certainty, that one must have missed the route. One may be entirely leisured, not rushing the difficulties, stopping where one likes for as long as one likes, knowing that there is no competition with the clock. And one is climbing light, possibly without sack, almost always without the infuriating clank of an ubiquitous axe against the rock. These, indeed, may only be the virtues of our home mountains' defects, and an insufficient compensation ; but they combine to give the very positive pleasure of a sense of intimacy with the rocks, whether hard or easy, which one cannot ordinarily look for in the Alps. This is the particular charm of our actual climbing ; the charm of the hills themselves, impossible to pin down, has much the same character. Nor is there anything new in this. One criticises and one analyses, and one weighs the trend of recent developments ; but the more one does so, the less significant does the change seem to have been. The whole *raison d'être* of British climbing, as of all mountaineering, remains, happily, defiant of dissection, now as before, and one is content to accept it as a true part of the satisfying indefinable whole.

THE ASCENT OF PICO BONPLAND IN THE ANDES OF VENEZUELA

By A. E. GUNTHER

The visit to the Andes of Venezuela in February 1939 [1] had been in the nature of a reconnaissance. It had left the last of the giants, Pico Bonpland, unclimbed. In the Sierra de Merida there are four great glaciated peaks. The highest, Pico Bolivar (5005 m.), was first climbed in 1936 by Dr. Franz Weiss ; the second, Pico Humboldt (4945 m.), by Dr. Alfredo Jahn in 1911 ; the third, Pico la Concha (4922 m.), by Weiss and myself in 1939 ; the fourth, Pico Bonpland (4894 m.), and a subsidiary peak to the Bolivar, the Columna S. Peak (4900 m.), remained to be climbed. There are now left but a limited number of pinnacles on the arêtes of the main peaks such as the Grand Gendarme (Piacho Vertigo) and the Dames Anglaises on the Concha which offer firstrate climbing.

Communication with Merida, the hill station from which expeditions into the Sierra start, has improved again since last year. The petroleum companies operating in the Maracaibo basin have constructed for the Venezuelan Government a magnificent highway cut die-straight through the bush for many kilometres down the E. side of the shore of the Lake of Maracaibo, passing through each of the great oilfields

[1] *A.J.* 52. 70 *sqq.*, in which will be found sketch maps and other necessary references for this article.

in turn : La Rosa-Cabimas, Tia Juana, Lagunillas, Bachaquero and Mene Grande. Motatan and Valera, on the trans-Andean highway, are now within four hours of Maracaibo ; Timotes, in the temperate zone, within six, and Merida within twelve. Merida, which in Blumenthal's day (1921) was the best part of a week from the Bolivar Coast oilfields, is now within two days of Trinidad, a day by air and a day by car. With K. W. Barr, geologist (Trinidad Leaseholds Ltd.), I left Port of Spain by air for Maracaibo on January 26, 1940, and motored to Merida the next day. On Monday, January 29, our train of five mules left Merida for the Alto del Paramo below the Paso del Toro, the site of last year's Camp I (4200 m.). Domingo Peña, our ' sirdar ' of last year, and three porters met us at L'Aguada, the halfway house on the tree line. On the following day, an hour out of camp, Barr was taken with mountain sickness, which never completely left him. Despite this we managed to pitch Camp II on the site of last year's Camp III (14,800 ft.), below the Timoncito Glacier. On the Paso Espejo, separated from the porters by the afternoon mist, we had an hour's anxiety until they replied to our calling at the start of the ' mauvais pas ' descending to the glacier, undoubtedly a passage to beware of in bad weather. Wednesday, 31st, was a rest day. The expedition spent most of it in sleeping-bags ruminating upon a concentration of the ills advertisers claim we are heir to, and the ' day starvation ' of high altitude was the least of these. Camp II was a U-shaped wall 2 ft. high covered by a tent enclosing two sleeping-bags, between which stood cooker and pots and pans and the immediate necessities of food. Breakfast and supper were eaten in bed, for the cold of early morning and the chill of late afternoon made warmth advisable. The sun set on our camp after three and rose upon it after seven, so that was the length of our nights. The temperature fell to −8° C., leaving glacier streams and porridge frozen by dawn.

The plan on February 1 was to make a reconnaissance of the Columna S. Peak rising some 200 ft. above the Col Bourgoin. The Timoncito Glacier leading up to the col ends in a steepish 100-ft. climb of rock and ice for which a rope is advisable. From the col southwards a snow and ice slope lies steeply against the face of the S. Peak, a serrated crest of jagged rock. The summit seemed easy climbing, but the steepness of the ice slope, falling at 50–60° to the glacier below, was forbidding to a party not yet on its mountain legs ; so we made Pico Bolivar instead. The ascent of Pico Bolivar from the Col Bourgoin is by a narrow strip of wind-corniced névé, lying on the E. side of the crest of the S. shoulder. Forty minutes of hard snow plodding brings one to a final slope of windslab and rock, then to a 15-ft. rock chimney emerging on to the summit of the S. tower, the highest point in Venezuela. The ascent of the Pico by this route should present no difficulty unless the party is without experience of ice. The route up the S. wall to the base of the Grand Gendarme and so up the S.W. arête of the Pico may eventually prove to be the easier and more popular.

Pico Bonpland (4894 m.) forms with its twin, Pico Humboldt (4945 m.), the Corona group. The peak is named after Aimé Bonpland, the botanist who accompanied Count Humboldt, the naturalist, upon his travels in Venezuela in 1799–1800. The Corona group, with the largest single glacier in these mountains, stands S. of and apart from the main range, and it has been owing to its partial inaccessibility that it has not been climbed before. Last year, during an ascent of Pico La Concha, it was evident that Pico Bonpland could be approached conveniently round the head of the deep-cut Quebrado Timoncito, a colossal amphitheatre of a valley heading against the La Concha–Bonpland saddle. It was therefore the plan this year to pitch a Camp III beneath Pico Bonpland under the snout of the Plasuela Glacier at an altitude of about 14,500 ft., from which the ascent of the mountain would be by glacier only.

On the morning of February 3, the party set out from Camp II with Domingo Peña and three lightly laden porters with supplies sufficient for one night's bivouac. About an hour from camp Barr was again taken sick; and feeling that the chances of the expedition would be greater without him, he unselfishly decided to return to Camp II, and left for L'Aguada with one of the porters the next day. The traverse from Camps II to III took $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours, of which an hour was spent on the rugged saddle between La Concha and Bonpland, for from there can be seen one of the most striking views among these mountains. To the E. the ridge falls steeply for 2000 to 3000 ft. into a confined valley in which lies the Laguna Verde, white green with glacier water. At the head of this valley the Humboldt Glacier tumbles steeply towards the lake, and broadens as it rises into the névé slopes of the Corona group culminating in the Humboldt and Bonpland peaks. Below the Laguna Verde the valley flattens and broadens into meadows of green sward down which a stream meanders into the black waters of the Laguna Negra, an immense square of water from which rise steep hills of rock and verdure. The greatness of mountain scenery is not better brought out than here in the whole Sierra de Merida.

Camp III under the snout of the Plasuela Glacier was exposed, but in the Andes in February one may forego precautions. Gathering clouds in the deep valleys reddened by the setting sun presaged a change in the uniform fineness of the last few days. At sunset mists cut us off from the rest of the world and the cold found chinks in the protective armour of five layers of woollens and a four-ply sleeping-bag. But the early night was clear again, a deep starlit sky. The friendly pointers of the Great Bear, welcome companions of a northern clime, gave security in direction. Alarm clocks are not generally necessary above 14,000 ft. Breakfast was porridge warmed in the sleeping-bag above freezing point. Because of the threatened change in the weather an early start was essential, and camp was left at 3.55 A.M.

The ascent of Pico Bonpland was a glacier climb throughout, begun up the steep ice slopes of the glacier snout in darkness, for the last

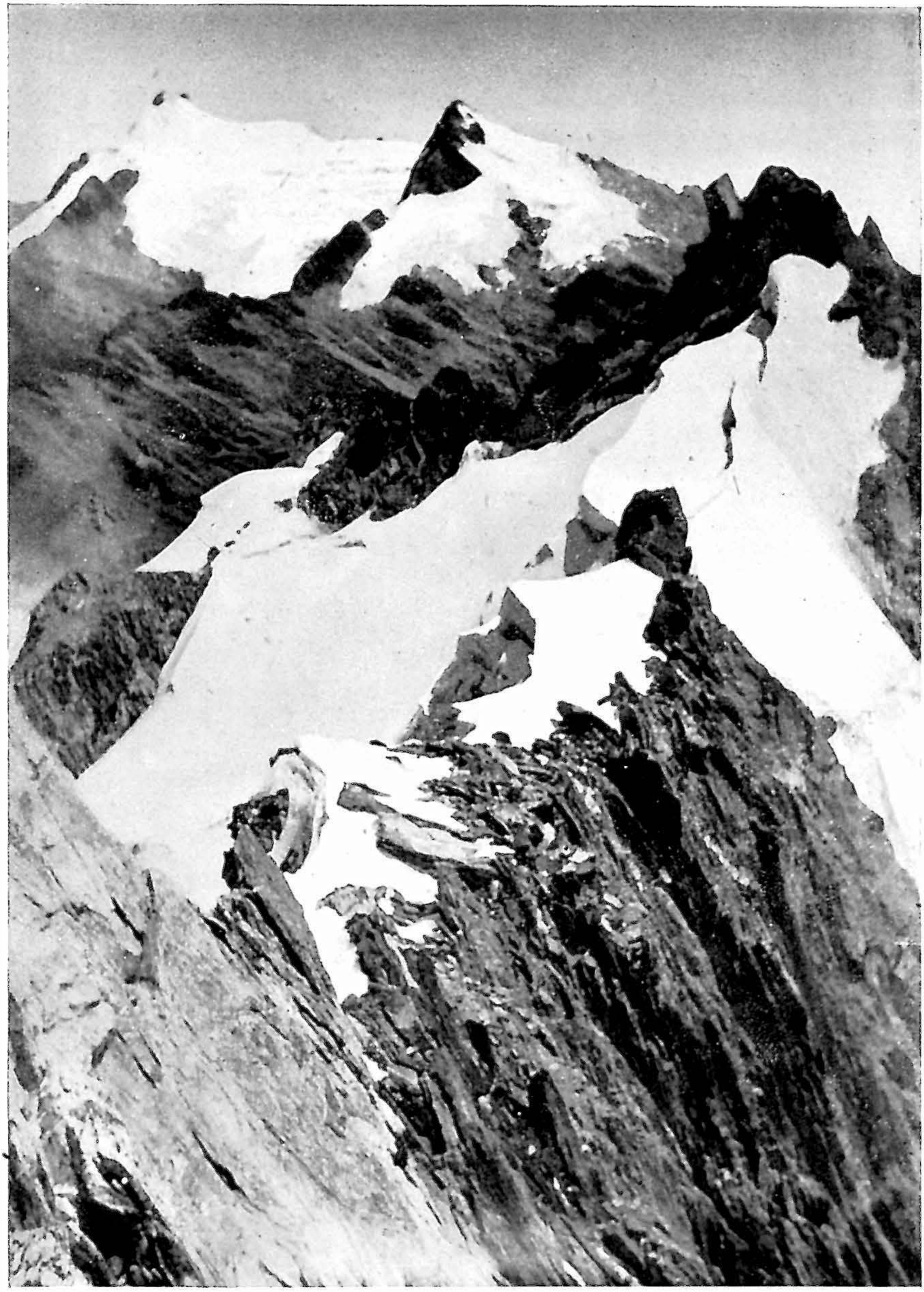
quarter of the moon had not then risen on to the northern slopes, and the little light it gave came weirdly reflected from the Columna range, intensifying the blackness of surrounding night. The glacier snout, commanded at its side by ice-smoothed cliffs, rose at some 50°, and in the almost complete darkness progress upwards was on all fours, the front teeth of the crampons biting the hard ice behind, and the pick of the axe in front, for those friendly irregularities in the ice's surface might be felt, not seen. But the higher slopes, though crevassed, became easier, and the moon later emerged from behind the summit to throw a dark cold ice world into a world colder still, for where the snow slopes lay against the rocks of the summit ridge the wind froze. The summit of Pico Bonpland is a long ridge of rock rising into a broken and jagged crest at its southern end, and falling precipitously on to the Humboldt Glacier to the E.

It was 5.25 A.M., the sunrise still a line of red glow over the Orinoco basin, casting its rays into the retreating night. The scene was weird if not magnificent: an upper world of half light extended the length of the high Andean peaks, while the deep-cut valleys, capped by cloud, remained cloaked in the mantle of night. There was relief from cold in cairn-building. The Scottish custom of adding a stone to the cairn is a good one, but there was no cairn here, nor trace that the summit had been trodden before, so beneath a 3-ft. cairn a record was left in a bottle and tin of this ascent, February 3, 1940—5.30 A.M. It seemed fitting that the summit stone of this cairn should be laid in honour of the greatest name in the history of Venezuelan mountaineering, that of Dr. Alfredo Jahn. His work as a naturalist is well known, but it was his ascent in 1911 of Pico Humboldt, commanding the Bonpland from the N.E., that dates the beginning of Alpine climbing in the Andes of Venezuela.

The ascent of Pico Bonpland had thus taken only an hour and a half from Camp II, and the descent about half that time. It was fortunate that the climb had been made early because after 7 A.M., on our return to Camp II, the Corona group was lost in cloud and was not seen again until midday.[2]

Our failure to attempt the Columna S. Peak from the Col Bourgoin had left its sting. There was an alternative approach from the E. (the Concha–S. Peak saddle) by the Hermanas Glacier. This had been the route taken by Blumenthal in 1921, and by Lüthy and Smith in 1930, in their attempts upon Pico Bolivar. All had reached the top of an 80-ft. chimney rising to the E. ridge from the glacier, and all had reported the ascent of Pico Bolivar feasible from that point. But poor visibility must have misled both parties, for the frozen snow and ice slope falling to the N. is a steep ice traverse, too steep, indeed, for crampons. Were the Bolivar climbed from that side one could best follow the ice cornice to the S. Peak and then down to the Col Bourgoin, a longer route than the direct approach from the W.

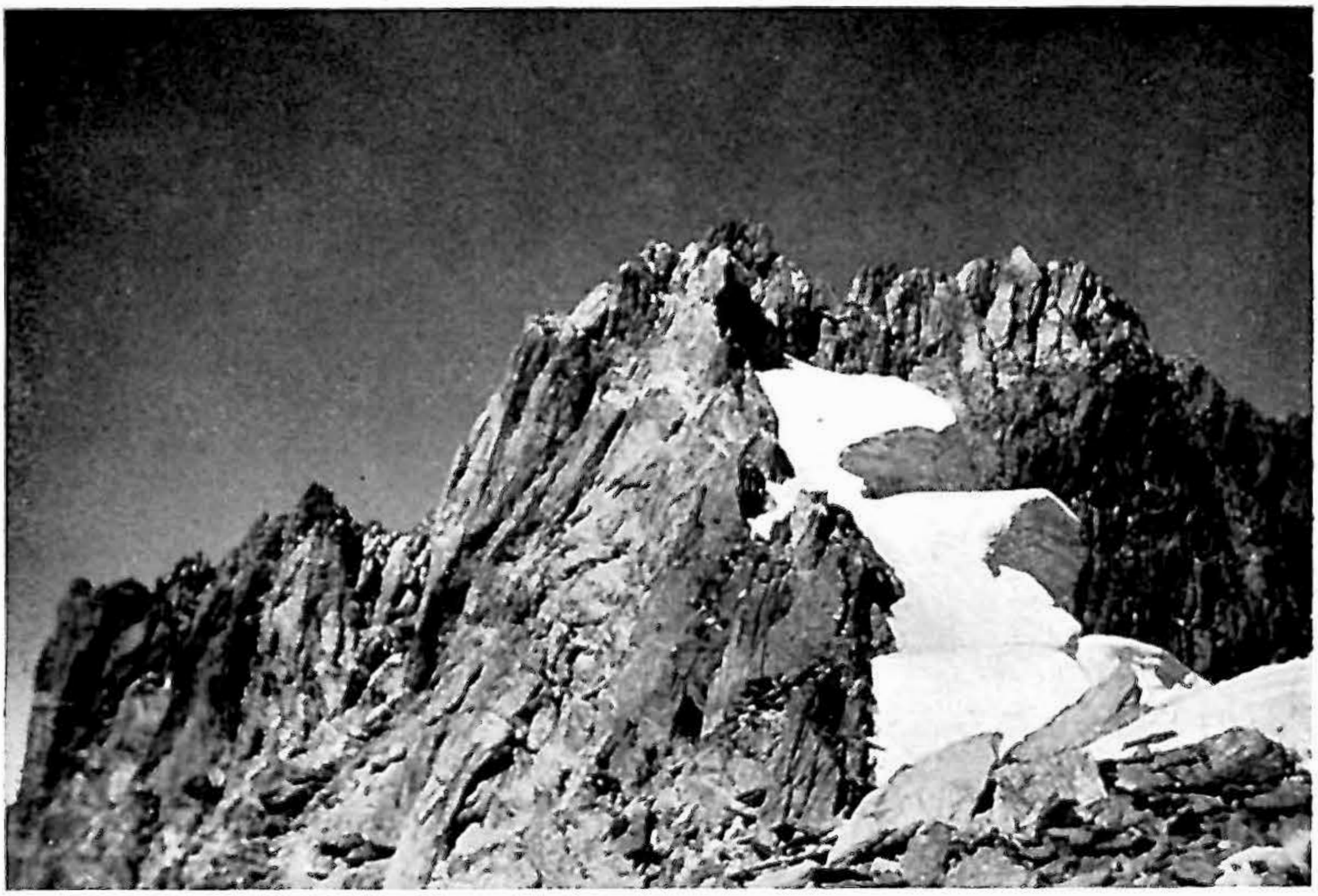
[2] The porters who pitched Camp II were: Domingo Peña (sirdar), Ventura Sanchez and Theofilo Zerpa.



Photo, A. E. Gunther.]

PICO HUMBOLDT (LEFT) (4945 m.), PICO BONPLAND (4894 m.), AND COLUMNA S. PEAK (RIGHT) FROM PICO BOLIVAR. S. ARÊTE OF PICO BOLIVAR AND COL BOURGOIN IN FOREGROUND.

[*To face p.* 130.



Photo, A. E. Gunther.]

PICO BOLIVAR (5005 m.) FROM ABOVE THE COL BOURGOIN, LOOKING N.W., SHOWING ROUTE OF ASCENT.

Photo, A. E. Gunther.]

LOOKING E. FROM THE COL BOURGOIN. LEFT: PICO LA CONCHA (4922 m.). RIGHT: E. ARÊTE OF COLUMINA S. PEAK.

The ascent of the Columna S. Peak was made from Camp II. Domingo Peña accompanied me. The Hermanas Glacier is in the last stages of decay, and one may crawl beneath it to examine ice-rock contacts. The top of the glacier is still of a piece perhaps a couple of hundred feet long ; lower down immense blocks of ice fill the floor of the valley. The chimney leading to the E. ridge is partly vertical and the rock bad. One of us had a narrow escape from a falling boulder on the descent. The route of ascent to the S. Peak seen from Pico Bolivar appeared simple enough, but we found it impossible to get on to the rock crest of the E. arête. From the névé platform at the top of the chimney we climbed upwards inside the bergschrund for about 100 ft., reaching a narrow shelf of rock 50 ft. below the crest. To the right, across a few feet of gaping bergschrund, the glacier slope fell steeply northwards ; to the left slabs of ice-smoothed rock rose to the crest. First, one of us crawled along the shelf to try the slabs upwards, but they offered no holds and the bergschrund gaped menacingly below. Then Domingo Peña, meaning business, took off his sandals and tried lower down with the same result. Even if we had got up it is difficult to see how we could have got down. For the moment it seemed as if we were beaten, for altitude is apt to make alternatives even more difficult when they mean renewed effort. The agonising thought of failure, with the summit less than 200 ft. off, brought us to our senses. There was still the ice route, but Domingo's sandals were not equal to it.

The bergschrund was lightly bridged below our shelf. The ice lip was narrow and rose steeply, and higher up overhung the chasm in a thin sheet. One could cut steps 6 ft. down and strap-hang with the other hand for some 50 ft. Then the slope flattened and steepened to a double-decked bridge below the higher rocks. There a short Mummery crack, one side of smooth rock, the other of ice, led to a rock shelf where one could rest. From there the route to the summit led over a spur and down into an exposed chimney on the W. face of the peak which fell, it seemed vertically, on to the Timoncito Glacier. From a ledge within this the summit was a scramble 30 ft. up. It was disappointing that Domingo Peña, who by his presence had contributed so much towards this climb, could not share in its success. A record of first ascent was left beneath a cairn at 10.30 A.M. on February 4.

It must not be supposed that the Columna S. Peak is a difficult climb ; it is not, only that unfitness and altitude together conspired to make it appear so. And it is true of most of the Andean peaks that, though higher, they lack the thrill and interest of the Alps. Pico Bolivar, for instance, has qualified at last for the tourist. Since 1939 it has fallen to several parties, among them one of fifteen students from the Colegio San Jose of Merida, and ascents are becoming more frequent. But many of these expeditions should be deprecated, for altitude and ice will never make the Pico a 'safe' mountain for the inexperienced. It would be a pity were the growth of interest in mountaineering in

Venezuela to receive a setback through the spirit of adventure overreaching itself as it has in some European countries.

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A FEW CLIMBS WITH CHRISTEN JOSSI.

By G. A. HASLER

Like the Piper of Hamelin, the Editor of the Alpine Journal would charm us back to the land of youth and yesterday, to that land of innocence where no one dreamt that brigandage on the grand scale could arise, that one would again see slave trading revive. In those days, one lived roughly, and went on short commons just to please oneself, spent winter nights in icy huts, had chilly bivouacs in the open in summer time, froze or sweated through arduous days, and thought it all grand.

It should be equally grand to write about, but for that foul miasma that lies across the world and overclouds those bright days. Look at the filth with which they are overlaid ! And when one has pushed the filth to one side, one is brought up short by the thought of a gallant civil population facing death and mutilation, day in, day out, of that multitude of men mounting guard on land, on sea, in the air.

And then, through the mirk, one sees our mountains, lovely, calm and aloof as ever, but one knows that on their high frontier ridges, bad weather or good, through the long cold winter nights, men are standing guard. They have their troubles too. Worries about wives and children, business, rising prices, dwindling stocks which cannot be replaced, hardly any fuel, shortage of everything. The mountain men know that their centres are empty. The townsmen know that their towns are deadly still. In fact it looks as if we should soon be taking in each other's washing, if we have anything left to wash, or any soap to wash it with. Both of which seem doubtful.

However, what once was, will return again some day, though I doubt