

**SONAMARG**  
**CLIMBING & TREKKING GUIDE**

***John A. Jackson***



## CLIMBING AND TREKKING GUIDE FOR SONAMARG—KASHMIR

*Re-edited by John A. Jackson*

Sonamarg is set high in the Sind Valley before the Westward flow of the river is turned South to the Vale of Kashmir. At this point it cuts through a line of *igneous* rock running North-West to South-East, wethered and firm. Nichinai and Thajiwas Valleys from North and South run alongside these harder strata to join the Sind just below Sonamarg. Rock to the East of the valleys is sand and limestone of frail quality. It is split by two major valleys to the East, the Nilanai from the North and the Durin Nar from the South, descending to join the main stream. East again of the Nilanai which descends from the Bot Kulan Ganj into Ladakh is a fine snow and rock massif culminating in peaks of over 17,000 ft. or 5,100 metres. To the South from the head of the Durin Nar a pass leads over to Kolahoi and hills to the South. The true head of the valley is towards the Zoji La and a Southern tributary river of the Sind joins from the direction of Amarnath and the Harinag lakes.

All these areas are readily available from Sonamarg to the climber and walker, and with the construction of the motor road between Srinagar and Leh in Ladakh, access is also made easier to areas further afield.

What follows is a revision of a guide written some thirty-two years ago by Noyce, Tilly, Whittle and myself.

In the original preface, Wilfred Noyce wrote "Because this is a pioneer attempt, it should be considered the precursor of others". Now in late August 1976, I feel that there is some value in bringing the material of that guide into the light again. I have added to it information gleaned from various sources, plus the knowledge gained by trekking and mountaineering for a further nine months in 1945 and whilst on a brief excursion to the Kolohoi area in 1952 and during the two months of revisiting each of the areas in 1976.

As with the original, this is not an exhaustive guide and consequently it is hoped that much fresh material can be contributed by future climbers and trekkers. This was always the wish of C.W.F. Noyce and we other contributors.

Some of the best mountaineering and rock climbing is in Thajiwas—the 'Valley of Glaciers' or in the Sogput Dhar, a line of peaks west of the Nichinai Nar. The rock is igneous of the Punjab Volcanic Series. Due north of the village of Sonamarg, the summits are yellow or grey and dolomitic in appearance but utterly fragile and more resembling the scenery of Ladakh. To the east of Nilanai, the bigger glaciers and peaks are accessible on a three or four day expedition whilst for a similar period or a week or two at a time the peaks above Amarnath and on both sides of the Zoji La provide the thrill of exploration and new ascent as in the early golden days of mountaineering in the European Alps. Trekking may be organised through one of the big Srinagar agencies who will make all arrangements for motor transport, ponies, porters, and equipment etc., or arrangements can be made locally by individuals at places such as Pahalgam and Sonamarg.

The Jammu and Kashmir Department of Tourism provide a full service in Srinagar and further information can be obtained from The Mountaineering Wing—Office of the Director of Tourism. Srinagar, Kashmir.

*John A. Jackson.*

JOHN A. JACKSON

*Tourism Inspection Bungalow,  
Srinagar,  
August 26th 1976.*



## THAJIWAS—'THE VALLEY OF GLACIERS'

This valley runs south-east to north-west to join the Sind River below Sonamarg. Two very different types of rock form its boundaries. On the left looking up the valley is the soft lime and sandstone of cretaceous age.

Some climbs have been made on the rock walls facing Glacier 3 and interesting walks and scrambles completed along the pinnacles and ridges that eventually slope back into the easier grass slopes of Zabnar (4040 metres).

Zabnar may be ascended from Sonamarg taking a track about a mile and a half from the village among the woods near to the new Tourist Bungalow, or it may be ascended from the Thajiwass Valley at a point where two rivers meet. The smaller stream descends Bear Valley (so called by the writer after seeing many bear footprints and a mother bear with two cubs in 1945) and after ascending this stream for two kilometres, green grassy slopes lead easily to the Zabnar ridge. Taken either way, Zabnar makes a splendid day walk from Sonamarg and provides one of the finest view points in the area for peaks such as Nanga Parbat, Nun Kun, Amarnath and other peaks of Ladakh. It also gives the best views of the high rock peaks, steep glaciers and buttresses on the opposite side of the valley. These sharp peaks and ridges of Thajiwass are made up of tough igneous rock of the Punjab Volcanic series. Between the ridges which pile themselves higher and higher to culminate in the peaks bounding the valley on the west side, six fairly well defined glaciers

are at present in action. Though in summer time the rate of ablation is such that the glaciers seem to be visibly retracting, it is interesting that in 1976 after some 31 years, the writer could detect no sign of glacier regression and in fact feels sure that the small Glacier 5 has pushed out a tongue of ice into the main valley. Glacier 3 is the largest glacier and starts from an extensive snowfield. The glaciers are steep, harder of ascent than the average glacier in the European Alps and the main climbing starts from and between them. Various camping sites may be found in the valley and for the walker the plateau between Glaciers 1 and 2 is perhaps the best. The mountaineer would do well to journey for another two hours further up the valley to a height of 3600 meters below Glacier 3 (the first waterfall) or even higher if climbing on the peaks at the head of the valley.

The glaciers make excellent landmarks for descriptive purposes and will be taken in numerical order.

### Glacier 1

This is the glacier that overlooks the 'Meadow of Gold' (Sonamarg) and lies directly under the peak 4860 metres (15,928 ft.) 'Greater Thajiwas'. It is on the pattern of the other glaciers, steep of snout with a more level middle portion leading up to the high rock curtain of the watershed. 'Greater Thajiwas' rises on the true right of the glacier in a series of fierce cliff faces broken between the two summits by the Great Couloir. The Couloir is perhaps 320 metres in height steepening in places to 70°. Its condition will vary greatly throughout a season and from year to year. It was first climbed by James Waller in 1937 and the summit of the peak reached by the final

rock pyramid. In October 1944, Wilfred Noyce climbed solo in crampons up much of the couloir finding hard snow crust and ice pitches in places. In July 1945 John Jackson found conditions of deep, soft sliding snow, revealing ice, and retreated after some 250 metres. As far as it is known no second ascent of the Great Couloir has yet been made, though a second ascent of 'Greater Thajiwass' was made in September 1945 via Glacier 2 by Jackson and Buzzard. Waller bivouaced at 12,000 ft. (3,655 metres) on Glacier 1 and made his descent by Glacier 2.

Another possible route very nearly completed in 1944 by A. J. M. Smyth and Dr. Graham would be to ascend to the head of the glacier and traverse back along the watershed curtain of the north-east ridge.

The true left (right side looking up) descends from a peak just on 4600 metres—'Lesser Thajiwass'. This was frequently climbed by reaching the col between 'Lesser Thajiwass' and the rock buttresses at the head of the glacier. Sound rock climbing on a 100 metre rock buttress completes the route.

## Glacier 2

Glacier 2 is divided from Glacier 1 by two parallel rock ridges running up to the higher buttresses or subsidiary summits of 'Greater Thajiwass'. The glacier neve descends from close under the final pyramid of 'Greater Thajiwass' flowing evenly for a while before the jumble of the lower icefall. A broad level terrace or neve extends the whole way under the watershed rock curtain. The icefall varies from year to year. In 1937 Waller descended "straight down the middle". In 1944 the Centre seemed



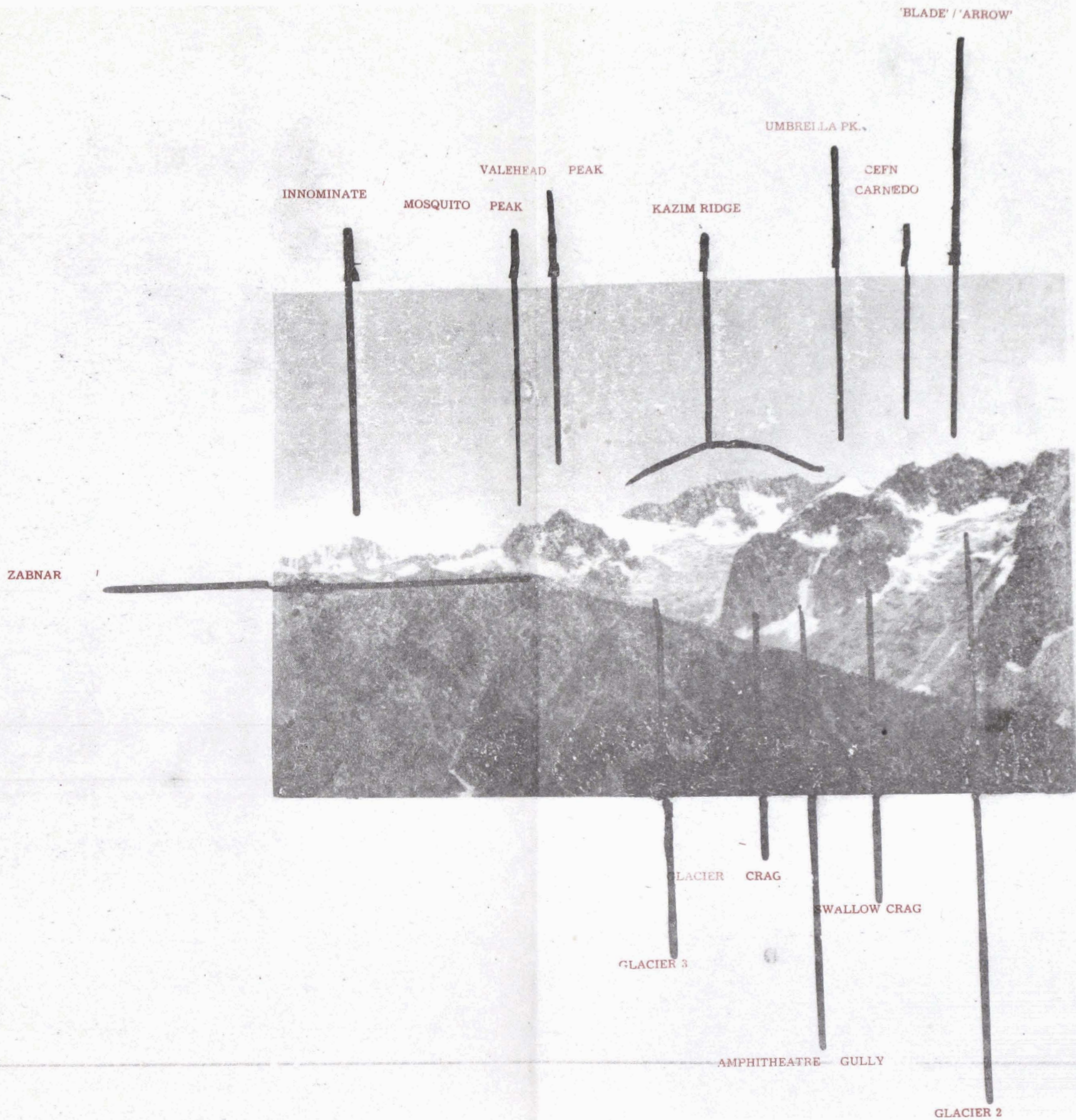
hopeless and a different line attempted. In 1945 during the second ascent of 'Greater Thajiwas' Jackson and Buzzard commenced ascent on the true left of the icefall and weaved a way through crevasses and ice walls to reach the neve on the true right of the glacier!

The ascent of Greater Thajiwas by the rock ridges soaring up from the valley between Glaciers 1 and 2 would make a fine mountaineering expedition of high quality. The ridge bounding Glacier 2 on its north side rises in a series of steep steps and at about 3500 metres a huge slab is very visible from the south. To its right and immediately below is a Yellow Crag some 150 metres in height. The rock climbs on this crag will be described later. The point to make now is that above Yellow Crag and the Great Slab, the same structure continues with infinite possibilities.

Glacier 2 is bounded to the south by a series of very steep buttresses and rock ribs that culminate in the summits of "Cefn Carnedd" 4,800 metres, the "Blade" (sharptch) 4,820 metres and "The Arrow" (tiar) 4830 metres. No attempt on these peaks from this side are known of and certainly the climbing should be of high interest.

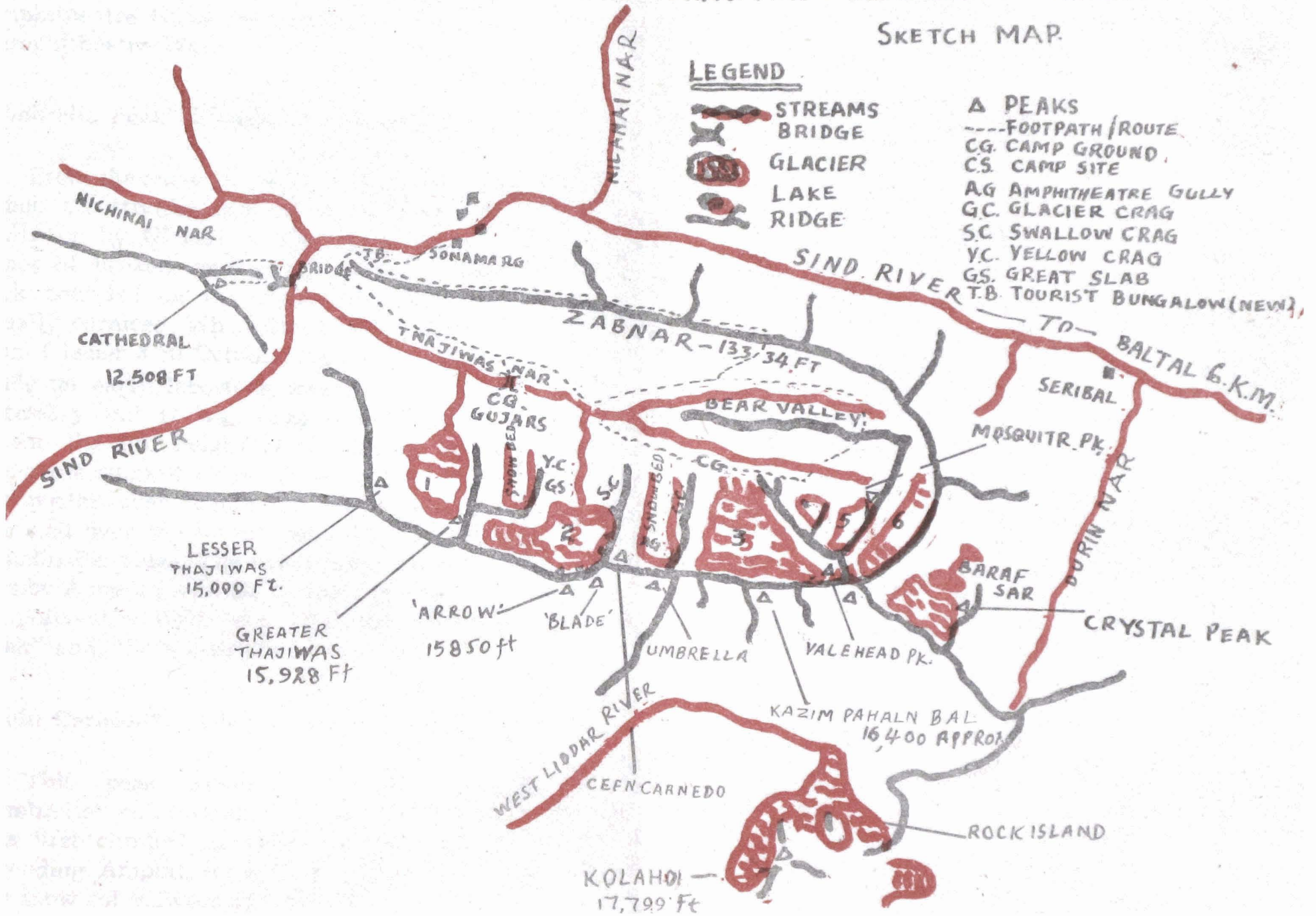
### Between Glaciers 2 and Glaciers 3

The structure of the rocks between Glaciers 2 and 3 is of two huge crags or cliffs buttressing two higher peaks—"Umbrella Peak" (chathari) 4798 metres, and "Cefn Carnedd" was named "Swallow Crag" (schair). The next buttressing cliff some 800 metres in height juts boldly into the valley and was named Glacier Crag. This fine



# THAJIWAS - 'THE VALLEY OF GLACIERS'

## SKETCH MAP



rock buttress is linked to "Umbrella Peak" by a snow col. Between Swallow and Glacier Crag lies the long Amphitheatre Gully culminating in a steep wall of rock "Amphitheatre Wall".

**"Umbrella Peak" (Chathari) 4798 metres.**

From the snow col between Glacier Crag and the peak which it buttresses, descent can be made by Amphitheatre Gully or by Glacier 3. The peak "Umbrella rises in a series of broken rock escarpments to a summit cone of rock bounded on the right by a sweeping snow ridge usually corniced. When first climbed by Noyce and Jones from Glacier 3 in October 1944, very heavy powder snow made an early laborious ascent of the rock escarpments necessary but it was suggested it would be easier to ascend the full height of the glacier and traverse back along the summit ridge. This traverse was once made by the writer over 'Umbrella' on a journey from Basmai Nar and over the lowest point at the west end of Kazim Pahalin Bal ridge. The usual route up "Umbrella" in 1945 was by Amphitheatre Gully and over the rock escarpments. Amphitheatre Wall is a challenge both for "Umbrella Peak" and "Cefn Carnedd".

**"Cefn Carnedd" 4,800 metres.**

This peak immediately to the north-west of "Umbrella" culminating in a flattened dome of snow. It was first climbed by John Buzzard and party in 1945 ascending Amphitheatre Gully, traversing "Umbrella" to the snow col between the two peaks and then up the snow to the summit.

**"The Blade" (Sharptch) and "The Arrow" (Tiar) both 4830 metres approx.**

Both these tops lie along the ridge from "Cefn Carnedd" to the north-west and form part of the back wall of Glacier 2. They were first climbed in 1945 by the writer and John Buzzard taking the same route as described for "Cefn Carnedd" then continuing along the ridge. Rock was sound though more broken than hoped for. In 1976 the "Blade" looked somewhat blunted when seen by the writer from Valehead Peak and there may well have been some fall of rock.

The possibilities of more entertaining ascents from Glacier 2 has been mentioned.

### **Glacier 3**

This is the largest of the six glaciers and the most active. It is roughly triangular in form and stretches from under the Umbrella Peak skyline along a broad terrace beneath the steep rock and ice ribs of Kazim Pahalin Bal which forms the back wall of the glacier. At the east end of the terrace from the col between Kazim and Valehead Peak, the glacier descends first as smooth neve then in a jumble of seracs and crevasses to break in confusion over smooth glaciated slabs at its base and into the valley. Access can be made unto the glacier from the side of Glacier Crag or from the col between Glacier Crag and Umbrella. During several crossings in 1944 and 1945 nothing untoward happened but the evidence of much ice debris gave warning that the serac areas require much watching.

Walking from Sonamarg the waterfalls beneath this fine glacier can be reached in three hours, or no doubt much more quickly if a riding pony is taken. The scenery is superb and the walker will revel in the wilderness of high peaks, soaring crags and tumbling glaciers as well as in the rich profusion of Himalayan flora of the the valley.

There are several areas here suitable for camping at about 3600 metres and above.

**“Mosquito Peak” (Moho) 4612 metres.**

This peak and Valehead Peak stand at the head of the valley. The skyline ‘north-east ridge’ of Mosquito Peak descends to the skyline col at the head of the valley, but this col on arrival proves to be not yet the true col, 4326 metres; a  $\frac{1}{2}$  km. of easy snow of Glacier 6 must first be crossed. Glacier 6 bends down from the very heart of Valehead Peak, beyond Mosquito Peak, in a smooth curve. From Glacier 6 on the southern and more broken side, Mosquito Peak is easily accessible. The north-east skyline ridge gives 260 metres of sound rock climbing to the summit. The rock plunges down to the north and on to Glacier 5 from this summit.

**Valehead Peak (Hapath Gamo) 4758 metres.**

This mountain stands at the head of the valley, buttressing Glacier 3 with its right flank; while on the left as seen from down the valley it throws an arm in the form of a miniature Peteret ridge to connect with Mosquito Peak.

Another main ridge extends roughly due north into the valley and divides Glacier 3 from Glaciers 4 and 5.

*Routes.* Several routes have been worked out, up this Peak from Thajiwas Valley.

### **From Glacier 3**

(a) Take Glacier 3 as directly up its centre as possible starting from Glacier Crag. From the head of the glacier an easy snow couloir leads direct to the summit some 180 metres above the glacier. The route depends on conditions on the glacier which are not always easy and frequently there is much danger from ice avalanche.

(b) Glacier 3 route as above but ascend steeply on rock to reach the north ridge of the peak. A fine sense of exposure here. Follow the ridge over huge monolithic blocks towards the summit. Steep at first but easing after 100 metres to a nearly horizontal, jagged edge. Rather than follow the ups and downs of the edge it is more pleasing to take a series of block edges leading off to the right close above Glacier 3 and to join the easy couloir from Glacier 3 as in (a).

### **North Face and Ridge Route**

The long and serrated north ridge of Valehead divides Glaciers 3 and 4. Its lowest buttress, named Sunday Crag, dominates Glacier 4. The route takes the face directly above the head of Glacier 4 which is reached easily either from Glacier 5 or up the rocks of its right (true left) flank.

(a) **The Face**: An irregular couloir splits the face above Glacier 4 narrowing later to an ice-bedded rock gully. This steepens until it becomes advisable to traverse right on rocks to the skyline north ridge. The exit from the gully is difficult, followed by slabs which are dangerous in snow conditions. The traverse is exposed and some 100 metres without sound protection.

(b) **The Ridge**: The north ridge is now climbed as described in the Glacier 3 route (b).

This is a very fine mountaineering expedition worked out by Wilfred Noyce and as yet one of the most serious routes in the valley. In July and August the whole north ridge plus Sunday Crag would make a fine ascent.

### **Mosquito Peak Route:**

Take the skyline north-east ridge of Mosquito Peak to its summit. From the summit descent is made to a gap in the ridge (Glacier 6 can be gained easily from this point). Continuing from the gap follow up the ridge, with exposed views down the precipices to the right until it steepens to the final section of Valehead Peak. The ridge ends in a series of sharp pinnacles, cut off from the peak itself by a narrow col. From this an easy gully descends to Glacier 6. From the col. traverse left on steep rock for 65 metres to easier ground and the summit.

The rock of this route is mostly sound. A good continuation is over the Pinnacle Ridge to the 4,326 metre col and along the whole remaining crest to Zabnar.



## Glacier 6 and Pinnacle Ridge Route

Cross Glacier 6 to the 4326 metre col overlooking Durin Nar. From the col the ridge sweeps round on the southern side of the glacier to the summit of Valehead. Mixed snow and rock at first, followed by a steep rock scramble to a pinnacle buttress. Watch for unstable rock. Watch also for the rich profusion of Himalayan rock plants. From the pinnacle buttress the ridge continues round to the right almost level in its upper portion to the summit cairn. Traverse pinnacle buttress over its left shoulder.

## Glacier 6 Route

This is the easiest ascent route. Ascend Glacier 6 to the very head where a couloir or gully on the left (true right) leads easily to the final upper portion from Pinnacle Buttress. This is also the easy way off from the mountain after ascending other routes on the peak.

## Kazim Pahalin 4,900 metres approx.

This long serrated ridge forming a backwall to Glacier 3 is the highest point of the whole valley. The east, central, and west pinnacles are approximately the same height at around 4,900 metres or 16,100 ft. What was possibly the first traverse and ascent was made by the writer in August 1945. This was a solo ascent starting and ending in darkness. From the campsite below Glacier 3 ascent was made to Valehead Peak from Glacier 6. From Valehead the crossing of Glacier 3 col leads to the start of Kazim. The ridge rises steeply at first then settles down to ledges, gangways, dips and rises. A rock window

is remembered near the east pinnacle. Superb views of Kolahoi and Sekiwas Peaks. Keeping to the north side gives fine exposure as one looks down steep rock and ice ribs to Glacier 3.

From the central to west pinnacle, the traversing is similar but becomes of more monolithic block formation. West pinnacle onwards involves a little more serious climbing with block, slabs and cracks leading eventually to the lowest point of Kazim and access to Glacier 3. From here along to the summit ridge and ascent of 'Umbrella Peak'. Descent was made via Amphitheatre Gully. The ascents of 'Valehead' and 'Umbrella' Peaks can be omitted. This is a long route and should be taken seriously. In the event of storm or sickness along the ridge, escape can be made readily on the south side which is much broken and leads to easy terrain below the Kolahoi glacier. You are now a long way from base!

As ascent of Kazim North Face via the ice and rock ribs above Glacier 3 should be a fine mountaineering expedition.

**"Crystal Peak" (Khand) 4,710 metres approx.**

From the col, 4,326 metres and the Pinnacle Ridge to Valehead, there are fine views of the Durin Nar and of Zabnar as the ridge curves round to the north. To the east lies a fine peak of around 4,900 metres provisionally named "Innominate". To the south-east, the ridge of Valehead sweeps round northwards to enclose a seventh glacier which is not really a part of Thajiwas. Below the glacier lies a lake partly frozen and covered by snow all the year round—"Baraf Sar". The northern

arm of the ridge enclosing the lake and glacier culminates in a peak of some 4,710 metres named "Crystal" (Khand) when first climbed in 1945.

The route traverses Pinnacle Ridge of Valehead then round over broken rock and pinnacles to "Crystal". Descent to Baraf Sar is steep over unstable rock. Return via the 4,326 metre col to Glacier 6. The name was given because of a fine cave of clear quartz crystals found at the base of the largest pinnacle on the route.

### **For the walker :**

Splendid walks into Thajiwas can be taken by the walker who requires to wear good stout hill boots.

(1) An easy walk of 1½ hours from Sonamarg to Thajiwas Nar and over the bridge to the Gujars Camp Ground. This is also often done by tourists on pony back. Round walk an easy 3 hours.

(2) From Sonamarg a walk of 3 hours up Thajiwas Nar will lead to the Campsite below Glacier 3. The scenery is superb and a great variety of Himalayan flora abounds. A further 1 hour of walking over snow beds leads to a break on the left of the valley which gives access to Bear Valley and a descent route back into Thajiwas Nar. A round walk of 6 or 7 hours.

(3) From Sonamarg, a walk of 2 hours leads up Thajiwas Nar to Bear Valley. From Bear Valley the reverse of Route 2 can be made or a steep grassy ascent to Zabnar ridge can be made and return along Zabnar ridge to Sonamarg. This gives some of the finest mountain

views of the whole area. If the reverse route is taken, ascend the track into the woods just above the new Tourist Bungalow (opening in 1977). Allow up to 7 hours for the round-but on good days many will take longer because of the interest that exists in rock scenery, flora and mountain views.

### **For the Rock Climber :**

*Yellow Crag* : This crag of some 150 metres lies between the Great Slab above, and Suicide Rock below. There are three climbs.

#### (1) *Knee Climb*. 140 metres.

Starts up the first major rib on the right of a grassy gully dividing from Great Slab. Follow the rib as accurately as possible for 60 metres-and it is possible when in doubt to make judicious use of the knee. Passage of a rock window seen on the main rib to the right lands on more broken ground. There is juniper around but the climbing is good if a direct line is kept.

*Standard* : Very Difficult or Grade 4. Rock sound.

(2) *Window Cracks* : A gully splits the face of the crag ending in a series of ill-defined caves and overhangs. For the first 50 metres easy gully climbing. Here, from the bed of the gully a line of parallel cracks starts left of and under the window of Knee Climb Ridge. This gives 45 metres of good climbing in places delicate.

*Standard* : Very Difficult or Grade 4.

(3) *Straight Rib Climb* : A clean straight rib lies on the right of the central main gully. Start in a chimney

immediately to the right of the rib. At first vertical but easing off it leads after 50 metres to a birch tree terrace. Reach the rib by a traverse left and keep to the rib direct to the summit. The route is unartificial. Its line eventually joins Knee Climb rib.

*Standard* : Severe or Grade 5-Just.

To the right and below Yellow Crag the Suicide Rock gives a sheer drop of 130 metres. Several moderately difficult routes provide interesting ways by the rear of the crag.

The slabs, towers, ribs and buttresses above Yellow Crag hold infinite possibilities for the rock climber or of mountaineering ascents of the high peaks.

*Swallow Crag*. This huge crag is split by an immense gully. Several ways have been taken on the right side of the crag but only two completed climbs are known. After completing the climbs it is possible to continue and would make a fine ascent route for "Cefn Carnedd" Peak.

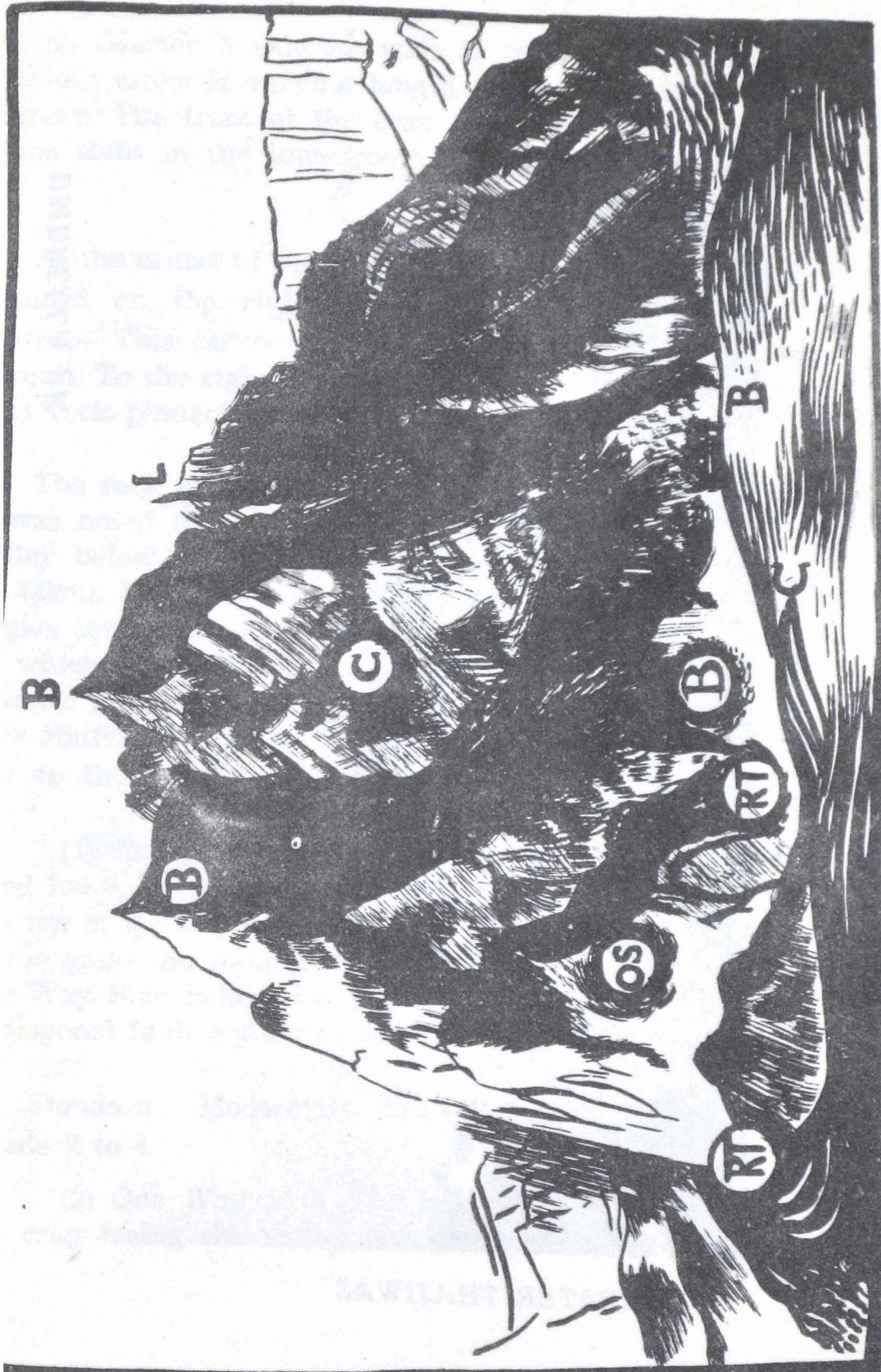
(1) *Peggy's Pinnacle*. Starts immediately right of the gully and leads to a picturesque rock finger. Several variations are available.

*Standard* : Difficult or Grade 3

(2) *Thajiwias Needle*. The obvious needle of rock some 60 metres above Peggy's Pinnacle gives fine climbing if taken direct.

*Standard* : Severe or Grade 5.

*Glacier Crag*. This crag is some 800 metres in height.



RT — RAINY TRAVERSE.  
OS — ONE WAY SLAB.  
BB — BENDING GULLY.

CC — CENTRAL CRACKS.  
BB — BROTHER'S BUTTRESS.  
L — LEANING PINNACLE.

UMBRELLA PK.



GLACIER CRAG

GREATER THAJIWAS

On the Glacier 3 side its wall is vertical and split by ferocious cracks of varying length from 150 to 300 metres or more. The front of the crag facing the valley reveals steep slabs in the lower part becoming broken as they rise.

At the centre of the cliff a line of cracks split the face, bounded on the right by a real rock-nose—Brother's Buttress. This buttress continues in a direct line to the summit. To the right, a jumble of aretes lead to a prominent rock pinnacle—Leaning Pinnacle.

The rock is in the main clean and sound but in 1976 it was noted that debris from new rock falls lay in the valley below most of the rock faces and caution should be taken. However, scrutiny of Glacier Crag from many angles could reveal no evidence of rock fall. It is a crag on which one might easily be benighted and light modern bivouac gear might be advisable if the longer climbs, or new routes are attempted. A series of juniper filled gullies on the right provide escape routes.

(1) *Rainy Traverse.* A steep open chimney with good holds on the Southern face below the cracks. From the top of the chimney the route can be varied and takes to the grass and juniper ledges that lead over the bulge of one Way Slab below. Eventually it is possible to descend a diagonal fault ending near the foot of Central Cracks.

*Standard:* Moderately difficult to very difficult.  
Grade 2 to 4

(2) *One Way Slab.* The lower left hand section of the crag facing the valley is a steep slab. A climb here



takes the steepness at its shortest and escapes right as soon as possible. The start is at the highest part of a broad terrace crossing under the steep cliff at this point. A crack slightly overhanging leads to a belay after 10 metres. A delicate traverse right over ledges gives another 25 metres of climbing until a more direct line can be taken to a high rock pinnacle ridging the crag face. The pinnacle can be reached in a variety of ways. Rainy Traverse can now be joined. Length of slab climb is 80 metres.

*Standard* : Mild Very Severe Or Grade 5+.

N.B. On inspection in 1976 it was clear that since 1945 other climbers have been in this area of the crag for loose material has been detached to reveal holds for a steep route to the left of One Way Slab and starting at the bottom left hand corner of the crag. It must be pointed out that though enquiries have been made and the pages of Himalayan Journals perused up to 1976 there must still be much that has been climbed that is not known about. The high altitude training school has been active for some time in the Sonamarg area and in addition the University Rock Climbing Courses plus courses from the Department of Tourism have climbed regularly during the last three or four years. Mr. M. Ashraf and Mr. K.K. Sharma can be approached on this subject on enquiry at the Office of the Director of Tourism in Srinagar.

(3) *Bending Gully*. A wide open rift starting up left from the foot of Central Cracks. First 60 metres is over snow bleached delicate slabs. Vegetation above until a small rib to the right gives some 45 metres of sound climbing.

*Standard: Difficult or Grade 3.*

(4) *Central Cracks and Brother's Buttress.* Brother's Buttress divides the face of the crag of which it is the most prominent feature. It leads direct from base to summit of Glacier Crag in a series of boldly sweeping steps. In height it is over 730 metres. The climbing is continuously steep with adequate holds. Start at the Central Cracks to the left. Leave the cracks as they become too grassy and take the steep section of the buttress. Take the next series of startling pinnacles direct. Above this steep section the ridge leans back in a series of 90 metre stretches. The line is unmistakable. The climb reminds the writer of the ferpegelgrat of Dent Blanche in the European Alps but the rock is more sound and the actual rock climbing more continuous. Most of the climbing is Grade 3 and 4 (Difficult to very Difficult) with one short section high up of Grade 5 (Severe). Because of this and length of climb the standard must be placed high.

*Standard: Severe or Grade 5.*

(5) *Leaning Pinnacle Aretes.* A series of aretes lead up to the prominent and obvious leaning tower to the right of Brother's Buttress. Various lines can be taken all of about Difficult or Grade 3 standard.

Climb the leaning pinnacle round its right shoulder. Connection can be made with Brother's Buttress for a climb to the top of the crag.

*Sunday Crag.* This crag lies to the right (true left) of Glacier 4 and is the base of the north ridge of Valehead Peak. Several short climbs have been worked out from

Glacier 4. As with all the other crags climbing possibilities are tremendous.

*Other climbing.* Useful training boulders can be found in the forest area a few hundred yards above the New Tourist Bungalow and just off the Thajiwas track.

Other climbs have been made by students on rock climbing courses during the last 3 or 4 years on the low crags above the Srinagar/Sonamarg road at the base of "Cathedral". The rock on this peak is the same Punjab Volcanic Series and many long climbs are feasible.

Climbs have been made on the much less sound rock of the ridge that divides Bear Valley from Thajiwas Nar.

### **Skiing**

Particularly in late May, June and early July, it is possible to ski the whole of Thajiwas Nar. As late as July 22nd in 1976, the writer and his wife were able to ski in the valley between 4,200 metres and 3,300 metres. Glacier 6 is not crevassed and provides good ski surface in May and June. Glacier 3 would make a fine ski mountaineering expedition to the Peaks "Valehed" and "Umbrella".

## **ZAIWAN AND LIDDARWAT**

Zaiwan and Liddarwat are in separate valleys, the quick approach to Liddarwat being via Pahalgam and the West Liddar Valley, that to Zaiwan being via Ganderbal and the Sind Valley.

These two valleys are separated by a range of hills running roughly south-west to north-east from Ganderbal up the Sind Valley to Thajiwas above Sonamarg.

Such a pass as the Yem Har (4,100 metres) provides an appropriate central crossing point for this range and a very useful focal point for the country between Zaiwan and Liddarwat. This pass gives the walker and climber an extensive area in which to roam.

### **Liddarwat Area: Approach.**

Pahalgam like Sonamarg is well situated for approach to the hills and provided with porters, ponies and food. There is a Tourist Information Office here.

From Pahalgam the West Liddar River trends North-west and for 24 Kms to Liddarwat the walk is a gradual rise from 2,134 metres to 3,000 metres. Arau at 2,462 metres is a pretty little mountain meadow or marg between the two points and provides good camp sites with fresh water and fuel. This is a good centre for the southern ridges and peaks of the Kolahoi massif. Ponies can be hired and food purchased at the village.

### **Around Kolahoi.**

At Liddarwat there is a splendid camping ground. There is also a Forest Hut. The situation is beautiful amid thickly fir clad slopes and pinnacled ridges springing out in each direction of the compass. From Liddarwat it is but 14 kms. to the snout of Kolahoi's north glacier. The route follows the river to its main source at the glacier. Some 1½ to 2 Kms. from the snout there are good

campsites which immediately make available to peaks on either side of the upper reaches of the West Liddar.

Kolahoi North glacier is of easy access and provides the quickest route to the North Ridge.

Ascent of the glacier in a south-east direction takes the climber to the base of the East Ridge by which it was first climbed in 1912 by Neve and Mason. This is the route normally taken and first ascends a snow gully to the south before taking to the East Ridge ledges, and gendarmes. Probably the rock island which splits the glacier provides the most appropriate place at which to spend the night before completing the Neve/Nason route. In 1952 the writer and David Bryson made the ascent from the camp ground below the glacier but this makes an unnecessarily long day.

The South Ridge of Kolahoi was climbed by Hunt and Cooke in the 1930's.

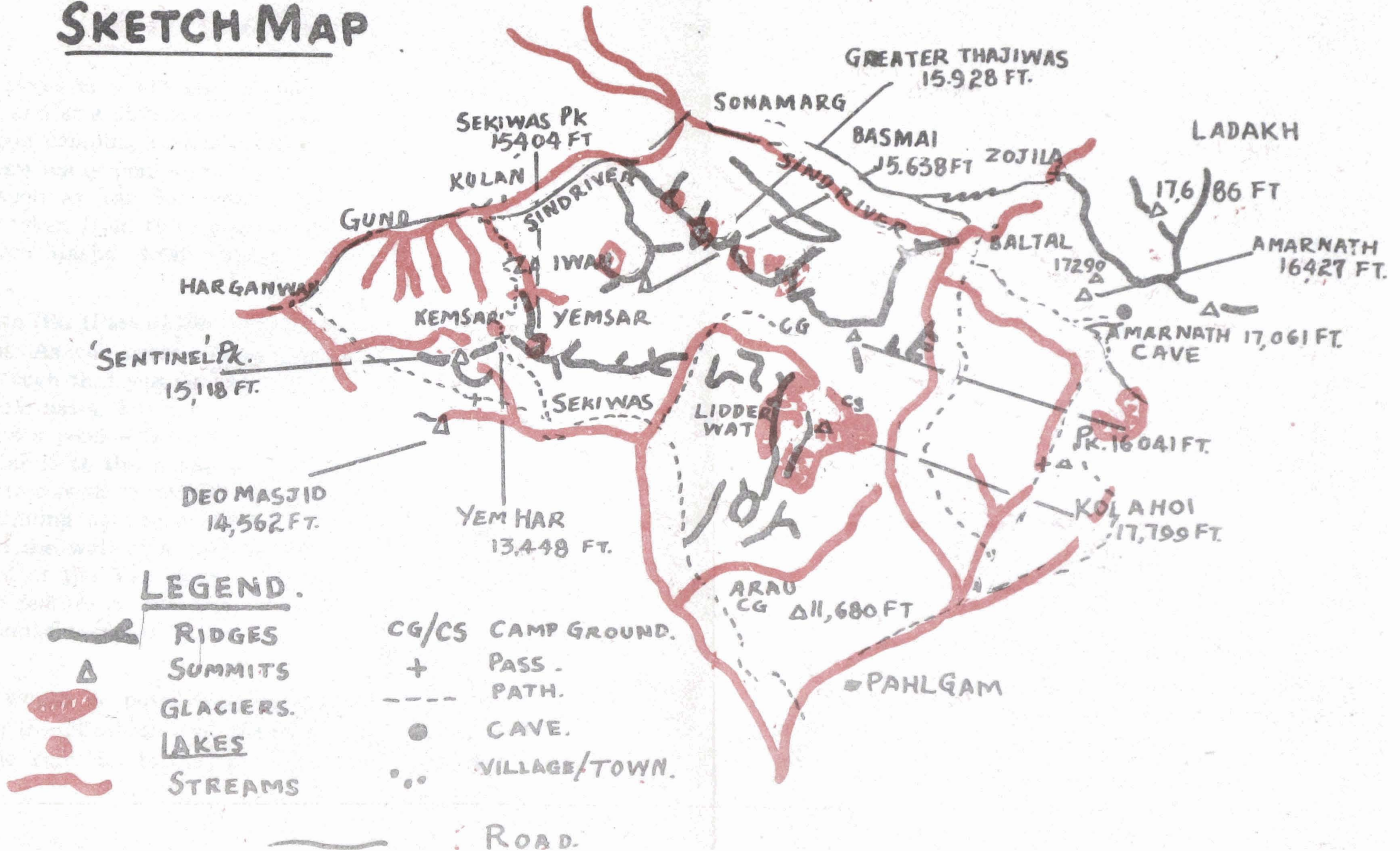
West of Kolahoi, 5,427 metres (17,799 ft) is a fine rock ridge culminating in a striking rock peak which towers above the camping ground.

East of the camping ground is a peak 4,890 metres (16,041 ft) in height. This peak is the eastern termination of the long ridge and line of summits that ends in the west at Lesser Thajiwas.











North-west of the camping ground the most striking peak is Basmai. Most of its bulk is bare rock of poor quality.

# ZAIWAN. LIDDERWAT.

## SKETCH MAP



### LEGEND.

- |   |           |   |               |
|---|-----------|---|---------------|
|  | RIDGES    |  | CAMP GROUND.  |
|  | SUMMITS   |  | PASS-PATH.    |
|  | GLACIERS. |  | CAVE.         |
|  | LAKES     |  | VILLAGE/TOWN. |
|  | STREAMS   |  | ROAD.         |

## Liddarwat to Yem Har.

If instead of following the river to the north-east and round the Kolahoi valley, you turn west at Liddarwat you enter the nullah leading to Sekiwas and the excellent walking country of that area. It is now a popular trekking area.

Sekiwas is a pleasant meadow or marg set at 3,420 metres and at a distance of 11 Kms. from Liddarwat. This is a good camping ground with water and fuel. To the south are many points over 4,250 metres and pretty little lakes such as Tar Sar well worth visiting. Good walks can be taken from the camp site and to the west an easy peak Deo Masjid, 4,440 metres ascended.

Yem Har (Pass of the Goddess Yem) is 6 kms. north of Sekiwas. As you ascend to the pass, the structure of the hills is such that you feel to be walking at the bottom of a gigantic basin. The east wall of this "rock bowl" sweeps round to a peak—"Sekiwas" some 4,700 metres in height. Yem Har is to the north, and the west side of the bowl curves to a peak "Sentinal" 4,609 metres in height. Instead of continuing its sweep full circle, the ridge curls tightly to form the wall of a very striking rock amphitheatre at the foot of the Yem Har south side. An interesting and notable feature of the amphitheatre is the large isolated rock pinnacle—Spinx Rock.

It would be possible to camp at the small unnamed lake on the South side of Yem Har. From this small lake over the Yem Har to Zaiwan is but another 11 Kms.

## Zaiwan Area

In 1945 the Zaiwan Forest Hut was situated on the Northern slopes above the Sind Valley at 3,200 metres. It is possible to camp here if the hut is not available. Reach it by crossing the river at Kulan 6 Kms. beyond Gund and ascend through pleasant coniferous forest for 900 metres. The situation is ideal for within range of a day are many fine peaks, ridges and glaciers. Ponies, porters and food are available in the Sind Valley.

A rough pony track from this site rises steeply for some 500 metres to above the tree line. From here it is a "high level route" at 3,560 metres until reaching Yem Sar a very fine lake where camp can be made. Wood can be taken from Zaiwan. The hills form roughly a horse-shoe shape around this high valley of which the two dominating peaks are "Sekiwas" above Yem Sar and "Sentinel" above Kem Sar. The ridge rises from Zaiwan to 4,200 metres approx. It is mainly grass with slaty pinnacles and bears a resemblance to Zabnar in Thajiwas area. It is a fine view point. From the highest top it falls gradually to 3960 metres forming a small col divided by a little pinnacle east of Yem Sar. From the col the ridge rises steeply in a series of buttresses leading up to "Sekiwas" 4,700 metres. Here the ridge branches east and west. The east branch extends to the West Liddar Valley and consists of many climbable summits. There is a short branching of this ridge which curves east then south forming the east wall of the rock bowl. The west branch descends in a series of pinnacles to Yem Har 4100 metres rises again buttress peak fashion to "Sentinel" 4,609 metres and there divides again. The south branch curves to form the rocky amphitheatre. The north-west branch



descends to the tree line in a series of rocky bounds and sweeps like the back of a Dinosaur—"Dinosaur Ridge".

**"Sekiwas" Peak. 4,700 metres approx.**

The easiest approach to the summit is along the ridge from Yem Har. The writer and W. Starr made the ascent this way in August 1945. A cairn was found at the summit.

The steep rock buttress above Yem Sar should make a fine route and various other methods of approach are in evidence including that by the two glaciers at the base of its North Face. ●

**"Sentinel" Peak (Chowkidar) 4,609 metres.**

This is a most striking peak and its well defined ridges sweep down majestically from a final cone which dominates the whole area. The reflection of this peak in the still waters of an ice edged Yem Sar is a superb mountain moment.

The writer made what was possibly the first ascent in June 1945. So early in the year for these mountains there was much snow and the ascent to Yem Har required much step cutting and a tunnelling through the snow cornice at its head. From the pass the route took the east ridge to a small saddle below the final east ridge to the summit. The easiest and quickest way to the top would be to ascend the snow gully to the small saddle and then take the east ridge. This way was used for descent. The south ridge is moderate. The north ridge (Dinosaur) is long and steep. From the Sindh Valley it would prove to be a very fine mountaineering ascent.

This mountain country of Zaiwan and Liddarwat with its close proximity to Sonamarg is a fine holiday playground for both trekker and climber.

Camping grounds and convenient passes enable great flexibility in planning a holiday amid truly lovely mountain scenery, bonny little lakes, high hills, clear atmosphere and grandeur of panorama.

### **Notes for the Trekkers :**

(1) From the camping ground at the foot of the Kolahoi glacier a route to the north goes over the col at the head of Durin Nar which descends to Seribal in the Sind Valley some 8 Kms. east of Sonamarg. The col is at 4,400 metres and is possible for ponies in late July and August.

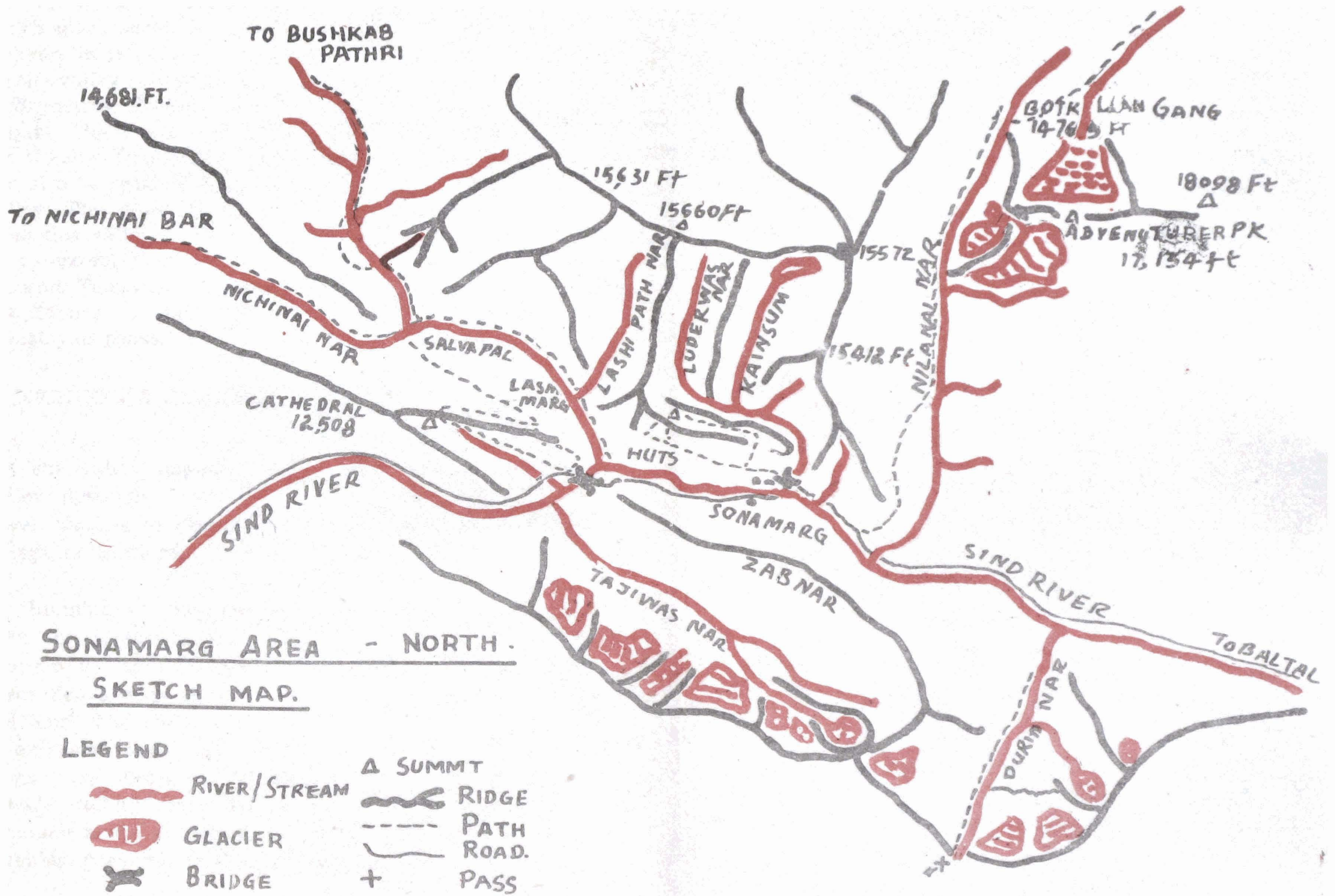
(2) In June and often in July the Yem Har is not possible for ponies and a route diverges from the main track to strike north-west between "Sentinel" and "Deo Masjid". The pass between the two peaks is high but easier than Yem Har. Descent is to the Sind Valley some 9 Kms. below Gund.

### **Ski Note**

There has been skiing in the past on Kolahoi glacier as well as in Thajiwas and the Zoji nullah. For ski information read "Skis in India" by Charles Bagot.

### **Durin Nar**









The village of Saribal lies 8 Kms. from Sonamarg up the Sind Valley. To it from the south descends the Duria



SONAMARG AREA - NORTH.

SKETCH MAP.

**LEGEND**

- |   |              |   |        |
|---|--------------|---|--------|
|  | RIVER/STREAM |  | SUMMIT |
|  | GLACIER      |  | RIDGE  |
|  | BRIDGE       |  | PATH   |
|   |              |  | ROAD.  |
|   |              |  | PASS   |



Nar whose stream rises close under the 4,400 metre col which gives access to the Kolahoi valley. (See notes for trekkers in the Zaiwan/Liddarwat section). Six kilometres up the valley is a level space and camping site with wood, 3,520 metres. This is Nilanag. Milk can be procured from Gujars. The Durin Nar could be a good approach route for Kolahoi from the Sonamarg area. The Durin Nar col can also be reached from the col at the head of Thajiwas valley. The peak "Innominate" could well be ascended from this valley. A fine two or three day journey would be to ascend Durin Nar and traverse to Thajiwas col—descend Thajiwas to Sonamarg or return to Sonamarg via Zabnar. A good round with superb views of high Himalayan peaks.

#### NICHINAI AND AREAS NORTH OF SONAMARG

The valley opposite and to the north of Thajiwas valley descends from the west, bending south in its lower reaches to debouch into the Sind just above the village of Shitkari.

Running roughly south-east and on a line parallel with the stream a rock ridge of the same formation (Punjab Volcanic Series) as the buttersesses of the Thajiwas Peaks ends abruptly over the Gagangir Gorge of the Sind. The rock is the same firm quality. The ridge is extensive and peaks of from 4,300 metres to 5,000 metres are numerous. This whole length of the Sogput Dhar stretching from "Cathedral" above Shitkari to Haramoukh above Gangerbal is a mountaineering and rock climbing paradise. Buttresses, pinnacles, faces, chimneys.

cracks and saw-toothed ridges proliferate. From Nichinai Peak above Nichinai Bar to a peak of some 4,785 metres above Vishan Sar is typical serrated rock scenery of the area. Apart from the mountaineering and rock climbing available there is much splendid walking and trekking country either to the lakes including Ganga-bal or in the country to the north of Nichinai Nar. Whilst walking or climbing, the distant mountain views in all directions are breath taking and to the north rises Nanga Parbat and the Karakorum.

**"Cathedral" (Girjha) 3,820 metres**

This mountain lies at the southern extremity of the range and overlooks the 'Golden Meadow' Sonamarg. From here it takes 3 to 3½ hours for ascent via the broad gully starting below the bridge at Shitkari. Return can be made down the skyline ridge to join the path from Nichinai Nar. It is a fine day's walk and gives a rocky scramble near the summit, provides good views and a good general idea of the district. Rock climbing courses based at Sonamarg frequently use the crags of this mountain. Further information can be obtained from the Department of Tourism in Srinagar regarding new rock climbs.

**"Nichinai Peak" 4,920 metres.**

This must be one of the main climbing attractions of the range. The track up the Nichinai Nar from Sonamarg and leading over to the lakes of Vishan Sar, Krishan Sar and Gad Sar, crosses the watershed at the

Nichinai Bar, a pass of 4,082 metres some 15 kms. from Sonamarg. The pass is directly under the northern rock face of the peak.

In November 1945 the north face was ascended in extremely cold conditions to a height of 4,800 metres above the second prominent rock pinnacle on the east ridge but the climb was not completed. This north face to second east pinnacle should readily be ascended in the summer months giving a splendid climb and finish on the east ridge. A more direct north face ascent would take the soaring towers of rock further over towards the west side. On this mountain and all along the great Sogput ridge long rock ascents of high standard are waiting to be done. A fine rock peak of 4,780 metres (15,685 ft) stands above Vishan Sar and two of 4,793 metres (15,723 ft) and 4,670 metres (15,331 ft) rise cleanly above Gad Sar. The highest point of this range is Haramoukh 5,148 metres (16,872 ft) climbed by Stein in 1894, by Brigadier General Bruce (of Everest) from Gangabal in 1902 and later Dr. Neve made an ascent from the south side in 1912—the same year that he climbed Kola-hoi with Mason. Apart from the mountaineering available here there are many pleasant walks to lakes and ridges and in the lakes some of the finest trout fishing in the World.

Alternative ways of approaching the Sogput Dhar can be made from the Sind Valley and indeed this is often the way of approach to Haramoukh. Having climbed the peak the continuation of the journey is to reach Sonamarg *via* the Nichinai Bar.

The country north of Nichinai Nar and the Ranan Sin (the river flowing north-west then north from Nichinai Bar) is composed of limestone and sandstone with the uppermost portions rearing fantastically skyward. The rock is crumbly and there are many pinnacles. This same structuring and basic material lies to the north of Sonamarg. Though throughout this area the rock scenery is very fine, too great care cannot be exercised in attempting climbs on the crags.

### **Sonamarg Nar**

This nullah trends north-east from Sonamarg village turning north-west after about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kms. Another 2 kms along the nullah bifurcates. One branch, the Kainsum Nar runs north-north east while the other, the Luderwas Nar continues north-west for about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kms before sweeping round to the north-north east. These two nullahs enclose a ridge and are bounded by two other ridges. All three ridges run north-north east for some 3 kms or more where they abut on the east-west watershed ridge at about 4,600 metres (15,000 ft).

The most westerly of the three ridges has a southward extension bounded on the north-west by the Lashi Pathi Nar—a valley west of Ludarwas. This extension is from west to east and is the hill to the north above Sonamarg. Its name is Ludarwas.

### **Ludarwas**

Over 3,670 metres (12,000 ft). Good walking from



**Sonamarg.** Cross the bridge over the river from the old Sonamarg village and continue along the obvious track that rises diagonally across the green grassy face of Ludarwas. When the broad open gully is reached two alternatives are available. You can either ascend the broad gully by a steep zig-zag path which leads to the ridge—or continue to traverse diagonally upwards until at a lush green shelf you reach the Gujar huts. From here you can ascend the ridge directly above the huts, or continue to traverse to the skyline ridge and ascend to the summit. Whichever route is taken, a splendid round can be made—but probably the best way is to take the traverse on ascent and descend by the broad gully path. Allow some 7 to 8 hours for the round which will include at least one hour or so for enjoying the flora, fauna and the scenery. There is now an experimental sheep farm on the other side of Ludarwas. Take water. From the top of Ludarwas, three striking ridges that run north-south.

### **The Easterly Ridge**

This rises to a peak of 4,700 metres (15,412 ft) then a ridge of shattered limestone supported by huge precipices runs for 3 to 4 kms north-north east to a point 4,750 metres (15,572 ft) on the watershed ridge. Access may be made from Pokribal or from Shalamar in the Nilanai Nar.

### **The Central Ridge**

Noyce and Whittle ascended to a point at 4,450 metres (14,582 ft) via a disintegrating gully on the east

face. From 4,450 metres the ridge continues for 3 kms north-north east to join the watershed ridge at over 4,600 metres.

### **The Western Ridge**

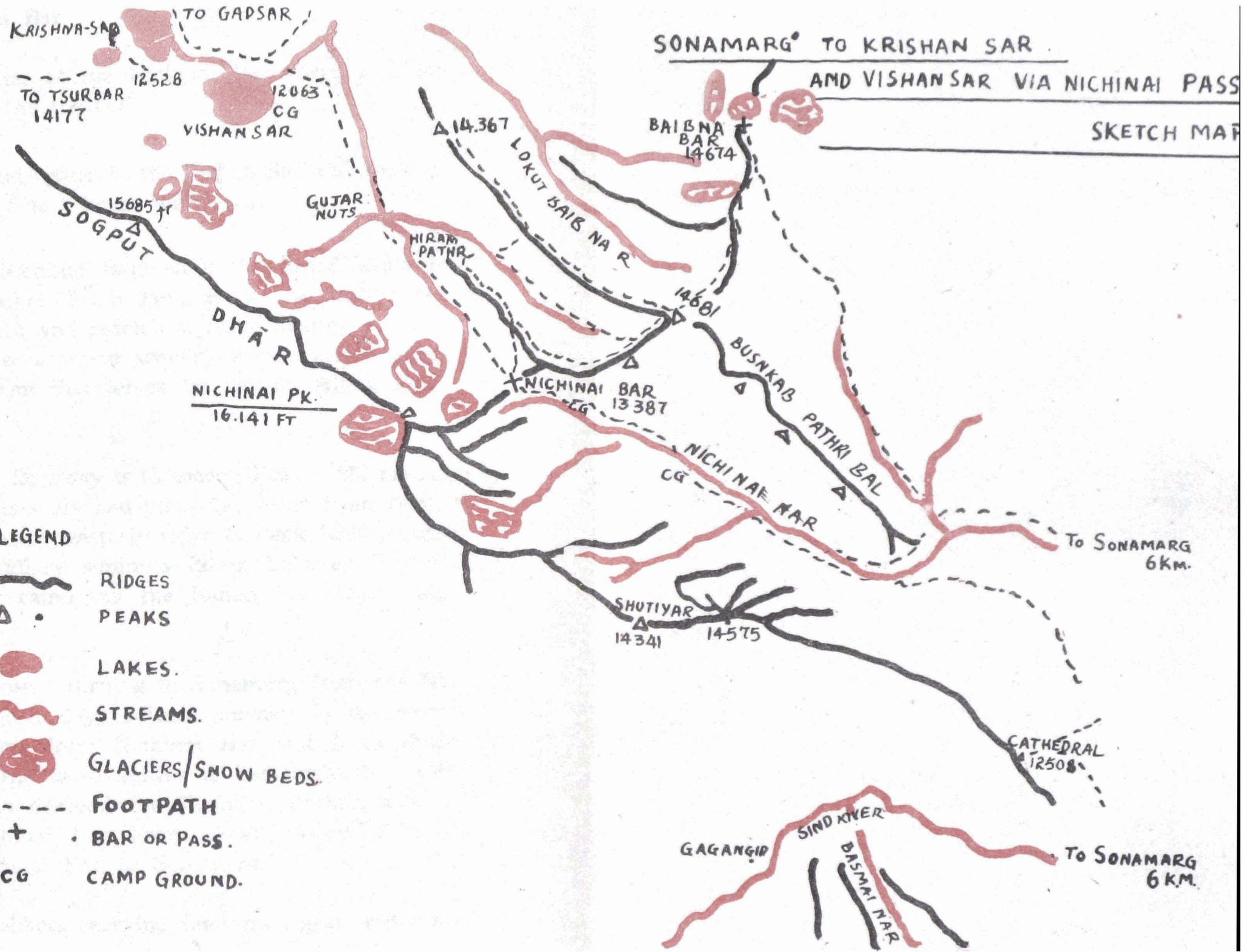
Similar in character to the other ridges but the crest more shattered. The colouring of the rock is very striking and varied. It rises to 4,765 metres (15,630 ft) at the watershed ridge.

Much of the area has been used for mountain training in recent years and though there are no records of ascents it is highly probable that most of these peaks have been climbed. From a campsite in the green valley north of Ludarwas much good walking and exploratory ascents could be found. Water scarce. Again it must be stressed that the rock is untrustworthy and great care must be exercised.









### **Lashi Pathi Nar**

A steep valley leading to peaks 4,765 metres and 4,766 metres. On Peak 4,766 metres, Graham and Noyce climbed a conspicuous gully in a bay in the crags above a small waterfall in the upper nullah. 100 metres of climbing not difficult rocks lead to the slopes and south ridge. The ridge was following to a series of large and awkward pinnacles. Bad weather prevented the party reaching the summit but only 120 metres of the ridge remained and it was felt that this last section should also provide an interesting finish to the ascent.

SONAMARG TO KRISHAN SAR  
AND VISHAN SAR VIA NICHINAI PASS  
SKETCH MAP



LEGEND

-  RIDGES
-  PEAKS
-  LAKES.
-  STREAMS.
-  GLACIERS/SNOW BEDS.
-  FOOTPATH
-  BAR OR PASS.
-  CAMP GROUND.

## North of Nichinai Bar

From campsites at the Nichinai Bar there is much fine walking for the trekker.

(a) Walk and return to the Vishan Sar and Krishan Sar Lakes. Time, 5 to 6 hours with stops.

(b) From Nichinai Bar, walk the broad ridge to above Hiram Pathri. From here cross the lush green valley to the north and reach the ridge leading to Peak (14,367 ft). Fine escarpment scenery here. Various alternative ways present themselves for return. Allow minimum 6 hours.

(c) A good long day is to ascend Peak 4,478 metres (14,681 ft) over its shaly and pinnacled ridge from Nichinai Bar then take the westerly ridge to Peak 4,380 metres (14,367 ft). Subsidiary summits lie in between. Return to Nichinai Bar camp via the Ranan Sin stream and Hiram Pathri.

(d) For those returning to Sonamarg from the Nichinai area a good days return journey is to ascend Peak 4,478 metres from Nichinai Bar and from there descend one of the scree gullies to the Bushkab Pathri Nar. Continue to descend the Bushkab Pathri until it rejoins the Nichinai Nar lower down. Allow 7 to 8 hours from Nichinai Bar to Sonamarg.

(e) For trekkers carrying their own gear and used

to mountain travel, take the full ridge—Nichinai Bar—Peak 14,681 ft on to the pass to the north—Baibna Bar 4,475 metres (14,684 ft). From this pass a full descent of the Bushkab Pathri Nar can be made and return to Sonamarg.

(f) From the Nichinai Nar some 3 to 4 kms below the pass, a route diverges to the west and traverses very rough terrain (snow lakes and snowbeds abound). The highest point is at 4,490 metres (14,729 ft)—Salnai Bar. After crossing snow beds under the southern face of Nichinai Peak, the route descends the Salnai Nar to Sangam then strikes south to the Dakteng Bar. 4,113 metres (13,499 ft). Another 9 or 10 kms takes you to Gund in the Sind Valley.

For a long continuation trek reach Kulan (6 kms from Gund) ascend to Zaiwan and cross the Yem Har to Sekiwas and Pahalgam. Go from Pahalgam to Amarnath Cave and continue to Baltal. From Baltal to Sonamarg completes a fine round.

## SONAMARG AND AMARNATH AREA









The peaks of the Amarnath area may be approached in various ways from the areas previously described.

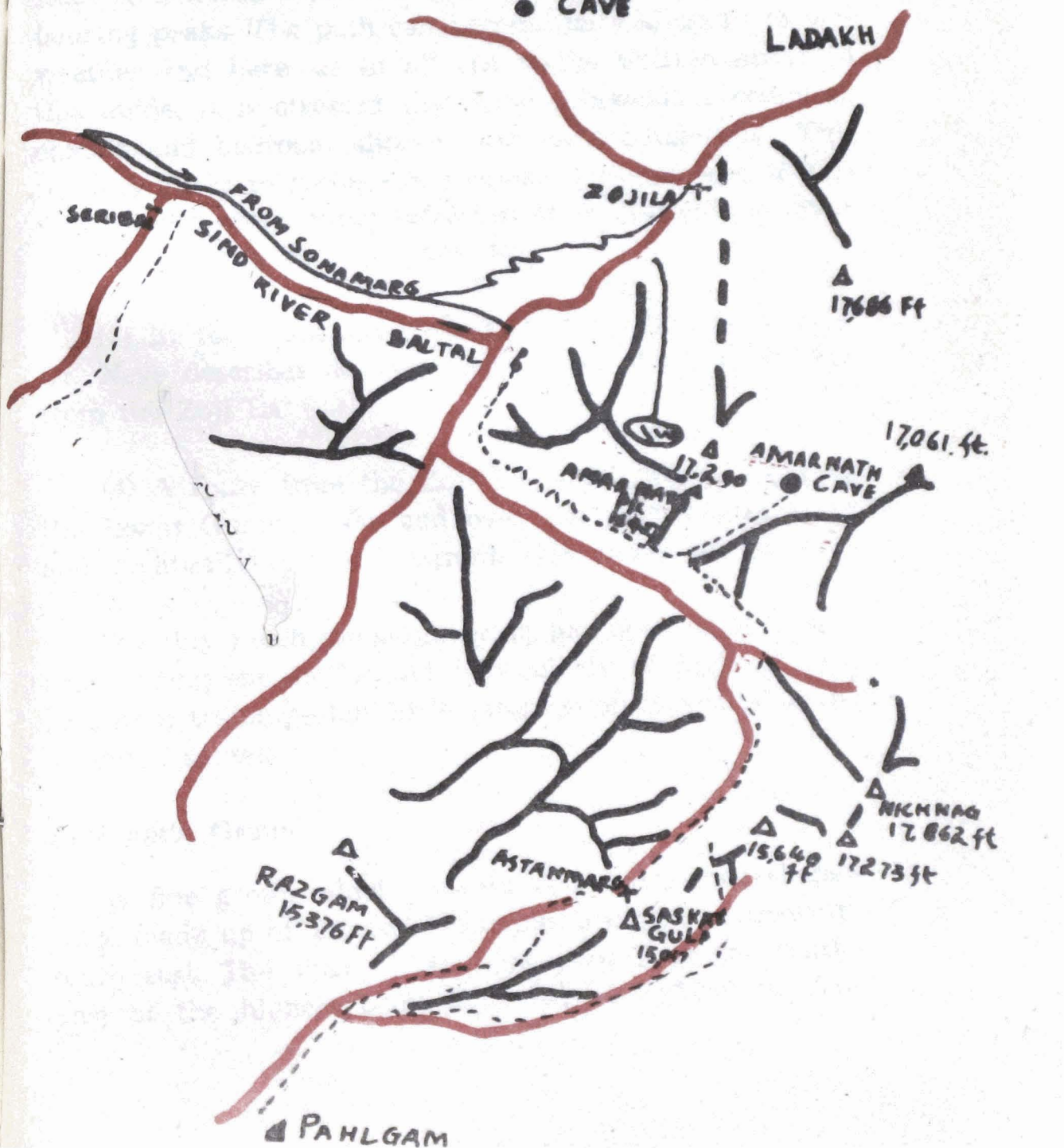
(1) The classic 'Pilgrim Road' from Pahalgam in the East Liddar valley leads to the Amarnath Cave some 6 kms beyond Panjtarni. The route is very good and well graded leading to Sheshnag and adjacent peaks as well as the Amarnath group of peaks.

# BALTAL-AMARNATH - VIA SONAMARG.

## SKETCH MAP.

### LEGEND

-  RIDGES.
-  VILLAGE
-  PASS
-  PATH
-  CAVE
-  ROAD.
-  RIVER/STREAM
-  SUMMIT





(2) **Sonamarg to Baltal**—by car, pony or on foot. At Baltal it is now possible to go a further 3 kms by jeep to the point where the Sind River takes a sharp bend to the south-east. From here a good path, steep in places, leads to Amarnath Cave and to the Amarnath and neighbouring peaks. The path can become very slippery in wet weather and here, as in all the walks written about in this guide, it is stressed that good footwear is essential, chaplis and bedroom slippers are very dangerous! This route is likely to become of increasing importance to pilgrims and already some refreshment is available at Sangam during the summer months.

(3) In the Himalayan Club Journal Vol. 2 of 1933, Dr. Neve describes an approach up the Kainpathar Nar from the Zoji La.

(4) A route from the Zoji La near Machoi leads up the Lokut Gumbar Nar and over the Seki Pantsal pass and eventually to the Amarnath Nar above the cave.

Possibly much mountaineering has been done in this area during the 1970's and particularly as high altitude mountain training—but little information is available regarding ascents.

### **Amarnath Group**

A fine group which consists of a horse-shoe shaped ridge made up of Triassic Limestone oriented north-west-south east. The apex of the horse-shoe is in the south-east at the highest point 5,240 metres (17,290 ft). The



valley enclosed by the arms of the horse-shoe is the Kainpathar Nar which debouches into the Zoji La on the Kashmir side.

Other peaks in this group vary in height from 4,822 metres to 5,008 metres (16,427 ft). This triangulated point of 16,427 ft is actually a subsidiary summit on the south-west ridge of Peak 17,290 ft. In 1856, W. H. Johnson used this point marked 'Amarnath, 16,427 ft' as a survey station.

Tilly, who provided most of the material for this chapter describes his ascent with Begg and Pike in 1944 "An easy grass ridge leads towards the summit from the junction of the Upper Sind Valley and the Amarnath Nar. High up the ridge becomes rocky with three rotten rock towers." Access to the start of this ascent was found to be very quick and easy from Baltal in 1976. From 16,427 ft. to the summit at 17,290 ft. is a ridge some  $\frac{2}{3}$  kms. in length.

Point 15,815 ft. is an easy rock peak with a steep final stretch. Col. Mason reached the top in 1911 from the Upper Sind over long and steep grass slopes. A ridge connects Peak 15,815 ft. with Peak 16,094 ft.

### **Peaks South and East of Amarnath Nar**

There are several peaks of around 15,500 ft. across the nullah south-east of Amarnath.

The magnificent snow peak 5,202 metres (17,061 ft.) on the Kashmir-Ladakh border is somewhat isolated and draws the eyes from all around. About 6 kms from

Amarnath Cave is a high pass leading over into Ladakh. The pass is the lowest point on the north-west ridge of Peak 17,061 ft.

Two rather dull looking scree peaks of over 4,900 metres lie north-west of the pass.

**Peak 5,202 metres (17,061 ft.)**

The tapering summit is supported by four ridges. The south ridge has an enormous gendarme about 300 metres below the top which should prove interesting. The north-west ridge from the pass looks narrow and difficult. In 1944 Tilly, Begg and Pike possibly made the first ascent of this peak. It was October, cold, and the mountain deep in snow. Ascent by the glacier on the west to the lowest point of the south-west ridge which was climbed without difficulty to the summit ridge. From here the final ascent on steep snow overlying frozen slaty scree was not easy. The summit was small and large cornices overhung the precipitous north face.

**Nichhang 5,445 metres (17,862 ft.)**

This magnificent peak lying south-east of Panjtarni is in view all the way from Sangam to Amarnath on the 'Pilgrim Route' from Baltal. From this track the two great ridges encircling hanging glaciers to the north-west should provide mountaineering ascents of high order. Possibly the easiest approach to the summit is from the Neh Nar in the south-west and over the long glacier.

## **Sheshnag Peaks**

Three very striking peaks of from 5,000 metres to 5,100 metres. All have been climbed several times by mountaineering parties from various countries. They can be reached from the 'Pilgrim Road' between Pahalgam and Amarnath Cave striking south from near Shishram Nag. In August 1976 a Japanese group of climbers placed their Base Camp on the true left of the large glacier below the north face of Peak 5,100 metres (16,725 ft.) and completed the ascent from there.

## **South of the Upper Sind**

Several peaks of 4,575 metres to 4,725 metres are accessible.

## **Walkers**

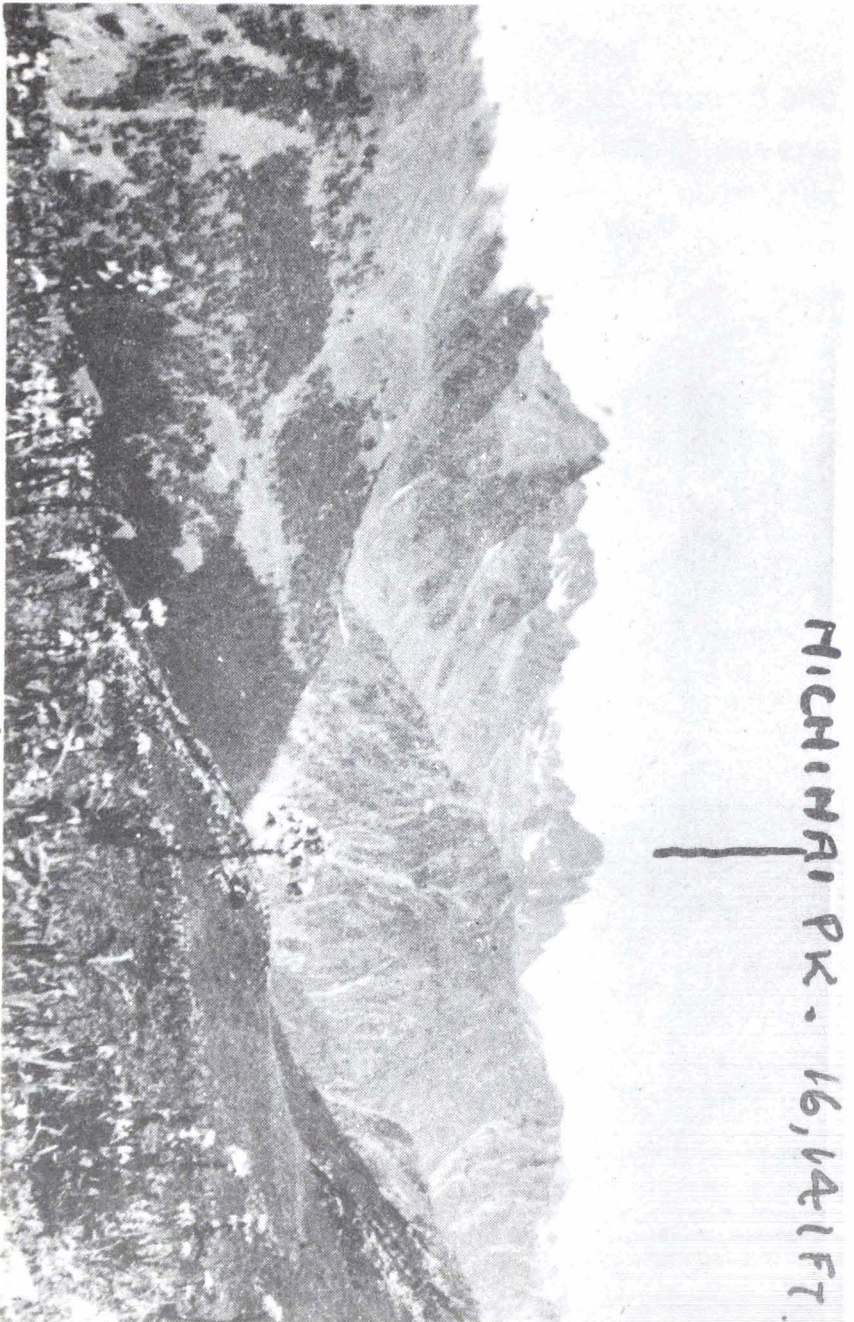
(1) The 'Pilgrim' routes to Amarnath Cave are well enough known and all along the way camp sites abound. There is a good variety of walking and visits to glacier areas etc. The journey Sonamarg-Baltal-Amarnath-Pahalgam-Liddarwat-Yem Har-Zaiwan-Kulan-Sonamarg has already been mentioned.

(2) For strong walking parties used to mountains, the crossing of the Seki Pantsal Pass to Lokut Gumar Nar and the Zoji La area is a very worthwhile journey in the summer months.



1. **NICHHANG** 17,862 ft.  
And Pilgrims on Baltal/Amarnath Track.-

NICHINAI PK. 16,141 FT.

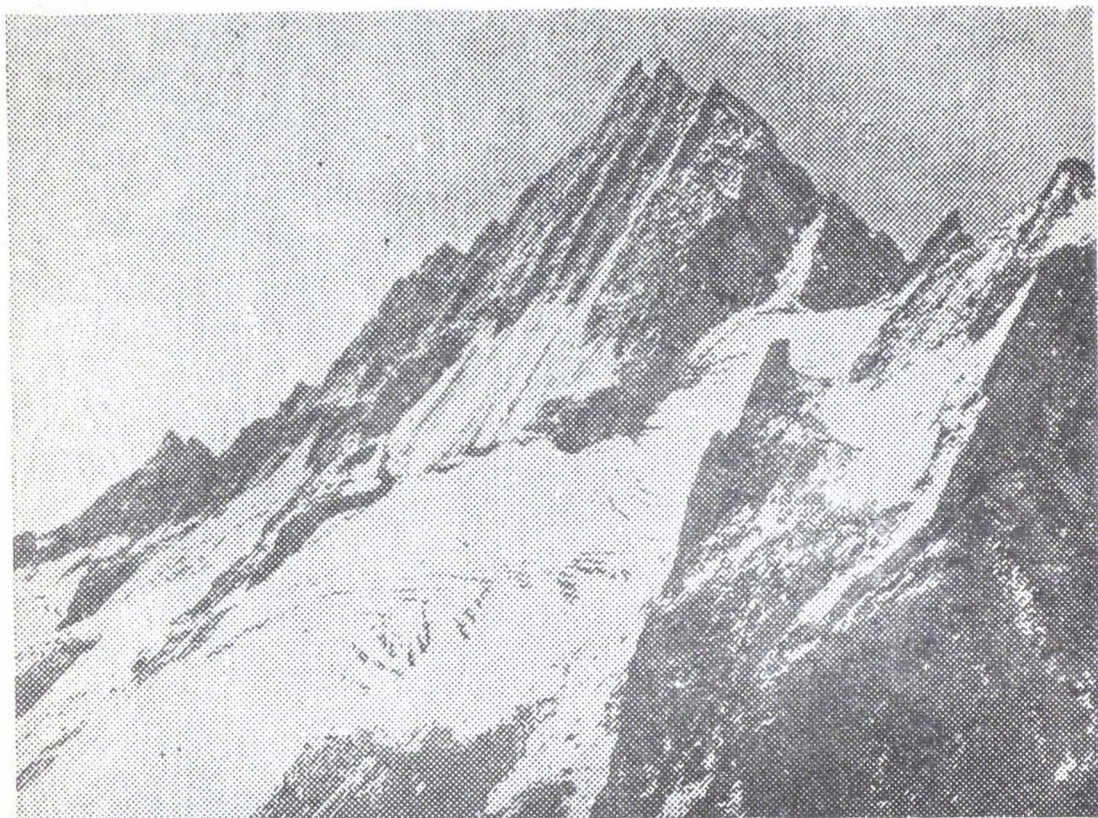


NICHINAI PEAKS AND MILANAI NAR  
From Luderwas

GREATER THAJIWAS.



GREAT COULOIR



INNOMINATE PEAK.

## LADAKH

South-west Ladakh is within easy reach of Sonamarg either by bus, car or on foot. The area offers mountaineering possibilities of a high order.

Within the limits of Sonamarg and the Upper Sind Valley to the south and west and the line of the Muski River to Dras on the north-east is an area of country averaging 4,576 metres (15,000 ft) to 5,500 metres (18,000 ft) and readily accessible from the Srinagar to Leh road. Part of this area has already been described in the sections dealing the Nilanai and Amarnath.

### Geology

The geologist and mountaineer, Gordon Whittle who wrote most of the material for the Ladakh section gives a fascinating geological description for the trekker and mountaineer.

"Igneous rocks of Cretaceous age, belonging to the Dras Volcanic series, are traversed by the Gamru River in its lower reaches, and yield sound rock climbing in this area immediately south of the Muski River. But by far the greater part of the region is made up of rocks of sedimentary origin of varying age and type, which were subjected to considerable regional stress during the mountain-building movements responsible for the uplift of the Great Himalayan Range. The effect has been to produce an area of considerable structural



complexity, with strata, frequently vertical or overturned, aligned along a general northwest-southeast axis. This alignment reflects the drainage of the country, consequent streams flowing northwest-southeast, subsequent streams north-east-southwest.

Along the northern side of Sind Valley above Sonamarg are tremendous walls of grey limestone of Triassic age, with vertical or almost vertical dips; a feature reproduced in section in the splintered crags above Saribal village on the southern side of the valley. Care needs to be exercised when dealing with this limestone series, for its more fissile members may disintegrate suddenly.

Northeast of Baltal the Zoji La has carved a spectacular gorge through crumbling slates of uncertain age. Beyond the Zoji La (11,557 ft) these slates give way to more highly metamorphosed rock types: massive phyllites (micaceous slates), phyllitic and mica schists, sounder than the slates in texture, and offering more interesting and reliable climbing. The Mechoi Peaks, and other peaks flanking the Suweke Nar, are representative of this class.

At Matayan, forming precipitous flanking walls rising several thousands of feet above the valley floor and extending downriver for some 4 miles to Pindras, is a great thickness of Upper Triassic Limestone. This limestone, part of a great overfold, gives rise to the prominent scarp features so conspicuously seen south and south-west from the vicinity of Dras, and culminating in the peak of Beraz (17,981 ft.). Despite the impressive nature of this

wall, climbing prospects are disappointing. Much of it is impracticable, and where routes do exist the going is so interrupted by frequent terraces surmounted by short overhangs that continuous climbing is hardly possible.

The volcanic rocks of the Dras area have already been mentioned briefly. They encroach along the northern edge of the present area as part of an extensive igneous series covering a great part of western and central Ladakh. In such a land of plenty, these outcrops of the Muski River could only attract when higher peaks are for the time being deemed impracticable”.

## **Weather**

Generally, greater reliance can be placed upon weather conditions in Ladakh than in the neighbouring parts of Kashmir, particularly in July and August when inclement weather coming from the west has been observed encroaching on the peaks of Sonamarg and Nichinai. The still higher peaks east of Sonamarg remain largely immune. Occasional snow falls may be expected in September and in October the higher peaks tend to become more heavily invested.

## **Approaches**

The new road between Srinagar and Leh affords rapid and easy access to the heart of the area from Sonamarg.

The Sind river is crossed by a bridge at Sonamarg and the road is followed on the northern side of the Sind valley to Saribal where it diverges—one section continuing to Baltal and the other main section rising to cross the Zoji La 3,552 metres (11,557 ft.).

As you cross the Zoji La, descent into Ladakh is gentle and to the south you first see the entrance to the Lokut Gumbar Nar at whose head is the Seki Pant-sal Pass, 4,650 metres (15,253 ft.) leading to the Amarnath Cave. Opposite and to the north is the entrance to Bod Gumbar Nar leading to the Nilanai peaks. Some 3 kms further along is the entrance to the Mechoi glacier and peaks. A further 2 to 3 kms leads to Minimarg and from the True Right bank of the Gamru River the entrance to Saweke Nar leading south towards a large area of glaciers and high peaks. At Matayan, a further 5 kms along the road, the Matayan Nullah leads in towards Beraz 5,450 metres (17,881 ft.) and to the peaks 5,313 metres (17,423 ft.) to "Cumberland" Peak 5,228 metres (17,150 ft.) and others approximating to the same height.

The Gamru River turns east at Matayan and for a while its course approximates with the junction of the Drass Volcanics and Matayan Limestone.

A second way of approach is via the Nilanai Nar and the Bot Kulan Ganj 4,502 metres (14,766 ft.) already described in the Sonamarg North section.

### **Climbing Beraz Group :**

This group of mountains is bounded on the west and north by the Gamru Nar, and on the east by the Chiskam Nar.

**(a) Beraz 5,450 metres (17,881 ft.)**

This prominent limestone peak can be seen most effectively from just west of Dras. The summit is crowned with a thick inclined slab of limestone with vertical sides. It is not known if a full ascent has been made but Bagot and party did reach within 100 metres of the summit from Chiskam Nar up the north-east wall to the North Ridge south of a prominent rock pinnacle. In 1976 much snow was lying on the upper part of the mountain in August.

**(b) Peak 5,313 metres (17,423 ft.)**

From Beraz a high rocky ridge at over 4,880 metres (16,000 ft.) continues south-west for 5 kms to this peak which may differ from Beraz in not consisting of limestone. Approach can be made from the Upper Chiskam Nar and the indefinite south face. Steep approach can also be made from the Matayan Nullah.

**(c) Peak 5,022 metres (16,478 ft.)**

A summit overlooking the Gamru Valley below Matayan and located on the north-west ridge of Beraz

A way may probably be forced up the great wall overshadowing Matayan—spectacular! Alternatively, up a small unnamed valley with a small glacier at its head, which joins the main valley some 3 kms below Pindras village.

### **Peaks North of Suweke Nar**

Access to these peaks is by way of the deep narrow valley of the Suweke Nar which drains several large glacier basins at its head, before trending north-west for 12 kms. to unite with the Gamru Nar some 4 kms. north-east of Mechoi.

These peaks can be seen from the road near Mechoi. Approach to these peaks can be and has been made from the Matayan Nullah.

#### **(a) Peak 4,985 metres (16,350 ft.)**

Follow up the Suweke Nar for 3 kms. bearing first left then right around an obvious bend in the river. Ascend steeply the right flank to a grassy shoulder at 3,651 metres (12,000 ft.) overlooking the first right tributary. Continue up this tributary to a campsite at 4,070 metres (13,350 ft.).

In September 1944, Whittle attained the west ridge at around 4,400 metres thence mixed rock and snow for 2½ hours lead to a lower summit of 4,920 metres. A further 20 minutes of steeper climbing lead to the

higher summit at 4,985 metres. Descent was made back to the campsite via the North Ridge in 2 hours.

**(b) "Cumberland Peak" 5,228 metres (17,150 ft.)**

This summit is connected with Peak 16,350 ft. by a curving rock ridge approximately a mile long falling to around 15,599 ft. and enclosing a moderately crevasse-glacier basin. Approach the peak as for Peak 16,350 ft. to a higher campsite at 4,350 metres (14,250 ft.) near the foot of the terminal moraine—or from Matayan Nullah.

Whittle and Stokoe in September 1944 ascended the peak from the campsite at 4,350 metres. From the glacier snout to the foot of the neve slopes leading to the north-west ridge. The ridge can be followed to the summit though initial ascent was continued by a rising traverse to the centre of the west face neve. Two bergschrunds were crossed at 4,880 metres (16,000 ft.) and a steep rising traverse made back to the north-west ridge which was followed to the summit. Ascent took 4½ hours and descent 2 hours back to the campsite.

In 1945 Jackson and Starr made an ascent via the north ridge approaching from Matayan and the Nullah. Descent was made via the north-west ridge and across the two bergschrunds to Suweke Nar, then to Matayan—a long round, but a great day providing excellent mountain views of Ladakh peaks and the high Karakorum.

**(c) Peak 5,243 metres (17,200 ft.)**

This summit is the culmination of a rocky ridge running east from 'Cumberland Peak'. Can be ascended from the valley immediately south of Peaks 4,985 metres and 'Cumberland Peak' over the glacier then by steep and broken rock of the south face. As with 'Cumberland Peak' ascent can be made from the Matayan Nullah taking the north-west face and ridge. After ascending 'Cumberland Peak' from Matayan Nullah or the Suweke Nar the ridge linking the two peaks can also be taken.

**(d) Twin Peaks 5,270 metres (17,300 ft.)**

A tri-lobed glacier system guards the northern approach to these peaks. Nothing is known of any attempts or ascents of these mountains.

**West Peak. 5,267 metres. (17,273 ft.)**

A fine rock pyramid approachable from the Suweke Nar by its long south-west ridge. Steep approach. An ascent from the north side should provide some fine technical climbing.

**East Peak**

Can be approached from the west and north over the glacier to a high neve basin under the north-east face. A large bergschrund here barring access to an almost level ridge (junction of the northern and western ridge) leading to the highest point.

## Peaks south of Suweke Nar

Included here are the Mechoi Peaks and Peak 17,871 ft. further to the south-east.

### Mechoi Peaks

Superb views of these peaks can be seen from Matayan. Although only one peak 5,393 metres (17,686 ft.) is usually shown on maps at least three distinct masses will be found to surpass the 5,183 metre (17,000 ft.) mark. These summits are ranged around the head of the Mechoi glacier, an extensive, steep and broken ice stream terminating a short distance above the Srinagar—Leh road. These Mechoi peaks are separated from the previous peaks described, by the deep trough of the Suweke Nar. To the west the Lokut Gumbar Nar leading to the Seki Pantsal Pass intervenes before the Amarnath group of peaks.

Very little is known about ascents or attempts on the peaks described but quite possibly several have been climbed as the area has been much used as a high altitude training ground for many years. The Mechoi glacier was occasionally used in 1945 for snow, ice and glacier training and it has been much used since.

#### (a) Peak 5,253 metres (17,200 ft.)

A wedge shaped peak with two small glaciers under the north-west and northern faces. A long south-east



spur descends towards the Suweke Nar from a point on the east ridge not far short of the summit ridge. This will probably be the easiest way of ascent. The north ridge is likely to be a more difficult and interesting way to the summit.

**(b) Mechoi Peak 5,393 metres (17,686 ft.)**

This peak was attempted by Waller in June 1937 by the north ridge. (Himalayan Journal Vo. 10 (1938) p. 160 and the book "Everlasting Hills" by Waller). He established camp at 15,200 ft. on the ice fall of the Mechoi glacier. From here he attained the foot of the north ridge at 5,000 metres (16,400 ft.) but further progress was abandoned because of the onset of bad weather. He returned to the foot of the glacier by following under the length of ridge down the western side of the glacier. From the Srinagar-Leh road this true left (visual right) side of the glacier is the best ascent route to the upper glacier section. A sound pathway leads along the lateral moraine. This fine peak can be easily approached from the south to the foot of the south-east or the south-west ridges. Both seem steep, exposed and largely free of snow.

**(c) Pinnacle Ridge 5,430 metres approx. (17,800 ft.)**

North-west of Mechoi Peak and separated from it by a col probably over 5,185 metres (17,000 ft.) not attainable from the north because of hanging ice, is a long pinnaled north-west-south-east rock ridge.

This very broken ridge some  $2\frac{1}{2}$  kms. in length has four recognisable summits all apparently higher than Mechoi peak. Faces are vertical whilst to the north-west the ridge terminates abruptly in a sheer descent to a well defined col before rising again to a pyramidal shaped peak of around 5,185 metres accessible by the north ridge.

The ridge rising above the Srinagar-Leh road leads to a point of some 4,730 metres which overlooks the Mechoi glacier. A more detailed examination of these Mechoi peaks can be made from the north at this point.

**(d) Peak 5,448 metres (17,871 ft.)**

Some 6 kms. upstream, the Suweke Nar receives a tributary from the south-west. This lateral valley can be ascended readily for  $4\frac{1}{2}$  kms. to an excellent campsite at around 3,660 metres just short of a large glacier having a source in the large neve fields on the western side of Peak 17,874 ft.

The Amarnath section describes a way to this peak from Amarnath Cave.

An attempt on this summit was made from the recommended campsite by Noyce and Whittle in 1944. Their description is as follows:—

“From the campsite, the lower ice-falls of the glacier were avoided by an ascending traverse

along the right retaining wall first south and then veering east to a broad ice-saddle at the foot of the steep and rocky west ridge. The crevassed ice of the saddle was crossed to the foot of the west ridge which was ascended over snow plastered rocks (22nd September) to a height of 5,304 metres 17,400 ft. immediately below a conspicuous rock mushroom at the commencement of the final snow arete."

The party had to return from this point to keep a timed rendezvous but they could see no obvious difficulties above. Their descent was by the upper part of the ridge then by a snow couloir on its south side to the upper neve. From here, descent to a saddle and a more direct way to the campsite taken by following down the subsidiary branch of the main glacier originating in the steep and broken ice of the upper west face of the mountain.

### **Area south of Dras**

The Ghumchand Nar and the Chiskam Nar lead south to an extensive glaciated area, and many high peaks of from 5,000 metres to 6,000 metres. This area lies to the west of the Upper Suweke Nar by which it can also be reached. So far as can be ascertained little mountaineering has yet been done in this area. It is strongly suggested that exploration and mountaineering ascents on foot and ski would provide great satisfaction for mountaineers in the future.

## Peaks between Muski Nar and Gamru Nar— East of Nilanai Peaks

In 1933 Garry and Harrison explored this area of peaks and much of the information below is taken from their description. Supplementary observations have been made by Whittle, the present writer and others. The area defined is dominated by a small knot of peaks ranging from 5,185 metres to 5,490 metres (17,000 to 18,000 ft.).

This area can be approached from Nilanai Nar and the Bot Kulan Ganj. 4,503 metres (14,766 ft.). A description has already been given of this approach and of the peaks ascended.

### Approach from the Bod Gumbar Nar

Probably the easiest approach. Ascend the nullah by the left bank for  $\frac{3}{4}$  kms. until opposite the Kiblar Nar. Ford the stream and follow the right bank for a further  $\frac{2}{3}$  kms. Attain the left bank again by fording and continue for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kms. to a small grassy mound-camp site.

Some 3 kms. above the campsite the nullah divides. The northern branch has its source in two small glaciers rising out of an extensive snowfield with Peak 5,518 metres (18,098 ft.) set in its midst. The western flank of this northern branch is formed by two large hanging glaciers which appear to lead to smooth snow surfaces above. The Bot Kulan Ganj route follows the true right

(left Bank) of the northerly glacier and is possibly the easiest approach to the snow field and Peak 5,518 metres.

The eastern branch turns sharply from the line of the main nullah and narrows very much.

Ascend for 480 metres by following the left bank of a large glacier of black ice for 3 kms. approx. Here the first ice-fall is reached. Gentle snow slopes lead to two further ice-falls and a col or pass 2 kms. beyond. A possible route leads to the snowfield by Peak 5,518 metres from above the first ice-fall.

**Peak 5,000 metres (16,400 ft.)**

Climbed by Garry and Harrison in July 1933. Route up the western glacier of Gumbar cirque by snow gully and rock rib forming left edge to easy snow slopes above the ice-fall. Followed for  $\frac{2}{3}$  kms. ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles) to rock peak at its head--Peak 5,000 metres.

**Sirbal Peak 5,237 metres (17,178 ft.)**

This highest peak of the Nilanai group is located on the ridge forming the right retaining wall of the glacier described above. Ascent could be difficult from this side.

**Adventurer's Peak 5,224 metres (17,134 ft.)**

Ascent of this peak was made from Nilanai Nar and has been described. It can also be approached from Bod Gumbar Nar via the Bot Kulan Ganj track.

## **Reconnaissance of Kiblar Nar**

This nullah was ascended by Garry and Harrison in July 1933. Up the left bank and over snow bridges for  $\frac{3}{4}$  Kms. to foot of rock ridge (limit of pony transport) with waterfall and small frozen lake above. The curve round to the north terminates in a magnificent ice-wall.

From the Kiblar Nar it is practicable to cross the Kashmir-Ladakh divide into the upper reaches of Ranga and Kokuran nullahs leading to the Sind Valley above Sonamarg.

**Peak 5,518 metres (18,098 ft.)**

See Nilanai section and approach to Bod Gumbar Nar.

**Peak 5,307 metres (17,408 ft.)**

Lying to the north-north east of 18,098 ft. and possible via the long ridge from the low col of 18,098. This summit ridge flanked on the north by steep snow slopes is then traversed to reach the higher eastern summit.

**East of Peak 5,518 metres (18,098 ft.)**

An unnamed valley or nullah entering the Gamru Nar from the west half way between Mechoi and Matayan leads to Peak 5,518 metres and to an attractive mountain 5,439 metres (17,841 ft.) to the south.

This peak and Peak 5,160 metres (16,923 ft.) can be well seen from Zoji La and should be readily ascended.

**Peak 5,104 metres (16,741 ft.)**

This triangulated limestone peak overlooks the eastward bend of the Gamru Nar above Pindras. Routes possible on the east face and on the north-east ridge have been noted and probably climbed.

**Notes for the Trekker / Walker :**

Ponies or porters are most readily available from Sonamarg though Pindras and also Matayan may readily supply portorage.

Once over the Zoji La it can be seen that a wide variety of walks and camps can be taken, for example :—

- (a) From Mechoi it is a fine walk up the true left lateral moraine of the Mechoi Glacier to the snowbeds overlooking the ice-fall and neve. Return can be made by the ridge above—or the route can be reversed.
- (b) It is very worthwhile to set up camp at the campsites described in the Suweke Nar for here you are amongst a fine group of high peaks and glaciers providing superb scenery. Pleasing and spectacular walks abound.

Alternatively, camp at Minimarg where in summer eggs and milk can be procured from pastoral nomads and walk into the Suweke Nar.

(c) Matayan Nullah is a very worthwhile day's walk from Matayan where again there are good sites for camping and milk etc. is available.

(d) The Bod Gumbar Nar is very worth visiting but only lightly laden porters can be taken high and over passes.

(e) Ardent trekkers may take the Lokut Gumbar Nar over the Seki Pantsal Pass 4,650 metres (15,253 ft.) to Amarnath Cave and return to Sonamarg via Amarnath, Baltal and the Sind River track.

### **For Skiers :**

The Zoji Nar has been skied but the time of year needs to be carefully chosen.

The Mechoi glacier which is used often nowadays for high altitude mountain training is frequently skied and in May/June may be run right down to the Srinagar/Leh road.

The area described south of Dras should prove to be a great one for ski mountaineering and glacier travel on ski.



**Beyond Dras :**

In the original guide it was felt at first that beyond Dras was perhaps too far from Sonamarg to be included. However in late 1944 and throughout 1945 numerous journeys on foot were taken to Mulbek, Bod Kharbu and Lamayuru. No time was available for high ascents but several lower summits of 4,600 metres to 4,900 metres were taken from either side of the footpath. The view of the Zaskar peaks from Mulbek Gompa always had a magnetic attraction and it is good to know now that there is a fine trek from Manali in Kulu, over the Roh-tang La and other passes to the Zaskar Range, thence to Kargil and over the Zoji La ending the walking at Sonamarg. The Srinagar/Leh Road now makes many high peaks of from 5,300 metres to 6,200 metres available from Sonamarg.

**Very Provisional List of First Ascents :**

This has been included because many mountaineers are interested in the history of mountaineering ascents.

It will be seen that the earliest date is 120 years ago.

Peak 16,427 ft. (Amarnath)	W.H.Johnson	1856
Haramukh 16,872 ft.	A. M. Steir	1894)
Ascent from the south side	Dr Neve	1912)
Peak 15,815 (Amarnath area)	Col K Mason	1911)

Peak 17,061 (An ornath area)	Tilly, Begg, Pike	1944) Oct.)
'Adventurer's Peak' 17,134 ft. (Nilansi)	C.W.F. Noyce	1944)
'Cumberland Peak' 17,150 ft Ladakh	Whittle and Stokoe	1944)
By N. ridge from Matayan	Jackson and Starr	1945)
Peak 16,350 ft.	G. Whittie	1944)
'Sentinel Peak' 15,118 ft. (Zaiwan)	J.A. Jackson	1945
'Sekiwas Peak' 15,404 ft. (Zaiwan)	Unknown	
2nd Ascent	Jackson and Starr	1945
'Kolohoi' 17,799 ft. (Z/L)	Dr. Neve/Col Mason	1912)
Ascent by south ridge	Hunt and Cooke	1938)
<i>Thajiwas Area</i>		
'Valehead Peak' 15,528 ft.	L. Watts' party	1933
., Greater Thajiwas' 15,928 ft. (By Gt. Couloir)	J. Waller	1937)
2nd Ascent by Glacier 2.	Jackson Buzzard	1945.
., Mosquito Peak, 15,150 ft.	C W F Noyce	1944
., Umbrella Peak, 15,700 ft approx.	Noyce and Jones	1944) (Oct
., Arrow. 15,850 ft. approx	Jackson Buzzard	1945
., Jade, 15,850ft approx.	Jackson/Buzzard	1945

'Crystal Peak, 13,400 ft. approx. Jackson/T pp/Levy 1945  
Cefn Carnedd' 15,750. ft Buzzard and party 1945  
Kazim Fahn Bsl 16,200 ft. approx J.A. Jackson 1945



*John A. Jackson was the Chief Instructor of the R. A. F. Mountain Training Centre at Sonamarg from 1940 to 1945. At that time he was the Co-author of the "Mountaineering Guide to the Kashmir Himalaya", published by the Himalayan Club. John and Eileen Jackson re-visited Kashmir in 1976 and updated the present Guide originally published in 1945. His other works include "More than Mountains" and the "Safety on Mountains". Till last year he was the Director of Plas Y Brenin Mountaineering Centre in Wales. Presently he is associated with the British Sports Council.*



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*Price : Rupees Five only*

**Published by the Department of Tourism, Jammu and  
Kashmir Government and Printed at Govt. Press, Srinagar  
J. & K.**