

KAMET, 1937

CORPORAL RALPH RIDLEY, 1st Bn. East Surrey Regiment, writes from Joshimath, dated June 19, 1937:—

‘ On behalf of the climbing party [himself, Lance-Corporals J. A. Williams and J. Bull and Private S. Hillier] of the above unit, I take this opportunity of informing you of the result of our climb on Kamet. We did not succeed in attaining the summit, the highest point reached being 23,500 ft. on the final slope above Meade’s Col. . . . From our fourth camp at 20,000 ft. we relayed our kit along the glacier plateau to the foot of the ice precipice leading to the snow slopes which ascend to Meade’s Col. The camp here at 21,000 ft. was the highest we established. Our failure to establish at least one higher camp, if the summit was to be attained, was due to the following:

‘ Our choice of route lay between an attack directly over the face of the precipice and a steep snow couloir on its extreme right. Fearing avalanches down the couloir we chose the precipice. After two days of strenuous effort we found that although we could climb the precipice we could not get the kits up to establish a camp.

‘ We now felt rather weak and were further handicapped by diminished provisions, due to being held up by a blizzard. It became obvious that a higher camp was out of the question. We elected to risk the couloir and climb unloaded as far as we could from our present position. Six hours, during which we cut many steps, brought us to the head of the couloir and the snow slopes leading to Meade’s Col. At 4.30 P.M. we had reached a point about 200 ft. above the col. Our descent with the kit to the Base Camp occupied four days and was completed without serious difficulty. Naturally, we feel disappointed at not completing the climb, yet at the same time we feel we have enjoyed a fine adventure without any unpleasant incident to mar it, and that is the thing that counts.

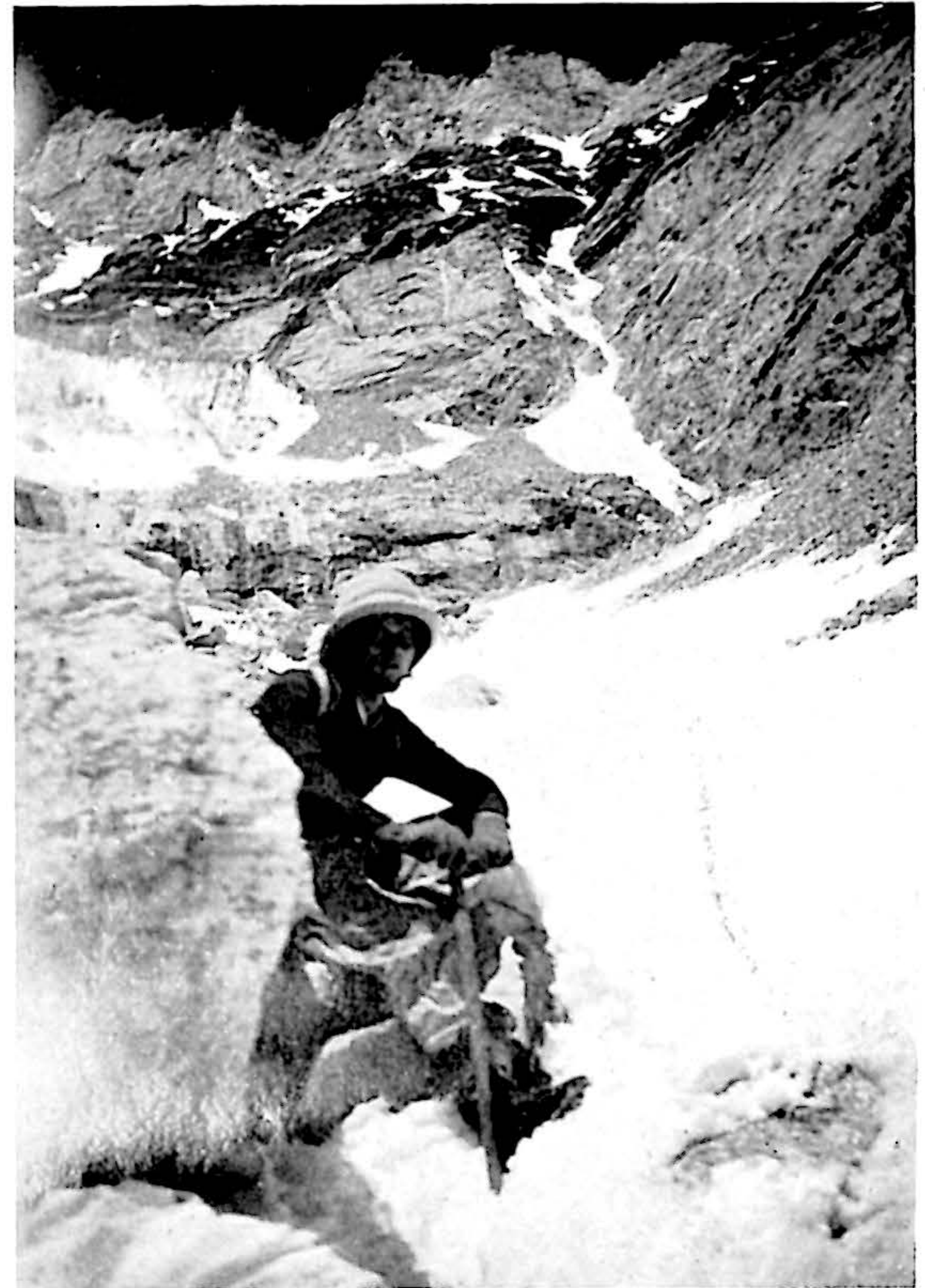
‘ I would like to mention a few facts concerning our manner of preparation and the equipment we used. We had carried out our previous Himalayan expedition when last year we made a trek to the Arwa valley and the source of the Saraswati River. From books like Spencer’s *Mountaineering*, Smythe’s *Kamet Conquered* and Shipton’s *Nanda Devi* we added to our knowledge. We spent many evenings in barracks practising the use of knots, etc. In all, we spent eight months in preparing for our present venture.

‘ As regards equipment, our sleeping-bags were purchased from Messrs. Burns (Manchester) and consisted of two double layers of eiderdown. The ice axes were given us by Mr. Tilman after his climb on Nanda Devi last year. All our warm clothing was Service



Photo, E. Surrey Regt.]

CAMP 3, 18,000 FT.



Photo, E. Surrey Regt.]

SNOW GULLY TO CAMP 4.



Photo, E. Surrey Regt.]

BASE CAMP, KAMET.



Photo, E. Surrey Regt.]

PORTERS ON WAY TO CAMP 2.

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kit and proved excellent, climbing boots we had made by our Regimental bootmaker. For tents we used the small Army 21-lb. pattern, and whilst on snow we used one tent as a floor with pieces of packing cases underneath it. Like this we managed fairly well during the ten days we were above 20,000 ft. One other interesting fact I would point out: above our third camp on the E. Kamet Glacier, at about 18,000 ft., we did not use the coolies. To Tapoban we employed twenty-one, but since then only eight.

'I have journeyed ahead of the remainder in order to settle details in readiness for the second part of our venture; this consists in a W. to E. crossing of the Nanda Devi basin, reaching the Gori by Longstaff's Col and returning to Ranikhet *via* Traill's Pass. Our proposed visit to the glaciers of Harthi and Gauri Parbat has had to be abandoned owing to lack of time. . . . Our Colonel and officers have extended to us every consideration and granted us long leave.'

This expedition of soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment is an epoch-making performance, and a magnificent adventure. Corporal Ridley's account warmly acknowledges the sympathy and encouragement received from the commanding officer of the Battalion, and it is to be hoped that other soldiers serving in India and equally fortunately situated may be inspired to emulate this fine example. At the same time we may also hope that in future beginners in mountaineering will have sufficient patience to refrain from attacking a big Himalayan peak until they have acquired a little more experience than is obtainable from one previous visit to Garhwal, or even from the perusal of such admirable works as Spencer's *Mountaineering*, Smythe's *Kamet Conquered* and Shipton's *Nanda Devi*.

It is remarkable that these comparatively inexperienced climbers showed no lack of mountain craft. They perfectly understood the dangers of the misleading attractive couloir that skirts the base of Eastern Ibi Gamin. Previous parties had also realised the danger of this couloir and had rejected it. Smythe, who found it in bad condition, says that it 'allowed little latitude for life, but an overwhelming margin in favour of death,' and that 'an unchecked slip or an avalanche would bring about certain destruction.' In the case of the four soldiers it was only the difficulties that they encountered on the rock-cliffs that decided them to face the couloir as the easier solution. In order to climb more easily they left their equipment behind. This was their undoing, for it involved them in an attempt to reach the top of the mountain from a camp as low as 21,000 ft., a forlorn hope indeed. It is surprising that with such a handicap and without porters they were able to climb to so great a height as 23,000 ft. It was a fine achievement.—C. F. MEADE.

KAMET

June 21, 1931

You eyed them as mere porters
 Of unresponsive soul,
 Not mountaineers of Himelay,¹
 The mighty peaks their goal.

Yet when Kamet was conquered
 Who was the first to feel
 That mighty monarch's haughty head
 Secure beneath his heel?

It was not Smythe or Shipton,
 Though they the climb had planned,
 It was the porter Lewa
 Advanced at their command,

They fain to crown his courage,
 His untaught pride and zeal
 Would teach him all the honour
 They for his valour feel.

And so King George's subjects
 On high together stand,
 One Indian and two Englishmen
 Like brothers hand in hand.

And so the climbing spirit,
 As nothing else has done,
 Joins Indian and Englishman
 In victory made one.

G. YELD, 1937.

¹ Shelley uses the form Himelay ('Keeping flocks in Himelay'). I quote from memory.