

## EVEREST, 1953

## (I) NARRATIVE OF THE EXPEDITION

BY JOHN HUNT AND MICHAEL WESTMACOTT

*The substance of Sir John Hunt's account given to the Alpine Club on November 10, 1953.*

*Introduction*

THE background to our attempt on Everest is well known to readers of the *Alpine Journal*. We must ask them to keep in mind the long history of previous attempts and reconnaissances; and also to do justice to the many who worked so hard to see us on our way, including the Joint Himalayan Committee. We also assume that the main features of the mountain on the Nepalese side are familiar to all readers and that the outline plan of our attempt is broadly known from the articles by the leader of the expedition, published in *The Times* before its departure. We therefore pass over the long weeks of planning and preparation. A description of the work involved might well fill this number of the *Journal*. The inventory alone took up thirty foolscap pages.

*The Approach*

We started from Bhadgaon, some 10 miles outside Kathmandu. On 10th March the first party, 9 sahibs, Tenzing and 16 other climbing Sherpas, and 180 coolies, were ready to move. Hunt was to catch up this party on the following day, when the second party was also due to start. This second party consisted of Wylie, Ward and Pugh with 3 Sherpas, another 200 coolies and 5 Gurkha N.C.O.'s. to help to control them. The main bulk of the loads was made up of food and oxygen. Another 60 loads of oxygen were brought up some five weeks later by Major J. O. M. Roberts.

It was a great relief to be off at last, with a fortnight's leisurely travel in front of us and with time to regain a sense of proportion. The wood had sometimes been in danger of getting lost behind the trees. Now the members of the party could get to know each other well. We were soon a happy team. We began to know and understand our Sherpas, too, though we were to find that the valley is not the best place to assess a Sherpa's worth on the mountain. Tenzing, with his frank manner and welcoming smile, was soon a friend to all of us.

For twelve days we made our way eastwards, along the route followed by the Swiss, the regular trade route from Kathmandu to Khumbu. The country was varied and magnificent. Paddy fields, heavily cultivated hillsides, grassy downs, jungle, scrub and pleasant woods, succeeded one another as we climbed, descended and climbed again, cutting across the grain of the country, towards the Dudh Kosi.

Risingo we remember particularly. The first party camped in the courtyard of a small Buddhist temple and were caught by a violent storm soon after the big mess tent had been pitched. Hailstones as big as moth balls drove everyone under cover, and the wind threatened to bring down on our heads the great masts, from which prayer flags were being torn in strips.

Junbesi, too, is memorable. It was the first stage inside the Sherpa country. It is the 'county town' of Sola and is set in a charming Alpine valley. We camped that night beside the stream and next morning walked through pine woods and over grassy slopes until we rounded a spur and saw Everest in the distance. It was not quite our first sight of the mountain, but it was the first time we had been able to make out any details. Our excitement at being so near to it was tempered by sobering thoughts on the nature of our undertaking.

We reached the Dudh Kosi on the 22nd, crossed it by a ramshackle bridge of logs and turf and then turned north and followed it. 'Following the Dudh Kosi' by the recognized track resembles nothing so much as a game of 'snakes and ladders.' The track winds up and down the sides of the valley, visiting every village and making apparently pointless zigzags. The 18 miles or so to Namche Bazar took us over three days.

Namche itself is not a beautiful place, though it has a fine view down the Dudh Kosi. With its rows of box-like houses set on regular terraces, it looks curiously like some mining village. Thyangboche, on the other hand, far exceeded all our expectations; it was here that we intended to establish a first Base Camp, for the preliminary training period before moving to the foot of Everest. From Namche a pleasant walk along the side of a hill is followed by a sharp drop down to cross the Imja Khola. After breakfast by the stream, a stiff pull takes one some 1,500 ft. up to the monastery. Nothing is seen until the very top of the path is reached and then, all at once, you see the monastery crowning a gentle slope to the left, and a pleasant alp before you and on the right. Behind, framing this peaceful scene, are the steep walls of the valley of the Imja, running up to ranges of fantastic peaks on the right and left; and at the head is Everest, a massive shoulder hunched above the tremendous south wall of Nuptse.

#### *First Base Camp*

We pitched our camp on a grassy alp near the monastery buildings and spent the next few days carrying out one of those periodic reorganizations of kit familiar to all Himalayan climbers. The coolies were paid off, the stores were unpacked and heaped in more or less orderly piles, Bourdillon set up a field workshop for the oxygen, Band started to test the wireless sets, personal kit was issued, stoves and tents were checked, plans were made. The whole party paid a visit to the monastery, where we were entertained to tea, strong rakshi, and miscellaneous foods, by the senior lama. The abbot, a young boy, was at Rongbuk, but a ceremonial muslin scarf was draped over his chair as a gift.

On the 29th and 30th the party left Thyangboche in three groups for the first half of the acclimatization period. These invaluable training trips had many objects. The first was acclimatization to whatever height could be reached in the limited time; we hoped to reach 19,000 or 20,000 ft. Among the other aims were experiments and practice in the use of oxygen; the training and selection of Sherpas for the crucial jobs high on the mountain; tests of the high altitude ration, of tents, boots and other equipment.

### *Training*

Evans' party, consisting of Band, Bourdillon and Westmacott, with 4 Sherpas and 6 local coolies, made their way up the left bank of the Imja for some 5 miles before striking eastwards up a valley immediately to the south of Ama Dablam. This valley had been entered from the east, from the Hongu glacier, by Shipton and Hillary in 1951, over a col which they named the Ama Dablam col.

The first camp was pitched at about 16,000 ft. on the grazing grounds known as Mingbo. From there an afternoon's reconnaissance was made to see if there was a practicable route over the left wall of the valley towards the foot of Kangtega. From three points on the ridge it appeared quite obvious that there was no route at all, so the decision was made to carry on straight up the valley. The next camp was accordingly carried to about 17,500 ft. on the south-west ridge of Ama Dablam and pitched there on March 30th.

The next two days were taken up with tests of both types of oxygen apparatus, which were found to be entirely satisfactory and to prevent any effects of altitude up to the highest point reached on the ridge—about 19,500 ft. Beyond this point the ridge became at first much more rotten and then steepened so much as to appear quite impossible.

On 2nd April Evans, Band and Westmacott, with three Sherpas, set off to find a way to the col some distance south of that crossed by Shipton two years before, while Bourdillon carried out an endurance test on the closed circuit set. The col, which was tentatively named Mera La, was reached after 3 hours of rough going across moraine and glacier and about 1½ hours of steep snow work on the final slope. On their return the sahibs of the party suffered severely from altitude sickness—in contrast to their experience with oxygen at about the same height on the previous two days.

On the 3rd Bourdillon took up a light camp to the col, the height of which was estimated to be about 19,800 ft.; and he was followed the next day by the rest of the party. Bourdillon made an attempt on a snow peak immediately to the south of the col, but was turned back by dangerous snow conditions after a few hundred feet. On the following day the party made its way back to Thyangboche.

A second party, consisting of Hunt, Gregory, Lowe and Tenzing, camped beneath the south face of Nuptse, two marches up the Imja Khola, at about 17,000 ft. During five days spent at this camp they

succeeded in climbing a snow and rock peak, which they named Chukhung Peak, immediately beneath Nuptse ; its height is slightly under 19,500 ft. Like Evans' party they also carried out some useful oxygen training and tried, unsuccessfully, to force a crossing from the head of their glacier—which they called the Nuptse glacier—to the Khumbu glacier. The third party, which included Hillary, Noyce, Ward and Wylie, made a remarkable circuit of the Taweche Peaks to the north of Thyangboche. During this round tour they climbed two peaks, the higher of which, locally known as Kangcho, is over 20,000 ft.

After returning for two days' rest and reorganization at Thyangboche, the expedition again divided into three parties, differently composed, for a second period of training. Hunt's party now included Bourdillon, Ward and Noyce. They again went up the Imja Khola but this time turned to the right to reach a glen immediately to the north of Ama Dablam. From this they climbed a very attractive rock peak by an easy route ; it is known locally as Umbu Gyabjen. Its height was reckoned to be at least 19,500 ft. After three days in this area they returned to the Imja River and continued north-west across an 18,000 ft. pass, descending to the east bank of the Khumbu glacier. From the pass three members of the party climbed another 20,000 ft. peak which is known locally as Pokalde. They then moved up the glacier and rested at the Lake Camp one march below the eventual Base Camp, before going up to take over from Hillary's party on the ice-fall..

Hillary's party, consisting of Lowe, Band and Westmacott, went from Thyangboche straight to the foot of the ice-fall in order to reconnoitre and prepare the route up this formidable obstacle.

The value of these periods of training and acclimatization was undoubtedly very great ; they were a most important factor in our success this year. By the time the party had gathered at Base Camp towards the end of April everyone had reached an equal standard of fitness and acclimatization to height ; we were all acclimatized to about 20,000 ft. This meant that we had no difficulty from the point of view of altitude in going straight to the top of the ice-fall. The preparatory period certainly paid a very big dividend, both from this and other points of view. We gained confidence in our equipment and also in each other, Sherpas and members of the expedition alike.

#### *Reconnaissance and Preparation of the Ice-fall*

A camp was set up on 12th April by Hillary's party, with five Sherpas and forty-odd coolies approximately on the site of the future Base Camp. They had some trouble on the way with snow-blindness among the coolies, owing to persistent falls of snow in the afternoon, but this was overcome by improvising forty pairs of goggles with adhesive tape and small squares of talc. The fitting of the goggles caused great amusement among the coolies, who carried well, in spite of most unpleasant conditions in the last two days, across snow covered moraine and glacier.

A few tent platforms were soon cleared on the site of the old Swiss

Camp I, which was littered with tins and the usual camp débris. The Swiss had also left behind some firewood, which was very welcome. Kirken, our second cook, began to build a kitchen, but he had no sooner finished it, four or five days later, than the camp was moved to a flatter and cleaner site some hundred yards downstream.

On the 13th, Hillary, Band and Westmacott, with three Sherpas carrying tents for Camp II, walked up the glacier for a few hundred yards until they were opposite the foot of the ice-fall. Hillary had thought, drawing on his experience in 1951, that Camp II might be established that same day. But as soon as the party had a near view of the fall, it was obvious that it had changed radically for the worse and that some days' work would be needed before any camp could be carried. The Sherpas then dumped their loads and returned to base while the three sahibs started work on the lower part of the ice-fall.

That first day a height of about 19,300 ft. was reached, almost level with the eventual site of Camp II, but separated from it by an impassable jumble of blocks and gaping crevasses. Often, at later stages, attempts were made to improve the route followed that day, but it was remarkable that only minor changes were made.

The next day Band found a shorter and better route from base to the foot of the steep part, while Hillary, Westmacott and Da Namgyal found a way to the snowy scoop which was to hold Camp II. The approach was worthy of the camp. It lay across a little hollow seamed by crevasses; separating the crevasses were rickety walls of piled blocks, over which one picked one's way as delicately as Agag, hoping that the Sherpas were exercising the same care. This section used to change from day to day and was known as the 'Atom Bomb Area.'

In addition to the Atom Bomb Area, immediately below Camp II, there were a number of different pitches on some of which we fixed ropes, and some very big crevasses. One especially unpleasant area was known as 'Hell Fire Alley,' a steep section up which the track threaded its way between, over and even underneath ice boulders of all shapes and sizes, many of them unstable, some of them as big as houses. This part of the route, the result of a fairly recent collapse of the ice below the terrace on which Camp II was situated, was the scene of a number of incidents. A sérac crashed down on one occasion as a party of Sherpas led by Gregory was climbing beneath it; the mass of ice passed between Gregory and the Sherpa next behind him, actually grazing the latter. It was probably the nearest moment to disaster of any during the whole of our time on the mountain. Another sérac became so imminent a menace that Noyce, chipping away at its base and finally pushing with a log used as a battering ram, felled it before it could do any damage.

On 15th April an attempt was made by Hillary, Band and Lowe to find an alternative route much further to the right. The going was easy for three-quarters of the way, but then became much harder and very much more dangerous. The alternative was then abandoned and Camp II was established on a terrace some two-thirds of the total way

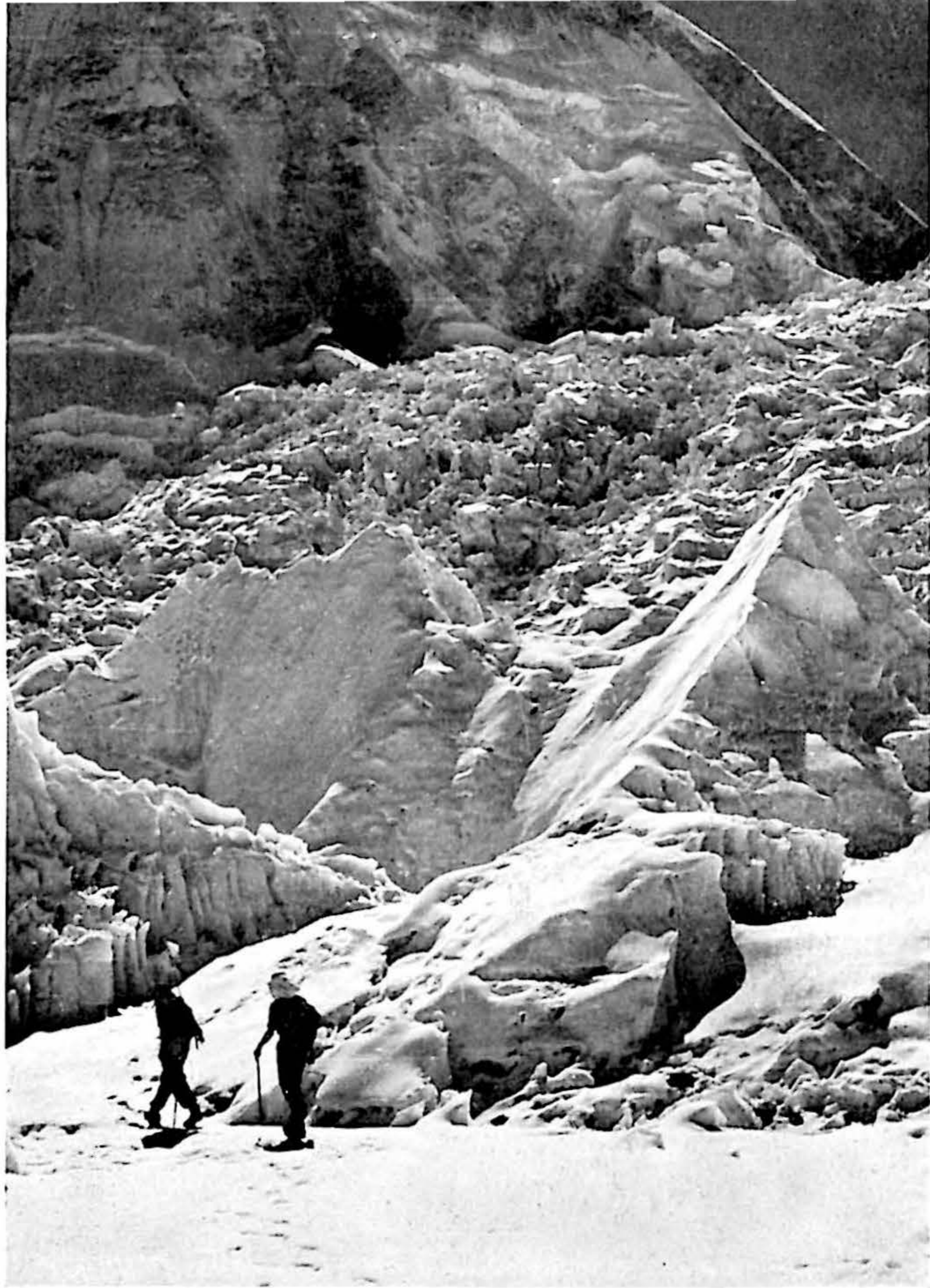
between the foot of the ice-fall and the lip of the Western cwm on 16th April. This camp was never popular. One was oppressed by the nearness of the ice cliffs above, by eerie noises beneath the surface, and by the repeated sound of a falling block or of an avalanche coming down the side walls. Later on we had to abandon this camp when crevasses opened across the site.

Above Camp II the character of the ice-fall changed. Below, it had been a ruin, a labyrinth of crevasses and tumbled blocks. Higher up rank on rank of huge slices of glacier towered above one like ice-bergs. The track zigzagged from left to right and back again amongst the séracs, discovering the weak points in their armour and bringing one eventually on to the level top of the largest and highest of them. One particularly dangerous section was a wide trough partly filled with the débris of a recent subsidence in the ice, but containing also a deep slanting crevasse overhung by a wide and steep slope loaded with huge ice boulders, even more unstable than those in Hell Fire Alley. The trough was entered by the aid of a hand-line and crossed over some rickety blocks of ice to reach the lower lip of the crevasse. The crevasse could only be crossed at one point, and this was effected by the aid of two sections of our metal ladder. It widened appreciably during our stay, and we had later to lengthen the span of the ladder by lashing logs beneath it.

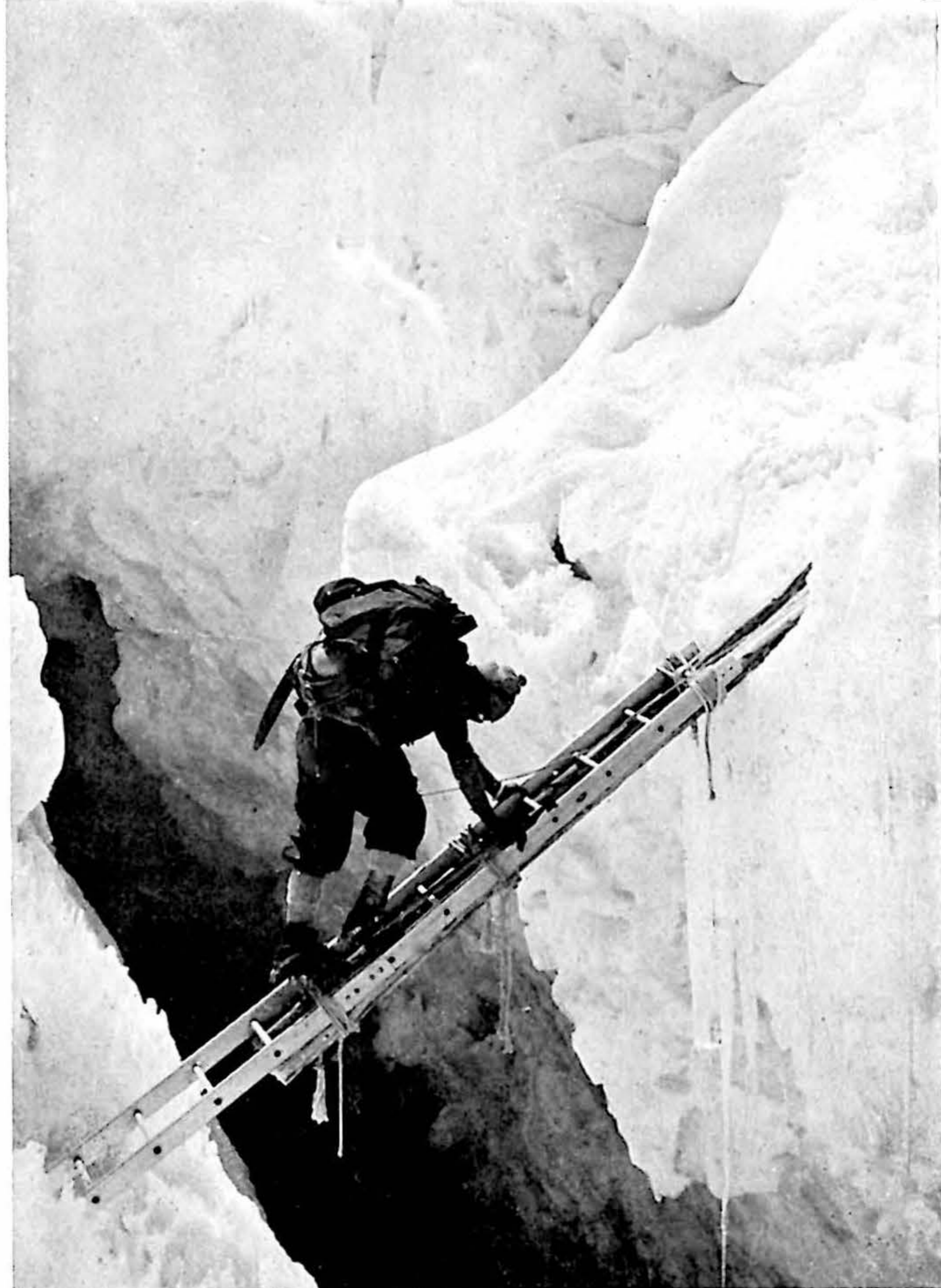
Another unpleasant pitch was named 'The Nutcracker.' This occurred at the top of the ice-fall where the surface of the Western cwm broke away over the steeper gradient below. We had to contour round the foot of the ice cliff thus formed to reach a vertical ice crack by which the cliff was climbed. In doing so, it was necessary to pass between the cliff and a section of the ice which had parted from it, forming a narrow cleft. On more than one occasion a Sherpa fell into the crack in this cleft owing to the collapse of the débris, and had to be rescued.

The lip of the Western cwm was reached on the 17th by Hillary, Band and Lowe. They emerged on to comparatively flat ground by climbing this difficult crack, perhaps 40 ft. in height. Later, we used our rope ladder for scaling the cliff. The ice-fall had been climbed and a fairly safe way up it was practicable. Now the preparation of the route for porters had to be completed and the first stage of the build-up could begin.

The improvement of the ice-fall route was, initially, the task of Noyce, Ward, Hunt and Westmacott, but it became a continuing labour of many hands throughout our time on the mountain. In fact, few parties went up to it without cutting more steps, or placing marker flags; and, in the early stages, there was usually another rope to fix, or another log to lay across a crevasse. The aluminium ladder, in five 6-ft. sections, was most useful. It was at first used in two parts on the ice-fall and later the lower part was replaced by timber and taken up to the foot of the cwm to bridge a 16-ft. gap. This was the point of entry into the Western cwm.



RECONNAISSANCE IN THE ICEFALL.



SERPAS CROSSING A BRIDGE OF LOGS AND SECTION OF A LIGHT LADDER IN THE ICEFALL.

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### *Base Camp Established*

While the work of reconnoitring and preparing the ice-fall was in progress, another party had been busy closing our former Base Camp at Thyangboche and moving up the remainder of our stores to the foot of the ice-fall. This party consisted of Wylie, Evans, Tenzing, Gregory and later, Bourdillon. They arrived in two groups on 21st and 22nd April, accompanied by Roberts who had arrived at Thyangboche on the 16th bringing the second consignment of oxygen equipment. With them also was James Morris of *The Times*. The new Base Camp was established, in a slightly better position than that used by the Swiss last autumn, on 22nd April.

### *The Build-up*

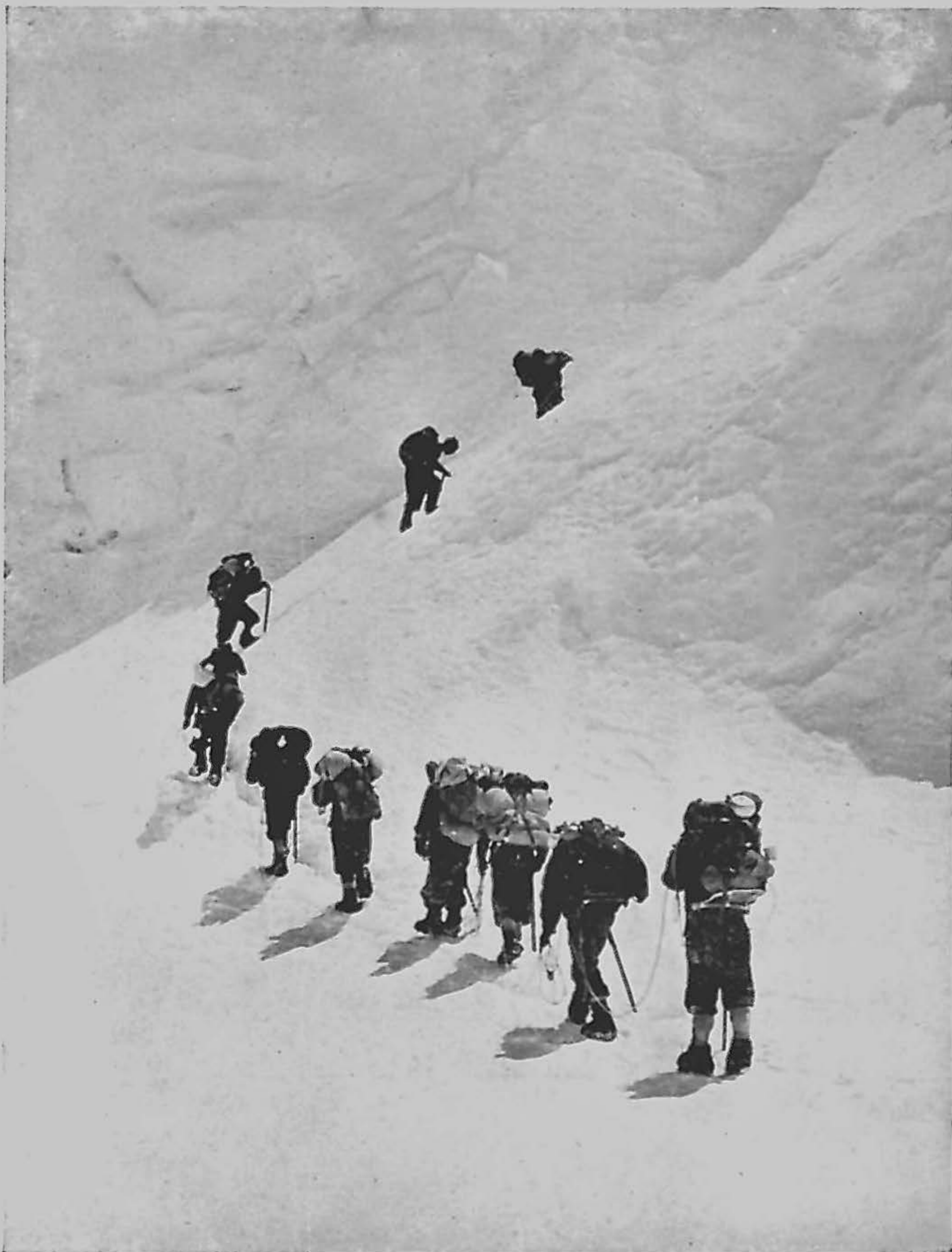
We were now ready to start what we termed the 'Build-up,' the lifting of some three and a half tons of stores to the head of the Western cwm. Careful thought had been given to this problem in London, and to the numbers of Sherpas necessary to carry it out and the time required to complete it. A total period of three weeks had been estimated, with 28 Sherpas working in a system of ferries, partly in the ice-fall and partly in the Western cwm.

The first stage of the Build-up involved lifting about one and a half tons of stores to Camp III at the top of the ice-fall, and onwards to Camp IV, near the head of the Western cwm, which was to become our Advance Base for the assault. Every day one or two parties of a sahib and seven Sherpas would leave Base for Camp II. The following day they would start early, dump their loads at Camp III, and return to Base by about midday, ready to repeat the process next day. It was a tedious and exacting job, but it was satisfactory to notice the pile of stores waiting at Base gradually dwindling away; the Sherpas and sahibs worked together well and confidently. Not least among our achievements was that of turning the ascent of the ice-fall into an accepted, humdrum, everyday task, despite the considerable risks and the handicap imposed by the weather. This factor of weather needs to be emphasized, for it exercised a mental as well as physical strain upon us all. It probably helped to account for the casualties which we suffered during the Build-up period due to various chest and stomach ailments.

From the moment when we had started the second period of acclimatization the weather had been bad. Every afternoon snow fell and daily the track had to be re-made through the ice-fall, sometimes by ploughing through a foot of new snow. This made the work of lifting the stores a very tiring one and greatly increased the time required for each journey.

### *Reconnaissance of the Lhotse Face*

Camp III was established at 20,200 ft. on 22nd April and the route into the cwm explored on that day by Hunt, Band and Hillary. On the 25th the big crevasse, discovered during this earlier reconnaissance, was bridged by three sections of the ladder, and a way found by Hunt,



WYLIE AND SHERPAS ON LHOTSE FACE, ON THE WAY UP TO THE SOUTH COL.

Hillary and Evans among the maze of crevasses in the floor of the cwm to the site of the Swiss Camp IV at about 21,200 ft.

Then came the task of moving the bulk of the loads from Camp III to Camp IV. Another ferry service of seven Sherpas with Noyce and Gregory started on this job on the 26th. They were seriously handicapped by heavy falls of snow, which made it necessary to remake the tracks afresh every day, no small effort at that altitude.

The time had now come to consider the second major technical obstacle—the Lhotse face. On 2nd May, Hunt, Evans and Bourdillon, using closed circuit oxygen, left Camp IV for a preliminary reconnaissance. They were followed next day by Wylie and Ward. Moving with great difficulty owing to recent heavy falls of snow, they passed the site of the Swiss Camp V and climbed a short distance up the steep section of the Lhotse glacier, probably reaching 22,600 ft. They returned to Camp IV and the following day established Camp V on the site of the Swiss autumn camp. Hunt then returned to Base with two sick Sherpas, while Evans and Bourdillon, supported by Ward and Wylie, continued the reconnaissance.

On May 4th a single tent was put up at a height of about 23,000 ft. This bivouac on a narrow ledge was dignified by the name of Camp VI. It was in the same place as the Swiss autumn camp and was reached by much the same route; some of the Swiss ropes were still in place. The going was extremely arduous and the route-finding very difficult, in spite of occasional traces of the Swiss. On the 5th, Bourdillon and Evans continued to push up the face, in atrocious weather and through deep unstable snow, to a height of nearly 24,000 ft., before returning to Camp IV and eventually to Base.

This reconnaissance enabled the Leader to decide the plan of assault. A theoretical plan had, of course, been worked out in London as a basis for the planning and preparation of the expedition; since that time two possible alternatives had been evolved, both based on a double assault, with a possible third attempt timed to take place some time after the first two in the event of their failure. Broadly speaking, Plan A would consist of two successive attempts using open circuit oxygen apparatus; in Plan B, one attempt would be made with the closed circuit system and the other with the open circuit. The general pattern of each type of assault was to be similar, with the important difference that in the second alternative (Plan B), the closed circuit attempt would be made direct from the South col without using an intermediate camp on the South-east ridge, thus saving time and economizing on the amount of stores to be lifted up the Lhotse face. As a result of the trials of both types of oxygen equipment during the reconnaissance, the closed circuit-cum-open circuit plan was adopted.

All was now prepared for a crucial stage of the attempt—the preparation of the face and the building up of the South col camp. The reconnaissance had confirmed what we had gathered from Swiss accounts: that a great deal of work would be necessary to make a good route for porters, and that even then the face presented a major obstacle,



LHOTSE FACE FROM THE WESTERN CWM.

both on account of the actual climbing difficulties and of the rarified atmosphere. The face is very steep and very long, probably 3,000 ft. from Camp V to the top of the glacier and another 1,000 ft. on the rising traverse to the col—a total of 4,000 ft. from the bergschrund to the South col. The combined effects of altitude and of daily falls of fresh snow made movement exhausting, even up a prepared track. The Lhotse face was clearly a problem which threatened to exhaust the resources of the party.

The reconnaissance had taken place during a break in the work of ferrying the loads upwards, during which most of the Sherpas and about half of the climbing party went down the glacier to a grazing alp named Lobuje for a well-earned rest. With their return on 6th May the second half of the Build-up programme was resumed, the teams being reconstituted so as to provide variety. In the first half, the main work had been in the ice-fall: now the emphasis was in the Western cwm. At the same time, a party was sent to prepare the Lhotse face, following the report of the reconnaissance party. This consisted of Lowe, Westmacott and Band with four of the best Sherpas: Ang Nyima, Da Tenzing, Ang Namgyal and Gyalgen. Unfortunately Band fell sick before this party set out. Gyalgen and Westmacott were by no means well.

After the Swiss experience of the direct route towards the South col, crossing the bergschrund and making straight for the couloir beside the Éperon des Genevois, we had chosen the more indirect route by the Lhotse glacier. The term is misleading for it is, in fact, a glaciated slope rather than a glacier. Its character is very different from that of the ice-fall. Photographs taken in 1951 and 1952 showed exactly the same conformation of walls and ledges as faced us this year. There was a comforting feeling of stability, at least as far as the larger features were concerned. The technical difficulties, however, were no less and the general angle considerably greater. Ice walls succeeded sloping ledges, apparently without end. A thousand feet of fixed rope was used on the face. It was a period of tremendously hard work for those engaged in preparing the way.

On 10th May, Lowe arrived at Camp V with Ang Nyima and three other Sherpas, and the next day they made their way with great difficulty (and without oxygen) to Camp VI. Lowe and Ang Nyima remained at Camp VI, while the other Sherpas returned to Camp V to begin a ferry service between the two camps. Westmacott followed to Camp V on the 11th, but was forced to return sick to Base after two days' work between Camps V and VI. Lowe remained at Camp VI or VII for no less than ten days, working daily on the route above and below him. Noyce joined Lowe on the 15th and they established Camp VII at about 24,000 ft., two-thirds the way up the glacier, on the 17th. Here Noyce was relieved next day by Ward, who remained with Lowe until they both descended on the 20th.

No praise is too high for this party which laboured on the Lhotse face, between 22,000 and 25,000 ft. for a period of ten days. Severely

handicapped in the first part by the atrocious weather—steps had repeatedly to be re-made and the track stamped out afresh, the climbers ploughing thigh-deep in heavy fresh snow—and, their numbers reduced by sickness, they did a wonderful job. It had been intended that the route should be prepared at least as far as the initial part of the traverse—from the top of the glaciated slope across to the Éperon couloir—but this could not be quite completed before it became essential to press on with the assault programme. Eventually it became obvious that the magnificent effort of Lowe, assisted latterly by Ward, was petering out.

### *The South Col ' Carry '*

Meanwhile the expedition had been drawing in its tail. Advance Base (hitherto Camp IV) was set up on 18th May leaving open only the most slender lines of communication behind it. The stores were ready, the assault teams were waiting, the weather had at long last improved—it changed suddenly for the good on 14th May—still the way to the col was not open ; we began to wonder how much time was left us before the onset of the monsoon. In fact, it was clear that we could not afford to delay any longer before making an attempt on the summit. Although the weather reports showed the monsoon to be still in the area of the Andamans, we knew that it might develop with sudden speed, as had happened in 1936 ; moreover, the weather was now perfect, and the prolonged period of waiting at Camp IV was proving a strain on us all. But there remained one more thing to do before the assault parties could be sent up. Many hundreds of pounds of stores had to be lifted to the South col ; this was the final and most critical part of the Build-up.

Noyce left Camp V on 20th May with eight Sherpas, two of them reserves. His instructions were to get his men to the col if possible, but to use his own discretion whether to go on himself to prepare the route first, or to attempt the carry immediately. Wylie, with the second South col team of nine Sherpas, followed a day later. Each of these parties included two reserves, to allow for sickness or other inability to continue at any time on the Lhotse face.

On the 21st Noyce found that his Sherpas were too tired to attempt the long and unprepared route to the col without oxygen, so he adopted the second plan. He and the Sherpa, Annullu, both wearing the open circuit, left Camp VII at 10 A.M. and made their way, slowly but steadily, up the remaining third of the glacier until they reached the point at which they must begin to traverse. Up to this point the going was typical of the Lhotse face ; soft snow on the ledges was succeeded by steep ice walls. The problem of the state of the snow on the traverse had been exercising our minds for some time. The Swiss had fixed a handline across the first hundred feet as a safeguard. It was with something like disbelief, followed by a mounting sense of confidence, that watchers at Advance Base now saw Noyce and Annullu moving steadily—almost fast—up and across the face to the great

shallow couloir beside the Éperon des Genevois. The snow was clearly in good condition and it seemed that we would avoid the necessity of fixing a rope as the Swiss had done. Noyce and Annullu had reached the top of the glacier at 12.30 ; soon after half-past two they were looking down on the South col at the tattered remnants of last year's Swiss camps.

Great as was our relief that the col had been reached, it was obvious that the most important task—the carrying of stores for the last two camps—still lay ahead. Hunt decided to send up Hillary and Tenzing to Camp VII in case there was any difficulty in persuading enough Sherpas to leave for the col on the next day. This was not an easy decision, for this pair were the summit party-elect for the second assault. The timing of this assault was certain to be disrupted and there was a danger that the strength of Hillary and Tenzing might be expended in this preliminary task. Short of taking men from the first assault party, however, there was no alternative and first things had to come first—it was quite essential to the plan that the South col 'carry' should be completed. As it happened, the successful climb by Annullu and Noyce and their return apparently unscathed, had worked wonders with the morale of all at Camp VII. But Hillary and Tenzing did much to ensure the successful carry to the col on May 22nd by making tracks ahead of the others and encouraging them throughout the length of that heartbreaking climb.

Watching from below, it was with an immense sense of relief that we saw no less than seventeen figures leave Camp VII and make their way slowly up across to the col. One Sherpa did not complete the climb—but the remarkable thing is that there was only one—and even his load was taken on by Wylie. Over 500 lb. of stores were carried to the col on that vital day.

### *The First Assault*

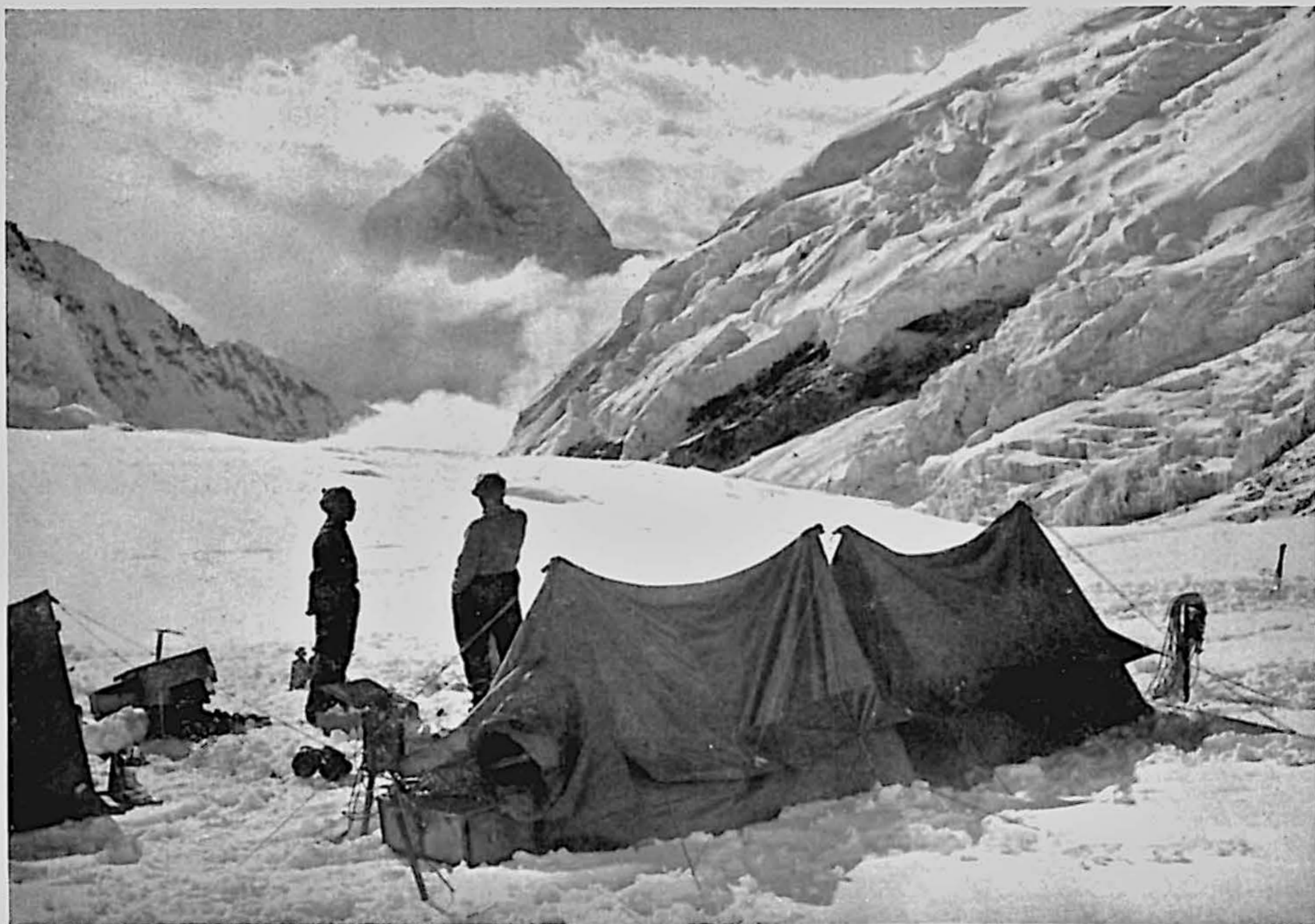
The first assault could now be launched. Using the closed circuit apparatus, heavier and more uncomfortable but considerably more powerful than the open circuit, Evans and Bourdillon were to make an attempt from the South col. Their instructions were to reach the South summit if possible, and then, if they had ample supplies of oxygen, if they were fit and had plenty of time, only then they were to try for the higher North summit. They were accompanied to the South col by Hunt, with Da Namgyal and Ang Tenzing, alias 'Balu,' who were to carry some of the stores needed for the Ridge Camp (IX). The party arrived on the col very tired on the evening of 24th May ; the going had been exceptionally bad owing to two days' very strong wind, which had obliterated the tracks made by the large carrying party only two days before and had covered the steep slope of the traverse with a breakable wind crust. On the col itself, it was blowing at gale force, making it difficult to stand up. The struggle to erect two tents in these conditions, anoxic as they were with their oxygen masks removed, was a terrible experience ; it took well over an hour to put up one Pyramid

tent, the canvas being frequently torn from their hands by the wind, the climbers falling over guy ropes, getting in each other's way. The following morning, 25th May, was again fine and the wind had miraculously died away to a stiff breeze. But the first assault party decided to remain on the col. Exhausted by their efforts of the day before, it would have been impossible to get away to an early start and, bearing in mind that the summit pair were to attempt to reach the South peak—if not the summit itself—from the col, this early start was considered essential to success. Moreover, one of the two Sherpas, Balu, had completely broken down, mainly owing to the demoralizing effects of this dread spot; it was still hoped that he might recover with rest, for much depended on having a full support team in order to carry the materials for the highest camp to the point where it was hoped to place it—at or nearly 28,000 ft. The day was, therefore, spent resting on the South col and getting ready for the morrow. So tolerable were the conditions on that day that Hunt managed to walk the whole length of the plateau, without oxygen, wearing down socks, and was able to look down upon the Western cwm in one direction and the Kangshung Valley in the other.

The 26th also dawned fine, but the wind was no longer so lenient; it was blowing strongly and clouds were coming up from below. It had been intended that Evans and Bourdillon should get away at 6 A.M. but they were held back by a defect in Evans' oxygen equipment, and eventually Hunt and Da Namgyal started soon after 7 A.M., both using the open circuit apparatus at 4 litres per minute. Balu was after all unable to come. For some distance they moved gently upwards across the slopes of boulder-strewn ice, making towards the foot of a steep snow couloir which leads to the South-east ridge immediately above a rock buttress, which cuts off its descent before it reaches the level of the col. They were soon passed by Evans and Bourdillon, their technical problems solved, now moving much faster with the more effective oxygen equipment. Even with the aid of steps cut and kicked by the leading pair, Hunt and Da Namgyal found the ascent of the couloir a great effort—owing to the absence of Balu they were carrying over 45 pounds of equipment each. It was not until after 9 A.M. that they reached the South-east ridge at about 27,200 ft., at the site of the single tent in which Tenzing and Lambert had spent the night about a year earlier; nothing remained but the bare poles, to which were still attached shreds of yellow cloth. The ridge itself was by now shrouded in mists and the weather was worsening; it was snowing and the wind was strong. They could see Evans and Bourdillon about 300 ft. higher, climbing strongly. Both Hunt and Da Namgyal were now tired, and Hunt was having great difficulty in breathing: they moved on slowly up the ridge, determined to get as high as possible before dumping their loads: Hunt had already realized that, with one man short, it would no longer be possible for this first support party to reach the highest possible camp site, but hoped that the larger second party, under Gregory, which had slightly less than half the total



PANORAMA OF THE HIMALAYA FROM THE SUMMIT OF EVEREST. MAKALU IN RIGHT FOREGROUND ;  
KANGCHENJUNGA IN LEFT DISTANCE.



SCENE LOOKING DOWN THE WESTERN CWM TOWARDS PUMORI, FROM CAMP V.

[To face p. 118.]

weight to carry, might pick up the dump and carry the stores higher. After struggling on for about another three-quarters of an hour, they stopped at a small gap in the ridge, where the angle steepens as the ridge rises to a pronounced snow shoulder; the height is now reckoned to be 27,350 ft. Da Namgyal was now at the end of his strength; Hunt might have gone on, but for not more than another 50 ft. or so. They therefore built a cairn and, leaving the tent, food, kerosene and their oxygen bottles, they started down without oxygen. Hunt had left one full bottle at the Swiss tent, intending to carry it down to add to the supplies for the second party. In order to give him strength for the couloir and to avoid an accident, he started to use this for a few minutes but finding that this only made breathing more difficult, turned off the supply and removed his mask. Taking great precautions in the steep upper part of the couloir, for they were both very tired indeed, they eventually arrived on the easier slopes above the col, noticing on the way that the second assault party was coming up across the Lhotse Face from Camp VII. They themselves reached Camp VIII exhausted.

Evans and Bourdillon were meanwhile making slow progress up the ridge. After leaving the Swiss tent site the going became appreciably worse. Soft snow on loose rock ledges called for extreme care. Their rate of progress slowed to about 350 ft. an hour. At about 10.30 they came to the snow shoulder, the point reached by Lambert and Tenzing the previous year, and were then faced with a crucial decision. The soda lime canisters of their oxygen sets had little endurance left. Sudden exhaustion of the oxygen on the steeper slopes above might well be disastrous. They decided after some heart-searching to take advantage of the easing of the slope and to change canisters and cylinders before going on any further. In doing so, they recognized that they were shortening the time that they could climb that day.

After a brief rest they moved upwards again. The snow was in bad condition and they kept to the left on rock for as far as they could. The last 400 ft. to the South summit are much steeper than the lower part of the ridge. They chose to climb up a steep rock rib to the left of a wide snow slope, for this snow seemed to be unsafe. At 1 P.M. they stood on the South summit.

It was now clear that they had neither the time, nor enough oxygen, to reach the main summit unless the final ridge proved to be very easy. No one expected it to be easy, but neither had anyone expected, except in pessimistic moments, the formidable alpine ridge that lay before them, leaning over in huge cornices of more than Alpine size above the eastern precipice. After a short pause for photography, they reluctantly turned back. Both were very tired, especially Evans, whose oxygen set was again giving trouble and had to be further modified to function as an open circuit set. Their progress down the snow slope, down the ridge and down the couloir to the col was slow, painful and even, in their advanced state of exhaustion, insecure. They were welcomed by Hillary, Tenzing, Hunt, Gregory and Lowe.



EVANS AND BOURDILLON ON THEIR RETURN FROM THEIR ATTEMPT AFTER REACHING  
28,720 FT. (SOUTH SUMMIT OF EVEREST.)

*The Second Assault*

The second assault party reached the col on 26th May, the day the first assault was made. Gregory, Lowe, Ang Nyima, Pemba and Ang Temba were intended to join Hillary and Tenzing in setting up Camp IX as high as possible—the Snow Shoulder was their aim. Five other Sherpas carrying additional supplies also reached the col; this visit was their second, and without oxygen.

On the 27th the party was confined to the col by a gale, but the next morning was fine, although the wind was still strong. Lowe, Gregory and Ang Nyima left the camp at 8.45, and Hillary and Tenzing at 10.0; Pemba was left behind sick in camp, and Ang Temba had returned down the Lhotse face with Hunt, Bourdillon and Evans the previous day, as he had obviously not been fit.

The two parties moved steadily up the couloir and rejoined each other near the skeleton of the Swiss tent. Lowe and Gregory had cut steps all the way up the couloir leading on to the ridge. When they arrived at the dump left by Hunt and Da Namgyal at 27,350 ft., a halt was made and the extra loads were shared out. Ang Nyima was carrying about 40 lb. and the rest of the party 50 to 60 lb each. Now moving more slowly, they started up the ridge again. After an hour or so, they began to look for a camp site, but there was no relief in the angle of the ridge. Eventually Tenzing suggested a traverse to the left where he thought he remembered a slight easing of the slope below a rock bluff. They made their way across and found a shallow shelf a little less steep than the rest, at a height of about 27,900 ft.

It was now 2.30 P.M. All were tired and Gregory, Lowe and Ang Nyima were now short of oxygen. They dumped their loads and made their way down to the col, while Hillary and Tenzing removed their oxygen and started work on making a platform. After two hours' hard work, all they had been able to make were two narrow shelves, one above the other. They pitched their tent and settled in for the night. They had no pitons, but fastened the guys to stones and oxygen bottles. Gusts of wind shook the tent at intervals all night. They had 4 hours of sleeping oxygen, and Hillary describes their experience as 'a reasonably comfortable night'; much of their time was spent warming soup and other liquid nourishment.

At 4 A.M. next morning they looked outside and found the weather perfect. They heated as much liquid as they could, ate their last stores of sardines and biscuits, and left the tent at 6.30 A.M. They kicked steps across and up to the ridge and then moved steadily upwards keeping slightly to the left of the actual crest, where the snow was a little better. They stopped at the oxygen bottles dumped by Evans and Bourdillon three days before, and Hillary was relieved to see from the gauges that they contained enough oxygen to use them most of the way down to the col. Above, the ridge soon broadened into the very steep snow slope that led to the South summit. The snow was still in a dangerous condition, a thin crust overlying loose incoherent



LOWE CLIMBING THE S.E. RIDGE ABOVE THE SOUTH COL.

powder, but they moved carefully up it, reaching to the South summit at about 9 A.M.

Here they discarded their first bottles of oxygen, thus bringing the weight of the set down to 19 lb., and examined the ridge ahead. It was a formidable proposition, but a lot depended on the condition of the snow. Moving off down to the ridge, Hillary found his best hopes were realized. The surface was firm crystalline snow, in marked contrast to the slope they had just climbed. Contouring to the left, giving the cornices on the right a wide berth, moving mostly on snow but sometimes along the edge of the rocks at the top of the West face, they made steady progress until they reached the great rock step about a third of the way along the ridge. We had seen this step from Thyangboche, and realized that it would be a major obstacle. It was about 40 ft. high and almost vertical. On the left Hillary judged it to be unclimbable under these conditions, but on the right there was a crack between the rock and the cornice. Belayed by Tenzing, Hillary led slowly up the crack and arrived eventually sprawling on the top. It was then, he said, that he felt nothing could stop them. He brought up Tenzing and, after a short rest, moved off up the ridge. They rounded hummock after hummock, only to find the ridge stretching out before them. They were beginning to wonder how long they could keep it up, when suddenly they found the ridge dropping away in front. A few more steps, and they were up. It was 11.30 A.M.

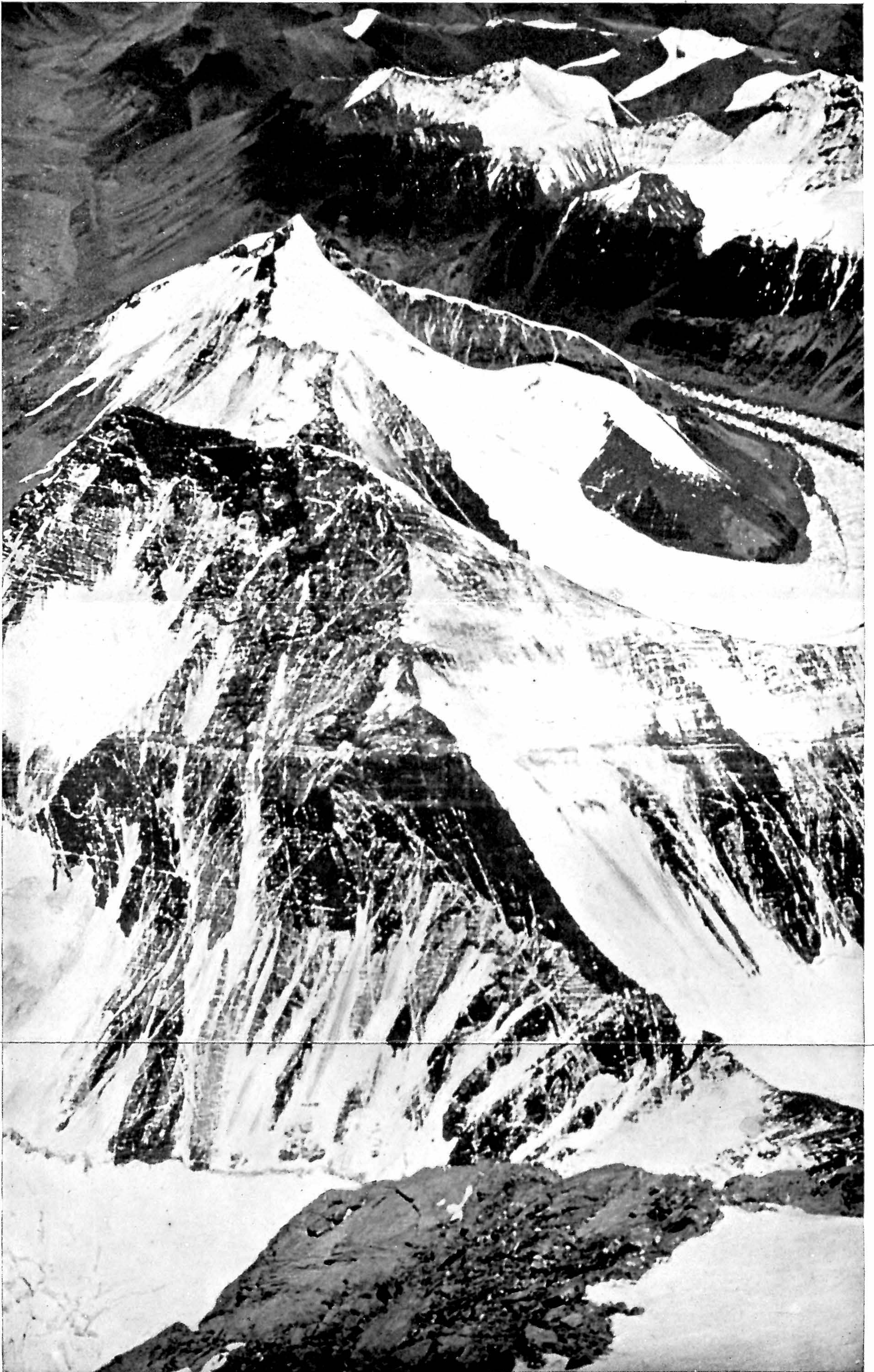
Many men have tried to express their feelings on reaching a lesser summit. We shall not be so bold as to speak for Hillary and Tenzing. Perhaps the best comment is in the words of Tenzing: 'It was like meeting an old friend. You do not want to talk, but you are glad to be there.'

They spent 15 minutes on the summit, during which they removed their masks and conserved their oxygen supply. They also ate Kendal mint and Hillary took photographs, and set off down at 11.45. In an hour they were back again on the South summit. After moving gingerly down the great snow slope they were able, in Hillary's words, 'to shrug off the sense of fear that had been with them all day.' At 2 P.M. they were down at Camp IX. Here they brewed a drink of lemonade and set off on the long trek down to the ridge. Both were very tired, but not too tired to make the last effort of cutting steps down the couloir, where yesterday's tracks had already been blotted out. On the col they were greeted by Lowe and Noyce; the latter had come up that day in support with Passang Phutar, both making their second trip to the col. Noyce had come up this time without oxygen.

On the 30th May, with the exception of the South col party and Wylie at Camp VII, the whole expedition was at Advance Base. The previous evening anxious eyes had watched the col, hoping to see a pre-arranged signal, sleeping bags placed in a certain position on snow slopes visible from the cwm. Noyce and Passang Phutar had in fact made the signal at the cost of tremendous effort, but drifting cloud had interfered. Excitement, not at all suppressed, filled the camp.

When the col party was seen coming down their every movement was reported and success or failure deduced from the speed at which they moved. They reached Camp VII and after a short interval moved down again, shortly disappearing from view in the invisible ground above and below Camp V. Suddenly, soon after 1.30 P.M., they appeared again over a rise some 300 yds. from the camp. They made no sign at first, but we started out to meet them and soon they signalled that they had succeeded after all. Perhaps it was a scene rather more emotional than is expected of members of the Alpine Club, but it was a day, after all, that will never be equalled in the lives of any of us.

After the climax, what is there to say? We had to return down the ice-fall, now more dangerous than ever, to pack up Base Camp and return to Thyangboche. There we took leave of Evans, who stayed to carry out further explorations in the area and to the west. We had a wet walk back to Kathmandu where we received a welcome, political at first, but increasingly friendly. A wonderful reception in India and a swift passage home: a whirl of receptions which now, but a month later, seems less real than those exciting, anxious, memorable days on the mountain.



LOOKING DOWN ON THE NORTHERN ROUTE FROM THE SUMMIT OF EVEREST.