



Moruisg seen from Sheasgaich

NO TIGERS IN THE HINDU KUSH

by

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Edited by Nigel Tranter



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WITH SALUTATIONS TO

THE CORRIEMULZIE MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

FOREWORD

by Nigel Tranter

It was only after considerable thought and hesitation that I finally decided to go ahead with this book, on Philip's behalf. I am no mountaineer – although I have always been a keen hill-walker – and felt myself manifestly inadequate for the task. But I had no doubt that Philip would have wished me to do it, and his three fellow-climbers supported the idea. Moreover, I felt strongly that it was a book which ought to be published, not only for its own intrinsic interest and excitements, but to make known and to emphasise what I believe to be a quite splendid example of the initiative, courage, endurance and sheer élan of four young Scots, at a time when it is the accepted thing to moan about the softness, supineness and general decadence of the rising generation. A large part of my reason for tackling the editing of Philip's Hindu Kush diary was that I might be privileged to touch my cap to four young men whom I would have been proud indeed to resemble, once – little thanks as I'll get from the three survivors for saying so.

Philip, our son, was killed in a motor accident on 19th August 1966, in Northern France, on his way home from another and shorter climbing trip in the mountains of Eastern Turkey. He was coming home to write this book on the Scottish Hindu Kush Expedition of 1965, and had left with us the diary so often mentioned herein, some hundreds of photographs, and all his maps and sketch-plans.

I must not, of course, make too much of the task of putting it

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all into book form – not only because it has been a labour of love and a real satisfaction in itself, but because it really has only entailed condensing and editing, and usually only minimal editing at that. Ninety-nine per cent. of what is set down hereafter is Philip's own words, written not months afterwards but on the spot, en route and high on the icy glaciers and snow ledges of the Hindu Kush, amongst the blizzards and the breathtaking beauty. The editing of this account has merely been to reduce the inevitable repetition. For this was a day-to-day diary and everything had to go in – and by no means always politely. Whether in fact Philip would have written his projected book this way is another matter. Probably not – for he was no tyro at the writing game, and had already published a great many articles on mountaineering and kindred activities in the hills he loved so well. Undoubtedly *his* book would have been a better book than this. But even so it is a good book, to me.

Philip was 27, and at the very peak of his physical and mental abilities – some will suggest, as good a time as any to move on, though others will think differently. As to these physical abilities, they were far from negligible, for he was 6 feet 4 inches tall, with quite the longest legs of anyone I have ever known – longest and most tireless. I love walking, but Philip's walking was far beyond me. From the age of 8, when we first took him, with his sister, up Cairngorm, and he drifted up and over those far from inconsiderable mountains in rubber sandshoes, with as little apparent effort and toil as one of the sailing cloud-shadows, he quartered the Scottish Highlands from end to end, year in year out, in all weathers, choosing in due course to live and work amongst them, as a civil engineer. He was the youngest man, at 22, ever to climb all the Munros (Scottish peaks of over 3000 feet) of which there are 277; and the only person, at that time, so far as I know, ever to have climbed them all twice. He walked non-stop right across the watershed of Scotland, from the mouth of the Atlantic sea-

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loch of Etive to Ben Alder, where the burns run down to Spey, 51 miles – and that across the Moor of Rannoch, perhaps as grim and waterlogged going as any in the Highlands. He did the traverse of the Cuillin ridge in Skye, a mountaineer's challenge, many times, and once, the greater traverse, solo. Most ambitious of all, probably, he made the full circuit of the Glen Nevis mountains, climbing them all en route – the ten Mamore Munroes, the four Grey Corries, the two Aonachs, Càrn Mòr Dearg, and ended up on top of Ben Nevis itself – 18 major mountains, 36 miles, and 20,000 feet of climbing, in 23 hours.

Yet, do not be mistaken. Despite all this Philip was no 'tiger'. He hated peak-bagging for its own sake, and was against deliberately notching up records, describing himself as no more than a competent mountaineer – although indeed he hardly used that word, content to be called a climber. He asserted that he was even less of a rock-climber – though he had scaled many of the most severe climbs in Scotland, led on not a few of them, and discovered quite a number of new ones. He was in fact editing one of the Scottish Mountaineering Club's guides for rock-climbs in the Northern Highlands, with his great friend Alastair Park, who fell tragically to his death on Foinaven's great precipices in April 1966, Philip being with him then. The fact was that Philip loved the hills, their beauty, their challenge, their quiet and loneliness, and even their savagery, with all his heart. He was an enthusiast, and an energetic one. And because of this, one of his experienced colleagues assured us, he had a unique knowledge of the Scottish mountains which will not soon be rivalled.

His friends were like-minded, and I must salute Will Fraser, Gavin Johnstone and John Wedderburn, and thank them for all the encouragement and help they have given us in editing this work and in the selection and provision of the photographs and appendices.

It is good to know that the further and follow-up expedition

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which Philip was seeking to organise for 1968, to go back to explore those intriguing and beckoning mountains beyond the Lost Valley, is still being planned by other young members of the Corriemulzie Mountaineering Club, to whom we wish every success.

If I have used the first person singular too much in this preamble, it is because the plural might have sounded odd. Nevertheless every word of the editing has been done by my wife equally and together with myself – as Philip would have it – and something of a consolation and a comfort it has been to both of us.

The expedition's little flag, the Cross of Saint Andrew of Scotland, made by Elizabeth McLaren, which has waved gallantly on the Roof of the World now sits in our home at Aberlady on the Firth of Forth, one of our proud possessions.

I am happy to have had the opportunity to write this – for it is a happy book – detailing one of the highlights in the life of a young man who loved life, lived it to the hilt, and managed to pack into his 27 years more than a great many of us do in a long lifetime.

Aberlady

February 1967

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CHAPTER 1

When this expedition was first thought of we were all four together on a climbing week-end in the granite hills of Deeside, in September 1963. The four of us had been climbing together for years, in Scotland and in the Alps, as members of what is now called the Corriemulzie Mountaineering Club; but for long there had been an understanding between us that one day we would venture further and higher. It was only when John returned from the Scottish East Greenland Expedition 1963 full of enthusiasm for things expeditionary, that our plans began to take shape.

Although naturally in early discussions our thoughts had ranged over the whole field of the Andes, the Himalaya and elsewhere in Central Asia, Afghanistan had always attracted us especially – for the Hindu Kush, that great mountain range, part of the backbone of Asia running westwards from the remote regions where the Himalaya and the Karakorum meet the Pamir, had enormous pull for us. The mountains to the south of the almost legendary Oxus River, within sight of Tashkent and Sinkiang, seemed to us a more romantic and compelling proposition than any other mountains in the world. Before we left the Cairngorm plateau that day, we had reached our decision. We would go climbing in the Hindu Kush if it was at all possible – and the sooner the better. Thus was born the 1965 Scottish Hindu Kush Expedition.

For all its splendid title, the expedition was to consist of only 4 men. Will Fraser, 25, a chartered surveyor from Edinburgh;

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Gavin Johnstone, 23, research zoologist, then studying at Aberdeen University; John Wedderburn, 23, then at an advanced stage in his medical studies at Dundee; and myself, Philip Tranter, 25, a civil engineer working in Wester Ross. John was to be expedition doctor – as he had been in Greenland; Gavin would be responsible for a scientific programme, inclusion of which we hoped would help to attract financial backing; Will and I would tackle the map-making and geographical objectives. But, first and foremost of course, it would be a mountaineering venture.

It might all sound simple enough – buy a few maps, ferry-tickets, and away we go. But like most expeditions that ever planned to go anywhere remote and unusual, we discovered very quickly that simplicity was a mirage. As others have found before us, the mountains of correspondence seemed at times entirely to hide the greater mountains of rock and ice which we planned to climb.

I suppose we made trouble for ourselves from the start. Based in Edinburgh, Dundee and Wester Ross, with one of us first in London and then near Aberdeen, it took a feat of organisation to get us all together for even a conference, much less an expedition. We must have driven as many miles to rendezvous in odd corners of Scotland as would have taken us to Afghanistan itself, and the mail that went between us would have filled a post office van. But the major problems, nevertheless, were not of our own making.

Politically we knew that there would be difficulties. Part of the Hindu Kush is a frontier range, bordering Russia, Pakistan and China, and the Afghan government was not keen to let anyone wander there at will. For a year we bombarded their capital, Kabul, with letters and applications, and met with a stony silence. We gathered from other sources that this frontier area was more or less forbidden territory – but we were given a hint that permission might be granted if we applied for an area wholly

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within Afghanistan itself. After long delay we were in fact granted the necessary permission to climb in the Central Hindu Kush.

While we were waiting, we had been finding out more about the country. It was not an easy land to learn about, but by reading accounts of the few foreign expeditions, Japanese and East European, we did learn a little.

The Hindu Kush was first recorded in 1333 by an Arabian traveller named Ibn Batuta, who had crossed the range at some point. He declared that the name meant Indian Killer, but more probably the Kush was a corruption of the Persian *kuh* meaning mountains – the Indian Mountains. Alexander the Great's army had crossed the Khavah Pass, on its way to India, in 325 B.C., and Marco Polo had traversed some part of the range en route for China in 1273. More modern exploration, however, does not seem to have touched the area until the first half of the 19th century, when in the days of expanding empire some expeditions, mainly British and military, penetrated into certain parts. But the two Afghan wars prevented the British from surveying the country properly, and the 800 miles of the Hindu Kush remained unsurveyed, except at one end, as after the second Afghan war the frontiers of that land were closed to Europeans. Actual mountaineering in the area is of only very recent development, the first peak on the main Afghan chain being conquered only in 1959.

The highest peaks, topped by Tirich Mir, 25,500 feet, actually in Pakistan, were in the forbidden frontier area of Wakhan. To the west was Nuristan and the Central Mountains. But the map, the only map, such as it was, showed this area as dull and a flat plateau. No one had ever been there, it seemed.

Had it not been for Dr. Diemberger of Salzburg, we would never have gone there either. Through him we learned that German expeditions, climbing to the north of this area, had seen

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that it was not any dull plateau but, in fact, a mass of high rugged mountains, some of over 20,000 feet. Apart from Koh-i-Krebek and Koh-i-Marchech, climbed from the north by the Germans, this whole tract was unclimbed, unexplored and unmapped. It became the avowed object of our expedition to make a second ascent of Koh-i-Krebek, this time from the south, and to master an unnamed giant seen by the Germans nearby, and as many other unclimbed peaks as opportunity put in our way. Very little was known about the southern valleys, especially the Bashgal, up which we intended to travel. Probably only one European had been up to the head of the Bashgal, and certainly no mountaineers. We hoped also to do as much mapping and exploration work as possible, but except for a few hunters and the traders who cross the passes, the local people not only do not go near the high mountains but never on any account venture above the pasture line, so porters would not be available for high level carrying, and this precluded our taking heavy surveying gear. I am sure that none of us imagined we would, in fact, spend more time exploring than mountaineering.

For this programme permission came from Kabul. The Scottish Hindu Kush Expedition was on.

There remained still, of course, an enormous amount of planning and preparation – in fact we had hardly started. But once we had the destination and the permission, we could feel that the rest might be classed as sheer hard and straightforward work.

First of all we needed money. Although we recognised that we would have to find the bulk out of our own slender resources, we did hopefully approach a great many organisations and firms. In the end we obtained only two actual grants – but one of them, £350 from the Everest Foundation, was not only a generous donation but it gave our morale a great boost. The Godman Exploration Fund gave us £50. This was all the cash we received,

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but many firms treated us, in respect of their products, with generosity. Nevertheless we still had to find, out of our own pockets, about £1300 – for individuals just starting on their careers, no light task. However, somehow or other we did find it.

We needed food – lots of it. But years of expeditioning in Scotland served as good experience, and we knew more or less what we needed. Gavin was made responsible for getting it, probably the biggest job of all, and he worked like a Trojan. We calculated on provisions to last for 100 days, roughly the estimated time out of Britain. It was our intention to be self-sufficient for the whole trip. For the time when we should be back-packing our own supplies, lightness was of prime importance, naturally; so for this period, which we estimated as a maximum of 60 days, we used accelerated freeze dried and quick dried meat and vegetables.

We needed equipment too, to supplement what we already had – high altitude clothing and boots, special tents, mosquito-nets, extra ropes, pitons, crampons, etcetera – hundreds of pounds worth of every type of gear, not to mention camera and film equipment. This was Will's job, in which he was assisted by Graham Tiso, the mountaineering specialist in Edinburgh.

John, as well as superintending health regulations and vaccinations, was our contact with Dr. Diemberger, and many were the letters, sketch-maps and plans which ferried between Salzburg and Scotland. Despite the German helpfulness, however, there remained still a great many question-marks. Could we indeed identify the unknown mountains from a heap of scribbled sketch-maps drawn from the other side of the range? Would the weather be favourable for climbing, or would the monsoon reach this part of the Hindu Kush? How far could we get transport up the Bashgal – 5 miles or 35 miles? If only 5, could we hire donkeys or porters for this stretch? Or would we have to march up and down that long valley 4 times with our loads? The whole shape of

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the expedition depended on these points, but we could not know the answers until we got there – as we were the first to try. We were told there was a track of sorts, but that was all.

I was not inactive myself. We needed many other things besides those mentioned – maps, routes, insurance, tickets and more items than I can list. We had decided that the cheapest and simplest way to get to Afghanistan was to drive all the way by Land Rover, and this entailed fighting with governments for visas to cross their territories. Time did not hang heavily on our hands.

The rather ambitious scientific programme we originally envisaged had to be cut down because of weight. Instead of trapping a veritable zoo, we had to be content with planning to identify and capture small mammals, reptiles, butterflies and bumble-bees, and to make a collection of the mountain plants of the area, for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Also, to keep ornithological records.

We bought a second-hand Land Rover and had it adapted for our purposes at a cost of £530, the biggest single item of our budget. We were almost ready.

We had, needless to say, timed our venture with some care. John and Will had both just sat their final exams, in medicine and surveying respectively, and so were at a suitably foot-loose transition stage. I was in the fortunate position of being able to request extended leave of absence from my employers and Gavin had only to organise his research programme so that it wouldn't be too upset by taking time off. We aimed to leave Scotland at the beginning of July and to return in mid-October, as the very latest we could delay in the serious business of earning our livings. I personally decided to go on ahead, to the Alps, for a fortnight's limbering up, while the others waited to tidy up sundry professional and domestic matters before picking me up, en route, at Chamonix.

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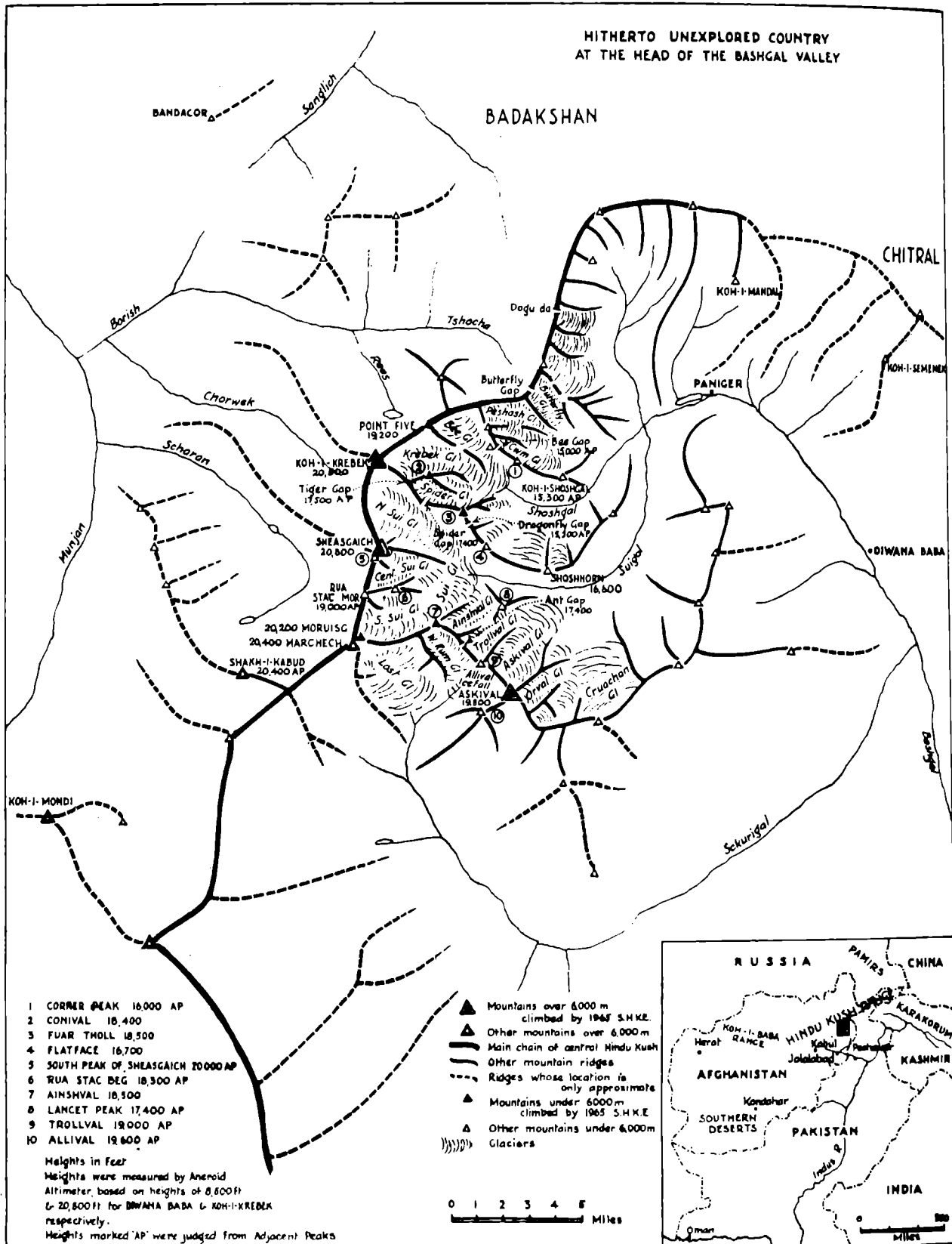
It had been intended that the packing of the individual day food boxes would be part of my job. Unfortunately all the food had not arrived by the time my commitments to others of the Alps party necessitated my leaving. So Elizabeth McLaren, our climbing club's secretary, and Fenella Johnstone, Gavin's sister, gallantly rallied round and made up for my defection in this uninspiring task. I may say that they had been towers of strength on other fronts also, and had made the small expedition flags, Scots' Saint Andrew's Crosses, which were duly to flutter on the windy roof of the world.

After three hectic days of packing, the expedition Land Rover eventually rolled out of Edinburgh, much overladen, at 9.20 p.m. on 4th July 1965, to a great send-off from friends and relations. Taking turns at the wheel – for a certain amount of day-and-night driving was going to be necessary to fit into a tight time-schedule – they were only 20 miles from Dover by 10 a.m. next morning. At this stage a tyre burst, through overloading. This was perhaps providential, for it caused my friends to make speedy purchase of a trailer for £20, and this in fact proved to be the answer to many problems – though it did produce some of its own. They missed their Channel ferry – and then missed another, on discovery of certain items missing from the stores. But they spent the night on French soil, in one of the new Sopus tents, and about 30 hours later routed me out of my bed on a fine morning in the Col des Montets.

It was now only approximately 5500 miles to the Hindu Kush.

HITHERTO UNEXPLORED COUNTRY
AT THE HEAD OF THE BASHGAL VALLEY

BADAKSHAN



CHAPTER 2

Three days later, in the late afternoon, we drove off the Bosphorus ferry and into Asia. We had covered the 1,600 miles through Eastern Europe at a fairly average speed; in fact, our cruising speed on these good European roads worked out at 58 m.p.h., and at this stage we were driving fairly solidly day and night – though we had taken a blissful 3 hours off, to bathe, when we reached the Sea of Marmora. Our system was for one to drive, one to navigate and sustain the driver's morale with song – and the others to sleep in the back, if they could. We were now feeling the heat, the temperatures being in the nineties, but we would have to get used to this. On the whole, the Land Rover was doing well, but it was heavy to handle and prone to weave on straight stretches at high speeds – possibly because of the trailer.

I am afraid that John and I saw little of the romantic Bosphorus, the gateway to Asia, for we were locked in the back of the Land Rover, on the advice of a friendly Turk who spoke English, to avoid paying for extra tickets.

And so on through Asiatic Turkey, on roads which were mainly new and very good, but occasionally old and very bad, or in process of being remade. Driving was an exciting business. Turks in cars cruised at 90 m.p.h. Those in buses and lorries, which constituted most of the traffic, drove at whatever flat-out maximum speeds their vehicles would permit, hooting horns at each other as in a continuous carnival. Bus drivers even persisted,

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with expressions of the utmost ferocity, in attempting to overtake us, when we were going faster than they were, falling further and further behind on the *outside* lane, hooting furiously. Sometimes all this childlike enthusiasm had me in fits of laughter, as Gavin cruised imperturbably along at his steady 58 m.p.h.

Although this traffic was the dominant feature of the afternoon, we realised that much of the country was very beautiful, especially along the coast and the lakes thereafter, becoming hilly and wooded as we moved east. It seemed to us that half the country was little more than a vast military camp. I have never seen more men under arms. The Turks are clearly a proud people, and there were national flags flying everywhere.

I took over the wheel on the way to Ankara. The stream of lorries was not only thinned by now but much slowed by the long climb into the central highlands and over the various passes – which at times reduced the Land Rover to first gear. We passed many evidences of the huge road-building programme under way in Turkey. As darkness fell, we began to experience a problem that was going to keep us on our toes all the way – the habit of Asiatic lorry-drivers to carry no tail-lights. There were many hair-raising incidents.

We reached Ankara after midnight, in bright moonlight, to find the town still very busy. Wishful to camp near the city, to have the Land Rover serviced next morning, Gavin enquired with a tentative “Camping. . . ?” of the first traffic policeman we saw. He promptly whistled up his own police Land Rover, told us to follow him, and in no time had us installed in the yard of the local police barracks. This was no beauty spot, and smelled strongly of the open sewer which ran behind it, but we were most generously provided with site, fresh water and the use of toilet facilities. We cooked ourselves the usual soup and hamburger supper, to the chorus of croaking bull-frogs, and settled down to welcome kip in the two Sopus at 2.30.

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While the Land Rover was being attended to next morning, I wrote my diary in camp, trying to ignore the smells – and the American songs on a Turkish policeman's portable radio. We didn't see much of Ankara, for everybody got so affected by the smells, dust and general lack of beauty that we decided to push on; but it seemed to be a large and fine city, pretty modern, but with the open spaces dry and parched.

Our A.A. route now would have sent us north-east, and along the Black Sea coast, but the Ankara garage people advised otherwise, suggesting instead that we go due east via Yozgat and Sivas, to rejoin the A.A. route at Erzurum – thus saving 80 miles in 500. We made good time along tarmac modern roads, through dry arid country, hilly but not mountainous. Despite the aridity there was a lot of cultivation with an abrupt transition to baked red earth where even weeds would not grow. As we progressed it became pure desert, with nothing but prickly scrub and dust, with the tarmac left behind. I slept a lot on this stretch, Will and John doing the driving and navigating. Better than that, they wakened us at 9.30 p.m. to provide us, in the back, with a meal cooked in the cab in front – a luxury much to be encouraged, even though the fare was the regular Pom dehydrated potato, and hamburgers, and I suffered from severe indigestion.

We drove on through the night, taking turns at the wheel, finding it very tiring on the rough roads. In fact, at this stage, all of us began to feel the effects of insufficient sleep, and learned that we would have to be more careful when Gavin, in fact, fell asleep at the wheel just as we were reaching the town of Zara. Fortunately, at his side, I was rather more awake, and grabbed the wheel just in time to avert disaster. We changed over, and I drove north now, on a road marked chequered on the map.

The reason for this was soon plain. Daybreak revealed that it was very beautiful country, spectacular scenery, gorges and mountains, wooded mainly with willows in the valleys, arid

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elsewhere. But the road twisted up and down by innumerable hairpin bends, with a great deal of bottom-gear and low-ratio driving necessary, so progress was slow. The surface was very bad on steep sections and through villages, but otherwise fair. At one point we crossed higher mountains, pine-wooded and less dry. We reached Suserhi, where Gavin was successful in buying bread, tomatoes, cheese and cherries for our breakfast.

This seemed more prosperous country, the villages better built. The land round Zara had been rather down-at-heel and Oriental. Women were now for the most part veiled, though there were few of them to be seen. We ran down into the coastal plain of the Black Sea, a wide agricultural strath, where we found a very pleasant spot by a barley-field to have breakfast. The place seemed quite devoid of life, but as soon as we stopped the Land Rover one man appeared, and within minutes we were surrounded by admiring Turks. This was a bit off-putting at first, but there was no getting rid of them. Anyway, they turned out to be very pleasant, cheerful folk. The Turks, we found, are insatiably and undisguisedly curious, and all we met insisted on watching everything we did at the closest possible range. We bartered a packet of Gauloise cigarettes for five eggs, and when I was scrambling these, two Turks virtually had their noses in the pan. It was the best breakfast so far, nevertheless, in blazing sunshine, with Gavin pointing out storks, and other birdlife. Life was good.

On to the south-east, myself still driving, the roads easier for a while but still much climbing and twisting. We couldn't average more than 25 m.p.h. At a road junction where we would have turned left for Erzurum, we went south instead, having been advised that the direct road was very bad. We soon were lost, but an ancient inhabitant put us right, by means of signs, and though turning the Land Rover and trailer was difficult we got back onto the correct road. It was exceedingly bad, all 40 miles of it, rough

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surfaces, steep, and in many places washed out by floods. We had many panic brakings, all four wheels locked, as we approached hidden ravines, then difficult climbing out of them. After a while I got to enjoy the challenge of this fairly well. There was no traffic at all on this stretch, with distant views to high mountains, very wild, beautiful but distracting.

In the early afternoon I was approaching one of the innumerable blind bends at about 20 m.p.h. when, to our alarm, a jeep, the first vehicle we had seen for 50 miles, came round the opposite way, travelling fast. At first it looked like a head-on collision, as neither of us could stop on the grit surface. But somehow we got by, with no more damage than a crumpled wing on the Land Rover. The Turks in the jeep were at pains to point out that they could not have pulled any further over – and this was all too obviously true, as their tracks were within half an inch of the crumbling edge of the drop into the ravine. As for ourselves, we were so far up the other bank that the tilt of the Land Rover resulted in only the top of the wing being damaged. Gavin remained solidly asleep in the back throughout. The rest of us, and the Turks – there were about ten of them in the jeep – parted the best of friends, with farewell handshakes.

Soon we reached Kemah, in a deep valley with a big muddy river and views to high snowy mountains, and I handed over the wheel to John, to join Gavin in slumber in the back – which was now inches deep in dust.

About 150 miles further, but still short of Erzurum, John and Will found us a very attractive haugh to camp in for the night, beside a river, with dramatic rock peaks opposite, exactly like Suilven and Stac Polly in our own Sutherland, and nobody about. We had all grown very tired and travel-worn, but this lovely and soothing spot quickly restored us to good spirits. As the full moon rose behind Suilven across the river, the only reminder that we were in the East was the great number of huge

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cockchafers and large bats which flew around, the cockchafers in particular seeming to make a beeline for us. We were asleep by 9.30.

Having seen the effects on us – or at least, on myself – of too incessant Land Rover travel, we decided to have a break for part of next day. We didn't lie in bed, however, being in fact up by 7, and by 8 o'clock were the centre of a group of Turkish children, ten boys and one girl, who arrived with a large herd of mixed goats and cattle. They were as inquisitive as their elders had been the day before, and gave us no peace, chattering excitedly, attempting to pinch our clothes, pens, glasses, Gavin's binoculars – in fact anything they could lay hands on. But they were jolly brats, and, once we got used to them, we found them rather fun. We made use of them by giving them our dishes to wash in the river, and they made a good job of it. Intermittent dust-storms were now blowing up, though the sun continued to blaze. Vultures and roller-birds flew overhead.

Gavin and I became smitten with desire to climb the mountain we had named Suilven, the others preferring to fester in camp – anyway, it was obvious that we couldn't all leave and expect to find our belongings intact on return, for the young Turks were still with us. We waded the river, and slogged up the thousand-odd feet of parched rising scrubland to the foot of the rocks. We were pleased to find that in spite of the heat and our recent lack of exercise we were fairly fit, and did this in about half an hour. After prospecting a direct route up the precipices, we decided that this was not on, as we were not inclined at this stage to attempt anything too difficult. So we moved round to the south, where we found a route to the top which involved only scrambling. We were a bit alarmed to see, away above us near the summit, remains of ancient fortifications – for the youngsters at camp had seemed to try to warn us of ferocious brigands up on the peak. We didn't let this deter us, however, and in due course

reached the summit. The ruins proved to be very decrepit and deserted – no brigands.

The prospect from the top was very fine, with vast plains of dry patchwork fields spread out to distant snow mountains and dotted with mud villages. We gained an interesting view of a griffon and Egyptian vultures wheeling below us and Saker falcons dashing overhead.

We were back in camp by early afternoon, to find the others all packed up – but John away to the local village in pursuit of a child who had purloined my scarf. He came back, alas minus the scarf, and also without the only wing-mirror to have escaped yesterday's prang. We also discovered a pair of Polaroid sun-glasses were missing. It was fairly clear where the brigands were! We drove off, Will at the wheel, at 4.30, without noticing anything else lost to our admiring audience of scallywags; but, alas, a day or two later, Gavin discovered a pair of jeans missing into which his mother had sewn a £5 note!

We didn't stop at Erzurum, a large town which seemed to consist mainly of innumerable military barracks. Some 65 miles beyond we halted for supper on a barren plain, by the light of the moon. The new primus was not working at all well and it took us nearly three hours to cook and eat our meal. Then on once more.

The roads were pretty bad hereabouts, both in surface and contours, and at one point where a bridge was washed away, as well as being nearly launched into the river we got lost in the subsequent detour through a village, and wasted an hour. There was much barking of dogs. Probably we much alarmed the good folk, for it was almost 2 o'clock in the morning.

When the sun rose I was driving, John beside me, and though I was feeling jaded, daylight and the knowledge that we were nearing the Persian frontier made things better. Oddly enough, despite the A.A. guide, which indicated the contrary, the roads

here were improving and getting straighter. At a place called Dogubayazit we succeeded in buying petrol, in spite of the hour – though the pump-attendant was highly suspicious of the 500 lira note we proffered (£20), the like of which he probably had never seen before, and obviously feared was a dud.

As we made for the frontier Mount Ararat rose ahead of us to the north, a great isolated cone of snow-capped mountain, nearly 17,000 feet high. We were now nearing the Russian as well as the Persian border, and this was naturally very much a military zone, troops and vehicles everywhere. We reached the actual frontier at 5.30 a.m. but found it still closed for the night, and so turned back along the road for a welcome breakfast beneath Ararat. John took the opportunity to make our first pot of porridge, despite it being the hottest morning we had experienced to date. We passed the next couple of hours writing diaries and postcards and watching imperial eagles which circled around. We were visited at this stage by two military horsemen, one an officer who asked us very politely in English whence we came and whither we were bound. We seemed to satisfy him, for we were allowed to go on to the frontier-post at 8.30.

Formalities at both the Turkish and Iranian sides of this barrier were fairly long-winded, and with having to advance the clocks here by an hour and a half, we seemed to be losing a lot of time. The heat was fantastic, and watching the smartly-uniformed Turkish soldiers doing drill at the post was a penance in itself. We had a Coca Cola at the hotel and washed our faces in the local fountain. Here we met an English cyclist from Devizes heading for India and averaging fifty miles a day – a marathon effort which must have degenerated into sheer hell when he advanced through Persia. He wasn't very happy then, suffering from a bad cold and having just lost £60 in travellers' cheques.

At last we were through, nearly noon, and myself at the wheel. We headed east. Quickly now the roads deteriorated, with rough

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gravel, through barren hills and gorges crumbling with erosion, which made even Turkey seem a verdant garden. Before Maku the gorges opened out and we found ourselves in an utter desert blazing with heat and stretching as far as the eye could see. The only relief was to look back towards the gleaming snows of Ararat. Conditions got worse and worse, with the road going over great wadis which had to be churned across in low-ratio, the gravel developing corrugations which had the Land Rover juddering like a pneumatic drill. The temperature inside climbed to 99 degrees. This was perhaps the most soul-destroying piece of country I had ever seen, a parched endless desolation of grey scrub and baked sand.

But eventually, nearly 100 miles on, we climbed over a range of hot, desiccated hills and arrived at Khvoy, a town of 50,000 people – though what they all found to do in such conditions is a mystery. Nevertheless the place was not so seedy as might have been expected. When buying petrol and cooling ourselves under the garage fan, we were surprised to meet a party from Scotland, St. Andrews no less, on an overland journey to India. They all knew of John, who was prominent in St. Andrew's University Mountaineering circles, and I had met one of the girls two years ago in Skye. They were now, however, a wary, worried company, having taken three weeks to get this far, and were now delayed by an electrical fault, causing a forced wait in this uninspiring spot while a replacement was sent for from Turkey.

If we had expected better conditions beyond the town, we were disappointed. Instead of getting better the road degenerated, forcing us down to 15 m.p.h., and even then threatening to shake us to bits. We did get temporarily cheered by an odd stretch of 10 miles of tarmac – but it was succeeded by 20 miles of corrugations. Actually we discovered that the entire highway was being reconstructed all the way to Teheran, more than 500 miles, but it was being done in patches, and at this stage was a

nightmare. Huge as the expenditure must be, there was little to be seen for it yet beyond bridges sticking up out of the desert and earthworks of vast scale stretching straight as a die, with occasional little runs of tarmac. This was to be our experience through much of Persia. It was galling in the extreme to cover hundreds of miles of atrocious surfaces and to see alongside us all the way the fine new road under construction.

Beyond Marand the country at least improved, and we lurched through picturesque hilly land, very dry with mud-walled fields and willow-like trees. We were now in camel country.

Tabriz which we reached in the evening was a large and busy city, thronging with people. We had been longing for ages for something to cool our throats, and stopped at a small café here to imbibe large quantities of ice cream and iced Coke – sheer bliss. Moreover the people left us in peace. Tabriz seemed to be a mixture of fine quality shops and shoddy bazaars, with carpet-making the main industry. The traffic was quite unruly. John at the wheel didn't like it at all.

Leaving in darkness we were about 15 miles on when we were stopped at a military post and our passports demanded. All was well until, just as we were moving on, one of the guards blatantly took one of our loaves of bread from the front seat and, laughing, carried it off to eat, despite our objections. Perhaps he was drunk, for all other Persians we had met had treated us with honesty, sometimes even refusing tips.

We drove on through the night, John and I in the back heavily asleep. I woke about 3.30 to find us at a standstill and all the others asleep including Will the driver. It seemed that Will had only driven for half an hour and Gavin twice that, when they both flaked out, completely shattered. The road conditions had been grim for so long, the heat was fierce and the pace was telling. We were only 60 miles from Tabriz.

However we were hell-bent for the Caspian Sea for our next

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camp, and as I felt now passably rested I drove on with Gavin dozing beside me. For over 100 miles of atrocious surface I clutched that bucking steering-wheel – and at one stage the jerking was so bad that I completely lost control, though fortunately I was able to draw up. I got out to inspect the Land Rover, but happily no damage showed. It was 7 a.m., and I was thankful to hand over to Will.

When next I surfaced we had stopped with a puncture, still in the middle of the same sort of parched plain. Changing the wheel was purgatory under the blazing sun – especially as our jack would not work properly. We had to stop a large lorry for help. The driver was a splendid character – and almost better, he had a most efficient hydraulic jack – and he got us going in no time.

With the shade temperature creeping up over a hundred, conditions in the Land Rover were unprintable. Nevertheless when in early afternoon we reached Takestan our spirits soared. For here was a good bitumen road at least – Allah be praised! We stopped for more iced Cokes, got a new inner tube for the puncture and on at vast speed on splendid surface. Soon we were on a busy north-going highway, the best we had seen since the Italian Autostrada, bearing very heavy traffic. It seemed that the next two days were a holiday in Teheran, and this was the crowd heading for the seaside.

So were we. Over a pass across the tail-end of the Elburz Mountains, down through splendid ravine country, we came to the Caspian plain. The heat was now about 110 degrees. Another puncture – but we had bought a new jack at our last stop, and managed to cope. Then on to the sea, which we reached joyfully, in darkness, at Kelachy. We wanted to camp, but appeared to be in the middle of some sort of lengthy open promenade, and only John was prepared to doss down here. After a midnight bathe we decided to turn, but got bogged down in the sand, and had to disconnect and unpack the trailer before we could extricate it.

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While this was going on, I made supper under a street lamp. Then back into the sea again, to soothe our weariness in the tepid waters, John drinking his hot chocolate while bathing naked in the moonlight, at peace with the world.

We finally camped a couple of miles further on, near the beach, about 3 a.m. It was still as hot as a furnace, but we all slept like logs.

We lazed, swam, shopped and generally enjoyed ourselves all next day. We came across, in a café, a Persian teacher of English who was very helpful with our shopping and showed us how to write rudimentary Persian, attending to our every need. We went to bed early, in the hope of getting as much rest as possible – but in my case at least severe sunburn to some extent defeated this excellent intention.

Though we had meant to be off first thing, the sea's call was too strong – also we attempted some brake adjustment. It was noon before we got away, just a week since we had bathed in the sea last after crossing the Bosphorus.

The Caspian coastline was highly developed, with many weekend houses of prosperous Teheran citizens. We stopped for a final bathe in the early evening before the road left the sea for good. The water here, strangely enough, was at least 10 degrees warmer than at Kelachy, and it was tempting to linger; but we still had 1500 miles to go even to Kabul, and the faint hazy outline of Demavend's great snow peak, monarch of the Elburz, nearly 19,000 feet, reminded us of our objective and spurred us on.

The good roads gave out again around midnight, and we bumped across level dusty plains – until a shout from the back from Will and John announced not only that they had wakened up but that things were falling off the trailer. Inspection revealed that we had lost two tins. One of these, by a process of deduction, turned out to be part of John's medical supplies. We rearranged

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and secured the baggage – and resisted the demands of an extremely grumpy Dr. Wedderburn that we should immediately back-track 100 miles to look for his precious tin; being equally grumpy myself, I was probably less co-operative than I might have been. Chit-chat continued throughout the night, with Gavin's cheerfulness putting us to shame approximately at the same time as we had a puncture, about 5.30 in the morning. We coped with this successfully, and discovered that we had reached very fine, colourful hilly country, with waving fields of ripe corn. This completed our cure. Probably too much sunshine lazing on the Caspian. Also, I had stomach-ache.

This unusually beautiful part of Persia, evidently some sort of nature reserve, extended for many miles but finally brought us up on to a high and dry desert plateau, uninhabited and very hot. Crossing this gave us one of the worst days driving we had had, but we clocked up a good mileage. Just before midnight we stopped to camp, only 120 miles from the Afghan frontier. It was suddenly cool, the temperature having dropped to 60 degrees for the first time in a week. We slept under the stars.

We entered Afghanistan in the early afternoon, the country that had drawn us half across the world. Before doing so we were held up for 90 minutes at a hot and sleepy Persian town called Taiabad, by customs, police and a gentleman called Security – whose principal interest appeared to be adding to his collection of foreign stamps. He did quite well out of us. The police chief was fast asleep on the floor when we arrived, and the formalities thereafter consisted largely of endless repetition of our fathers' names, and the towns where our passports were issued – the relevance of which escaped us.

About a dozen miles on we had to repeat the process at the first Afghan town of Islamkillah. Here however formalities were much easier, and Will and Gavin slept peacably in the back of the Land Rover throughout. The customs-officer had to be wakened up,

and half-way through the interview surprised us by calling for cigarettes, which were produced by a man who deferentially took off his shoes before entering the room. These Afghans were all fine-looking, turbanned men, many bearded, and jovially cheerful.

It was here, incidentally, on the way back, that we became involved in a mighty cholera scare which gripped these parts in mid-September, and though we then managed to bluff our way past the Afghan authorities, John throwing his weight about as a doctor, nothing would serve the Persians but that we must eat vast quantities of anti-cholera pills for two solid days – despite our anti-cholera jabs at home. Actually we didn't really eat the pills, John saying that the dosage was dangerously large, and the cholera epidemic was by then over anyway. We just went through the motions and spat them out when the Persians weren't looking – as did hundreds of other travellers, most of whom had every sort of certificate to say that they were already immunised up to the neck. However, eventually, we managed to do a deal with the Persian gent in charge, bargaining milk and biscuits for our discharge a day early. So much for public health.

More desert driving on roads which were now bad and twisting instead of being merely bad and straight. But before Herat, one of the major cities of Afghanistan, the scenery improved and we ran alongside the River Hari-Rud, the first non-dry river we had seen for 700 miles. Finally in the evening light we reached really beautiful country, with a magnificent 6-arched bridge across the river, a large fort on the other side with a beacon of fire blazing on its parapet, and hills behind – romance in every inch. We crept on through the night, for the trailer was giving trouble, past herds of goats and caravans of camels, but short of the city bedded down in the open.

We had decided that all-night driving was not only exhausting

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but much too dangerous in present conditions. In Afghanistan the roads are all either very bad, or incredibly good, built by the Russians or the Americans as part of their rival aid programmes – and on the latter 60 m.p.h. was the rule. But these tend to be death-traps at night, as neither camels nor donkeys carried tail-lights any more than did the lorries, and against oncoming headlights nothing could be seen. And all seem to park in the middle of the road for the night. So we settled for sleeping each night from midnight to 5.30 a.m., at which hour the sun became too hot to make slumber possible.

We liked Herat. It seemed an interesting city, much less modern than any we had seen so far, full of horse-drawn taxicarts and picturesquely-decorated donkeys walking the streets. We had time to explore a bit here, while a garage was attending to the Land Rover and trailer. We sat at the street-side drinking innumerable cups of tea at 2d. per pot, and writing diaries. Everything in Afghanistan seemed very cheap to us. The people looked a happy and almost patrician lot, compared at least with the Persians – but as everywhere in the East, the entire populace seemed to turn out to see us; one individual indeed was so intrigued with us as to fall off his donkey.

We left for the south-east on a fine new Russian concrete road, across a landscape of great jagged rock mountains rising from a flat plain of hot desert sand, and the light being phenomenally clear the view was as inspiring as anything we had seen since leaving Scotland. This, we surmised, was the western tail-end of the Hindu Kush. Some of the mountains, indeed most of them, were of architecturally fine formation, the first I had seen whose ascent appeared an attractive proposition.

With the sunset making a spectacular blaze behind these mountains at our backs, we turned almost due south into unrelieved desert again – this to avoid the great hill mass between us and Kabul. With the dark, foxes and great long-legged hopping

mice darted across the road before us. We still wanted to cover some mileage before our scheduled midnight stop, and were soon involved in the hazards already indicated. Cruising at 60 m.p.h. down a 5-mile straight into the glare of oncoming headlights, I had just drawn level with the approaching pantechicon when in a hideous shattering moment I realised that the road ahead was blocked by a parked lorry with no lights. By the grace of God I had just time to swerve between one vehicle and the other, but doom could never have been closer and still avoided. I went cold all over. Gavin was likewise severely shaken, and the two in the back were rudely awakened. Thenceforward I approached all oncoming headlights at 20 m.p.h., fingering the brake-lever, as survival technique.

Fifty miles or so on, our last reserves of petrol began to run low. This Russian Auto-put road was newer than our A.A. guide and bypassed all the villages – only, the Russians had not as yet built any petrol stations, rendering refuelling difficult for the uninitiated. We cruised on and on, ever more anxiously, the road avoiding all hopeful lights remorselessly, until at length we were 30 miles beyond the point where the tank finally showed empty. Hereabouts, one of the many rough tracks led off into the desert, on the left, and we despairingly followed it. After meandering between sundry sand-dunes, a red glow appeared ahead, which gradually and miraculously materialised into a petrol station. “Benzine?” we enquired tentatively, expecting diesel. Benzine it was, a miracle indeed. We filled up all tanks including spares, to the delight of the great audience that appeared out of the darkness from nowhere, and drove rejoicing on our way. But no one had much stomach for further unnerving progress that night, and we dossed down a short distance on, nearer 10 than 12 p.m. That night we ignored hamburgers for once, treating ourselves to a tin of salmon with our soup and Instant Whip.

Down an avenue of pines next day we ran into Kandahar – a

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famous name but a sprawling place of little obvious distinction, though with a handsome Indian-looking triumphal arch spanning the road. We were in fact not so very far from India here – less than 500 miles, with the Pakistan frontier only about 70 miles to the south-east. We partook of tea in a sultry den in one of the many bazaars, where we squatted on a shelf and swatted flies. Then on, north-east now round the mountain mass, by an American road for a change, for Kabul, the capital, 400 miles away.

We had still 60 miles of that to cover when at 11 p.m. we called it a day, all flaked out. Personally I was too tired even to get out of the Land Rover. We had just about enough of motoring.

Despite the apparent flatness of much of the land that the roads had followed, the ground level had been rising for a long time, and it was no doubt this height which gave us a much cooler night than we had had for a while. At last our chocolate and butter had solidified. We further improved morale in the morning by stopping about 30 miles from the city for a swim in the muddy river, the first bathe since the Caspian five days and thousands of miles back. We washed ourselves thoroughly and changed into our natty gents' attire. We were now prepared to face Kabul.

We entered the sprawling and incredibly dirty suburbs of the Afghanistan capital about noon, on Thursday 22nd July, 18 days after leaving Edinburgh. We had completed the major journey, as far as distance was concerned – but the difficulties ahead were now likely to multiply as we made for the exciting mountains which had drawn us half-way round the globe. Yet strangely enough, already some of us were feeling homesick for Scotland, myself most of all.

CHAPTER 3

We spent 5 days at Kabul – for there was much to be done, enquiries to be made, authorities to interview and plans to be finalised. Inevitably snags and frustrations cropped up. But we enjoyed those days nevertheless, and they enabled us all to recover completely from travel fatigue and staleness. To find a camping place we headed out of town in a purely arbitrary direction, and had the good fortune to land up near a magnificent artificial lake called Qarga, excellent for bathing and with a good restaurant which specialised in the finest steak meals of my experience, at reasonable cost. We settled here, and though we wore a trail in and out of Kabul during the next days, often productive of jaded spirits and irritation, this lovely spot soothed and restored us. We arranged that there was always at least one of us guarding camp and one enjoying the lakeside, to be joined by the others when freed from the chores of the city.

Our first call was at the British Embassy, a vast white building of pretentious proportions, set far out in the suburbs – and in fact very difficult to find. There was no one there, however, except an unhelpful porter, and although we collected our mail we got nothing else. We went into town, and after roaming about in what turned out to be the poorer districts, found the more modern quarter and the huge modern Spinzar Hotel, where we spent £4 on extravagant eating and refreshment, but felt absurdly well and civilised in consequence. Kabul is a huge city, but we

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were not greatly impressed. Dust, grit, smells and flies everywhere.

Next day Gavin and I were more fortunate at the Embassy. We ran to earth a female consular official, who was helpful as far as she could be. We gleaned some useful information. Firstly, that this was a public holiday and nothing could be done today anywhere in Kabul, no shopping, garage services or enquiries from the authorities. Second, that we required police permission to follow our chosen route up the valley of the Bashgal River, in Nuristan. Third, that a member of the Embassy staff had in fact penetrated a shortish distance up the Bashgal, about 20 miles perhaps, in 1963, and written a report on it – which report we borrowed and found fascinating. We discovered that there was some sort of track most of the way up our access valley, but that no European had ever reached the head of it – which might be as far as 70 miles – with the possible exception of Sir George Robertson in 1890. The lady also told us that there were no horses and donkeys available for transport in Nuristan – but this we later proved to be incorrect. She likewise assured us that the people were friendly – and in this she was quite right, happily.

We now had ample excuse for the remainder of the day to be spent in recuperative lazing. We drove back to the lakeside and bliss.

Our success the day following, Saturday, was unequal. The Afghan Foreign Ministry said that we could climb our mountains – but we, as foreigners, could not approach them by the only available route, which passed through a forbidden military zone around Barikot, near the Pakistan frontier. Here was a typically Oriental enigma – but the matter was being referred to the Interior Minister, and we might hear his decision next day. My own suggestion was that we should get an Afghan to drive our machine through the zone, while we hoofed it over the intervening mountains. We would have to wait for yet another day

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anyway, as we had not yet been able to get the Land Rover serviced. So it was back to the waterside, and lotus-eating.

Although John and Will set out for Kabul early on Sunday, to deliver the Land Rover to the garage, it was late afternoon before they returned. Their news was basically excellent. We could proceed through the forbidden Barikot zone so long as we did not stop – in fact they had acquired a written permit to that effect. But there were snags. The bridges in the Bashgal valley were all said to have been washed away in recent floods. We decided to meet this hazard when we got there. Gavin and I congratulated our envoys – for this advance in our situation had only been achieved by a hot day's oscillation between the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs, and the police headquarters.

Monday we went shopping for stores, fuel and petrol cans in the bazaars – a hot and dusty business. We were not entirely successful in this either. For instance, we couldn't get a thermometer or paraffin. We repaired to the Spinzar for Cokes and ice cream – but the cost of eating there drove us to a less ambitious establishment where we fed well on roasted meat impaled on spikes, in an atmosphere so thick with flies and potted music as to be virtually opaque. An Afghan sleeping beside us on a shelf was almost invisible under his screen of insects. We called in at the British Embassy on the way back, for mail – and I was glad to receive a letter from Scotland announcing that I had attained the dizzy eminence of A.M.I.C.E. which called for mild celebration.

That evening, feeling very pleased with life, we packed up camp and drove a bit round the lake for our last steak dinner at the restaurant there. Afterwards, at the first convenient spot, we slept under the stars again. That night there was a great display of wildfire-lightning to the south-east, continuing for hours, indicative of a major storm.

Daylight revealed that we were in a very beautiful place, above

a neat mud village amongst lush woodlands and irrigated fields, with high barren mountains behind – an ideal spot for photography in the early morning sunlight. We had a final swim – and were on our way.

Due east we drove now, through extraordinary and magnificent country, at first cultivated but dusty land between smallish mountains. We climbed on and on, slowly rising to the Lataband Pass, and then dropped mile after mile, for 6000 feet, down the other side, on the most spectacular road I had ever seen. The terrain was a challenge indeed to road-builders, just a maze of dissected rock mountains, dry gullies and immense steep-sided valleys. The road was constructed either as a niche dug out of almost sheer cliffs, usually of compacted moraine, or else on the sliced-off crests of knife-edged arêtes, with fearsome drops on either side. Hairpin-bends and wedge-like grades were the order of the day, and the sight of it all ahead of us was frightening. This, it seemed, was the old road. The new highway, on quite a different line, was then closed for reconstruction. There was quite a regular stream of gaily-painted lorries and rickmatick buses churning along, despite the hazards. However, Will got us over it without mishap – though we did lose our empty paraffin can – and eventually we rejoined the new road, and tarmac, about 40 miles short of Jalalabad. This, by way of contrast, was a finely engineered toll-highway, tunnelled and with good curves, running along a beautiful valley, which was often reduced to a rugged gorge in which the great Kabul River thundered.

The journey to Jalalabad, nearly 100 miles, had taken us 5 hours. It was frantically hot, and we took a poor view of the place, a small seedy town of rows and rows of fly-ridden booths, in one of which we drank tea and wrote the last letters we would be able to dispatch for a long time. Trying to post these however was not simple, for the only post office in town appeared neither to sell stamps nor to accept letters for postage. We decided that this

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Jalalabad was a dump of no mean order. Eventually we entrusted our mail to the local hotel. It did, indeed, duly reach its destination.

We tried again to buy the paraffin we had failed to get at Kabul. We were directed, after fruitless efforts, to a garage well out of town. At first the people there thought we were trying to sell *them* the paraffin. But even once that was resolved, and it turned out that they had the stuff, we had to go back to Jalalabad to buy a can to hold it. A dust-storm was blowing, and we found life a trifle trying – especially as Doctor John lectured us for drinking lemonade from a roadside booth.

The large Kunar River, from Nuristan and the north, joins the Kabul River near Jalalabad, which is consequently something of a junction-town, and up this lay our route. We took the very rough track northwards, leaving main roads once and for all – and for the first time I began to feel really excited.

We wound and bumped along through typical semi-desert and rock peaks, the road gradually improving a little as the Kunar appeared on our right. We could not average more than 10 m.p.h. now, and it was dark by the time we passed through the first small village. Soon thereafter even this modest progress was brought to a sudden halt by a grinding jolt. We were shaken to find that the left back wheel had fallen off the Land Rover. Responsibility for the disaster was never actually settled – probably somebody had just forgotten to tighten the nuts properly after the last puncture. At any rate, it proved to be a lot less serious than it might have been, for after some search we were able to find no less than four of the five missing nuts, and although the thread of the wheel-bolts was damaged, it was not so badly so that brute force would not make a new one.

We had been debating whether or not, in view of slow progress, to drive all night, but now we decided to stay where we were. This proved to be a remarkable locality for insect life. Most

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notable species were the fireflies that jinked about in the dark, flashing on and off. Huge pink sun-spiders up to 3 inches across scuttled around in the dust. Our long descent from the Lataband Pass meant that we were now only about 2000 feet above sea-level – the lowest for a long time, despite the comparative proximity of the giant mountains – and the heat was the worst to date. We couldn't sleep, mosquitoes adding to our woes. I stuck it for as long as I could, but eventually got up about 2 a.m. and went for a walk, then brewed up tea, the others being just as wakeful. Thus refreshed, with the help of a small breeze that sprang up, about 4 o'clock we got over.

The Kunar valley, with its wide river, continued to be green, hot and habited. Although the track was still very rough, the back wheel stayed on next morning, and soon we began to run through an area of small irrigated paddy-fields, to reach Chigha Serai, where the Pech River comes in from Central Nuristan to the north. This was the headquarters of the local military governor, and we were stopped at an army road-block. John went off to deal with the authorities, while we waited in the Rover, feeling hot and dusty, but admired at close quarters by much of the local population. John returned in an hour and a half with news that the road was definitely washed away, beyond Barikot on the Bashgal, about 50 miles ahead. He had acquired letters to the headmen at Barikot and Kamdesh further on, however, to help us. So far so good.

We pushed on, the road now hardly more than a cart-track, rocky in sections, with great grades and twists and some remarkable fords. The country grew finer and finer, the mountains heightening and drawing closer until the river was frequently roaring through gorges. The Kunar had a strange appearance, a tearing mass of heavy-looking muddy water, almost like wax. A thunderstorm was raging ahead of us.

About 25 miles short of Barikot we found an incoming stream

of clear water. As we were all parched with thirst, and dusty, it was bliss to stop to drink, eat biscuits and rest for a bit. Travel on such tracks as these is wearing to mind and body. Nevertheless we were thankful to be still rolling on wheels, and the country was becoming truly beautiful. The river was running high, and full of great beams of timber, washed down from goodness knows where, and most of the local people seemed to be engaged in trying to fish these out, involving some hair-raising feats of swimming.

At last the narrow valley opened out to a view ahead, and we could see the first great mountains of the Hindu Kush, sharp snow-clad peaks of about 14,000 feet which across a wide basin of cultivated crops, lower hills and dark forests, was exceedingly fine. Morale rose. These mountains were on the Pakistan border; in fact the entire far side of the Kunar was in Pakistan. About here we ran into and through a violent thunderstorm, with torrential rain and stinging hail – the first we had seen since Bulgaria.

We finally reached Barikot at sundown. We were met by an emissary of the military with a lorry, who confirmed that the road was washed away and impassable not far ahead. We followed him through the village, without any formalities, and on for another two miles. Ahead of us now another deep gorge and a major river came in to join the Kunar on the left. This was it. After three weeks of driving we had reached the Bashgal. It was a great rushing torrent of grey glacier water, roaring like a turbine, splashing great gouts of spray, and cold air with it, into the warm evening air, and leaving space for only a very narrow track along one wall of the gorge. It was a fitting gateway to our intended goal.

A short distance up we came to a stop, where a military gang was working on the blocked road. They were all very friendly, but while the others went ahead on foot to reconnoitre, I sat guard in the Rover. Presently they returned with the information,

given by the engineer-officer in charge, a pleasant but harassed man who spoke some English, that he thought it would be three weeks at least before the road was open again. My friends, having seen a great 50-yard gap where the cliff plunged sheer into the river, could only agree. We decided to pitch camp where we were, on a shelf by the roadside, which was just wide enough.

We were soon eating the supper that John made for us while we pitched the Sopus. We were back in the mountains, by a glacier torrent, away from the dust and the desert, and even though there were problems ahead, life was good. That night, lulled by the steady roar of the Bashgal, I slept deep and content.

At a conference in the shade of a tree, next morning, we were much admired by passers-by. There were three courses before us: to wait for the road to be opened; to hire porters for the 60 miles march to Ahmad Diwana at the head of the Bashgal; or to pack-march there on our own. Opinions differed. Indeed it was impossible to decide without more facts to guide us. John and Will headed back in the Land Rover to Barikot, to discover what they could about porters, the road, prices and so on. Gavin and I spent the morning diary-writing, a marathon task with so much to record.

At noon, John and Will returned with a local United Nations project officer, Assan by name, engaged in installing a sanitary water-supply, who had kindly volunteered to act as our interpreter meantime. Arrangements had advanced astonishingly well, and it appeared that we would be setting out on foot from Barikot at 6 a.m. next morning, with 6 donkeys and their drivers. Everybody seemed to be falling over themselves to help us, and we had a pressing and non-refusable invitation to move forthwith back to the local military chief's house, there to organise ourselves and spend the night. Alas, this meant packing up our fine camp in

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the gorge. However this was done at speed, and we rolled back to the village.

We spent the afternoon sorting out our gear into three categories – that to take with us, that to stay in the Land Rover and that to cast. The middle category was certainly the largest, and the last almost as great as the first. Undoubtedly we had brought too much stuff, when it came to carrying. All this was watched with great interest by the villagers, and latterly by the military commander, a little man grossly fat, whom John pronounced as about to die of heart-failure – and indeed he was dead on our return. All these scattered with great alacrity, as did we, when a sudden thunder-squall blew up with a great gust of wind and dust, spreading chaos all around. The rain that followed was sheer violence. Fortunately it didn't last long.

Naturally there was much debate about what we were going to take with us, in the end. Gavin's huge crate of scientific gear, which had much overawed us, turned out, for instance, to contain a lot of wooden packing, two small cylinders full of envelopes, and a vast box of mousetraps. A pity that all our problems were not so easily dealt with as this.

We had supper on the Commandant's lawn, again with our admiring audience in attendance, then dossed down early on the four wicker beds which had been provided for us, feeling quite exotic in the hot night air, under the stars, with wildfire flickering to the south, and guarded all night by an Afghan sentry armed to the teeth – who shouted the equivalent of "Halt – and be recognised!" to all who passed by. This, in Afghan, sounded like the combination of a great screech with a banshee wail, calculated to strike the fear of death into all concerned. We had no doubts as to the safety of our belongings that night.

We were up at first light, 4.45 a.m., and soon after that our donkey-drivers began to appear and demand their loads and their pay – a meagre 25 Afghans a day. I made breakfast while the

others packed, a strange diet of hot chocolate and a great mass of Instant Whip, a kind of milk pudding easy to make and sustaining. By 6 a.m. our donkeys were under way. In the end there were 9 of them, and 4 drovers, of whom one was much the eldest and seemed to be the boss – it had proved impossible to get all our gear on 6 beasts. We paid them all before starting, on the assumption that the march to Diwana Baba, about 60 miles up the Bashgal and as far as they were prepared to go, would take 5 days, though they hoped to do it in 4. The whole business seemed very effective and ridiculously cheap. We ourselves got away about 6.30, the morning being overcast at first and almost cool – most propitious. We bade farewell to Assan – without whom everything would have been much more difficult, and set off up the road in great spirits, each carrying about 40 lb. of personal gear. At last we were really on our way, the track stretching before us into the mountains and beckoning us on. Nothing was going to stop us now. It was one of the best moments of the trip.

We caught up with the donkeys just short of our old camp-site, and thereafter had to wait quite a while for them as they negotiated the big blockage where the road was washed away. This they did by climbing about 150 feet up the hillside to an older track. The donkeys seemed to go at a very respectable pace, more than 3 m.p.h. on good ground, but reduced to a crawl when it was rough.

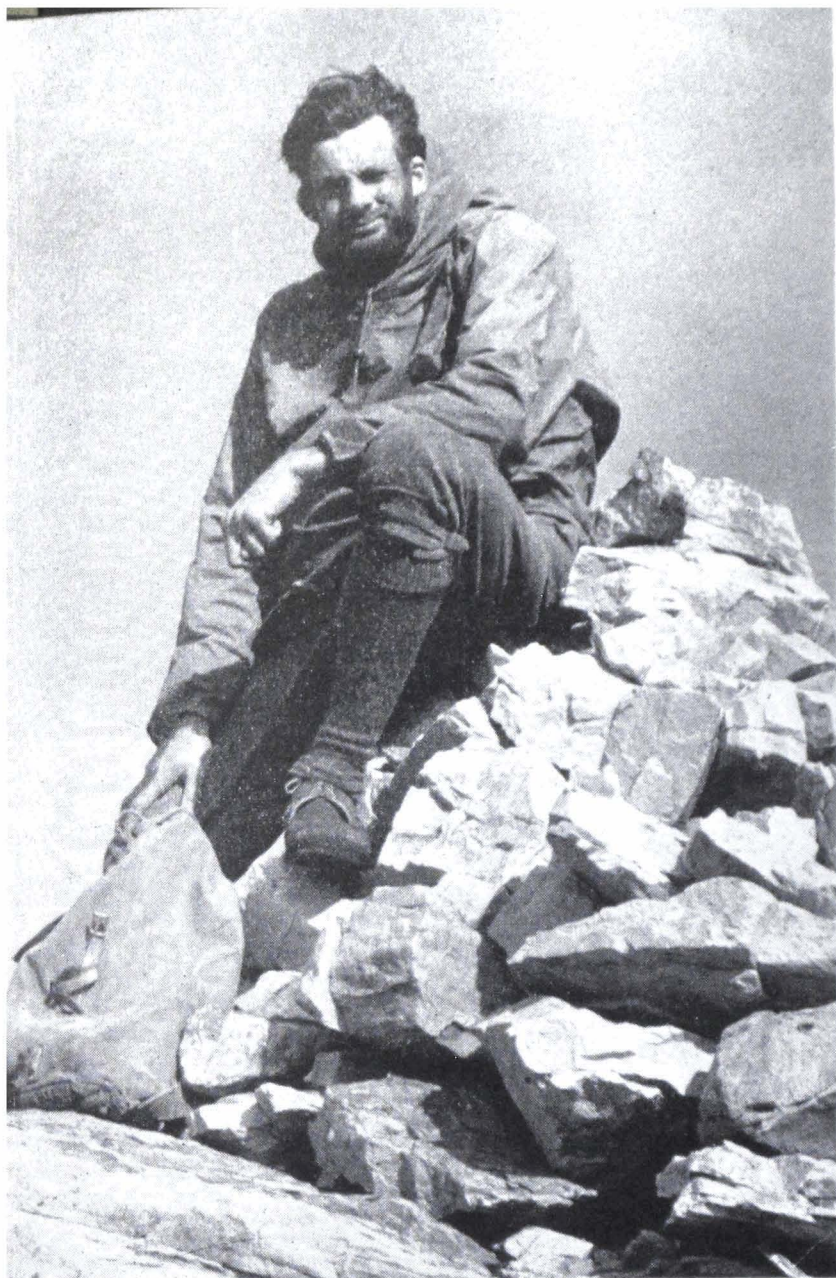
We marched on through the morning, catching up periodically with the donkeys, when we would stop and let them get ahead again. The Bashgal wound its way between great towering hillsides, their lower slopes clad in deciduous bush, their upper in conifers. Lesser gorges came in on either side, each with its torrent of clear water that was nectar to drink, and giving occasional glimpses of high peaks of rocks and snow behind. Each of the few little flats of the riverside was cultivated and neat. And

all this time beside us rushed the churning grey water, smoking with spray, straight from the snows, a joy to accompany.

Just before noon, when we caught up once more with the donkeys, we found them unloaded and their masters brewing tea. We were all very friendly together, and we shared their tea as they ate our raisins, with much grinning and silent mutual admiration. The chief drover we christened Moses, because of his patriarchal and Semitic appearance, an amiable old gentleman – although actually only about 55. One of the others constantly spun thin ropes on a spindle, out of which he made nets for holding the donkey-loads; naturally he became The Spinner. They were good types, and we might have been a lot less fortunate. It turned out that this break was indeed a 3-hour midday siesta – which time I spent mending my badly-punctured air-bed, and latterly in bathing with John and Gavin in a superb pool beneath a waterfall. We were almost reluctant to leave when our caravan eventually did move on.

The afternoon was similar, save that the donkeys were clearly tiring and moved more slowly – once indeed stopping altogether for a while. This at least suited Gavin, who was breaking in his new Le Phoque boots, with some discomfort. The rest of us were in fine fettle. I had broken in my own new boots in the Alps, and the others were not yet wearing theirs. We each had a pair of these expensive Le Phoque Alpine climbing boots, and also a cheaper pair of walking boots; some of us had left these latter behind at Barikot, as unnecessary. On this easy track-walking, of course, any old thing was worn.

Finally the donkeys stopped for the night 6 miles short of Kamdesh, about 12 miles on our way, at a handy spot with clear water and a strip of grass where we could pitch the tents. Thunderclouds threatened from the east. Soon we were brewing soup, while the caravan settled itself around us and two of the drovers caught fish for supper, using mulberries as bait.



Philip

John, Philip,
Will and Gavin





Land Rover on Russian road, West Afghan desert

Journey's end for the Land Rover; Bashgal roadway washed away



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The donkey-men were up next morning at 4.30, when it was still quite dark, the flickering light of their fire wakening me in the Sopa. We were reluctant to leave our beds quite so early as this, but they gave every impression of wanting to be off, so we felt that we had to let them have the tents to pack, and struck camp with all speed – only to watch the fellows put off time for nearly two hours. Still, we were away by 7 a.m., after a frugal breakfast of porridge, and chicken spread on Ryvita.

It was sunnier and hotter that day and we became jaded sooner, but the country remained utterly beautiful. It took us more than 3 hours to cover the 6 miles to Kamdesh – this because the drovers kept meeting their friends from round about. Kamdesh is a big village, well up the mountainside. We had to call at the police-post nearby to show our permit from Kabul, and get authorisation to proceed further. All here, from the chief of police down to the junior clerk shook hands with us most solemnly, and bade us sit down. But thereafter we were totally ignored for an hour. This was a tedious business, sitting in a hot, dusty mud-brick yard in the glare of the sun. We became rapidly disenchanted. Our donkey-train had gone on ahead, though they too required permission, of course, leaving Moses behind to deal with the paperwork. Our respect for him greatly increased here, for he was just as irritated as we were at this needless delay, and a sense of camaraderie developed fast. At last we got away about 12.15, without a word from the police chief but merely a wave of dismissal. We found our donkeys stopped for the regulation midday siesta only about half a mile on, and so we had to stop likewise.

Here, at Bagalgrom, we experienced our only taste of unfriendliness on the part of the local population, when some of the children, standing on the flat terraced roofs of their homes, hurled stones and abuse at us – perhaps not totally untypical of small boys elsewhere, but exceptional in Nuristan. We would

certainly not make much of this – though we did learn afterwards that this Bagalgrom might well have been one of the villages described in Sir George Robertson's book, where murderers were sent to live out their days, a sort of penal settlement which conceivably could have affected the behaviour of the said murderers' descendants.

The drovers offered us chupatties, onions and cheese, and we made tea for the whole party. Thereafter, during the remainder of the regulation rest-period, Gavin and Will spent quite some time and energy chasing butterflies – the commonest a large red-and-chestnut type, easy to catch, with less easy medium-sized fast-flying yellow ones. While we were eating, a couple of wild-looking individuals, very shaggy and carrying large bundles of animal hides strapped on their backs, stopped to join in our siesta. We gathered that they were fur traders, who had come over the Dogu Da Pass from Badakshan, on their long trek down the Bashgal and the Kunar to market.

Here we found that we had acquired a fellow-traveller in our caravan, a small but active, bright-eyed individual who, as far as we could understand, came from Turkestan. His general build, Tam o'Shanter type headgear and big boots made Wee Mac-Gregor his obvious nickname.

A good 8-mile stint in the afternoon to some extent made up for the earlier delays. The track now climbed fairly rapidly, with great cataracts in the river alongside. The country at first was highly populated and irrigated, with many fascinating little villages of log-and-mud huts clinging to the hillsides. The crops grown were maize and millet, with melons and mulberry-trees. Occasionally there were chestnuts, draped with vines, and handsome spreading walnut-trees giving welcome shade beneath. Gradually however the valley narrowed in to steep gorges again, completely uninhabited, and we had to go on and on before we could find a place to stop. By which time we were all of us sahibs,

drovers and donkeys, getting pretty shattered – this perhaps strengthening our feelings of comradeship still further. The camp-site we eventually found was the finest to date, however – a green basin where a large river, the first glacial tributary we had seen, flowed in from the west, with great cliffs and jagged rock pinnacles all round. We were now within 500 feet of the lower edge of the pine forest. I had had hunger pains for 6 miles, so I cooked supper with much enthusiasm. Thereafter I wrote up my diary by the light of the drovers' camp-fire, while Will took flashlight pictures.

The following day's march was somewhat frustrating, as we again found ourselves passing through an inhabited part of the valley, with all the drinking-water polluted, and constant attendance by the locals. As it was exceedingly hot our thirst did not improve our sociability. The drovers stopped for their siesta at Badamuk. I'm afraid I had no intention of halting here. I was in need of a rest, but feared this would be impossible surrounded by a friendly but inquisitive audience. So we trudged on for another 2 miles. However, apparently the donkey-men felt that it was incumbent upon them to keep with us, and they turned up again while we were still brewing our tea. They were also very loth to move on from here afterwards, indicating that we should stop for the night at Bragamatal. We got them going – and then the reason for their reluctance quickly became apparent; Bragamatal was just around the corner. Again I was much against staying here, visualising a continual audience, acute speechless embarrassment and very little sleep. But Will was adamant for a stop in a genuine native town, and John and Gavin agreed.

Bragamatal was the biggest place since Kamdesh, a fascinating little town of about 500 people, of mud houses built at random on either side of the river on hilly ground dominated by a picturesque fort. It was a very attractive Alpine setting, with side valleys.

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At first things were just as embarrassing as I anticipated, all the folk clustering round to stare and shake hands, but no one with a word that we could understand. There was a notable lack of women to be seen, here as elsewhere in the Nuristan valleys, and any we did meet would hastily turn away or cover their faces. When we were erecting our tents, always a big hit as an entertainment, a man appeared on the scene, however, who spoke really excellent English – though he understood ours less well. He was a young, almost European-looking Nuristani called Mohammed Esseq, an engineering student from Kabul University, temporarily employed here as a school-teacher. He proved to a mine of information, and was obviously something of an aristocrat. From him we learned that European travellers occasionally got as far as this by car, but few had ever gone any further and we were the first climbers. He also gave us much information about the Bashgal valley itself – for instance that the total population was as high as 20,000 – which surprised us greatly.

In appearance the Bashgalis vary widely, from fair skin and hair with blue eyes, to dark complexions, black hair and brown eyes. Many have a distinctly European look; in fact some could scarcely be distinguished from our own Scots folk. One theory put forward to explain this was that they are descended from stragglers from the army of Alexander the Great, on his march to India; but while there may be some truth in this, it seems that there were Greeks in Nuristan long before Alexander's day who were more likely to have been responsible. The Nuristanis were independent pagans until 1895, when they were conquered by the Afghans, had their land annexed and were forcibly converted to Islam. Sir George Robertson, whom I have mentioned before, and who was British Political Agent at Gilgit, had spent several months with them in 1890-1, when he traced the valley to one of its heads and crossed over the northern passes into the province

of Badakshan. His comprehensive account in *The Kaffirs of the Hindu Kush* gives a clear picture of how the people lived. Formerly there were three separate tribes in this long valley – the Kam, the Madagul and the Katirs, all being fiercely preoccupied in waging continual war amongst themselves, neighbouring tribes and the Chitralis in the Kunar valley. It was difficult to believe that the hospitable and contented folk we met were the sons and grandsons of those described by Robertson.

At Bragamatal we met with only friendliness, at any rate. They would have fed us comprehensively had we allowed it. This hospitality had its drawbacks, however, for when John asked if we could buy bread, this was translated into an arrangement that we should be supplied with free chupatties at every village we passed through from then on – which I found something of a trial, not being a chupatty-addict.

Mohammed Esseq was helpful in various ways, amongst others in persuading Moses our chief drover to take us on to the limit of the donkey-track, instead of stopping at Diwana Baba, for a further 300 Afghans. His warnings as to the dangers from tigers, bears, wolves and monkeys in the mountains we took with a pinch of salt however. We learned also that the little friendly Wee MacGregor, who had tagged along behind us all the way from Kamdesh carrying Gavin's camera, was in fact a policeman-guard detailed to protect us – and thought this as big a joke as we did.

We settled down to eat, with a huge audience, in the new school-room of the fort. At darkness we burra-burraed them all away, and got a little peace. For myself, however, it was one of the most miserable nights I had ever spent. For a little while I had been feeling unwell. The night was exceedingly hot, ridden with mosquitoes and I was badly afflicted with indigestion and a splitting headache. I barely slept a wink.

We were up at 6 a.m. and ready to get away by 7.30. But we

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were called back to see the deputy commandant at the fort. It appeared that the Hakim, or local governor at Kamdesh, had granted us permission to stay in the valley for only 5 days despite our permit for 2 months from the Ministry of the Interior. This present officer was reluctant to let us continue therefore, stressing the dangers of the mountains – the usual bogeys of wild animals, robbers and snow. But after some telephoning, and a note from us stating that we would continue entirely on our own responsibility, we were allowed to proceed, but with an escort of two Askars, or police-soldiers. These men had orders to remain with us until we returned to Bragamatal – though they had neither equipment nor clothing to survive in the high mountains. Nor were they armed to protect us from the alleged menaces. However, they seemed amiable characters, and we had no option but to take them along meantime.

Almost at once we reached the end of the ‘motorable’ road, and on to a very rough pack-track. The country now became much wilder and still more beautiful, amongst the conifers, with always the great jagged snow mountains gleaming ahead. Alas, I was in no state to appreciate it all, for I felt as weak as a kitten, and every uphill section – of which there were many and steep – was an exhausting challenge. Fortunately, the donkeys were also making very slow time on this rough surface of scree and mud, and we had plenty of opportunities, whilst waiting for them, to lie and bask by the river.

Having lost all my appetite, as we approached the next village, Apsai, around lunch-time, I felt that all I wanted was sleep. So, blowing up my air-bed, I crept into my feather sleeping-bag, under a shade tree, determined to avoid the inevitable chupatty-party in the village. I managed to sleep fitfully for about an hour, but was then awakened by one of our two new soldier-guards, who had come back in a state of great agitation to fetch me, refusing adamantly to be convinced by sign-language that I didn’t

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want to eat but only to sleep in peace. As *he* was obviously going to give me no peace, poking and shouting at me distressfully, I had perforce to get up and follow him, feeling as sour as vinegar. Will here turned up, to tell me that the Apsai villagers were refusing to feed the others until I was there also – so the soldier's agitation was to some extent explained. Reaching the village, I went through the ritual hand-shaking session with the best grace I could muster, and sat down on my stool amongst the others. But when no chupatties were forthcoming within 10 minutes, my indignation got the better of me, and signing to the headman that I was sick, and totally disregarding all the urgent pleas from villagers, police, drovers and even S.H.K.E. '65, I stomped off up-valley looking for a corner to doss in. This I found under a bush about 2 miles up, with fresh water nearby, and for a while as I dozed life was more bearable. After an hour, however, the caravan caught up with me, and the wretched soldiers saw me. Much shouting and prodding having failed to shift me, one askar stayed guard over me, while the other went on. They were undoubtedly trying to be helpful, but as I felt at the time it was impossible to see it that way. Having eventually made my point that I wasn't going to be ordered around by any damned policemen, I got up and pursued the rest, after about 20 minutes.

Though my progress was slow, I was still moving faster than the donkeys, and in due course caught up with the party. Now feeling desperately sick I managed to keep going until we reached Peshwar around 6 p.m. where we found a grassy meadow to camp. I wanted to settle at the far side of the stream, where the grass was lusher and where we would be screened by bushes from the village. But our askars were determined that we should camp on the near side, and persuaded the drovers to unload there. At this I almost lost my rag, for they were about as diplomatic as the Gestapo. I duly pitched my own Sopus on the far side, to the

accompaniment of a stream of abuse from our protectors. Gavin shared the tent with me but the others chickened and camped with the donkeys. Not being interested in food I went straight to bed. Obviously I was smitten with some disease. I passed a miserable night, reading until the candle burned out about 4 a.m., and though horribly tired sleep still eluded me.

I tried to get up next morning, was persuaded to eat some porridge, which I promptly lost, and tottered back to bed, telling the others to go on with the donkeys. John stayed with me, plus the inevitable askar, while the rest left at 7.30, hoping to reach the end of the track at Paniger, an upland summer grazing, or shieling, that day. I retired into the Sopus with 3 aspirins and an attentive audience of villagers, and tried again to sleep – with snatches of success.

About noon I was sufficiently recovered to make a move, but just then a villager appeared with a neatly-laid tray with three pots of tea, for John and me and the askar, and a heap of chupatties. John having disappeared, I felt it incumbent on me to try to do some justice to this kindly hospitality. The tea burned my gut like acid, and I soon gave it up, but managed to dispose of two chupatties, much to the approval of the large gathering, who obviously decided that I was well on the road to recovery. This was justified, for anyone who can hold down two of these large, rich and only slightly tasty dough-slabs must have a stable gut. John now arrived and pecked around tentatively – he had been half-way up a mountain. We moved on, complete with large escort of small boys whom the soldier tried ineffectually to chase away. I definitely felt better. I had a lighter load, and could trot along the flat at 4 m.p.h., but the slightest rise made me want to be sick. Fortunately John was just as slow, for he had the extra tent to carry; moreover the askar, the junior one, was completely unfit, and wanted his rests just as much as we did. We were a well-matched trio.

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For a mile or two up the big leftwards bed of the Bashgal valley the going was flat, mainly on bushy haughs, very lush and green. But after this we had to cross a stony waste of flood-plain, where we lost our escort of young villagers. We had to get over the Bashgal and zigzag steeply up the other side. This was shattering for all of us, and we stopped frequently to admire the superb view back down the glen. But eventually the climbing lessened and we emerged into completely different country, much less wooded, definitely cooler and with little cultivation – about 8500 feet up. The mountains now stood really close around, with snow gullies reaching down to only just above us. But even this country was tilted fairly steeply upwards, and we were a very weary trio when we at last reached Diwana Baba at about 6 p.m. – having been met by a local deputation some way out.

This, the last village of the Bashgal, was superbly sited on an irrigated mid-valley moraine, high mountains dominating it on either side, on the west a particularly shapely Alpine peak. We had long since given up hope of reaching Paniger that night, and much to our relief found the whole caravan camped just beyond the village. The donkeys had made good time, so Will and Gavin had arrived in the morning and both were now in great spirits, having been fed by the locals on hot roast chickens. Such hospitality was almost embarrassing. Gavin had spent the afternoon most successfully catching bumble-bees and similar insects, local variations of various species. It was touching to see how glad the drovers were to see John and me; more so when the villagers soon turned up with more roast chicken for us – for I couldn't eat mine! Once again I dosed down right away, and let the others feed me on tea and soup. But I definitely felt better than the night before, and wrote up my diary, hoping the dreaded bug was now nearly beaten.

Sunrise in the morning, over the magnificent snow peaks, was

an imposing start to the day – which was to be a special one in any case, in that we were now leaving the settled haunts of men. We largely lost the company of our ever-changing but always patrician-looking local following, upright robed figures, self-assured, with deep intelligent eyes, glinting with amusement. These natural aristocrats seemed to do very little, except visit one another in neighbouring villages, though we did see some near Peshwar carrying pine-beams on their shoulders. The women, who were very shy and never acknowledged a greeting, seemed to do most of the work and all the field labour. Some of the young ones were exceedingly attractive.

At one point we missed the main path, straying into a side valley, and fairly soon came across three men, probably herdsmen, sitting round a fire. They had two vicious dogs with them, and these promptly made a set at us – so that their masters, while endeavouring religiously to shake hands with us, had the said hands pretty fully employed keeping their dogs off us. John and Gavin, with the askar Tommy, were a little behind, but when Tommy saw what went on, he came rushing forward, aiming at the dogs with his tomahawk-affair – and not using the blunt end, either. When one of the herdsmen made objection, our over-enthusiastic guard and protector let fly at him with a stick. We beat a hasty retreat.

We proceeded up the main valley, here wide and open. Magpies and hoopoes abounded. After 3 miles of flat ground we passed a small loch, and the track climbing sharply, the valley turned further into the west. Suddenly the most stupendous view of truly Himalayan mountains opened before us. These were of a magnitude greater than anything we had seen before, certainly 20,000 footers – though of course at this stage unidentifiable. They were superbly built rock and snow cones, arêtes and great profiles. We could ask for nothing finer – but whether we could actually climb one remained to be seen. A local who was with us

named a mountain as Koh-i-Peshashgal; this we took to indicate the most prominent, a huge conical snow-capped peak rising from great rock ridges. With the help of other names he supplied, we identified our position and bearings on the only map we had, the very indifferent and vague 1/1,000,000 scale, or approximately 16 miles to the inch, British War Office Kabul sheet of 1955. Dr. Diemberger's information, of course, was all from the other side of these ranges and we had yet to correlate the two. This Koh-i-Peshashgal might have been his Peak Number Three, but this was only a vague possibility. Much recce work was obviously needed.

It was only after a long period of rhapsodising over all this, and trying to puzzle out the position, that it dawned on us that Paniger itself lay just below us, an idyllic meadow beside a clear blue loch, sheltered at its head by scrub woodland, the haughs grazed by handsome horses, and all under the sublime regard of these marvellous mountains. Here was the area for our base camp.

We went a little further, to the head of the loch, and unloaded the donkeys. It was an ideal place for our camp, with a clear spring gushing alongside. Personally I felt almost recovered, and the whole party was in a state of satisfaction. We hastily wrote last letters home, to be sent back with the donkeys, and John wrote a note to Assan, at Barikot, asking him to arrange for 4 donkeys to be back here for us on 9th September. This was Wednesday 4th August.

Then, with a touching scene of mutual esteem and friendship, we parted with our worthy drovers – and felt quite sorry to see them go. We still had the two policemen, of course, plus three or four locals who had tagged along. We spent the afternoon happily erecting camp, making necessary repairs to equipment, eating and writing. There was only one fly in the ointment – a severe paraffin crisis, owing to leakage and evaporation. Obviously we

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would have to try to use wood fires as often as possible instead of the thirsty primus stove. There was, fortunately, no lack of fine dry wood here.

It was our intention to base ourselves here for quite a few days, while we reconnoitred the approaches to the unmapped mountains ahead. The altitude was 9500 feet.

This was one of the finest moments of my life.

CHAPTER 4

Now that we were here we had to do quite a lot of preliminary probing, exploring and assessing before we could start any real mountaineering. As has been indicated, this whole region was unexplored, and we had only the vaguest ideas as to our programme. The areas we were concerned with lay immediately to the west of us, here, and so far as we could calculate comprised about 300 square miles. It was obviously a vast jumble of great and exciting peaks, but starting from scratch like this, we could feel little more than bewildered by this plethora of mountain riches. Dr. Diemberger's sketch-maps were somewhat vague and self-contradictory in many important details, as the German expeditions had not been primarily interested in exploring but only in mountaineering – and they of course showed nothing whatever of the Bashgal side of the Hindu Kush watershed. They indicated four major 20,000-foot peaks on the main watershed ridge, three of which they had climbed from the north – Koh-i-Krebek, Koh-i-Marchech and Shakh-i-Kabud. Between Krebek and Marchech was another 20,000-footer, which was neither named nor climbed. Our principal objectives had been, therefore, to make a second ascent of Koh-i-Krebek (believed to be the highest in the Central Hindu Kush, at 20,520 feet) from the south, and to conquer the unnamed giant nearby. Now, amongst all this unexpected welter of mountains, we had to identify them.

Paniger was, in fact, at the junction of the four headwater streams of the Bashgal – the Puosh, Peshash, Shosh and Sui. But

our map indicated each of these rivers only approximately, and as short streams rising on the flanks of a great twin peak. How hopelessly inadequate this was, even as a start, we did not yet realise. All we could say for sure was that Koh-i-Krebek was somewhere to the west of a pass called the Dogu Da, the only such over the Hindu Kush northwards, out of the Bashgal area into Badakshan. It became increasingly clear that we would have to devote considerable time and energy to exploration, before we could proceed to real climbing. But this was in itself an exciting prospect and, after all, part of what we had come out to do.

First of all, we had to come to terms of some sort with our unwanted soldier escorts – who by this time had become Tommy and Henry. First thing next morning we had it out with them. Will acted as spokesman, and showing them a great assortment of our gear – ice-axes, crampons, boots, sleeping-bags, etc. – we managed to get over to them that it was quite impossible for them to come with us into high altitudes, lacking these, despite their orders. In the end, they signalled agreement, indicating that they would either spend the interval here at Paniger or go back to Bragamatal. They seemed principally concerned that we didn't go over the border into Pakistan, apparently on pain of *their* lives. On this point we managed to reassure them. Meantime they would stay about the camp.

We held a conference as to our immediate programme. John was for climbing the rock peak immediately on our right, which the locals had called Koh-i-Munjan, to gain swift height for wide viewing purposes. I myself preferred to go further ahead, to climb a mountain overlooking the mouth of the Peshash, which I thought would serve us better. In fact there followed a debate as to how long our respective programmes would take. John and I thought the whole day, while Gavin and Will reckoned the distances and difficulties less. Eventually we decided to make two parties of it, and John and Will set off about 11, with Henry the

junior soldier tagging along. Gavin was busy netting butterflies, and it was 90 minutes later before we made a move.

We headed west by south, on a rising traverse across the foot of Koh-i-Munjan, towards the yawning mouth of the Peshash valley, which opens about 1000 feet above the true head valley of the Bashgal. We took a rope and a few slings in case we decided to have a go for the top. This traverse took us across very bad terrain, loose sandy scree at a steep angle, thinly grown with thorn and scrub, and with many areas of rough rock-fall debris. It was very heavy work in the hot sun. It took us about an hour and a half to reach the Peshashgal mouth, up which unfortunately we could see very little because of its narrowness. This effort revealed that I was by no means fully recovered yet, and I now felt pretty unfit and had developed an unpleasantly sore throat. I therefore rested for a little, while Gavin went on ahead. We were trying to reach a certain prominent brêche in the ridge between the Peshash and Shosh valleys in 2 hours, in an effort to win a wager Gavin had made with John who said it would take 5 – an echo of our morning's dispute. To get to this brêche we had to climb a long gully of dirt and scree and scrub, a haunt of rock-martins and choughs. But the altitude was telling badly on us both, and our progress was toilsome and spasmodic. Gavin, having earlier thought his 2 hours a certainty, did in fact achieve the summit in 2 hours 23 minutes, while I arrived, after a protracted struggle, in 3 hours 2 minutes, having been within an ace of giving up several times.

From the brêche the view was very fine, but less comprehensive than we had hoped, not adding very much except detail to what we had been able to see from below. The alleged Koh-i-Peshashgal stood out plainly at the very head of the last snow cwm of the Peshash, and the great mountains to left and right of it were obviously approachable from this Peshash basin. But we

could identify no new peaks to help correlate with Diemberger's information.

As we had both found this first climb taxing, we decided against going on to the top of the mountain of which our ridge formed part. Instead we merely climbed a big gendarme to the right of the brêche, a massive rock pinnacle. The rock was pretty good, and involved only moderate-type climbing. This stood at about 12,500 feet. It was good to be there – even though I wasn't feeling at my best.

The descent was easier. We were able almost to run down much of the dusty scree, making straight down into the Shosh valley instead of slanting back by the Peshash. I was back in camp about 6 p.m., with Gavin a bit later, as he dallied looking for insects.

John and Will appeared soon after. They had abandoned the Koh-i-Munjan climb early on, and instead pushed on up the right-most of the Bashgal headstreams, the Puosh, where there are some small hot springs, for the Dogu Da Pass, which pierced the main mountain chain about 5 miles west-north-west of base camp, and about 4000 feet above it. They had hoped to locate the great Koh-i-Krebek in this area. Like us they had found the altitude very trying, and progress a labour. They had not quite reached the top of the pass. They could not add much to our geographical knowledge either, the important mountains having been invisible from the track. But they had garnered a few facts. Koh-i-Krebek was *not* thereabouts. There were no high mountains around the Puosh, only a jumbled wilderness of jagged rock peaks, glaciers and vast fields of loose moraine. But they had had a good day. The askar had given up about half-way.

Gavin and I had soup ready by this time, on our camp-fire, and the rest of the evening was spent in further cooking, eating and discussion. We were at this stage living off Erin A.F.D. freeze-dried meats, and finding them very easy to prepare, and very



Donkey-train
on the march up
the Bashgal

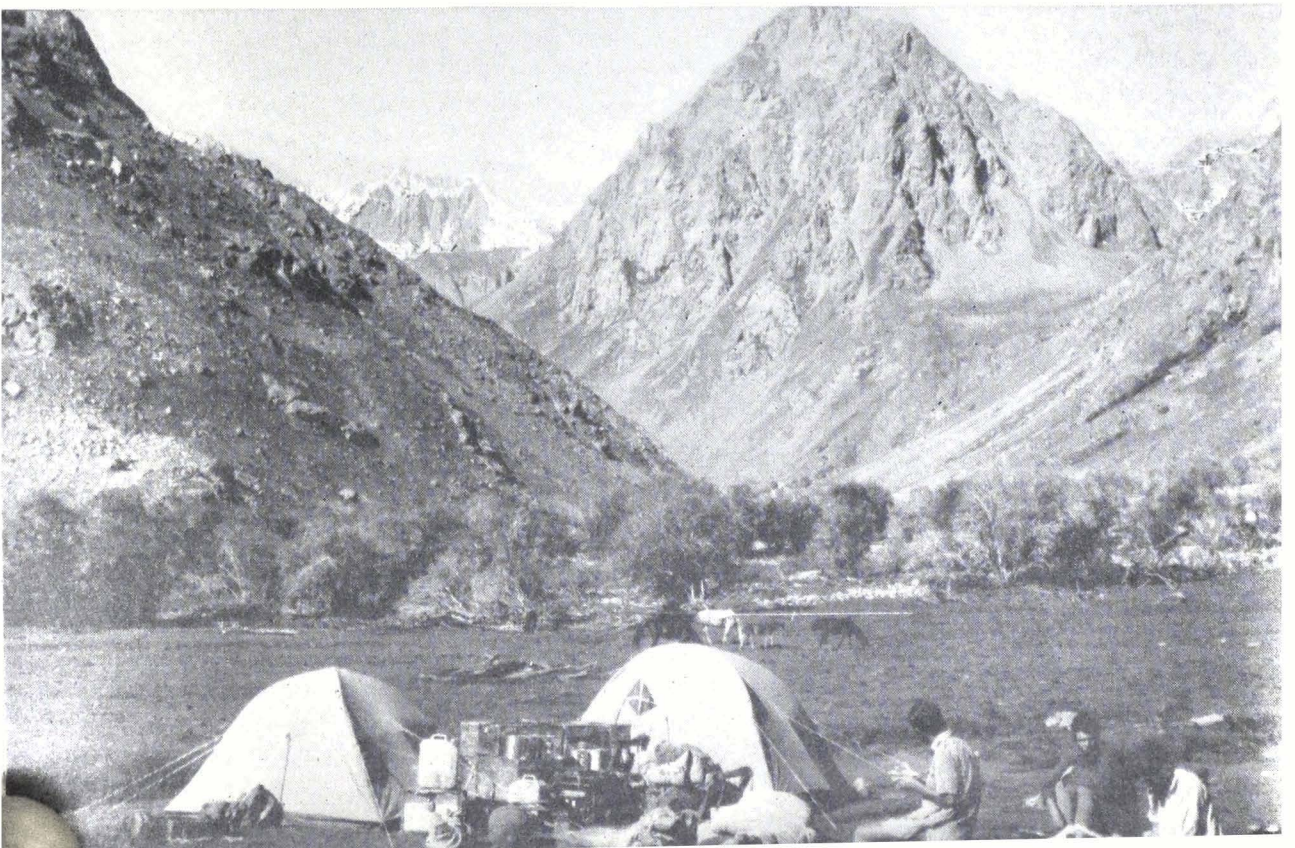


Moses,
leader of the
donkey-drovers



Escort out of Chigha Serai

Base camp—Paniger



palatable. We were all pretty tired after our first day on the mountains, and retired to our beds at 9 p.m.

In an effort to conquer completely my persistent feeling of unwellness, I decided to take a full day off. The others had various topographical ideas they each wanted to check up on, though nothing ambitious was planned for today. But before they set off, we put our heads together to see if we could in fact make any geographical sense out of the data we had. I was beginning to have a feeling that the mountain pointed out as Koh-i-Peshashgal might in fact be Koh-i-Krebek itself, as there seemed to be just no space for another major peak between this giant and the Dogu Da. This however was pure conjecture. Will still felt that an ascent of Koh-i-Munjan, above the camp on the right, would yield results, and Gavin agreed to accompany him. In the end, John decided to wander off up the Peshash valley on his own. Before the others made a move, one of the askars arrived from nowhere in particular with a leg of meat, of undisclosed species, for us – which was well received.

I spent the day quite pleasantly, reading, writing and doing some chores about camp – including improvising an oven to roast our meat. I had to entertain the usual series of deputations of solemn hand-shaking locals. My friends drifted back separately in the early evening. All three had found their efforts just about as exhausting as the day before, owing to altitude and the difficult loose moraine footwork. As the afternoon had been somewhat cloudy they had not managed to add much to our pool of knowledge. John had established that what appeared to be a single mountain above the junction of the Peshashgal and Shoshgal was in fact the end of a long ridge bearing north-west, which appeared eventually to join at right angles a still mightier ridge. The other two had merely climbed the first shoulder of Koh-i-Munjan. They all approved of my culinary efforts – but alas the meat was almost incredibly tough.

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The next morning we drew such tentative sketch-maps as was possible, as a basis for a further programme of exploration. Gavin and I decided to head up the Peshash with bivouac gear for two nights, to bivvy near the head of the glen, and so have time for some high-level investigation from there. John was going to head up the Shosh, while the determined Will returned to attempt the summit of the Dogu Da.

Not wishing to tax myself too abruptly – I was feeling benefited by my day's rest, but not yet 100 per cent. – I set off ahead of Gavin, with approximately a 45 lb. pack. I was able to keep going fairly steadily along the upper Bashgal to where the Shosh met the Peshash, taking it easily with lots of rests. Finding it impossible to get across the Peshash River, I turned right-handed steeply up the screes and dust of its eastern side. I felt that I was doing pretty well, considering, and was hopeful that I was beating the bug. The luxury of a long snooze in the sun, however, at the top of a waterfall, proved to be a mistake – for I found I had a long stretch of moraine rubble and loose debris to cross thereafter, and was morally unprepared for it. But eventually I reached the upper Peshash basin, and found it a lovely place of grassy green meadows ringed with wild mountains, watered with clear-flowing streams and alive with yellow-brown marmots. I stopped at the highest level bit of grass, below a great scree, where I guessed that our routes for tomorrow and the day following would diverge. We would bivvy here.

I was feeling pretty good now in this superb place, a Himalayan alp about 11,000 feet up – the more so, I'm afraid, when Gavin appeared in sight, just after the sun dipped below the western ridge, and obviously very weary. He had found the stretch between the waterfall and these upper meadows trying.

Our bivvy site got direct sunlight very early in the morning, and we were up at 5 a.m., so were able to make a splendidly early start. We headed south-west up the great moraine scree apron, at

first feeling the exhausting effects of altitude and our progress snail-like. But we were persistent snails, and reached the top of the moraine, 1000 feet up, in quite reasonable time. We had hoped to find a glacier here, but instead found a great desert of chaotic boulders interspersed with snow patches. For some time we had been seeing ahead of us a cwm or gap in a lofty ridge, and decided to investigate this. It was still a long way off and above, however. From the position we had gained it seemed a good idea to avoid further climbing of this boulder-strewn ground by quickly making height leftwards and then taking a rising traverse right. This way we could stay on snow the whole way – and the snow seemed firm. We put on our crampons.

The stratagem paid off handsomely for we climbed straight up about 800 feet in very good snow, along the foot of the southern boundary wall of the Peshash basin. For the first time for a week I felt really fit and left Gavin standing at this long crampon stint.

From there our way took us right along the foot of these boundary cliffs, traversing on snow and gradually gaining height. It was quite hard work, but straightforward, the only hazard being stonefalls from the cliffs above – but these could be seen coming, and avoided. Much of the snow here, and for the rest of that day, had a strange, flaky, scaly surface, the flakes standing up vertically at times as high as 18 inches. These phenomena have various names such as “praying nuns” and are common in the Himalaya and Andes. It made a difficult surface to cross. Eventually, slipping and stumbling over these, we reached the foot of the last rise to the cwm, and a slow, easy plod took us up to this. Still I felt fit, and still Gavin lagged behind – and I was selfish enough to rejoice.

We were now on what was actually a stagnant glacier, and at the head of it was our gap. From there, at length, the view was utterly stupendous. All the great ranges to the east and south

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stood out, and away to the north-east behind them all reared a simply colossal snow mountain, fully 70 miles away, which could only be Tirich Mir itself, over 25,000 feet, the highest of all the Hindu Kush and looking a rival to Everest. Others almost as high could be seen floating above the clouds on either side, one of them undoubtedly Noshaq. More to the point, we could just see the great white cone of Koh-i-Peshashgal (or was it Koh-i-Krebek?) appearing over the ridge ahead. We calculated that we were nearly 15,000 feet up, and felt pretty good.

From here we discovered that our cwm was closed at the west by a rock ridge, about half a mile ahead and 800 feet up. There was a prominent brêche on this ridge, with a great tooth of rock sticking up in it. To see what lay beyond, we had to climb to that brêche.

Gavin reckoned that it would take us 2 hours to reach – but in fact we did it in 50 minutes. The approach was very steep snow, my newly-rediscovered fitness allowing me to kick the steps the whole way. The last 50 feet or so involved ice-axe work, hands and a steady head. To think that we had almost left our crampons behind at Paniger!

There was a great feeling of exhilaration as we reached the summit. We could now see a great sharp peak to the left of Koh-i-Peshashgal, as well as many other mountains only slightly less high. Gavin and I felt elevated in more senses than merely in altitude, and spent a full hour on the brêche, in the sunshine, revelling in the glory of it all, and myself drawing a map, with the aid of a prismatic compass, on the back of a Kendal Mint Cake wrapper, of all that we could see. We decided to call this brêche Bee Gap, because of the huge bumble-bee that flew over it while we were there. We established that this was a feasible pass to use if occasion demanded.

We roped up, to climb down the first steep 100 feet or so, and returned to the cwm without difficulty. Thereafter we explored

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two further carries or snow scoops to the north, which proved to be dead-ends. Then down over wide snow-fields to the north-east, to the mouth of the great central glacier of the Peshash, up which we had a quick look. It too was a dead-end, though quite a deep cirque, with an exceptionally fine slender snow-and-rock peak at its head.

By now we were both pretty weary, and headed straight back to our bivvy. At first the way down the great glacier was easy going, but beyond the snout 1500 feet of the most abysmal and chaotic boulder-moraine, as loose as ruined masonry, jolted us unmercifully before we finally made camp. We were both very content, after one of the finest mountain days of either of our lives, and a completely successful recce.

It was a clear cold night up there in our lofty stance.

We were off again by 7.45 a.m., directly up the tremendous scree moraine, to the north-west this time, to investigate the northernmost branch of the Peshashgal basin. The going was a little bit easier initially than the day before, for we were following a groove in the screes, obviously a flood channel overflow to the main river which here flowed underground, and the rubble was to some extent compacted with water-silted grit. About 1500 feet up, level with the snout of the central glacier, the groove gave out on us, and unmitigated scree rose ahead. This was soul-destroying as lip after lip followed in slow succession, each we hoped the end of it. After a while we could see that this also was no through pass but another dead-end mountain cirque. We decided to go on, however, making for a col at the high head of it, to get a view over the great ridge there. It was nearly 2 miles, and over very bad ground, the snow this time being corrugated, treacherous and soft. Though the final climb was pretty steep, however, it was nowhere technically difficult, as Bee Gap had been.

I reached the col by noon – and I was much elated to discover that we were in fact on the crest of the main Hindu Kush ridge.

Gavin arrived half an hour later – by which time I had climbed a small peak to the right, to better the view. I spent about 2 hours on this ridge, eating lunch and mapping, with Gavin shouting up compass-bearings from below. The view was again magnificent, but owing to cloud less extensive. What was of vital importance was that we could see no really high mountains close to – which meant that Koh-i-Peshashgal must indeed be Koh-i-Krebek, the monarch of the whole area. That giant, however, was not to be viewed from this ridge, because it was obscured by a massive 19,000-footer intermediate – which of course we had seen the day before from Bee Gap, and had named Point Five. From this vantage-point on the ridge, which we named Butterfly Gap from the great numbers of them around, we had for the first time an exciting and extensive view to the west side of the range, but I mapped this in only sketchily, as we had more than enough to cope with on our own side.

There was a very cold wind up here, and we did not prolong our stay further. The descent was much faster than anticipated, and by 2.15 we were sitting on the highest lip of the great scree. The only way to go down this wretched stuff is in one continuous, tooth-gritting, bounding grind; any other method merely prolongs the agony. My long legs proved their value here, and got me quickly back to the bivvy. We fed, and packed up for our return to Paniger.

We found the further descent less arduous than expected also, and following the left bank of Peshash the whole way. Clearly we were becoming acclimatised. I arrived back at base-camp to find Will there alone, while Gavin lingered behind for his naturalist purposes.

Will had, on Saturday the 7th, achieved his dogged ambition to get right to the summit of the Dogu Da pass, but from there he had been unable to gain any useful view to the south-west and the high mountains. He had camped at about 13,500 feet, and

passed a lonely and apparently rather eerie night. On the Sunday he had traversed two ridges towards the south-west, and eventually reached the Peshashgal wall. He had climbed to a brêche thereon, at over 15,000 feet, and looked down into the head of the basin we had explored today, being much impressed by its complexity. He had seen some high peaks further to the south-west, but had been unable to identify them, and had returned to base camp after two good but hard days. This morning he had set off with John, up the Sui, the fourth of the headstreams, but becoming very tired about 7 miles up he had left John and turned back.

Will had stopped for a rest part-way down, and looking up from a half-doze had found himself gazing at extraordinary caveman-like drawings scraped on a rock before him. These were mainly of animals resembling mountain-goats, but there were also stick-men type figures and peculiar symbols. Nearby he had found more on another rock. Whether indeed these were prehistoric carvings, as they looked, or merely more modern doodlings, he could not decide. But he had photographed them, at least.

John didn't get in until about 3.30 a.m., too tired to heat up the soup I had left for him, and drank it cold. If sleep hadn't overcome us all so utterly we would have been a bit anxious – although we all had the utmost confidence in John's abilities and good sense.

Needless to say we all had a long lie. Anyway, the weather had changed by morning and all the clarity gone from the atmosphere – in fact by early afternoon it was raining. We spent the forenoon in a vast geographical conference. At this it became obvious that John's trip on the Saturday, up the Shosh, was in fact the vital key to our future programme. The Shosh had proved to be a far larger valley than we had realised, and very beautiful. At its head was a large glacier coming from the direction of Koh-i-Krebek

(which we had been calling Koh-i-Peshashgal). This must be the great glacier we had seen from Bee Gap. John had returned tired but triumphant at dusk that day, having discovered what was almost certainly our route up to the high peaks. We all now agreed that Koh-i-Peshashgal was indeed Krebek, Diemberger's Number One. His Number Two, and one of our main objectives, was clearly the sharp snow peak to the left, visible from Bee Gap, and his Number Three was apparently a huge bulky mountain at the head of the Suigal. This John had discovered on his marathon trip, when he had explored the Suigal alone, and found that it curved continuously for about 13 miles to the west and then to the north, to end up as a big glacier amongst more unidentified high mountains. Obviously John had covered a prodigious mileage that day.

We agreed that our approach route must lie up the Shosh – John had even chosen our first camp-site – then into the great glacier south-west of Bee Gap, above which Krebek towered. Somewhere thereabouts we would pitch our advance base camp.

There were still a lot of geographical enigmas and problems, but to date we were pretty satisfied with progress, and the fun of the exploration was tremendous. I spent hours map-drawing, indeed till late into the night, as the next day it was our intention to start off up the Shosh in earnest. The weather, by evening, was obviously beginning to clear again. The only snag was that Will was now showing signs of ill-health, with symptoms suspiciously similar to my own late troubles.

We were all looking forward to the onward march enormously – though we would be quite sorry to leave the delights of Paniger. It was an idyllic spot, and might be the last such we would see for a long time. Gavin especially was in his element here, amongst the wild flowers and the butterflies. The bird-life too was rich and varied. The most common species were kestrels,

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choughs and hoopoes; but we observed a golden eagle one day, and also saw griffon, Egyptian and Bearded vultures – with many smaller birds.

The high tops beckoned, however.

CHAPTER 5

To move a climbing expedition, with its essential equipment and stores, from base to advance camp, is always a major undertaking – especially when this is done without porters and the burden falls literally on the shoulders of the climbers themselves. The labours of the next three days were back-breaking, as we carried loads of up to 80 lbs. apiece up endless slopes of shattered rock-moraine, lungs straining for breath in the rarefied air. But at the end of them, we had established Camp One 5 miles and 3000 feet up the valley of the Shosh, on a beautiful Alpine meadow just below the glaciers.

The Shoshgal, striking westwards, consists of three steps of 800-1000 feet each, of moraine scree, with grassy meadow shelves above each step, the whole enclosed by fine rock and snow mountains. The going is inconceivably bad, the screes being appalling and the first two meadow shelves so thick with scrub-bush and flooded with glacial overspill as to be almost uncrossable. In the first step the river is completely underground.

As in all our activities we attacked this task in individual fashion, though under a general plan. Often all four of us were miles apart. Will, though feeling far from fit, insisted on doing what he could. I set out first, with a load of four day-boxes of rations, a paraffin-can, a climbing-rope and an Erin beef tin, in all about 70 lbs. It felt excruciatingly heavy, partly due to altitude; but if I set myself a slow enough pace, it was possible to keep going. Gavin

caught me up at my first stop, about a mile up. Thereafter, this first day, we carried on roughly together.

We followed the north side of the river, and when we reached the inflow of the Peshash we decided that it would be advisable to make some sort of bridge, as we would have to cross it many times. This took us about an hour and a half of hard labour, hauling logs and boulders but in the end it was quite a workmanlike job and proved its worth.

Just as we finished, Will turned up, plugging along determinedly in bottom gear. It seemed that John had stuck to the south side of the river and was in fact now ahead.

Gavin and I pushed on, soon leaving the gallant Will behind and despite the bad going we made the first shelf in good order, catching up with John there. After that I rapidly became hopelessly shattered, and though I was well ahead of Gavin at the top of the second step, I was so done in that I just could not continue, fully laden. I dumped half of my load for later collection, and went on lightened. This enabled me to speed up a bit. I caught up with John again half-way up the third step, at the top of which is a rather fine gorge portal.

At last we reached the upper meadows, 12,750 feet high. There were no bushes here, just grass and flowers, and the most magnificent cirque of peaks all around. It was quite superb and lifted my spirits completely. The haugh was about a mile long, and John had selected a good camp-site at the far end of it, where we marched to thankfully cast our loads. John was disgustingly spry, and made me feel quite ashamed.

We spent about an hour, resting on the grass, and then headed east again. Quite soon we met Gavin, stout fellow, still with his full load – which he left a bit short of the camp-site, to return with us. Then, bless my soul if we didn't meet the diseased William, only about 200 feet below the top of the third step. Such is determination. Although completely shattered, he was utterly

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set on reaching the skyline that had lured him so far. We left him to his last 100 feet, and trundled on downwards, back to Paniger – which we reached just at very last light, and Will surprisingly not so very much later. We just had enough energy left to make supper – which was much spoiled by a mysterious flavour of petrol. Tommy, the senior of our askars, had disappeared this evening, but had been replaced by another, and we still had the not-so-bright Henry.

The next day's effort followed the same pattern, though with still heavier loads. I myself went much better – perhaps because this time I was using my Desmason sack and not my pack-frame, which hurts me. Anyway I was glad to make Camp One by mid afternoon, John and Gavin joining me soon after, each going at his own pace. This had been a titanic effort, some of the hardest work we had done in our lives. To laze thereafter on the grass, eating chocolate and salmon, was sheer bliss. We left again at 5, meeting Will at the top of the third step, where he unloaded so as to get back in daylight. He now proclaimed himself as officially non-diseased, though of course he was still not yet 100 per cent. fit.

Back at Paniger we found Tommy was there again, with instructions from higher authority that we must return to Bragamatal within 8 days. But even Will was now prepared to laugh at this. Supper that night tasted exceedingly good, all four courses. One small disaster – Will lost John's good deep plate in the river, while washing it between courses. So much for excess hygiene.

Friday 13th August, ominous date, was our final departure from Paniger. Packing up therefore was quite a big job; the tents had to be struck, all our personal gear gone through, and what was not absolutely essential abandoned; everything thereafter to be divided into four approximately equal loads. It surprised me

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how little fuss Tommy made when he saw us striking camp and obviously not going back to Bragamatal in a day or two.

The loads, at about 60 lbs., were appreciably lighter than our previous ones. John and I, going off first, went a lot better; we were obviously getting fitter and acclimatised. As a matter of interest we made the whole march up in 9 spasms, between rests, compared with 14 I had taken the day before, and innumerable the first day – though as always the last haul up the third step was a marathon that took every ounce out of us.

As we pitched the tents, and then went for our half-way loads, it clouded over and in fact began to snow gently – the first we had seen since the Alps. It cleared again in the evening, however, and latterly our basin was lit by a fine full moon. It was pleasant to get back to primus stoves again after cooking on smoky fires.

We were glad to take it easy the following day, especially as the weather was indifferent, with frequent slight snow showers. There was much to be done, of course, of a sedentary nature – diary-writing and for myself endless cartography. This was now at the stage where names had to be used, and since there was none as yet, we had to invent them. I adopted a system which we used thereafter throughout. The glaciers I named after the prominent features dominating them; Krebek Glacier under Koh-i-Krebek, and Bee Glacier under Bee Gap. The passes, as has been indicated, we named from the insect life which oddly enough we encountered at each; e.g. Bee and Butterfly Gaps. As to the mountains themselves, in the main we named these after peaks in the Scottish Highlands with similar outlines – Gaelic names, which as it happened went well with the local ones. The only summits which were already named were, of course, Koh-i-Krebek; Koh-i-Munjan, above Paniger; Shakh-i-Kabud and Koh-i-Marchech to the south-west. These last two we had not yet identified. All these names were later translated into Farsi, for use in official reports and maps.

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This Camp One area was an attractive spot. There were many wild flowers – some pink ones, *primula macrophylla*, Gavin called them, and carpets of white Edelweiss. Also yellow *Potenilla* and *Corydalis*, all growing out of the granite grit sand. We saw here, too, grey wagtails, and green and wood sandpipers, plus one or two other unidentified species.

In the early afternoon I got restless and went off on a recce by myself, up the glacier. I didn't achieve much, as the weather closed in and the snow became quite heavy for a time. I got as far as the critical branching of the main Shosh glacier into the Krebek, Bee and another smaller glacier before the weather then turned me back. The rest of the day was uneventful. Gavin set some of his famous mousetraps, after which we played bridge in the big Sopus.

We were up at first light – some of us – and while waiting for the clouds to clear we filled in time working out positions. That is, all but Gavin, who stayed determinedly in bed. To the west and south-west of us, part of a subsidiary range striking east from the main chain, were two big rock peaks. That to the north we tentatively named Fuar Tholl, because the deep corrie on its north-west side much resembled that of the real Fuar Tholl near Achnashellach in Wester Ross. The other we called Flatface, for obvious reasons. John and I decided, as the clouds lifted, to take the plunge and head for Fuar Tholl, for not only did it look a fine and worthy peak but also it would give a perfect view of the whole upper Shoshgal glacier system for recce purposes.

Whilst preparing for the hill I found that I had lost my camera, and realised that I must have left it up on the glacier during my lone recce the day before. I asked Will to keep a look out for it if he went up there.

John and I left at 7.15, and moving rhythmically and easily made good time, first up a moraine about 300 feet, to a little lake, afterwards up long excellent snow slopes towards the Flatface –

Fuar Tholl gap 1000 feet higher, which we named Dragonfly Gap; then by a rightwards traverse across mixed moraine and snow to the foot of the west spur of Fuar Tholl, another 500 feet. Camp being at 12,750 feet, we were now at 14,550 feet, and were beginning to notice the altitude. We further traversed on difficult corrugated snow round the end of the spur, then up very steep snow and latterly naked glacier ice, into a glaciated basin, an impressive place ringed with jagged rock. It was now very hot, with the day much improved.

The only possible line up Fuar Tholl appeared to be by a long ice gully or couloir ascending directly from the ice basin almost to the top, and from face-on this looked dangerously steep and perhaps subject to avalanche. For a while we sat in the sun and debated, but in the end decided to have a closer look, and of course, as we approached, the whole thing foreshortened and looked a piece of cake. I was then going a lot better than John, and forged ahead up the first 500 feet of the gully, about 45 degrees snow and not bad surface, occasionally waiting for him to catch up. At this point, clouds had rolled up and flurries of snow started. Prospects of a view seemed negligible. We reached a bend in the gully, from which there was a clear view straight up 1000 feet to the cornice. John abruptly dumped his rope and ciné-camera, and thus unburdened started to go up like a bomb. From then on he led, kicking the steps, while I followed rather dubiously, thinking retreat perhaps the wiser course. On and on, gasping for air, slow but very determined, we ground our way up the gully, climbing at the highest altitude either of us had ever attained. The snow was balling a bit on our crampons, and though this didn't affect me much, it seemed to worry John.

At long last we got right up below the massive, icicle-festooned cornice, and bore right on to a rock rib to avoid it. This last stretch was steeper, maybe 60 degrees. The rock rib itself was very shattered but not long, and soon we were sitting triumphant

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on a pinnacle at over 17,000 feet, with a great icefall face below us to the north. This was not the top of the mountain, which was at least a thousand feet higher and across a steep bealach or gap. To have continued would have been folly, for we were both pretty exhausted and had done quite enough for one day. Anyway, we had come up here to recce.

We ate our lunch and took bearings. We saw that the complicated layout of the glaciers was not quite as we had thought from Bee Gap, and that Koh-i-Krebek and our other objective, Diemberger's unclimbed Number Two, could not be attempted from the same advance base. We also noted that the Flatface-Fuar Tholl gap looked like a possible route over into the top of the Suigal.

The descent was at first slow and very laborious, in falling snow. The ice-gully was so steep that we had to go down the first 100 feet backwards, in our old steps, undignified and tiring. At last, near the bend, we could turn round, and after that I personally fairly hurtled down, lurching over corrugations and slithering about in gyroscopic semi-equilibrium. I was down in the glacier basin, panting, in no time. John came somewhat more staidly, a little later. From there it was just straightforward but weary plod back to camp, by much the same route.

Will had meantime been a little way up the glacier to the north-west and had found my camera, but had not added to our geographical knowledge. Gavin had spent the day watching our progress through binoculars and making a collection of all the species of plants in our meadow. Being very tired, John and I got through supper with all haste, shoved the others out of the big Sopus, and were in bed by 8.15.

I had been determined to fester next day, but Will and Gavin wanted to go up Flatface, and I was not going to stay behind. Will had us up at 7 a.m., but he thereafter delayed our departure by falling into the river. All four of us left together, for John was

going to recce up the Fuar Tholl-Flatface gap into the Suigal. At first the sun was very hot and we made much slower time than on the day before, up the 1200 feet where the route was the same. Will, Gavin and I stopped to put on crampons, and John forged ahead. However, after drinking out of the last cold spring, quite delectable, the three of us made much better time, and did one stint of 1100 feet up even snow at one go – no mean effort at that altitude. It was a straightforward snow climb to the snowy north-west peak of Flatface, although the final 300 feet was very steep. The sun being mostly hidden now helped. I was sufficiently more acclimatised than the others to be able to kick the steps the whole way, but we were still more or less all together when we arrived on top.

Flatface is basically a two-peaked mountain, the tops connected by a thin shattered ridge nearly half a mile long. The north-east side of this is the great flat face of precipice and couloir by which we had named it. Until arriving at the north-west snow top we had not known whether it or the south-east peak, a great rock tower, was the higher. Now it was clear that the latter was. We sat for nearly an hour on the north-west top, eating and map-drawing. The view into the Suigal valley was exceedingly grand, with many high summits at the far side which were new to us. One in particular, a soaring glaciated tower, south of Diemberger's Number Three, now visible, took our fancy. It was perhaps 19,000 feet high.

When all this had been mapped on the usual Kendal Mint wrappers, we sorted out our gear, leaving ice-axes, crampons and much else behind, for now we were going on to rock, and set off along the shattered ridge towards the summit tower. We knew from the start that we were short of time. At first we moved in pitches, roped together on 300 feet of rope, Will in front, Gavin in the middle. The ridge was a real knife-edge. The rock was granite, some of it very good and some horribly broken. Five

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itches of 70 feet, about moderate to difficult, one an exciting *a-cheval* block, took us to the easier central section, where we moved together, Alpine fashion, for perhaps 200 yards. All this was being thoroughly enjoyed, our first real climbing of the expedition. Then followed three more pitches to the foot of the final tower, the first of which was exceedingly steep and badly shattered, quite the hardest of the ridge. Hereabouts Gavin slipped on a false hold, and cut a deep gash in his hand, which bled profusely and inhibited him a little for the rest of the day. At the foot of the tower, it started to snow. To save time, we re-roped and Will led up the full 150 feet, roped to me, and thereafter bringing up first myself and then Gavin, each on a single rope. It was quite a good lead, no harder than difficult, but very steep, the top of doubtful security, and quite a test at this altitude.

We were all highly chuffed on the top – our first major ascent, and on a very worthy and unclimbed mountain, at approximately 16,500 feet, which had put up just the right amount of opposition. We took the conventional photographs, and ate a tin of salmon. But it was late, very late, at 4.45, and we could not linger. We abseiled off the tower direct, 150 feet, but this took quite a lot of time, what with my cagoule jamming and Gavin's bad hand, and it was hard to get the rope down afterwards. But we would not have liked to climb down that very steep loose upper section. A real snowstorm now blew up from the south, completely obliterating everything, and turning the evening dim and our bodies chill. We feared that it would be dark before we even reached the other top and our gear. But our fortunes improved and we moved back along the ridge in the reverse order, myself leading and what with being familiar with the place and finding one or two better routes, we only needed two actual belayed pitches, both immediately after the tower. On the rest we moved together. Latterly the snowstorm blew over, and

the views looking back along the ridge to the great terminal tower, looming out of the clearing mists into a greenish evening sky, were very memorable.

We reached the north-west top in good spirits in an hour, and re-equipping with ice-gear, left immediately. From there we went fast straight down the long slopes of snow, now freezing hard and giving a perfect surface, and got right off the mountain proper before torches were needed, despite our earlier fears.

We got back by 8 o'clock, to find John getting worried – though he himself had only been back about 90 minutes. He had even fired off a flare, not of course knowing the difficulties of the arête we had been on. He himself had had a very successful day also, and had completed all the recce work needed from this camp. He had gone through the Dragonfly Gap, but had found it a poor access to the Suigal, because of the wretched moraine descent on the other side. He had then proceeded right up the Sui, below Diemberger's Number Two, which mountain we had also seen well, and mapped, from Flatface. Finally he had crossed back into the head of the Shosh by another pass, which he called Spider Gap – yes indeed, there was a spider there – thus returning to camp. It was a good effort. Altogether this was the expedition's most profitable day to date.

John now declared that he thought we should put Camp Two at a spot he had found, and that he and I had noted the previous day, near the Shoshgal glacier fork, and from there climb Koh-i-Krebek. Then we might move over Spider Gap, and establish Camp Three in the Suigal, climbing Number Two from there. Finally to move back down to Paniger via a Camp Four in the Suigal. This programme was thrashed out and tentatively agreed.

We all agreed on a recuperative fester for next day – which in any case turned out to be the worst weather we had had. Diary-writing and running repairs to equipment kept us busy, and for

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myself I spent many hours map-drawing, a progressively more difficult task as we got more and more angles and data on a wider and wider area, little of which seemed to correlate. Gavin made occasional brave sallies into the elements to seek new plants for his collection. By nightfall there was much new snow on the tops and the moraines, but the clouds at last cleared away to give starlight.

We started our next move the following morning – latish because Gavin and Will seemed unconsonably slow. John and I moved off about 10.30, with 55 lb. loads, heading for a camp to be sited under the ice-face of Fuar Tholl, at the junction of the Krebek and Spider Glaciers. This was no great distance in mileage, but it was 3000 feet higher. We made fairly good time, using the crests of the two long moraine ridges which I had recced on the Saturday, and these, being mainly compacted grit, gave fairly substantial footing. 1300 feet up we reached the glacial snows, skirting the foot of Fuar Tholl's north cliffs. The glacier rose steadily ahead, grade about 1 in 5. As we ground stolidly up, the weather closed in once more, and a great curtain of fine snow swept in from the Peshashgal, wiping out all prospect. The glacier made fairly good going, with very few crevasses. I eventually halted at a melt-water pool which Gavin and I had seen on our recce, and after inspecting another site further up which John had suggested, we plumped for this one and dumped our loads about 3 p.m. It was a cold and icy spot, just below the last ice-fall of the Krebek Glacier, and the ice-face of Fuar Tholl above it was a fearsome sight. From now on we would be camping on snow.

It was too cold to rest for any time here, and we turned back unburdened. Complete white-out conditions now prevailed, reminiscent of Scotland. We met Will in the mists not far out from our chosen site, going steadily – but he had not seen Gavin for some considerable time. This was not important, for our

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tracks up the glacier were very obvious. John and I plodded on down, and soon left the white-out conditions behind, the snow thinning and turning to rain. There was still no sign of Gavin, even when we reached the moraines, and finally we came across his abandoned luggage only about 800 feet above Camp One. Back at camp before John, I found Gavin there severely afflicted with headache and general invalidism, unwilling to eat and very apologetic for having failed to get his load any distance. When Dr. John got in, however, he pronounced the sufferer not yet sick unto death, and he was fobbed off with a mug of hot blackcurrant drink and two aspirins.

When Will returned, with clearing skies, the three fit members ate together in the big Sopa, and had no difficulty whatever in demolishing Gavin's allotted portion between them.

Once again it took us 3 days to move camp in full. Gavin happily recovered quickly and took his full share. As a point of interest, we learned that we had underestimated at least one of our askars. The next morning Tommy surprised us all by turning up at Camp One, to ask permission to move our gear from Paniger down to Diwana Baba, where they could have shelter while guarding it. Naturally this was agreed. Tommy seemed in good spirits as he left us.

It was at this time that I discovered a way of keeping feet warm in Le Phoque boots. I put a poly-poke between the inner and outer boot; experimenting with one treated so and one not, I proved the efficacy of this.

The third morning dawned absolutely cloudless and sunny, so brilliant as to induce Gavin actually to immerse himself in the glacial stream. This heat, I fear, rendered us exceedingly lethargic and it was late before we finally got away with the last loads. The sky clouded over about noon, however, which gave the eternally pessimistic Will opportunity to mutter darkly about a break in the weather, the end of the fine spell. It did indeed

snow on us for a few moments, but this at least countered the heat, excessive for load-humping.

Camp Two was at 15,500 feet. As we were pitching the tents there was a minor incident. I fell into a small crevasse, while stretching out a guy-rope. Unfortunately I continued to hang on to the rope, and it tore a hole in the fly-sheet – which I had to mend right away.

We all seemed to have acquired enormous appetites at this stage. Gavin ate so much that he got indigestion that was even worse than mine. After supper we blethered happily in the big Sopa, mainly about the Stone of Destiny. There was a very hard frost this night. At first I found it hard to keep warm in bed, until I decided to put my Icelandic sleeping-bag over my big new one. After that I was snug as a bug, and slept well. However, the night was punctuated by noises of avalanches falling from Fuar Tholl – slightly alarming.

It was another fine morning, and the glacier in the early light was really beautiful. On our right hand, almost due west, was a shapely rock peak, which we had noted from Bee Gap, and which we now decided to call Conival, from a distinct resemblance to the mountain near Loch Prille at home. We intended to climb this today, purely for recce purposes – but Will was intent on mastering Fuar Tholl on his own. We left him to it. I felt stupendously fit, for some reason, and blasted off up the glacier at a steady pace. I made it my job always to go ahead, making a route over crevassed glaciers, for John considered that we ought to move roped over these, while I held that roping was a waste of time on easy ones like these. It was a wonderful day, and this world of the mountains looked at its finest. The glacier gained height fast, but was very smooth and easy, and excellent for cruising up. Quite soon I turned left-handed round the foot of Conival, and the upper glacier opened out before me, a superb snow basin over 16,000 feet up, with the sharp and shapely

Conival on the left and the great dome of Koh-i-Krebek on the right. Once in the basin I turned left again and ascended a steep snow slope to a dip in the Conival ridge. Then up this ridge, hard going on soft snow, another 600 feet or so, when the ridge turned into a rock arête and I stopped at 11.30 to wait for the others. Krebek looked very grand across the glacier, one or two rather terrible looking gullies on its right seeming to offer the only likely means of ascent.

I had an hour and a half by myself there, waiting, and found this view-gazing completely delightful. When my friends turned up, John decided to abandon Conival in favour of a close recce of the most promising gully of Krebek – a very necessary task. So he set off down to the glacier again, leaving Gavin and me to attempt Conival and to try to get a view of Krebek's south ridge from the summit.

To get to Conival's top we had first to traverse an intermediate summit, and this involved some awkward rock-climbing, difficult to very difficult, and consumed a lot of time, though not unpleasantly. We made a cache of un-needed gear, including Gavin's ice-axe, where John left us. When we reached the brèche beyond the intermediate summit, we found that it would have been far easier to approach this point direct from the Krebek Glacier by simple snow slopes. However, we continued across the col and up the final ridge of Conival, very steep and imposing. Three pitches of 150 feet, the first of rock, the others of difficult mixed snow on a fragile arête, took us to an altitude of over 18,000 feet, only some 50 feet below the base of the summit tower. But it was now 5 p.m., and the weather had turned cold and cloudy, and to climb that final tower it was necessary first to descend and make a difficult traverse round an intermediate lesser tower. Time pressed. I descended and traversed, held by Gavin with two peg runners, and ran out of rope just as I reached the rocks of the final tower. There was no time for Gavin to join

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me here and to continue to the top, if we were to get back in daylight. I was tempted to go on up the last 100 feet solo, but though this would have been quite easy on mixed rock and ice, the unroped descent would not have been safe. Discretion was the better part of valour, and I retreated and rejoined Gavin, who was now exceedingly cold.

A bite to eat – Gavin insisted on sharing his personal sardines 50-50 with me – and we roped slowly down again to the brèche, quite tricky work. Meantime we had seen John get nearly 1000 feet up the Krebek couloir, and he was now safely down on the glacier again and making for camp. We were now closely pressed by dusk, and abandoned the cached gear for the day, so that we could slither and glissade straight down from the brèche to the glacier, a real piece of cake.

We were back in camp as darkness fell, after a fine day's mountaineering, even if not 100 per cent. successful in that we had not reached the top of Conival – though in fact we had attained our highest altitude to date. But while there we had seen a splendid group of rock mountains about 8 miles away to the south, very reminiscent of the mountains of Rum, at home. These had excited us.

John told us that the Krebek couloir had been quite easy, and that he had already excavated the best part of a tent-platform at the highest point he had reached. Will was not yet back from Fuar Tholl, but the gleam of his torch could be seen descending the lower slopes.

While waiting for him, and preparing supper, the three of us evolved a plan of assault on Krebek. It had to be somewhat elaborate, to be done in stages with a certain amount of ferrying of gear and provisions, involving us making the summit in 2 parties over 4 days.

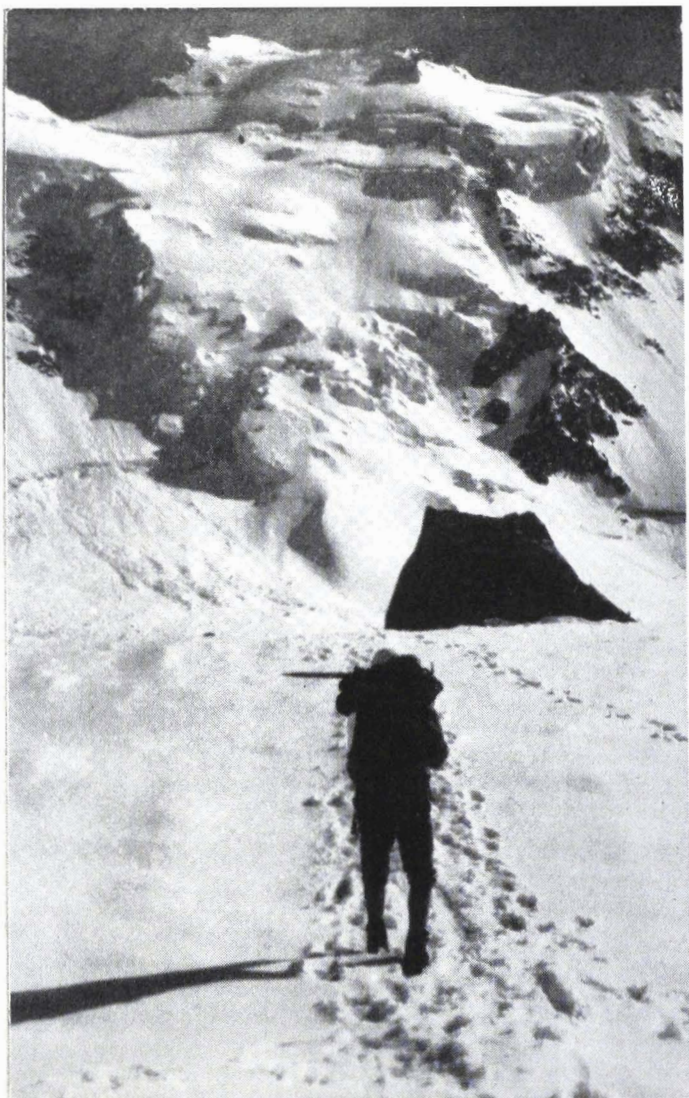
Will duly arrived, and was able to announce that he had successfully got to the top of Fuar Tholl 18,550 feet – a fine



General view up the Peshash, showing difficult moraine country

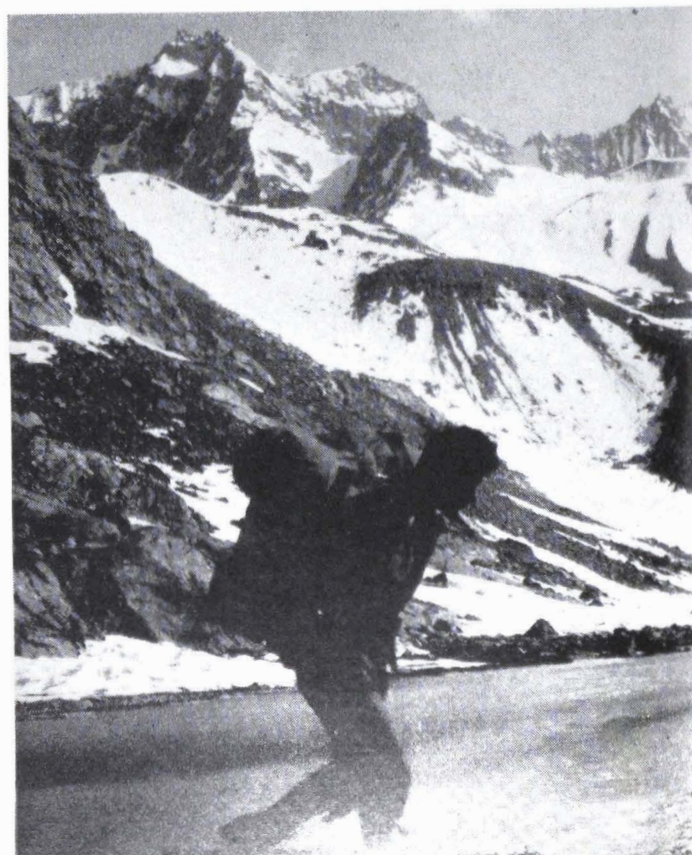
Last climb up towards the Shosh meadows; Flatface behind





Gavin reaching Camp Two,
below terrible north face of
Fuar Tholl

John about to collapse
on the Shosh meadows
near Camp One



effort. He had encountered some difficulties in getting on to the ridge near Spider Gap, some tricky climbing, which he had managed to avoid on the descent by using an alternative route on decent snow. Once on the ridge, though troubled a bit by altitude, all had been well.

The nights at Camp Two were very cold, and continuously punctuated by disturbing cracking and crunching noises, as the glacier adjusted itself to the grip of the frost. The little Sopus, I feared, was pitched plumb on top of a crevasse.

The morning dawned very fine, and because there was a lot of work to be done, sorting out gear for the Krebek assault, it was 10.15 before I set off, the others not long behind. We all of us had at least 70 lb. packs today, with everything we needed for the 4-day attempt on a 20,000-footer. We expected to find such weights to be utterly exhausting at this altitude, but in fact we all went exceedingly well and no one took more than 3 hours to reach the spot we had selected for our camp-site, at the foot of the Krebek gully. This we called Camp K.1, and was at 17,390 feet. We had decided to name our second major objective, Diemberger's Number Two, Sheasgaich (alias Cheesecake) after a similarly-shaped mountain in Scotland; the assault camps for Sheasgaich would be S.1, S.2 etc. We were now beginning to see some system evolving out of what had hitherto been something of a jumble.

Gavin and I pitched the big Sopus at K.1, gathering stones from below the cliffs to weigh it down. Soon we had it snugly set, as a haven against the bitter cold. Meantime John and Will were off up the gully itself, and presently I followed them with a 40 lb. load, while Gavin headed back to the Conival ridge to collect the gear left there the day before. The going up the gully was hard work, on a mixed snow surface, but it took us only 90 minutes. An hour's labour had John's excavated platform enlarged sufficiently just to take the little Sopus – though it was a tight

squeeze and Will looked rather worried. This was Camp K.2., 18,000 feet up. I left John and Will to spend the night there, when things were more or less shipshape, and made the descent to K.1., in only some 10 minutes, arriving back at the same time as Gavin.

We spent a sociable evening, for Gavin really is a most equable tent-companion. We fed well if plainly on the unusual soup and Pom and Erin mince, all our goodies having been left behind in Camp Two. It was a bitterly cold night, with sighs of freezing wind drifting down the glacier from the west, but we were snug and secure in the Sopu – though we did not sleep well on air-beds that had become punctured as a result of cactus thorns, picked up in the Persian Desert, slowly working loose.

We were up with the sun at 5.40, on a bright and breezy morning. Melting snow for water is a slow process, so that breakfast-making took some time. It was 8 before I set off again, upwards. The views down the glacier that morning towards Tirich Mir and Noshaq were incredibly fine, far better than ever before. These two majestic peaks seemed only a few miles away, rearing high above a sea of lesser mountains. Perhaps all this beauty and splendour inspired me, for I felt very vigorous and in fact reached K.2., in only 45 minutes – to the admiration of John and Will, who were striking camp, bleary-eyed after a poor night. I gave them a hand, and at 9.15 we started off upwards again, leaving a quarter of the total load for Gavin, who could now be seen making his way up from K.1.

I was in front kicking the steps, with a load which included personal gear, the Sopu, and 300 feet of rope – about 50 lb. I was quite surprised that I was able to keep going steadily, always expecting to flake out at any moment; but in fact I seemed to have hit peak fitness just at the right time. The gully's average angle was 45 degrees, a bit steeper at the top. It was a long and continuous grind which took me almost 2 hours.

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It was a wonderful moment when I reached the abrupt end of the gully, at a brêche in the Krebek-Point Five ridge, with a rock tower on either side. Everything was breathtakingly beautiful. Beyond, to the west, was an icefield, falling steeply to the great Munjan River basin, away behind which rose the mighty isolated mass of Koh-i-Bandaka, 22,500 feet. To the left, across steep snow, the final snow cone of Koh-i-Krebek loomed close above me, glistening in the sunshine. We had virtually made it. Nothing was going to stop us now. This was God's own country! I was almost in tears with enthusiasm.

John and Will arrived in 10 minutes, similarly inspired, and after a bout of photography we traversed left across snow, to reach a high basin below the last lift. There I pitched the little Sopus, K.3., while the others prepared for an all-out assault on the top. This was not the original plan, but we had time in hand, and the summit looked so temptingly close and conditions so good that they decided at least to have a look at the route. They left at 12.30, Will going very well but John a little troubled today by altitude. I almost decided to go with them, but waited for Gavin instead. He turned up at K.3., soon after they left, feeling pretty shattered after the gully. By the time we had melted snow and brewed coffee, my own enthusiasm had waned somewhat, and I was content to join Gavin in a lazy afternoon. The site of K.3., was superb, with a vast view both west and north.

In the afternoon any ideas of map-drawing collapsed, as the weather suddenly turned rough. Before long there was a gusty gale blowing, flurries of snow and a white-out. As we crouched in the shaking tent, listening to the hail drumming on the roof, we grew anxious about our friends up higher – and also about whether the tent itself would hold. It was pegged only to pitons attached to the guys by krabs, and dug well into the snow – my own idea, but so far untested.

The gale continued, and soon was blowing a blizzard. We were

thankful indeed when, about 4.30, John and Will put in an appearance, weather-beaten, frigidly cold, and very tired. As we fed them with hot coffee, we learned to our joy that they had indeed made the top – although they had been able to see little or nothing, the blizzard striking them just as they arrived there. It had taken them 3 hours' hard going, through heavily-crevassed rotten snow – and the descent to K.3. again had been a terrific struggle through a total whiteout, with no help forthcoming from their upwards tracks, blotted out under the new snow. On the descent, John had felt anxious about the crevasses, and suggested that they ought to be roped together. However, Will had pooh-poohed the idea as unnecessary – but after a little, on hearing a loud shout from John behind him, Will had been alarmed to see him half in, half out of a crevasse that was completely covered by snow. John had apparently felt vindicated and happier after that. But they had achieved one of the major objectives of our expedition, the first ascent of Koh-i-Krebek from the south.

They left us again in under the hour, with evidently mixed feelings – both for their own further descent and for our continued safety in this wild and wind-torn spot. But their descent of the gully went smoothly, and they spent a good night at K.1.

Gavin and I settled for an early night, laboriously cooking soup, mince and the inevitable Pom, this being a tiresome business in the cramped little Sopa, with the small primus fuming away so as almost to asphyxiate us. The storm grew worse and worse, and we feared that this might presage a real break in the good weather which had blessed us hitherto. The snow piled up round the tent. Both of us were in an abnormally excited and nervous state. Gavin's main worry was that we would be blown away, while I had visions of our retreat being cut off by avalanche conditions in the gully. By 7 o'clock, the meal was over, and neither of us feeling like conversation, we wooed sleep – with

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only doubtful success. The weather outside sounded grim, and sifting snow drifted in at the door – but the Sopa stood firm. It was frantically cold, and as I was using Will's feather sleeping-bag – shorter than my own – I could not get completely covered, so my shoulders remained chilled all night. Both of us had splitting headaches, but we could deal with this by taking aspirins. It was not a pleasant evening.

After 3 hours I was forced outside, however, by the pressures of nature, and found the sky clearing, and the wind blowing only spindrift around the tent. This was a great relief, and fears of avalanches receding I for one slept thereafter.

We were up at 5.15, after an only tolerable night – but it was a wonderful and idyllic morning, enough to cheer the gloomiest heart. Bandaka, away to the north-west, was sheer magnificence. Gavin and I responded to it all, and fought with the bitter cold to make breakfast. Even when the sun reached us, it took us an hour to generate enough heat to beat the ice which gripped everything, including all our possessions. The most serious problem was our Le Phoque boots, which were frozen quite solid. It was impossible to get both feet and inner boots inside the outers, and in the end we had to dispense with the inners. Gavin, in fact, could not even lace up the outers, and when we marched had to flop off uphill as though wearing outsize clogs. He would have preferred to spend an hour dancing on a nearby rock-pinnacle, thawing them out – but I wouldn't have this, fearing that our supply of good weather might be short as the day's before. At this stage admittedly there wasn't a breath of wind or a cloud in the sky.

We set off at 8.30, stiff and awkward. The first 1000 feet up a very bad snow surface was indeed a long, hard plod, and pretty steep. The snow had soft patches into which we frequently floundered above our knees – at such an altitude an exhausting procedure. We made two stops, one to attempt to put on our

inner boots, the outers having thawed a little – though I still couldn't get my left inner on. The second stop was to put on crampons, when we started hitting ice below the surface snow.

The last stint was the longest and the steepest, up a sharp ridge of ice and snow at 60 degrees. But at length, 3 hours out of K.3., and with John and Will's tracks still visible before us, we heaved ourselves on to the summit of Koh-i-Krebek.

Triumph! This was the highest point in Nuristan; the weather, the best noon-day of the trip; the land spread below and around us like a map. We had done it. We felt completely fulfilled, alive with enthusiasm.

The view, of course, was utterly breathtaking. Most prominent was the Tirich Mir-Noshaq group, far to the north-east; Bandaka to the north-north-west; our own great range flanking us, and Shakh-i-Kabud and Koh-i-Mondi away to the south-west. Also visible were the Oxus basin to the far north, the mountains of Wakhan, the mountains of Swat to the east, and many ranges as high as our own far to the west, perhaps 100 miles away, which we thought unknown to the mountaineering world. Very far to the east, some distant jagged teeth may have been the Pamirs.

Here we made a vital discovery. It was that our altimeter still read 19,000, while we knew that Koh-i-Krebek was in fact 20,500 – for the British and American surveys agreed on this, and the German expeditions concurred. We later discovered that it was a fault in our instrument, and in consequence had to adjust our estimated heights throughout. (The heights mentioned heretofore have been so adjusted.)

We could now see all Diemberger's peaks on the great Bashgal-Munjan ridge. Number One we stood on. Number Two, Sheasgaich, appeared to have two summits. Number Three was an ice peak, slightly less high, midway between Two and Four – the latter being a magnificent rock and snow mountain

bristling with sheer precipices and perhaps the finest summit of the range.

Mapping all this, taking bearings, and an orgy of photography, occupied 90 minutes of sheer joy – marred by one disaster when one of my maps blew away over a cornice as soon as I put it down. At 1 p.m., we turned to head for lower levels.

The descent was easy after the first very steep 50 feet, which we covered roped, facing inwards. But although not difficult it was very laborious indeed – Gavin thought more so than the ascent, especially as one of his crampons came off, and search as he would in the snow he could not find it. Fortunately we had a spare set in Camp Two.

We packed up K.3. and set off down the gully. Gavin here naturally was much inhibited lacking his crampon. Steep downhill work with a heavy load is awkward at the best of times. Back at K.1. on the glacier we found Will and John festering happily, deservedly after their epic ascent of Krebek in foul weather – for which Gavin and I took off our hats to them.

The weather remained splendid right through the evening, and it was a pleasure to sit all four of us together again, in the big Sopus, eating supper, chatting and watching the sunset light on the great Tirich Mir-Noshaq massif, an evening of great contentment.

We split up again next morning, John and Will heading off down the glacier, in good weather, to climb Point Five, intending to do it by a large gully very like the Krebek one. Once they were out of the way, Gavin and I got up, to occupy the big Sopus and make breakfast – back to porridge and Ryvita spread with tinned chicken. Today our programme was to master Conival, which we had failed to do previously.

We went well that morning. Only 45 minutes of steady plodding took us up nearly 1000 feet to steep snow without undue fatigue, to the foot of the rocks of the west ridge, the

opposite side from our previous attempt – a pleasing sign of growing fitness. The ridge was a splendid viewpoint for the Rum Mountains. These were dominated by a dramatic and shapely glacial peak across the mid-Sui Glacier, which we named Askival. It had a fine rock partner, Allival; a rocky satellite, Trollval; and a glacial neighbour, Ainshval – names given there, and which stuck. There were also excellent views towards Sheasgaich and the other giant, which we decided to name Moruisg, after a fine peak in the Lochcarron area of Ross, near the original Sheasgaich. Programme planning and map-drawing were, of course, much simplified by having names to the main features, and these Gaelic names seemed to suit these wonderful hills, which though of course immensely higher than the Scots originals somewhat resembled them in outline, character or rock structure.

We spent 45 minutes defankling the new twisty 300-foot rope, it being in fact part of the day's plan to straighten out this plaguey line. It was while doing this that we named the mountains.

Thereafter we climbed the west ridge, direct to the top. It was a rather fine arête, giving the expedition's best rock-climbing to date, the granite being really superb. Five full pitches of 150 feet each led through, average standard difficult, but with a selection of short very difficult passages, and very narrow. We were not hasty about it, for there was no hurry today. We reached Conival's top, triumphant, at 1.30, 18,400 feet.

We spent an hour on the summit, revelling in it all, and mapping. Towards the end of this we could see John and Will arriving back at K.1. from Point Five. Then we abseiled directly 150 feet off the summit tower, on to the snow of the north face, finally killing the kinks on the rope. On down the snow's easy going, we arrived back in camp just as the sun left it at 3.30.

The others had had a fine day. They had conquered Point Five, at 19,200 feet, the gully giving them a long hard grind, with



Fuar Tholl. Will climbed it solo . . .
Camp K.2 perched half-way up Krebek couloir

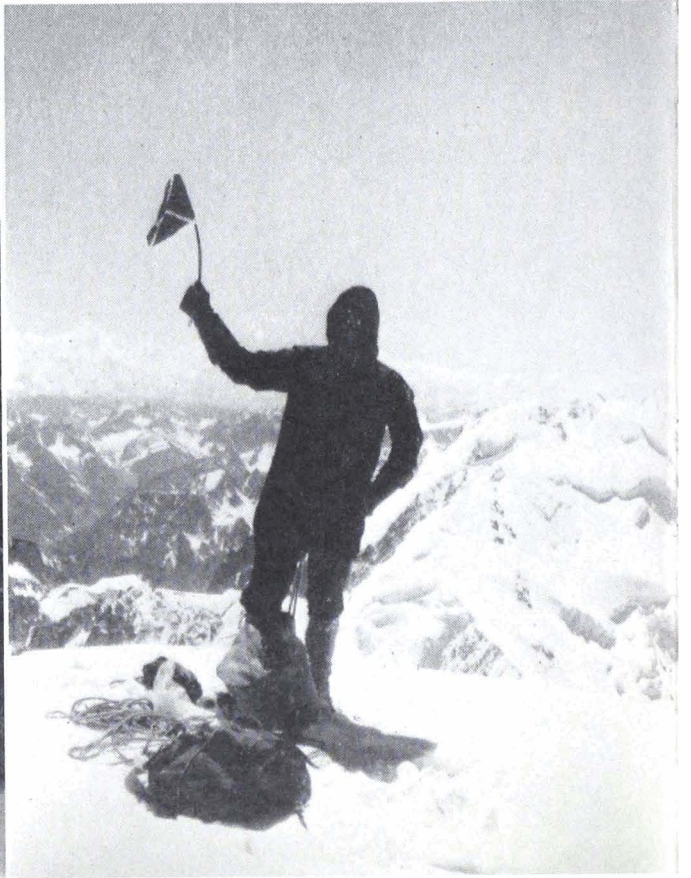




Camp K.3. Philip with Bandaka behind

Will reaching top of
Krebek couloir

Gavin flag-waving on
top of Krebek



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Will going very well. The ridge from its summit to the top of the mountain had been very fine and sharp, like a Forbes arête, exhilarating and splendid, and taking about an hour. On top they had drawn my map for me, of the Munjan side, and basked in the sun. Now they had the big Sopu struck and were ready to head back to Camp Two.

Gavin and I quickly followed their example, for with the sun behind Krebek it was bitterly cold on the glacier, and soon we had our own tent packed away. The march down Krebek Glacier was quite far enough, with a fair-sized pack after a heavy day – but we were all back at Camp Two by 5.30, the weather remaining excellent. Once camp was pitched we had supper, enjoying our return to the fleshpots with butter and tins of fruit – which had been classed as goodies and so not taken up to the assault camps.

CHAPTER 6

We had promised ourselves one really lazy day thereafter – and it was needed to effect running repairs. I spent most of it, in perfect weather, lying on a great flat rock near the camp, 5 hours of it mapping and correlating data gained since Flatface. I was joined on my rock by Gavin and Will, reading and mending – while John spent many useful hours frying our vast accumulated excess of onions, and feeding us with the surprisingly delectable results. Indeed food bulked large that whole blissful day. Our supper was an orgy – oxtail and chicken-noodle soup, with peas; Pom and Erin goulash; prawns-in-sauce; a choice of peaches and/or blackcurrants; and Bird's Instant Whip. Then coffee and biscuits. The only snag was the rice for the prawns, which failed to cook even after 45 minutes' hard boiling – probably an altitude effect.

Next morning I was up long before the others, on my rock in the sunshine, writing an article on a trip in the Fannich Mountains at home, for a Scottish magazine. John, as he so often gallantly did, made breakfast for us all.

Again it was a camp-moving day, and we were going to go over Spider Gap onto the North Glacier, to establish Camp Three – which we hoped to manage in two days. We each had loads of 65 lbs. today, and were all feeding lethargic and much weighed down, so that progress at first was slow – and every opportunity taken to photograph the wonderfully jagged rock scenery. I led, the others following in my tracks at intervals of a few hundred

yards, and at a similarly funereal pace, looking like a string of run-down clockwork dummies. The glacier rose gently for about a mile and a half, then followed a steep climb up snow, and then a gully to Spider Gap, a sharp notch between rock teeth. This climb was utterly traumatic, as hard work as any on this expedition noted for great labours. By the time I reached the gap, at 17,300 feet, 1800 above Camp Two, I was distinctly fagged – for the snow had been very difficult and broken up, forcing me to take huge 4-foot strides. However, in due course we were all assembled in the col, Gavin cannily bringing up his load in two halves.

When John and I were part-way down the far side, the group which we had named the Rum Mountains appeared in view, glistening in the sun, the shapeliest mountains of the entire range, and appealing to us very strongly. Askival, Trollval and Ainsval were visible from here. A steep snow descent of 700 feet took us down on to the northernmost head-branch of the Sui Glacier, fortunately well supplied with melt-water pools and runnels. We dumped our loads – Camp Three, 16,500 feet.

This was a really magnificent spot, considerably more distinctive than Camp Two had been, a great ice basin hemmed in by tall red precipices of Sheasgaich, Krebek and Fuar Tholl, each with its snow-cone gleaming above.

As planned, we managed to establish this camp within the 2 days – in fact, I personally brought over my second load in time to put in a short recce the following afternoon, before the others arrived. I wanted to inspect the possibilities of the snow col which connected Sheasgaich to its east ridge, the right-hand wall of the North Sui Glacier, to discover firstly if this col would provide a better route to Moruisg than round the end of the ridge; and secondly to have a better look up the snow gully which started near the col, and by which John and Gavin intended to climb Sheasgaich.

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I flogged across the flat glacier for nearly a mile, then up steepening snow and across a bergschrund towards the col. About 150 feet below the crest I found myself on pretty nasty ground, ice at nearly 70 degrees, with thin, unstable snow on top. I didn't like it at all, unroped – especially the prospect of retreat. I considered my recce as sufficient. The Sheasgaich gully could be clearly seen, and looked relatively easy and free from danger. It was obvious, however, that the col itself was no route for a pack-march, except in dire necessity. So I retreated carefully, backwards at first, and was back in camp 90 minutes after leaving it, to find the others arrived and settling in.

That evening and night it snowed again.

Sunday's programme was a divided one. It was becoming obvious that, with so many magnificent peaks waiting to be climbed over and above our original basic objectives, we couldn't all climb everything. So we must see what we could do in pairs. Now we planned that while John and Gavin attempted Sheasgaich, Will and I would recce forward, with loads, to establish Camp Four somewhere on the Ainsval Glacier, taking a look at the Moruisg approaches on the way, with a view to tackling this giant the next day. The other two would try to establish Camp S.I. 2000 feet up the Sheasgaich gully.

That morning I was at my fittest, and strode off with my load at a spanking pace, soon covering the couple of miles down to the end of Sheasgaich's long east-south-east ridge. There a wonderful scene of magnificence opened before me. Round to the right were the other two horns of our Sui Glacier, Central and South, separated by a fine rocky ridge with two peaks – which I now named Rua Stac Mor and Beg, the Great and Lesser Red Stacks – running eastwards from the main central range. Moruisg was prominent now, towering above the South Glacier. It was clear at a glance that Moruisg was accessible via this glacier, the col on the Ainsval-Moruisg ridge, and then by its long glaciated

east shoulder. We should be able to place Camp M.1. tomorrow, on the col.

I removed crampons to cover some moraines on the way due south across the wide stretch where all three Sui glaciers joined. I was making for the great icefall which pours down from the Ainsival Glacier. During a rest half-way up, I glimpsed Will for the first time, rounding the end of Sheasgaich's ridge. He was apparently feeling the altitude at this stage. This altitude effect was an unpredictable one, each of us being differently affected at various times.

After a long rightwards traverse, I reached the comparatively level snows of the Ainsival Glacier, which descends straight off the face of Ainsival, only perhaps 1500 feet above. I dumped my load and started to look for a camp-site, the prime necessity being a flat surface plus available water. There was a trickle of water just over a col above Trollval's glacier. This would suffice – and the outlook from here was the finest yet, 16,900 feet up, on Ainsival.

I thereupon returned, as I had come, to Camp Three, passing and chatting with Will on the way. He had now shaken off the altitude lethargy and was going well.

Back at camp, I could see John and Gavin toiling up the Sheasgaich gully, still 1000 feet below the ledge they intended to camp on, and we exchanged some powerfully bellowed greetings. They had made a late start in order to avoid the noon sun on the gully snow.

When Will got back it was to report the other two now only a few hundred feet below their target shelf. After supper, at 7.30, by prearrangement I went out to watch for their flare. A green one duly sailed into the air off Sheasgaich's mass, spot-on the half-hour, so all was well. I replied in kind.

Next morning, with heavy clouds louring to the east, we packed the remainder of our gear necessary for the Moruisg

attempt, and set off southwards again. By this time Gavin and John could be seen, and still shouted to, high on the ridge above, two tiny specks on the white, which hardly seemed to move, about one-third of the way from the assault camp to Sheasgaich's top. They must have eyed the rather ominous weather to the east somewhat askance.

We were carrying 70 lb. packs – at sea-level perhaps a reasonable load but at 16,000 feet a giant millstone which affected our every movement. It was my turn to have the awful feeling of lethargy, Will on the contrary going very well. But the steady rhythmic stride which we had developed took us gently down the glacier, a smooth white road between the red granite cliffs of Fuar Tholl and the shattered pinnacles of Sheasgaich's eastern ridge. Ahead the view was down the Sui valley, so far below us that we could not see its floor. Behind us a tremendous cirque of red rock closed the glacier's head, riven by fearsome couloirs, scored by stone-falls and avalanches, above which rose the perfect shining cone of Krebek and the scalloped corniced ridge of Sheasgaich, floating in the sky, immensely high.

The snout of the North Sui Glacier is a tumbling mass of loose moraine, and finding a route down it was a weary business and a strain on our shoulder-muscles. But it was not a long descent, and by noon we stood on the main Sui Glacier and faced towards Moruisg.

The ice of the main and South Sui Glaciers merged smoothly together as one, and made a highway for us, typical of these Central Hindu Kush glaciers, which were easy and with crevasses few and far between. It was 4 miles up to the foot of the slopes which rose to the col on the Ainshval-Moruisg ridge, on which we intended to camp – 4 miles of steady plodding up a steepening carpet of dazzling white, gaining a lot more altitude than had seemed likely looking at it from the foot. To the left huge icefalls crumbled off the ridge of Ainshval; to the right the gleaming

crest of Sheasgaich, crowned in cornices, loomed in the sky above a mile-high face. How were our friends? We could not see them now.

By 3 p.m. we had reached the foot of the ascent to the col, 500 feet high and split half-way by a gaping bergschrund. To reach this gulf did not take long, but it was hard work, up powdery snow. We found a shaky-looking ice-bridge, which however was strong enough to take us across the formidable abyss. Above this the slope was ice, not snow, and steepened up to 70 degrees. For a while we took turns at hacking at the ice with axes, cutting steps, but with packs as heavy as ours this proved too great an effort to sustain. We decided to pack-haul. We cut a little platform in the ice-face, and Will climbed up 150 feet unladen, till the rope ran out. The idea was to haul up the packs on the rope to easier ground; but when Will tried to draw up the first one, it was beyond his strength. I had to divide both loads into two – a dodgy business when teetering on the platform in the cold on a 70-degree ice-slope. But eventually Will, noble fellow, managed to haul up 3 half-loads, so I tied the rope on to the fourth, climbed up to join him, and between us we pulled up the last one. By that time it was really witheringly cold, as we were out of the sun. It was hard exhausting work and very time-consuming, but it was safe, where cutting steps loaded was not.

Even at this upper stance the snow slope lay at over 50 degrees, too steep to traverse safely with a really heavy pack, so we left the loads split up, and each made double journeys over the 300 yards or so to the col.

It was 6 p.m., before we had everything up to pitch camp on the col, and our arms and legs were done. The sun had gone behind Moruisg and the cold descended like a leaden mass which numbed body and mind. But the col gave a level site, with rocks for shelter and stones for holding down the tent, and soon we

were snug inside the little Sopu, melting ice for water on the primus.

That night we had much to think about. The ice above the bergschrund had been steeper than we had expected, and it had taken us 2 hours to gain 200 feet. Above camp now the vast east face of Moruisg heaved upwards in a series of steps and ledges, and some of the steps, especially the first and longest looked even steeper than the ice above the bergschrund. We had hoped to place a second camp, next day, about 2000 feet above this level, but that lower step alone was 700 feet. Seven to 10 hours for that alone? The danger of exhaustion and a careless fatal slip was too much to ignore. We knew that Moruisg had two tops, the north one that we could see from here, and one to the south which we had glimpsed from Koh-i-Krebek. How much of a gap there was between them was unknowable. This was the reason for planning for such a high second assault camp. We were now at 17,300 feet, a full 3000 feet below the summit which was further than we had so far climbed in a single day at this altitude. But despite this, we decided that night to scrap the second camp, and try for the top from here, unladen, the next day.

First dawn, at 4.45, saw us up and breakfasting – but with frozen boots to be beaten into submission and ice to melt for hot drinks, it was 7.15 before we were ready to move, by which time sunlight streamed in a dazzle from the east, but the sky to the west was grey and leaden. We set off straight up the steep snow and ice-face behind camp, making a good steady time, but increasingly concerned with the pitch, towards the foot of the great first step. The surface of the snow was sculptured by sun and wind into a maze of pinnacles and troughs, knee-high, tiring to climb through. We took it in turns to lead and kick the steps, Will leading the last 500 feet or so which was distinctly unpleasant, with the snow reaching an angle of nearly 70 degrees, with treacherous surfaces, which had to be traversed beneath a

huge pendant cornice, with the South Sui Glacier 2000 uninterrupted feet below. When the sun got to work on that cornice, the slope we were on below was going to be a dangerous place, to put it mildly.

At length we traversed out left from under that beak – and neither of us was at all sorry to do so, though our relief was tempered by doubts as to our eventual return over it. But there was now another hazard, for this wind-compacted snow proved to be the steepest part of the entire climb, and a casual glance might have deemed it vertical. Each cut step had to be judged with care.

But at last the angle slackened off, and we reached soft slopes of powdered snow above the step. We were doing well, we told each other. We had basically 3000 feet to climb, and we had done 1000, very difficult, in 90 minutes. We rested for a while and admired the vista of sun gleaming on Bandaka, 25 miles to the north – but ahead, the summit of Moruisg itself was lost in cloud.

When we resumed I took the lead, blessed with a sudden access of energy. From here the mountain rose at 45 degrees into the cloud, the rises and shelves smaller and less pronounced. But it was hard work beating a track up the soft powdery snow, often through a fragile crust. First Rua Stac Beg, then Rua Stac More, fell below us.

Thus we climbed right through the morning, until we reached the fringes of the cloud, 1500 feet nearer our goal and only 500 more to go.

The mountain steepened once again, a great rock buttress looming on the left, up to 65 degrees. There was ice now, just beneath the snow, but our crampons reached and gripped it. The thinness of the air was like a throttle, slowing us to a gasping crawl where in Scotland we would have climbed with rhythm, onwards and upwards through the freezing mist.

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Will had been leading for the last 500 feet, and now halted to rest. I went on. Suddenly I came out of the mist and into dazzling sunshine. I found myself on a narrow ridge of virgin snow which thrust above the cloud, and only 100 feet higher the graceful summit stood gleaming against the blue of the sky. I waited for Will, and together we ground on and up the rising snow arête.

At 11.30 we had made it. We were perched on the roof of the world, 20,200 feet high, where no man had ever stood before. The Hindu Kush was shrouded in mist beneath our feet.

It was a wonderful moment. As always at such altitudes, the sun was hot but the snow was biting cold. Our feet fought with frostbite and our arms with sunburn, while our lungs fought for air.

We knew that there were the two summits to this mountain. This was the north one, and we had hopes that the south peak would be accessible from it. But where was the south peak?

For a moment the thin west wind tore a rent in the mists that billowed around us. Below a great drop plunged away into nothingness, too steep even to see over the lip. Across it a huge white fang of a peak, hanging with cornices and ice, climbed to about 200 feet higher than we stood – and nearly a mile away. It looked arrogant and splendid – but it pleased us not at all. The drop might be 600 feet or more – or less? There might be a route down to the saddle from here, or there might not. We certainly could not see one. The weather to the west, from whence came the wind, looked filthy; obviously a blizzard was blowing there. It would take us at least 4 hours to get to the second top, and back – if not more. Had we the strength to face the climb on the return? Had we, indeed 4 hours before the storm was likely to reach us? What of the great barrier step at the bottom, late in the day, perhaps in blizzard and darkness and near exhaustion?

Reluctantly we turned our backs on the great white fang. This north top was no shoulder of the higher south peak, but a superb

summit in its own right. Enough was enough. We had done a good day's work and climbed a previously unknown 20,000 foot mountain.

I hurriedly took what bearings I could, for the clouds were rapidly approaching and already obscured two-thirds of the view, peaks rising around out of the mist. We could see that Sheasgaich was about 100 feet higher than ourselves, and its subsidiary ridges thrusting out towards the Bashgal were very complex.

We started the descent. The thin white ridge sank like a shark's fin into the mist. Soon we ourselves were in it, the cold vapour icing our beards. The first steep step was tricky but short, an awkward creep backwards, crampon-points groping the ice, then a longer careful descent facing outwards, until the angle eased below the clouds.

Then we were on to the soft snow slopes. Avalanches were our danger here. The weather cleared a bit, to the east, showing us the Rum Mountains. We could see now a deep and mysterious valley to the south. This is a major geographical feature, a valley running between and parallel to the Bashgal to the east and the Munjan to the west, with very fine and high mountains beyond it. It was a puzzle, fitting in with nothing we knew. The first flickerings of a determination to come back to Nuristan one day, to explore this exciting prospect, crossed my mind.

The cold would not let us linger, however. We moved quickly down, no rhythmic striding here, but a lurching rush, for the snow surface varied, in some places a crusted powder, 3 feet deep, in others as hard as rock. In less than an hour from the summit we stood on the top of the daunting barrier step, our camp an orange speck 1000 feet below.

Only a fool would have chosen that route down, that afternoon – but there was no other route to choose. We roped up, and crept downwards, crabwise, belayed to axes hammered into the snow. Will was better at this than I was, partly because his

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ice-axe shaft was slimmer, and could thrust into the ice where mine would not, and partly because he had 12-point cow-catcher crampons; but also he had a better natural sense of balance. The morning sun had reached this place, and the surface had gone soft, coating the hard ice in 3 inches of loose crystals, a sliding carpet of treachery. How it stuck there at all, at 70 degrees, I do not know. Above us the horrible icicle-festooned cornice still hung poised to fall – though we told ourselves that it would not do so now that the sun had left it. We hated every moment of that descent. We stuck to our system, as one must in such a place, rope length after rope length, moving singly, chopping steps behind and below us, as we traversed right.

At last the angle eased to 55 degrees or thereabouts. Even this is desperately steep, but a slip could now be stopped with an axe – and indeed I did have one such slip. We unroped and moved together. At 3.15 we reached our camp in the col.

It had been a pretty hard 8 hours work – but a great day's mountaineering.

I settled in at once to a session of map-drawing, for I had garnered much new material. It was now snowing. Will was too hungry to wait for me, and made all the supper himself, feeding me course by course, until both my maps and the meal were finished.

CHAPTER 7

Having climbed Moruisg in a day less than we had planned we now had a day in hand, and felt that we could spend it lazing, with a clear conscience. To start with we had a long lie, by Hindu Kush standards, not arising until 8.20, having slept the clock round. The evening's storm had died away and it was a perfect morning, the sky cloudless blue and every peak for 50 miles around glinting in the sunshine.

Even before breakfast I was lying out in the sun on my air-bed, diary-writing, while Will made the porridge – double rations this morning because we had only had puffed wheat the day before. After breakfast I wandered up to the first little summit along the snow ridge towards Ainshval, some 200 feet above camp. There I sat on a rock in continuous hot sunshine throughout the day. I took compass-bearings, drew maps, wrote – and all the time admired the stupendous view, especially down the mysterious valley to the south, which I was beginning to call the Lost Valley.

Will joined me up here presently, and the afternoon passed most pleasantly, until at 4 p.m. the sun began to drop behind Moruisg and it suddenly became bitterly cold. I don't suppose the shade temperature had risen above ten degrees of frost all day. We returned hot-foot to camp in a thin bitter wind, and hurried inside to make supper – which as ever took a major portion of the evening. But it had been one of the finest days of the trip. Whether we in fact enjoyed it more than the day before

is hard to say. Is it finer to climb a great peak, or to look at it after you have climbed it? Also it had been a good day from the point of view of personal pleasure, good companionship and even cartography, the only fly in the ointment being that the soup-pan spilled all over my trousers at suppertime.

In the morning we had to move to Camp Four, to meet our friends, for whose progress on Sheasgaich we had been constantly concerned. It was another splendid day, and we decided to make our way by a different route, along the Ainsval ridge and the Ainsval-Trollval bealach – partly for variety and partly because it probably involved less ascent; also partly to avoid the pack-hauling stint and the dreaded bergschrund below us. The route, of course, was unexplored and its difficulties largely guesswork.

At first the ridge was relatively easy, sometimes ice and snow, sometimes rock, up past where we had sat the day before – though of course at over 17,500 feet any uphill work was exhausting, especially as now we had heavy packs on our shoulders again. But we had learned how to conserve our strength, and we could enjoy the challenge of it. Presently we came to an unexpected drop, the ridge deteriorating into scree and broken rock. This necessitated the removal of our crampons for the next hour or so, and it made very tiring but interesting work. Icefalls tumbled off this ridge into the South Sui Glacier, across which the great mile-high wall of Sheasgaich towered impressively grand. Much to our joy, while traversing this ridge, we actually made contact with John and Gavin – who must have seen us silhouetted on the skyline from the glacier miles below, and who yelled at us with great lung-power. We replied with equal vehemence. It was good to know that they were safely down off their savage-looking monster opposite. Presumably they were doing their share of portering from Camp Three to Four.

At the end of this section of the ridge there was a 100-foot step

of pure ice-cemented broken rock, and climbing up this at this altitude with 55 lb. packs was so laborious as to be almost comic. But as Will commented, back home in Scotland he would not have believed such a thing even to be possible. Above this we were on the final snow ridge of the west peak of Aishval, and a good steady crampon-plod along the crest of a huge icefall took us at length triumphant to the top. West summit, Aishval, 17,800 feet – first peak climbed by 1965 S.H.K.E. with full packs!

We sat on top for a while, in great good humour. Then we set about the descent into the West Rum Glacier – as we called this one, which we had not seen before, and which flows down between the main mass of the Rum group, starting on the long ridge of Aishval, southwards in a great rock gorge. The descent at first was on steep very broken rock, then by a snow couloir where the *sastrugi* build-up reached really fantastic proportions so great that one almost disappeared completely if one slipped amongst them. With my long legs and outsize stride, I found this going difficult, Will found it horrific.

At last we reached the level glacier, now under leaden skies. We had a great feeling of exploration here, on this completely new ground draining into the Lost Valley by a most impressive buttressed gorge below Allival. After that an easy plod took us a mile or so across the glacier, then up 300 feet of good snow to the very pronounced V-notched pass between Aishval and Trollval. We called it Ant Gap, after three flying ants at its foot. There was a wonderful view back from it to Moruisg, with its two peaks looking dramatically fanglike and separate.

We were thankful to discover that the far side of Ant Gap, which we had been wondering about with some concern, was as easy as the approach. We dropped down good crampon crystalline snow into the head of the Trollval Glacier, beneath the most exciting north face of Trollval, a huge wall of ice-cracked slab, smooth, black and challenging. Then a mile down this glacier

took us to the snow slope leading up to Camp Four. A steady 500-foot plod and we were there, at 2.45.

We found the big Sopus pitched, but John and Gavin had gone off again for their second loads from Camp Three. We pitched the little tent, and started to make a meal for four. While this was being done I read Gavin's diary, and learned the details of their exceedingly epic ascent of Sheasgaich. Just as soup was ready the pair of them arrived up the icefall. Great was the joy of reunion.

They had been quite worried about us, we found out now – for I'm afraid we had omitted to keep a flare-watch as arranged, for Wednesday, the day we had spent lazing in the sun. Our two friends had fired off one white and two green flares that evening, and received no reply save only the echoes of their shouts. We made abject apologies.

That night, as we celebrated our reunion and dual successes by double rations, plus one of the Horlick's bars – very good it was, but I would hate to have to live two days on one of them – we learned the full details of the Sheasgaich climb.

The huge snow gully by which John and Gavin had started the ascent was divided into two main sections, the lower third an open snow slope of some 40 degrees, and the upper two-thirds enclosed by rocks, mostly about 50 degrees but steepening to 80 at the top. The snow was of a highly unpleasant quality, soft powder overlaying hard compacted snow and ice. The weather closed in as they climbed, and it began to snow. They estimated the gully to rise 1900 feet. It was during this long and arduous climb that we had seen them, and thought that they were going slowly – and little wonder.

The last few hundred feet were fought out in a minor blizzard, in semi-darkness, as the cloud encompassed them. There was nothing to be seen now save the rock walls of the couloir and the endless ever-steepening ribbon of grooved snow. These, and the



Philip map-making on top of Conival, looking to the Rum Mountains
Moruisg and Sheasgaich from below Spider Gap, showing the route up





Sheasgaich from the south

Moruisg from west ridge of Ainshval



fitful threatening wind which moaned up the gully beneath them, brought cold and unease. It was vital that they should reach the top of the couloir for the night, to find a flat place large enough to build a platform for the tent. Gavin was going the better of the two that day, and was in the lead step-kicking for most of the way. Their packs seemed almost insuperably heavy, threatening to topple them backwards and send them hurtling down the gully.

Despite every effort, darkness caught them still in the couloir. But there was no question of stopping, for to camp at such an angle was impossible. In the end, however, the end of that gully was nearer than they feared. At the final 100 feet the angle steepened rapidly, and to climb it laden and unroped was out of the question. This forced them out on to the rock-wall to the right. The top of this wall was broken and not such desperately bad going. Suddenly, in almost total darkness they were there.

They emerged on to a fairly narrow snow ridge, where they were able to level off a small area, sufficient to hold the big Sopus in a gusty wind. The guys they secured with ice-screws. It was then that they fired off the green flare, which I had answered from Camp Three. They had trouble with the primus fuming, and had to be content with a one-course meal cooked as a mess, and no hot drink.

After a too brief night's sleep they woke to a morning which looked by no means promising, with low cloud to the south and west, mist blowing about the ridge of Fuar Tholl, and Moruisg's two summits swathed in sifting eddies, strange and beautiful. When puffs of cloud came streaming up their gully, neither of them had really much hope of climbing Sheasgaich that day.

Neither of them was feeling like bold decisions either, and they would have preferred to spend the day at the tent, hoping for an improvement in conditions. But they had already eaten the bulk of their provisions, and all they had left was an emergency ration

for one night. To stay in camp must mean retreat the next day, and the chance to climb Sheasgaich lost. They compromised, and decided to reconnoitre forward, so as at least to prospect the route for some later attempt.

Although feeling lethargic, at 18,400 feet, they set off, without loads now, scrambling up the rocky ridge above which soon joined the main mountain by a wide snow platform. Above, the snow sloped steeply upwards to a corniced ridge, and as the weather seemed to be getting no worse, at least, they decided to go on, and to turn back only if it became really bad.

Roped together, Gavin in front at this point, they plodded over deep snow, tiring work. At the top of this slope they had to cross a sizeable crevasse, but they found a snow-bridge. After the previous day's struggle in the couloir this seemed almost a promenade. More crevasses to be crossed and ice-bulges to be by-passed, but little more. They were already high on the face when they saw two black specks leave Camp Three on the glacier half a mile directly below – Will and I starting our assault on Moruisg. By 10.30, to their delight, they had made the summit ridge.

The weather was no better but no worse. The heavy cloud to the east was no nearer. From where they stood now the actual mountain-top looked to be within an hour's reach. Suddenly success seemed possible.

Their route had been up a broad shoulder where the east ridge joined the main mass of the mountain, but as they followed the summit ridge southwards they soon got beyond the shoulder to where the east face fell sheerly below them as an awesome mile-high wall, into the Central Sui Glacier. A huge cornice of powder snow overhung the face – but on the other, west side the mountain quickly steepened into precipitous slopes for as much as 7000 feet, and efforts to avoid the cornice exposed them to the glaring danger of avalanche down this west side.

Roped, they continued, with ever-increasing caution, Gavin ahead. The snow here, above 19,000 feet, never melted. It had a powdery quality into which they sank, at times, up to the knees and thighs. Concerned to keep away from that ghastly drop to the west, they were inevitably edged ever nearer to the cornice as the ridge narrowed.

They reached the first crest of the ridge, but it was a false summit, and the ridge continued, narrower still, after a slight dip. Both were nervous now. The next summit, too, was false, and from it the top of the mountain seemed as high and as far away as ever. The dip beyond that curved towards the west, steepening still further the drop on that side. Gavin was still ahead, edged to within 20 feet of the cornice to the east, his axe prodding the snow beside him at every step.

Suddenly there was a sickening crunch, as a monster chunk of the cornice, 50 feet by 20 feet wide, cracked off from the point of his ice-axe and avalanched away down the sheer east face – to leave him peering a mile straight down to the glacier.

With a swiftly decisive action, John jumped down the west side with the rope, and thrusting in his own axe, belayed the rope round it, and so had Gavin secured if he fell.

Poised above the appalling drop Gavin stood, badly shaken. But no more of the cornice came away. Slowly, he forced himself to move, edging gradually over, down beside John.

It was the nearest thing to disaster imaginable – even though John now sought to make light of it by calling it a friendly warning from the mountain. Had Gavin been using the axe in the other hand, he would have gone with the section of cornice.

After a short interval, they continued upwards. Soon they reached a place where the west face had avalanched and left a base of hard ice, with an inch of recent powder snow on top, which balled up the crampons. This surface was set at 35 degrees, steepening rapidly to the right, and Gavin, after his

shock, just couldn't face it. But there were some rocks on the other side of the ice, and once John had picked his way carefully across, he got a sound belay amongst them, and brought Gavin over.

The ridge went on and on, the distance between the climbers and their base stretching horribly behind them. False top followed false top, until at last another crest revealed a bigger drop than usual just ahead, and beyond it what was surely the ultimate summit, rising 300 feet above them, a bold dome of glistening white, truncated on the east.

It was 1 o'clock, and the cloud to the east seemed nearer. They debated whether they had time to continue. And had they the strength? For they had already been climbing in heavy snow for hours, at 20,000 feet. But having got so far, it would have been almost unthinkable to turn back. After a rest, they continued, grinding slowly, roped together, up the last long ramp.

At 2 p.m. they stood, at 20,300 feet, on the summit of Sheasgaich. In point of fact, in a way, the mountain did beat them, after all – for the actual highest point was the edge of a huge mass of cornice – and they had had enough of cornices for one day. They had to be content with flying our little expedition flag 15 feet short of it, on the flank. But it was sufficient.

They did not linger long on that spot. It was difficult for them to feel any real relief or elation just then, in view of the ground they had to cover on the return journey. Nevertheless they were aware that it was a moment of triumph. They were the first to climb this great mountain, and it had been a fight all the way.

They took a few photographs, a few notes on the prospect as seen from this vantage-point, to aid in the mapping, and turned to face the long descent.

If the summit ridge had seemed a lengthy ordeal on the way up, it seemed a marathon on the return. But at least their faces were pointed towards camp and safety, and the hazards were

known – with their own tracks there to guide them. They swallowed their gnawing apprehension and kept on and on down the long thin ridge, over the rises that seemed like individual mountains now, over the patch of avalanched ice, carefully along the edge of the gap in the cornice – at which they paused to photograph Gavin's abruptly cut-short tracks – and determinedly on to the easier slopes beyond. At last they reached the base of the eastern shoulder, and the way ahead lay comparatively simply downwards. They made camp in the early dusk, almost completely shattered.

The plan, based on experience of the easier Kohi-i-Krebek ascent, and a misjudgement of the distance from the top of the couloir to the summit, had been for them to return that evening down the couloir to Camp Three on the glacier. But in their condition then, of mental and physical exhaustion, this was not to be considered, even had there been daylight left to do it in. Without even discussing any other course, they demolished their emergency rations and crawled into their sleeping-bags.

Next morning, even with a paltry but delicious breakfast of oatmeal bar, rum-flavoured fudge and hot chocolate, the tension of the last two days was still to some extent with them as they packed up camp and set about the long descent of the couloir. The inhibitingly steep angle at the top was worse to descend than to climb, and for hours they had to kick backwards down the gully, unbalanced by their loads, as nerve-straining an effort as could be imagined. But all went well, Gavin having one slip, but stopping himself with his ice-axe within 20 feet. By noon the two of them were plodding wearily across the level glacier towards Camp Three.

This account, and our own story of the Moruig climb, occupied us till late that evening, as the wind blew spindrift around the tent at Camp Four, high on the Ainsval icefall.

We were at this stage beginning to feel that the expedition was

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nearing its end, with all the highest peaks climbed and time running out. It was 4 weeks since, on 4th August, the donkeys had left us at Paniger, and they were due to come back for us on 9th September – that was in exactly one week. Our thoughts, of an evening, were therefore apt to turn homewards – at least mine were. Will said that were it not for the continual hunger and longing for more and varied food, he would have been happy to stay here for weeks yet. John now only wanted to eat, fester and revel in the scenery, as indeed did Gavin – who had undoubtedly managed to keep up the best semblance of a civilised being of all of us. We had the oddest day-dreams. I had a great longing to be driving my Mini up Loch Lochy-side while John preferred the thought of racing, unladen, up the A.1. Gavin, however, dreamed of us. We had the oddest day-dreams. I had a great longing to be Will, who prior to this never had cared for Jaffa-cakes, for instance, now entered into an imaginary Jaffa-cake-eating competition with great enthusiasm, and we solemnly estimated that we could each eat probably a maximum of 30-40 bars of milk chocolate. So much for high altitudes and low cravings – and empty stomachs.

CHAPTER 8

Next day, Friday 3rd September, was notable for the expenditure of camera film, the morning being glorious and the scenery likewise. There was no set programme today, and we all went our own ways. After photographing everything in sight from Camp Four, I set off alone to climb Aishval's main peak, with no special purpose other than to get even better views from higher-up. Actually I never went better, across the glacier and up the snow slopes, over the bergschrund and the steeper soft snow above, to reach the summit ridge, where some step-cutting was necessary at the steepest part. I made the top in 50 minutes flat, 18,500 feet, 1500 feet without a rest. Such is acclimatisation – and of course I was carrying no pack.

Up there I spent two excellent hours, in the brilliant sunshine, taking more pictures and bearings and drawing maps, and was later joined by Will.

Gavin had made himself useful the restful way by collecting much melt-water from the rocks behind camp. John however, as restless as I was, had gone off on a recce to find a suitable site for Camp Five, possibly in the lower Askival Glacier.

We lazed the afternoon away, with writing, reading and map-drawing. When John turned up, very tired after a strenuous day probing in various directions, he declared that he had found a possible site. We would move to the Askival Glacier next day.

That evening, Will managed for the first time for a month to

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tune into the ether successfully on his little transistor. We were just in time to hear broadcasts from Mr. Shastri of India, and the Pakistan News, and it seemed that the two countries were virtually at war over Kashmir – alarming news, especially with ourselves within a few miles of the Pakistan frontier.

The plan next morning was to move camp in one stage if possible, for the journey was short, only about 2 miles, and downhill nearly all the way – into the Trollval Glacier and round the north end of the Trollval ridge into the Askival Glacier. Determined to make it in one, I staggered off with a load of almost 100 lbs., followed by Will similarly burdened. Such a weight at such an altitude was a crazy effort, and once down on the Trollval Glacier I had to stop completely to reorganise my pack which was grossly top-heavy. During this pause Will overtook me, and we went on more or less together thereafter, round the ridge to where John had found a flat site, though without water, only a short way up the Askival Glacier. But when Will and I saw the climb ahead, short as it was, we stopped dead. It was just possible to move downhill under 100 lbs.; uphill was too much.

We dumped our loads and went ahead unladen, to prospect. Once up 100 feet or so on the glacier, we found not only an ideal camp-site but water too, plenty of it in a crevasse below a boulder – so there was nothing for it but to return and pick up our packs. That last uphill section was killing work, especially for John who was suffering from an off-day. This site was at 16,200 feet, and in another really beautiful situation, looking out across the jagged Sui-Bashgal mountains, and above them all to Tirich Mir.

That evening we had much discussion as to the time remaining to us. How long would the march back to Paniger take? John, in his currently exhausted state, saw it as a 3-day task, although some of us thought much less. The only decision we reached was

that it would be wise to eat as much of our provisions as possible, to reduce our loads for the trip. That, and the fact that we had time to climb Askival next day.

Just to carry out stage one of this programme, we had almost double rations of everything, and a Horlick's bar as well. I went to bed feeling more satisfied than for many nights, and wrote till almost midnight.

We were all looking forward to this last day's real climbing. Happily it was again glorious weather. We got away to a good start, plodding easily up the Askival Glacier, which provided more or less a high road to the top. I went in front, pacing with my usual measured stride, which the others recently had come to find a useful lead, but which they did not use on their own. At first the glacier was fairly flat and easy, then there was a steep 700 foot rise, quite uncrevassed, followed by another flat step, then a second rise with a big bergschrund near the top. There was an obvious way round this to the left, but I prospected ahead to see if it could be taken direct. This indeed proved possible, via a wide bridge, and the others followed me while I waited above. We were now 1750 feet above camp, and the outlook was magnificent. Life was quite superb.

From there to the top I took in one go, plodding with great regularity. We bore left on to the ridge that ran up to the summit. This was most spectacular, and Will lingered behind here, so that John and I should make suitable objects to impart scale to his photography. He thereupon turned his camera in the opposite direction, to use Gavin, still climbing up, as a foreground object for Tirich Mir.

Higher, some of the snow was deep and soft, and there were crevasses to avoid, but nothing held John and me up. Near the top was a large cornice overhanging the east face, which alarmed John somewhat, after Sheasgaich. The last 500 feet or so were a pretty steep-canted snowfield, where John also held back to

photograph my progress. I steamed my lonely way to Askival's summit.

Via a last little rocky ridge, I arrived on the top at noon, the views being probably the finest of the whole trip. All the usual monsters now supplemented by Shakh-i-Kabud and another giant which must have been Diemberger's Koh-i-Mondi, were looking at their finest. The geography was too incredibly complex to make mapping really satisfactory and many enigmas remained – but this by no means spoiled my pleasure in it all.

All the party was assembled by 12.45, and great was the jollity. This was to be our last Hindu Kush mountain, and when we had established that it rose to 19,800 feet, which made it one of the select band of 6000 metre peaks, we were more gratified than ever. In fact, we were more pleased about these Rum Mountains than almost anything else in the expedition. They were all our own, completely unknown to the world before we found them. Moreover they were particularly fine and shapely rock peaks, architecturally the most satisfying and spectacular we saw anywhere in Nuristan. Also, because of their isolated position in relation to the main chain, they gave the most dramatic of all views of the Central Hindu Kush.

We were still unable to decide on the direction of flow of the Lost Valley, but thought it might end up as the Sckurigal. All thoughts of descending that way, to the Bashgal, had to be dropped however as impracticable.

To celebrate this final ascent flares were fired, flags waved, photographs taken and other forms of *joie-de-vivre* indulged in – whilst I tried soberly to concentrate on mapping. John built a cairn, and left a note of our success.

After an hour of this, we rather reluctantly turned away from the high places, back to lesser things. That evening, preparing supper was a serious business. We were going to dispose of a vast quantity of food in a final effort to lighten loads for the march to

Paniger tomorrow. We started off with very thick soup, putting everything into it that came to hand. Then double rations of the usual Erin mince and Pom, but into the pot we added three meat bars, supposedly sufficient for 6 people, which we removed from the Horlicks' emergency rations. This produced a hash of such stupendous proportions that the efforts to finish it were quite as great as those expended in climbing Askival. Will, for one, had to withdraw in some confusion thereafter – poor chap, grieving at having to deprive himself of the fudge bars and chocolate biscuits. As he left the tent he put these hurriedly into a Horlicks' box. When I pointed out indignantly this blatant example of hoarding, in our present conditions of bloat and high spirits, this sounded so ludicrous that we all became slightly hysterical, and Will's agony caused by over-indulgence was intensified by convulsions of laughter. In fact all of us suffered in some measure from the same disabilities. I blame the altitude.

Will recovered sufficiently to tune in later to the ether, from which we learned that Albert Schweitzer was dead, and that the Kashmir crisis continued unabated – except for All Indian successes according to All India Radio. This station then put out a propaganda hate programme about massacres by Pakistani troops in 1947 – a sordid message to receive up in this clean high solitude.

We collapsed into bed forthwith, I myself taking a post-prandial nap before waking up at some unspecified hour with very cold feet – for of course we were still at 16,200 feet on the glacier – and decided to do a bit of writing. I indeed managed to finish the article on the Scottish mountains which I had started a few days earlier, before sleep overtook me again.

Monday 6th September was to see the beginning of our long march out. It proved to be the usual superb morning, and we were soon packing up camp. We divided the loads equally, and though they were still heavy, we all agreed that our orgies at

Camp Five had not been in vain – though Gavin was still feeling the effects of gluttony. I found that I had got rid of the body of the small Sopus, and also a short rope, from my normal burden – and rejoiced therefore. We were indeed transporting only two food-boxes back. There was still discussion as to how long this march would take. I thought that it was possible in one day; the others were less sanguine.

I found it fairly easy going down the glacier, catching up with John, who had gone ahead, at the snout, 1000 feet below. Further down we saw a vast lengthy slope of truly horrible moraine, down into the valley of the Sui. Together we prospected for the best way down, but none was evident, and eventually we set off separately, promising to shout if we found a good route. After a bit of picking around, putting on and taking off crampons, I found a useful snow-and-ice crampon slope which led down to finer-grained moraine, which is easier to negotiate with a megapack. But although I shouted to John for all I was worth, I got no reply. Indeed, I didn't see him again that day.

I continued independently, and after long and jarring slogging, necessitating the repacking of my load, I at last reached the Sui River, just below the end of its own main moraines. The valley here was very beautiful indeed, green and verdant near the river, with the great ice mountains thronging it round. Marmots scuttled everywhere, and the air was fragrant with the smell of flowers. All this was in such contrast to the ice-world of our last month that every sense of appreciation was sharpened, and I delighted in everything that I saw and heard and smelled.

I carried on down the left bank of the Sui, finding there the traces of a track which John had discovered on his original recce up this valley, discontinuous and very rough, but useful. The Sui valley's loveliness was such that, despite the vile going underfoot and a complete chaos of boulders most of the way, I was some 3 miles down it before the labour involved really began to tell on

me. From then on I just ground my way, mile after mile, enjoying the rests but not the marching.

In all, the Sui was 9 miles long, from the point I reached it, to its junction with the Bashgal. In the entire length of this there was but one habitation, and that a temporary one of the summer sheiling type, where a man and his two sons salaamed me gravely. Besides this family's cattle, only marmots inhabit the Sui – but there are plenty of them.

By the time I reached the Bashgal valley, I was thoroughly tired, and the last couple of miles round and over the boulder fields, and across our little bridges over the Peshash, Shosh and Puosh, were a great weariness. I finally arrived at the base-camp area about 5.45, to judge by the light. Of course there was nothing at all at Paniger but grass, Tommy and Henry having removed all our stuff to Diwana Baba. I pitched the tent part of the big Sopu, which I had been carrying, and attempted feebly to converse with a mounted cowherd, who had soon turned up. Finally I got rid of him by pretending to fall asleep – though little pretence was needed. When he had gone I made myself comfortable and ate two and a half bars of chocolate, a Horlicks oatmeal block and 4 Horlicks tablets – this being all the food I had with me. It would have to do me until the others turned up. It was by then completely dark – but as the arrangement was that those who couldn't make base in one march should bivvy en route, there was no cause for alarm.

However, after I had been sleeping contentedly for some hours, Will turned up alone. It seemed that the others had decided to bivvy only a couple of miles down the Sui – that is 8 or 9 miles from Paniger – though whether from exhaustion or admiration of the scenery was not clear; probably something of both. They had been under the misapprehension that I had no food at all with me, and Will, noble fellow, had come all the way on with a food-box. He was of course very welcome – though I

was somewhat upset that he had thought it necessary to do all this. He had found the night-time part of his march a trial indeed, as well he might, and was now exceedingly hungry, thirsty and tired.

Will's march down had indeed been quite an epic one, for it was soon dark, and most of the ghastly 9 miles had to be covered with what aid he could extract from his torch – though the moon rising later did help. After passing the cowherds' sheiling, with the going becoming much rougher, through jumbled rocks and rubble, he had had difficulty in keeping to the route, and indeed lost it frequently, wasting much time in climbing over huge boulders. At one stage, when he had stopped to adjust his pack, he thought that he saw the light of a flare in the sky ahead. Assuming this to be mine, he immediately replied with a green one of his own – but with no further development. Later again he saw a torch flashing below him, and hurried down to the spot, expecting to find me – but there was only one of the cowherds who called a greeting from the other side of the Sui, and whom he would not have expected to have such a thing as an electric torch. He was finding me something of a will-o'-the-wisp – while in fact, of course, I was by this time comfortably installed at Paniger. What the light was that he had mistaken for a flare he never found out. His 7-hour lonely and difficult trek to bring me food, however, was much appreciated – and then, of course, it was incumbent on us to do justice to it all. We ate together, vast quantities, taking an hour or two over the business, and then finding ourselves for some reason in a talkative mood it was 3.30 a.m. before we finally blew out the candle.

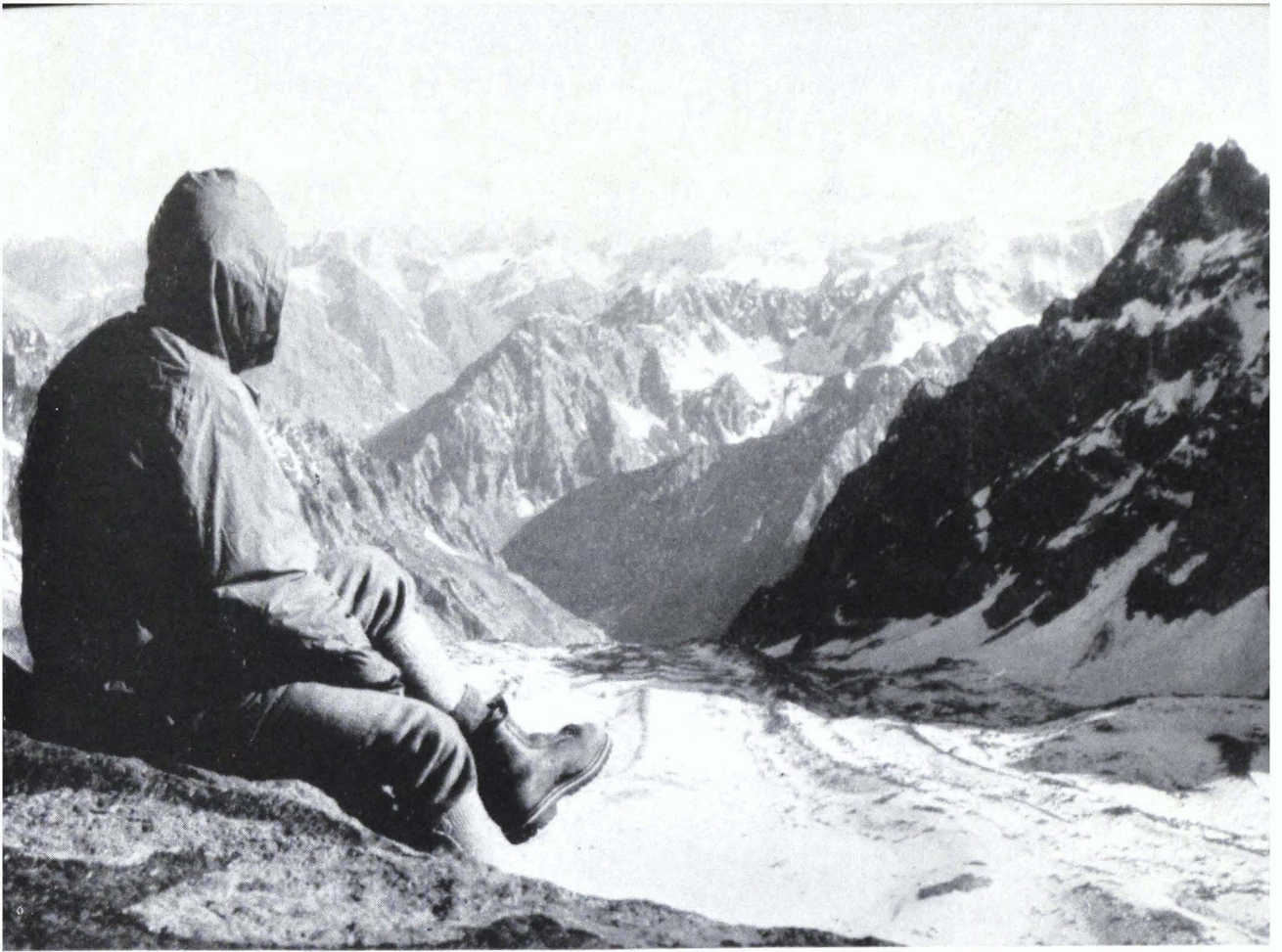
We did not lie long in the morning, nevertheless, being wakened up by the unaccustomed heat of the sun through the tent, at 7.15 – something we had forgotten about in the high altitudes. It was a joy, however, to look out from the tent-door at the green meadows of Paniger, with all the flowers, to listen to the birds and the murmur of the river.

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Will actually took off his socks this morning – for the first time in 3 weeks. He was surprised to discover the state of the skin, all hard and flaky. As he pointed out, any barefooted herdsman would have been proud of them. For myself, as I aimed to have another big day's walking, I kept mine veiled.

My objective that day was a final geographical recce and survey of the Puosh-Dogu Da area. I headed straight up the steep hillside behind camp, the going being loose sand, stones and thorn-scrub, at an angle of 45 degrees, very exhausting. I reached the Dogu Da track which traverses the hillside about 1000 feet up. Though quite an important route, the track is extremely bad, just a jumble of boulders more worn than their neighbours; I was already leg-weary before I got into the hanging valley of the Puosh, which stretches north into the mountains. At the level where the track enters it, the Puosh is very beautiful, a string of little lakes, with grand views behind them to Askival, green with grass and onion-reeds and alive with little birds. A wheatear type was very prominent that morning, black with a white head and bright red rump, very colourful. I plodded on up the so-called path, soon leaving the little lochs and winding up through coarse ugly moraines and desolation. The Dogu glen branches off the main Puosh somewhere to the left, but unfortunately I missed it by following the too prominent tracks of a large herd of goats which obviously had gone quite recently up the Puosh. By this time I was already feeling somewhat lethargic, and as I pushed on and on up a track which presently faded out altogether, I began to doubt the sense of it all. I stopped to eat my bar of chocolate – and found it full of nuts, which I don't like. While I was doing so, a goatherd turned up, herding his flock. This, out of nowhere, at 12,000 feet. We gazed at each other for a bit. Then I asked him, as best I could, the way to the Dogu Da, for I had guessed by now that I had gone wrong. He at once confirmed my suspicions, and leaving his goats led me in friendly fashion off

down the glen again, padding along at a great rate over the rocks in his bare feet. He was an incredibly dirty but quite handsome youth of about 15, dressed in a ragged robe. Instead of taking me direct to the Dogu track, he led me first to his "house", a dry-stone-built hovel by a big boulder, about 8 feet square by 5 feet high, with no window, thatched in the most elementary way with the onion reeds. It couldn't have provided much protection, and was of course only a sheiling for summer-time pasturing. A huge yellow hound snarled and barked at the entrance, and had to be restrained from attacking me. Once I had climbed into this hovel, I discovered another, younger goatherd asleep in a corner. He was most startled by the intrusion – as well he might be, for of course I hadn't cut my hair or my beard for weeks and must have presented a fearsome sight. The only plenishing of the hut was two bowls of very filthy goat's milk. Both youngsters were very cheery and hospitable, so I responded by showing them all the things out of my poke – crampons, compass, torch etc. All I could give them was a box of matches and a sweetie each; but I fired a flare for them to watch, and then let them fire one each themselves – this being a big success. The elder boy could write, and wrote his name for me, and shouted "ten" when I wrote in English the letters one to nine. The younger one had obviously no schooling. Finally I left them to their lonely existence, and directed by the elder brother crossed the valley and headed up the moraine by a rough zigzag track, for the Dogu Da Pass. I had, in fact, decided not to go any further towards this, as it was getting late and I was tired, but after being shown the route so kindly, I felt obliged to go on for a bit. 1500 feet of steep moraine led sweatily upwards, but I ground on, for the benefit of watching eyes. Eventually, after much labour, I came out, not on to a glacier as I expected, but to a large valley-floor of jumbled chaotic moraine at about 14,000 feet. This had been snow-covered when Will had been here a month ago. I could see the last turn-up to



Will on Ainsval ridge looking south down Lost Valley

Krebek and Fuar Tholl seen across snout of Trollval Glacier





Camp Five, on Lower Askival Glacier

Trollval, Askival and Allival from Ainshval



the pass, about a mile ahead, but the sun was already dipping towards the jagged peaks to west – a fine cirque of rock and ice on the Munjan-Puosh watershed – and I was pretty exhausted. I decided to call it a day. I took bearings of the pass and along the ridge, and of all the prominent features, drew a map of the fantastically intricate system of radial ridges that comprise the Puosh basin, then stumbled wearily back.

The walk down the glen in the evening seemed very long, and my tiredness immense. Truly the head of the Bashgal is a terrible place for really grim going, and to take one's eyes off one's feet for two paces is almost inevitably to end up amongst the rocks. Eventually I arrived above camp, and slithered down the steep slope, to get in about 6 p.m. I found both Will and Gavin in the big Sopa – Will having remained about Paniger most of the day, afraid for the safety of our gear at the hands of some interested passers-by; but he had taken one short walk, when he had seen a bearded vulture at close quarters, a colossal bird. He had also talked with sundry of the locals. The prevalence of visitors at Paniger was to be accounted for, not so much by travellers heading for the Dogu Da but by the presence of hot springs somewhere up the Puosh, which appeared to be popular for bathing and medicinal purposes.

Gavin had only recently arrived down the Sui, and John came in about half an hour later. They had spent a very pleasant night in the upper Sui glen, but both, especially John, had found the laden march down the lower glen very heavy indeed. Will made supper while we others sprawled exhausted in the tent. John was in an excellent humour, despite obvious extreme fatigue, and it was a fine feeling for us all to be assembled again at base camp, unscathed, as it were by the mountains. A pleasant tired evening followed, enlivened by the arrival of our askar Henry, and another very mongoloid type, apparently senior, plus the Diwana Baba Malik or headman. Henry unfortunately insisted on spend-

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ing the night with us, but the others went away after we had assured them that we would be on our way within two days, with the expected donkey-train, heading out for Bragamatal and Barikot.

It was a very wet night, and I was up at 3 a.m. putting the flysheet on the big Sopus, which was leaking so badly that I was soaked through my sleeping-bag – to find John doing the same job on the smaller tent. The delights of low-level life!

CHAPTER 9

For the next two days we lingered at Paniger, awaiting the arrival of the donkeys which we had previously arranged should come for us by 9th September. With no word or sign of them, we filled in time variously, myself mainly by mapping and writing. The weather was wet the first day, and we would all have been glad enough to rest, had it not been for acute hunger – for we had little food here. The only good feature of this waiting was that we were able to observe the bird-life of the area more closely, and find it rewarding. We saw red-necked phalaropes, 2, 4 and 7 on 3 successive days. Also a young cuckoo being fed on the wing by two yellow wagtails. Eastern turtle-doves were now fairly common, although we had seen only one or two on the way up in August. Two roller-birds, seen frequently on the journey across the arid steppe country of Afghanistan, were now observed in this very different habitat, and tree-pipits were present in large numbers, as were warblers. Gavin was glad to be able to record a blue-throat in the upper Bashgal, a red-tailed flycatcher and a blue hen rock-thrush. Most interesting to me was the sighting of a golden eagle on the Thursday.

On the first day of waiting, Gavin had gallantly made a lone sortie down to Diwana Baba, intending to bring back from there some of our food, to keep us going while we awaited the donkeys. He found however that our luggage had not been taken to Diwana Baba but only to a hamlet called Chiraz, much nearer here. He had retraced his steps, and after a little difficulty had

managed to run our stuff to earth in a sort of police strongroom there, and brought back enough provisions for 2 days.

When this was consumed, and still no donkeys had appeared, it was obvious that we must do something more positive than just wait here. In addition to the tents and climbing gear that we had brought down the Sui, we had now collected the extra gear left behind at Camp One weeks ago, so now unfortunately we had more stuff than ever to transport, and if we were going to attempt to carry it all on our own backs, it was going to make all-time major loads. Nevertheless it seemed that we would get nowhere unless we made some such move. The next day we would start for Chiraz, at the mouth of the Semenek gorge, at least.

So the morning of Friday 10th September saw four grossly overburdened mountaineers staggering off down the Bashgal under monumental loads. My own was the heaviest I have ever lifted, much less carried, so that I could only go for 7 or 8 minutes before shoulder-strain became intolerable and I had to rest. But eventually we got down below the steep moraines and there was Chiraz before us, a very small hamlet set amongst hayfields at the foot of the Semenek gorge which leads by a pass over into Pakistan. Here in a special askari building we found Henry, with his new colleague, whom we called Willie, and the rest of our property.

However, we found ourselves little better off. We discovered that we could not hire donkeys or horses here, because apparently the Malik or headman at Diwana Baba was the sole source of authority in this respect. We certainly could not go on any further under our own steam. So we drew lots to decide who should proceed, unladen, to Diwana Baba, to make new arrangements for hiring transport. Gavin and Will got the job.

Unfortunately, although they came back in due course believing that they had the problem solved, we were in fact little further forward. They had had to accede to the Malik's

exorbitant charges of 1000 afghans for the hire of 4 horses. This was 3 times the rate that we had paid for the donkeys – and this was only to take us as far as Bragamatal. But there seemed to be no option. However, next morning, the Malik with only one horse turned up, totally inadequate of course for the task. Others were promised, but though we waited, none appeared. Eventually John and I, patience quite exhausted, stamped off down the valley to see what had happened, in no genial frame of mind. This unnecessary delay was frustrating in the extreme, especially as our food stocks were almost exhausted and our hunger monumental.

We did not achieve any success either, and eventually John decided to go on further and I turned back. Presently I met our single horse, with its load in process of disintegration and its driver unable to cope. I repacked and retied the load, and got the beast moving again. Then, still heading back, I met a very irate Gavin, who told me that Will was still doing battle with the Malik, who seemed to be as inefficient a man as he was cheerful.

Presently another horse appeared, also in trouble with an ill-packed load. Next came a small boy, staggering under about 100lbs. of our gear – but grinning gallantly, and going quite fast. This seemed to me quite extraordinary, but finally I met Will himself, with another boy, also laden to the same extent. This apparently was all our baggage. Will explained that there had been a colossal row between the Malik and the drovers and horse-owners, which he could not entirely follow but which was pretty obviously connected with inadequate payment to the latter.

We were, of course, quite mad at this shambles, after paying through the nose to the extent of 1000 afghans, and our ire was not eased by presently having to shoulder the loads of the two boys, who though game just could not cope. In this state we eventually reached Diwana Baba.

That night, we decided that someone must get down the 24 miles to Bragamatal next day, to organise something better than this – despite the fact that the Malik was here again, still promising 4 horses. Drawing lots again, Gavin and I got the job this time, and agreed to an early start.

We were on our way soon after 7 next morning, carrying a basic minimum of food and sleeping gear for ourselves. It took until 4 p.m. to cover the distance, but it was a pleasant march through fine country, without the irritations and frustrations of the past days. There were not a great many travellers on the track, but we had to shake hands with each one we passed. It was strange and agreeable to be back amongst trees and cultivated land.

At Bragamatal we met up with our friend Mohammed Esseq, as kind and hospitable as ever, and he introduced us to the new governor, who had just arrived to take up his appointment. They gave us tea, and were greatly intrigued to hear of our doings. They pronounced us ‘the bravest men in the world’, for coming from a mere civilised country to climb mountains that these hard men who actually lived there could not climb. We fell back on our expensive equipment to explain this away. They were much interested to hear how high the mountains were, not realising that they had such giants at their back door. They demanded comparisons with the Pamir and the Himalaya.

Presently who should steam in but the Malik of Diwana Baba. He had all his pack-horses here – but Will and John were, according to him, lagging behind, and not yet arrived. We were surprised, naturally. Here was a radical change of fortune. When John and Will turned up, presently, they explained that there had been a great scene at Diwana Baba after we left, with the drovers going on strike and throwing their money back in the Malik’s face, with much shouting and vituperation. Obviously the Malik had been clinging to a large part of the 1000 afghans. Presumably

they all came to some more equitable arrangement, for our friends had at last got off about 9 a.m., with the Malik himself, 3 horses and 2 boy drovers. Once they had left the rougher ground behind, the 3 Afghans had somehow managed to mount the horses on top of the baggage, and got along at a cracking pace, out-distancing the foot-slogging Will and John.

So there we were at last, all together, with our luggage at Bragamatal, on Sunday night. We learned with satisfaction that the road to Barikot, where the Bashgal joined the Kunar, was now repaired and open – and there was even talk of some kind of bus possibly showing up – although, as we guessed, this unlikely vehicle never materialised although we waited until midday on the Monday on the chance of it appearing.

I then went to the new governor, and though we could not speak each other's language, managed to get him to use the telephone to find out about the prospects. His talk to Kamdesh further down the valley ascertained that no bus would come further up than there – allegedly because of an acute petrol shortage. Instead, horses would come for us, but they could not reach Bragamatal until Wednesday night, which meant that we in turn would not get to the Land Rover at Barikot until Friday at the earliest. There were evidently no horses available here at Bragamatal.

This further long delay would not only have thrown all our return schedule out of gear, but meant a very real food and oil crisis. Anyway we were now feeling frustrated to a degree, and I for one had no intention of lingering longer in this valley, lovely as it was and hospitable as were the people. I was, in fact, greatly longing for home, now that we had achieved all and more than we had set out to do.

So I returned to the others and put it to them that I would make a forced night march right down to Barikot itself, forthwith, and fetch back the Land Rover. The distance was, we estimated,

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about 43 miles – but this shouldn't be beyond me, on a cool, moonlit night. The others agreed that this was the answer and John volunteered to come with me.

We had a good meal before starting, making deep inroads into our slender remaining stock of provisions, and we took with us 42 Ryvitas, spread variously with salmon, Erin-meat, sugar and raisins. I'm afraid this left Gavin and Will pretty short. At 4.45, with the sun already off the valley, we set out.

At first the march was thoroughly pleasant, walking down through the beautiful valley dotted with harvest-fields, in the evening light, and feeling fresh, well-fed and purposeful. As dusk settled over the Bashgal the atmosphere took on an aspect of romance which had quite eluded us during the recent days of delay and inaction. We chatted together very happily.

We passed Badamuk and then there was a long stretch with no major village, during which the dusk deepened, and scattered houses looked highly picturesque with their windows lit by flickering firelight. We also saw a mystifying glowing red light, trailing sparks, which hovered by the river on our left then, as we approached, crossed our path with a strange jerky motion and wafted off up the hillside. Presumably this was a glowing brand carried by somebody, but we could distinguish no hint of a carrier, and in the silent night the effect was eerie.

After about 3 hours marching, we took our first rest, at the grand rocky river junction where we had spent our second night on the march up. We were still feeling fresh and enjoying the walk, although John's feet were hurting a bit. After a strict half-hour we pushed on. We kept going until we neared Kamdesh. By this time it was 11 p.m., and the moon was high in the sky and lighting the glen splendidly, with sharp black shadows under trees and behind rocks.

We ate some of our Ryvitas and were off again in another half-hour, John hobbling at first. A mile on, at Urmir – the Kamdesh

police-post and Hakim's headquarters – two askars were sleeping by the roadside as we crossed the bridge, and we were just congratulating ourselves on getting past these without trouble when a ringing challenge hailed us through the night. Outlined against the starlight, standing on the roof of the police-post, another greatcoated askar was summoning us imperiously, presumably to halt and explain ourselves. John and I hesitated. We hadn't a word of Nuristani, nor he, no doubt, a word of English; there would be no one in authority available at this hour; to stop and try to explain would probably end in us being detained until daylight at least. Was the man armed? Would he send a shot, or a patrol, after us, if we ignored him? Instant decision was called for. I shouted "Englistan!" up at the challenger, and we marched on – with an itch between our shoulders, as the askar scrambled down from the roof and called after us again and again.

Until we got over the next rise down the track, we felt uneasy in the extreme. We marched on at an increased pace – but, of all things, stomach-ache chose this moment to assail me with severity, in fact doubling me up. After half a mile of this, I could stand it no longer, and askars or none I had to stop and lie down on the road – while John fretted beside me, muttering darkly.

Five minutes of this was as much as our anxieties would take and we continued on down the moonlit Kamdesh gorge at a strong pace, until in another mile or so my pain became so acute that I had again to stop. This time I took 15 minutes, and though still not entirely recovered, I was able to go on, with gradually decreasing discomfort. The cause of these stomachic attacks, from which we all suffered to some extent, was never fully explained – although I suppose that our eating habits were unconventional.

Finally, after what seemed a very long stint, we stopped where we had spent the first night with the donkey-train, and had our

third rest on the river sands, at 2 a.m. It was wonderful just to lie on one's back and gaze at the moon, feeling recovered and well on our way.

On in half an hour, John hobbling really badly now but keeping up. We were heading for the fine bathing-pool where we had stopped for lunch on the first day out from Barikot, expecting this to take us a good 2 hours – but we reached it in 90 minutes. We were growing increasingly weary. It was considerably hotter down at this level – we had dropped fully 4000 feet from Bragamatal – and the night was full of low-flying bats.

At our last halt, 8 miles short of Barikot, the first glimmerings of dawn turned into full daylight, and the final grind down the valley, latterly in blazing sunlight, took us over 2 hours. We met Moses and the Spinner, our late donkeymen, on this last stretch, and could have wished that they had still been on the job.

We eventually arrived at Barikot, with an escort of exuberant schoolchildren, at 7.25 a.m. – 43 miles in 14½ hours.

We were weary, hot and dusty, but satisfied. We found the Land Rover just where we had left it, and collapsed on to its seats, thankfully, to consume tins of cherries and Ambrosia rice.

The news of our arrival quickly spread, and first Assan and then the Commandant turned up, and polite conversation became necessary – even though this was almost beyond us at this stage of heat and exhaustion. This Commandant, replacing the fat one of our previous visit, was much more cheery than the other, and Assan was as helpful as ever. We learned that the reason for the non-appearance of the donkey-train was due to misunderstandings. Apparently a train had been sent, arriving at Paniger before we got back, and not finding us, returned to Barikot. They were then sent back again, but got side-tracked at Bragamatal by somebody there offering them better money to carry loads of grass down the valley.

We managed to obtain 5 gallons of petrol – which was a great boon, making unnecessary the 50-mile drive down to Chigha Serai and the first pump, saving us many hours. Petrol had become a rationed commodity throughout Afghanistan – probably a side-product of the India-Pakistan war, though the story given us was that it had something to do with a plague in Russia. We hoped this was not going to complicate unduly our journey home.

Formalities over, John and I drove out of Barikot a couple of hours later, there being nothing detectable wrong with the Land Rover. The journey back up the Bashgal was uneventful, but very rough and very hot, the temperature being in the nineties. John drove the first half, I the second. The askar at Kamdesh was so startled to see the Land Rover that he omitted even to challenge us. The repaired road was no worse than many we had driven over, but I doubted whether the much-talked-of bus would negotiate it. The bus did exist, in fact, for we were awakened by it, on our last morning, on its way from Jallalabad to Kamdesh. Meantime it was a wonderful sensation to cover the country with so little effort. We rolled triumphantly into Bragamatal hours ahead of schedule shortly after midday to the great amazement of the rapidly assembling populace.

Gavin was there to greet us, joyfully, but Will had gone off exploring 3000 feet up the mountainside, to the highest habitable levels, and we had to wait for some 3 hours before he put in an appearance – which time we filled in packing the Land Rover with our gear and talking to Mohammed Esseq.

Will was much surprised and delighted to see us when he got in, and almost bewildered by being more or less bundled straight into the Land Rover, and after farewells to Henry, our askar, and Esseq, driven off down the valley. I think he was quite sad to leave so unceremoniously. Will is always a great one for getting on with people.

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So we sailed out of Bragamatal, at last, and for the last time, John and I dozing fitfully in the back, and passing Kamdesh and Urmir without stopping, despite hails from the guard. We reached the bathing-pool, north of Barikot, at 9.30, to settle at this idyllic spot for the night. John and I slumbered, I must admit, even while Gavin made supper – with two tins of roast duck in orange sauce which we had been looking forward to for weeks. In the event it proved as good as in our anticipation.

We slept swiftly, soundly and contentedly, under the stars.

POSTSCRIPT

That, I suppose, was really the end of the expedition for although we had over 6000 miles to drive home, with no lack of incident and interest, this venture had been principally one of mountaineering and exploration, and that was now behind us.

We headed on the long and difficult road to Kabul, satisfied that it had all been very worthwhile. We had in fact achieved a great deal more than we had set out to do. We had climbed Koh-i-Krebek from the south; we had climbed not one other 20,000 footer but two, as well as 7 other major peaks over 18,000 feet, and named another dozen; we had established the existence of a most dramatic group of rock and ice peaks, which we had called the Rum Mountains, and which were outstanding for their shapeliness and sheer attraction for mountaineers, in an area which in addition to the high summits named was nothing more than a maze of mighty mountains. Also we had made the first crossing of 5 passes, the lowest at 14,500 feet, and also discovered 16 glaciers. All this and a great deal more we had mapped, taking every opportunity to use altimeter and prismatic compass to take bearings of all prominent objects, from virtually every summit and vantage-point we reached, so recording every significant physical feature of the upper Bashgal basin about 50 square miles; and also obtaining a much more approximate map of a further 200 or so square miles of the adjacent areas of Nuristan.

The scientific objectives of the expedition had perhaps been a

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little less successful; but it had been understood from the first that these would be subsidiary to the main climbing and exploration. Nevertheless, although we saw few wild animals except marmots and grey foxes, and shot or captured none, we had obtained a good collection of insects and plants, for identification by natural history experts, and Gavin recorded no fewer than 76 species of birds.

But, in fact, better than all this, we had reinforced our own original friendships. This, we understood, was not always the case in climbing expeditions; but with us, we returned from the Hindu Kush with enhanced mutual admiration, esteem and affection.

We spent 4 days at Kabul, completing formalities, buying presents for home – my own choice was a great fox-skin rug – and eating hugely. Perhaps the highlight of this interlude was when we sent the following cable to Scotland:

FROM S.H.K.E. 65 16TH SEPTEMBER. KABUL EXPEDITION
GREAT SUCCESS. ALL SAFE AND WELL

APPENDIX A

MOUNTAINS CLIMBED BY EXPEDITION

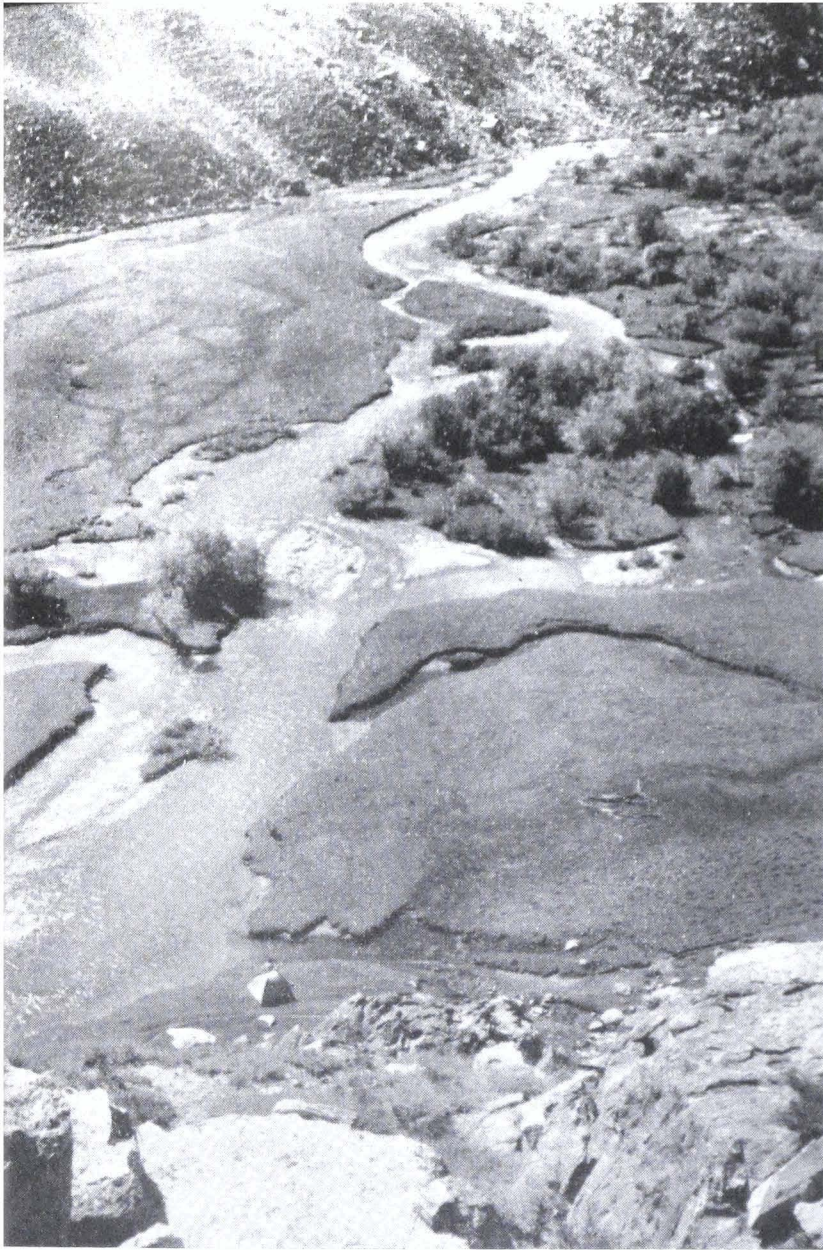
(Chronological order: climbers' names listed alphabetically; mountain names shown as translated into Farsi for new official maps. Also new heights, in metres, since ascertained by aerial survey.)

1. *Koh-i-Shoshgal* (4835 m.) East summit. First ascent by J. Wedderburn on 6th August 1965, from base camp. Rock-climbing of moderate standard but rock loose in places.
2. *Divar-i-Saf* (Flatface) (5200 m.) First ascent by W. Fraser, G. Johnstone and P. Tranter on 16th August from Camp One. Snow climb up to North Summit; pleasant mixed rock and snow climb (v.diff.) to South Summit.
3. *Surakh-i-Sard* (Fuar Tholl) (5697 m.) First ascent by W. Fraser, 21st August from Camp Two. Magnificent solo effort. V. diff. climbing to reach north-west ridge, mixed rock and snow to summit.
4. *Koh-i-Kredek* (6290 m.) First ascent by S. Ruf and party in 1960. Second ascent from opposite south side, by W. Fraser and J. Wedderburn 23rd August 1965. Third ascent by G. Johnstone and P. Tranter, 24th August.
5. *Qola-i-Panj* (Point Five) (5954 m.) First ascent by W. Fraser and J. Wedderburn, 25th August from Camp K.I. by big snow gully and south-west ridge. Gully 550 m. of 50 degrees

APPENDIX A

but summit ridge gave hour of very pleasant mixed snow and rock climbing.

6. *Makhrut* (Conival) (5710 m.) First ascent and complete traverse by G. Johnstone and P. Tranter on 21st and 25th August from Camp Two and Camp K.1. First attempt by East ridge (v.diff.) halted by darkness at foot of summit tower. Second attempt by West ridge (v.diff.) successful.
7. *Koh-i-Sisgeikh* (Sheasgaich) (6130 m.) First ascent by G. Johnstone and J. Wedderburn 30th August, 2 days. By 2000 foot snow gully of 50 degrees, on East face, then by long summit ridge and series of false tops, with many cornices. Dangerous.
8. *Koh-i-Morusg* (Moruisg) (6435 m?) Actually subsidiary north top of *Koh-i-Marchech* (6450 m.) First ascent by W. Fraser and P. Tranter on 31st August, from Camp M.1. on col above South Sui Glacier. Large step formation, then frighteningly steep snow (at times over 70 degrees). Snow unstable. Traverse under large and fragile cornice.
9. *Koh-i-Ainshval* (Ainshval) (5625 m.) First ascent by W. Fraser and P. Tranter on 3rd September from Camp Four. 1500 feet snow plod to fine view-point. Time 50 minutes—good old Naismith!
- o. *Koh-i-Askival* (Askival) (5870 m.) First ascent by W. Fraser, G. Johnstone, P. Tranter and J. Wedderburn on 5th September from Camp Five. Straightforward snow climb but steep and sometimes crevassed. Dramatic peak, giving superb views of whole Hindu Kush range.



Base camp from
above, on the track
into the Puosh and
the Dogu Da

Rum Mountains
from head of Sui,
on the march out





John on march to Semenek—note size of loads

Police post at Semenek, where the baggage was found



APPENDIX B

PASSES FOUND AND CROSSED BY EXPEDITION

(All were named after zoological specimens found *in situ*. Names shown as translated into Farsi for new official maps. Heights shown in metres, not checked by aerial survey.)

1. *Zanbur Da* (Bee Gap) (4500 m.) First ascent by G. Johnstone and P. Tranter 8th August from base camp. Steep but relatively easy pass from Peshash Basin into Shosh Basin. An alternative route to the foot of Koh-i-Krebek would be up the Peshash and over Bee Gap. Would be more direct but would involve some loss of height.
2. *Parvane Da* (Butterfly Gap) (4500 m.) First ascent by G. Johnstone and P. Tranter 9th August from base camp. Lies on the Bashgal-Munjan (and therefore Indus-Oxus) watershed. Relatively easy pass.
3. *Dragonfly Gap* (No Farsi name, apparently) (4550 m.) First ascent and crossing by J. Wedderburn on 16th August from Camp One. Lies between Flatface and Fuar Tholl. Easy ascent from Shosh but descent into Sui steep and bouldery. Not useful pass.
4. *Ankabut Da* (Spider Gap) (5220 m.) First crossing by J. Wedderburn 16th August from Camp One. Pass links the Shosh and Sui between Koh-i-Krebek and Fuar Tholl. Has steep but straightforward snow slopes on both sides and

APPENDIX B

was used by the Expedition in moving from Camp Two to Three.

5. *Murče Da* (Ant Gap) (5220 m.) First crossing by W. Fraser and P. Tranter on 2nd September in moving from Camp M. to Camp Four. Links West Rum Glacier and Trollval Glacier between Trollval and Ainshval.

The Dogu Da (pass) was also ascended by W. Fraser on 7th August, from base camp (4500 m.) Used by fur traders going from Bashgal into Pakistan. Were unable to determine into which part of Badakshan the pass leads. Information was that it went to Wulf in Munjan, but observations would suggest it goes to the Sanglich Basin. Route could possibly then reach Wulf by crossing second pass. The Puosh valley, part of which forms southern approach to pass, is extremely complicated, having no fewer than thirteen separate dividing ridges.

APPENDIX C

EXPEDITION CAMPS

1. *Base Camp* (2850 m.) At Paniger, at the head of Bashgal, 70 miles from Barikot where Bashgal joins Kunar River. A sheiling, or summer grazing ground.
2. *Camp One* (3850 m.) 5 miles from Base Camp at upper end of great Shosh meadow at foot of Shosh moraine.
3. *Camp Two* (4650 m.) At junction of Spider and Krebek Glaciers at foot of dramatic North Wall of Fuar Tholl.
4. *Camp K.1.* (5200 m.) On Krebek Glacier at foot of great South Gully of Koh-i-Krebek. No water.
5. *Camp K.2.* (5450 m.) One-third of way up Krebek's South Gully. No water.
6. *Camp K.3.* (5800 m.) At top of South Gully and at foot of final summit cone of Krebek. No water.
7. *Camp Three* (4950 m.) At head of North Sui Glacier, with almost vertical walls of Krebek, Sheasgaich and Fuar Tholl towering above.
8. *Camp S.* At top of East Gully of Sheasgaich. No water.
9. *Camp M.* On col between Moruisg and the Rum Mountains. No water.
10. *Camp Four* (5100 m.) At top of Ainsival Icefall—probably most scenic camp of all. No water.
11. *Camp Five* (4850 m.) Beautifully situated on lower part of Askival Glacier.

APPENDIX D

BIRDS

By Gavin Johnstone

The main problem with the birds was to identify them. Although the majority were familiar European species, there were also many species which breed throughout Asia and in our area were near the western limits of their range, and most of these we were unable to identify. We were greatly helped by the publication *On the birds of Afghanistan* by Dr. Knud Paludan, the detailed report of a Danish Expedition to the country.

In general, there were 3 areas where we saw good numbers of birds – near Kabul, at the Qarga lake where we camped both on the outward and the return journeys, in the Bashgal valley (particularly in its upper reaches) and in the mountains above about 3000 metres. We saw many more birds on the return journey in September than in July and early August, and this was presumably the result of the birds leaving their breeding grounds in Badakshan to the north and migrating over the mountain passes on their way to the Persian Gulf and other wintering areas in the south. In a short account it is not possible to deal with all the species we saw, but I shall mention the commoner and more interesting ones.

On the Qarga lake in July the only water birds we saw were Great Crested and Little Grebes. Yet in September there were about 3000 Mallard, several Terns and waders – Little Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Dunlin and 2 Spotted Redshanks, as far as we know the first record of this species for Afghanistan. Black Kites were common here, and I once saw 5 in the air together.

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We watched an Osprey catch a trout from the lake, which is artificially stocked, and fly with it to the top of an electricity pylon beside the road.

The Bashgal valley had a profusion of birds. My favourite was the Blue Whistling Thrush, not unlike our Blackbird but with longer wings and tail and a brilliant metallic blue sheen to its plumage. It lived in the bushes by the riverside and had a very loud and lovely song, hauntingly beautiful as it floated above the constant roar of the river. Another bird that lived by the river was the Brown Dipper, different from our British one, which seemed quite at home hopping in and out of really violent rapids. There were Common Sandpipers by the quieter stretches of the river, and White and Grey Wagtails were common. We watched a young Cuckoo being fed by its Grey Wagtail foster-parents beside our base camp. Sandmartins, Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows were a common sight hawking insects over the swirling waters of the Bashgal. The "domestic" sparrow in the villages was the Tree Sparrow – as in many parts of Asia the House Sparrow and the Tree Sparrow have swapped habits, the former living mostly in the agricultural land and migrating south in winter. Around base camp particularly we saw Golden Eagles, Kestrels, and 3 kinds of vulture – Griffon, Egyptian and the magnificent Lammergeier. Magpies and Red-billed Choughs were also common at the head of the valley.

In the autumn the valley was literally alive with birds – around base camp there were hundreds of Tree-Pipits, Wagtails, Flycatchers and various Buntings. We also saw a few Bluethroats and Scarlet Grosbeaks, and two Rollers which are unusual at this altitude provided some local colour. Hoopoes were both common and entertaining, as they hopped about flicking their brilliant crests up and down at one another. On the lochs at base camp and above Diwana Baba there were Mallard and, to my delight, small parties of Red-necked Phalaropes; while Green and Wood

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Sandpipers fed round the shore. We saw both Pallid and Marsh Harriers hunting over the water, and lower down the valley the fields were full of Eastern Turtle Doves.

There were few birds above 3000 metres. In the marshy basins of the Shoshgal and at Camp One we saw Green and Wood Sandpipers which presumably breed there and were very tame. Snow and Rock Pigeons were seen frequently in the upper parts of the valleys, and I saw a Crag Martin feeding its young at a nest, quite inaccessible, cemented below and overhung half-way up a 300 metre cliff on Koh-i-Shoshgal. In the mountains proper several times we saw and heard little birds that were probably Accentors, and we had occasional glimpses of Chukor, or Rock Partridge – we found their droppings on the summit of Conival at 5520 metres. Alpine Choughs appeared regularly up to the highest tops, and we had a dramatic view of a Lammergeier as it wheeled low over Conival while we were climbing it. The only evidence of migration up here was on the summit of Askival at 6000 metres when three smallish raptors, one of which may have been a Shikra, flew south over our heads, accompanied by two Ravens and several Alpine Choughs. Lower down I heard, one still evening, a strong trisyllabic call echoing eerily over the wastes of rock and ice south of the Askival glacier at 4000 metres; later I found that this fitted the call of the Stone Curlew, perhaps resting for the night before continuing, like us, its long journey to its winter home.

APPENDIX E

PLANTS

By Gavin Johnstone

We were too late for most of the flowers except in the highest parts, just below the glaciers. All the plants we collected (which were subsequently identified for us at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew) came from the upper basin of the Shoshgal near Camp One at 3850 metres. Here the most prominent plant was a kind of wild onion (*Allium semenovii*) eaten by the local goatherds. The silty meadows were carpeted with edelweiss (*Leontopodium leontopodium*), brilliant yellow *Potentilla* spp., purple vetches (*Astragalus* spp.) and bright pink and mauve *Primula rosea* which looked like cake decorations. Sedges (*Carex* spp.) grew in abundance in the damper parts by the little streams, and here we found the lovely *Primula macrophylla* in quite dense colonies. On the dry moraine-strewn hillsides there were thistles (*Cousinia* sp.), fleabane (*Erigeron* sp.), a sort of ragwort (*Senecio koelzii*) and a form of wild rhubarb (*Rheum tibeticum*) that was large and luscious in the lower part of the valley and was much favoured by the local people; they also dried the leaves with their hay as winter feed for the livestock.

As none of us knew much botany we weren't able to identify many of the plants we saw on the way up and down the Bashgal. There were wild roses just like our own Scottish dog rose, and in the autumn rose-hips. There were rich purple poppies, too, and it was a surprise to see buckthorn berries (*Hippophae* sp.) as we trekked down the valley – they looked just like the familiar sea buckthorn berries that one sees on Scottish sand dunes.

APPENDIX F

FOOD REPORT

We took provisions to last for 100 days, roughly the estimated time out of Britain. This meant that we should be self-sufficient for the whole trip and should not have to rely on local supplies of food. For the time when we should be parted from the Land Rover, which we estimated as a maximum of 60 days, lightness was of prime importance so for this period we used accelerated freeze dried and quick dried meat and vegetables. Our only heavy luxuries were tinned fruit, condensed milk and jam.

Food for these 60 days was packed in 14lb. biscuit tins, one for each day. They were numbered in the order in which they were to be opened since some items (e.g. jam) had to last over several days. The normal daily ration was based on our experience from climbing in Scotland and was not submitted to a dietician. It proved very satisfactory and although we spent a lot of time feeling hungry we were glad not to have to carry more weight.

The daily allowance for one man was as follows:

porridge oats	4 oz.
tinned fish or chicken	2 oz.
crispbread	2 oz.
butter	2 oz.
mint cake	2 oz.
chocolate	2 oz.
boiled sweets	1 oz.
dried fruit	3 oz.

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soup	1 pint
meat	8 oz.
vegetable	4 oz.
potato	6 oz.
tinned fruit	4 oz.
sweet biscuits	2 oz.
sugar	4 oz.
milk	$\frac{3}{8}$ pint
tea and coffee	
salt and pepper	
$\frac{1}{2}$ candle	
matches	
toilet paper	

We found that we could have done with more milk and potato and extra sugar could easily have been consumed. The only drawback of this type of packing was that the strong aroma of the mint cake gave the porridge oats a strange taste which did not increase their palatability. A great advantage was the ease with which the tins could be carried on our pack-frames without damage to the food.

As it happened we had a disaster with our food which could easily have been avoided. In Kabul we bought two spare petrol cans which were put in the trailer on top of some food-boxes. These cans leaked and despite the fact that each food item was protected by at least two layers of polythene and the containing tin, much of it was contaminated with petrol and rendered quite inedible; consequently it had to be jettisoned. Very fortunately we had just enough food left, including the four 'One man two day' ration packs which we had for emergencies, to cover the period away from the Land Rover. However this meant that we did not have enough food to last us back to Britain, so that we were able to eat in restaurants and cafés with a clear conscience on the return journey.

APPENDIX G

EQUIPMENT REPORT

A. Personal

Boots, high altitude	Air mattress or foam rubber mattress
Boots, walking	Sleeping bags, 2
Camp footwear	Day rucksack
Socks	Pack-frame
Stockings	Kit bags, 2
Snow gaiters or stop touts	Torch
Climbing breeches	Whistle
Spare trousers	Flare gun
Windproof trousers	Ice axe
Underwear	Piton hammer
Shirts	Crampons
Jerseys	Waist length cord
Duvet jacket	Mugs, plates, k.f.s.
Anorak	Compass
Cagoule	Writing paper, log book
Woollen gloves	Reading material
Overgloves	Camera
Balaclava helmet	Water bottle
Snow goggles	Mosquito net

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B. *Climbing*

300 ft. No. 2 rope, 3	2 sets étriers
120 ft. No. 3 rope, 2	Spare piton hammer
150 ft. Terylene cord	Spare ice-axe
100 ft. hemp cord	Spare adjustable crampons
12 nylon slings	Spare crampon straps
24 Carabiners	Two spare pairs snow goggles
40 rock pitons	
18 ice pitons	
4 wedges	

C. *Camping*

Sopu tent, 2 man (7ft. x 5ft.)	Primus spares
Sopu tent, 3 man (7ft. sq.)	Cooking pots
Black's Arctic Guinea	Frying pan
Black's Pal o' Mine	Spare guy rope and pegs
Primus stoves, 2 @ 1 pint	Polythene jerricans, 3 @ 5 gallons
Primus stove, 1 @ $\frac{1}{2}$ pint	Polythene jerricans, 4 @ 2 gallons
Polythene bottles, 4 @ 2 pints	Paraffin, ten gallons
2 tin openers	Methylated spirit, 6 pints
60 metal boxes	Candles, 12 doz.
Steel wool	

D. *General*

Monochrome film, 20 films	Nylon string
24 (36 exp.) colour films	Glue
12 (20 exp.) colour films	Soap

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20 colour ciné films	Cards
Wide angle lens, 28mm.	Transistor radio
Telephoto lens, 135mm.	Flags
1 pair binoculars	Max/min thermometer
Aneroid altimeter	1 doz. tubes glacier cream
Torch batteries 110 @ $1\frac{1}{2}$ v.	800 cigarettes.
30 @ $4\frac{1}{2}$ v.	Plant presses, equipment for collecting zoological specimens, etc.
Scissors	.22 rifle plus 200 rounds ammo.
650 polythene bags	Fifty flare cartridges
Spare bootlaces	
4 tins wetproof boot polish	
Mending materials	
2 pairs pliers	

APPENDIX H

Bibliography

1. *Two Mountains and a River* by H. W. Tilman (Wakhan).
2. *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, 1958, by Eric Newby and Hugh Carless (Western Hindu Kush).
3. *Deutsche im Hindu Kusch* by 1935 German Scientific Expedition.
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5. *Kafirs and Glaciers*, 1938, by R. C. F. Schomberg.
6. *Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, 1896, by Sir George Robertson.
7. *Between Oxus and Jumna*, 1961, by Arnold Toynbee.

There is little revelant literature on the Central Hindu Kush and most of our information was gained from personal contacts. The above is a selection of the principal books which we found helpful in learning about Nuristan in general.

