THREE MONTHS IN UPPER GARHWAL AND ADJACENT TIBET

GURDIAL SINGH

THIS article is an account of two journeys made in 1951 and 1954 in the Garhwal Himalaya and on the latter occasion in adjacent Tibet as well. In 1951 I was accompanied by R. Greenwood and three Sherpas: Gyalgen Myckje, Dawa Thondup, and Lhakpa Tsering. On the second occasion Lav Kumar and I joined forces. I had not met him previously, but had been told that his love for mountains was matched only by his interest in birds. We employed a few Garhwalis of the Dhauli Ganga valley as porters, of whom Kalyan Singh and Diwan Singh [1] served us loyally.

Both times the policy was to travel light and to get off the beaten track with a view to attempting secondary peaks where possible. Tibet was, of course, a forbidden land for climbing, so we did such climbs as our fancy suggested in the by-corners of Garhwal.

When Greenwood and I parted company at the Trisul Base Camp [2] on 25th June 1951, it was arranged that we would reassemble on 5th July at Lata, the last village on the conventional route to the Rishi basin, to carry out the second part of our programme, i.e. travel in the middle Dhauli valley and one of its tributaries, the Kosa. Meanwhile he would attempt Mrigthuni, 22,490 feet, lying between Trisul and Maiktoli, and I, in company with Gyalgen, would make a quick trip to Badrinath to 'acquire merit'. Accordingly I returned to Lata on the afternoon of 4th July. Here a spirit of merriment prevailed: the harvest festival was in full swing. The wheat harvest which had just been gathered was threshed during the day and at night the male population indulged in an orgy of dancing to the accompaniment of the drums in the local dharam sala; women and children were passive spectators of the nightly scene. Next day Greenwood and Robert Walter [3] came leaping down from the heights. We exchanged news. Greenwood's gallant bid for Mrigthuni had failed when within 500 feet of the summit, because Lhakpa was unable to continue owing to cold feet. He met Robert in the Trisul nala and together they followed almost in

[1] Both Kalyan Singh and Diwan Singh, of villages Bampa and Rini respectively, had distinguished themselves in the Bengal Sappers' Expeditions to Kamet; the former was one of the three who reached the highest point in 1952, and the latter, a year later, was included in the first assault on Abi Gamin.

[2] *Himalayan Journal*, vol. xvii (1952), pp. 112–14.

[3] Robert Walter and Sherpa Nima Tensing climbed Trisul on 24th June, 1951.

Dr. Longstaff's footsteps of 1907 to return to the Dhauli valley. Despite the accursed flies which Lata seemed to draw like a magnet, it was a happy reunion that day.

SKETCH MAP

Showing the author's route
in Upper Garhwal

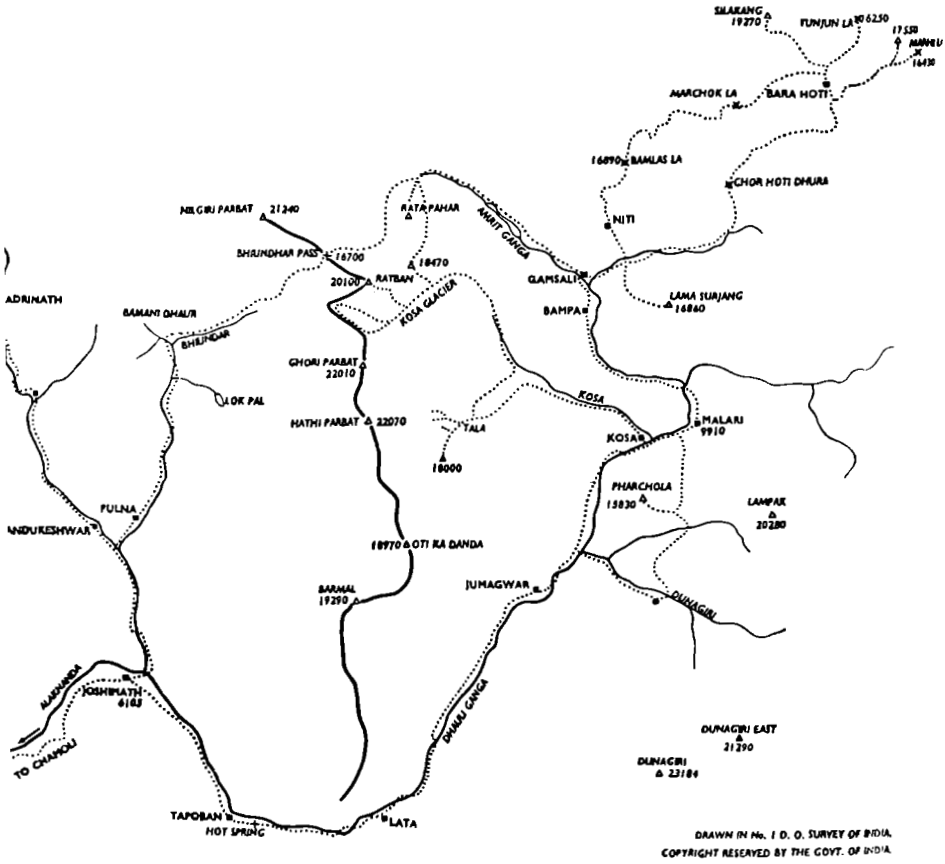
Scale 1 Inch to 4 Miles

Miles 5 4 3 2 1 0 5 Miles

Based upon Survey of India maps with permission of the Surveyor General of India.

Reference

Route taken in 1951 and 1954... .. ..



Our way from Lata now led up the valley of the Dhauli river—a roaring torrent which was turgid with glacial silt. The sun blazed down from a caerulean sky as we followed the major trade-route linking Garhwal with Tibet. Not many caravans of Bhotias passed us, for the northward migration to their summer homes had virtually subsided a little over a week ago. The gorge of the Dhauli looked drab, unlike the well-timbered Rishi valley; but the presence of the redstarts (both white-capped and plumbeous), whistling-thrushes, red-billed choughs, greenfinches, and eastern grey wagtails

added a winsome note. We slept beneath the deodars at Juma, and in the morning travelled to the village of Kosa overlooking the confluence of the Kosa and the Dhauli. Here we left Dawa and Gyalgen to move the main baggage to Tala the highest meadow to which the local shepherds venture for a few weeks every summer, while Greenwood and I, with Lhakpa, moved off towards Bampa to satisfy our curiosity about the traders who live in the Bampa-Niti area

We rejoined Dawa and Gyalgen at Kosa on 10th July and on the following day, after an eight hours' march along a sheep track which was bordered, about 2,000 feet above Kosa, by silver birches and rhododendrons, and, higher up, by anemones, potentillas, primulas, violets, and a host of other plants, arrived at Tala. This idyllic spot, at 14,400 feet, was studded with small lakes and low rock gardens and lay between the hillside and the right-bank lateral moraine of the Raj glacier. In front of us, as we faced the Hathi-Ghori Parbat group of peaks, both hidden through foreshortening, were two detrius-soiled ice-falls flanked by grim precipices. The higher ice-fall, which drained the cirque enclosed by ridges running from Ghori Parbat and Durpata, discharged avalanches regularly and formed a formidable defence in the armour of the adjoining peaks. Both these ice-falls looked impossible with the resources at our command; but Dawa and Greenwood forced a passage up the middle of the lower ice-fall before dismissing it as being too dangerous for laden men Meanwhile Gyalgen and I did some exciting scrambles on the rocks to the left of the lower ice-fall and climbed an attractive gendarme, at over 18,000 feet, lying to the south-east of Peak 19,030.[1] Mist had gathered before we reached the top, but we enjoyed an occasional peep at the wild rock pinnacles which surround the Juma cirque. I did not then know that the 1939 Swiss party had also climbed the same peak and that they had circumvented the two ice-falls after a prolonged reconnaissance.

We now turned our attention towards Rataban and decided to try to reach the Bhyundar valley by finding a way over the Kosa-Bhyundar divide. So after two marches—all of us were now heavily laden—we placed a camp at 15,500 feet on the left-bank moraine of the Kosa (Kunar) glacier. Nearby the hill slope was ablaze with *Primula reptans*, and many a lake reflected the narrow ridge which runs first north and then north-west from Ghori Parbat. On this ridge a splendid peak of about 21,000 feet, with its east face seamed by ice-flutings, evoked our admiration.

Greenwood, Dawa, and I set off at 7 a.m. on 16th July to attain

[1] *Himalayan Journal*, vol. xii (1940), p. 40.

the col at the head of the Kosa glacier. We descended to the glacier and traversed to our left to tackle a climbable but sinister-looking ice-fall. The sun shone pitilessly as we circumvented yawning crevasses and cut steps alongside them. Less than four hours after leaving camp we stood at the foot of the gentle snow slopes leading to the col, which we reached shortly after midday. Whatever hope we might have entertained of being pioneers here were soon dispelled when, on the rocks overlooking the col, we sighted a cairn; either the Swiss or some survey party must have erected it. A thick swirling mist enveloped the middle Bhyundar valley, while our basin was strikingly sunny save for a few wisps of fracto-cumulus clouds. Access to the Bhyundar valley, although not impossible, was not as easy as we should have liked; nor was Rataban a feasible proposition from the west. So while gazing north-eastward at the Bhyundar pass through a parting in the mist we decided that across this pass lay the nearest line of approach to the Bhyundar valley.

Next day Govind Singh, a Kosa porter whom we had sent down to fetch stores, brought the distressing news that Duplat—we had met him in the Rishi basin—and another climber of the French Expedition had disappeared somewhere on Nanda Devi.

I hardly slept that night; horrid nightmares of the French tragedy kept haunting me. Consequently on the following day when Greenwood, Dawa, Lhakpa, and I set off at 5.30 a.m. to attempt Rataban my spirits were at a low ebb. After two hours of steady progress mostly on boulders and hard snow, during which we must have gained about 2,000 feet in height, we were confronted with a rather steep snow slope still in shadow. I lacked the nerve to try it, so I returned from here, leaving the others to complete the climb. At noon they reached the summit (20,100 feet), where they spent nearly twenty minutes. A fierce cold wind drove them down, and at 4 p.m., over a cup of cocoa, Greenwood was telling me how Lhakpa, whom we had hitherto considered to be the weakest link, had risen in his estimation as a potential rock and ice-ace. Their route conformed, I think, to that of Huber, who achieved the first ascent of Rataban twelve years previously.

Two days later we stood on Peak 18,470, marked on the map between Ukhi Pahar and Rataban. It offered us an exhilarating climb, though the rock was rotten; at one spot I, having strayed away from the rest, longed for the safety of a rope while groping my way upward on a rocky rib. A tent platform and two stumps of juniper on the summit revealed that we had been forestalled here, too. However, momentary views of the Kamet group of peaks and the fact that feasible snow slopes stretched northward to the Amrit

Ganga valley was adequate consolation. As we sped down some most promising ski slopes to camp beside the glacier I made a mental note to visit this area again.

I did; it was in June 1954 with the 17,220-foot high Rata Pahar as my objective. But the wintry conditions of that season dealt a blow to the attempt by the north ridge, when Kalyan Singh and I were not more than 500 feet from the top.

On 21st July we went over the Bhyundar Khal, 16,700 feet, a pass which provides the shortest link between Niti and Mana. We had not been in the new basin for many minutes when masses of *Primula moorcroftiana* began peeping at us from every direction. Lower down, between Chakulthela and Bhamini Daur, two grazing grounds marked on the survey map, I saw many old friends—marsh marigolds, Jacob's ladders, fritillaries, anemones, geraniums, lady's slippers, lloydias, poppies, and others too innumerable to mention: a scene which brought back memories of the week I spent here in late June 1949.

We camped close to the old camp-site, near Bhamini Daur, and another week passed all too quickly. We had plenty to read and our larder was full once again, thanks both to our thoughtful and energetic Sherpas, who journeyed to Joshimath and back, and to the local shepherd, Murkulia Singh, who supplied us fresh milk. One day Tensing, then Sirdar of the French Expedition, sent us a gift parcel of some choicest delicacies. If our conscience occasionally reproved us for indulging the grosser appetites, we could always console ourselves that there was little else we could do in that wet spell at any rate.

During the return journey we enjoyed the generous hospitality of the French Expedition for three days. From Chamoli to Kotdwara, the railhead, we lived together and, despite the linguistic barrier, felt that oneness which is so peculiar to climbers everywhere. And together, our manpower now nineteen strong, we helped the meagre P.W.D. gangs in clearing the landslides with our ice-axes.

In early June 1954 I took the high-road to Joshimath for the fourth year in succession; in both 1952 and 1953, when I accompanied the Indian Sappers to Kamet, the route was identical. On arrival here on 3rd June I heaved a sigh of relief at escaping from the purgatory of both the scorched plains and the parched foothills: I had reached the threshold of the real Himalaya. Lav Kumar joined me in the afternoon. He had done a day's march from Badrinath, where he, like a good Hindu, had gone on a pilgrimage after visiting Kedarnath. As we sat under an apricot tree in front of the rest-house I guessed—correctly, as my subsequent experience proved—that he

was the man to go travelling with in the hills, being not over-adventurous, but patient, amiable, and as keen as mustard. In the evening Kalyan Singh, the head of our small porter team, arrived from Bampa, according to schedule. Providence had smiled and I was no longer sceptical about the outcome of the yet-to-be-born tour.

The next few marches along the Dhauli had no thrills of the unknown for me; I knew every twist and turn of the journey. The familiar sights and sounds were nevertheless fascinating. I heard and met innumerable brown hill-warblers and black partridges and saw horse-chestnuts in full glory on the way to Tapoban. The hot spring at Tapoban, the blue pines on the route to Rini, the Buddhist shrine beside the confluence of the Dhauli and the Rishi, the chaotic scene of boulders between splendid cliffs below Lata and the broad shingly bed of the Dhauli above it, the grassy sward at Surain Thota, the pale pink trumpet-shaped flowers of some amphicome swaying in the breeze near Juma, and, above all, the long processions of Bhotias heading towards Niti—with all these I had now formed more than a passing acquaintance. The route to Dunagiri zigzagged through a gorgeous sylvan setting, and on the afternoon of 7th June we were admiring the excellent potatoes for which this village is known in all Garhwal. The lofty glen of Dunagiri, with its ring of some magnificent peaks, was one of the most delectable I had seen among these mountains. And it was rich in bird life, too, cuckoos and rubythroats being specially more abundant than usual. We ensconced ourselves in the village school and gave simple medical aid to the people who asked for it. This brought us goodwill immediately and soon, as tokens of gratitude, we had more potatoes than we needed.

Pharchola, a 15,830-foot peak situated on the ridge running west from Lampak, was the next objective. The climb was perfectly easy. The east ridge, which we reached via Kanari Khal and Kalla Khal, two entrancing passes between Dunagiri and Malari, was free of snow. On the way we disturbed the peace of three bharals and the female of a snow-cock; the latter, with her brood hardly a week old, rose almost from my feet as I clambered round a rock tower. The summit, of solid granite, was crowned with a tall pole and was a most wonderful viewpoint. Every peak from Trisul to Kamet and from Lampak to Hathi Parbat stood out majestically on that cloudless day, and Dunagiri seemed to be the monarch of them all.

On 10th June we reached Bampa village. Its school—or Gamsali's, for it was nearer Gamsali—was put at our disposal by the schoolmaster, a man neither 'severe' nor 'stern to view'. With this as our base we set off to attempt first Lama Surjang to the east and then Rata Pahar to the west.

We marched along the savage cleft of the Dhauli to Temarsan, hardly three miles distant. Here a small contingent of the Police Armed Constabulary, posted with a view to guarding India's frontier, gave us a warm welcome. We pitched our tents on the soft turf beside a limpid brook lined with *Primula involucrata*, and on the following day climbed to a green terrace on the north-west face of Lama Surjang. Close at hand were evanescent snowfields amid such surroundings in which bharals and snow-cocks always seem to revel. At 8 a.m. on 13th June we stood on the west ridge, where a blue rock-thrush greeted us, and four hours later, after negotiating the stimulating problems posed by both the rugged brown spires and the loose crumbly rock, we attained the summit of Lama Surjang, 16,860 feet. The view was execrable. Apart from fleeting glimpses of Malari village, which lay at our feet, and of Chor Hoti pass, which Kalyan Singh identified at once, and of the valley of the Chubag ghat (a tributary of the Girthi to the east), which puzzled him, though he had driven his sheep to its pastures, thick vapours reigned supreme. Next day we were back at the village school.

To the west of Gamsali is a U-shaped trough, a marvellous example of the effect of past glaciation on a mountain valley. Here nearly a week was spent in the attempt on Rata Pahar, already mentioned, and in the observation of the breeding habits of some birds.

According to an ancient custom, no Indian may cross over into Tibet until the 'Sarji', a Tibetan envoy sent by the local Dzongpun (District Officer), declares the passes open. This usually happens in the third week of June. On 22nd June, just when we were beginning to chafe at the delay, he arrived. Two days later, having regretfully left our ice-axes and rope at Bampa, our caravan, consisting of Kalyan Singh, Diwan Singh, Madho Singh, Lav Kumar, myself, and three pack-ponies set out for holy Kailas and Manasarowar, in Tibet. All our Garhwalis had been to Tibet before. Madho Singh, aged forty-two and the oldest member of the party, had carried out trading trips there every summer since his boyhood. His experience, in particular, was of inestimable value to us.

The Chor Hoti pass was crossed on a calm sunny day. Snow lay in big patches and the Himalayan griffon vultures, perched on the ridge or soaring above it, were scrutinizing the treacherous route for any victims among the hundreds of sheep and goats going towards Bampa and Bara Hoti, a camping ground in a vast moorland at which many trade-routes converge, was reached the same day. Here the P.A.C. had set up their camp a day before, to remain there till September. On 26th June, accompanied by two men of the P.A.C., we climbed Point 17,550 to the north-west of the Marhi La,

on the Indo-Tibetan border. From the sharp ridge we enjoyed a good view of the pyramid of Kamet and could see the warm brown uplands of Tibet and, across them, the snow-capped Trans-Himalayan range.

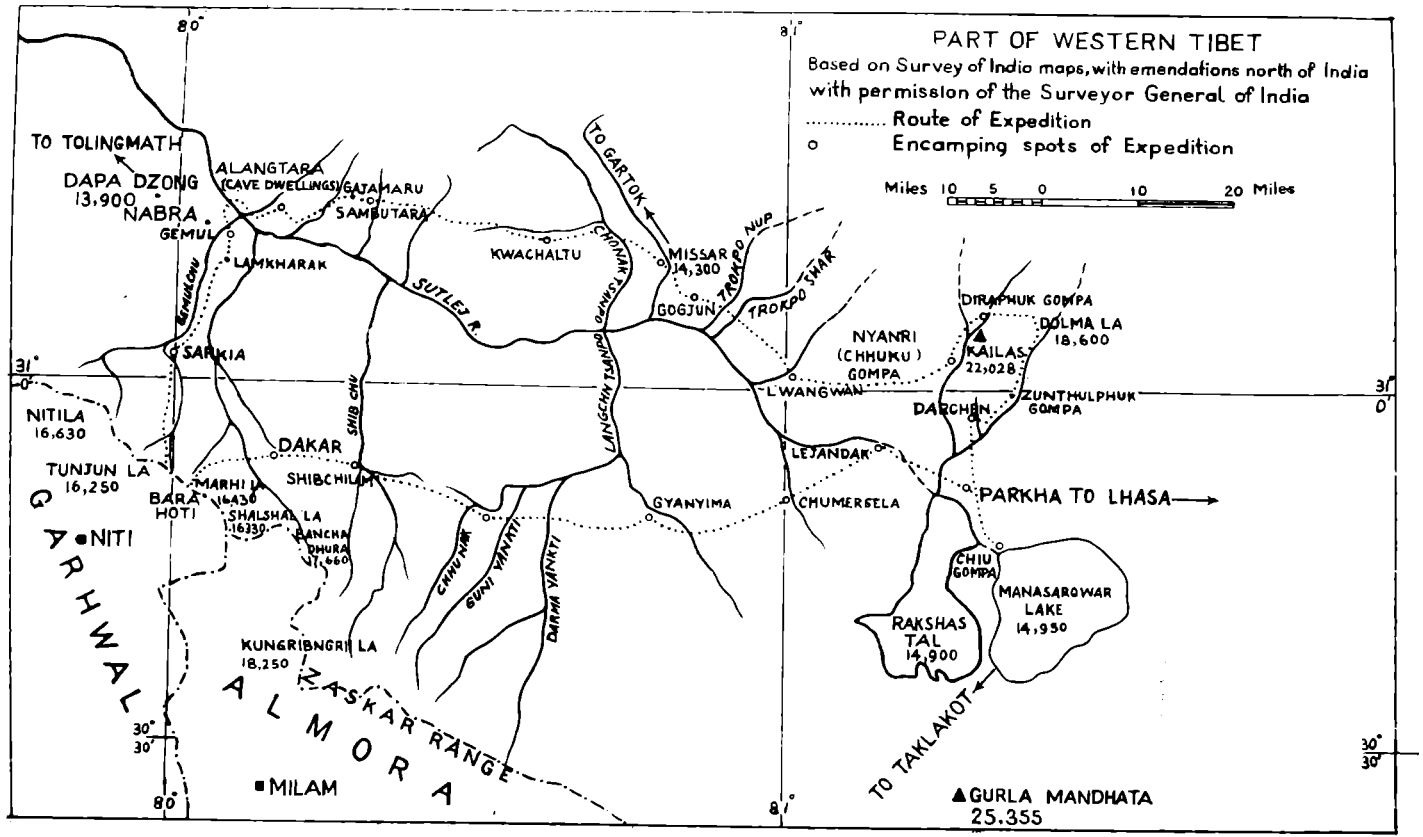
The next three weeks were spent in Tibet. How we passed that period is being set down briefly in diary form below. After our return to Bara Hoti on 16th July we ascended Silakang, 19,270 feet, and collected more fossils from the summit of the Tunjun La. The route we took to reach Silakang—first to the Silakang La (Parla), 17,820 feet, and then by the south ridge—was completely free of snow and presented no technical difficulty. The west face of the ridge was terribly steep and we heard the silvery tinkle of many a rock fragment bounding down the slope to the hungry depths below. From the camp it took us 4½ hours to reach the summit, climbing at the rate of a thousand feet an hour. While Kalyan Singh built an enormous cairn on the top I gazed at the Tibetan plateau and the last lap on Kamet, both of which had been the scenes of our combined travails and which, although so close, now seemed so distant. Perhaps I shall return to them some day.

Back at camp Madho Singh had bought a sheep from a passing caravan for fourteen rupees. The liver and kidneys and the mutton—all provided a real gastronomic treat, a glorious finale to that wonderful day.

On 18th July the Marchok La, 18,250 feet, was crossed and on the following day we went over the Bamlas La, 16,890 feet, our pack-ponies coming nearly to grief near the summit of both the passes. We had returned, intact, to the zone of rosefinches, snow-cocks, rubythroats, meadow-buntings, and, to quote Longstaff, 'to soft airs, warmth, trees and flowers'.

TIBETAN JOURNEY: EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY

27 June. Dawned fine. After taking a few photographs and depositing the cameras and the maps (their entry into Tibet being prohibited by the Chinese Government) with the P.A.C., we left Bara Hoti at 0800. A short while later we passed by the camp of the wandering minstrels, who had regaled us at Bampa; they, too, were on their way to Kang Rimpoche (Kailas). We followed a much-used track to Nabra and Dapa Dzong. (Both these summer trading-camps are visited by the Bhotias of the Dhauli valley.) Gradual slopes led to the Tunjun La, 16,250 feet, where fossils, mostly ammonites, lay in profusion. Obviously a palaeontologist's paradise.



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Conditions very wintry on the northern side of the pass; our men said they could not recollect having seen so much snow here ever before. We marched along the stream, called the Sarkia Sumna by our men. Ochre-coloured hills enclosed the valley. Arrived at Sarkia at 1515. A windy spot. We can, however, draw consolation from the fact that the main valley, about 200 feet below us, is even windier.

28 June. Left at 0815 and arrived at Gemul at 1620. Close to our Sarkia camp was the confluence of two streams: the Jindu Chu and the Sarkia Sumna, the combined river being called the Gemul Chu. Saw a party of sheep-drovers first descending to the Jindu Chu and then going up the way we had come yesterday. We ascended the odd 800 feet from our camp to attain a col which provides access to the Jotal Tankha—a broad steppe, waterless, and covered with caragana. Two packs of kiangs (wild asses) were seen browsing on this vast plain. Kamet and couched at its feet, Abi Gamin, both now almost behind us, gave us a wonderful view. In the afternoon we saw Kailas on the horizon to the east. Descended to the bed of a dry ravine and walked along it. At length, at Lamkharak, there was a small spring, which accounted for an encampment of Tibetan nomads. The afternoon milking of the ewes was in progress and large lumps of cheese made of yak milk had been put in the sun to dry. From here a dusty track was followed to the Gemul Chu—a raging torrent dark grey with silt. Because we couldn't risk our food getting wet, we camped on the right bank, although the real camp-site lay across the stream. Saw numerous Turkestan rock-pigeons and goldfinches here.

29 June. The stream had not subsided. However, Diwan Singh, a likeable rascal, tried to fathom its depth. He drove a nag into the water, held tenaciously the tail of the beast and went across, but not without trepidation, though the water reached barely up to his waist. We forded the icy cold torrent at 1015. Across the Gemul Chu, about 200 feet above it, was a 2-acre patch of cultivation (the only one we saw in Tibet) where barley had just been sown. It belonged to a 'roptuk' (landlord), called Ongdu. At 1150 we went over a col, whence we followed a dry wadi. Some distance above the valley floor the rocks were sculptured into fantastic shapes by aeolian corrosion. Passed a party of five Tibetans (two on horseback), who were driving a flock of thick-woolled sheep to Bampa to be sheared and to bring back grain, &c., in exchange. They agreed to take with them the fossils we had collected in the Tunjun La area and to leave them with the P.A.C. at Hoti. At the Sutlej bridge (the most dilapidated I have seen), which was crossed at 1345, we saw the Turkestan rock-pigeons, crag-martins, redstarts, and a wall-creeper. After

lunch we went first up the Sutlej for a short distance and then up a tributary (not waterless) to camp at Alangtara at 1615. Above us the hill-slope was honeycombed with caves, all uninhabited, with tracks leading to them: a weird scene; and quite frightening.

30 June. The goldfinches were trilling around us in numbers in the morning. Heaps of conglomerate lay in both the Alangtara and the Gemul areas. At 0930 we crossed over into a different basin and at 1400 reached an encampment of nomads at Gajamaru. Their yaks were of all shades ranging from brown to black and had beautifully curved horns. Rather pugnacious beasts: they couldn't tolerate our ponies. At 1700 when we reached a straggling runnel at Sambutara we decided to call it a day. Close at hand the desert wheatears and horned larks were disporting and at a range of 400 yards a flock of fifteen bharals (or were they *Ovis ammon hodgsoni?*) were browsing.

1 July. A very pleasant seven hours' march, first across rolling downs and then along a limpid rivulet, to Kwachaltu. The Himalaya were swathed in monsoon clouds.

2 July. Having left camp at 0845, we walked down the Chho Tal Gadhera to its confluence with the Chonak Tsangpo, a tributary of the Sutlej. On arrival here at midday a typical central Asian scene greeted us: a large Ladakhi caravan was enjoying one of its numerous rounds of tea, with its pack-animals, donkeys, scattered all over the place. Some of them were carrying dry apricots, which they would barter for wool at the foot of Kailas. We crossed a low ridge to get to Missar, an attractive camping ground which commands a good view of Kailas and which is on the main Lhasa-Gartok route. At 1630 we camped beside another Ladakhi party and, in order to lessen the possibility of being waylaid by bandits, decided to accompany them to Kailas. From here onwards for the next week the well-known Tibetan prayer 'Om mani padme hum' was often in our ears.

3 July. A short march to Gogjun. Several parties of Ladakhis, Rampur Bashahris and Tibetans were encamped here on what must be some of the most succulent grass in all Tibet.

4 July. An eleven hours' march across the steppes, gorse-covered and abounding in hares, to Lwangwan, our stage for the day. Two knee-deep streams of pellucid water, the Trokpo Nup and the Trokpo Shar, were crossed on the way. Enjoyed good views of the Himalayan peaks from Nanda Devi to Kamet and, from the camp, of Kailas which resembled Nilkanta as seen from Badrinath. Despite the long day we've had, Lav Kumar is after the Tibetan sand-grouse we spotted a short while ago.

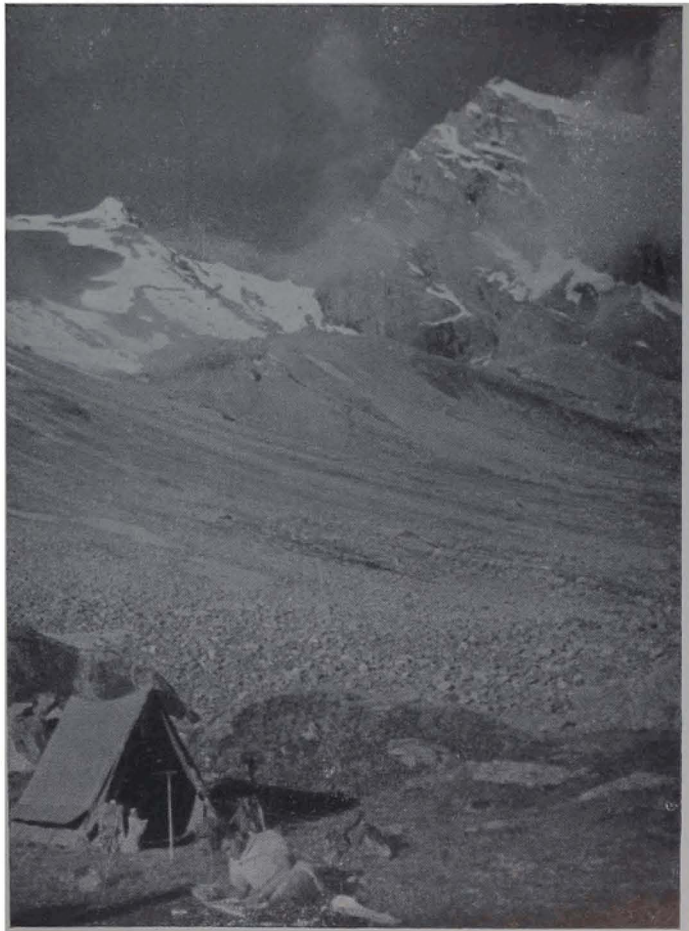
5 July. Off at 0445. We tramped across the bleak steppes and saw processions of laden yaks and mules heading toward Missar. At

1100 I had my first glimpse of Rakshas Tal (the 'demon's' lake)—a charming lake (despite its name) amid gorgeous surroundings, far more beautiful than I had imagined. All high peaks were obscured by clouds. In the afternoon the storm broke. A head wind and icy rain made conditions miserable. We were cold and wet when at 1900 we sought shelter in Nyanri (Chhuku) gompa. This monastery is situated about 300 feet above the Lha Chu, a lateral valley to the west of Kailas. It looked like a dungeon as we stepped inside its low-roofed dark chambers. And its state reflected little credit on those who dwell in it.

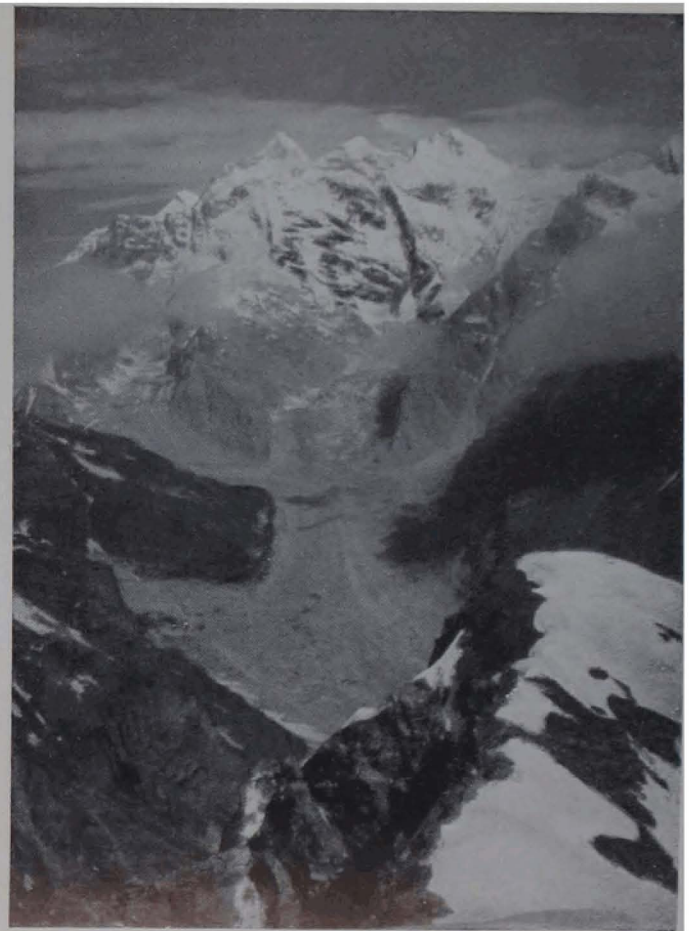
6 July. The head-lama was on tour and the three boy-lamas, all avaricious, made themselves more obnoxious than we could endure. After the morning drizzle stopped, we descended to the pilgrim route. Pilgrims, mainly Tibetans, singly or in twos and threes, were already on the march. Some of them were, it seemed, all set on making the circuit of the 'Holy One' in a day. The base of the west face of Kailas looked most sensational. The top remained hidden until we arrived at Diraphuk gompa, a monastery which commands a full view of the prodigious north face. The mountain is beautifully proportioned. A mighty cathedral; it seems to be a creation of some divine architect. No wonder it is considered so sacred by millions of Hindus and Buddhists. Late in the afternoon we paid our homage to the gilded images of the gods in a cave in the monastery. A musty odour, caused by the fumes of numerous butter-lamps, pervaded the whole atmosphere.

7 July. A thirteen-hour day including the 2½ hours' break for lunch at Zunthulphuk gompa. As we ascended the slopes leading to the Dolma La, over 18,000 feet, I noticed what I believed must be the south-east ridge. According to R. C. Wilson,[1] it provides the best approach to the summit of Kailas. But it would be a tough problem for even the most accomplished in ice-craft. Perhaps I merely conjecture. On the northern side of the pass our Garhwalis shaved off each other in the belief that it is a good religious practice. Close at hand were families of both screaming marmots and Guldenstädt redstarts, the latter very similar to the white-capped redstarts except for a distinct white patch on the wing. On the other side of the pass, about 300 feet below it, all of us bathed in Gourikund to invoke the blessings of Lord Shiva! Farther down fanatical pilgrims were seen doing the *parikrama* (circumambulation) by measuring their length on the ground and chanting 'Om . . .' as they went along. We are told it is a specially meritorious thing to do this year, since it is the year of the Ta-Lo pilgrimage, Tibet's greatest festival

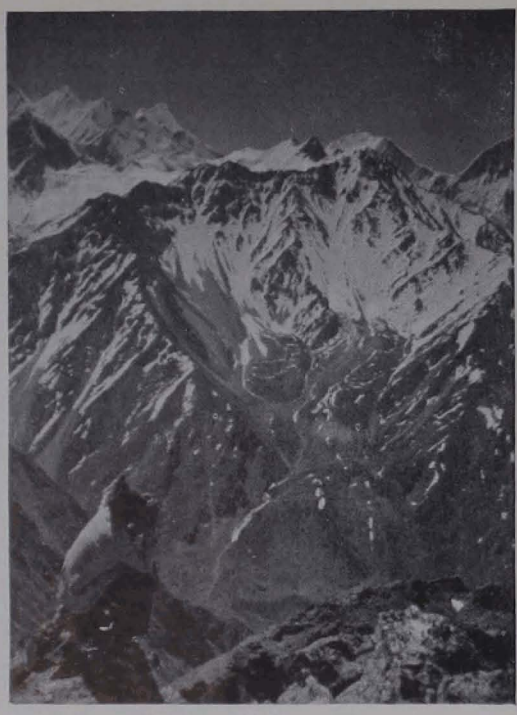
[1] *Alpine Journal*, May 1928.



Point 18,000 ft. (left) and Peak 19,030 ft. from Tala Camp, 14,400 ft. 12 July 1951



View north-west from Peak 18,470 ft. The distant range includes the Mara-Deobar group of peaks. Rata Pahar, 17,220 ft., lies in the foreground. 20 July 1951



View south-east from Pharchola, 15,830 ft. The distant range includes peaks on the watershed of the Dhauli and the Gori between Kalanka and Trisuli. 9 June 1954

Dunagiri and Trisul from near the Chor Hoti Pass. 25 June 1954

held every twelve years. Then we passed long rows of stones with those mystic words 'Om mani . . .' inscribed on them. As we approached Darchen a cumulo-nimbus cloud had cast a gloom over Kailas and to the south, well beyond Gurla Mandhata (which looked tantalizingly easy), the monsoon had undisputed sway. The *avant garde* of the Bhotias of the Goriganga valley was already at Darchen. Here the most influential person (called *labrung*), who was a Sikkimese, gave us accommodation for the night. Judging by the number of weapons he had, he was apparently a man of great authority. The night was spent in a room decorated among other things by a 12 × 16 inch coloured print of Mao Tse-tung.

8 July. We found two Indian pilgrims in a pitiable state, one suffering from acute dysentery and the other lacking any resources to buy food with in this austere land. We helped them in a small way. When we went to bid farewell to the labrung he told us that there was no likelihood of any harm being done to us in the daytime but it was necessary to take good care of our gear and ponies at night, for the danger of thieving scoundrels was not yet completely over, though it had lessened since the Chinese raj began. We ought to take a ferocious Tibetan dog on our travels, he said. After presenting him with a tin of Norwegian sardines, we set off at 0915 for Lake Manasarowar. A vast stretch of almost level ground with small streams flowing toward Rakshas Tal now lay in front of us. It was one big expanse of pasture-land. Dotted all over it were sheep, yaks, and graziers' tents, giving it a peppery effect. With the real onset of the trading season it would literally swarm with animals, we were told. We by-passed Parkha, a small though important settlement at the junction of a good many routes, and then traversed an arid, wind-swept, caragana-covered rolling land to reach Chiu gompa beside Manasarowar at 1730. The south-westerly wind howled outside as we lay in the top-most tiny cell of the monastery.

9 July. Spent the morning first at a thermal spring and then on the shore of Lake Manasarowar. The holy lake, flanked by the Gurla massif to the south, sparkled with an ethereal glow. Should the gods have forgotten to forgive all the sins earlier, a dip in it was deemed necessary. So we poured the holy sweet water on ourselves. The spring lies to the west of the monastery, about 200 yards distant, in a shallow channel (then dry) which links Manasarowar to Rakshas Tal. Apparently no sanctity is attached to the spring, for there was no sign of anything nearby to give that impression. Perhaps the shadow of the monastery is holy enough! Sulphurous fumes emanate from the bubbling water, all round of which there are masses of sinter. Late in the afternoon, accompanied on the way by a large

party of Bashahris, who had just completed the circuit of the lake, we reached Parkha. Here two Chinese soldiers, in padded khaki-cotton uniforms, asked us, through a Tibetan interpreter, what object we had for being in Tibet and whether we were carrying any cameras or arms with us. We explained the facts. Decent fellows they let us go, unsearched. I am told at the check-post at Taklakot the baggage of every Indian pilgrim is examined.

10 July. Some high Tibetan dignitary (called *urgu* by our men) and his convoy, with bells jingling and flags fluttering, passed by our camp at 0700. A gay crowd with a lot of pomp and circumstance; they were heading toward Gartok. We forded many a stream, but not the Sutlej, for it just did not exist on the direct route that took us to Lejandak. We are mystified where its source lies,[1] possibly in the range that runs to the west of Kailas, or perhaps it emerges from some subterranean channel of Rakshas Tal. At Lejandak at least six miles distant from Rakshas Tal, there is some kind of a river-bed, presumably the Sutlej's old bed, but it contains merely a chain of small pools.

11 July. A five hours' march to Chumersela, a camping ground which lies at the intersection of the direct routes from Darchen to Gyanyima and from Missar to Taklakot.

12 July. Having left at 0715, we marched along the trade-route and crossed into the basin of Langchen Tsangpo. The divide was studded with numerous cairns and near the top was a flock of some wild sheep. We soon lost the track and so decided to follow a dry watercourse which led us to Gyanyima. Feeling weary after being over ten hours on the move today. No traders have arrived as yet; we are a fortnight too early. Madho Singh tells me. The nearest encampment of nomads is nearly two miles away.

13 July. A hot dreary march across a vast plain. Packs of kiangs stared at us inquisitively, but they had long ceased to interest us. Waded through numerous channels of two rivers, the Darma Yankti and Guni Yankti. Near their head-waters lay the gentle slopes which led to the Darma La and the neighbouring passes across the Zaskar Range. Bhotia traders and Tibetan graziers were encamped at Gombachin. At sunset the snow of Gurla was flushed with a vivid crimson.

14 July. Five miles away was a larger encampment. Here shearing was in progress. An average fleece weighed a little over 2 lb. and fetched four rupees. Farther west the topography changed: we had entered the 'bad lands'. Shibchilam, another trading site, was still deserted.

[1] *This My Voyage*, by T. Longstaff, published by John Murray, 1950.

15 July. Several kiangs watched us from a close range and hares went leaping over the gorse bushes within a couple of miles of Dakar. Left the desiccated plateau behind. How wonderful the hill (that lay between us and the Sutlej) looked with its russet hues set against a gentian-blue sky!

16 July. We were not quite certain of our whereabouts in that bewildering chaos of ravines and ridges. So the last march to India turned out to be a ten-hour stage. We made toilsome ascents of three ridges before hitting upon the Marhi La, 16,430 feet, the gateway leading to India. Yet it was an exciting day. The downhill scree slopes, the familiar flowers round the corner, the rippling streams so refreshing to the eyes, the first view of the Hoti amphitheatre in the mellow afternoon light after three weeks in harsh Tibet, and, above all, the happy camaraderie among us—all these and the carefree joy of those moments will linger long in memory.