

steaming cups of coffee and milk with bread and honey. With rucksacks and nailed boots we clattered through the silent deserted streets in the half-light of a still summer dawn and bade farewell to Igor as we climbed into the train taking us back to Poprad Tatry whence we returned by air to Praha.

Czechoslovakia and the Tatra deserve to be better known. There are two guide books to the Tatra. One is *Hochgebirgsführer der Hohen Tatra*, by Dr. Gyula V. Komarnicki, published in 1918 by Turistik and Alpinismus of Budapest. This guide book is in German and gives the German names of the mountains with sometimes their Polish and Hungarian names, which are not necessarily the present Czech names. The other is *Vysoke Tatry*, by Kroutil and Gellner, published by Orbis, Praha 1947. This is an excellent book in two volumes. A copy is in the Club Library, but being in Czech is not of much use to the majority of people in this country.

July and August are the holiday months when the huts are crowded. It is said that it is better to go to the Tatra in September when the weather is often more settled and when the holiday crowds have left. The crowds, however, are in the huts and in no single case did we ever find another party doing the same climb as ourselves.

A first visit to a country, a range of mountains, and a people is always interesting and exciting and our visit to Czechoslovakia and the Tatra was no exception to the rule. I cannot, however, conclude without saying that the pleasure and interest of our visit was immensely heightened by the friendly welcome and help we had from everyone we met and not least by the thoughtful and well laid plans and the boundless hospitality of our many friends in the Federation of Czechoslovak Mountaineering Clubs.

BANDAR PUNCH AGAIN

BY R. L. HOLDSWORTH

THE party whose venture is to be herein described consisted of my colleague, J. T. M. Gibson, the originator of the idea, Major John Munro, Lieut. Narendra Dhar Juyal, M. P. Chennappa, a fifteen-year-old pupil of ours, and myself, with the Sherpas Tensin, Dawa Dondrup, and Dhian Sin. Leaving Chakrata on July 3, 1946, we pitched a base camp, on July 11, at approximately 12,000 ft. in the Upper Hanuman Ganga valley—as far as we could make out exactly on the site used by A. R. Leyden in his 1943 and 1944 attempts, following the route he has described.¹ Of the party, Gibson and Tensin had, with J. A. K. Martin, been the pioneers of the S.E. ridge of our mountain in 1937, and Dawa Dondrup had accompanied Leyden in 1943.

¹ *A.J.* 55, 173 *sqq.*

The monsoon which was active at Dehra Dun when we started, deserted us for four days in the Jamna valley where we should have welcomed some cooling showers. How grateful we should have been for those four days when we were on the mountain may be imagined. After that it rained with a vengeance, and we had great difficulty in keeping ourselves and our kit even relatively dry. My old (1931) Meade tent, in particular, was suffering from senile decay in every joint, and very soon gave up the pretence of affording any real shelter from the rain. Luckily we had adequate reserves of tentage.

On July 13, leaving Chengappa, who was visiting the mountains for the first time, with the guns, the two dogs, and the porters we did not need, at the base camp, we set out to push a camp as far up the mountain as possible, to be occupied by four climbers, three Sherpas and one local man, Mor Singh, with two Meade tents, a porter's tent, and a small bivouac tent. Mor Singh, a villager of Kasali, six miles from Jamnotri, came to us with a big reputation as a guide, created entirely by himself, since Leyden does not remember him. As a guide, even over the high pastures, he was more of a hindrance than a help, and was soon sent home.

The route was at first on the true right bank of the torrent that forms the northern branch of the Hanuman Ganga, and led through lush meadows ablaze with Asters, Blue Poppy, Geum and Primula. Soon the surroundings became more austere, and, after crossing the torrent where it formed several branches, we were presently treading the stone-covered ice of one of the main glaciers. We aimed for a rocky spur well up on the S.W. face of the peak, and some 2000 ft. above where Gibson and Martin had camped in 1937—in other words, about 16,000 ft. The Chakrata men, a tough and cheerful lot of Tehri-Garhwalis, did very well to carry up to this site, since the last 1000 ft. involved an unpleasant rock and snow gully, with very loose rock and considerable danger from dislodged stones. Here we were able to pitch a comfortable camp on rock and scree before hail, sleet and snow began to fall. We had brought up the ten best porters carrying what we could not manage ourselves, including three loads of wood, and they now returned to the base camp with orders to reprovision and refuel us as required. The weather and the cold soon drove us indoors. We found, by the way, that a fine morning almost invariably deteriorated before midday and our chances of success were narrowed by our inability to count on more than half a day's clear weather.

The next morning, July 14, however, was far from clear. Snow was falling. Since we were all four very keen 'on having a go' at the summit, and all three Sherpas equally keen, there was a formidable transport problem in establishing our next and final camp on the ridge. Seven men (unless they are Shiptons and Tilmans) cannot carry enough tents, bedding and food to live for a possible three nights on a ridge over 18,000 ft. high. It was therefore desirable to carry up some of the gear separately, and this could well be combined with a reconnaissance of the route to the S.E. ridge.

Martin and Gibson, in 1937, reaching the ridge by what became known as Martin's couloir, had camped at about 17,000 ft., and a long way horizontally from the summit. Leyden had camped rather higher and nearer. We had decided to find a camp site higher and still nearer, and to work out a safe route to the left of both previous routes. The weather showed signs of clearing before midday, and so we abandoned bridge, accelerated lunch and set out, all seven of us, carrying provisions for three days and other impedimenta which we could dump. Incredibly rotten but quite easy rock took us past a camp site, about 500 ft. above our own, which Dawa identified as one used by Leyden in 1943. Shortly above this a steep snowfield rose unbroken to the ridge. I funk'd climbing it direct since the snow was very soft, and it was warm, and instead we reached the ridge slightly to the right by a rather irritating route up rock ribs and smaller snow patches, without calling for the rope. By this time snow had started falling again. We had not found a possible camp site, but we had reached the ridge somewhat nearer the summit than Leyden had, and we reckoned that the afternoon had been profitably enough spent. We therefore dumped the provisions on the ridge in the shelter of some rocks. On the descent we decided to try the big snowfield, with all due precautions, and found, to our delight, that it was perfectly safe and showed no tendency at all to avalanche. This saved us valuable time.

The next day's plan was for ourselves to carry two Meade tents, the porters' tent, our sleeping bags, spare clothes and cooking gear, and to establish the ridge camp still higher and further along the ridge. The 15th dawned exceptionally brightly, but almost at once unpleasant clouds, fish-shaped and otherwise, were scudding up from the S., and draping themselves with insidious speed round the summit. The prospect looked beastly to me, and I was in favour of waiting a bit for the weather to declare itself. Others were in favour of starting before it got too bad. We decided to play bridge till 10 A.M., when the umpires would inspect the wicket. Mountaineering in the monsoon is not unlike cricket in an average English summer. In the meantime, everything was to be packed in readiness. Fortunately Juppiter Niveus (or Shiva, or Hanuman, or whoever controls the weather on Bandar Punch) intervened decisively at 9.30 A.M. and play was abandoned for the day by mutual consent.

It was unlikely that we should find on the ridge any place for a camp where the tents could be pitched on rock or scree, and everybody who has climbed in the Himalaya realises that, however mild the weather, sleeping on snow is a cold business, unless you have cork mattresses under you, or, better still 'Lilos.' We had cork mattresses, but unfortunately we had to leave them at the 16,000 ft. camp, as they were the heaviest part of our sleeping kit. As it was, without them, when we started off the next morning in fair weather, we were carrying loads of 35 lb. each, the Sherpas considerably more. This made the journey up to the ridge very tiring. Moreover, on the ridge itself,

just beyond where we had dumped the loads two days before, the snow was in places rotted right through, and I, probably the heaviest member of the party, was sinking in thigh deep ; so that I began to think that, if these were the conditions all along the ridge, an attempt on the summit would be futile. Fortunately these soggy places were curiously local and we soon got on to sounder snow. We pushed on up fairly steep snow slopes for perhaps 400 ft., when we emerged on the top of a subsidiary point which Gibson identified as the highest point he and Martin had reached in 1937. The height was about 18,200 ft.

From here the ridge dipped 50 ft. or so and continued more or less level to the foot of a rock ridge, ceasing to be a ridge at all at this point. The *névé* fell away abruptly on the left in a huge *sérac*, and very gradually on the right to form the snowfield of a big glacier running down in the general direction of Harsil. Above the rocks rose what appeared to be an exceptionally steep but short snow—or ice—slope. But the usual afternoon snowfall had blotted out the further prospect above this.

The Sherpas gallantly went back to fetch the dumped stores while we cut platforms in the snow on the ridge for our tents.

I have never before been cold at night sleeping at these or higher levels, but I have never before slept on snow without a mattress. The weather was mild, and even at this height there was only slight frost at night, but I was never really warm and slept very little. I rather think the other members of the party felt the same, though perhaps not so acutely. Bad nights are bad for moral, and it would, perhaps, have been better if we could have rested the next day and made our attempt the day after, but the impending end of Munro's leave made us all anxious to make an attempt without delay.

Owing partly to the bad night we had spent and partly to such things as wet boots, we did not make as early a start as we should have, and it was 7 A.M. before we got off, roped in two parties. Twenty minutes' walk took us across the level *névé* to the foot of the rocks. These consisted of a ridge of perhaps 1300 ft. vertically, set at an easy angle at first, but finishing in an impressive tower. The ridge was steep on the left hand side, and less so on the right. The rock was rather firmer than we had met hitherto, and without difficulty. After we had covered about half the distance, John Munro declared that he was feeling the effects of altitude and was uncertain of his steadiness. It was bad luck on him. We had to arrange for him to go back to camp with Dhian Sin. Shortly after, Jack Gibson said that he was not feeling too grand, and that he would return with Munro. I told Tensin to follow me and to finish the rocks unroped. He is a fine climber with a very shrewd notion of tactics, and, unless he was helping somebody else, the rope would be little more to him than a mild insult on these rocks. I then wasted valuable time myself by an error of judgment. I thought that we should save labour by moving on to the N.E. face so as to turn the final tower, but I found the rock on the face much more rotten than on the ridge and wrongly stratified. Making

our way again to the ridge we tackled the tower directly and found that it 'went' without difficulty.

We emerged on a small snowy platform (where a camp could, if necessary, be pitched without difficulty) which I recognised immediately as the place from which Leyden had taken his picture of the summit block. In front the ridge soared up, uncorniced but very sharp, at a very steep angle, at least 50° , I should say. To the left, on the S.W. face, above formidable ice cliffs, was a very distinctive shield of ice shaped like a number of scimitars, well seen in Leyden's picture. Beyond this slope, which was perhaps 250 ft. in vertical height, I knew the ridge levelled off and even, probably, dipped slightly, before soaring up again for some 700 ft. of equally steep snow and ice, with one formidable step in it which might prove too much for us. After this it eased off again to gentler slopes to the summit. But this last part was out of sight now because the weather was rapidly deteriorating, and all but the shorter steep slope was fogged out by mist and falling snow. There seemed, however, no reason why we should not tackle at least this first slope; after which we could again take stock of the position.

Tensin now came on to our rope and I put him into the lead, as he was obviously the strongest of us and there would be a good deal of step-cutting to do. For the first 100 ft. we were able to kick straight up the ridge. The snow, though not hard, was in good condition for kicking—we had decided to leave crampons behind. Then Tensin struck hard ice under six inches to a foot of snow, and with his instinct for doing the right thing began to cut steps. It was not necessary to cut elaborate steps so long as the pick went into the ice, and four or five blows of the axe were enough. In this way we passed well above the highest point reached by Leyden, which he estimated at 19,800 ft., and reached the top of the short steep slope, above the 'shield.' Beyond us the ridge, now heavily corniced, rose very gently. We could see no further. As I have said, a slope three times as long and quite as steep rose beyond, obscured by swirling mists. It was 11.30 A.M. We had, I reckoned, some four hours of hard work to get to the top and we should be little if at all quicker coming down that steep exposed ridge. True to form, after a fair morning, the weather was going bad on us. How bad would it get? I knew very little of monsoon conditions on a high and very exposed Himalayan ridge. If it were no more than snow drizzle without wind, we might push on safely even at the risk of being benighted. But if there was severe wind, we might easily succeed in 'cooking our goose.' Then there was the factor of exhaustion. The Sherpas, I felt, were all right. I was going fairly well, considering I am not nearly as young as I should like to be, but, as nominally in charge of the party, I was anxious to maintain a certain reserve of strength. Narendra Dhar was still going strongly. Considering that this was only his second visit to these heights, he had done extremely well. He had climbed the rocks without trouble, and appeared quite steady on the snow slope. But he was only nineteen years old and I knew that young climbers are liable to reach the end

of their tether without giving themselves or anyone else any warning signs. If we were caught in an exhausted state in a violent wind coming down that long steep ridge ahead of us, I felt it would require more than a little favour from the Lord Shiva to pull us through. So, reluctantly, and greatly to his disappointment, I signalled retreat.

At the top of the rocks we stopped for lunch, and reached camp without further incident at about 2.30 P.M. I had hoped that we might have a rest day on the morrow, and return to the attack the day after. But this would not allow John Munro time to rejoin his unit, and so we decided to break up the ridge camp and go back that evening to 16,000 ft. From there Gibson, Munro, Narendra Dhar and Tensin were to climb one of the Hanuman peaks—which they successfully did—while I was to make my way back alone and at ease to the base. After that, and after the rest of the party had rejoined their units, or gone home, Gibson and I were to go up and try our luck again. But a sharp attack of fever put me, and a chill on the liver put Gibson, out of the projected hunt, and we had to content ourselves, by the kindness of His Highness of Tehri-Garhwal, with some fabulous trout-fishing in the Dodital lake, whence we walked back by way of the Bagirathi to Mussoorie.

It was, of course, foolish to attempt the mountain in the monsoon, and the 1946 monsoon was a regular 'bumper.' But that couldn't be helped. Schoolmasters can't be choosers. They have to climb in their holidays, monsoon or no monsoon. I think the mountain would 'go' perfectly well in June, before the rains break, when one could be reasonably certain of fine weather. The snow conditions high up would be as good as or better than we found in July. There might be a certain amount of winter snow lower down, which might make progress difficult for the Chakrata coolies below 16,000 ft., though I believe that the latter, if well treated, and assured reasonable shelter at night, would be tough enough and keen enough to overcome these difficulties. Certainly this would be a better time than September or October, when, although the weather would be perfect, the slopes above 'the rocks' would be ice slopes.

We were, in point of fact, short of manpower. To establish seven summit-seekers in fit condition on the ridge needs more than seven carriers. We took too much out of ourselves in carrying our bedding up to the ridge, and even so we were short of bedding—at least I was. It would have been better if the summit party had been reduced to three, the remainder converting themselves sacrificially into beasts of burden, to establish the ridge camp and to return to the fleshpots of the 16,000 ft. camp. But we were all desperately keen to have a go at the summit, and so we had to make the best arrangement possible under the circumstances. After all we climb for our own collective pleasure.

The mountain is a good one. It might be described as a glorified and much more beautiful Lyskaman, lacking the unfortunate ugliness of that peak, and, even under the most favourable circumstances, it will not be a gift to anyone.