of the two terms, generally towards the end of October and March—the times in the year when the Doon is perhaps at its most beautiful. This was a three-or-four days holiday in which work stopped, but the boys were not allowed to go to their homes however near they might be. Instead, they had to see India. They might, in the custody of masters, visit the great cities of Delhi and Agra, or even far-off Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. Still more, they were encouraged to explore their immediate surroundings, the forests of the Doon and the two great rivers that confine it, and the hills that rise immediately above it.

In March 1940, being a stranger to these hills, I found myself detailed to take a party of ten boys from my own house on a semi-circular tour from Deva Prayag to Narendranagar by way of the hills, which, Foot had decided, could be achieved within the prescribed time. 'Nandu was one of the party. A Pahari himself, he would at any rate be useful in making us intelligible to the cultivators. We walked as hard as we could; we slept in strange places—on the banks of the Ganga, in a _chatti_ (roadside shelter for pilgrims), on a terraced field, and, only the last night, in a Forest Rest House. We missed our 'bus' connection and arrived back half a day late. The Headmaster, however, was merciful and only observed he had thought we might find it rather hard going.

This was the first of several explorations of the outer Himalayas with 'Nandu' who soon became virtually my adjutant, and the beginning of a partnership in the hills. Usually, we had to employ porters, as rucksacks were scarce and the boys quite unused to carrying anything on their backs. The expeditions often went wrong in some particular, mostly because the porters were either unobtainable or went astray or we were sent astray. We eventually achieved a porterless expedition, which, when it was nearly completed, elicited from 'Nandu' a historic comment: "There's something queer about this trip. Nothing has gone wrong." Since these early days, Doon School boys have been making not only porterless, or virtually porterless, expeditions but also masterless expeditions and these to heights of well over 12,000 feet.

I think it was in 1941 that 'Nandu' the fire having now been well-kindled, obtained permission from home to do a considerable trek in Kashmir with one of his best friends, Hasan Ahmad. He was still barely 14 years old. After a training walk to the top of Alpathar (Aphawat), not by the usual route, with 'Jak' Martyn and me, they set off for Pahalgam
with a pony and one man, who also acted as cook and guide, and a Meade tent. They visited the Kolahoi glacier, crossed a high pass over to Sonamarg. Later, they crossed over by the Vishensar and Gangabal lakes and returned to the Wangal nallah, where they rejoined Martyn and myself having a week's fishing. It was nothing sensational, but it was not a bad start for boys of 14 and 16, and they enjoyed every minute of it.

**INTRODUCTION TO BIG GLACIERS**

In 1942 came 'Nandu's' introduction to big glaciers and permanent snow, and it was not a very prepossessing or successful expedition. Martyn and I planned to take three boys, including 'Nandu', to a place above the Arwa valley, where Frank Smythe had pitched a glacier camp—after the ascent of Kamet (25,447 feet)—at about 19,000 feet. From this camp, five or six peaks between 20,000 and 22,000 feet had been climbed. Two or three, we fancied, were simple enough to take virtual beginners up.

We started from Mussoorie about the beginning of July. We had engaged two Sherpas, and taken one of the school cooks, who had done some trekking. but not, it appeared, quite enough, because his morale broke down with the first genuine monsoon shower which caught us on the lovely Kink Hola pass in Tehri-Garhwal at 12,000 feet. We had to send him back and thereafter the Sherpas cooked for us very adequately. From the Kink Hola Pass, we descended to Trajugi Narayan and Ukhimath, crossed another pass of about 10,000 feet, reached Chamoli in the Alaknanda valley, and thence, by the pilgrim route, to Joshimath and Badrinath. Here we sent our Mussoorie porters back and engaged a contingent of men of Mana village, one or two of whom were veterans of the 1931 expedition.

We established a base camp at about 15,000 feet just short of the snout of our projected glacier. The monsoon had now established itself in some strength and we had—not altogether unwillingly—to indulge in a rest-day during which heavy wet snow fell. It was decided next day not to move camp since the new snow would be very trying for the porters, but to go for a training walk as far as the proposed camp.

The glacier was in a terrible condition for walking, with a foot or more of new snow and with a hot sun producing ideal conditions for 'glacier lassitude.' It was not a happy introduction for the three boys. We plodded on to about the limit of their endurance, about 1,000 feet short of our goal. Since the way ahead was a straightforward snowplug, with no conceivable difficulties we returned.
Next day we moved our camp up and sent the Mana porters back to base. The glacier had not improved; it was, if anything, worse than the day before. We rested at the group of boulders which we had reached the previous day. This was a mistake. A rest in that sweltering humidity was no rest at all. It merely hastened the development of 'altitude' headaches.

CAMP SITE OF SMYTHE'S EXPEDITION

Anxious to identify the camp-site, I started off first and forced my unwilling feet to plod up the remaining distance. There were no crevasses and no danger. I hit off the camping site, on rocks and scree on the left bank of the glacier, without any difficulty. In all those 11 years, it seemed, the glacier had not advanced or receded an inch. There was my own tent-platform and there were those of Smythe, Eric Shipton and the rest. There were empty tins in plenty, but, alas, no full ones.

The next arrival was Ravi Matthai, our youngest and smallest, apparently as fresh as a daisy. Then came Martyn, tired out but not unduly distressed. A few porters and the Sherpas strolled in and began to pitch tents. After a long interval of time came Balram Singh, very distressed, not only by a splitting headache but by a bad throat. Last of all came 'Nandu', hitherto the most active of the party, bearing a look of black despair on his face, just as I was putting on my boots again to go and see what had happened. There was nothing really wrong with him and he quickly recovered. Balram's throat was a different matter. Of course, high-altitude throats are as common as high-altitude headaches, but this one did not yield to rest and treatment. Another rest-day was clearly indicated. We were not in any condition to go peak-bagging even the easiest of peaks.

We made a "bridge-four" with 'Nandu' and Balram, while Ravi tooted happily on his flute. But Balram's condition deteriorated. In the course of the day, it became obvious that he wasn't getting better. We had to think again. We must get him down to the base camp as soon as possible, and send for medical help from Badrinath. It was decided that Martyn and one Sherpa should take him down next day, and that 'Nandu', Ravi and I should attempt the easiest of the peaks. Ravi would return that evening with the other Sherpa. 'Nandu' and I remaining until the porters from below came up to evacuate the camp.

Balram, now unable to walk, was successfully evacuated, thanks to the prodigious efforts of the Sherpa who attended him. We made a late start for our mountain, and the snow was in its usual deplorable condition. The ascent of the 'Rock Peak', as we called it, consisted of
a long plug up to the head of the glacier, followed by an exhilarating scramble over easy rock to the summit. What easier or more delightful introduction could there be to high mountain-climbing? I felt that once we reached the ridge, lassitude would disappear and my two pupils would follow me like chamois. But we never reached the ridge. The snow seemed bottomless. The sun played down pitilessly. I had to take a decision, and called it off, thus extinguishing, I thought, all passion for mountaineering in the boys.

Ravi, still the fittest of the three, trotted off to the base camp. ‘Nandu’, condemned to stay another night, was depressed and suffering from his usual headache. The next day the camp was successfully evacuated, and what a relief it was to get off the searing glacier to the comparative coolness of the moraine! ‘Nandu’ recovered his form immediately. When we reached the glacier torrent, we decided to toss a coin to decide who should carry the other one over. I won. When we had got half way across, ‘Nandu’ deliberately deposited his house-master in the icy stream. He was that kind of chap. I got my own back later by the old device of placing a large rock in his rucksack and watching him carry it for some miles.

PROMPT MEDICAL AID

At the next camping place, Balram was more or less delirious, but the temple doctor from Badrinath had arrived with a shopkeeper, with whom we had made friends. He produced a stethoscope, listened to Balram’s lungs and remarked: “As I suppose you expected, there is a touch of pneumonia in one lung. I have brought this.” He put his hand in his pocket and produced M. & B. 693, then a scarcely known drug. We had not expected such a rapid and efficient response. The effect was almost immediate; Balram recovered almost at once. In a day or two he was able to walk, and we returned safely to Badrinath. All’s well that ends well, but as a climbing expedition it had been a ‘flop.’ It must have been a near thing for Balram, and if the temple authorities ever read this, I should like to put on record our appreciation of their prompt response to our call for help.

Balram and Martyn, with one Sherpa, proceeded by easy stages down the pilgrim route. ‘Nandu’, Ravi and I made a pleasant detour over the eastern shoulder of that lovely and still unclimbed mountain Nilkantha (21,640 feet).* We were again at Joshimath. Here a division of

* Nilkantha was climbed for the first time by an Indian expedition led by Captain Narinder Kumar, on June 13, 1961, those reaching the summit being O. P. Sharma and two Sherpas, Phurba Lobsang and Lhakpa Gyalbu Lama.
the stores was made, and, while Martyn, Ravi and Balram departed by the pilgrim route to Ranikhet, ‘Nandu’ and I, with some of the Mana porters, set off for the Kuari pass and the Gona lake, where we had permission to fish.

The monsoon had by now thoroughly set in and we could not avoid it. Almost every night, it seemed, we were pitching wet tents in a relentless drizzle. The Kuari pass, usually a place of ineffable beauty and grandeur, was a sea of shifting mist. We had been warned that the forests on the south side of the pass were infested with leeches, and I told ‘Nandu’ to put on puttees over his boots. He forgot my warning and soon our slimy friends were upon us in thousands. Eventually he was roused to taking off his boots and stockings and removing the leeches adhering to him. We were lucky to be out of the infested area when we pitched another rainsodden camp.

The next day we made our way to the neighbourhood of the Gona lake, but could not cross over because the stream at its entrance was flooded. We crossed it the day after with great difficulty, but found the lake coffee-coloured with mud and our eagerly-awaited trout fishing impossible. Eventually, two very dishevelled travellers fetched up at Ranikhet, with their clothing in rags and covered with mud. The Superintendent of Police, who promptly arrested me as an escaped Italian prisoner and ‘Nandu’ as my accomplice, had every excuse for doing so. Having escaped from the clutches of the law, we travelled without incident to Dehra Dun, where our ways parted.

SUMMING-UP

As an introduction to mountaineering, it was a failure. Never once did we hear the musical tinkle of ice as steps are cut up an ice-slope; never were hands and feet at work together over firm rock; never were we rewarded by the glorious moments on a hard-won summit. We had experienced the pleasures of the outward trek but we had also savoured to the full the miseries of mountain travel in a persistent monsoon.

‘Nandu’ was not a conventional athlete. At cricket, he was almost comically hopeless; he was a fair footballer, hockey player, and cross-country runner; a very good boxer and gymnast. He had an overwhelming amount of animal spirits, and I felt that if he didn’t find an outlet for them in mountaineering, his future was uncertain. All his pent-up energy must find some outlet. We had provided him with experience of the difficulty of travel in the Himalayas during the monsoon, but with no mountaineering. I thought, the trip would cure him of any
desire to climb, but I was wrong. Apparently, it only increased it. He disappeared, however, from the mountaineering scene till 1946, to complete his career at the Doon School and to enter the Indian Army.
CHAPTER II

CHALLENGE OF BANDAR-PUNCH

By R. L. Holdsworth

For some time after the successful reconnaissance by J. T. M. Gibson and 'JAK' Martyn of the southern ridge of Bandar-Punch in 1937 and the single-handed attempt of A. R. Leyden to climb it in the early forties, the beautiful swelling dome of Bandar-Punch (20,720 feet) so prominently visible from Mussoorie and Chakrata, and even from certain parts of the Doon, remained inviolate—a tantalising challenge.

Jack Gibson was, however, determined to climb it, and, in 1946, when he was back at the Doon School, he made his plans. The party consisted of three Sherpas led by Tenzing Norgay, himself, Major Munro, a gunner, 'Nandu' Jayal, now a subaltern in the Bengal Engineers at Roorkee, Nanda Chengappa, a boy in his own house in the Doon School, and myself.

We left Dehra Dun at the end of June, when the monsoon had already broken, though only tentatively. The approach started from Chakrata, where we recruited our porters, a cheerful and willing lot, some of whom did good service above the snow-line. Today, to reach our base camp at the head of the Hanuman Ganga valley, it would be quicker to use the motorable road up the Bhagirathi valley as far as Uttar Kashi, and then turn left and reach the Hanuman Ganga valley *via* the Dodital lake.

In 1946, we dropped down from Chakrata to the Yamuna at the historic Lakhamandal and then followed the river by easy stages as far as Kharsali, only a few miles from Jhunnotri itself. Here we reorganised our transport and rested for a day, and I lost my umbrella—a serious thing at this time of the year. During these preliminary marches, the monsoon had eased off and we had glorious views of our peak, though we should have been glad to exchange this treat for a few cooling showers in the Yamuna valley. We had hoped to reach the Hanuman Ganga base camp in one day from Kharsali, but the weather turned bad on us. The track followed a well-known path by which, the virtuous pilgrim used to march from Jhunnotri to Gangotri, from Gangotri to Kedarnath and from Kedarnath to Badrinath, thus visiting the four
important shrines in one season. I am afraid, pilgrims today are not made of such stern stuff. The track traverses the lower shoulders of the mountain, rising from the cultivated fields through fir and spruce forest, and then through bush rhododendrons, where we saw our first pheasants, to the open grass-coursed shoulders.

**SHERPAS' RESOURCESFULNESS**

By this time, at a height of about 11,000 feet, a cold and pitiless rain was rapidly depressing our spirits. I have seldom felt more miserable. The tents had been put up in a spot where there was no water supply, and we had visions of a supperless night. But here, Tenzing and the Sherpas showed their remarkable resourcefulness. A kitchen shelter was made, a fire was miraculously lighted out of soaking fuel, and the ample rain water was canalised into a certain supply. We spent a comfortable night, but had to pass another day in drying out. The day after, a short traversing march took us to our base camp, an Arcadian spot on lush meadows with the uncounted blessing of a gujar encampment of well-nourished buffaloes that kept us in milk, butter and lassi as long as we were there.

The plan was that, Chengappa, who had done no climbing before, should be left in charge of the base, where he would try his luck with the local monal pheasant and supervise the provisioning of our higher camp. The local coolies were comfortably sheltered at the base by a huge boulder and a few tarpaulins. We planned to establish Camp I at over 15,000 feet, which would be provisioned and fuelled from below. We would then set up Camp II on the ridge at approximately 18,000 feet, from which the attempt on the summit would be made. The meadow continued till about 14,000 feet, when it merged into the glaciers descending from the western face of Bandar-Punch. From here a steep climb in snow and unstable rocks took us to an ample platform where Camp I could be placed. Our local porters returned.

The next day we decided to carry food and crampons to the ridge, as far as possible, and to return. We had only seven people to do all our carrying, and we achieved this object in very doubtful weather. It was straightforward work, mostly in snow, but a few steps had to be cut, and there was a certain amount of easy rock. We reached the ridge, dumped the kit and descended to Camp I.

With such limited porterage, it appeared best to take up the necessary tents and sleeping bags but to leave behind our mattresses, not then the modern 'lilo' but a much heavier contraption. This was, I believe, a bad mistake. It was not really cold at the point on the ridge, a few hundred
yards nearer the summit than we had reached the day before, which we selected for our last camp. The sky was overcast and the night temperature could scarcely have dropped much below freezing point. But, with only the groundsheets of the tents separating our sleeping bags from the snow, we felt very cold, and none of us slept at all well. For this reason and because the weather was extremely doubtful, we did not make an early enough start.

STEEP SECTION OF SNOW AND ICE

From the ridge camp the problems of the ascent could be clearly seen. At first the ridge continued practically level and as broad as a main road. Next there was a steeper, though not very steep, rocky section that seemed to present no difficulty. Above this, there was probably a short level space. This turned out, in fact, to be of ample dimensions for another camp, and was used as such by the final and successful attempt on the mountain in 1950. Beyond this, there was a comparatively short, but extremely steep, section of snow and ice. The western face of the ridge fell away steeply in a sheer ice-slope like a shield, with the ice-layers in sickle-shaped stripes. We called it 'the shield.' Above this, the ridge proceeded almost level—there might possibly be a slight descent for a short distance—before it soared upwards again into a steep convex ‘bosom’, three-quarters of the way up which there appeared to be a perceptible crack, amounting to a small ‘bergschrund’, which might give considerable trouble. Further up, the slope flattened out again before rising at no very formidable angle to the summit cone.

We started up on two ropes, Gibson, Munro and Tenzing on one rope and ‘Nandu’ Jayal, the other Sherpa and myself on the other. I led the way across the level part of the ridge, and we were soon enjoying the rare feeling of climbing good but easy rock. Less than half way up the rock Gibson signalled to me to stop. Munro, who had never been as high as this before, was showing unmistakable signs of altitude sickness, and Gibson felt that he ought to see him back to camp while the going was easy and he was not too exhausted. He asked me to take Tenzing with me and have a go for the summit, but not to press the effort too hard if bad weather or lack of time suggested otherwise.

Leaving Tenzing unroped, since it was quite easy-going for him, we completed the ascent of the rock and stood on the platform of snow above, confronting ‘the shield.’ Here Tenzing tied himself on, and I put him in the lead, since there was obviously some heavy step-cutting to be done, which I feared might be too much for my advanced years—I was 47 at that time. It was an extremely exposed place, and even Tenzing
conceded that it was a bit tricky. He cut steps just on the left of the crest where hard ice was thinly covered with good snow. On the right side of the crest was soft snow, but it looked likely to avalanche. After some time, we reached the top and paused to consider the situation.

In the descending mist and slight snow-fall, we could just make out the 'bosom.' It looked extremely steep and longer than I had suspected. If, as seemed likely, part of it was pack ice, it would take us four hours to reach the summit. It was now 12.30 p.m. It would take us, in view of the steepness of the 'bosom', almost as long to descend as it was where we now stood. That meant that we should be benighted.

**COMPELLED TO WITHDRAW**

The weather was deteriorating, and the summit was invisible. Under the circumstances, there was only sensible thing to do and that was to retreat. ‘Nandu’ was bitterly disappointed. He had climbed excellently and was still full of energy, and begged me to go on. I was firm, as, I am sure, he would have been in his maturer days. The point we had reached was, I estimate, about 19,300 feet, approximately 300 feet above the top of the rock, which was the highest point reached by Leyden. When the summit was reached in 1950 by Tenzing and Staff-Sergeant Roy Greenwood, a higher camp pitched above the rock was used on their return, and that, they said, left them none too much time.

We turned our backs regretfully on the summit and started descending the ridge above the 'shield.' Tenzing still led, and I followed immediately behind ‘Nandu.’ I saw him start to turn round at the steepest place so as to descend the steps facing inwards—and the next moment he was off and slithering down the steep ice of ‘the shield’ alarmingly fast. One of my feet was torn from its step by the jerk, but I managed to hold with the pick of my axe. Tenzing was, of course, on the alert and easily arrested the slip from his end. What might have happened had we been descending the ridge in the dark and exhausted, is not difficult to imagine. The rest of the descent back to camp, reached at about 4 p.m., if I remember rightly, was without incident.

We decided, I think, in view of the threatening weather, not to spend another night on the ridge, but to pack up and reach those much-desired mattresses at Camp I, and, if possible, to make another attempt later. But this was not to be. The next day, the others climbed the Hanuman peak—about 18,400 feet—as a consolation prize. I made a comfortably late start and strolled down exploring the botanical possibilities of the left bank of the glacier stream. The flowers were all that I expected of them, but I omitted noticing that the stream near the base camp.
was unfordable and possessed no snow-bridge. I had to make my way all the way back to the glacier before I could cross, and met the others who had started out in some anxiety on a search for me.

We were unable to resume the attempt. I went down with a mild attack of ‘flu’ and Munro and ‘Nandu’s’ leave was nearly up. They and Chengappa went back by our route of ascent to Chakrata, while Jack Gibson and I forced a pathless route through dense thickets of rhododendrons across the Hanuman valley to the Dodital lake and thence, via the Bhagirathi, to Mussoorie.

Bandar-Punch had to wait four more years.
CHAPTER III

CLIMBING THE 'MONKEY'S TAIL'

By H. Williams

Since 1937, seven or eight attempts had been made to reach the summit of the beautiful Himalayan peak of Bandar-Punch (20,720), but without success. In 1950, a party led by J. T. M. Gibson, then Principal of the Joint Services Wing of the National Defence Academy, was more fortunate, three of its members climbing it on June 20. The team included Gurdial Singh, a master at the Doon School, Cadet Jagjit Singh and Sergeant-Instructor Roy Greenwood, both of the Defence Academy, myself and three Sherpas from Darjeeling, Tenzing Norgay (35), Kin Chok Tsing (27) and Kusang (23).

We left Dehra Dun on June 9 and drove by bus and lorry via Rishikesh, Narendranagar and Tehri to Dharasu. In the well-situated and airy bungalow there, we examined the visitors' book and found an entry by Lieutenant Williams in 1927. From there we walked 18 miles by the pilgrim route to Uttarkashi. Then, striking north via the Kaldi Gad, we spent a day at Dodital, where the small lake was well-stocked with trout. From there, we crossed the Pandrasu range into the Hanuman Ganga valley and established our base camp in its upper reaches on June 15.

Here, at about 12,000 feet, is some of the most magnificent Himalayan scenery. At the top of the valley stands Bandar-Punch, the Monkey's Tail, awe-inspiring and strikingly white in the sunlight, flanked on either side by hills almost equally high. Lower down on either side of the river are numerous rock peaks and green valleys, the home of thar, goral and monal and all about the camp itself lush grass-meadow with every kind of alpine flower, primulas, anemones, adonis, corydalis, potentillas, gentians, rhododendrons and blue poppy.

GIBSON'S THIRD ATTEMPT

This was Gibson's third attempt to climb Bandar-Punch and both he and Tenzing had considerable knowledge of how an approach to the summit should be made. Tenzing had been up to 27,000 feet on Everest and was, probably, then the best climber on snow in India. The
equivalent in every way of a guide in Switzerland, he was regarded as a strong and careful mountaineer of quiet and happy disposition, and a most delightful companion on any mountaineering expedition. Kin Chok Tsing—it was necessary to invent a nickname for him as no one could spare breath at 18,000 or 20,000 feet to shout so long a name, and he became "King John"—was also a strong climber, though less experienced. In addition, he was a first rate cook with a flair for producing excellent hot meals under difficult conditions. Kusang, a little younger, showed his worth carrying heavy loads to the higher camps. Though usually cheerful and quick-witted, he spent a great deal of his time singing melancholy songs in a minor key.

Little time was spent at the base camp. On the second day, Camp I was established at about 16,500 feet and, shortly afterwards, Camp II at about 18,200 feet both in austere surroundings strongly contrasting with those at the base. There was little room to pitch tents on the small spaces which could be cleared of snow and rock and there was of course no vegetation or fuel of any kind in their vicinity. Few birds were seen—some accentors, or hedge-sparrows were noticed at Camp I and some wall-creeper at Camp II.

The best line of approach to the summit is along the ridge running south-east from the mountain itself. This ridge divides the waters of the Hanuman Ganga which ultimately flow into the Yamuna, from the waters of the Bhagirathi, which, on joining the Alaknanda becomes the Ganga. Previous reconnaissances along this ridge from Camp II had shown the desirability of establishing a further camp before making an all out attempt on the summit.

Up to now, the weather had been very favourable—clear and bright in the mornings and cloudy, with some showers, in the afternoons and evenings. With little warning this changed, and there seemed some danger that a large party might be caught in bad weather at Camp II with insufficient food and fuel. Accordingly, on June 19, Gibson descended with Gurdial Singh to Camp I leaving Greenwood, Tenzing and "King John" to establish Camp III higher up on the ridge at about 19,300 feet on June 20 and, if the weather improved, to reconnoitre forward towards the summit.

Greenwood and Tenzing decided to make an early start from Camp II next morning but the party actually did not get away till 6.30 a.m. They reached the point on the ridge known as the "rocks" very quickly and shortly afterwards, at about 8.30 a.m., found a suitable site for Camp III on an ample saddle of snow. Here they pitched the tent and laid out the bedding and spare clothing. Then, after a brief rest, they
roped up and started climbing the snow-slope in continuation of the rocky ridge.

Conditions at first were good and they made excellent progress until they reached a cluster of rocks where they first came on difficult ice. They put on crampons and, belaying one another, ascended this ice-slope slowly. About 10.30 a.m., they were seen from Camp I making good progress, though there were occasional halts and delays for no apparent reason. Weather conditions were distinctly favourable and there seemed every reason to hope that they would reach the summit.

About 11.30 a.m., the clouds gathered and shut out the view, and Camp I was left in doubt about the ultimate result Half-way across the main slope a dangerous crevasse looked as if it might give trouble, but Tenzing cut steps along the rim and the crossing was quickly accomplished. Greenwood was beginning to feel the effects of the height, but both the Sherpas were going strong and took it in turns to lead.

THE SUMMIT REACHED

The last few hundred feet rise steeply to the summit, and here again they came on difficult conditions of snow covering ice. Step-cutting was necessary and progress slowed down considerably. Gradually, the slope eased off and at about 12.30 they found themselves on the summit. Unfortunately, clouds obscured the view and, except for occasional glimpses of the Hanuman Peak, they saw nothing. Greenwood confessed afterwards that he felt exhausted and quite unable to carry out his promise that if they were successful he would do a "hand stand" on the summit.

Gibson, who had returned early in the morning to Camp II, saw the climbers momentarily on the summit and set out at once for Camp III. After a rest of about 40 minutes, Greenwood and Tenzing descended and reached the crevasse without undue difficulty. They had to traverse the main slope as quickly as possible because there was now some danger of the snow avalanching. Then, at the top of the ice-slope, they hammered in an ice-piton and belayed one another down. Sleet and hail had now begun to fall; the mist was dense and progress very slow. Gibson became anxious at the delay and left camp to meet them. Late in the afternoon, after a very gruelling day, the entire party returned to Camp II.

Four in a small tent at over 19,000 feet is not very comfortable under the best weather conditions, but on this occasion things could hardly have been worse. It snowed during the greater part of the night and was still snowing at dawn. The sky was heavily overcast with dark clouds, and it appeared that the weather had broken and that no attempt could
be made for some days. They might have stayed on at Camp III or even at Camp II hoping for some improvement, but Gibson felt that members of the party at Camp I might misunderstand the cause of this delay and be worried. He, therefore, decided that they should return to Camp I. As luck would have it, the following day was fine and the move down lost him a reasonable opportunity of getting to the summit.

Gibson, Jagjit and myself, together with the Sherpas and a Garhwali porter, named Gabar Singh, who had shown himself very capable in carrying heavy loads to Camp I, now climbed to Camp II, hoping that the weather would hold. I had proclaimed at the start of the expedition that I would be disappointed if I got no higher than 16,000 feet, happy if I got to 18,000 and astonished if I made the summit. I had now reached the altitude of happiness, but my knee, still painful after having sustained a twist earlier in the trip made it impossible for me to climb to astonishment. The next morning (June 22) was bitterly cold and the sky overcast with clouds. Though the chances of success were very slight, Gibson with a party started for the summit but, by the time they reached 19,000 feet, conditions had worsened and the attempt had to be abandoned.

Everything now pointed to a considerable break in the weather, and, as the amount of food and fuel at Camp II was limited, it was decided to call off further attempts. During the afternoon, camp was broken up and the whole party descended in a hailstorm to Camp I. Had these conditions continued for some days, a decision to remain at Camp II might have had serious consequences. As it turned out, the following day was unexpectedly fine and it had to be acknowledged that Gibson had again missed a chance of climbing Bandar-Punch.

The next few days were spent in trying to climb an unnamed peak (20,020 feet) Gibson, Tenzing and “King John” climbed to within 700 feet of the summit, but had to turn back because of heavy dense mist. Various cols on the ridge between the Tons and the Hanuman Ganga were visited and a good deal of less strenuous climbing occupied the time of the other members. The party reassembled at the base camp on the afternoon of June 28, and from there made its way back by easy stages to Dehra Dun.

No expedition to the Himalayas can succeed without the assistance of porters, and they are nowadays very expensive to employ. Indeed, the cost of an expedition is almost proportionate to the number it is necessary to engage. Nevertheless, their wonderful work over difficult ground and their cheerfulness under all conditions are beyond praise. At the base camp, they found themselves excellent shelter in some caves which saved the expedition the cost of bringing tentage for them. Here,
at the end of a long day's carrying, provided that their plea for cigarettes was suitably met, they settled down contentedly to their simple meal, prepared to laugh and joke with everyone.

**SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS**

The expedition was planned by the members themselves and was not sponsored or financed by any outside organisation. In all, it cost Rs. 5,606 of which Rs. 3,604 were spent on transport. Friends helped with the loan of tents and climbing equipment, and even with transport, but the bulk of the requirements was found by members themselves. It is, therefore, of interest to summarise what was achieved, so as to give some idea of what can be done by a small expedition privately organized in India.

A general officer climbed in moderately difficult snow, ice and rock to over 18,000 feet to his obvious pleasure but not without anxiety to his companions. A young cadet, not then 17, climbed to 19,000 feet and carried sizable loads on several occasions to over 18,000 feet, an experience that was bound to stand him in good stead in future in the high Himalayas. Greenwood, helped, as he would readily acknowledge, by the two Sherpas, climbed Bandar-Punch—a fine feat for a young mountaineer and a fitting reward for his efforts and enthusiasm.

Gurdial Singh, who was then in his twenties and had a long climbing career before him, went to well over 19,000 feet and greatly improved his skill and confidence. Gibson, though unlucky not to have reached the summit, was indefatigable on the mountain, carrying heavy loads between the higher camps and climbing on several new peaks. Above all, he was most generous in passing on his knowledge and experience to a rising generation of climbers.
CHAPTER IV

ASCENT OF THE BLACK PEAK

By J. T. M. Gibson

There have been accounts of climbs on Bandar-Punch in the Himalayan Journals of 1938, 1946 and 1947 and the Alpine Journals of November 1945 and May 1948. Apart from these, there has been at least one other expedition of which I do not think any account has appeared: the attempt made by Major White and Captain Massey of the 9th Gorkha Rifles on the "Black Peak" in 1939, which involved an approach to the Bandar-Punch group of mountains from Harsil. It is probable that the outbreak of war prevented a description of it appearing in print.

In 1935-36, the Survey of India re-surveyed the region south and east of Bandar-Punch, but the great basin drained by the source streams of the Tons and lying to the north and west of the range running westwards from the Lamkhaga pass to the Borasu pass and beyond remained and remains, if not blank on the map, at least filled only with broken formlines and the peak of Swargarohini (20,512 feet). In 1952, at my suggestion, the Survey of India mapped this region and a party, including cadets from the Joint Services Wing of the National Defence Academy, was able to give them some assistance.

MAPS OF THE AREA

One result of the 1935-36 survey was the discovery that the "Black Peak", a point 20,956 feet, was higher than Bandar-Punch (20,720 feet). In their excitement, the Survey of India called it Bandar-Punch I and the other point Bandar-Punch II. This seems to me quite unjustified. It is certainly one of the same group of mountains, but it is two miles distant from the true Bandar-Punch as the crow flies and more along the ridge that runs from one to the other, a ridge that at places is more than 1,000 feet lower than the summits.

The decisive argument, it seems to me, that the 20,720-foot peak should be called Bandar-Punch and the other by some different name, lies in the meaning of the word itself. Bandar-Punch means "monkey's tail", and it is the shape of the 20,720-foot peak, as seen from Mussoorie and
the plains beyond the Siwaliks, that caused it to be given this name and be known by it for generations. The "Black Peak", seen from any angle, could hardly be likened to the tail of a monkey. Not that I wish to quarrel with the Survey of India, who have done so much to help climbers in the Himalayas.

The sketches of the Bandar-Punch area that appeared in the Himalayan Journal of 1938 and the Alpine Journal of November 1945 (the latter being repeated in the Himalayan Journal of 1946) are inaccurate, in that they show a main ridge running southwards from a point 20,020 feet. In fact, the ridge runs westwards from Bandar-Punch to 20,020 feet and then continues westwards for just over a mile to a peak, a little over 18,000 feet. Between this peak and point 20,020 feet there is a fine col at 17,000 feet giving access to a valley running down to the foot of Surgnalin and then turning westwards to join the Tons below the Harki Doon. From the 18,000-foot peak the ridge turns south-westwards. In other words, the water parting between the Hanuman Ganga and the Yamuna should be shown further to the west than as shown in the sketches published, while the source of the Tons, I feel, lies beyond Surgnalin and the river to its south is its tributary.

In 1948, I crossed the Lamkhaga pass, descended to Chitkal, then recrossed the same range by the Borasu pass and descended to the Harki Doon. From here I climbed a shoulder of Swargarohini, and had a wonderful view of Bandar-Punch and adjacent peaks looking up the valley that starts at the col below point 20,020 feet. It was this view that prompted me to visit Bandar-Punch and led to a number of expeditions to the Harki Doon and the Black Peak valley in 1952, 1953 and later years. In 1937, John Martyn and I had first reached the south-east ridge of Bandar-Punch without planning to attempt the peak. In 1946, R. L. Holdsworth had led a party, of which 'Nandu' Jayal and I were members to try to climb it, but we were defeated by adverse weather. There were several other unsuccessful attempts, but in 1950 Bandar-Punch was climbed by Tenzing Norgay and Roy Greenwood and a Gorkha soldier on leave from Malaya who claimed to be Tenzing's brother.

PARTY LEAVES AJMER

In 1955, a party from the Mayo College and the Doon School including present and old boys of both, under me, set out to make an attempt on the Black Peak on which the Doon School party had been turned back when only some 200 feet below the summit in 1953. We left Ajmer on May 10 by train after two days of frantic packing. The party con-
sisted of Narendra Singh (Charlie), an old boy of the Doon School, Sushil Kaul, elder brother of a boy in the Mayo College, Ghanshyam Singh, an old boy of the College, and Dwarka Nath Mathur, who was still at school there.

In Delhi, next day, we collected some stores and got away from there about mid-day. Our next stop was Roorkee, where we borrowed a lilo, two pairs of boots and four ground-sheets from the Sappers, who gave us welcome tea on their lawn. Four days were spent in Dehra Dun collecting more stores and equipment, doing final packing and waiting for the Sherpas. There was little time for joy except for a supper party by Martyn to ‘Nandu’ Jayal and Gurdial Singh. After some anxious waiting, the Sherpas, Pasang and Chetan arrived from Darjeeling on the afternoon of May 15.

We were off to Mandali on May 16, where Jagjit Singh joined us much to our delight, just as dusk was falling. The first part of our walk to Ringali, the next day, was very lovely. Sushil lost himself on the way and caused some anxiety, but was rescued by a porter and turned up soon after dark. On our way to Jarmola we saw a golden eagle. Black partridges were shouting all the evening.

We came across magnificent bushes of wild white roses all the way to Naitwar on May 19. The locals make attractive balls of these and hang them from their caps. The wheat was turning yellow at the top of the valley down from Jarmola and was being harvested by the time we reached the Tons 2,000 feet lower. Here and there, there were bright green nursery fields of paddy. The Tons was running clear and we were surprised to see no snow water in it. The journey from the junction with the Tons up to Naitwar was hot and toilsome. Sushil had trouble from blisters.

May 20 saw us bound for the camping ground beyond Taluka and below Datmir. For the first half of the walk the country was alive with game birds—chuckor (I was a bit surprised, but there was no doubt), black partridge, jungle-fowl and a pheasant I could not identify for certain. At the half-way village we were taken into a house, where a man, who had had a bad fall, was lying ill. He had knocked out several teeth and broken his jaw. I gave him an injection of penicillin, and some pentids to take later. He did not look as though the treatment could do him much harm. There was a fire in the room with no chimney, and large numbers of anxious onlookers.

Dwarka got up the 'climbing rock' at the lunch halt, but Jagjit failed. We all nearly stepped on an adder lying where the climb starts. The chestnut and walnut trees, as usual, astonished us by their size and
magnificence. The Forest Department had put up boards naming the trees, but had also painted on suitable rocks, instructions not to shoot as it was a sanctuary, which, from the point of view of our food, was not so good. We were in tents for the first time.

THUNDERSTORMS AND SNOW

Camping below Oshla on May 21, we sorted our stores and made them up into porter loads. We also tended Sushil’s blisters, which must have been very painful. The porters arrived early the next day both from Oshla and Ganga villages. We had met their headman on the road a day earlier, and felt his name, Lakhi Ram, was a good omen. We sent six mules back and the other six to the Harki Doon to await our return an awful expense, but I did not know how to diminish it. We eventually got away with 27 porters from the two villages. There were the usual delays in an attempt to turn one day’s work into two, but ultimately we all got to the base camp site at the lake at 11,700 feet. The advance party arrived in fine weather, but before the last of the porters reached us, a thunderstorm had started and it was snowing hard. We pitched tents in driving snow and a light that reminded me of the film ‘Scott of the Antarctic.’

After a chilly night, we woke to a perfect morning on May 23. There was ice on the lake (with little birds walking on it) and crisp snow all around. We breakfasted in the sun and then prepared skis for the next day. We slept most of the afternoon but did a 500-foot slalom down the gully above the camp after tea. It was a great fun. The next day was dull so far as the weather went, but fun otherwise. We skied on the patch of snow below the gully till lunch, by when it had started raining or snowing—it couldn’t make up its mind which to do.

On May 25 we woke to a bright sunshine, but the sky was soon enveloped with clouds. It was not a very fruitful day. We all went up towards last time’s Camp I at Jagjit’s insistence to find, what I had expected, much snow and no satisfactory place to camp. We only reached 13,700 feet, about two miles short of the site. On the way back, Sushi again managed to lose himself. It was difficult to plan for the future as Jagjit wanted to go straight for the peak and the rest were not yet fit for the heights. He was in good trim after his training course at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute.

Though I pointed out to him that he would need the Sherpas and tents which we could ill-spare and that there was still plenty of time, Jagjit was very impatient. So I let him go off on May 26. I only hoped he would not make a fool of himself, as there was a great deal of snow
and danger of avalanches. He and the Sherpas promised to take all the precautions. 'Doggie' followed them up and I hoped she would not freeze to death.

**LOVELY SCENERY ALL ROUND**

We then went up a valley on the opposite side of the main valley, one lower than the first we tried last time which, according to the porters, led to the Jamnotri pass. We crossed and climbed through lovely scenery to the foot of the valley and then on snow to about 13,500 feet. All but Sushil, who gave up, had several runs on skis of about 1,000 feet. A thunderstorm broke at lunch-time and we had to spend a cold wet evening in camp. Snow had fallen and lay round the tents, and there was ice on the lake as soon as the storm stopped. The surrounding hills under fresh snow looked beautiful next morning. While the rest had a day in camp, Dwarka and I went up the ski valley and had a splendid run on fresh snow. There was rain and snow again in the afternoon.

There was another clear morning on May 29. We set out early for the ski valley and climbed to a side col. The climb was steep and at places tiring as we sank into snow under a crust that did not always hold our weight. Charlie kicked the track for a good distance, while the rest did well as beginners. The view from the top was magnificent and I took a photograph of the Black Peak, which I expected had been climbed by then. I put Ghanshyam and Sushil on a rope for a few feet down till they gained confidence, and then skied down myself. It was a stiff bit of skiing but very exhilarating. I was more than pleased with the new short skis made for me by the Forest Research Institute. We launched about two-third of the way down, and then the usual snow-storm began. We got back to camp to find Jagjit returned from his climb. They had got to about 400 feet below the summit, but had to turn back exhausted by the deep snow. We could not help feeling rather selfishly pleased that it was still there for the rest of us. Both the Sherpas looked very exhausted.

May 30 was a rest day for all of us. We bathed—it was most refreshing—and washed our clothes. We had an excellent lunch, though the food bundobast was not as good as we would have wished, and we missed Kalam Singh. In the evening, I crossed the main river and climbed to the site of our 1953 ski camp. On the way back we found that it had rained hard as usual in the afternoon and the sun through the clearing clouds down the valley looked wonderful. We decided on an early start next day and a full-day's skiing and climbing.

May 31 turned out to be a crystal clear morning with ice on the lake
Ascent of the Black Peak

As usual. Charlie and Pasang went up the valley on skis, while Chetan, Jagjit, Sushil, Dwarka, the two Oshla men and myself climbed above the col by aneroid 15,400 feet. It was a steep climb well over 50°, the snow being frozen almost to the top. The view from the summit was gorgeous and there was much photography. On the way down, Sushil slipped and slid down 600 feet and gave us all a fright. I ought to have put him on a rope, but he seemed quite all right; it was really due to overconfidence and carelessness. He took it very well and apart from this, both he and Dwarka climbed excellently for beginners. Ghanshyam, whom we now knew as ‘Auntie’, stayed at the bottom. My ski down was extremely steep at places and as exciting a run as I have ever had. After lunch, we all practised turns till the usual afternoon rain and snow, hail, sleet, thunder and lightning drove us back to camp. I sent down two porters for potatoes, onions and other stores left at Oshla for our return, and to buy a sheep or goat.

PRACTICE SKIING AND CLIMBING

June 1 was spent in camp, but not quite as a rest day. Jagjit took a party and gave them practice in rapelling and other climbing techniques, while I gave instruction in skiing on our nursery slope. The placid lake, with green light showing through from the bed, surrounded by the rocks and the snows mirrored in it, was a fine setting. It all made me feel a bit in need of adult company, a glass of beer, and the comforts of a Swiss holiday. There was rain and snow as usual after lunch. A week ago, the storms were coming from the west, then their source shifted to the south, and now they seemed to come from the east. It was still very cold in the mornings, with ice on the lake, but by after-breakfast one could have a refreshing dip in hot sunlight.

On June 2, Jagjit, Charlie, Dwarka and Pasang went up the ski valley on skis. Sushil, Chetan and I climbed the side of the valley above the camp and found it well worth doing. Doggie’s sore eyes after her epic ascent with Jagjit did not prevent her from insisting on coming up with us. Although we only got to 15,000 feet we had some hard snow-climbing with step-cutting; it was a delightful little snow ridge from which the view was magnificent. To the north was Swargarohini, partly hidden behind the flanking mountain on which we were, and beyond a great snow-field opening through an insignificant cleft a little further down the main valley than the lake. I had not noticed this opening; I might have suspected it if I had thought more how the moraine holding up the lake was formed. There was a ridge leading on from our little summit which seemed to promise access to Swargarohini’s plateaux from which rose
the rock pinnacles. The chief of these faced us with a sheer yellowish rock precipice of quite 4,000 feet. Whether it was climbable from the other side remained to be seen; from this side it was certainly not by orthodox methods. Snow began to fall at noon as we reached our summit, and so we came down as fast as we could, doing a long glissade down a gully. We got back to find the skiers returned and ate a late lunch in the sleet. An Oshla porter arrived with a goat which was quickly slaughtered, and then I dozed, read and wrote in eager expectation of a good dinner.

We made June 3 a pleasant restful day in camp, preparing for the departure of Jagjit, Ghanshyam and Sushil for Oshla next morning and a move to Camp I by the rest of us. Jagjit and party were off by 8 a.m. and 'Doggie', which had climbed with Jagjit earlier as far as she could get, went after them. The Sherpas were not sorry to see the last of him as he stole food. We took another two hours to complete our arrangements. It was a pleasant walk up to Camp I, which we reached at about 3.45 p.m. It snowed between 5 and 7 p.m., the usual afternoon weather.

June 5 was a fine day. It was pretty cold in the morning and we could get away only at 9.30 to carry loads to Camp II. Charlie, Dwarka and I climbed up on skis, while Chetan stayed behind to cook the meat. Pasang had a rather heavy time making a track in snow that softened as it got warmer. Dwarka felt the height and Charlie and I the glacier lassitude, but we all recovered on the way down and had a wonderful run. I was delighted with the short skis, except perhaps for racing when, at great speed, they might become a bit unsteady.

ARRIVAL OF NEW GUESTS

On June 6, we set up Camp II (17,000 feet). Late the previous evening a man arrived from base camp with news that Don Soughan, Winston Tharke and Chicky Ranganathan had arrived asking for instructions, and another from Jagjit reporting meeting them at Oshla and remarking that they had arrived with six mules, whose loads were being carried up by five porters. He also reported having bought a sheep for Rs. 6/- and having treated the new guests well.

I decided that, as all the food was up at Camp II, we should continue our attempt on the Black Peak, but that Dwarka, who was too young to get to the top, should go down. We were up by 5 in the morning in spite of its being very cold, away by 7-15 and up in Camp II 500 feet higher than the previous day, by 10-30—three hours earlier, as the snow was much easier to climb on before melting. The route up from Camp I was straight up the ice falls we had to circumvent in 1953, and which
now made a steep and exciting ski run. It remained a perfect day till about 2 p.m., when it clouded over.

By 11 a.m. on June 7, we (Pasang, Chetan and myself) were at Camp III (19,000 feet). Feeling the height a little bit, Charlie had a poor night and so, I left him behind at Camp II and sent a note down to the others to come up to Camp II. It clouded over a bit early that day but we hoped the weather would hold. Harpal and Jaipal from Oshla came up with us and did extremely well.

We woke on June 8 after a most miserable night. All of us were suffering from a form of indigestion common at high altitudes, and there was barely room in the tent. I could not sleep, as every time I dozed off I was woken by a fit of panting. I peeped out twice and disliked the look of things. I also suffered from a feeling of claustrophobia. Whenever my head got cold I would put it in the sleeping-bag hood, but had to tear it out quickly. I looked at my watch by torchlight four or five times almost every two hours, until at 3.30 a.m. I persuaded Chetan to start the primus and make tea. This led on to breakfast and a very early start at 5. It was bitterly cold but romantic, and reminded me of the old days in the Alps. We saw the sun come up and light the banks of clouds that filled the valleys—it looked so pretty, but caused us anxiety. Would they dissolve or rise and engulf us?

**THE SUMMIT REACHED**

A stiff west wind swept the Black Peak clear of clouds and we made good progress. I was able to lead a bit, but not as much as I should have liked. The snow was a dry powder covered with a thin wind-slab into which one sank at each step, up to the ankles on the flatter bits and to the thighs in places where it was almost perpendicular and one had more or less to swim up. We went right up the shoulder across the bergschrund and reached the summit at 8:30 a.m.—a fine summit of a narrow crest of snow over a cornice. The view all around was marvellous but it was too cold to wait long in admiration. Bandar-Punch, invisible until the very summit, is even more of a fine mountain from the north than from the south. I was very sorry I did not have any Doon School or Mayo College boys with me, but I thought it would have been too much for any one in that year's party. Even Pasang, who did not carry anything and did less leading than Chetan, who was a tower of strength, was sick several times. The icy wind reminded me of the last occasion. As we hurried back, the hills began to be covered with clouds and so justified our cold and early start. We returned to Camp III by 11 a.m. and I unfroze my feet. It was painful, but luckily
there was no frost-bite. We got back to Camp II heavily laden by 1 p.m., and I enjoyed the luxury of my tent to myself. Charlie had gone down.

June 9 was a bumper day. We woke to a clear day, feeling more than fit. Charlie had skied down to Camp I and, finding nothing to eat, had continued down to the base camp. Soughan was doubtful about coming up because of the shortage of lilos. His party had eaten most of their food on the way up from Chakrata and had only Rs. 80/- left in cash. I decided to move down, but first, at 7-30 a.m. after breakfast and packing up, set off with my skis dragging behind me to the site of Camp III, which I reached at 9-45. I came down in great form to meet Chicky and Winston arriving at Camp II with 'Doggie', her eyes again inflamed. They were both tired, having started from Camp I much too late and waded through heavy wet snow. After some refreshments, we all set off for Camp I, which we reached at 1 p.m., to find Chetan with lunch ready for us. I and Pasang skied down, so that I had had more than 4,000 feet of running in direct descent. I wondered how I should manage the Black Peak shoulder, which at places was very steep and not more than 20 to 30 yards across, but all went well thanks to the short ski.

On June 10, we explored up the main glacier coming down from Bandar-Punch, while the boys and Chetan practised skiing. Pasang and I worked out a route for an ascent next day of the 18,000 feet at the corner where the valley turns westwards. Soughan arrived at teatime, bringing a note from Charlie, to say that on the descent from Camp II to Camp I he got his turns both ways and only fell twice.

SUCCESSFUL BIDS ON 18,000 ERS

June 11 was another great day. I had slept ill—experiencing a bit of panting and feeling cold in spite of heaps of clothes. Chicky, Winston and Chetan set off for the 18,000er, Don and I going with them on skis till they turned off the main glacier. There was not enough equipment for us all to go up together. They planned to pitch a tent at about 17,000 feet and wanted us to follow them up next day. Chicky sent back a note saying, "We have had lunch and both of us feel perfectly fit at 17,000 feet. We are going to have a crack at the peak now as we have put our tent up and the weather is fine. If we cannot make it today, we shall try early tomorrow. If you and Soughan leave early, you will be able to do it easily."

At 2-30 p.m., we saw them on the top.

June 12 was a long and fine day at Camp I. We were up at 4 a.m. to see the first light of the sun on the highest summits. We decided to leave Chicky's and Winston's mountain to them and try another 18,000er
on the Swargarohini ridge above the pass to Harsil. Don, Pasang and I left at 5-45, Harpal carrying my skis up on frozen snow. When we were at about 16,500 feet, Harpal dumped the skis and returned to Camp I. The rest of us climbed very steeply till 10 a.m., when we reached the summit—or rather some 20 feet below it. The views were marvellous and, as usual, much film was exposed. I left the last few feet to the summit as we had no rope with us and it involved crossing a cornice which looked as though it would break off. We decided that discretion was best. Don had gone very well indeed for his first ascent to over 18,000 feet. I thought he felt at times we ought to have been roped; it would perhaps have been better but would have taken too long.

We could not tell the exact height, as Chicky, whose party we watched returning, had the aneroid. I had the longest and fastest glissade of my life on the way down, but when I reached the skis I realised I had left my coat behind on the way up. Pasang nobly climbed back to retrieve it whilst I lay on my skis and dried my seat. I had a really wonderful run back to Camp I, while the other two arrived at 12-15 p.m. We all had lunch together. Chicky’s party was in great form and started for the base camp at 1 p.m. We arrived there at 4 p.m. after a long and tiring, but pleasant, descent via the glacier snout. I thought this might be a shorter way, but it was not. I got back in the nick of time as soon after a thunderstorm started and it rained very heavily.

The base camp was, as Charlie had promised, quite a different place. The grass was green, the fields of anemones were out and the rhododendrons were in full bloom. The goat had been slaughtered and we all looked forward to a supper of liver and kidney. Rum and hot tea were most reviving on arrival. Poor Dwarka was in great pain from his toes, but I could not make out what was wrong.

On June 13, Charlie, Chicky and Winston went off skiing after breakfast, while the rest of us spent a quiet day sorting, mending, washing, resting and eating. It seemed to me that Dwarka must be suffering from the after-effects of a mild go of frost-bite. The change all around from nine days ago was astonishing. The lake, which had been beginning to get low, was again brimming from the melt off the slopes of Swargarohini. The banks of the stream were pale with *primula involucrata*, and the silver birches had clothed themselves in delicate green.

MORE OF SKI-ING AND CLIMBING

It was a perfect morning on June 14. The only drawback to this camping site was having to wait till 8 a.m. for the sun to reach it, though that was partly balanced by getting the last of the evening sun. I took
a number of colour pictures of flowers, later did some rapelling with Chicky and Winston and then cooked lunch, the Sherpas being away ski-ing with Charlie. Dwarka’s feet, thank goodness, were better in the evening, and we struck camp, all but the tents we slept in, ready for an early start next morning. We sat round a camp-fire after supper, but the singing was rather desultory.

We reached the Harki Doon camp on June 15. It was a very long day—12 hours on the march, with a good deal more of real mountaineering than I had expected. Though breakfast was over by 5 a.m., it was not till 6-30 that we were able to leave because of the usual delays with the porters, fewer than we had sent for having arrived from Oshla. I found I was going very slow and my heart pumping a bit, but Don, I was glad to note, was no faster. Winston and Chicky were in great form, and I wished they had come up earlier and tried the Black Peak. A good deal of the climb to the pass was made difficult by the steep grass-slopes being frozen and the hard ice in the gullies. We had to cut a good many steps where, later in the day, we could have walked, and twice we had to fix ropes for the porters. Pasang slipped and fell about 200 feet on ice to give me a fright. His ice-axe was pulled out of his hand, but he stopped himself very well on a lip of hard snow just before the gully disappeared over a cliff. It was 1-30 p.m. by the time we reached the pass. We took it in turns to ski down on the four pairs of skis we had carried up. Charlie went very steadily, Dwarka was most promising for a beginner, Winston took everything straight till he fell, and Chicky fell a good deal. The snow was difficult, with sudden icy patches here and there, but we all enjoyed it.

On June 16, we bathed before breakfast and then had a late meal in the sun. Food and money were both getting very short, and we lived that day mostly on milk, dahie, lassie and butter bought from the gujars. We climbed the big boulder—about 70 feet of severe climbing—after breakfast, and built a cairn on top of it. The next day we were up by 5 a.m. and off by 6-30. The walk down to Oshla was perfect, and there we organised our loads. Leaving there by 1 p.m., we arrived at Datmir at 4-30, feeling very tired. There we met Rajendra Vikram Singh on his way up to try the pass to Jamnotri. He would have liked one of us to join him, but I thought we all felt the call of the flesh-pots. He generously offered us some of his supplies, but I told him we had enough to get us down. ‘Doggie’ and ‘Doggo’ were given to the men of Oshla who had asked for them, and I hoped they would be well-treated. They could not have stood the heat of the plains and, I thought, were likely to be as well looked after in Oshla as in Chakrata.
We were up early on June 18, after a heavy thunderstorm and rain most of the previous night, and left for Naitwar at 7. The first part of the walk was very pleasant through forest, but we started feeling the heat as we went further down. The man I had injected with penicillin on the way up had made good recovery, though his jaw had not set straight. The walk down to Thadiar the next day was extremely exhausting. The monsoon had not yet broken and it was extremely sweltry. We had a most refreshing bath in the river on arrival there. The Sherpas were very irritable, perhaps due to the beastly heat.

We got to Khatian on June 20. It was not an unpleasant walk up under an overcast sky, but the long pull home usually tends to take the edge off the pleasure of an expedition until forgotten in retrospection. The Sherpas were still bad-tempered. Heavy rain started in the evening and the monsoon appeared to have set in. A pleasant eight-mile walk to Mandali the next day brought our tour almost to an end. We spent a happy day lazing and ended it up with a feast of ham, bacon, asparagus, tinned cream, strawberries and cherries. All of us were happy again.

We started off from Mandali as early as 2-30 a.m. on June 22 and got safely to Chakrata for an eagerly-awaited breakfast of eggs and beer. The Sanwals gave us an affectionate welcome and lent me enough money to pay off the Chakrata porters. Back in Dehra Dun the same afternoon, we celebrated at Kwality Restaurant what had been, at times, a hard, but, on the whole, a very successful and enjoyable trip.
CHAPTER V

FIRST BID ON KAMET FAILS

By Major N. D. Jayal

The idea of an expedition to Kamet (25,447 feet) was born when I met General H. Williams at the College of Military Engineering just after he had returned from his expedition to Bandar-Punch (20,956 feet) in 1950. At that time, the objective was Nilkantha (21,640 feet) a peak of great beauty but beset with so many difficulties that four full-scale attempts on it by experienced mountaineers, including Frank Smythe, had failed.

Our plans took more concrete shape during the Group Sports Week at Roorkee in November 1951, when it was decided that the expedition should go to Kamet. The object in view was to prove, if proof was necessary, that a sizable expedition could be mounted in India and that attempts on the higher peaks need not remain the monopoly of visiting expeditions. We decided that eight would be a sound number—General Williams as leader, Gurdial Singh from the Doon School, who had been on the Bandar-Punch expedition in 1950 and had climbed Trisul (23,360 feet) in 1951, Flt.-Lieutenant N. D. Jayal, a cousin of mine from Air Headquarters who had also been on the Trisul expedition in 1951 and the remaining five all Bengal Sappers, Major Mark Valladares, Lieutenant P. P. S. Bhagat, Lieutenant K. C. Johorey, Lieutenant Manohar Lal and myself. I may add here that I had climbed with H. L. Holdsworth in the Arwa glacier basin in 1942, had been with him again in 1946 on Bandar-Punch, and got as high as 23,000 feet in 1951 with the French expedition to Nanda Devi (25,645 feet).

APPROACH TO MOUNTAINS

Success would mean a tremendous achievement, especially to the novices, and failure to get to the top would not be as great a mortification as it would have been on a less high mountain. So, right from the start, we were mentally prepared for failure, at least of the entire party reaching the top. I think this is the correct attitude of mind with which the mountains should be approached. They should not be treated with arrogance but with humility. A mountaineer is always the gainer even
First Bid on Kamet Fails

if he does not reach the summit. He at least gains in qualities which
danger and Nature in the raw sharpen, and an understanding of the
qualities of sacrifice, physical exertion almost beyond human endurance
and, above all, comradeship of one's fellow men.

The intervening months were spent collecting equipment and food.
Fortunately, General Williams took this task upon himself. Gifts of
various food-stuffs were gratefully received, and the Bengal Sappers
purchased excellent tents, climbing boots and other essential items of
personal clothing from the U. K. The Master-General of the Ordnance
also loaned us equipment in considerable quantity.

The party collected at Roorkee on June 1, 1952, and we left by road
the next day for Kotdwara with the good wishes of the Commandant
of the Bengal Engineer Group and every sapper and non-sapper of the
Centre. From Kotdwara we motored to Chamoli in a free bus loaned
to us by the kindness of the General Manager of a transport company.
The remainder of the journey to the base camp was straightforward;
it took us two days along the pilgrim route to Joshimath. We had expected
the marches up the Alaknanda valley to be tiresome, but timely rain
made the journey pleasant. So, we considered luck was with us right
from the very start and we hoped that it would continue.

At Joshimath we met two interesting persons. One was Kesar Singh
who had climbed Kamet with Smythe's party in 1931. He was quite a
character, and as General Williams said, "the years have not dulled
his enthusiasm or his capacity for bluff." He swore to us that he would
either reach the summit or die. He did neither, but helped us to engage
porters and alternatively amused and exasperated us. He had to be
carefully watched, but did quite well under supervision. His great
weakness, as that of all bhotiyas, was arak, and he was completely un-
manageable when drunk. The other was a Tibetan Sikh with whom we
made a very satisfactory contract for the transport of our loads to Niti.
It was interesting to meet a Tibetan Sikh, for we never thought that
followers of the first Guru were to be found in Buddhist Tibet. Inder
Singh, however, enlightened us by saying that there were quite a few of
them in South-West Tibet.

From Joshimath we marched the few miles to Tapoban and then
on to that delightful alp at Surai-Thota (7,090 feet). From here we
had a magnificent view of the peak of Dunagiri (23,184 feet). We tried
our hand at rock-climbing, but were warned that we were not to en-
danger our limbs before the attempt on Kamet. After Surai-Thota
we made a halt at Juma, and then at the beautiful village of Malari,
famous for its aged and dignified cedars, many hundreds and possibly
thousands of years old. Smythe had wondered, "what inscrutable process of Nature decreed their growth in this particular spot far from their fellows of the lower valleys?" Before the war, Malari was also noted for its hunting grounds for enterprising young Bengal Sappers; Valladares tried to uphold this tradition but did not get close enough to a shootable head.

REMINISCENT OF SONAMARG

We arrived at Niti on June 11. We had travelled along the Dhauli valley which, situated between the villages of Kurkuti and Bampa, especially arrested our attention. It is very unlike the steep-sided rugged and narrow-bottomed nullahs of Upper Garhwal; it is more like the calm, comforting and verdant valleys of Kashmir. This particular stretch was reminiscent of Sonamarg. At Bampa, we met a young Parsi from Bombay; it was nice to see him—a man living hundreds of miles away from the Himalayas and yet turning to them for his vacation. His plan was not very ambitious but arduous enough, as he had to go over two 17,000-foot passes. He was without a companion, but this did not seem to deter him. We admired his adventurous spirit.

We camped about a mile short of Niti, a very large village for these parts. The next day was a ‘make-and-mend’ day, while Gurdial Singh, Nalni Jayal and I went off to a 16,000-foot shoulder for views and a possible glimpse of Kamet. I also wanted to try out my skis. Strangely enough, this was the very slope Holdsworth skied on during his halt at Niti with Smythe's expedition in 1931. It was very pleasant to ski and I wishfully thought that skiing on the slopes below Meade's Col at 23,300 feet would be just as enjoyable.

On June 13, some of the party stayed behind to sort out baggage for the animals and men. An altercation arose between one of the jhobawalas and Kesar Singh. The jhobawala wanted all his animals to be employed, or else he would not let any of them go. This man appeared to be a very influential person from Kesar Singh's village, and Kesar Singh found himself torn between the loyalty to his employers and the anger, and certain vengeance, of his neighbour. He thought he would be with us for only two months, while he would have to live all his life with his neighbour. At this stage, I would like to make the point to anyone intending to go to the mountains in regard to porter management. Porters in Upper Garhwal are very poor and are eager to extract as much money as they possibly can from seemingly wealthy visitors from the plains, while the climber, always in desperate hurry to go to the mountains, is sometimes willing to pay any price for it. Each party
knows the weakness of the other and, like the poker player, the one that can feint or hold out the longest wins the day. In our case, the matter was settled by the forceful application of a kick on the bottom of the offending *jhobawala*. This took Kesar Singh by surprise, and, though he had all his men to go on a sit-down strike, he got back to work with alacrity.

The path to Goting, our next halt, was most provoking. The track climbed steeply 300 feet or so to round a spur, and then descended 100 feet to cross a stream. The area was barren and uninteresting, and it was only near the stream that a few plants and flowers grew. On the way we met the first procession of sheep and goats coming from Tibet. These animals engaged our attention due to their size and quality; they were indeed magnificent specimens. We learnt that this was a Government flock, sent by the Tibetan Government to Bampa officially to open the trade route and make business contacts with their counterparts in India. We bought two goats, and Manohar Lal, our messing member, had the tiring task of alternatively towing them away from the flock and being towed a certain distance back by them. Tea and biscuits and a wash in the Dhauli wiped away the annoyances of a rather exacting day.

**BASE CAMP REACHED**

The next day (June 14) we reached the base camp at about 3 p.m. thoroughly hungry and tired. It was established at exactly the same spot as that of the Smythe expedition in 1931. Kesar Singh pointed out the platforms that had supported the tents of Smythe, Holdsworth and Raymond Greene. There were old empty tins strewn about, and I found a rusted pipe-cleaner which must have been used by Holdsworth. It was exciting to picture the expedition of 21 years ago having used the various objects, slept on the very same platforms, sat back appraising the same route up the East Kamet glacier and got their first close look at Kamet with the same growing feelings, hopes and anxieties. The snowbridge over the Dhauli, a mile above the confluence of the Raikana nadi and the Dhauli gave us easy access to the Raikana valley. We knew that the bridge would have melted away on our return journey, and so made plans as to how the rope bridge would have to be constructed.

June 15 was declared a day of rest, and the porters were sent in search of juniper bushes to stock them at the base camp as fire-wood. I took Mark, Johorey, Manohar and Bhagat on to a steep snow-slope about a mile and half away to introduce them to step-kicking and cutting, traversing and delaying, while the others took a well-deserved rest and brought their diaries up to date. The *jhobawalas* and extra porters were
dismissed, and only 12 bhotiya porters were retained to help us set up the higher camps and maintain the supply of firewood for the lower camps. Of these, six were given equipment to fit themselves for work above 20,000 feet, while the remaining six were sufficiently equipped to work below that height. The five Sherpas had, of course, been completely equipped at Roorkee.

On June 16, we left with fervent hopes and great expectations. Everything had so far gone more or less according to plan, and we were having fine weather with no dark clouds on the horizon. But it was a most annoying march to Camp I (16,000 feet), climbing along the lip of the craters with which the glaciers below Camp I were honey-combed and then going down in an unending monotony. All the members were carrying more than 30 lbs., Gurdial with an extra 10 lbs. of photographic impedimenta, and I of skis. Added to this were a relentlessly hot sun and rocky and barren surroundings, only compensated by the glory of the Mana-Deoband group and the stately pyramid of Ganesh Parbat in the north on the Indo-Tibetan border. The camp was pitched on the left lateral moraine of the glacier, and the porters were sent back the same day to bring up fresh loads.

Gurdial Singh, Valladares, Bhagat and I, with three Sherpas, took some loads the next day to drop them somewhere up the glacier and also to carry out a reconnaissance for the route. I went up along the southern edge of the glacier, while the rest of the party were on the other side. As I went further up the valley, the danger of avalanches from the near-vertical faces and hanging glaciers of the Mana-Deoband group became greater, and so I decided to cross over to the left bank. At a little depression I heard a crackling noise. The snow under me gave way and I sank to my thighs in a sort of jelly formed by ice and water. There appeared to be an under-ice stream, the ice layer over it having been covered with fresh snow. I could not move my legs as my boots were clamped to the skis, and I could not get down to the bindings to release them. After making a few attempts, I shouted for help, and it seemed ages before the others arrived. In the meantime, I felt my legs completely frozen and my thigh muscles cramped. Bhagat volunteered to go in and loosen the ski bindings. A rope was tied to his waist and he had to bend right up to his shoulders in the ice and water. They then pulled me out and massaged my legs, and it was a long time before I felt any life in them. After a spell of rest, we dumped our loads and started back for the camp. There we found the porters we had sent back arrived with extra firewood and other loads. The stocking up of the camp was proceeding according to plan and all seemed well.
The trip to Camp II (18,200 feet) on June 18 was uneventful, except for a report from one of the Sherpas that the porters had deserted. Fortunately, on investigation, this was found to be quite untrue, but it gave us the impression that the Sherpas and the bhotiyas were not pulling on well together. The bhotiyas were jealous of the preferential treatment given to the Sherpas, but this position will always remain on large expeditions until such time as they can do cooking and generally look after the climbers.

A WONDERFUL SPECTACLE

The next day, while the others rested, Gurdial Singh and I went up the glacier to have a look at the route, taking part of our personal loads which we could dump en route. It was a steady and pleasant plod up the glacier. An impressive cirque was formed by the broken upper reaches of the east Kamet glacier with the steep southern slopes of Kamet, two unnamed 21,000-foot-high peaks and Mana (23,860 feet) forming a curtain wall. It was a wonderful sight, and I made a mental note that the crossing over from the east Kamet glacier to the west Kamet glacier and into Mana village over the passes formed between Kamet and the 21,940-foot-high peak to its south would be an interesting proposition.

The move-up to Camp III (20,500 feet) was done in two days; the first party went up on June 20 and the second on June 21. The steep snow-gully was tricky, as the layer of snow was not firmly fixed to the ice underneath, and, though a slip would not have been fatal, it could have been like the very commonly asked problem of a turtle on a steep bank climbing up three feet and then sliding down two. Later, a rope was anchored to a boulder to provide a handrail for the porters.

Nearer the camp, I felt tired and worn out and wished I had rested on the days set aside for that purpose. Here I would like to stress the importance of giving yourself rest even though you may feel on top of the world. It is by far the best policy not to exert yourself too much when you feel fit, as it will mean reserves of your energy being readily available when they are required. I feel you should exert yourself considerably on the approaching marches, and when the higher altitudes are reached, you should start being sensible and go easy, till such time as the real effort is required.

June 21 turned out to be a 'red-letter day' for us. We tackled the problem of finding the route on the 1,000-foot-high precipice of rock and ice between Camps III and IV. To Smythe and his party, this had been a great headache—four days of exploration and disappointments.
We all had studied the book ‘Kamet Conquered’ which, at that time, was our bible, but it was mainly due to Holdsworth’s briefing of Gurdial Singh and his vivid retention of it that we struck gold the very first time. We knew that, on the success of our discovering the route would depend whether we would be able to get even within striking distance of the summit, and so it was with great respect and awe for the mountain that we started off that morning.

It was lucky that the day before had been fine and the previous night extremely cold, so that the snow lying on the steep ice was well-frozen. In the early hours of the morning, I found it quite safe to traverse a 55° slope without being roped. It was at about 3 p.m. that, after making slow progress over narrow snow couloirs and steep slabs with very narrow cracks and ledges as handholds and footholds, Ang Tsering and I came on to the pitons and rope left by the 1931 expedition. I could not restrain myself and joyful shouts rent the still air. It meant, we had no more serious or time-consuming impediments and “the one chink in the armour of the giant” had been probed. Though the shouts caused some worry in the camp, they soon realized that the tone was one of exuberance rather than of fear or tragedy. We were obviously on the right track, and returned to the camp quite satisfied.

On June 22, Gurdial Singh offered to take Johorey, Bhagat and a Sherpa on his rope, while Ang Tsering, Ang Dawa and I went ahead fixing the ropes and pitons. The intention was to fix ropes as handrails. We had four of them, each 200 feet long at the most dangerous places up to the bottom of the final 150-foot ice-slope which left the top of the rocks and shaped. It would have been too much to have expected to fix a rope and climb that slope the same day.

THE SUMMIT PARTY OFF

The next day (June 23), the summit group was separated from the main party and, with instructions from General Williams, set off with high hopes. This group consisted of Gurdial Singh, Johorey, Bhagat and I, four Sherpas and six bhotiyas. It was completely fitted out for the attempt and was given the pick of food, clothing and equipment. Those of the remaining party that were fit would follow later and be in themselves self-sufficient in all respects. Owing to the previous days’ work, the going to the top of rocks, though exciting and at times trying, was not really dangerous. Making use of fixed ropes, we made heartening progress. At one place Gurdial had found a way up to a steep snow couloir, which saved a rather tricky traverse over rock made dangerously slippery by a coating of hard ice. I was well behind the party as I was
having difficulty in manipulating my skis, which were strapped across my rucksack. I wished I had paid more attention to what General Williams often kept repeating, “Remember the main object—that of climbing Kamet—: everything else is secondary.” I thought I could do both—give the attempt on the summit everything I had and still be able to have a go at beating Holdsworth’s world record for high-altitude skiing at 23,500 feet, which I missed by barely 500 feet.

By the time I got to the bottom of the ice-face, all the porters had already got there and were resting. Ang Tsering was belayed on a rope round an ice-axe held by Ang Dawa. Ang Tsering is a lama and whenever he is in a dangerous predicament, he starts chanting prayers loudly; he was doing so now. I put on the remaining pair of crampons to go up and take turns at cutting steps with him; it was slow and tiring work. This was the most dangerous stretch we encountered on the whole expedition. The slope was extremely steep; it was hard ice with only a thin layer of snow on top. The main belay was the ice-axe held by Gurdial and Ang Dawa, 70 feet directly below us. If I had slipped, I am certain, Ang Tsering could not have held me, and if Ang Tsering had, I could not, in which case we both would have hurtled down and could only have been held when the rope tightened with a jerk 70 feet below Gurdial and Ang Dawa. This journey would have carried us over many rocky protuberance.

The sun had left the ice slope, and the sudden cold was almost paralyzing. With a great sigh of relief, we eventually heaved ourselves over the cornice on to the small plateau where we were to fix Camp IV. It had been over three hours of exacting work, and we were glad to pull ourselves over on to the plateau of deep and stable snow. It was wonderful to sit back and relax; proud of hard work done.

We sent Ang Temba and two bhotiyas back, as planned, to Camp III to assist, if required, any later party. It was at 22,000 feet that Camp IV was pitched. Heavily crevassed and broken up, snow slopes lay between us and Meade’s Col somewhere near which Camp V had to be placed later.

The next morning (June 24), Bhagat informed us, for the first time, that he had received an injury on June 22 when he had stumbled and received a scratch on the thigh with his ice-axe. On inspection, it did not look dangerous, as there was no wound.

Though the snow was fairly wind-packed, the going was slow. The climbers carried 20 lbs and the porters 30, and at that height it was quite discomforting. A thick fog reduced visibility to five yards, which meant we all had to climb in close formation lest any one should wander
astray and fall into a crevasse. The effect of the fog was very dampening on our spirits.

It started snowing with a strong wind that afternoon. The weather conditions worsened when we reached a reasonable camp site, about 300 feet below where we wanted to establish Camp V. Two bhotiyas had to return with Ang Dawa, who was to look after Bhagat at Camp IV. The day was rather tiring, as of necessity, through lack of sufficient porters, we carried 30 lbs. and the porters 50 lbs., which is a tremendous load at over 22,000 feet. We sat down and discussed as to whether we should carry on in such weather. The only factor against our pushing on was that our uphill tracks might get obliterated, in which case there would be great risk of the three men on their return journey getting lost in the maze of snow cliffs and crevasses with disastrous consequences. We decided to camp where we were. Typical of the vagaries of Himalayan weather, two hours later the snow stopped falling, the wind dropped and the sky became clear.

The next day (June 25) we awoke to a high wind and heavy snow, which lasted the whole day and kept us in our tents. The tent situation was also acute, as in the porters' tent there were three Sherpas and Kalyan Singh, and in ours the three of us huddled together.

SLIGHTLY DEMORALISED

We had two nights and one day of rest, and consequently were overjoyed when we rose to find June 25 dawn clear. Ang Tsering was chivied and bullied into making an early breakfast, but it was not before 9 a.m. that we were able to leave. All of us were in high spirits and optimistic. We were a strong party; the three of us and Ang Tsering, Pemba Norbu and Kalyan Singh. There appeared to be no insurmountable difficulties on the mountain, and the confidence we expressed of gaining the summit undoubtedly invited the vengeance of the mountain Gods.

However, the going for the first two hours was slow. It was thought that Ang Tsering, with all his experience, would have a good eye for likely hidden crevasses and so he was put in the lead. It was found later that he had too good an eye and took ages in probing places where there was the slightest suspicion of a crevasse. At the level of Meade's Col we got on to the north-east face of the mountain which was crevasse-free, and this business of probing about with ice-axes for crevasses could be given up. The face was steep and the sun started having its effect. The snow became softer and the going tedious, though not exasperating.
First Bid on Kamet Fails

Shortly after mid day, Gurdial said his feet were cold and that he would have to turn back. He could not, of course, go down alone, and there was only one rope with us. This presented quite a problem, and we had to cut the rope with an ice-axe, which took quite some time. To my great disappointment, Ang Tsering and Pemba Norbu also said they would go down to Camp V with him. However, I borrowed Gurdial’s camera, and, with the Bengal Sapper flag in my rucksack, had visions of a very successful day.

The three of us, Johorey, myself and the faithful bhotiya Kalyan Singh, carried on. We made towards the north ridge, hoping that, once there, we would be on ice when the going would be easier than on the soggy snow of the face. The halving of the party had slightly demoralized us, and the turns at leading were coming around much sooner. We stopped at about 24,400 feet for a lunch of sardines and ‘daurala’ sweets. The view of Abi Gamin (24,130 feet) below us, the Tibetan plateau to the north, the peaks of Mana, Deoban and Nanda Devi behind to the south-west and others of the great Himalaya range to the south were breath-taking in their vastness, the little wisps of cloud in the valleys heightening the appearance of their loftiness.

It was now clear that, with the time wasted that morning on the crevasses and the cutting of the rope, we could not make the summit and should be back at Camp V before dark. Johorey, though he was doing very well, had never been to the mountains before, and in cases like this, more often than not, great physical exhaustion sets in rather suddenly. Kalyan Singh, the Garhwali, had never done any real mountaineering, and unlike the Sherpas, would be more of a hindrance than a help on the ice-slope which he would encounter slightly higher up. With these factors in mind, we decided to descend and conserve our energies for an attempt the next day. It was heart-breaking to have had to give up the attempt like this, especially as we were in good physical form. More days spent at higher camps would mean greater physical deterioration.

Back at Camp V, we were very pleased to see General Williams and Manohar, who had come up from Camp III. We were happy to think then that, even if perchance we did not gain the summit, the expeditions would have already won sufficient laurels gained by two complete novices—one getting to 24,400 feet and the other to 23,000 feet, and the leader, a man of 55, getting up to 23,000 feet. Unfortunately, General Williams left the same day to look after Bhagat at Camp IV, and Manohar stayed behind at Camp V to join the summit party the next day.
On June 27, there was snow again, accompanied by wind, and Ang Tsering was sent down to Camp IV with Johorey and Manohar. The others remained confined to their tents.

On June 28, after four nights at 23,000 feet, the six of us—Pemba Norbu, Ang Dawa, Ang Temba, Kalyan Singh, Gurdial and I—set off at 8 a.m. for the summit. The tracks made previously had all been wiped out by fresh snow, and the whole tiresome procedure of June 26 had to be repeated all over again. The quality of the snow was the main drawback. In our deteriorated physical condition, sinking up to the thighs in the snow was extremely exasperating. It was after mid day, and we had left the top of Abi Gamin well below us when we halted for some rest and biscuits. A great mistake we made was not to have carried thermos flasks with something hot in them. I felt quite distressed, and decided that it would not be in the interests of the team if I carried on. Ang Dawa, Ang Temba and I turned back, while Gurdial, Pemba and Kalyan Singh carried on with our sincere good wishes. When we got back to Camp V and looked up to see how the trio were getting on, we saw them resting about 400 feet above where we had left them at a height of about 24,800 feet, but after a while they began descending. When they came in, we learnt that they had met with very much worse snow and had been forced to give up. There was now no question of any further attempts, as, after five nights at 23,000 feet and two days of strenuous climbing to well above 24,000 feet, it would mean courting disaster to make another bid.

LAST, DESPERATE ATTEMPT

The next day (June 29) dawned clear, and Ang Temba, Pemba and Kalyan Singh were sent down with most of the loads. I still toyed with the idea of a last desperate attempt at Holdsworth's skiing record, and had intentions of looking at the sides of Abi Gamin closely for routes to be used on later expeditions. Ang Dawa and I started off towards Meade's Col, while Gurdial went down to Camp IV. After climbing for about half an hour, I realised that physically my condition was at a very low ebb and the most sensible thing for me to do would be also to go down. After taking the skins off my skis, I started a descent very different from the spectacular and accelerating dash I had fondly imagined I would do.

When I arrived at Camp V, I learnt that Bhagat's condition was such that he would have to be carried the whole way. The descent to Camp III would prove the worst, especially down the 150-foot ice-slope. However, we constructed an improvised sledge with skis, ski-sticks
and ice-axes and strapped Bhagat on to it and lowered him down with ropes. From thence onward he was carried pick-a-back, and the whole descent to Camp III was awfully nerve-racking, requiring the greatest concentration to avoid a slip which might mean disaster. It was with a sigh of relief that we came on to the easier slopes 200 yards from the camp, and only then realised how completely fatigued we were. I could not sleep that night and in spite of everything I did, the cold seemed to have penetrated to the marrow of my bones. It was by far the worst and longest night I spent on the whole expedition.

Down the east Kamet glacier our progress was fair as Bhagat could be pulled along on the improvised sledge. From Camp I to the base camp he was taken in a hammock made by a blanket hung on a pole carried on the shoulders of two men. From the base camp onwards he was carried on a pony and in a dandy palanquin.

We arrived at Bampa late in the evening of July 5 and Bhagat, after a cup of Ovaltine, seemed to go to sleep from which he never awoke. His death was the greatest blow that could have befallen us, as the passing away of a comrade far transcends other misfortunes. A local Brahmin was engaged and his body was cremated on the banks of the Dhauli Ganga. This upset all our plans of returning via the Valley of Flowers, and we made straight for Badrinath, taking poor Bhagat’s ashes with us. There, at a solemn ceremony at the holiest of all holy places, we committed him to the sacred waters of the Vishnu Ganga.

We did not reach the summit of Kamet. We would have if the weather had held and, as Holdsworth said, if we had the strength in porters that they had in 1931. And so, in the words of Francis Younghusband, “The struggle of man with the mountain continues apace. Man reels back again and again, but again and again he returns to the onslaught. What is it in the mountain that so allures him? He knows full well that, in order to stand for a bare half-hour on the summit, he must endure incredible hardships, run most fearsome risks and hazard even his life. Yet nothing daunts him. It would almost seem as though the greater the danger the stronger is the attraction. What is the secret of it?”
For the first time in history, a regimental flag was placed on a high mountain. It was appropriate that in mountain-climbing, as in many other matters, the Bengal Sappers should give the lead to the rest of the Army by ascending a 24,000-foot mountain!

This was Abi Gamin (24,130 feet), which had been climbed only once before by an Anglo-Swiss expedition in 1950 from the north. Abi Gamin is connected to Kamet (25,447 feet) by Meade’s Col—itsel 23,500 feet, and, though our objective was Kamet, snow conditions and sickness made us divert our efforts to the lesser peak, thus turning what might have been a total failure into a success.

The members of the party were Lieutenant-Colonel S. A. Pinto, Major M. Valladares, Major Trilochan Singh, Captain N. L. Bery, Captain Nardip Singh and myself—all Bengal Sappers—Captain (Dr.) R. K. Chopra, Gurdial Singh from the Doon School and Cadet Jagjit Singh from the National Defence Academy. Of these, Valladares, Gurdial and I had been with General Williams on the Kamet expedition of the previous year.

The 1953 expedition was made possible only through the help received from General Williams, the Commandant of the Bengal Engineer Group, and the Director of Weapons and Equipment at Army Headquarters. I should like to acknowledge our indebtedness to them, and to thank them for all that they did for us.

The road-head at Pipalkoti was reached on May 20. We were disappointed to see this beautiful village in such a bad condition. We remembered it as a typical little village snuggling into the hillside at an altitude of 4,350 feet, with its clean cobbled main street and cosy huts with low roofs. The first tentacle of modern civilisation had reached it in the form of a motor-road, and had brought in its train the disorders of a new road-head. We found the fresh beauty and symmetry of this charming village spoilt by sheds, with their ugly corrugated iron-roofs, and crowded with pious humanity on its way to and from Badrinath.
Camp II. Circa 18,000 feet, on the East Ramet Glacier, looking towards Ramet and Abi Gamin.
Joshimath, where our route bifurcated from the main pilgrim path, is always a joy to reach. It is known for its salubrious climate, so typical at 6,000 odd feet, fruit orchards and a picturesque temple. Our first instalment of mail received here was very welcome, especially the large number of telegrams and letters wishing us luck. The next halt was at Tapoban, which, though only seven easy miles away, boasted a hot spring and this was cogent reason enough for our first halt.

**Bhotiya Encampments**

All along this trade route, we saw attractive little encampments of Bhotiya families on their seasonal summer migration to the higher villages of Niti, Bampa, Ghamsali in the Dhauli Ganga valley and Mana in the Alakananda valley. In winter they descend to their other homes around Chamoli. They lead a very interesting semi-nomadic life with two fixed homes, cultivating their land in both. They have to be sturdy people for this sort of life, and shrewdness comes to them as second nature through their trade with Tibet. Apart from this, they are a people of untold charm, gaiety and health. All in all, by most standards their way of life is enviable. Among them we met some of our previous year’s porters, whom we engaged on the spot.

On May 26, we got to Malari at a height of 9,910 feet. We looked forward to seeing again the stately and ancient deodars of this village, with its atmosphere of placid calm. The journey between Malari and Niti, like the previous year, gave us immense joy. This particular segment of the Dhauli valley is one of the most picturesque I have seen in Garhwal. Most of the high valleys, as one nears the Tibetan border, are bare, but this one held copious beds of *iris kumaonensis* and fragrant *sedum rhodiola*. Primulas showed themselves along moist rocks, and wildly flowering pink-and-white sweet-briar dotted the countryside. The whistling thrush, the restless plumbeous and white-capped red-starts, with the hill-cattle grazing on the luscious grass, completed a refreshing picture.

At Bampa, we collected our second instalment of mail and reported to the sub-inspector of police manning this last outpost of civil administration on the Niti trade route. He was most suspicious of Pinto’s antecedents, a situation the latter greatly added to in fun by his constant leg-pulling and by an assumed foreign accent. Eventually, after a written statement from me that he was nothing more or less than an Indian Army officer, we were allowed to proceed.

Soon Kesar Singh collared us. This year we were determined not to take him, as he had given us endless trouble in 1952 in matters of money. But the likeable scoundrel managed gradually to win us over and get
a place in our team of bhotiyas. We told ourselves that it was a just tribute to his effort in climbing Kamet with Smythe in 1931, and that we must employ him. At Niti we camped at exactly the same spot as the previous year.

On May 29, we climbed that 15,000-foot pass to have a look at Kamet and a grand-stand view of Mana, Dunagiri, Lambak, Ganesh Parbat and Trisul—the bigger Garhwal giants. Three of us, whose hunger for magnificence was still unsatisfied, climbed another peak 1200 feet higher and were rewarded by a glimpse, through the clouds, of the great Nanda Devi and her sentinels.

May 30 was a busy day for us. Sixteen yaks, jhobus (a cross between a yak and a hill cow) and Tibetan mules and 16 bhotiyas, who had been selected earlier, arrived. Twelve high-altitude porters, who were to be used above Camp III (20,500 feet), were issued with warm clothing, and the remaining four porters with clothing and equipment for work between the base camp and Camp III. On the way to Goting, one of the mules caused the expedition almost to end its aspirations prematurely by falling down a steep rocky cliff on to a narrow scree-chute. Though the mule recovered its balance, its load tumbled down the chute. Among the load were all the climbing necessaries—nylon ropes, crampons, pitons and the piton-hammer. However, we were lucky as a thousand feet below a bend in the chute diverted the bag containing the climbing equipment into a cleft between two rocks, barely a hundred feet above the raging torrent. This incident gave us quite a fright and brought home to us the lesson that all the eggs should not be carried in one basket. We found very much less snow than the year before and there was no snow-bridge at the spot where we had to cross the Dhauli river into the Raikana valley. It took more than four hours transporting the loads and men across an improvised rope-bridge.

ARRIVAL AT BASE CAMP

On May 31, we staggered into base camp, just as the sun was leaving it, extremely tired. From here we could see Kamet and its eastern precipice of 6,000 feet of sheer rock and ice. The north-eastern face, which we had to use for 2,200 feet before we could get to the summit ridge, was broken up by great icefalls. From the highest point reached the previous year to the summit ridge we saw a bare slope of steep and relentless ice glittering blue and challenging us.

June 1 was a rest day for the purpose of sorting out the loads required on the mountain. On June 2, while the porters were busy carrying loads in shifts to Camp I (16,300 feet), the novices were taken to some steep
slopes nearby to be taught step-cutting, belaying and other technicalities of mountaincraft. We worked out in detail a system of stocking juniper wood up to Camp III. The working out of porters’ food, adjustment of loads and arrangements for relays between the various camps provided a fine problem in logistics.

The main party left base camp for Camp I on June 3. Early that morning, Nawang Sherup, a self-styled priest among the Sherpas, made a stirring invocation to the Gods of the mountains, accompanied by the stage-effects of burning ghee and green juniper to produce scented smoke. He explained that the chief mountain God was enthroned on Kangchenjunga and the lesser ones on the other high mountains of the Himalayas. After hearing this, we hoped we would just need to lift our feet on the mountain and these benevolent Gods would do the rest. Gurdial and I stayed behind another day to write letters. Valladares, who had been to Camp III the previous years, developed symptoms of high-altitude sickness and also stayed back in the hope of improving. He stayed on the next day again as he was still not well enough to move up. Gurdial left at 10.30 a.m., while I waited an hour and a half more to finish off a few letters and a despatch to the ‘Statesman’ to be sent down with a mail-runner to the nearest post office in Bampa village, two days away.

The march to Camp I, as expected, was annoying. Huge ice-craters with which the lower east Kamet and Rajkana glaciers were completely honey-combed, were vying with outsized boulders as to which could be the more tiresome obstacle. Frank Smythe once appropriately said that glaciers had been created by God to humble presumptuous mountaineers. To complete the picture there was a relentless hot sun and the rocky terrain, only compensated by the glorious view of the Mana-Deoban group to the west and the striking profile of the stately pyramid of Ganesh Parbat on the Indo-Tibetan border to the north.

Camp I was pitched at 16,500 feet, as in the previous year, on the eft lateral moraine of the east Kamet glacier, and it was about 4.30 p.m. that I spied the Bengal Sapper flag flying from the top of a very prominent rock near the camp. I learnt later that one of the Sherpas, who had sprained his back a few days before could not carry any loads and was not likely to be well enough to do so for some days. This was disappointing, because, owing to the great demand for Sherpas on Everest, Manalsu, Nanga Parbat and K2, we had managed to get only two experienced Sherpas. The remaining four were completely raw, their only claim to mountaineering being that they came from “climbing families.” The injured Sherpa was sent down to the base camp to look
after Valladares and help in collecting juniper which was later to be transported to Camps I, II and III.

The next day (June 4) we all moved up to Camp II (18,300 feet), but the doctor and Gurdial remained behind. Gurdial’s stomach was misbehaving and so he had a day of rest. The doctor was to wait on till he had news from Valladares and, if he got worse to go down to the base camp. Food for nine porters for 20 days had been left at Camp I, which was to be the base for all the porters working below Camp III. From there, some were to collect firewood already stocked at base camp and others to take it in relays up to Camps II and III. Up to Camp I, it had been a dull march over drab grey moraine, but from there on to half a mile above Camp II, we moved in the valley of the east Kamet glacier. At first narrow crevasses and later large yawning ones, displaying invisible depths appeared. However, there was no danger of falling into them as they were all visible owing to the little snow on the glacier. Though we were 12 days earlier than the previous year there was very much less snow. This was to have a great effect on our progress beyond Camp III.

GLACIERS AND ICEFALLS

Instead of finding snow-slopes, we had to negotiate much more ice. The great rampart to the south of us carrying Mana (23,860 feet) and Deoban (22,890 feet) appeared a near-vertical wall. Hanging glaciers and ice-falls, which amazingly clung to Mana and Deoban owing to the great plasticity of ice in the Himalayas caused by the large range of daily temperatures were frequently disgorging avalanches of large boulders of ice. By the time they reached the glacier they were pulverized into powdered ice and covered the valley below with large cumulus-shaped clouds. In this trip we were assailed by glacier lassitude (as distinct from, or in addition to, altitude sickness) because of the great heat reflected from the ice and the enclosed air of the valley.

Camp II was established on a longitudinal ridge on the glacier about 200 feet above the previous year’s Camp. There was very little snow covering the ice and tent platforms were constructed on the ice itself. The porters, except one who was retained to help in the kitchen, were sent back to Camp I to bring up loads next day. That night we had quite a scare. Nima Tensing, our Sherpa Sirdar, who had complained of a sore throat at Camp I, suddenly cried out and appeared to choke. We all ran out to find him gasping for breath and asking for a paper and pencil to write his last ‘will and testament.’ Three of us carried him to his tent, where we had a look at his throat which was
very inflamed. We put him on glucose water, and early next morning sent a porter to Camp I with a note to the doctor, describing his symptoms and asking him to come up immediately. He arrived at about 2 p.m. and after examining Nima told us that he had narrowly escaped developing pneumonia. In any case, he was out of the running for the rest of the campaign, which meant that one of the two Sherpas with any experience had become 'hors de combat.' It was quite a blow, the full magnitude of which we realized with distress and frustration at Camp V.

The move to Camp III (20,500 feet) was carried out in two days. Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit and I moved up on June 7. Pinto and Bery were to follow the next day, while the doctor was to stay with Nima until he was out of danger. Tarlochan, who had started suffering from altitude sickness, was to go down if he did not improve; he was compelled to do so on June 9. This reduced our strength to six, but it had one redeeming feature in that there would now be a climber at base camp to look after Valladares who, we learnt later, had contracted pneumonia and was at times delirious.

The steep snow-slopes, on to which we branched off from the east Kamet glacier, and those just below the ice-gully leading to the glacier, on which Camp III was set up, were tiresome to traverse, as the snow in this area was very strangely surfaced. It had large ridges and eruptions standing erect like snow stalagmites on which steps had to be kicked. It was an altogether a fatiguing business. The day, which had been very fine, suddenly became cloudy, and, with a breeze springing up, it became very cold and depressing. Camp III was pitched at exactly the same spot as in the previous year, and all the porters and the two Sherpas were sent down to bring up more loads.

FOUR DAYS ACCLIMATISATION

We now entered a four days acclimatisation period at Camp III. It is most important, while acclimatising, that a certain amount of exercise is done to induce an appetite and to accustom the system to physical exertion under reduced oxygen. For this we chose a 21,000-foot peak near C. F. Meade's and Dr. A. M. Kellas' old camp site. These excursions made it apparent that we would be able to form only one summit group, consisting of Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit and myself. Pinto and Bery, who had come up on June 8, were suffering from altitude sickness and could not, for some time, go above Camp III. They gave us news of the other casualties. The doctor had developed an 'accidental tumor' and had to stay on in Camp II, and one of the Sherpas was affected by altitude sickness and could not carry loads up. This was
tragic: half of our Sherpas, whom we were intending to use mainly above Camp V, were out of the running even before we got to Camp III (20,500 feet).

On June 10, I took Pemba and the Garhwali porter, Balwant Singh, with me to fix ropes on the ice-gullies and chutes on the steep rocky face below Camp IV. In 1931, Smythe's party had taken four days to find "the one chink in the armour of this great giant." They had found, as we did the previous year, that this was the only possible route to the plateau on top of the spur which jutted out from the main massif. On the south was the extreme end of Kamet's great south-eastern 7,000-foot precipice, and on the north a steep ice-fall made formidable by towering seracs. The steepness of the slope was well over 55° and a slip or a fall was unthinkable. The three of us took it in turns to hammer pitons into the rock and ice and to fix ropes and cut steps, while the other two firmly belayed the worker. We left the ropes and crampons at the bottom of the 230-foot ice-slope, which culminates in the small plateau on which Camp IV was to be established, for use later during the three-hour gruelling work that would be required on the way to Camp IV. It was now 3.30 p.m. and we were on the east face of the spur. The sun had already left the slope, and the temperature had suddenly dropped to below freezing point. It was tantalizing to be in the cold while we could see the rest of the party basking in the sun on a flat rock at Camp I11, a thousand feet below us. As Camp I11 was situated in a cwm it was still getting the sun. We turned back and beat a hasty retreat to it. We saw many more of Symthe's ropes and pitons still embedded in ice since 1931. The pitons we made use of on our fixed ropes and later kept as souvenirs.

Next day (June 11), while we rested five porters and one Sherpa were sent to deposit loads at points below the final ice-slope to where we got the day before. We learnt later that on this day, while two porters were bringing up juniper wood from Camp II to Camp III, one of them slipped while negotiating the ice gully, but fortunately hurt himself only superficially. He was considerably shaken and was unfit to carry on to Camp III. The two of them spent the night there without a tent or extra clothing. They made a fire of the loads they carried and it kept alight throughout the night. The next day they made their way back to Camp II.

SUMMIT PARTY SEPARATED

The summit party which consisted of Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit and I, six Garhwali porters and two Sherpas separated from the rest on June 12th. We got to the foot of the ice-slope at 2 p.m. The plan was that
Pemba and I would put on crampons and drive in an ice-piton about the middle of the slope and let down a rope fixed to this. Two Garhwali porters, Balwant Singh and Mangal Singh, using this rope, would come up slowly without loads, cutting steps along the rope. In the meantime, we would have got to the top and lowered another rope which, when tied to the lower rope, would act as a hand-rail for the rest of the party.

I was leading on our rope, but found that the extreme steepness of ice necessitated the cutting of steps as well. The height was about 21,000 feet and it was extremely tiring. It was not possible to sit down on the slope, and to rest standing at one place soon became very painful. At the top, we made a firm holdfast of four ice-axes, with their shafts driven in the snow, and let down a rope. The sun had left the slope and the cold was agonising and, to top all, a breeze sprang up. It was impossible to remain sitting; we had to keep pacing up and down the snow plateau on which Camp IV (22,000 feet) was to be placed, slapping our arms and backs in an effort to keep warm. We were however much better off than the party below, who could not walk about and were being showered with ice-splinters from the slope. It must have been torture to sit for three hours waiting for the route to be made safe for everyone to move up.

After Balwant Singh and Mangal Singh had hacked steps to the top, they were sent down again along with Pemba. This had to be done because the lower steps had got clogged with ice falling from above and had to be scooped out again before laden porters could come up. It was dark by the time everybody arrived, and the three tents were hurriedly pitched. The four of us huddled into one, while the porters took the remaining two. There was no question of any tea or dinner; we were all so tired and cold that we could only think of warmth and sleep which came but fitfully.

The next day (June 13) was a day of rest, while the porters made short trips to bring up the remaining loads from the bottom of the ice-slope. On June 14, we left for Camp V. Between Camps IV and V, we noticed a great change in the topography. The previous year there had been snow-slopes heavily crevassed and broken up with huge ice-cliffs, but this year there was no superficial snow and, except for the gradual slopes just above Camp IV, the rest were slopes of ice on which laborious steps had to be cut and, at one place, a bergchrund tackled. Considering this, it appeared unlikely that we would be able to pitch Camp V the same day above 23,300 feet, as we had intended to do. We left some loads at Camp IV to be brought up later, so that the porters would be more lightly laden, and we spurred them on with all the persuasive powers we
could summon. At 6 p.m. one of the porters, without any warning, jettisoned his load and made off towards Camp IV. As he was obviously very tired, we could not allow him go down alone, for lone travel in the Himalayas invariably ends in disaster. So we got Nima Sunda, our fifth Sherpa casualty, suffering from altitude sickness, to drop his load and go back with him. There was a strong north-easterly wind blowing, which picked up the snow from below Meade's Col and deposited it on us. We were all very exhausted and found facing the snow-laden wind a tremendous effort. With great difficulty we moved up another 150 yards, which gave us an increase in height of 80 feet. We were not dissatisfied with the day's work, as even under changed conditions, the camp was 100 feet higher than the previous year's Camp V.

ATTEMPT FROM CAMP V

For the first time in 27 days (June 15) we did not wake to a clear sky. There was thin cloud haze over us, but south-east in the distance ominous and dark, 'alto-cumulus lenticulata' clouds were skirting Nanda Devi and other peaks of the Great Himalayan range. All the porters and the only Sherpa were complaining of splitting headaches. It was decided that, under these conditions, it would be impossible to form a strong enough group to climb the 2,247 feet to the summit in one day, and so a bivouac camp at about 24,000 feet would have to be established, where two or three climbers could spend the night and then make the attempt. However, the porters had reached their limit at 23,200 feet and could not carry any more. If the climbers carried the tent and food, in addition to their personal clothing and equipment required to set up this bivouac it would mean that they would be completely exhausted before the attempt. There was, therefore, no alternative but to make a bid from Camp V at 23,000 feet and, after great coaxing, we persuaded Pemba and two porters to accompany Nardip and myself. We left at 9 a.m. and had hardly been out half an hour when a snow-storm started and this confined us to our tents for the rest of the day. This was the only day of really bad weather we had on the mountain, and it was just our ill-luck that it was so on this critical day.

June 16 dawned fine. The sky looked deep azure, as only a mountain sky framing copious snow peaks can look. Mana, with wind-rippled snow-fields in the foreground, became the centre of photographic attention. A yellow-billed chough was noticed here conspicuous in its striking contrast to the whiteness of the snow. It had obviously followed us up like the albatross in the 'Ancient Mariner', but fortunately without the same consequences. The mornings at Camp V did not start off, as one
Kamet Team on Abi Gamin

normally expects, with a steaming mug of tea pushed into the tent accompanied by a pleasing and full-throated "Good Morning, Sir." Instead, it became routine for me to slip on my boots and make a tour of the porters’ tents. I was invariably greeted by melancholy groans emanating from the tents and, on looking inside, I used to find the porters looking the picture of misery, holding their heads and swaying from side to side in agony. If it was not so tragic and heart-breaking, the situation would have been most amusing.

However, we managed to persuade Pemba and the two porters to accompany Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit and myself. We were able to set off at 8 a.m. and reached Smythe’s Camp V site at 8.30. At this point Jagjit said he was unable to carry on and would go back. He had done extremely well for one so young and for him to have come up to this height was really a stout effort. Balwant Singh too began to moan about his weakness and misery and was also allowed to go back. Our strength was now reduced to three climbers, of whom Nardip was a novice, one Sherpa and a porter, whose determination was somewhat undermined by altitude sickness and who might down tools at any moment.

**ALTERNATIVE TARGET**

At ‘a council of war’ it was regretfully decided that Kamet would have to be given up and, instead, an attempt made on the 24,130-foot Abi Gamin. From the snowfield below Meade’s Col we could see the peak clearly and also the three buttresses running vertically to the summit ridge. The two right buttresses so were each capped by lower snow peaks. The approach to the ridge appeared easier from a snow-gully on the right of the extreme right ridge buttress so we decided to go to the ridge by this route, and then traverse along the route north-west towards Abi Gamin. We got to the ridge about 1 p.m. after casting frustrated looks at Kamet over our shoulders. The Garhwali porter we had taken with us could go no further, and asked if he might go back. The four of us carried along the ridge and, as it was corniced on the north-east at places, we had to traverse across the slope. At about 3 p.m. Pemba also gave up and lay on the rock to await our return. From just below the extreme-right rocky buttress we could see the Abi Gamin peak, which appeared not more than 100 feet above us. We were elated and thought we had the peak in our pockets. When we got to the top of the rocky buttress, we found that there were two ice-couloirs between us and the final summit ridge. These, we estimated, would required two hours of solid work, which would mean that we could not be back at
the camp till after dark and in our tired condition this appeared an unjustifiable risk to take. However, from here I saw that there was a possible route up the extreme-left rocky buttress which would take one to just below the main peak. We decided to return, but I had made up my mind that a further attempt would be made next day via the extreme-left buttress. On getting back to camp, we found that a Garhwali porter had arrived with some provisions, and, being fresher than those at Camp V, I thought he would possibly be fit for an attempt on Abi Gamin next day.

On the morning of June 17, Pemba, Puran Singh and I left camp at 8 a.m. for Abi Gamin. Gurdial and Jagjit, with one porter, went down to Camp III at 8.30. Though this was the fifth day at above 22,000 feet and everybody was desperately tired, I asked Nardip to stay with the remaining porters, and to make an effort to move the camp towards Abi Gamin as far up the snow-field as possible in the afternoon if he found that we were facing difficulties on the mountain or might be late in getting back. However, the route up the extreme-left buttress, though much steeper, was shorter. Though some time was spent in tackling the bergchrund, the sound rock on the Abi Gamin massif made climbing easy. We did not find rock in the whole area that made climbing so much of a delight as here. On heaving ourselves up over a steep rocky slab, we were surprised by the final snow slope to the summit. We came on to it much earlier than we had expected. This was 2.30 p.m. and in 10 minutes we had traversed diagonally on to the summit.

**A BROAD FLAT PEAK**

The summit was again a surprise, as the profile we had viewed the day earlier had given no indication of it being a broad flat peak. This plateau summit was approximately 50 yards long by about 20 yards wide. Clouds were extremely low but at times in between, I got a hurried view of the Raikana glacier to the east and Balbala and the Mana pass to the north-west. The plains of Tibet were completely covered with clouds, but the purple plateau was visible occasionally. The vast panorama of mountains all round must have been magnificent, but this sight was denied to us and we could not linger on because the clouds had begun to envelop us. We stayed there till 3.20 p.m., and got back to Camp V, early. Those at Camp V had seen our ascent and saw us returning early, and so Nardip decided not to move the camp up. When I got back, I found some most welcome mail and got the news of the ascent of Everest. It appeared to me a very appropriate place and day on which to hear of this great achievement. I was particularly glad at
the success of Tenzing, with whom I had climbed twice; I felt he was the most deserving Sherpa for this honour.

The next day (June 18) we evacuated Camps V and IV. Pinto and Bery had left Camp III on June 16; of their own accord they had stayed on in Camp III for nine days, even though height-affected, as they realized they would be a greater help controlling porters and supplies to the higher camps. We got to the base camp on June 20 and were pleased to find Valladares and Trilochan well. It was a cheerful reunion, and that night we sat round the camp fire and discussed the happenings of the past 19 days over drinks which Valladares had thoughtfully stored for the occasion. The talk became nostalgic, and wistfully we began to think of certain comforts of civilized life—more relished through their recollections than in their eventual realisation.

After an exhausting 20 days on the east Kamet glacier and the Kamet-Abi Gamin massif we started down from our base camp on June 21 to the bhotiya village of Ghamsali. Here we rested for two days and were entertained royally by the locals.

On June 24 we left the trade route and went up west along the Amrit Ganga, through a valley as beautiful as its name. Nardip, who was suffering acute pain from frost-bitten feet, was to take the equipment not required by us and make his way as fast as he could to Delhi. Jagjit, who was suffering to a lesser degree from the same ailment, decided to come with us. We spent that night near a shepherd encampment at Remkhin, and then traversed along the Bank Kund glacier to our next camp at about 14,000 feet, below the Bhyunder Khal (16,700 feet) and the 20,230-foot Rataban mountain, which showed a near-vertical face to us.

NILGIRI PARBAT TACKLED

At a meeting we discussed the possibility of climbing Nilgiri Parbat (21,240 feet) from its south-east ridge leading off from the Bhyunder Khal pass. Disappointed over our failure on Kamet, and exhilarated by our success on Abi Gamin, we decided that an attempt would be worthwhile. Gurdial and I, with three Sherpas and a local porter, were to leave the rest of the party on the pass and camp at some suitable spot on the ridge. From there it was an estimated three days to the summit and back.

On June 27, we woke to a very cloudy day. It had been raining off and on for the past two or three days, but we hoped the monsoon had not yet set in. We climbed over the icy snout of the glacier on to the snow field below the pass, and soon found ourselves enshrouded in
heavy mist and a thin drizzle. There was a strong down-valley wind which blew straight into our faces while we plodded uphill towards the pass. As the slope eased, we felt we were near the pass, but visibility was reduced to about 50 yards.

The party was split into two, one to remain at the spot reached and the other to attempt locating the pass. This did not prove successful and we all sat and waited for the mist to lift. We were very tired and extremely cold, and our toes, which had been affected on Abi Gamin, were causing incessant pain. We countered the cold by slapping our own and each other's bodies and walking about, but the movement of our toes in the boots only aggravated the pain. As the porters arrived, we made our way towards the pass, only 16,700 feet, but the mist and the breeze made it definitely one of the coldest days of the expedition. The pass was reached at 12.30 p.m., but the mist did not lift. The south-east ridge of Nilgiri Parbat, from which we intended to approach the mountain, was hidden, giving no indication as to whether it would take tents or not.

The monsoon was on us, and so we regretfully decided to abandon the Nilgiri Parbat attempt and go down the valley with the others for four days of delightful rest. Below the snow-line, congregations of *primula macrophylla*, with sweet-smelling *sedum rhodiola* splattered here and there, heralded greater delights for us in the Valley of Flowers. The sight and smell of these, the luscious grass, the noisy flight of the monal pheasant disturbed from its rocky perch, all combined to make us forget the annoyance of trying mornings. Once we had decided not to tackle Nilgiri Parbat, we felt as if some sort of fetters had fallen off us—an indication that we were tired, in body and mind, of these higher altitudes and the discomforts they bring. It was good to feel that for the next few days we would be lolling in surroundings as akin to the 'Garden of Eden' as one could obtain in this world. We had left the barren territory of Shiva, the "Destroyer", behind us and were now entering the Elysian and beautiful domain of Vishnu, the "Creator". Camp was pitched that night in a steady drizzle. We had got soaked during the afternoon, but the thought of the morrows made us rush down the valley, hopping buoyantly from boulder to boulder over the lateral moraine of the Lari Bank glacier, with music in our movements, in our hearts and on our lips.

**ALPINE PASTORALE**

On June 28, we reached Bhamnidaur and camped at about 12,000 feet beside a stream on a meadow thick with flowers in full bloom.
This is the place where visitors to the Valley of Flowers should camp, rather than at the less interesting Shepherd's Hut three miles lower down. Here we met shepherds, who come up every season with their flocks of sheep, who were to provide us with meat and milk during our stay. It provided a perfect picture of Alpine pastorale, some thing the poet dreams and writes of, the artist images and paints but only the mountaineer lives through. In and around this valley snow-covered peaks, rocky crags, luxuriant grasslands, myriads of flowers in a variety of colours, stately firs and pines on the fringe of the tree-line, the shy thar and agile burrhal, all merged harmoniously into a glorious concord.

The next few days were spent by the party going out in little groups up the hill-side for photography, for an early morning view of Rataban and Hathi and Ghori Parbats, for exploring little nooks and crannies of the valley in search of flowers and for a three-mile trip down to the valley to Hemkhund, a lake at 14,500 feet and a shrine for Sikhs, or lazing in camp. The flowers we saw and photographed were of over 50 different varieties, which included the abundant anemone polyanthes, the fragile meconopsis acultata (the blue poppy), the delicately fragrant primula denticulata and the gorgeously-coloured potentillas. My search was complete only when I discovered the shy lloydia tibetica, with its drooping head and chestnut centre.

On July 1, we left for a short trip to Badrinath before coming down to the plains at the end of a very successful, well-balanced and exciting holiday with the best companions one could hope to have.
CHAPTER VII

ATOP KAMET AT LONG LAST

By Major N. D. Jayal

In 1955, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and the Bengal Sappers jointly sponsored an expedition to Kamet (25,447 feet) as an advanced course of the Institute.

The H.M.I. was interested in a venture of this type for four main reasons. First, that basic training at the Institute must be followed up by advanced training for the most promising graduates of the course. Secondly, the ascent of a big mountain by an Indian group would offer a sense of achievement and provide a stimulus to mountaineering in India. Thirdly, it would give exercise to the instructional staff of the Institute, thus providing a fresh approach away from the stagnation of routine and lastly, an expedition-cum-course fits in with the Institute's plan of encouraging mountaineering in India, affording help to well-established and active mountaineering clubs.

The expedition to Kamet consisted of ten members. Two were nominees of the Bengal Sappers Mountaineering Club, Gurdial Singh of the Doon School and Lieutenant R. K. Agarwal. Two were students of the H.M.I., Captain J. D. Dias and Captain R. K. Malhotra. Six members came from the instructional staff of the Institute, five Sherpas and myself. The Sherpas were very experienced climbers who had been on the Annapurna and Everest expeditions: Sirdar Ang Tharkey, Sirdar Gyalzen Mikchen, Da Namgyal, Ang Temba III and Nawang Topke.

A PERCEPTIBLE AWAKENING

At Gulabkoti, on June 12, the expedition led by me enjoyed the hospitality of a party of cadets and officers from the Military Wing of the National Defence Academy. The climbers found a growing and perceptible awakening among Indians of the lure of the mountains. The expedition left the pilgrim route at Joshimath on June 13, with their mule train carrying a ton and a half of equipment and food. They followed the now familiar path up the Dhauli Ganga valley, and planned to make a short march to the hot springs at Tapoban for the last thorough cleansing for a month.
From Joshimath to Tapoban was a very pleasant and easy march. The next halt was at the junction of the Tolma Gad and the Dhauli Ganga, the delightful alp of Suraithota (7,090 feet). Jumagwar, the following halt, had little to recommend it except that the second half of the journey to Malari (9,910 feet) afforded a pleasant welcome to higher regions. The large terraced fields, well-planned drains and stately deodars give Malari, a rather big village, an atmosphere of thrift and beauty and of hard work and happiness. The women of Malari, among other chores, weave patthu on handlooms, a thick coarse cloth like tweed.

The march to Bampa, beyond the village of Kurkuti, was one of the pleasantest in the high Himalayas in contrast to the preceding marches over rather barren country. The expedition established itself at Temarsam (11,120 feet), the camping ground near Niti for traders from Tibet. On June 19, Gyalzen and Temba left to supervise the stocking of the base camp with firewood, while four members climbed to a 15,000-foot col for a grandstand view of Kamet and its satellites.

A rope bridge was constructed across the Dhauli Ganga above Gothing to ferry the expedition’s loads. The party left the trade route here for the junction of the Raikhana and east Kamet glaciers, where the base camp was established at 14,950 feet. The following day, while the porters stocked Camp I, the rest of the party sorted out food and marked containers for the higher camps. Up to Camp I was all that could be expected from travel over the terminal and lateral moraine of a great glacier. The boulder hopping and continual sinking and climbing from the lip of an ice-crater to its basin, the hot sun and breezeless day, dampened enthusiasm although the party had at last come to grips with the outer defence of Kamet.

On June 23, the party moved up to Camp II (18,200 feet). Because of shortage of porters and the desire not to lose a single day, the entire party carried considerable loads on a gruelling march. At Camp II five porters were sent back to relay loads between Camps I and II. The remainder of the party and nine porters left on June 24 for Camp III at 20,500 feet, which was set up as an advanced base camp.

**PLAN FOR THE SUMMIT**

At their own instance, four Sherpa instructors led by Ang Tharkey carried loads near Camp IV so that the first summit group, planned for June 25, could move off with greater speed. The idea was that the first group should move off on June 25 to make Camp IV, Camp V and the summit in a determined push on three consecutive days unless hampered
by bad weather. Had the plan been successful, it would have meant that the first group would have reached the summit 18 days after leaving Roorkee, with only two days resting and with no period set aside for acclimatization—a record in mountaineering. It was planned, also that the second summit group should move off on June 27, making its way up in conventional fashion, completely self-sufficient and independent, with its progress dictated by the fitness of the climbers.

Considering all the routes possible, it was decided that the group should go on to the south-east ridge just below the granite rocks some 300 feet below the summit. Dusk soon fell on this very steep ridge with a 7,000-foot drop to east Kamet. At this point, I estimated the distance to the true summit of Kamet vertically to be about 60 feet and horizontally nearly 150 feet. It was then about 7 p.m., darkness was fast closing in and the temperature was dropping rapidly. The party had been over 12 hours on the move. The temptation to climb the summit so nearby was almost irresistible, but it would have been foolish to risk life and limb on a gamble like that of Annapurna. The party gave up the attempt to reach the summit because of failing light, and wisely started on the long descent back to the tents pitched at 23,000 feet.

The next morning, considering all factors and looking at the weather, I decided that the group should go down to Camp III. On the way, the party met Gurdial, Dias and Gyalzen en route to attempt Abi Gamin. Plans were recast and the whole group moved down for a few days’ rest at Camp III. Despite the altitude, over 20,000 feet, the first summit group recovered splendidly and promptly made plans to attempt Kamet again.

On July 3, some of us climbed to a nearby 20,700-foot ridge overlooking the east Kamet glacier for exercise. On it, to our surprise, we found three flowering plants growing on loose micaceous sandstones; these were collected. Two of them are probably crucifers and the other leonopoditums. They have been handed over to the herbarium at the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun. It is thought that these are the highest growing plants ever collected.

By the same afternoon, all loads for the second and final attempt had been adjusted, and the six chosen porters had arrived in camp after their rest at lower altitudes. We were quite a large party, consisting of Dias, Gurdial Singh, Agarwal, Ang Tharkey, Da Namgyal, Ang Temba, two Sherpa porters and six local porters. At 2-30 p.m. we reached the old Camp IV site, where some loads had been left behind from our earlier expedition of 1953. These were split up amongst us all and we
CAMP IV CIRCA 22,000 FEET, ON KAMET, LOOKING EASTWARD
carried on for another hour to camp a bit lower than the first expedition's Camp IV. This place was a little over 22,000 feet.

A GOOD AUGURY

That evening devotional songs poured out of the porter tents, which was a good augury. Outside, there was a glorious sunset, lighting up only the tips of the Mana and Nanda Devi peaks with a warm orange glow; the moon was out at the same time and it was full. We were all in good form and an atmosphere of peace prevailed. Such a combination is quite rare, this masterpiece of Nature at its mellowest and prettiest, with the unrehearsed foreground of human joy and thanksgiving portrayed by the porter songs. It recalled to my mind the shepherds rejoicing in Beethoven's "Pastoral" symphony.

Next morning (July 4) we made an early start. We had fitted a few of the porters with crampons as well and divided the party up in ropes so that the cramponed and non-cramponed were intermingled. This meant that we would not have to cut large steps or "ladders" on the icefalls above Camp IV.

The first summit team's Camp V was reached at 1 p.m. Here the dried fruit and some more tinned food which we had left behind was also re-distributed and we plodded on. Very soon we topped the crest and came on to the big ice-plateau south of Meade's Col. All of us began to feel the height, and progress became very slow. During the long halt on the plateau we discussed the siting of our Camp V. This would depend upon whether we were going to make the assault from the face as we had done previously or the north ridge. I decided that it would be the north ridge. For one thing we met appalling snow conditions on the face on all the previous occasions and the last 300 feet before one got on the summit ridge were terrifyingly steep. The ridge, on the other hand, though more windy—we could see snow devils being blown up off it all the time—offered possibilities of better snow conditions, though of more ice. The sun stayed on the ridge for over an hour longer than on the face and there was no danger from avalanches.

The most compelling reason, however, was the fact that it was a new and unknown route. The site chosen, we went about making a camp for what we hoped to be only for two night's stay. Everything for the attempt on the peak was made ready the same evening, as the time for departure was fixed for half past four the next morning.

Half past four on July 6 arrived accompanied by a howling and chilling wind. We put on our clothing inside the tents and slid on our boots which we had kept inside our sleeping bags to prevent them freezing.
Fortunately, our prayers had been answered and, though it was a windy and bitterly cold morning, the sky was clear.

Seven of us started off—Dias, Gurdial, Tharkey, Namgyal, Temba, Lhakpa Dorje, a 19-year-old Sherpa who was very keen to come, and myself. Two of the local Garhwali porters, who had said the evening before that they wanted to come, would not stir out of their tents. We went across the plateau for about ten minutes before we came out on to the slope which would take us on to a shoulder on the north ridge about 400 feet higher up. Here we caught the sun and the wind died down a little. We sunned ourselves, felt life returning into our limbs, and got organized into two ropes. One rope was Tharkey, Namgyal, Temba and I, and the second Gurdial, Dias and Lhakpa. It was here that I realized that, during a switch-over of rucksacks at the camp, my goggles had been left behind. As we were the leading rope, my going back for the glasses would have meant some delay, and this was what we desperately wanted to avoid. It was then that Dias very nobly offered his own glasses, saying that it was very important that at least one rope got to the top. I took the glasses, knowing that Dias could go back for another pair and come up slowly behind. As we were making the tracks, I felt that they could catch us up easily. Lhakpa was then included in our rope and we left Gurdial with instructions that he and Dias should definitely follow up.

The slope got very much steeper as we reached the ridge. Getting on to the ridge, we had our first halt. I looked down hoping to see Gurdial and Dias following. I saw Dias return from the camp, have a discussion with Gurdial and then both turn back towards the camp.

From Camp V it had looked that the ridge would ease off a bit, but actually it got steeper. This was at about 10 a.m., and at 11-30 we got on to a little knoll from where the summit looked an easy ten minutes. I put Lhakpa in front as I wanted him to be the first to step on the summit in tribute to his youth, to the Sherpas and to the prospect of numerous mountaineering years and many more peaks ahead of him.

RETURN OF CONFIDENCE

However, when we got on to this peak we found that it was a false crest; but of this there was no doubt that we were on the summit ridge and on the first of the three bumps one sees on the top from lower heights. Confidence returned—confidence we had been afraid to show earlier for fear of Nemesis—and we knew it was only a matter of time and the summit would be ours. We saw another summit about 30 feet above us and when we got on to it there was nothing higher. Forty feet away,
slightly lower, was another hump. This I recollected must have been what Frank Smythe thought was the summit when they came up along the same ridge from the opposite direction, and then later had to come on to where we were now standing. There was some wind but the sky was still clear. We attached the three flags with us, the Indian, the proposed flag of the Mountaineering Institute and the Bengal Sappers; and took a few photographs in black-and-white and colour and with a cine-camera.

The view around us was magnificent. It was exhilarating to look down on everything with in sight, and to see as far as the eye was able without any obstruction. The long knife-like ridge of Mana (23,360 feet) stretched out from almost under our feet with the black rock massif of Nanda Devi (25,645 feet) as a backdrop. Slightly right of that was the west Kamet glacier with its jade-green pools stretching out towards Badrinath. The immense Chaukhamba group was very prominent in the distance above a sea of clouds. Looking further round, Mukut Parbat presented an exciting spectacle with an intricate pattern of hanging glaciers clothing its flanks. Further right was the biggest glacier I have ever seen stretching out into Tibet. Beyond that and coming round in a wide arc, behind Abi Gamin, stretched the purple plain of Tibet with Kailas Parbat showing indistinctly in the distance. Then there was the east Kamet glacier up which we had come.

Three Times Rebuffed

On reaching the summit I had no overwhelming feeling of exultation as I had imagined; that would come later. Three times I had been rebuffed at the portals of this snowy fortress and at last Kamet had yielded. The struggle on occasions had been almost beyond physical endurance and had, at times, strained the mind alarmingly. I recalled the occasion when I gave up a previous attempt after getting hallucinations half way up its final face. It was now all over and possibly the finality of it was the reason for the void in my feelings. To me it had assumed a very personal and symbolic aspect of attempting to assure myself of my own youth, intrepidity and perseverance. It was almost with regret that I realized that we would rush down its slopes for the last time. It had been a hard fight which to me had proved more exciting and ennobling than the ascent itself.

At 12-20 p.m. we reached the summit and at 12-50 we left it. We had to be very careful in the descent as, apart from our fatigue, the snow had started spoiling in the sun and it was no longer firm and stable. From some way down we saw the other party heading towards Abi Gamin. It was a rather sadistic pleasure we derived from the thought
that we were descending while they were toiling up. When we saw them against a snow-slope, we made out that there were five of them; Dias and Gurdial must have persuaded three of the fitter Garhwali porters to accompany them. At 2-30 we got into the camp and saw the Abi Gamin party reach their objective. We had had a 10-hour day and were suffering from considerable fatigue, emotional and physical. It was not like a normal home-coming after an ascent; there was no one to greet us with hot tea or help us remove our crampons.

Two hours later, the Abi Gamin party came in, but we were in no condition to offer them the welcome we were denied. Gurdial and Dias crawled into my tent and, after mutual congratulations, we all got into our sleeping bags. Nobody thought of food or fluid till the next morning (July 7) when Ang Tharkey and Da Namgyal whipped up some very welcome tea.

The short spell of fine weather had ended, and we left Camp V in a blizzard. Dias, Pasang and I went ahead on one rope. At our first halt, we learnt that two of the Garhwali porters were practically non compos mentis, had thrown their loads down and were, with difficulty, being brought down. Four of us got on a rope to go back and investigate. A little way up, we met them coming down and we found their condition was due to dehydration. Though we had given the porters meta-fuel stoves, they were too sick to boil water in our absence. We brought them both down with great difficulty.

Between Camps I and II, Malhotra had to be fished out of a crevasse. He had been coming up from base camp with one porter and, fortunately for him, we arrived shortly after his fall. Apart from a nasty cut on an eye-brow, a broken nose and shock, he got off lightly. At Camp I, Agarwal, who had been complaining of numb-swollen feet, found he could not walk and had to be carried down. Apart from these and Jodh Singh (a Garhwali porter), who had frost-bitten fingers, and whom we brought with us for hospitalization, we had no mishaps.

TWO UNIQUE FEATURES

There had been one or two unique features of the year's achievement. Never before had the same party on such a high mountain made a second attempt on the same peak within a week; two parties of the same expedition climbed two peaks on the same day, and, for the first time, four Sherpas of an expedition climbed a high peak. It was also very creditable of Agarwal, a complete novice, to climb to 23,400 feet, though novices on our earlier expeditions had climbed higher.
SCARCELY had Roy Greenwood and I returned from the trip to Bandar-Punch in 1950 than we started making plans for the following summer. Inspired by the epic tales of exploratory mountaineering, as told in the accounts of F. S. Smythe, E. E. Shipton and H. W. Tilman, suggestions for various high-altitude treks in Garhwal were mooted, rejected, only to be resuscitated, until Trisul (23,360 feet) appeared on the scene. From then on all other plans, quite suddenly, receded into the background and Trisul loomed larger and larger in our thoughts.

The die was cast with the arrival of Tom Longstaff’s ‘This My Voyage’ in the world of books. Nothing could have been better timed. I do not suppose I stopped poring over it until I knew the modest, exciting, almost lyrical, narrative of his amazing climb by heart. From a camp at about 17,500 feet, Longstaff, the brothers, Alexis and Henri Brocherel, two guides from the Italian Alps, and Karbir, a Gurkha soldier, had reached the top of Trisul in 1907. Nearly 6,000 feet had been done in a day: a tour de force which would have been impossible under adverse conditions of snow or weather. Fortune had smiled on them. Well, perhaps, we too would be privileged to follow in their footsteps—or at least so we hoped.

Greenwood, though my companion in the plot, left the task of forming a party and the labour of organisation both to me. The former was readily accomplished. Two old boys of the Doon School, Surendra Lal and Nalni Jayal, who had long desired an introduction to the high hills, were invited to join the party. Their acceptance meant that, whatever the fate of Trisul might be, we, kindred spirits all, could at least be sure of the lasting satisfaction of congenial company shared and enjoyed in a mountain venture. The average age of the party was 25 and all of us were not yet certified climbers; but, being fully aware of our limitations and deficiencies, we vowed not to tempt Providence.

MODEST ORGANISATION

The organisation was as modest and simple as possible, for no other reason than that none of us was a person of affluent means—least of
all the schoolmaster in the party. The Mount Everest Foundation, a pillar of great support to many an expedition, was not then born and our expedition was born too soon. However, the Himalayan Club and, through the sponsorship of General Williams, the Quarter-Master-General's Branch of the Army Headquarters loaned us some valuable equipment. Messrs. Welcome and Burroughs were quite liberal, at least about sulphaguanadine, which was supplied in such large quantity that we appeared adequately equipped to treat all the pilgrims who might suffer from dysentery on the route to Badrinath.

One luxury, however, we did not forego and that was of employing three Sherpas; the Garhwali porters had not yet got their ‘ticket.’ Having travelled with Sherpas before and entertaining some doubts as to our capacity to carry out the venture, I knew our success would depend a good deal on their knowledge of mountaincraft. I conducted negotiations direct with Tenzing Norgay, hoping he would be able to come himself. But this was not to be; the French Nanda Devi expedition had appropriated him at the last moment. Instead, he sent the reliable Gyalgen Myckje, as Sirdar, and Dawa Thondup, a ‘Tiger’ of high merit, whose record was so impressive that it would, probably even today, be the envy of the entire community of climbers in the world. A veteran of many pre-war expeditions, notably to Everest and Nanga Parbat, he had, at the age of 43, climbed Abi Gamin (24,130 feet) in 1950 with the Anglo-Swiss expedition. Our third Sherpa, Lhakpa Tsering, had no big climbs to his credit; yet he was not only at home on rock and snow but a willing hand at any time.

On the appointed day our party of seven members assembled at the Doon School—the trysting place of several expeditions before and since. The headmaster, himself a firm believer in the educative value of hill-training, permitted me to begin the summer holidays three days before the term was scheduled to end to enable us to outwit the monsoon.

On June 7, 1951, we left for Kotdwara, the railhead; thence two days’ journey by bus, first across the foothills and then along the Alakananda, brought us to Chamoli. Three days later we reached the last human habitation, the village of Lata, at 7,600 feet. Here we reorganised our baggage into porter loads of 56 lbs. each and made the acquaintance of a Bhotiya of Bampa village, Kesar Singh, who, to everyone’s delight, volunteered to accompany us and to take upon himself the task of finding 15 porters.

Kesar Singh was thrilled to learn that his fellow countrymen were proposing to make a bid for Trisul, which he had himself scaled in company with Peter Oliver in 1933—two years after his historic climb
on Kamet (25,447 feet) with Smythe's expedition. The spirit of adventure rekindled in him as he sat in the courtyard of the village dharamsala regaling us, in an exuberant manner, with accounts of his climbs in the thirties. Little did I then know that I would see a lot more of him, as I did on the three expeditions to Kamet. On our first attempt in 1952, this extra-ordinary man reached Meade's Col, though he was on the far side of 50. 'Theatrical, keen and determined', as Oliver described him, he certainly was; also perhaps a notorious scrounger—but, all in all, a most lovable character. Therefore, it was with great sorrow that I learnt of his passing away in 1957.

A GLORIOUS VISION

'Flies during the day and midges at night'—this laconic comment in my diary sums up our feelings towards this settlement in Garhwal. So, it was with great relief that we set off for Lata Kharak, a delectable flower-covered grazing ground on a wind-swept ridge above the upper limit of birch trees. The exhausting climb of 5,000 feet was soon forgotten when we breathed the pure, balmy and invigorating mountain air and saw the glorious vision of the rugged spires across the Dhauli-Ganga and the snowy peaks of Ronti, (19,895 feet) Nalida Ghunti (20,710 feet) and Bethartoli Himal (20,840 feet) across the Rishiganga.

After a day's rest, we headed towards the Lata-Tolma ridge in mist. The weather steadily worsened, and it was in disconcerting sleet that we crossed the rather sensational 14,700-foot pass leading to the Dharansi glen. We staggered and slithered over wet rocks and snow-filled gullies, doubting our sanity in choosing this mode of spending a holiday. But, gradually, conditions began to improve; the mist lifted to reveal not only the Rishi gorge, which was now several thousand feet below us, but also the broad alp of Dharansi, which lay spread out in front of us. Though chastened in spirit, we purred with delight once again. Nalni had the unnerving experience that day of altitude sickness, no doubt aggravated by the effects of cold for he had improvidently been wearing his tennis shoes all along.

The next morning saw us on the 'curtain' ridge, so called because it screens the middle and upper parts of the Rishiganga valley. From here we sighted Dibrugheta, 'a fragment of Arcady dropped amid chaos', in Longstaff's apt words. We quickly descended to this alp and soon our eyes were luxuriating on the rich fare provided by its lloydias, fritillaries, anemones, cypripediums and potentillas. We camped beside a stream and, on the opposite bank, beneath a clump of willow trees, saw the resplendent tents of the rearguard of the French Nanda Devi
expedition. It was a happy party which got together that evening to celebrate this chance meeting of mountain-lovers.

Next day dawned fine and we had our first view of the heavenly Nanda Devi (25,645 feet) when we emerged from the fir forest overlooking Dibrugheta. Along a craggy hillside, which was cut by deep gullies, lay our route. There was no track of any sort, and those of us who lacked instinct for the right way got lost for some hours. We dropped down to Deodi, 10,800 feet, to camp under birch trees about 200 feet above the Rishi. The site showed signs of recent occupation, and a placard attached to a tree indicated the direction of a bridge: a thoughtful act on the part of a French climber, Robert Walter of Pondicherry, who too was heading towards Trisul. We felled another tree to ensure safe crossing over the rough bridge.

As we were striking camp the next morning, I saw Greenwood boldly scrawl the words 'Trisul 6 Days' on a massive strip of birch bark, which he installed next to the site of the bridge. The time-table had till then run so smoothly that our optimism was becoming almost unbridled. The ascent of the next 2,000 feet was completed through a tangled mass of rhododendrons. Nothing had tried my temper so sorely before. Heading south, we entered the catchment basin of the Trisul nalla and pitched camp in a trough near the snout of the Bethartoli glacier.

BASE CAMP ESTABLISHED

Wearily we crossed the glacier next morning. Nalni and Surendra, in particular, made heavy weather of the trudge on the moraines; they lost touch with the rest of party in that chaotic wilderness of rocks and caused us great anxiety for a long period. Following a barrhal track on the divide of the left-bank moraine of the Trisul glacier, we eventually established our base camp on a level, grassy hollow at a height of 15,000 feet. Save for the drawback of lack of fuel, it was difficult to imagine a kindlier site. It was sheltered and all around us was turf bedecked with primulas and saxifrages, while close at hand was a runnel of clear water. The stern, yet glorious, spectacle of both Devistan (21,910 feet) and Dunagiri (23,184 feet) could be seen to good advantage. Rapturously, Nalni poured forth melodies from the music of Mozart and Beethoven.

While Nalni and Surendra re-organised loads and recovered from the exertions of the previous day, Greenwood and I, eager to see what lay ahead, left the base camp with light loads. Our route alternated between the top of the moraine and the trough below to its west. After rounding a long series of cliffs, we saw the moraine turn sharply in a westerly direction towards a towering ice-fall. Instead of following the curve of
Garhwali porters carrying loads to the Dharansi Pass, which provides access to the basin of the Rishi Ganga
the moraine, we climbed a moderately steep slope covered with evanescent snow. As we ascended a flock of *barrhal*, silhouetted against the sky, watched us with interest from a projecting buttress on our right. On our left, beyond the ice-fall, stretched the snowfields on the north-east slopes of Trisul. We levelled some rocks opposite the ice-fall, pitched a tent, dumped the loads inside and sped down to Robert's camp for a hot drink, and thence to the base camp to celebrate Bandar-Punch Day round a blazing fire.

Next day, Camp I was occupied by the whole party except Kesar Singh and the porters who, being ill-equipped, returned to the base camp. The same afternoon, Greenwood, Dawa, Gyalgen and I climbed another 500 feet in thick mist to dump stores at Robert's camp. Altitude had begun to tell on Nalni and Surendra, as evidenced by splitting headache and severe lassitude. Accordingly, at supper, it was arranged that Greenwood and I, with Dawa and Gyalgen, should put 'rush tactics' to the test, leaving the others to follow the advance party if they felt fit enough to climb, or, if not, to return to the base camp and await the arrival of the summit party on June 25.

Four of us lay cheek by jowl in a ‘Meade’ tent that night. Though reasonably warm, sleep was out of the question owing both to our cramped state and to lack of acclimatisation; and anything which broke the stillness of the night—the rumble of a distant avalanche, the tinkle of falling rocks, the spasm of rapid breathing, or the moan of an ailing companion—seemed to contribute to insomnia.

**IMPOSING NANDA DEVI VIEW**

In sparkling sunshine we joined Robert the next morning. As we looked back, we beheld, behind a dip in the Devistan ridge, the imposing head of Nanda Devi. This double-turreted peak asserted itself in the views which we were privileged to enjoy during the next few days. Accompanied by Robert and his Sherpas, we, now heavily laden, resumed the climb over glistening snowfields. Robert, Greenwood and I took the lead in turns, as we were less encumbered than our Sherpas. Progress was slow and it was tiresome work breaking the trail, especially as the morning advanced and the sun shone with pitiless intensity. At 3 p.m., with the arrival of the usual afternoon mist, we decided to set up Camp II on the gentle slopes stretching to the east of the north ridge of Trisul, at an estimated height of 19,500 feet. Just as we ensconced ourselves inside our sleeping bags, the snow began to fall.

We awoke to a glorious morning on June 23 to find a low pile of drift-snow near our feet. The preparation of a hot drink took longer
than expected owing to a brisk wind, which interfered with the rather
delicate task of handling a primus stove in a small tent. This and the
bitter cold prevented an early start. Robert gave us the disquieting news
that he did not feel well enough to start with us; he decided to wait
and attempt the peak from a higher camp. Altitude, we hoped, would
not claim him too.

At 8-40 a.m., the wind having abated, the summit party set off to
complete the final lap. Dawa carried a light rucksack containing a rope,
photographic material and some food. After an hour's climb, we tied
on the rope, partly because the neve ahead seemed riven with concealed
crevasses and partly for its moral support in keeping the party together.
Soon, Dawa, not satisfied with the rate of progress, was in the lead.
Steadily, we climbed in his footsteps. The Devistan group of peaks
sank lower and lower and by 2 p.m. was completely enshrouded by a
sea of clouds, through which Dunagiri, the twin peaks of Nanda Devi
and the distant Kamet group peered like floating castles.

After nearly six hours of the weary struggle, the climb still seemed
interminable with the same unbroken horizon of snow above us, until,
at 3 p.m., the somewhat gentler slope of the summit ridge was gained.
Here Gyalgen announced that he had reached the end of his tether.
He looked a very tired man—he had obviously reached the absolute
limit. Dawa attributed his exhaustion to petrol fumes inhaled while
brewing tea in the morning. We instructed him to await our return, and
then resumed the wretched business of putting one foot in front of the
other. Gasping for breath, Greenwood and I tugged at the rope. Dawa
turned round and, with a mixture of firmness and politeness,
emphasized that time was pressing; therefore, we must quicken our pace. What
prodigious energy he had!

THE SUMMIT REACHED

4-15 p.m.: the tip of Shiva's trident was ours at last! No flag was
planted on top. Instead, Greenwood erected a tripod—not an easy task
with numb fingers—and then clicked his camera through 360 degrees.
The only demonstration of joy I can recall was our homage to Mother
Earth: we bent our heads low and pointed our feet skywards, though
Greenwood remarked that our attempts lacked technique.

Forty minutes of exalted life on the summit were followed by a rapid
descent. For a while we stopped at Robert's Camp III* to exchange

* R. Walter, with Sherpa Naina Tenzing, climbed Trisul independently next
day (June 24). This mountain has since been climbed twice by Indians, in
1958 by an Army-Navy expedition led by Capt. N. Kumar and in 1961 by an
expedition led by Gurdial Singh.
salutations. Clouds were tinted with the glow of sunset when, just after 7 p.m., the weary but contented lot of us reached Camp II. The signboard at Deodi had been vindicated and a dream fulfilled.

On June 24, we raced down the gleaming snowfields and, after collecting the left-over loads at Camp I, wallowed in the comforts of the base camp before midday. Greenwood, still assailed by the thoughts of high ridges, stayed behind with Dawa and Lhakpa to attempt Mrigthuni (22,490 feet), while the rest of the party retraced its steps towards the lower levels. Double marches enabled us to reach Joshimath on June 28, where Gyalgen and I took leave of Nalni and Surendra to spend another month in the high valleys of Garhwal.
AFTER a lapse of five years, I was back at the delightful village of Joshimath—the focal point on the pilgrim route to holy Badrinath and the “Chamonix” of Garhwal for mountaineering. Within easy reach of it are the innumerable snow-clad peaks, revered for centuries as the traditional home of the Hindu Gods but coveted zealously by climbers for their own fanciful pursuits.

One such peak, Mrigthuni—“the deer’s chin”—rose inviolate to a height of 22,490 feet due south-east of Joshimath, and appeared from a vantage point in the Kumaon Hills as a small eminence between its towering neighbours, Trisul (23,360 feet) and Nanda Devi (25,645 feet). It is, in fact, on the southern rim of Nanda Devi, which, to quote T. G. Longstaff, “reigns over the most supremely beautiful part of all Himalaya.’

In 1951, my introduction to climbing in the Himalaya was in association with a small four-man expedition that scaled Trisul. Facing us invitingly throughout this climb was Mrigthuni, which rose high up in a gentle sweep from the opposite flank of the Trisul glacier. Following his Trisul success, one of the members of our party, R. D. Greenwood, accompanied by a Sherpa, Lhakpa Tsering, resolved to climb this peak. Within an ace of victory his Sherpa companion complained of frozen feet, and they had regretfully to retreat a mere 600 feet from the summit.

A SIX-MAN EXPEDITION

Our six-man expedition to Mrigthuni in 1956 had, for its inspiration, Greenwood’s earlier attempt. Granted good weather, we did not anticipate any insuperable difficulty and hoped that it would be a happy and successful prelude to Himalayan mountaineering for our three novices. If things went well for us, we had nearby Trisul as an additional string to our bow.

The genius behind the venture was Gurdial Singh, a master at the Doon School, who led the successful expedition to Trisul in 1951. This was his seventh consecutive climbing season in Garhwal, an enviable record which scarcely any other climber could match. His annual migra-
tion along this route had been so unfailingly regular that at every other step he was greeted reverently by the locals. On par with his passion for the mountains has been his abiding interest in birds and flowers—subjects on which he can speak with considerable knowledge.

N. Chuckerbutty, also a master at the Doon School, charmed us and the pilgrims on the route with his enchanting renderings of Tagore's songs. He had trekked widely in the Himalayas and eagerly looked forward to his initiation in climbing. So also the brothers, Mahinder and Roopinder Lall, whose combined scientific erudition toned conversation to a lofty pitch.

John Albiston was thrilled at the realization of the ultimate dream of all mountaineers to climb in the Himalayas. He had resigned his job in a shipping concern in England for this purpose, but also with an eye to an Antarctic expedition to follow. He was weary but obviously strong, as his record of Alpine climbing clearly indicated.

I was the eleventh-hour intruder on the expedition. Although I had seen and admired Mrigthuni in 1951, and was smitten with the desire to make another bid for Trisul in view of my previous failure, leave was a somewhat uncertain factor. A few months earlier, Gurdial had applied for a grant of £125 from the Mount Everest Foundation—which, from royalties, had by now accumulated a prodigious capital—to assist the expedition in its objects. I was named as one of the referees and now faced the embarrassing situation of participating in a venture that was given a grant on the strength, partly, of my strong support.

Organizing an expedition into the Himalayas is indeed a tedious task. A variety of essential provisions and equipment demand meticulous planning months in advance. Gurdial has, however, perfected the routine to such a degree that not only did he think nothing of my last-minute encroachment but had everything gathered in perfect order and readiness for departure on the appointed day—June 3, 1956.

Dehra Dun was our trysting place. We departed very early by bus and covered the 27 miles through the dense, picturesque Doon forests to Rishikesh in inclement weather. Heavy, unseasonal rains in the hills had caused numerous landslides on the motor road to Kirtinagar on the pilgrim route to Badrinath, and we heard disturbing reports about the lengthy transshipments that would be necessary en route, causing inevitable dislocation of our itinerary. Fortunately, the breaches had been repaired expeditiously and we were able to accomplish our 62-mile journey from Rishikesh, along the steep valley of the Ganga, to Kirtinagar. Here porters transhipped our loads across the Alaknanda to a dilapidated
bus that kept breaking down on the three-mile journey to the erstwhile capital of Garhwal, Srinagar.

ENERVATING BUS-RIDE

It was a very enervating bus-ride because the road seldom rises above an altitude of 3,000 feet. The humid heat, combined with the severe joltings of a rough road on seats designed for austere pilgrims, made us yearn for the higher altitudes where the waywardness of machines would not bother us.

Early the following day, we continued the journey by bus along the valley of the Alaknanda, until a landslip on the road brought us to an abrupt halt. A long row of vehicles, teeming with pilgrims, faced each other on either side of the obstruction, which labourers were busy clearing. Accepting the delay with resignation, we amused ourselves singing exultantly from a repertoire that ranged from Tagore's devotional songs to a Papagenovaria from a Mozart opera. I had taken with me a bamboo flute, with which, I was told, I produced the most disagreeable sounds, to the horror of Gurdial, who, as it happens, is an accomplished flautist. Drawn by our “noises”, a saffron-robed pilgrim hailed us and proceeded to recite a poem by Amil Khusro, which, roughly translated, extolled the possession in man of knowledge, wisdom, wealth and physical strength and courage, but before the supreme grace of music, declared all these virtues put together as of no value.

Soon after midday, the bus journey terminated at the road-head at Pipalkoti, after a 74-mile drive. Awaiting us, to our delight, was beaming Diwan Singh, who faithfully followed our arrangements for a dozen mules to transport our gear over three stages to the village of Lata, where porters would be engaged. Diwan Singh had climbed Abi Gamin with Gurdial the previous year, and is among an elite of Bhutias who have proved their natural climbing ability no less certainly than the Sherpas of Darjeeling. The latter are now an expensive luxury which a small expedition, such as ours, with limited resources at our command, could ill-afford. We, therefore, for the first time, relied entirely on local men for high-altitude transportation and support.

Entrusting our loads to the muleteers, we strode along buoyantly for an eight-mile walk to Gulabkoti with the intention of bracing our jaded muscles. A heavy downpour, however, soaked us to the skin, and it was by torchlight that we reached our destination. The ways of the weather are inscrutable, and we cherished the belief that the fury of the past few days would have spent itself before our climbing activity began in a little over a week from that day.
We now abandoned the pilgrim road, which, more than ever, that year was thronged with an endless stream of devotees from every corner of India, seeking to acquire merit by enduring the privations of the road, worshipping at the shrines, and receiving forgiveness for past sins and assurance of future happiness.

BEAUTY OF ALPINE SLOPES

Soon we rose above an altitude of 10,000 feet and revelled with unsurpassed delight in the beauties of the higher Alpine slopes, lush with fresh spring verdure and flowers in gay profusion. These, among others, are, in the words of H. W. Tilman, "the joys that furnish to a mountaineer fresh evidence, if such were needed, of the wise dispensation of a bountiful Providence."

This account taken from the "Statesman" ends abruptly because Chuckerbutty fell ill with pneumonia at Dibrugheta and died a few days later. The expedition broke up and all except Albiston returned to the Plains. The next chapter gives an account by Amir Ali of the successful climbing of Mrigthuni two years later by an expedition led by Gurdial Singh.
CHAPTER X

ADVENTURE ON MRIGTHUNI

By AAMIR ALI

Mrigthuni means 'the deer's chin', and, though the mountain bears no resemblance to the chin—or any other anatomical feature—of a deer, it is a very attractive name and calls for further attention. The pujari of the temple at Tapoban disagreed with this interpretation and assured me that it did not mean the deer's chin at all. It meant 'naval' or 'middle', he said, and the mountain was so named because it was neither the highest nor the lowest in the region. The pujari is a man learned in the myths and folklore of the region and may well be right. But whether it is a chin or a naval—and I vote wholeheartedly for the chin—it is a name well worth further investigation.

I heard of this mountain several years ago when Gurdial Singh wrote to me suggesting that it was an ideal mountain for a small party and that we should attempt it some time. I heartily agreed, but, like most of life's dreams, it remained one for many years.

The first attempt on Mrigthuni was made in 1951 by Roy Greenwood and a Sherpa. Greenwood had just climbed Trisul with Gurdial, and had stayed on in the area for a few extra days. He was able to get to within 500 feet of the summit, but had to turn back because he complained of cold feet and they were afraid of frostbite.

The second attempt made in 1956 ended in a tragedy. Gurdial Singh organised an expedition, consisting of Flight-Lieutenant Nalni Jayal, Mahinder Lall and his younger brother, Roopinder Lall, N. Chukerbutty, and John Albiston. I had hoped to join this, but was unfortunately not able to get leave at the right time. At Dibrugheta, Chukerbutty fell ill with pneumonia and, despite the efforts of his companions, died a few days later. The expedition broke up and returned, except for Albiston, who had come out specially from England for a climbing holiday. He went on with some of the porters and joined Keki Bunshah, who had just climbed Trisul. They made an attempt on Mrigthuni, established three camps, but bad snow conditions forced them to abandon the bid some 2000 feet from the summit.
It was Gurdial Singh again who organised and led the expedition of 1958. There were four of us, an ideal number for a small expedition: Mahinder Lall, who had been on the 1956 expedition, Rajendra Vikram Singh, who works in the National Physical Laboratory, and myself, employed by the International Labour Office in Geneva.

DEPARTURE FROM DOON

Gurdial’s rooms in Dehra Dun have become quite accustomed to serving as the assembly point for expeditions, and were, therefore, not at all upset by the confusion and turmoil caused by our gathering there on June 1 to give the final touches to the packing and sorting of loads. We left in the small hours of the following morning in a truck and caught the first bus of the day from Rishikesh.

Next day we were met at Belakuchi by some porters with ponies. The transfer of the luggage from the bus to the ten ponies took place relatively smoothly—there were more ponies than we really needed. After lunch, we braved the afternoon heat, opened up our umbrellas—that essential item of equipment for all Himalayan expeditions—and ambled along to Gulabkoti, only a few miles away. There was then a jeappable road to Joshimath. One cannot help feeling sorry at the inroads that mechanisation is making into the mountains, and there is no getting away from the fact that pilgrims on foot look far more genuine than pilgrims in a bus. Soon, no doubt, the pilgrim chattis at Badrinath will be replaced by Expresso bars, juke boxes and stocks of Coca-Cola. I hope the juke boxes will at least carry the record—“You can’t get to heaven in an old Ford car.”

Where the jeappable road coincided with the footpath, it wasn’t much fun walking on it and being bathed with dust every now and again. So we were glad to leave the pilgrim route at Joshimath and take the path up the Dhauliganga to Tapoban. There is now a small P.W.D. Inspection House at Tapoban, but by far the greatest attraction there are the hot springs and the lovely open-air pool in the temple courtyard with flowing hot and cold water. The bath was delightful and well-needed, though not nearly so well-needed as the bath we had there on our return. That was the first full-scale wash in over three weeks and a greatly looked-forward-to luxury.

From Tapoban it is a short day to Lata, the last village on our route. We arrived there before lunch and paid off the ponies—Rs. 20 each for the trip from Belakuchi. Our porters from the various villages in the neighbourhood were waiting for us and we spent the afternoon making up 30-seer loads. We had a merry time calculating how many porters
we would need. Our own gear and food came to 18 porter loads. Food for these 18 men at a seer per head per day for four weeks came to 13 porter loads. Then food for these 13 porters had to be calculated and later food for those who would carry that food. And so forth, *ad infinitum* or *ad absurdum*, or whatever the correct term may be. Needless to say that, after many fascinating hours over this problem, we adopted hit-or-miss tactics, took a goodly supply of flour and rice and engaged 30 porters.

**NO SHERPAS BUT PORTERS**

We had taken no Sherpas with us, partly because they are somewhat expensive for a small unsubsidised expedition like ours, and mostly because Gurdial was convinced that some of the Garhwali men who had been with him on several expeditions to Kamet and Tibet before would serve us as well as Sherpas. This judgment was fully justified. Not only did the selected few serve us excellently on the mountain itself, but proved willing and cheerful companions on the approach march, with no bickerings and arguments, higgings and threatenings, such as commonly afflict expeditions. This was largely due to the fact that many of them had been with Gurdial before and their trust in, and devotion to, him were apparent. The only time they straggled was on our return—the day we passed through Lata. It was the first human settlement in over three weeks, and *chang* must have flowed generously. As a result, while we were fretting and fuming at Tapoban waiting for them to arrive, they were scattered at various points along the road, wisely sleeping it off.

Two men need special mention—Kalyan Singh, who acted as Sirdar, and Dewan Singh, who may be termed a co-Sirdar. Kalyan Singh belongs to Bampa village and is a trader with Tibet. He was a responsible and hard-working leader, and looked after the setting up and breaking of camps, as also the making up and allocation of loads. He had been to Camp V on Kamet a couple of times and had climbed Abi Gamin in 1955 with Gurdial. He is a competent and intelligent climber. Dewan Singh, hailing from Renni Jugju village, was by no means as responsible; in fact, it would not be far wrong to say that he was quite irresponsible. But, besides being as tough as a mule, he had a charming smile and hardly ever spoke without a chuckle in his throat. Besides being a veteran of Kamet’s Camp V and Abi Gamin, he had been with Albiston and Bunshah on Mrigthuni in 1956, and, when he met us this time, he did his best to dissuade us from going to this mountain. “Oh ho ho”, he said rolling his eyes and stamping his feet, “it’s a very *kharab*
mountain, sa’ab. Let us go to Trisul instead.” As a climber, he is tough and almost tireless, but much less intelligent than Kalyan Singh. Both these men came to the summit with us.

We paid the porters Rs. 4 per day plus food—Rs. 4-8-0 per day for Kalyan Singh—with appropriate supplements for those who came to Camp I and those who came to the summit.

The route to our base camp—the same site as base camps for Trisul—has often been described. From Lata we climbed up to Lata Kharak, a shepherd's camp site at just over 12,000 feet. Having climbed these 5,000 feet, we felt “kharakad”, an expressive word coined by Gurdial and Mahinder Lall in 1956, and in mood to do justice to the chicken we had brought from Lata—a gift from Dewan Singh. None of us felt particularly chirpy that evening, except Rajendra who remained quite unaffected by altitude throughout the trip. Altitude sickness is my particular bugbear, and I was sick that night—a rather ominous omen at this relatively low altitude.

Crossing over the Dharansi pass the following day, we traversed some of the most desolate and savage country I have ever seen. I arrived at the camp site that evening very sick and weak and found myself in no condition to go on. After a hasty council-of-war, it was decided that in order to save porterage costs, Rajendra would go ahead with 12 porters to Bethartoli, dismiss all but two or three of them, and wait for us.

THREE GLOOMY DAYS

We spent three very gloomy days at this camp site. On the second day (June 9), I had recovered and was ready to go on, but Kalam Singh, the Garhwali cook we had brought with us from Dehra Dun, was sick, really sick. He was running a temperature and coughing, and making ominous noises in his chest. We were convinced that this was pneumonia, and we wondered if we were going to have a repetition of the 1956 tragedy. The news of ‘Nandu’ Jayal’s death, also reportedly from pneumonia, on Cho-Oyu a few weeks before was also very fresh in our thoughts. He had been a close friend of all four of us, and the news of his untimely death lay heavily on us. It was impossible not to think of Chukerbutty and ‘Nandu’ whenever we thought of Kalam Singh.

Mahinder Lall was the expedition’s ‘doctor’ and did an excellent job. He gave Kalam Singh injections of penicillin and streptomycin and spent most of the day looking after the patient.

On the second day, the Service officers’ expedition to Trisul arrived at the camp site on their way back. Two of their party, Sub-Lieutenant
P. P. S. Mehta and Sherpa Nyima, had reached the summit but unfortunately both suffered from frostbite. Nyima's toes were frostbitten—evidently snow had got into his boots during the night—while Mehta had his fingers frostbitten, those of his right hand being particularly affected. We wondered how these two had managed the route back from the base camp in that state.

Anyway, the Dharansi camp site that evening presented a sad appearance, with Captain Narinder Kumar giving penicillin injections to his patients and Mahinder Lall doing the same to his. Our morale was pretty low and we entertained fears that our expedition might end there and then, even before it had begun.

On June 10, we saw the other expedition off. Captain Kumar went ahead intending to get to Joshimath the same evening so that he could telegraph or telephone for medical assistance to be sent up for his companions who would arrive in Joshimath two days later. It was with great relief that we learnt later that neither Nyima nor Mehta lost any of their extremities, though they had to spend two or three months in hospital at Dehra Dun.

Kalam Singh continued to run a temperature throughout the day but by the evening it came down. He had no fever the next morning, and so we sent him back in charge of Kedar Singh, a reliable porter. He got down to civilisation all right, and, when we saw him in Dehra Dun later, had quite recovered.

After watching Kalam Singh and Kedar Singh make their slow and painful way up towards the Dharansi pass, we broke the camp and set off for Dibrugheta. It was at Dibrugheta that Chukerbutty had died with the 1956 expedition, and we put up a small copper plaque in his memory on a silver birch tree.

DIBRUGHETA EXTRAVAGANZA

Dibrugheta was perhaps the most attractive camp site on our route. It is a large alp some 500 feet above two converging rivers. As a previous visitor to this region had written, it is a bit of horizontal arcady lying amidst vertical chaos. On the way back, we spent a rest day at this lovely place and passed a most memorable evening. We had asked four of the porters, whom we had dismissed at Bethartoli, to come back to the base camp on June 27 for the return. As it happened, we left the base camp on June 22, and so met these four men at Dibrugheta. Not only had they brought a chicken, some fresh vegetables and apricots for us, but also a generous-sized bottle of chang. We did full justice to it, and it was the only evening on the entire trip that was warm enough
for us to sit outside round the fire after dinner. Whether this warmth came from the temperature outside or from the chang inside, I do not know, but it was a nice mellow warmth anyway.

We started singing, and the porters, sitting round their camp fire, began singing in their turn. Their repertoire became much bigger than ours, and, after an hour or two, we joined them. They knew a wide variety of songs—film, devotional, patriotic and folk. There was one particular folk song—strangely enough Kumaoni, not Garhwali—which became the theme song of the expedition afterwards. I wish I could reproduce the tune and the words. It must be a very popular song in the region because we heard it a couple of times in the lower valleys too, played on the flute or sung by other people. It is called KajZ Pako, and, sung in unison by a band of porters, is quite irresistible.

After this singing match had gone on for a good part of the night and we were reduced to singing the national anthem a couple of times because we had run out of songs, the porters began to dance round their fire. We joined them again and the next couple of hours were spent in some very strenuous and warmth-giving dancing round the fire. Every song was danced to the same steps—two forward and one back—and so it didn’t require much Terpsichorean skill to take part in the festivities. And as this orgy went on till late into the night, many of the men recalled that the previous year on his Nanda Devi expedition, ‘Nandu’ Jayal had spent the best part of the night at Dibrugheta dancing with the porters. Incidentally, ‘Nandu’s death was still fresh in the memories of all the people in this region. They had known him well from his expeditions to Kamet and Nanda Devi, and the news of his death had spread throughout the region, to the genuine sorrow and distress of the people.

Dibrugheta is the limit of the shepherds who come in summer to graze their flocks, and so after this there is no track. With so many climbing expeditions having been to the area, there is some sort of a route more or less worked out. At Deodi, one has to cross the Rishiganga. We were lucky to find a solid snow-bridge which made the crossing easy. On the way back, the snow-bridge had, of course, gone, but we were still lucky. In 1956, two German brothers, Fritz and Adolf Hieber, had gone to Trisul and Devistan and, with true German thoroughness, had built a very solid cantilever bridge across the Rishiganga. It was still in good shape, and the ropes holding it together had been reinforced by the Service officers expedition.
DEODI TO BETHARTOLI

From Deodi to Bethartoli in the Trisul valley we waded through almost impenetrable rhododendron bushes. It was bad enough going through these with light ruck-sacks; how poor Kalyan Singh, who carried a pair of skis, managed it, I do not know. Rajendra was waiting for us at the Bethartoli camp site. He had been there for three days, wondering what on earth had happened to us and keeping himself amused by trying his hand at shikar. He had brought with him a gun which, however, turned out to be somewhat non-violent and pacifist by temperament, and, whenever a burrhal was in sight and aimed at, it misfired. Anyway, he was glad to see us and brought out the last of the lichis we had brought with us from Dehra Dun. Incidentally, it was a pleasant surprise to find fresh lichis last so long. We had the last of the mangoes at Dharansi on June 9 or 10, more than a week after leaving Dehra Dun. They might have lasted longer had not Gurdial quietly polished them off, telling us afterwards that he had it on Sir John Hunt's authority that this sort of behaviour was expected of expedition leaders. Evidently, Hunt has recorded in his book that he found a tin of fish on the South Col which the Swiss had left behind, and so, without telling anyone, he ate it up by himself. Gurdial was only trying to live up to the rigorous standards of leadership thus set. We had the last of the lichis at Bethartoli on June 13, 12 days after they were bought.

The next morning (June 14), we dismissed all but ten porters and started off up the moraine of the Trisul glacier. By about 3 in the afternoon, we came to a lovely green sward lying between the moraine and the mountain, an ideal place for the base camp. A shelter made of flat stones to serve as a kitchen and some evidence of tins proved that this was also the site used by the Service officers. Our two porter-cooks, Dabbal Singh and Govind Singh, remained with us, while the others went down again to Bethartoli so they could bring up the remaining loads the next day.

FINDING THE ROUTE

Mrigthuni overlooked the camp, and it was possible to see the whole of its northern and western faces, except the very lower portions which were hidden by the moraine. Its western face was a series of rocks and ice-cliffs. Its northern face presented a series of broad snow-slopes, heavily crevassed, but nowhere steeper than 35 or perhaps 40 degrees. Down the middle of the face, stretching for some 1,500 feet was a line of rock and ice-cliffs perhaps 500 feet high, pouring down avalanches on the western (right) side. There were two huge crevasses which seemed
to stretch right across the face, and we wondered if these would constitute a problem. A safer and easier route, we thought, would be to keep to the eastern (left) side of the ice-cliffs, but this would lengthen the route considerably and perhaps necessitate an extra camp. I believe Greenwood used that route in 1951 and established three camps.

Another problem was the point at which the mountain should be tackled from the Trisul glacier. For about three quarters of a mile, the mountain presented rock and ice-cliffs which were unclimbable. To the south of these there was an icefall that provided a possible route, and to the north of it there was a line of rock-and-snow which definitely provided a route. The southern route was more direct and much shorter, though more difficult. The portion of the icefall that could be seen appeared possible enough, but the upper portion was hidden by a buttress and it was difficult to guess what it would be like. We chose the longer, but easier and surer route, and were probably wise in our decision.

June 15 was spent in arranging loads and equipment for the morrow. Getting the climbing gear ready was in itself an incentive to be up and doing on the mountain. Most of the afternoon was spent in trying out the two primus-stoves; either they would refuse to light at all or else burst suddenly into enormous flames and attempt to commit suttee. Rajendra and Mahinder Lall finally tamed them—at least to some extent—, but I was glad I had brought a small gas-stove from Geneva, with ten hours of gas. We used this at Camp I and it behaved excellently, except that the 10 hours seemed to pass very quickly.

On June 16, the four of us set off with the four porters, Kalyan Singh, Dewan Singh, Khushal Singh and Jodh Singh, to establish Camp I. This was Mahinder Lall's birthday, but it proved a rather sad one for him. We went up the moraine for about a mile or so, and then descended to the Trisul glacier and crossed it. On the other side, we took the scramblly route up the line of rocks, and got on to the mountain proper at about 16,000 feet or just over. It was here, just as we roped up, that Mahinder Lall, who had been feeling unwell since the morning, decided that he could not go on any further. He settled himself on some rocks to await our return.

BAD SNOW CONDITIONS

The first hour or so after this was awful. The snow was rotten, and we sank in up to the hips, certainly up to the thighs, at every step. Progress was miserably slow and it was obvious that, unless snow conditions improved, we were not going to get very far, for all our puffing and
panting. Luckily, after an hour's struggling with, and cursing at, this snow, we hit a much better patch and progress was reasonably fast.

We traversed the flank of the mountain, now only occasionally floundering in deep snow. At one point, Dewan Singh suddenly went through up to his hips in a crevasse. It was a place where no self-respecting crevasse had any business to be. Anyway it gave Dewan Singh an excuse for a good deal of clowning and shouting. At about 2 p.m. we reached a band of loose rocks, lying free of snow. We decided to set up Camp I here, and were glad to dump loads and sit down to some lunch. The height must have been about 17,500 feet. We had brought two tents with us, and in putting them up we made one of those inexplicable discoveries that beset life, not only on the mountains. For one of the tents, two sections of the poles were missing. All the tents had been thoroughly checked in Dehra Dun before starting, and this particular tent had not been opened at all on the route. How had those two sections disappeared? And what is even more inexplicable is that when we got back to Dehra Dun and checked the tents again, not only did they all have their poles in order, but there were two extra sections to spare. Life is indeed a mysterious affair.

Having prepared platforms for three tents and put up the one that did have its full complement of poles, we went down again, picked up Mahinder Lall, and got back to the base camp in good spirits. However, when we turned to look at the mountain again and saw where Camp I had been set up these good spirits were a bit dampened because it looked awfully low. Camp II would have to be carried a good 2,000 feet or more higher if we were to avoid having to establish a third camp.

The next morning (June 17), Mahinder Lall was still unwell and obviously unfit to go up. Jodh Singh complained of pain in his knees, and Dabdal Singh shyly volunteered to take his place. Dabdal Singh's main charm lay in his unfailing capacity to answer every question with a wistful smile and a "kuchh pata nahin babuji." We got to Camp I just after 1 p.m. After some food, Gurdial, Kalyan Singh and Dewan Singh set off to make tracks for the morrow. They went up for about two hours and it was encouraging to see them make reasonably fast progress. Rajendra spent most of the afternoon taming the primus-stove once again, and demonstrating exemplary patience and perseverance.

It snowed that night and there were about two inches of fresh snow in the morning (June 18). We left the camp at 8 in the morning and for the first stretch made good time using the tracks already prepared. As we drew up to the ice-cliffs, the slope steepened and the weather worsened. The two large crevasses that we had seen from below did not present
any problem, but the snow and mist had reduced visibility considerably. At about 4 p.m. we decided to set up Camp II, and prepared platforms for the two tents. We had brought a light aluminium spade, having included it in the loads with much hesitation, and it proved invaluable. We estimated the height at about 20,300 feet. Dabbal Singh and Khushal Singh descended to Camp I and fortunately, about half an hour later, the weather cleared slightly, making their descent a bit easier. We had two tents, Gurdial, Rajendra and I sharing one, and Kalyan Singh and Dewan Singh the other.

Although we started getting ready the next morning (June 19) at about 5, it was not till 8 that we managed to have some tea and got ready to leave. This was a mistake: the sun reaches this face of Mrigthuni by 6-30 a.m. and we should have left much earlier. I had my second bout of mountain sickness and this worsened continually. We were all climbing on one rope; the snow was soft and the going heavy. Most of the track-making was done by Dewan Singh and Kalyan Singh. Until about 1 p.m. the weather was beautifully clear, but after that the usual afternoon storm came and it began to snow, reducing visibility drastically.

**THE SUMMIT CLIMBED**

For the first time that day doubts about the summit began to assail us as hour after hour passed and the peak continued to remain lost in the clouds above. My sickness got worse and I became more and more of a drag on the others. At about 4 p.m. I decided to unrope and let the others go ahead. As it happened, however, the summit was only a couple of hundred feet above, the last hundred of which, just below the summit cornice, was firm snow and ice—quite a change after the perpetual soft snow. We were on the summit by 4-30 p.m. Unfortunately, the mist and the snow made it impossible for us to see more than a few feet in any direction, and we had no views at all.

Mrigthuni has a very long and almost level summittal ridge and, visibility being what it was, we were not certain that we were on the highest point of this ridge. While I remained where I was, too sick to care much either way, the others went along the ridge for another half hour or so to make sure that the real summit had been climbed.

When we started down at about 5 p.m., it was still snowing and fairly dark. We had some uncomfortable thoughts about the tracks being covered with snow, about bivouacs, frostbite and so on. But, fortunately, the weather cleared up about half an hour later, and, as if to make up for the loss of any view from the top, we were treated to a glorious
sunset. We were back at Camp II just after 7 p.m. and went straight into our sleeping bags. Rajendra kept muttering about something to eat—we had eaten nothing except some chocolate all day—but no one paid any attention to him.

The descent the following day (June 20) was relatively quick and easy. We picked up Khushal Singh and Dabbal Singh at Camp I and were back at the base camp by about 4 p.m. to be greeted by an enthusiastic Mahendra Lall and lots of hot tea. That evening the monsoon arrived in full force and it rained throughout the following day. We had been lucky with the weather; if we had been two days later, our difficulties would have increased immensely.

Our original intention had been to spend another week or so in the region, climbing Trisul and perhaps the unnamed 21,000-foot peak to the north of Trisul. But the arrival of bad weather and the general state of exhaustion led to some lengthy councils and we decided to abandon intentions of further climbs and start back. This decision was particularly tough on Mahinder Lall, who had now recovered and was anxious to go up.

We broke the camp on June 22 and began the return journey. We had thought we might spend a few days in the region of the Kuari pass, but it was raining so heavily when we were in Tapoban that we gave up that notion as well.

Since our return, several people have asked me whether going on such an expedition is not frightfully expensive. An expedition organised to attempt a major peak is, of course, an expensive business, but a small group, like ours, with modest ambitions and with modest needs, can have a wonderful time for relatively little. It might be of interest to record that, excluding the cost of personal equipment, the whole expedition from Dehra Dun back to Dehra Dun, covering a period of almost five weeks, cost us less than Rs. 1,000 per head; to be exact Rs. 914.
To the strains of the Sherpa mountain song "Shedke Mia Zomsung, Nubki Mia Zomsung...", we parted company after our final evening together.

The words mean: "Collected here are people from the East, the West, the South and the North; and is it not wonderful that they are all my friends?" Is it surprising then that we go back to the mountains again and again to savour of such soul-stirring companionship, to restore and nourish our fading memories of brief, but intensely-felt, moments of happiness and content, and to add to these experiences? My mind will always be haunted and charmed by these words and all that they connote.

The team dispersed, and little did members know how considerable their individual contributions had been to the expedition. Among those who reached the top of the 24,150-foot Sakang peak were the two Darjeeling boys, the quiet Das and the ever-smiling Topgay Pulzer, who gained the summit by the merciless flogging of their bodies, and the young geologist, Vijay Raina, whose under-current of good humour stood him very well. Of my Sherpa colleagues there were Da Namgyal, that gentlest of all souls, whom we had nicknamed the 'Country Parson' on Kamet the previous year, the excitable, but perfectly steady and safe, climber Nawang Gombu and the small-eyed tough Topgay.

All these men made the top of that formidable and frightening unnamed peak at the head of the Sakang-Lungpa glacier, which gave us many an anxious moment. We felt too presumptuous naming peaks, but, if I may, I would venture to suggest the name "Sakang" peak to those responsible for doing so, as it is the only peak on the Saser range that imposingly dominates the Sakang-Lungpa glacier.

Of the remainder, our doctor Chopra, always heroically trying to cheer people, got up to 22,180 feet on the mountain. The efficient Ang Tharkey was organizing the 'build-up' from the lower camps, while Ang Temba and the never-complaining senior geologist Kurrien, were both sick. Colonel Ishar Katoch, the most reliable of companions,
had to leave us early accompanied by the earnest M. S. Kohli, as their limited holiday had drawn to a close.

**MOVE UP TO CAMP I**

On July 9, 1956, we all moved up to Camp I on the south Phukpo glacier. The next day, our advance party set off from there to establish Camp II at 18,200 feet on the cirque at the base of the west face of Saser Kangri I (25,170 feet). At Camp I the remainder made up loads for higher camps.

We left Camp II early on the morning of July 11. It was a completely cloudless day, and our party split into two ropes to reconnoitre routes. Our progress was impeded by the crevasse-ridden cwm and with the slopes gradually becoming steep. Later, we made good progress on crampons until the snow-slope changed to an extremely steep ice-wall. At 21,000 feet, there appeared a seemingly impregnable barrier—an overhanging ice-wall girdling the whole face of the mountain. Would it provide a breach to be exploited for a route? It looked disheartening, but we continued in the slender hope that our fears would be disproved. On “rubbing noses” against the obstacle, the futility of attempting a route became obvious, because of the overhanging big blocks of ice continuously hurtling down. From this point a gap was perceived in the girdle on the opposite side of the cirque, but it was acting as a chute for falling stones. We decided to consider that route as a possibility later. We descended weary and tired at 3 p.m. to the glacier. The snow had become wet and heavy and presented a real avalanche hazard.

I had never felt so hot and uncomfortable in my life. The air was deadly still, the cirque was enclosed and the sun beat down mercilessly. The rays reflected off the snow made the basin a solar-cooker, with us on the frying pan.

The next morning (July 12) we moved down to Camp I and discussed our future on this side of the mountain. We could possibly attempt the peak through the gap we had noticed on the south side of the face, but it was evident that, whatever the chances of success, any attempt would have to be confined to a strong and highly mobile party of four or five. It would have meant that the ex-students of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, for whom it was the first opportunity to be in the really high mountains, could not be included.

This was where the main difference lay between the usual expeditions and ours of that year and the last one. For the former, an ascent by even one member would be success enough, but for us that was not sufficient. We wanted as many of our party as possible to make the
summit. In view of the impracticability of having a large summit party, because a *tour de force* by a bigger party would certainly increase the element of risk beyond acceptable limits, the attempt from the west face was abandoned.

SAKANG-LUNGPA GLACIER

We then decided to explore the unnamed glacier south of the south Phukpo glacier, with a view to getting into the basin at the head of the Sakang-Lungpa glacier. We could then attempt an entry into the huge north Shukpa-Kunchang glacier. This, in turn, might even lead to a possible route on the south-east face of Saser Kangri.

We selected 20 of the sturdier Ladakhies to remain behind and sent the rest down with the Lambardar of Panamik, Topgay, and Temba, who fell ill after the earlier reconnaissance he had done with me. They were to pick up all our stores from the base camp, go down to Panamik and then travel up the Chamsing-Lungpa to meet us on the Sakang-Lungpa glacier, which was the route taken by J.O.M. Roberts when he was faced with a similar problem. Meanwhile, we would try and cross from one glacier system to another. This would take us over high unexplored cols and save time. It would also enable us to have a closer look at the Saser group. With great difficulty, a route was found but it took us three days to get the whole party over the first col into the Sakang-Lungpa glacier and down a steep 1,000-foot rock face.

On July 15, our stores were moved to the col by our main party which returned to the camp. Pulzer was still sick and receiving penicillin injections. Gompu and I moved on to pitch a camp at the head of the Sakang-Lungpa glacier. It was very fatiguing; Gompu carried about 80 lbs. and I, 60. Gompu cooked an excellent dinner of soup and macaroni and we went to bed early.

On July 16, Gompu and I left at 6 a.m. to try and find a route over the 15,000-foot col joining Saser Kangri II (24,650 feet) and Saser Kangri III (24,590 feet) into the north Shukpa-Kunchang glacier. On the result of this depended our last hope for attempting the main Saser Kangri peak. With mumbled prayers we trudged 5½ hours to the col only to find the other side an impassable precipice crowned by overhanging cornices, portions of which avalanched down with disturbing regularity. Our hearts sank. Three weeks of battering at and around the outer defence of Saser Kangri had come to nought. Gompu and I returned down the glacier weary of body and spirit.
AN UNCOMPROMISING PEAK

My Sherpa colleagues, who had spent all their lives climbing, were astonished that the mountain had been so uncompromising. In their combined experience of all the Himalayan giants, no mountain had been as utterly unapproachable as this. In this segment of the Karakoram we found that, though the glaciers were comparatively accessible, the granite peaks, owing to very heavy and constant weathering, were not.

The next day (July 17) the rest of the party gathered at the camp. On July 18, Tharkey, Namgyal and I climbed to Roberts' "Look-Out" peak (20,500 feet) to see if Saser II might prove kinder. Gompu was not feeling too well after our reconnaissance together; Katoch, Kohli and Raina came part of the way but were later deterred by a sudden snowstorm. Saser II looked forbidding, rising in sheer inviolate majesty over the south Shukpa-Kuchang glacier. It would have been madness to attempt it. To the left of it, however, was a sharp attractive pyramid which looked as if it might be climbed from its south face. Viewed earlier from the west, it had completely obscured Saser II. It had not been climbed before and was obviously over 24,000 feet.

Here we saw how we could transform what might have been complete failure to success. I was still somewhat dubious, as it would mean inviting trouble to climb high Himalayan peaks by their faces—ridges should always be used in preference, but our only hope lay in tackling the face. We decided to summon all our reserves of energy, hope and ambition and put ourselves fully against the new challenge.

We moved our camp to the junction of the north and south Sakang-Lungpa glaciers. On July 20, Raina, Tharkey, Namgyal and I moved up the latter glacier to have a closer look at the peak. The arrival of Temba and Topgay, with provisions from Panamik the following day, synchronized admirably with our summit plans. Unfortunately, it was time for Katoch and Kohli to depart. They left on July 22, while some of us moved down to the lower camp at 18,500 feet. The next day, five of us cut steps and fixed ropes for the porters on the more dangerous sectors, returning to the camp late in the evening.

On July 24, the summit party, consisting of Chopra, Das, Pulzer, Raina, Namgyal, Gompu, Topgay and I left the camp at 9-30 a.m. We were accompanied by six Sherpa porters who where to return the same night to the lower camp. At 2 p.m. we put up camp at 22,180 feet.

SAKANG SUMMIT SCALED

After a very early breakfast on July 25, we left for the summit at 5-30 a.m. in two ropes. All were feeling the altitude and the strain of
the past few days, but Doctor and Das were worse than the others. Doctor got back into the tent but I managed to persuade Das to join us. Namgyal and I took it in turns to lead and cut steps, while Gompu and Topgay had Das on the rope with them. We were on the very steep south-west slope without the sun and, therefore, felt extremely cold. We felt it all the more so because the tops of the adjoining peaks were set afire by the rays of the morning sun. We fixed a rope on the steepest bit for the return journey. Life returned to our limbs when we topped a crest at 11 a.m. and met the sun. We reached the summit at 12-30 p.m. after a rather hair-raising traverse on the corniced summit ridge.

Our two altimeters, with a ceiling unfortunately of 24,000 feet only, had shown their maximum about 400 feet below. From our summit, Saser II, our immediate neighbour, looked hardly 200 feet higher. Making allowances for wishful thinking and a possible error of the altimeters, we estimated the height of our summit conservatively at 24,150 feet. Saser I (25,170 feet) and Saser III were clearly visible. From above 22,000 feet both of them looked as if they might "go", but all the principal obstacles obviously lay below that height. Saser II persisted in giving the impression of being unclimable.

Nanga Parbat (26,660 feet) was also visible to the west and soared quite distinct on the skyline. Clear and fathomless, a beautiful azure sky spread over the world. Exultantly we savoured of the magnificence of being in space, looking down when we had been used to looking up, and of that intoxicating world which seemed so intimately and completely ours—a world of rocky spires piercing the sky and gigantic glaciers ravaging the mountainside in their slow and stubborn flow to the lower valleys. We took photographs all round, while Namgyal tied a khada, a Tibetan ceremonial scarf, to the rock at the summit, while the others satisfied their own idiosyncrasies. We returned to the camp at 5-45 p.m.

Our return journey was highlighted, among other things, by evenings in front of camp-fires, till then denied to us, by stumbling on to rare but verdant meadows studded with wildly flowering primulae and asters by a nose-to-muzzle meeting with a herd of over a hundred burrehals, by an encounter with a trade caravan from Yarkand carrying raisins, silks, and exotic carpets, and by the overwhelming hospitality of our lovable Ladakhi porters in their villages.

**EXPLORATION A SUCCESS**

We failed in scaling the initial objective but undoubtedly the expedition was a great success. We had traversed five glacier systems, two of them having been unvisited and unexplored before. We also climbed the
virgin 24,150-foot Sakang peak which, at the time, was the third highest climbed in the Karakorams, the two higher being K2 (28,250 feet) and Gasherbrum II (26,260 feet).

It is impossible to give adequate credit to the efforts and co-operation of all the members in a brief article, but I must say that it was a close-knit and happy team. It was a team of mountain-lovers in whom all the desirable manly qualities had been proved under the greatest stress—the qualities of self-sacrifice and comradeship and, above all, of pushing the body to the utmost limit for something indefinably inherent in a person which he himself does not fully comprehend but feels convinced is intrinsically noble and worthwhile. They also learnt that the greatest, and possibly the only, reward of their efforts lay in the heightening of these qualities in themselves and the happiness this process gave them, for experiencing which they would be prepared again and again to face discomfort and invite danger.
CHAPTER XII

NARROW ESCAPE ON NANDA DEVI

By Statesman’s Staff Reporter

The full story of the Indian expedition’s narrow escape from disaster on the 25,645-foot high peak of Nanda Devi was told to me in Delhi on August 9, 1957 by Major N. D. Jayal, the leader. A three-day blizzard, with a wind velocity of 90 m.p.h., that sprang up suddenly blighted Camp IV on the night of July 21, completely ruining the chances of a second assault.

The first attempt on the morning and afternoon of July 21, scheduled to begin at 4-30 a.m., started as late as 8-30 a.m. because of unfavourable weather and poor visibility. This attempt had to be abandoned just when the team was 600 feet from the summit because Da Namgyal, the Sherpa, who had gallantly hacked the path through the ice, suddenly collapsed from exhaustion.

With two hours’ going still ahead and 600 feet still to climb, the leader of the first summit team, despite protestations from Namgyal, decided to give up the venture as time was fast running out, and it would have been extremely difficult and risky to descend with a sick man in the growing Himalayan twilight. After this, the weather deteriorated rapidly. The blizzard roared like a white inferno rushing down the mountainside. The expedition was hastily called off, and the men, in two groups, descended as fast as they could to the lower camps.

“Three days earlier or three days later, we would have been all right”, Major Jayal told me. “It was just our bad luck that on July 22 the thing started. We had to pack up because the food and the fuel would have run out. And if we had not evacuated in three days, we would have died from dehydration. There was no question of sticking it out. The blizzard was unpredicted, and it showed no signs of abating.”

HECTIC DESCENT TO SAFETY

In the hectic descent to safety, one of the teams covered that part of the journey which upward took 12 days in a single day. This party slid down and ice-slope of 50 feet, but fortunately no one was injured as they plugged themselves with ice-boxes. “Injury to any one”, Major Jayal said, “would have been fatal for all”. The other team, which was
more cautious, reached Camp III on the first day of the descent and rested there for the night. The blizzard had almost obliterated Camp III.

Recounting their adventures, Major Jayal (who has been on seven major Himalayan expeditions) told me that the blizzard was the most fearful ever experienced by him. Though protected by a ridge at Camp IV, the jaws of the earth, it seemed, had opened up and there was one white yawn that seemed to engulf them all. Snowfall was heavy, landmarks disappeared and visibility did not extend beyond five yards. On July 23, the entire party reached the base camp, and it was then that the cursed blizzard abated, after the expedition had left behind two tents and considerable supplies on the way.

Reaching Latha, where there is a temple dedicated to Nanda Devi, named after one of the daughters of a native king who became the consort of Shiva, the expedition recalled the prediction of the oracle who had said that the expedition would be successful. Remembering the Garhwali prayers they had offered before the ascent and the agreement that they would sacrifice two goats if the expedition was successful, they performed the sacrifice and asked the oracle, through whom the spirit of Nanda Devi was supposed to speak, why the attempt had failed. "You would have got to the top if you had sacrificed two human lives", the oracle said.

Arriving at the base camp on July 7, a month after departure from Delhi, the expedition at the beginning had fine hopes of climbing this out of the highest peaks in India. Nanda Devi was a tempting challenge; the mountain is best described in the words of Dr. T. G. Longstaff; Nanda Devi drains an area of 254 square miles of ice and snow and has, therefore, carved for itself what must be one of the mightiest gorges in the world.

Major Jayal felt satisfied with the limited success achieved by the expedition. It had afforded excellent practical training to advance students of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. In a sense it was a combined Services expedition, its members being officers from all the three Armed Forces. They were Major Jayal, Major L. M. Rai, Captain Mulk Raj, Captain L. M. Khanna, Lieutenant J. S. Rawat (I.N.), Pilot Officer A. K. Chowdhury, P. Mukherji and three Sherpa instructors, Sonam Gyatso, Da Namgyal and Nawang Gombu (nephew of the Everest hero, Tenzing).

In a comment before the Jayal expedition left for the mountain, the Statesman, in its issue of June 18, 1957, said: "It is good to see the steady,
unheralded progress which the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute makes year after year. In the three years of its existence, four expeditions have set out to climb formidable Himalayan peaks; the latest party of climbers passed through Delhi last week bound for Nanda Devi. Last year, a party from the Institute led by Major Jayal, the Institute’s Principal, climbed Sakang (25,150 feet) in the Karakoram, although it failed in its main objective to climb Saser-Kangri. The approach to the latter is difficult and time would not permit the party to try conclusions with the mountain.

“These annual expeditions are part of the advanced course in mountaineering run by the Institute, and the student members of the party going to Nanda Devi have been selected from among those who have passed the Institute’s basic mountaineering course.

“Major Jayal, who is one of the most experienced mountaineers in the country, has been on Nanda Devi before. He was a member of the French expedition in 1951. This attempt ended in a tragedy in which the leader, Roger Duplat, and Gilbert Vignes lost their lives. Their end curiously resembled that of G. L. Mallory and Andrew Irvine on Everest.

“The project was to climb the peak and then traverse the formidable arete between the east and west summits. Another member of the expedition described it as an “audacious and perhaps rash plan.” The two Frenchmen were last seen climbing steadily, 900 feet from the summit. One member of the expedition believed that they met their death when a cornice broke off and hurled them to destruction. Tenzing and another member of the expedition made a gallant and exhausting climb of the east peak in an effort to find the missing men.”
IN 1958, the Government of India sponsored its first major expedition to the Himalayas and that to the distant Cho-Oyu (28,867 feet), the sixth highest mountain in the world. Cho-Oyu, the “Goddess of the Turquoise”, is situated in North-East Nepal, 12 to 15 miles, as the crow flies, to the north-west of Everest.

This mountain had been climbed earlier, in the autumn of 1954, under the able leadership of Herbert Tichy, with an equally veteran Sirdar, Pasang Dawa Lama. The two got to the top after an initial setback due to severe frost-bite. Special mention must be made here of Pasang, by quoting Sir John Hunt, who, in his foreward to “Cho-Oyu”, wrote that “men like Pasang can reach the top of Everest without oxygen.” There was no doubt about his strength and technical ability. We were lucky to have got him as our Sirdar-cum-member.

The initiative for the venture was taken by Keki Bunshah. A paper was forwarded by him to the Prime Minister, who liked the idea of an Indian team attempting an ‘eight thousander.’ He promised to back the enterprise and a ‘Sponsoring Committee’ was formed. Keki was selected leader for preliminary organisation, procurement of equipment, engagement of Sherpas, and planning of food and medicines. The team was selected by January and consisted of members from all spheres of life.

We were very fortunate in our Sherpas. Pasang, our head Sherpa, chose his own team of six; we accepted his selection, as the Sherpas’ co-operation, obedience and team-spirit meant more to us than anything else. I would like to make a special mention of our cook, Thondup, who was a veteran of over 20 major expeditions. He could produce palatable dishes from almost nothing, and his resourcefulness was matchless.

By the middle of March, all the members of the expedition, except Nandu Jayal, gathered at Patna. Our equipment and food supplies were brought by members from all parts of the country. The absolutely essential items of equipment were, in fact, brought from Switzerland by the Swiss Dhaulagiri expedition.
EQUIPMENT LOST IN PLANE-CRASH

Keki left by plane for Kathmandu, so that he could make arrange-
ments for our arrival and the transport of three tons of our equipment.
The ferrying of our equipment and supplies was an ordeal by itself.
After a quick calculation, John Dias and I came to the conclusion that
the best way to get to Kathmandu with all the equipment was to fly
from Birganj. We flew with part of the equipment in the first available
plane. Next day the remainder of the equipment was ferried in two
plane-loads. The second plane unfortunately crashed on one of the
ridges en route; the pilot had flown on a wrong course and in a cloud
hit a mountain. We were sorry for the 18 lives lost as also for our lost
equipment. An important item we were deprived of was our complete
supply of films; therefore, a hectic day was spent in Kathmandu in
search of films and frantic calls to Delhi and Kodaks in Bombay.

For the first time, we met our Sherpas. Pasang proudly displayed his
rows of medals, but what impressed us even more was his quiet confidence.
With one look at Thondup and the younger lot, I knew we would be
good friends and make a splendid team.

With the help of the Sherpas, 120 loads of 60 pounds each were prepared.
Major-General Sardanand Singh of the Indian Military Mission in
Nepal very kindly helped us by providing transport for the members,
Sherpas and baggage to be conveyed to Banepa, which saved us two
days' marching. At last, the day we had been awaiting for so long
arrived. We could shoulder our ruck-sacks and be on our feet again.
We wanted to be in tune with the mountains, and enjoy their fresh air.

Passing through the narrow streets of Bhadgaon, we suddenly came
upon an open enclosure and saw beautiful eleventh-century architectural
monuments. The porters were already there waiting for their loads.
Anyone allotted a load knew he had secured employment for 17 days.
This was the agreement, and it was going to take us that long to get to
Namche Bazar.

On March 27, the loads were distributed and the expedition was on
its way. It was a sunny morning and the air nippy and fresh. There were
many women on the road; nearly all had flowers gleaming in their black
hair. Women in this part of the world do more work and are more
handsome and robust than the menfolk.

The days slipped by quickly. We had to go east, ascending innumer-
able ridges and descending to the streams below, only to climb again.
Plans were discussed about the best possible way of tackling Cho-Oyu,
but I knew in my mind that it was no good thinking about it so early
as that. It was three week's march away, behind the foot-hills and high clouds, too distant for us to bother about at that stage. There were yet many obstacles to be overcome before we could get to grips with it. We decided to camp early to avoid the afternoon showers. The pace was set by Thondup and his fast-moving gang, so that the porters could be coaxed to reach the camp early. The fast troop consisted of the kitchen staff and the members' personal stuff, including tents. On arrival, tents were pitched and hot tea was made ready to raise the morale of tired members.

ARRIVAL AT NAMCHE BAZAR

It would be tedious to narrate our daily march to Namche Bazar. The loads were collected every night and covered with plastic sheets to protect them from damp and pilfering. They were shared out again every morning with laughter and occasional bickering. We travelled eastwards for the first 100 miles, where we met the Dudh Kosi. We crossed this river by a rickety log-bridge, and from Jubing followed it northwards for another 60 miles to reach Namche Bazar.

The stages of each day were ruled by tradition, and nothing could change them. We followed the tracks of the earlier Everest and Cho-Oyu expeditions right from Kathmandu. The only traces left by these expeditions en route were the used oxygen cylinders and aluminium ladders, which we found lying as antiques in some Sherpa huts.

We invariably avoided camping in villages or monasteries, to keep ourselves away from ticks and lice, for once one starts breeding these insects it becomes an unpleasant task getting rid of them. We were not very lucky in obtaining distant views of the mountains as the mornings were usually hazy and the afternoons cloudy. The weather so far continued to be favourable, except for an occasional shower at night. Compared to Garhwal or Kumaon, it was more misty and cloudy.

The landscape was dry lower down and, as we moved eastwards and beyond Risingo, the countryside became prettier. The path was flanked on either side by rhododendron trees in full bloom. This being the first major Indian expedition, there were not many barriers we had to cross to get mingled with the local population. Many of us knew the language which helped us to be more friendly with them. We would often walk out into the night to join our porters and Sherpas for a drink and a dance.

We had already walked for over a week, cutting across the main Himalayan drainage system and crossing many an unstable bridge over numerous kholas. At Chyangma La, one of the many passes we crossed,
we had our first delightful view of the high mountains. Thondup, a veteran of many expeditions, who had traversed this well-beaten track several times before, pointed out to us Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and one peak that looked like Gauri Shanker. Many more peaks could be seen but were not recognisable.

DELIGHTFUL SURROUNDINGS

We had now entered the Sola-Khumbu district. Soon we reached a chorten—a typical east Himalayan scene—and met an old woman. On inquiry we found that she was a relation of Tenzing Norgay. Our minds suddenly turned to Everest, the giant of the peaks, and the amazing feat of Tenzing and E. P. Hillary. We came across our patches of snow before Junbesi. We walked through delightful surroundings of rhododendron trees thickly laden with moss. The vegetation became more luxuriant and we saw many species of primulas.

We had now entered the country of the Sherpas, the most hospitable people on earth. One has just to walk into one of their houses to realise the spontaneity of their affection and hospitality. As soon as a guest enters, barrels of chang and rakshi are offered only to be emptied and refilled. On the least pretext, the Sherpas would serve drinks, and it is considered bad manners to leave a house until the host is satisfied that he has done enough for his guest.

All Sherpa villages present a similar look from a distance. Some appear neater from outside than the others. I have seen the dirtiest and the cleanest of houses, but inside the design is always the same. The houses are dark, dingy and sooty; a few have windows usually of glass. The smoke is not allowed to escape in the cold season, as it keeps the room warm and eyes have to get accustomed to it. The fire is always burning; either potatoes are being boiled or chang prepared. Huge bamboo receptacles lie about in a disorderly manner, waiting to be filled with partly fermented chang. It is the same scene in all the houses; there is an air of solemnity and propriety.

We descended from the Takshindu monastery, a pleasant spot amidst a forest of rhododendrons and magnolias, to the Dudh Kosi. The river is appropriately named as the water is deep green, and we quenched our thirst with its ice-cold water. Soon we met the track coming along the Dudh Kosi from Jaynagar—another well-beaten track for Namche Bazar.

Moving northwards, we were soon confronted with a magnificent, awe-inspiring view. We took out our binoculars and maps to identify each peak by name: there were Kangtega, Kwande, Mera and many
more—all above 20,000 feet. I pointed these out to the Sherpas around us, but was surprised to find them indifferent to the views. These very mountains dominate their lives and are the means of their livelihood.

We were now approaching Pasang's village and news had already got around about our arrival. His wife and sister had turned out in their best attire and prepared many barrels of chang to welcome us. Their hospitality knew no bounds, surpassing all that civilization had to offer. The chang and boiled potatoes were served with folded hands. I could only say Thuchi-Che for their kindly gesture. It was customary to do bottoms—up three times before settling down for the party. We had our first Sherpa dance here; it was easy to pick up the basic steps, but once the rhythm quickened and the tempo rose it became difficult to keep pace. Eventually, it ended up with the loud stamping of feet on the wooden floor and Shi—Shi—Shi.

**HOME OF THE SHERPAS**

On April 11, we reached Namche Bazar—home of the Sherpas, after 16 marches. We crossed the Dudh Kosi by a plank bridge and, after passing through a bushy area, descended to the Bhote Kosi, the stream to be followed for Nangpa La. After crossing the Bhote Kosi by a very narrow bridge, we found ourselves up against a very steep climb. A slow and rhythmic pace was set and, on turning the shoulder, we saw Namche Bazar lying before us—the dreamland of many a mountaineer.

A small border town built up by generations of traders between Nepal and Tibet over Nangpa La, it consists of about 100 houses arranged in a hemispherical form in a cup-like depression of the mountain. The houses are built on terraces, one above the other, and white prayer flags stream above the walls and roofs.

Officers at the check-post welcomed us. On inquiry, we found that no news of ‘Nandu’ had yet arrived. We set up our camp about 500 feet above Namche Bazar. Hardly a hundred yards away was the loveliest view-point for the giants of the Himalayas. At one glance, we could view Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse, Ama Dablam, Tawanche, Kangtega, Kwangde and many more peaks. The Thyangboche monastery was lighted up beautifully with an evening glow and presented a solemn, quiet and sober scene. We had our first snowfall at Namche Bazar and the night temperature dropped to 8°C below zero.

Sonam Gyatso paid off the porters engaged at Kathmandu who had served us well. They could not accompany us any further as their clothing was unsuited to cold climate. They also lacked acclimatisation, for which local Sherpas from villages around Namche Bazar were better suited.
As they are born and bred at these heights, their lungs become accustomed to the rarified atmosphere. No difficulty was experienced in procuring Sherpas for carrying our loads to the base camp. In fact, far too many came forward to be employed. Our two scientists, Rao and Dutta, separated here to do their research in the Everest and Dudh Pokari regions. We were relieved to hear over the wireless from Kathmandu that films had been despatched by a fast runner and that ‘Nandu’ had left Darjeeling to join us.

On April 14, after three hectic days of sorting, packing and rejoicing at Namche Bazar, we left for the base camp. We visited the monastery to pay homage to the Gods, while our Sherpas prayed solemnly. Breathing difficulty began as the height became considerable. The tree-line fast disappeared giving place to glacial landscapes. Snow fell every day and boulder-hopping made the going difficult. Four members and some porters started suffering from altitude sickness. Appetite decreased and halts for rest became more frequent. Many porters including sherpanis, lay moaning next to their loads. Keki and the doctor also suffered from the height; Das got a touch of it but his previous climbs helped him overcome the nauseating feeling quickly. Sonam and I still went strong with little ill-effects.

At one stage, we came upon a rock structure which the forces of Nature had shaped into a horse’s head. Legend goes that no horse can go beyond this point over the Nangpa La. The Sherpas firmly believe in this and would not venture to disprove it. It is said that once a Tibetan trader tried to cross it and his horse died on the spot.

WILDERNESS OF STONES

We were now a little above the tree-line and, as we wanted to conserve our petrol and dry meta-fuel for higher camps, it was important that we carried firewood with us. Nine extra Sherpas were engaged for this, while each porter put a few pieces of wood on top of his load for his own requirements. We were glad to have the same Sherpas as Tichy and Raymond Lambert employed. Without their previous knowledge, the route might have proved very tricky as a large number of moraines had to be crossed. The path could be guessed only from the occasional yak droppings and the slightly even surface discernible here and there in that wilderness of stones.

Our progress became more and more difficult. The path was strewn with boulders and fragmented rocks. Wearily we staggered over one obstacle after another, meandering through giant seracs and reached our Jasamba camp. Soon we stepped out upon a huge snow-field with
deep cracks in it, looking more like miniature crevices. The Nangpa La (19,050 feet), marking the boundary between Nepal and Tibet, was a very wide saddle, not a narrow gorge but a smooth snow-covered depression between high mountains. We noticed a pole planted in the snow at the highest point with innumerable prayer flags, to which Sonam added one on behalf of our expedition.

The base camp was reached after a gruelling and exhausting trudge through knee-deep snow and slush. The pitching of the camp presented no difficulty, as we had learnt a lot from the experience of past expeditions. The plan was to camp at the same place as the Swiss and then follow Tichy's route. We would, in this way, save a camp and have the best possible approach to the mountain. For a little while the clouds cleared and we got our first glimpse of Cho-Oyu, which looked serene and majestic. The high-velocity winds had carried the snow away and made it look naked and uninviting. The weather deteriorated, as usual, in the afternoon and the porters turned up one by one in a miserable state. Snow and hail fell from a grey sky.

As the height told on most of us, our morale was at a low ebb and lack of acclimatisation dictated a day of rest. All the porters were paid off, except those required for high altitude carrying and for procuring firewood from below. Others occupied themselves in organizing the camp and sorting out food and equipment for higher camps. As the base camp was to be our home for over a month, we wanted to make it as comfortable as we could.

On April 21, Sonam, Pasang and I left, accompanied by a few Sherpas, to set up Camp I at 20,800 feet. The route was over a steep scree-slope for about 2,000 feet, ending up on a ridge. The last 300 feet were rather steep and a rope was fixed for use as a handrail for the loaded Sherpas. From the ridge, we descended steeply through scree and snow-fields with a few crevices. This camp, which corresponded to Camp I of the Swiss expedition, took us four hours of tiresome toil to reach it. The next two days were spent in stocking Camp I for the build-up. On the same rope, Sonam, Pasang and I were to select a safe route, improve it where necessary and establish the next camp.

On April 24, we moved ahead to set up Camp II at 22,600 feet, closely followed by Keki and some Sherpas. This Camp was located below the ice-wall, the only real barrier presented by the mountain. The successful negotiation of the ice-wall was the crux of the climb to Cho-Oyu.

In 1952, this ice-wall had turned back the British expedition when Eric Shipton wrote:—

“At an altitude of 22,500 feet, they (Hillary, W. G. Lowe, R. C.
Evans, T. D. Bourdillon, Gregory and R. C. Secord) encountered a formidable barrier of ice-cliffs which ran right across the face. It was obvious that it would take at least a fortnight to overcome this obstacle and establish a route over it, and this would necessitate the build-up of supplies on a scale which had already been decided against us. So we reluctantly abandoned our attempt to climb Cho-Oyu."

**Steady Gaining of Height**

We went to the ridge towards the site of Tichy's Camp II and found that the route now lay along the ridge. Three spurs had to be climbed before reaching Camp II below the ice-wall. This was the site of Tichy's Camp III, and thus we had saved the establishment of one camp. The day was calm and fine, with no wind. We climbed rhythmically, steadily gaining height. Clouds obstructed the view to the Nangpa La and beyond, but the plateau of Tibet was visible for miles. Cho-Oyu seemed calm and untouchable, and after the previous few days' wind, its slopes looked more rocky and bare. The ice-patch, probably 800 feet below the summit, looked more prominent against a dark blue sky than ever before.

On April 25, Sonam, Pasang and I set out with ropes, pitons and karabiner to tackle the ice-wall. We felt strong and suffered little from lassitude, though, of course, breathing difficulty was there. Keki was not in good shape and so had a rest. The remainder of the Sherpas were sent down to bring supplies for reinforcement.

At first, the ice gradient was tolerable, but the last 200 feet of the wall were extremely steep. Pasang, an expert of ice-craft, had learnt much from the Argentinians on Dhaulagiri and, absolutely sure of himself, he blazed the trail ahead. Sonam and I were often concerned about his safety, when he tenaciously stood at precarious angles. The pegs were driven cautiously through the hard crust of snow and ice. It took us six hours of gruelling work, but we felt quite confident now that, if the weather held for a few days more, Cho-Oyu should be in our grasp. That evening, I spoke for over five minutes with 'Nandu' over the wireless, and from his voice it seemed he had a touch of cold. He congratulated us on our work on the ice-wall and wished us luck for the summit. He, however, warned us about rushing the mountain.

Next day (April 26), we set out, with Pasang, Sonam and myself in the lead to set up Camp III. We gained height rapidly, but had to halt frequently for Keki, who was not feeling too well. The route, according to Pasang, had become more creviced and dangerous. We could not follow Tichy's route but had to negotiate the shambles of ice-cliffs care-
fully. We were forced to bivouac in an ice-cave due to heavy snow and high wind. Our energy and strength were fast dwindling due to inactivity, and we were consuming our already meagre supplies.

On April 27, we succeeded in forcing ourselves, supported by three Sherpas, to Camp III after negotiating a safe track through innumerable hidden crevices and a jumble of ice-blocks. The route had become particularly soft from the previous day’s heavy snow-fall, and at places conditions were avalanche. It had taken us four hours to gain 1,000 feet in height.

For the first time now we started doubting our physical capabilities for an attempt on the peak. Pasang, on the other hand, would have none of it; with his indomitable will-power and perseverance, he was all for our climbing next day. During the night, the wind increased in intensity and we could not sleep well. Neither were we keen on taking sleeping pills, as we recalled to our minds Lowe’s experience on Everest.

We rose early the next morning (April 28) only to find clouds creeping up the Nangpa La and the wind still howling outside. Tsampa was brewed on the stove, and a great deal of effort was required to crampon and put something into our stomachs. After a council of war, it was decided to abandon the camp—before we got caught in a storm without food supplies. Our condition was already pitiable, we had become very weak and our knees failed to support our weight. Picking up our personal belongings, we started off on the downward journey. The sky now cleared up, but a bitterly cold and penetrating wind swept the ridge. On arrival at Camp II, we met Dias who had been doing a splendid job of work catering for our needs from below. There we heard the sad news of the death of ‘Nandu’ Jayal, which came like a bolt from the blue, and, for a while, we were unable to believe it. He had reached the base camp on April 23 and Dias and Doctor were there to greet him. On arrival there he felt completely worn out, as he had been doing double marches to catch us up. After a day’s rest, which was spent trudging on the glacier to obtain a view of Cho-Oyu, the three set out for Camp I. April 26 was spent at Camp I as ‘Nandu’ complained of feeling slightly unwell. His condition deteriorated the next day. Doctor administered oxygen, which had been brought from the base camp by a Sherpa, Phu Dorje, within the remarkably short time of three and a half hours—an admirable feat indeed. He was also given appropriate injections and pills. That night Doctor slept in his tent and massaged him whenever
he woke. At 3 in the morning of April 28, he went to sleep, and two hours later, when Doctor got up to check on him, he was found dead.

Dias, who was ‘Nandu’s’ great friend and had climbed with him on two previous occasions, was beside him throughout. He desired Dias to see that his property was passed on to his sister in Bhopal, and that his old bearer, Majid, was looked after well. ‘Nandu’ was buried near Camp I, in full view of Cho-Oyu, according to his last wish. His grave lies in solitude amidst the giants.

On April 29, we all descended to the base camp. The impact of such a great loss made it impossible for us to think clearly. We had lost our friend and the best mountaineer amongst us. Being a Lama, Pasang held a most touching funeral ceremony according to Tibetan rites. After a quiet discussion, we decided to make another attempt on the summit after recuperation. The plan was to relax and build up for the second and final attempt. Pasang went down to Namche Bazar to collect a few more of important supplies. We rested, ate and recouped at the base camp for the next ten days. The Sherpas were sent with supplies to re-stock the higher camps. We avoided physical exertion as far as possible, so that we could conserve our energy that would be needed in a few days’ time. The weather was tolerable during our stay at the base camp, and we religiously turned our wireless receiver on for the daily weather broadcast by All-India Radio. We anxiously waited for the so-called “pre-monsoon lull” that never came.

Pasang came back with essential supplies. It was not through negligence that we had left some of our stores at Namche Bazar, but in order to avoid unnecessary expense. We were not sure how long we would take to reach the summit. It would be easier to send for more from below than to carry unexpended rations back.

With renewed vigour and firm determination, we set off on May 9. The weather had by now deteriorated and the wind speed increased. The sky was cloudless, but very often it was hidden by the powdery snow picked up by the wind. This made our movement upwards impossible and we were forced to spend two days in inactivity at Camp I. A hurricane swept the ridge and the western face of the mountain. High-velocity gales laid Cho-Oyu bare—one of the most exposed summits continually swept by powerful westerly winds.

WAY FORCED UPWARDS

On the third day (May 12), we forced our way upwards in the midst of the high wind. Many a time, I was bodily lifted by the wind and dropped a few yards away. The nerve-wracking part of it was a cloudless blue-
sky. We battered on resolutely along the ridge. Each crest was taken on turn by turn, with increasing difficulty, while the gale howled and flew thick flurries of snow in our eyes. Thanks to good rope work by Pasang and Sonam, I was not carried down the mountain. Our faces looked ghastly and aged, and ice and snow clung to our beards to form thin narrow icicles.

On arrival at Camp II, we found our tents torn to shreds and our supplies scattered. Many of them lay thousands of feet down below on the glacier. Putting up tents in that state was out of the question and a quick effort was made to dig a snow cave. The cold had sapped our energy and, after a few futile strokes of the ice-axe, we gave up the idea. We made a hurried descent for Camp I. By now, the mountain had taken everything out of me, and I did not think it advisable to stay on and be a hindrance to the rest of my companions. I descended to the base camp to join Doctor.

On May 13, the winds eased and Sonam, Pasang and Dias, supported by the Sherpas, left Camp I to make the final attempt. The following day Camp III was reached, and the same evening it was decided that, whatever be the condition of weather, an attempt would be made. The summit party, consisting of Pasang, Sonam and Dias, would leave the camp as early as possible, while Da Narbu and Phu Dorje would carry sleeping bags and a tent to meet them en route. They all spent a night of fitful sleep as the wind howled outside.

At the first faint streaks of dawn on May 15, the primus stove was lighted to prepare Tsampa. After forcibly swallowing some food to give them the necessary energy for the almost 4,000-foot climb, the summit party left at 7-30. A start was made immediately to avoid the cold standing in the shadowed mountain-side. The trio were not roped; Pasang was in the lead, closely followed by Sonam and Dias. The going was good at first, except for the bitter cold and high wind. At about 10 they reached the wide girdle of granite and ice, a distinctive feature of the mountain.

**LONE DESCENT BY DIAS**

Dias had already been flung off the face twice by strong gusts of wind and started lagging behind. At about 25,000 feet, he decided to turn back to avoid being a burden on Pasang and Sonam. He decided to come down alone; it was a courageous but dangerous decision, as a lone climber in the Himalayas can hardly stand against the powers of Nature.
Pasang and Sonam went up and up over steep and, apparently, never-ending slopes of snow and ice, and the surrounding mountains sank lower and lower. There was no question of photography, as the biting cold would have certainly caused frost-bite. They made short pauses to overcome the effort of each step, abandoning the rope, piton and extra bars of chocolates to lighten their ruck-sacks. They were now in the "death zone", the region above 26,000 feet, without oxygen. The life-giving atmosphere of the earth here seemed to border on the cold of outer space, where men are intruders in "a landscape of absolute and abstract beauty, never intended for their eyes."

Pasang and Sonam had by now almost reached their limit, but did not suffer from any illusionary visions as experienced by Smythe on Everest, Hermann Buhl on Nanga Parbat or 'Nandu' on Kamet. The mountain was still in front of them, however high they went, offering little difficulty except steepness, strong wind, cold and fatigue. They were on the move for almost eight hours; their movement became slower and slower until the view widened and there was no more to climb. It was 3-15 in the afternoon of May 15. The two did what all climbers do on obtaining the "Throne of the Gods"; they embraced and kissed each other. Pasang unfurled the Nepalese flag and the Indian Tricolour. The still camera worked, but the 8-m.m. movie refused to function due to the cold. Pasang buried sweets and chocolates in the ice, while Sonam left behind a Tibetan prayer flag. Sonam felt very exhausted; icicles had formed on his face. When Pasang gave him some raisins, he put them into his mouth but could not move his jaws because of the cold.

Pasang had reached the top of Cho-0yu for the second time. In 1954, he had climbed it for love and wager. He had told his prospective father in law: "If I get to the top of Cho-0yu, you will give me Yang Tshin (now his third wife) for nothing. If I don't, you can keep her and I shall pay you a thousand rupees as penalty."

The view from the summit was disappointing because the peak was enveloped by thick clouds. According to Pasang, conditions on the mountain, including the weather, were more difficult than on the previous attempt. The achievement was even more creditable after the poignant tragedy suffered by the loss of 'Nandu.'

A hasty descent had to be made to avoid frostbite. Steps were unsteady and vision faulty. At 7-30 in the evening, they both staggered into Camp III tired in body but refreshed in mind—"they had been in tune with the infinite." Camps were evacuated before the weather could further deteriorate and the expedition returned to the base camp, which had put on a holiday appearance to celebrate the success.
ATTEMPT ON SECOND PEAK

I had sufficiently recuperated by May 15 and planned to climb a neighbouring peak with Pemba Phutar, the only Sherpa available at the base camp. I thought, we would claim a second peak for the expedition and be able, through binoculars, to watch the progress of the summit party on Cho-Oyu. I left at 7 a.m., traversed the glacier and then climbed a cruelly steep scree, on which, in our heavy boots, we slipped back at every step. We reached the shoulder in time, leaving the exhausting scree-slopes behind. The ridge rose in white, icy splendour right up to the summit. We cramponed to find the snow firm, the spikes holding well. From time to time, I looked back at the western slopes of Cho-Oyu to see if there were any signs of movement, but found none. Soon the wind and cloud rose to obstruct the clear view across to Cho-Oyu.

We moved steadily but strongly. I led, with Pemba close on my heels, linked by a rope. At 11-30 a.m., when the peak did not look more than an hour’s climb away, I suddenly fell up to my arm-pits in a hidden crevice. It was a lateral crevice, but luckily I made only a small hole through which I slipped, but was held by my elbows. I tried to swing my legs to get a hold with my crampons, but, to my dismay, found them dangling in free space. At this stage, Pemba, a youngster with little experience, got nervous and panicky. He started crying, forgetting to embed his ice-axe in the ice to hold me fast by belaying. I shouted across to him to take hold of himself, and secure the rope by the ice-axe, which he did. Then I told him to pull the rope, while I tried to press up on to my elbows. The sides of the crevice suddenly cracked and I fell inside. I dropped about 10 feet but was stopped by the belay. Looking below to see what it was, I found I was surrounded by a peculiar formation of icicles.

It was no good hanging in mid-air with the rope tightening every minute and restricting the air-passage through my lungs, when at this height the slightest effort results in gasping for breath. I shouted for more rope, and was again dropped by about 10 feet. This time I got a better view inside, and could faintly discern the outlines of a small bulge in the fathomless bottom. When I shouted for more rope, this time with a calculated forward swing, I dropped with a thud on the ledge. Fortunately, the crampon held well and did not break to send me tearing down to the chasm.

Pemba was still panicky over the mishap when I shouted across to him to throw me all his warm clothing, including his feather-jacket, gloves and wind-proof, and all the provisions of food—chocolates, biscuits and dry fruits. Later, I heard him run down the mountain like
a mad man shouting, at the top of his voice, for help. In his haste, he forgot to secure the rope, thus leaving it to be carried away by the wind or dropped in the crevice.

LIKE A FISH OUT OF WATER

I cut the icicles around me with the ice-axe to make a comfortable stand for myself. I was certain that help would come, but was not sure how long it was going to take. I covered myself with all available clothing, but, after some time, the look of the crevice and the cold temperatures made me shiver involuntarily. After nearly three hours and a half, Thondup arrived with two Sherpas. With proper belay and united pull, I was gradually hauled up like a fish out of water. This ordeal cost me and the Sherpas some real cold fingers, just short of frost-bite. I thanked the Sherpas for their splendid work. After a brief rest, we all roped to make the summit at 3-30 p.m. Like every mountaineer, I hugged and shook hands with each Sherpa. We ate chocolates and sweets and Thondup and I buried some for the Gods. I took photographs, including one with Cho-Oyu in the background.

The weather was unpredictable throughout the day, with a steady 30 knots westerly wind. We would have stayed on the summit gazing at the wonders of Nature, but we were too tired and the shadows were lengthening fast. After a brief half hour, we made a hasty retreat to meet Doctor, who had come up half the way to greet us. It was good meeting an old friend, especially after an accident which might have had serious consequences.

Next day (May 16), the summiters, Pasang and Sonam, returned in a terribly weak condition. The previous day’s effort had used up all their reserve. They came down in a dizzy and shaken condition, their knees staggering under their almost weightless bodies. As soon as we saw them coming down the steep scree-slope, we rushed and embraced them and clasped their hands. We took their light ruck-sacks and supported them back to camp.

We had by now spent over a month above 19,000 feet. All of us were keen to get away to better and warmer surroundings. A hasty departure was made to the extent of even abandoning some of our equipment on the mountain. The rope, complete with pitons, was left in position on the ice-wall. We took three days to reach Namche bazar—a distance which we had covered in five days on our way up. As our limbs and bodies were tired, we carried shamefully light ruck-sacks; still the going over the glacier was extremely tiresome.
We took our own time crossing the Nangpa La. It was a lovely cloudless day: the mountains shone and glistened. Here we looked back to see Cho-Oyu in all its splendour for the last time. A long banner of blown snow flew from the peak, and its slope showed up against the blue sky. At the Nangpa La, we met our first long caravan of traders carrying food grains and clothes on yaks from Namche bazar to barter for salt and borax in Tibet. Soon, we came across our porters which Pemba had collected; they were a mixed group, more women than men. They were a jolly lot; we sat down and enjoyed their hospitality of chang and freshly-boiled potatoes.

**FETED ALL ALONG ROUTE**

After continuing for some time over bare and stony moraines, we came to Alpine pastures. The tiny flowers, the chirping of birds and the humming of insects made our return journey pleasant. We passed by isolated hamlets and terraced fields. Men and women were at work on their potato and barley fields. The news of our success had already reached them, and we were feted and congratulated all along the route. Barrels of chang flowed like water, and we reached Thami in a half-dazed state. At Thami, the same ritual had to be performed—more chang and dances which lasted till late in the night. Climbing a mountain is an effort by itself, but it requires super-human effort to cope with the special functions that follow. We knew, this was only a prelude to bigger and longer ceremonies to follow at Namche bazar and Pasang’s village.

On May 20, we headed for Namche bazar as “conquerors.” And, sure enough, the whole village had turned out in its best to welcome us. The Lamas, with the others, had walked to the outskirts of the village to greet and bless us. There were the long trumpets to announce our arrival, and we were presented with ‘khattas’, silk scarves of honour, which we wore round our necks. Barrels of chang and cups appeared on the scene to be filled and emptied time and again.

We were chaperoned to the house of Ang Kami—a local Sherpa of Namche bazar, who catered for all our needs when we were on the mountain. In fact, we had considered his house as our own. Parties were given and exchanged at his house; in spite of our desire to rest, we found ourselves caught in the whirl of social functions. As a rule, dancing began at dusk and continued till dawn without a pause.

After a few days’ rest, all of us visited the Thyangboche monastery to offer our prayers to the mountain Gods; and the incarnate Lama prayed for ‘Nandu’s’ soul. From here, some of us went towards Everest and returned soon after reconnaissance of Ama Dablam and Pumori.
A day's rest at Namche bazar was imperative to sort out our kit and to pay off the Sherpas before commencing our trudge back to Kathmandu. We could tarry no longer because the day of our departure had come. Our hopes and sorrows, the generous hospitality of the Sherpas and their steadfastness, the howling wind, the blinding snow, and, above all, the serene majesty of the towering wind-swept Cho-Oyu,—all these had blended together to etch an everlasting imprint in our memories. The urge to conquer an 'eight-thousander' and to seek newer horizons, that had impelled us onward, had been satisfied. We found it difficult to tear ourselves away from our friends.

Later, we were feted both in Kathmandu and in Delhi, but quite often I felt nostalgic for the fast drum-beats and the intricate patterns of foot-work, and for the joy of living which the friendly Sherpas have in such abundance.
CHAPTER XIV

CLIMBING WITH FOREIGNERS

By Flight Lieutenant Nalni Jayal

It is curious to reflect that my real awakening about the majesty of the high Himalayas came about during swift flights in high-powered machines. The stirrings occurred in the winter of early 1948, when, in the course of my Air Force training, I was flying fast fighter aircraft, often at considerable heights, a mere stone's throw from the maze of lofty snow pinnacles of Himachal Pradesh.

These, indeed, were flights that proved a revelation, for I well remember being fired by a burning desire to venture out on a pilgrimage of wonder to the mountains, which seemed invested with some irresistible magic. Perhaps, only my dormant impulses had been roused, because I belong to the Himalayas; I was born within their folds and brought up under their very shadow—a background that needed only a spark to set my enthusiasm aflame.

My first opportunity came in 1951 with a visit to that imposing 'trident of Shiva', Trisul (23,360 feet), in the lap of the Garhwal Himalaya. How vividly that spring day in June comes to mind when my three companions and I were camped high upon a primula-sprinkled meadow beside the vast Trisul glacier—an enchanting introduction indeed to the high hills.

FRENCH BID ON NANDA DEVI

A Garhwali runner brought a letter, the authorship of which was unmistakable. It was a happy thought that my remarkable cousin, Nandu Jayal, to whom the mountains, since his early boyhood, were in the nature of a religion, was climbing on the adjacent peak of Nanda Devi, separated from us by the Devistan range. He had characteristically accomplished an amazing tour de force in his bid to catch up with the French expedition to Nanda Devi, after overcoming numerous hurdles, including the seemingly impossible one of time.

I can clearly recall 'Nandu's' words of joy at finding his cousin newly-converted to the cult of mountaineering adventure. I suspect he believed I was a confirmed armchair admirer of the mountains; but what he could not have guessed was just how much I was inspired by his passionate
dedication to a way of life which, I feel sure, contributed largely to his amiable and magnetic personality.

I believe I am right in saying that the tradition of Indian liaison officers accompanying foreign expeditions to the Himalayas started in the summer of 1951, when Captain N. D. Jayal, then a young Sapper officer of the Army, who was already a fairly experienced climber, was officially attached to the French Nanda Devi expedition. By the time he reached the 'inner sanctuary' of Nanda Devi—in itself a hazardous journey through the formidable Rishiganga gorge—the attempt on the summit was well on its way. He raced up the technically difficult mountain, and, when he reached one of the high camps at about 22,000 feet, it was already clear to him that tragedy had overtaken the summit pair and there was no alternative for the anxious support party, but to retreat from the mountain.

The weather had been fearsome when the French climbers, exhausted and demoralized, were met by this rather unusual 'Sherpa', none the worse for his daring climb from the base camp over steep rock and ice. Large quantities of camp equipment, which needed to be ferried off the mountain, were piled high on their new and obliging 'Sherpa.' Not until all were safely back in the calm of the 'inner sanctuary' base camp was the identity of the gallant 'Sherpa' revealed amidst expressions of regret. To 'Nandu' this was a big joke, for the French frankly confessed their pleasant surprise at the existence of an amateur Indian mountaineer with courage and skill of no mean order.

My visit to Trisul that year had whetted my appetite for the mountains, and, although I was slow to acclimatise on this my maiden venture and, therefore, unable to go high up, I returned a true convert to the charms of the inner Himalayas. And, thus, the annual pilgrimage began. In the summer that followed I joined a Sapper expedition, which included 'Nandu' as its pillar of support, on a bold attempt on the 25,447-foot Kamet in the Zaskar range. The story of that climb, dogged by misfortune and tragedy, after a gallant attempt to within an ace of success, is related elsewhere in this book.

**FRENCH EXPEDITION TO NUN-KUN**

The ascent of Everest in 1953 was a significant event for mountaineering, not only because it caught the imagination of the world as a landmark in human endeavour but also because it highlighted the essential brotherhood of man, transcending artificial boundaries, in a common struggle—not against fellow human-beings—but against the noble strongholds of Nature.
I was privileged that year to be associated with an expedition, comprising four French, one Swiss, and two Indian climbers, including myself, to Nun-Kun (23,410 feet). No barriers of nationality, language, occupation, or even sex—for we were blessed by an estimable representative of the fair sex—prevented the common bond that united us in the purposeful pursuit of our adventure.

Mountaineers who have climbed together in a rope know the inseparable spiritual link fostered by that vital and symbolical piece of climbing gear. It is indeed no naive assumption to say that the world might be a happier place if more people from different countries could come together as climbing companions to realize the fundamental affinity of man, irrespective of such shallow divisions as race, nationality, colour and creed. That the Himalayas, objects of religious veneration since almost the beginning of time, should be the ultimate play-ground and the most cherished goal of mountaineers from all over the globe is indeed a significant design of Nature and a blessing to those privileged to dwell close by.

When, early in 1953, Bernard Pierre wrote from Paris asking me to join an expedition he was planning for July-August to climb the inviolate 23,410-foot peak Nun-Kun in Ladakh—the highest peak in the 400-mile segment of the Great Himalayan range between Nanga Parbat and Garhwal—I was delighted, because I was not only very keen to enlarge my acquaintance of the Himalayas by venturing deep into the mountains of Kashmir but also because I felt sure that it would be an enriching experience to share such an adventure with foreign friends of our common mountaineering fraternity and to learn the latest techniques of mountain-craft from a band of experts.

Setting your heart upon a mountain is one thing and setting your foot upon it, after surmounting endless obstacles, quite another matter. Planning a heterogeneous expedition to a remote peak in an inaccessible extremity of the Himalayas presented formidable difficulties; indeed, it might well be supposed that the climb itself was the easiest part. Yet, Bernard and his compatriots were not only outstanding mountaineers, rich in experience of the Andes and the Alps, but they also knew their business, and it was quite clear when they landed in India that all advanced planning had the stamp of Gallic enterprise—the equipment and provisions being of the finest quality available anywhere. Meanwhile, in India, with generous assistance from various quarters, arrangements for the long journey to the base of the mountain were assured in so far as it was possible to anticipate the needs of an obscure route.
A MOTLEY PARTY OF 7

What a motley party it was that scrambled into the Pathankot Express as it stood ready to steam out from the Delhi platform on a wet July evening! Strangers to each other a few days before, we were already exchanging meaningful glances of friendship: Bernard Pierre, a silk merchant, Claude Kogan, a designer of swimming suits, Jean Guillemin, a doctor, Michel Desorbay, a commercial agent, K. C. Johorey, an Army Sapper, and myself, an Air Force flyer, accompanied by a band of six indispensable Sherpas, Kami, Gyalzen, Pemba Norbu, Ang Phuter and Pa Norbu, led by the redoubtable veteran, Ang Tharkey—all united by a common veneration for the mountains. Our remaining member, Pierre Vittoz, was a Protestant Pastor, who joined us later from his parish in Ladakh. He was no stranger to Nun-Kun, for the previous year he had skirted round the attractive mountain and cast aspiring looks upon it. With his presence, we believed ourselves piously ordained to succeed in our endeavour!

An oft-quoted remark, attributed to H. W. Tilman, that ‘a man who is bent on getting to the Himalayas will find ways and means’ could scarcely have been applied with greater force to the seven of us and our six Sherpas when we found ourselves at last on the lateral moraine of one of Nun’s southern glaciers, pitching our base camp at 15,500 feet in a wilderness of boulders, rocks, snow and ice. The supreme silence, save for the occasional bubbling call of the snow-cocks and the chattering of choughs, was like a balm after all the exasperations of a long approach journey from the distant plains. Truly may it be said that the actual climb on a Himalayan peak is only the culmination of a series of adventures—or perhaps misadventures—which begin almost the moment such a project is conceived.

We thought of our misadventures on the approach journey and almost wondered incredulously what mercies of Providence enabled us to reach the foot of the mountain of our dreams! When we left the railway train at Pathankot and boarded our buses, the monsoon rain fell in torrents and, midway on the road to Jammu, we were almost washed away lock, stock and barrel by a rivulet in high flood. Our vehicles must indeed have sensed our high purpose, because faithfully enough did they eventually deposit us at the motor-terminus at Doda in the Chenab valley after a 178-mile ride. Switching over to mules for transporting our gear and such members of the team as wished to preserve their energies against the enervating heat of the lower altitudes, we marched first up the Chenab valley and later struck northward along the tributary valley of the Marau river.
PROBLEM OF TRANSPORT

Long before we were anywhere near our goal, we wondered, with alarm, if our expedition would end up at the ignominious altitude of only 5,000 feet when our muleteers went on strike at a wayside place, demanding, without provocation, enhanced wages to an extent that would have crippled the expedition’s finances. Tact and compromise, however, saved that situation. But very soon we were horrified to discover that we had grossly under-estimated our requirements of cereals for the hundred porters or so required to reach us to the base camp from the last village, and, as it was a deficit area in food, our climbing prospects appeared doomed. This time, for a well-deserved consideration, the local people worked a virtual miracle—we preferred not to ask how.

In the end, when all seemed set, we were abruptly halted by a raging torrent, the Zaz Nal, uncrossable for want of a bridge. With uncanny skill, the dwellers of the farthest village on our route erected one for no consideration other than the altruistic one of seeing us on our destined way—which to them appeared foolish in the extreme. A strike by porters, over-awed by the scale of the gigantic mountains around, a stage short of our base camp was the last of our logistical problems. We realised the wisdom of Tilman's remark that the problem of climbing in the Himalayas is almost entirely one of transport.

When Bernard selected the month of August for the expedition’s attempt on Nun, he did so in the accepted belief that, although at this time the south-west monsoon is vigorous in the lower and eastern segments of the Himalayas, the inner snows of Kashmir and Ladakh are appreciably beyond its range and fury. There was ample evidence to support this view, since earlier expeditions appeared to have climbed in this region without undue interference from the weather; and indeed they held that it was the most appropriate time after the somewhat longer spell of winter storms here than elsewhere.

The Himalayan weather-Gods have, however, a way about them that defies reason and logic just when you hope that they might conform to established pattern. This is particularly true of the isolated giants of the Kashmir Himalayas that rise Saul-like above lesser peaks, and, in consequence, manufacture their own weather: the woeful tale of tragedies on Nanga Parbat bear witness to this. In the event, Nun too proved for us a formidable adversary, thwarting repeated attempts on it with weather, the unpredictable nature of which was annoying in the extreme.

Technically, Nun presented no insuperable obstacles by an approach from the west ridge. We had earlier resolved upon this route after studying reports of previous unsuccessful expeditions, notably that of
1946, as a member of which,—Berry wrote, "I certainly did not like it (the east ridge), and I feel quite certain that the west ridge is simpler. It is, I admit, steeper but has not the outstanding difficulties of the east." We believed, therefore, that the attainment of the west ridge was the key to Nun's defences. From our base camp on the left lateral moraine of the Fariabąd glacier—fed by the southern slopes of the west buttress of Nun—the route to the vital col on the west ridge appeared as straightforward that there was no restraining our optimism that Nun was in the bag!

**AN AWESOME SPECTACLE**

When, however, Camp I was established on the west col at 17,700 feet, after a steep climb of 600 feet from the head of the glacier over tediously unstable rock and scree, the awesome spectacle of Nun in front chilled our enthusiasm at once. An enormous tower of snow, rock and ice over 2,000 feet high barred the approach to the final west ridge. Staggered by the mountain's incredible proportions, the question uppermost in our minds was, "Will it go?" Deep inside, however, we were not without that certain lurking confidence which makes mountaineers always believe that there must be a way somewhere.

The weather—brilliant so far—began to play its capricious tricks. Confined to camp for two days, while snow and sleet fell, our minds were high up on the mysterious tower above—the key perhaps to failure or success. When Claude, Pierre and Tharkey at last resolutely forced a way up after endless step-cutting on the steep ice-slope and rendered the really difficult pitches safe with a fixed rope for laden Sherpas, we raised a huge cheer. A site for the crucial Camp II at 19,300 feet on a plateau behind the formidable tower had been discovered and a cache of camp equipment deposited. The route ahead seemed clear—Camp III, and then on to the summit?

No one, however, could have guessed how dreadful an ordeal loomed ahead and how alternately hope and despair would beset our endeavours to the very end. The rest of us quickly consolidated Camp II, while Bernard, Michel and Tharkey followed it up by blazing a trail towards the next camp, despite the poor visibility in swirling mist. With uncanny skill, however, Tharkey excelled in route-finding, spotting a wide couloir and then zig-zagging between seracs and snow-hummocks. The weather boded ill and, leaving a cache a mere thousand feet above Camp II, the climbers retreated to the base camp.

For a week that followed the weather unleashed its fury upon us and, condemned to inaction at the base camp, we read books, played cards
and gossiped idly—our minds all the time torn by anxiety over the prospects of defeat at a stage when the inner defences of Nun appeared to have lost their magic and terror, for the Gordian knot had been cut. My chief pleasure, I must confess, was the animated conversation of my companions in French, which was like music to my ears. It was as well that I understood little of it, for the sweet cadence flowed into my ears without the attendant mental distraction of having to grasp its meaning and import.

When at last the leaden skies turned blue, only 12 days remained for the appointed day when a contingent of porters from the last village would arrive at the base camp for the return journey to civilisation. There was no time to lose, and at once the stocking of Camps I and II began, while Bernard, Claude, Pierre and Tharkey established Camp III at 21,000 feet, having moved the cache left earlier on the slopes a further 800 feet.

WEATHER DETERIORATES

Only one clear day was needed now for the summit to 'go', for the route ahead seemed clear—first skirting the seracs of the ice-fall on the right to attain a little col to the east, and then traversing across the great face of Nun to the west ridge, whence the summit cone of snow and ice appeared a mere stone's throw. In the exuberant excitement of that fateful evening, even while Bernard and Michel vainly discussed just how they would take the summit photograph the following day, sinister 'mare's tail' clouds appeared in the southern skies, and not all the luminous splendour of the dream mountains, K2 and Nanga Parbat, piercing a limpid sky in the northern horizon, could dispel the ill-augury.

What luck—cloud, mist, wind and snow! There was no option but to retreat, for to stay and consume the limited provisions was to risk being dangerously cut off by the storm. Everything was left behind, the tents fastened, and Camp III evacuated. In the blinding mist, Tharkey led the way roped to Bernard and Michel, while Pierre, Claude and Jean followed on another rope. Then, while groping in the featureless slopes of a white desert, the ominous silence was broken by a sharp crack. A great slab of snow had given way beneath the first rope, and within seconds Tharkey, Bernard and Michel slid swiftly down in an avalanche. They stumbled and tossed until 500 feet lower the slope eased. Smothered and suffocated in masses of snow, they were extricated from death by their companions who miraculously escaped harm. Doctor was the first to reach them and treated their injuries in the safety of the nearby Camp II, administering precious life-giving oxygen.
Retreating to the base camp, the injured were helped down by the others in a blizzard that mercilessly maintained its onslaught. I had returned the previous day from Camp I, where, in support of the summit party, the weather all these days had imprisoned me. The sight of my companions, for whose safety I was filled with anxiety, inching their way down on that gloomy day seemed almost like the tragic retreat of Napoleon's army from the fierce gales of the Russian winter.

It was clear that Bernard, Michel and Tharkey were unfit for further action. Time was fast running out, and when the weather smiled again one last chance for the summit had somehow to be clinched. Fortunately, Claude and Pierre were in good form, and Bernard, despite his physical handicap, felt duty-bound, as leader, to accompany them as far up as possible. Supported by five Sherpas, they did a remarkable climb of 3,700 feet to Camp II in a day. For Bernard this was indeed a prodigious feat—something adds lustre to the nobility of a mountaineer's sense of purpose and duty.

ANOTHER ATTEMPT FOILED

An attempt to gain Camp III the following day was foiled again by mist and snow: was ever the enigmatic weather more puzzling? The sun was soon out again and offered perhaps the last chance. After an exhausting climb in soft snow, when the party reached the site where Camp III stood, they were startled to discover that not a trace of it had remained! Tents, provisions, climbing gear, personal belongings, cameras, films, refills for the cine-camera, cooking-stoves, and a precious cylinder of Calor gas had all been crushed and buried beyond reach under countless tons of snow that must have peeled off the seracs hovering above. Struck dumb, we needed an effort to realise that the earlier mishap was perhaps a blessing in disguise. It had saved the team from certain disaster that might have befallen it if perchance this ill-fated camp had been in occupation.

It was a grave decision (for the thought of consequences of another storm were alarming) to take when the party—consisting of four, including Pemba—decided to huddle for the night in the only two-man tent they had carried up with them. There was very little food and practically nothing to drink. If only the weather-Gods would relent the next day. Nun would surely not again elude the summit party.

Early next morning (August 28), Pierre dived for the entrance of the small tent, put his head out and exclaimed jubilantly: 'Magnificent weather! Nun's in the bag! At 7.30, Pierre and Claude on the first rope were followed by Bernard and Pemba on the second. Seracs that
had earlier crashed on Camp III blocked a frontal attack and were, therefore, skirted on the right up a combe to a shoulder, and from there traversed to the left and then on to the face. Two and a half hours later at 21,800 feet, Bernard, after a superhuman toil, lost all sensation in his feet and, realising that he would only be a drag on the others if he continued, announced tearfully, "Pierre, Claude, this is where I must turn back!" They embraced him and, as he saw them climb energetically away, he blessed fate for sparing their best two climbers from the earlier avalanche that had so tragically rendered him hors de combat.

Pierre and Claude struggled up the steep face in foul powdery snow, apprehensive of starting an avalanche, for they were now on dangerous wind-slab. Slowly they edged up to the relative safety of the west ridge—and, in the words of Pierre, "Claude's axe gleamed as she thrust it over the crest of the ridge leading straight up to the summit.....With our eyes fixed on the end of the little snow crest running up into the sky, we went forward arm in arm, slowly, the better to savour our enormous joy. Twelve-thirty.....Nun was ours!"

WELL-DESERVED VICTORY

At Camp III, the Sherpas, seeing two black specks emerging from the summit, rent the air with joyous yodels.

And so yet another Himalayan peak gave up her secrets; the price she asked for was devotion, courage, determination and selfless camaraderie. It is no immodest claim that all these qualities, and more, displayed in an ample measure, led the team to a hard-fought and well-deserved victory.

A number of other Indians have accompanied foreign expeditions during the past decade or so—R. Rahul, as liaison officer, with the Swiss to the Garhwal Himalaya and Everest in 1947 and 1952 respectively, Flight Lieutenant Jayal with the R.A.F. to Kulu-Spiti in 1955, Captain Jagjit Singh and Captain M. A. Soares with the British-Nepalese to Annapurna II in 1959, Tenzing Norgay's daughters, Pem Pem and Nima and niece Doma, with an all-woman expedition to Cho-Oyu led by Madame Claude Kogan in 1959, and Captain Vinod Badhwar with the Yugoslavs to Trisul II in 1960.
During our ascent of Mt. Everest, Indian tea constantly gave us cheer and vigour.

Caleutta
26th June, 1933.

This is what the Everest Conquerors say about INDIAN TEA
CHAPTER XV

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY OF EVEREST

By Flight Lieutenant Nalni Jayal

In 1933, the flight by two Westland aircraft over Everest was a creditable achievement worthy of the best traditions of human enterprise and adventure. Aviation was then still in its infancy, and the numerous problems that confronted the organizers required thorough scientific investigation and research. The success of these flights, without doubt achieved the main object of 'the desire to increase the human knowledge of Nature's greatest mountain stronghold.' The photographic record proved the efficacy of aerial survey from great heights in remote and inaccessible regions.

The Indian Air Force, in planning a flight over Everest at the greatly advanced stage at which aviation was in 1953, set a comparatively easy task for itself. The four-engined piston-driven Liberator, fully fitted with oxygen supply system, was capable of exceeding the height of Everest by a safe margin, but required careful handling of controls, which have an inclination towards sluggishness in a rarefied atmosphere. The object, stimulated by the interest of the world focussed on the bid by Colonel John Hunt's Expedition on the summit in 1953, was very similar to that of the 1933 Houston flights—as they came to be known after the financial support given by Lady Houston. The original intention—that of synchronizing aerial photography of the Everest massif with the final attempt by the British expedition—was dropped in the interest of safety of the climbers, who might well have been disturbed in their arduous task.

SIGNAL TO STAND BY

On June 2, the great news of the ascent of Everest on May 29 was announced. It was the signal for the aircraft appointed for the task, for which it had been carrying out intensive trials to ensure success, to stand by in readiness at the base of operations at Gaya airfield in the plains of Bihar, 250 miles due south of the objective.

On June 6, eight days after the ascent, which we estimated would allow time enough for the climbers to evacuate the region, our Liberator aircraft took off at 8 a.m. and headed northwards on a steady climb.
The Captain of the aircraft was Flight-Lieutenant A. E. Paul, supported by four aircrew. Two officers operated still cameras and two others, including myself, took cine-shots in colour. The plains of Bihar, baked by the intense summer heat, were shrouded by a thick dust haze. It was such a relief to climb above temperatures of 114°F into the cleaner and cooler upper atmosphere. But very soon we began to be bothered by the cold, and, when the altimeter registered 15,000 feet, we received orders from the Captain, through the inter-communication, to put on our electrically-heated suits and don our oxygen masks.

We were still over the plains, a hundred miles away, when suddenly gigantic white towers loomed into view through the limpid higher atmosphere. Instantly, I recognized the Kangchenjunga massif to the extreme right and Makalu slightly right of the Everest group straight ahead. The foot-hills were obscured by a layer of strato-cumulus clouds, and it was a disappointment to be denied a view of the approach to Everest through the lovely valleys of Nepal.

Having gained a height of 32,000 feet after an hour and a quarter, we found ourselves spell-bound at the sight of Everest, profoundly impressed by the awful beauty and magnitude of her form. It was late in the season and the monsoon was expected to break any moment. We were, therefore, not optimistic about views, but when we arrived not a wisp of cloud shielded the massif, and it appeared as if Everest stood posed for the photographer.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

For over an hour, we circled south of the peak over Nepal, and 'shot' the region with the aid of four cameras, capturing every possible aspect and detail of the mountain. Port-holes were provided on the starboard side of the fuselage to enable proper aiming of the camera lens. The cold draught at $-27^\circ$C that entered these ports added greatly to the difficulties of handling the cameras, which were provided with electrically-heated covers. Despite this precaution, there were stoppages which made a second sortie the following day necessary.

It was perhaps unusual luck to be blessed by two splendid days in succession, with Everest in supreme repose during a somewhat prolonged pre-monsoon lull. The complete absence of the famed Everest 'plume' made us believe that very calm wind-conditions must have prevailed. At no time did the aircraft experience any 'bumps', indicating the absence of turbulence, which very nearly brought to grief one of the Houston flight planes in 1933. In such favourable conditions, only good photo-
graphic results were to be expected. It was a great thrill to observe our efforts yield excellent results.

Our photographs greeted the victorious Everest expedition members when they returned to New Delhi. Their appreciation was a source of deep satisfaction to us. It was interesting to hear that they had had a glimpse of our aircraft through the clouds from the Thyangboche monastery on their return journey, but had not, for a moment, suspected it to be a mission by some strange aircraft!
CHAPTER XVI

HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINEERING INSTITUTE

By Major N. D. Jayal

Even prior to the successful British expedition to Everest, there had been some mountaineering activity by Indians in the Himalayas. The world-wide publicity given to the ascent of the highest peak in the world and the fact that an Indian, Tenzing Norgay, was one of the summit team caught the imagination of Indians.

The greatest factor contributing towards the establishment and successful running of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, is that men in public life, such as Mr. Nehru and Dr. B. C. Roy, who are President and Vice-President respectively of its Executive Council, have, in the midst of their other pre-occupations, been able to give their time and support to the Institute, where young men are provided an opportunity to develop their character, exercise initiative and quench their thirst for adventure.

With help from the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research, Zurich, in the obtaining of equipment and in the training in Switzerland of a nucleus staff in the latest technique, the Institute was formally opened in Darjeeling by the Prime Minister on November 4, 1954. Since then, eight basic courses have been held and 168 students trained.*

BASIC AND ADVANCED COURSES

The basic course lasts 42 days, and 24 students are trained at a time. The charge is Rs. 10 per day, inclusive of boarding, lodging and equipment. The course is broken up into two parts, with ten days at the beginning and four at the end in Darjeeling, and 28 days out on trek.

The days at Darjeeling are devoted to theoretical training, consisting of lectures on high-altitude physiology, history of mountaineering, mountain fauna and flora, geomorphology, geology, map-reading and glaciology. During this period, films on wild life, mountaineering expeditions and allied subjects are shown.

* Up to the end of 1960, 24 basic courses had been completed and nearly 500 students trained.
The practical side is covered by a seven-day trek to a camp at the base of the Kanchdzonga mountains, where training on rock, snow and ice is imparted for 14 days. This period is wound up with a climb to a peak of 18,000 to 20,000 feet, which exercises the students in all aspects of their training. The trek back is along a different route and gives an excellent view of Everest and the Eastern Himalayas. Students collect geological and other specimens while out and are also given a chance to organise food and transport arrangements.

Yearly advance courses are run in the form of expeditions. These are a necessary complement to the basic training. They are organised for attempts on peaks well over 20,000 feet, or alternatively for visits to hitherto unfamiliar or scientifically unexplored regions.

Since the setting up of the Institute, two expeditions sponsored by it have attained successes in Garhwal district of U.P.—the second ascent of Kamet (25,447 feet) and the third ascent of Abi Gamin (24,130 feet)—both in 1955, and the first ascent of Sakang (24,150 feet) in the Saser group of the Karakorams this year (1956.)

The Kamet expedition was a joint effort of the Institute and the Bengal Engineer Group of the Army. The Bengal Sappers had previously made two unsuccessful attempts on it—once in 1952 and then in 1953, losing one of their officers, Lieutenant P. P. S. Bhagat, in the first. When the peak was climbed last year, it was no mean feat because it is the highest that a purely Indian expedition has got to in a field which had hitherto been largely a foreign preserve. However, that was only the beginning, and this year the Institute looked out for a high peak which had not been climbed before.

The slack period is during the monsoon, so it had to fall in an area not affected by the early rains. Saser Kangri (25,150 feet) in the Karakorams, and lying in a comparatively unexplored part of Ladakh, filled the bill admirably. Saser Kangri itself could not be climbed because a safe route to it could not be found. Instead, an unclimbed and unmapped peak of over 24,000 feet in the Saser group was scaled by a party of seven, including four students, along a very steep and forbidding ice-face.

**BENEFITS OF CLIMBING**

Mountaineering accentuates and exercises the quality of self-reliance, leadership and discipline among students. Towards fulfilling these aims, the mountains themselves are great allies. These mighty symbols of the stark and the beautiful in Nature provide an atmosphere of power and vastness and exact self-discipline from mountaineers. One has to be thoughtful and tolerant and to exercise concentration, as on these depend
the comfort and safety of one's companions, when it would be understandable to be selfish and careless. Society under such rigours throws up leaders and gives them an opportunity to gain confidence.

The Institute is establishing a Himalayan mountaineers craft, a consolidation of all scientific and cultural knowledge pertaining to the Himalayas. This will lend a certain cultural facet to the training by making students conscious of how the inhabitants of this great Himalayan chain live. New buildings are to be constructed shortly at a cost of Rs. 6,50,000, and the museum will have sections devoted to various areas of the Himalayas and contain agricultural exhibits, items of dress, samples of arts and crafts and literature on socio-religious customs of each area.

The ascent of Everest marks the end of the ambitious era in mountaineering and the beginning of an age in which the Himalayas will be approached with feelings untainted by any national competitive spirit. In other countries young men have taken to the mountains. India has the advantage that the Himalayan range has the loftiest and most forbidding peaks down to the most rounded and gentlest of foot-hills, quilted in a parchwork of forest and verdant meadows, providing amazing scope and variety.

Some of the old students of the Institute have been so stimulated that they go into the mountains on their own or with friends. Their achievements may not be spectacular, but their approach is well-balanced and will eventually lead to bigger things. This movement of youth towards the mountains will slowly but surely gather momentum.
CHAPTER XVII

A COURSE IN MOUNTAINEERING

By Major N. D. Jayal

It has often been said of Indian university education that it is too academic and that students have no outside interests and no ambitions in life except to get a job.

I feel that the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling can assist in filling in a crevasse in our educational system. A lot has been written about mountaineers and mountaineering but nothing, as far as I know, about how it can contribute towards the enhancement of our education. In my opinion, the most glaring flaws—and it is not typical of Indians only—in the make-up of our youth are (a) too much of a competitive attitude towards others, rather than an effort to improve on their own performances, and (b) an accent on trivial and petty things in day-to-day life.

What we do at the H.M.I. is to give students a week of thorough theoretical training in all subjects connected with mountains and mountaineering. This includes high-altitude physiology, plant and animal life, principles of geomorphology, meteorology, geology, cartography, first-aid and mountaineering technique. This is followed by an eight-day trek to the climbing area, six days’ rock-climbing training, six days of ice and snow technique, followed by an attempt on a 19,000 or 20,000-foot peak combining the three. After this, an eight-day trek back by a different route is followed by three days of testing, ending up at Darjeeling.

If a tour like this was all that we were to achieve, there would be nothing unique or worthwhile about this Institute. Most of what I have described could be arranged by a tourist organisation. I believe the answer lies in laying the correct emphasis and creating an atmosphere conducive to men and mountains meeting under conditions from which men come away greatly benefitted.

TWO PHASES OF TRAINING

In the first phase of training at Darjeeling, emphasis is laid on the scientific aspect. By teaching all the scientific subjects that have any-
thing to do with the mountains and showing their relation to one another, we will eventually be able to shape a "Himalayan mountain-craft". We know that plant life in the mountains is related to the geology of the area. Animal and bird life are dependent upon climatology and the forests of the Himalayas. These and the rivers and glaciers dictate the lives, habits and customs of the people living there. So, we see that all these are correlated. Individually, all these subjects have been well-studied and research on them carried out. Various scientific bodies in India deal with one or more of them. But we wish to blend as much of them as pertains to the Himalayas with technical training in mountaineering and living in the mountains. By assuring this background, we combine strong purpose with pure love for the mountains and climbing. We also expect assistance from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research in facilities for scientific research.

When the new buildings come up, one of our objects is to have a museum. Its sections will be filled with exhibits showing how people live in the long Himalayan chain, their agricultural implements, their dresses, their social and religious customs, their crops, their art and handicrafts. These will give students a better understanding of the area in which they travel.

The second phase of training is the time out of Darjeeling. During this period, apart from technical training in mountaineering and climbing, we lay stress on training in self-reliance, leadership and discipline. During the study at Darjeeling, all planning and purchase of food-stuffs and making up of loads are done by students under supervision and advice. Some of the subjects are taught by students themselves and some by a form of discussion — a seminar, for which books and pamphlets are given to students to study beforehand. On the trek, the issue of rations is supervised by a team composed of two students and one member of the staff. On the mountain, after they have attained some proficiency, students are given opportunities to lead on the rope. On advance courses this is more frequent.

I am certain that students who have been with us for about six weeks will go away better and maturer citizens than when they came. I think that, in order to counter indiscipline, it is more effective and lasting to replace the desire to "make a mark" or "feel important", the root cause of lack of discipline, by a substitute — by sublimation rather than through regulation and regimentation. This substitute can be the self-discipline imposed during mountaineering treks and expeditions of living in a restricted society under hardship and of having to exercise concentration because somebody else's safety or comfort
depends upon them when it would be much less irksome to be relaxed and careless.

A BALANCED OUTLOOK

We do not intend to produce mere athletes and gymnasts, but to help students become integrated and balanced in outlook. One of the greatest advantages mountaineering has over other sports is that there is no danger of playing to the gallery—no question of exhibitionism. The most important of all is the impact, conscious or sub-conscious, on students of the symbolic aspect of mountaineering, the very fact of rising higher and higher and surmounting all obstacles. On a mountain, a mountaineer is always the gainer even if he does not reach the summit. He has at least gained in the qualities which danger and nature in the raw sharpen, and an understanding of the character of sacrifice, physical exertion almost beyond human endurance and, above all, the comradeship of one's fellowmen.

I do not maintain that it is mountaineering alone that will accomplish this. It can be sailing on the oceans, exploration in forests and polar regions and similar adventures where the difficulties that have to be faced are undoubtedly bigger and stronger than man. In these endeavours man can have “victory without pride” and “defeat without despair”, unaccompanied by the psychological consequences normally attendant upon victory and defeat when competing with fellow human beings.

The Himalayas, by humbling those that come to them with their vastness and power, satisfying them with their grandeur and beauty, trying their manhood by glaciers and peaks, challenging their spirit with their inviolate secrets forge men who, when they come back to everyday life, will do so with a new perspective. Through their experiences, it is hoped, they will ignore the petty and unimportant things and concentrate on things that really matter.

The mountains have inspired and raised to great emotional heights man of science, thought and letters. I feel that students of the Mountaineering Institute can also be similarly stimulated to some degree if they are sensitive and endowed with idealism, which fortunately most Indians are. I think it will be quite a creditable achievement if even 25 per cent of our students are so animated and exercised in their character and leadership that they return to the mountains on their own or with their companions, with an attitude of mind in which they feel “physically small and spiritually great.”
CHAPTER XVIII

FUTURE OF INDIAN MOUNTAINEERING

By AAMIR ALI

INDIAN mountaineering—that is mountaineering by Indians and not merely climbing in India—has had such a short past that it seems a bit presumptuous to talk about its future. Or, perhaps, that is an additional reason for talking about its future.

It is only in the last decade or so that Indians have begun to take to mountaineering as a sport. Though climbing activity has been on the increase in the Himalayas over the past 50 years, this has been mainly by foreigners: English, Germans, Swiss, Americans, Italians, French, Austrians, Norwegians, Japanese, Argentinians, New Zealanders and others. If Indians have been associated with these climbs, it has been only as porters or, more rarely, as liaison officers, and there is a legitimate difference between climbing as a sport and climbing as a paid porter, led and guided by others.

This volume has given a fairly full account of Indian mountaineering and outlined some of its achievements. But what of the future? Well, first of all, I think one may reasonably expect that the movement, so promisingly begun, will continue and increase in momentum. There is every reason to hope so, because opportunities and possibilities are increasing and there does not seem to be any particular reason to fear that it will not, or that the movement will die down. Local impulses may decline, as, for instance, that of the Bengal Sappers and Miners, once General Williams and Major ‘Nandu’ Jayal had left. But one must hope that, in general, the tendency will continue.

It is, however, tempting to say that Indian mountaineering is today where mountaineering in Europe was some hundred years ago, when most of the giants had been climbed, and the heroic age was about to give way to an age when climbing spread widely among all classes of people and was no longer the privilege of a coterie. But there are so many differences between Europe then and India now that such a comparison would be worse than misleading.

One very major difference seems to me to be accessibility. The European could go to a mountain resort like Zermatt or Chamonix or Grindelwald
or Saas Fee—to mention only a few of the better-known ones—or to one of a score of other such resorts, establish himself and his family in a hotel and go out for occasional two or three-day periods to climb the local peaks. Most of the Alpine peaks are accessible from such resorts. There are many hill-resorts in India but, alas, they are all far from the high peaks. Apart from the enterprising young man who claimed to be a mountaineer on the strength of having spent a holiday in Mussoorie, the hill-stations cannot grow naturally into centres for climbers. Most of them cannot even serve as starting points for expeditions. The only hill-station which is associated with climbing, partly because it is a centre for recruiting Sherpas and partly because it is the home of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, is Darjeeling.

CO-OPERATIVE ENTERPRISE

Climbing is essentially a co-operative enterprise. It can best be fostered through clubs and associations which enable people with similar interests to meet and arrange climbing trips together. The institutions which are active in this field at present are the Mountaineering Institute, the Winter Warfare School in Gulmarg, the Himalayan Club, with its centres in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Dehra Dun, the Doon School, the Mayo College, and the Himalayan Mountaineering Club in Allahabad. There is scope for a great many more local centres of training, particularly in the universities. In fact, it will be only when university students take to this outdoor sport in right earnest and university climbing groups show active interest in it that mountaineering will have arrived in the country.

There are, of course, many inhibiting factors—expense, time and opportunity. Expense is a very real obstacle, but not insuperable even to people of modest means. Rail travel is still cheap in India, and if equipment can be hired and one aims at not too inaccessible a peak, an expedition can be organised for much less than one would think. Still it must be confessed that for most people indulgence in mountaineering necessarily means curtailment in other spheres and may prove a serious deterrent. In Europe, unless a guide is to be hired, which is expensive, the only substantial expense involved is on getting to the Alps. Once there, the cost of huts is negligible. Climbing clubs and societies provide a means of further reducing costs. Time, of course, is the least of the obstacles, especially for university students with their lengthy vacation. A great many people can afford holidays of four to six weeks, which should be sufficient to undertake a climbing expedition. For married people, no doubt, it is more difficult to spend that much
time away from their families. In the Alps, if a person leaves his family at a mountain resort he can come back every couple of days to see them in between climbs.

**DRAWBACKS AND LIMITATIONS**

Opportunity seems to me to be the most formidable of the obstacles. A novice can only go on a climbing trip with someone who is experienced and can teach him at least the rudiments of climbing. There are few people in India who qualify themselves as trained climbers, while the number of novices who can hope to be taken on by them is limited. For the others, the choice lies either in taking a course at the Darjeeling Institute or hiring experienced Sherpas to do the teaching. That is why students at the Doon School and the Mayo College are so fortunate: they have a built-in training scheme available to them.

There is another aspect which is quite important. Most young people get the urge to climb either through proximity to high peaks or through association with climbers—listening to their tales and aspiring to emulate their example. In India, most people live far away from the Himalayas and rarely have occasion to come into contact with climbers. A craving for climbing, is therefore, usually derived from books and newspapers—*i.e.*, at second hand, and surely this is bound to be much less effective.

There is yet another drawback to climbing expeditions in the Himalayas. The time spent on actual climbing is relatively a small proportion of the total time taken by an expedition. If an expedition is away for six weeks, not more than 10 days may be spent on actual climbing. Then, climbing itself has certain limitations for the development of technique: the altitude, the desire to get to the top by taking the easiest route up, and the necessity of carrying heavy loads. It would be much better training in technique if one were on a relatively low mountain, or spent one's time on the lower slopes got trained on different types of snow and ice-slopes. Presumably, that is what the Darjeeling Institute courses do, and that is why Jack Gibson's expeditions to the Harki-Doon have provided such wonderful training facilities.

**CLIMBING HUTS IN THE ALPS**

A further difference between the European Alps and the Himalayas is the existence of climbing huts in the former. Over the past 100 years, scores of such huts have been built in the Alps—situated at strategic places, giving access to a number of climbs in the area. Huts like this eliminate the need to carry tents and sleeping-bags. They reduce the load to be carried and, therefore, make it possible for much more strenu-
ous and technically difficult climbing being undertaken than could be done otherwise. Moreover, to have a warm hut to start from and to return to, rather than a tent, makes an enormous difference in itself. These huts are maintained by local sections of the Alpine Club, or other climbing clubs. The cost of using them is minimal. In Switzerland, for instance, the normal expenditure per night is Frs. 1.50 (double that for non-members), or about Rs. 1.65. There is an additional charge of Frs. 1.50 per day for firewood. Most of the larger huts have gardiens during the season, who look after the hut and are usually willing to help with cooking. Most of them are retired guides and, therefore, a useful source of information on climbs in the region and on the prevailing conditions.

What are the prospects for such huts in India? Will the Himalayas soon see a network of climbing huts? I doubt it; not for a very long time to come anyway. To do away with tents altogether, each mountain will perhaps need several huts, rather than one hut serving several peaks. In order to make it worthwhile having a hut, it must be used by scores of climbers every year; we are still a long way off from that prospect. However, tents will still be necessary for the approach march, and so the need for them will not be completely eliminated.

Moreover, it should be remembered that several approaches are at present partly served by forest bungalows or rest houses of some sort, and the one at Harki-Doon can almost count as a base camp—at least a central base for climbing in the region. This type of a centrally-placed hut at a relatively low altitude may prove to be the best answer in the long run.

POSSIBILITIES OF ROCK-CLIMBING

It is true that the Himalayas are far away from most people and so difficult to get to, but there is one aspect of mountaineering which has remained almost completely undeveloped in India and for which the scope should be considerable.* This is rock-climbing; this requires no Himalayan giants, no well-organised and time-consuming expeditions. It needs suitable rock-faces on what may be no more than small hills or cliffs bordering the sea. There must surely be scores of such places all over India. Yet I know of only two places where, apart from the Himalayas, enthusiasts have undertaken this activity: Robbers' Cave

* The H. M. I. has started sending out its trained Sherpa instructors to all parts of the country, during their offseason in winter to teach beginners the technique of rock-climbing in the low hills. Nearly a dozen such rock-climbing courses have already been held and the response has been very encouraging.
near Dehra Dun, where Gurdial Singh takes his disciples on occasions, and the very attractive cliffs just outside Ajmer, where Gibson takes his Mayo College boys. There must be hundreds of other places close to towns which could provide good possibilities for rock-climbing. Unfortunately, the ghats around Bombay, though presenting many rock-faces, do not seem to present any good climbing places. I myself have looked around quite a bit and I know of others having made similar searches. The rock is not quite what is wanted: no doubt, geologists have sufficient explanations for this to offer.

In Europe and North America, rock-climbing opportunities have been discovered and developed at places far from the high mountains and close to cities where one would have thought no climbing was possible at all. Paris, far from the French Alps, or indeed from any mountains, has the rocks of Fontainebleau which are used by young men every week-end. Every bump and depression in these rocks has been worked over and utilised, and there are passages there which call for the highest skill. Copenhagen—flat and on the sea—could surely offer no rock-climbing to anyone. Yet one of the pleasantest days of rock-climbing that I have had was with some enthusiastic members of the Danish Alpine Club when I visited Copenhagen. We drove for an hour to Helsingfors, where Hamlet's ghost was wont to stalk the battlements, took the ferry across to Helsingborg in Sweden, and drove another hour or so to Kullen. Here there are some lovely cliffs overlooking the vivid blue sea that offer a variety of passages. And if one should get too hot, one could stop off for a dip in the sea. North of Montreal there are the gentle and low Laurentian mountains. At first sight, one would not think they would provide climbing of any sort. But some years ago, I was told, a Swiss businessman settled in Montreal, found that the cliffs at Val David, about 40 miles from the city, offered excellent climbing. Now there is a flourishing group of climbers using these cliffs, and the students of McGill University have a particularly active climbing club. I have not yet spoken of the delightful rock-climbing offered by the Saleve, just outside Geneva. Within 15 minutes' drive from the centre of the city, the cliffs of this mountain offer every sort of rock-climbing that one can desire, and hundreds of people from Geneva make use of them. The Saleve has contributed a very important share to the many outstanding rock-climbers that Geneva has produced in the last 50 or 60 years. In fact, it is interesting that the common French expression for rock-climbing, "varappe", originated on the Saleve.

Similar possibilities must exist at many places in India; they are awaiting discovery and use. It is only through rock-climbing "schools"
like these—places which are easily accessible and which enable climbers to devote several hours per week to the sport—that high standards in technique can be attained. Such rock-climbing would also be a very good preparation for the high mountains, and provide one of the ways of enthusing youngsters with the desire to get to them.

**DIFFICULTY OF EQUIPMENT**

Equipment is another difficulty in India; as far as I know, there is no shop or agency through which one can buy climbing equipment directly.* This means that the intending climber must either order it direct from Europe or buy it from a Sherpa who may have received his kit from some foreign expedition. The first method immediately raises problems of foreign exchange, customs duty and import permits, and is probably now out of the question anyway. The second alternative is more feasible, but equipment by this means can be available only to those who can easily get into touch with such Sherpas. It is possible, of course, to hire equipment from the Himalayan Club at a very reasonable cost, but their stocks are limited. The Doon School and the Mayo College also have stocks for use by their students. All these are expedients, and equipment does continue to present a serious problem. The answer probably lies in extending the system used by the Himalayan Club: have stocks of equipment available for hire. As the demand grows, so will the stocks.

There is one widespread fallacy which also constitutes an obstacle to the growth of climbing. This is the belief widely held that it is a frighteningly dangerous sport. It is true that climbing carries with it certain risks: it is true that lives can be lost and are lost in the mountains: it is true that frost-bite is a possibility, especially in the Himalayas. But it is equally true that for an experienced climber who takes the normal precautions, the margin of risk is very much less than popular imagination in India would seem to accord to it. A great many climbing accidents occur because of inexperienced people taking insufficient precautions; this is probably far truer of the Alps than of the Himalayas. Indeed, I cannot recall any climbing accident in the Himalayas due to over-rashness.

**CRAVING FOR PUBLICITY**

This fallacy is largely due to another unfortunate element that plays a deplorable part in India: the search for publicity. There are a type

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* Most of the mountaineering equipment and clothing are now being manufactured indigenously in the Ordnance Factories and in the private sector.
of persons who seem to go to the Himalayas not so much because they find it a pleasurable experience but because it is a means of getting a lot of publicity. Climbing is merely a somewhat unfortunate means to be employed to achieve the desired end. It would be impossible to exaggerate the harm that such people do to mountaineering or the disgust that they cause to real mountaineers. It is such people who give the impression that climbing consists entirely of hanging on to a perpendicular face in a howling blizzard by one's eyebrows. The credulous believe this, and conclude that climbing must be very dangerous, and a sport meant only for such super-heroes as these men wish to make themselves out to be. Perhaps this diseased craving for publicity arises out of all the press ballyhoo there was over the climbing of Everest. Perhaps, it will die down in due course; we must certainly hope that it does.

Another aspect of mountaineering capable of immense development is ski-mountaineering. I hesitate to write more about this because I am ignorant of the extent to which this is practised by the Winter Warfare School. But skiing is spreading—witness the growth of Kufri near Simla as a ski resort—and the possibilities of ski-mountaineering in the Himalayas must be vast.

The potential for the advancement of Indian mountaineering in the future is great. As the roads and railways penetrate the Himalayas and bring the high peaks closer to the plains, as the knowledge of climbing as a sport and its technique increase, as the enthusiasm of pioneers spreads to more and more people, it is difficult to believe that at least some part of the potential will not be realised.