KANGCHENJUNGA CLIMBED

By GEORGE BAND

In writing this personal account of the Expedition, I am greatly indebted to Charles Evans and to *The Times* for permission to quote freely from his dispatches. The responsibility, however, for any errors, omissions, or opinions is mine.—G. C. B.

It was a dull October evening and the rain-washed cobbles leading up to Lime Street Station reflected the foggy light of the street-lamps. My train had just steamed in and, dumping my heavy luggage, I made straight for a telephone call-box.

'Is that you, Charles? This is George here. I'm back.'

'So what,' he probably murmured. But I knew that, on the recommendation of Sir John Hunt's sub-committee, the Alpine Club had asked Charles Evans to lead a strong reconnaissance expedition to Kangchenjunga in the spring of 1955. Having just returned from the Karakorum by car, I was anxious to submit my application to join the new expedition before it was too late.

My knowledge of the previous attempts on the mountain was sketchy—I had not then had the benefit of the last two ALPINE JOURNALS[1]—otherwise my eagerness would have diminished rapidly. For once, I had cause to thank my unretentive memory and limited perusal of the literature. They prevented me from recalling the following opinions :—

Freshfield, on the North-west Face, 1899 : 'The whole face of the mountain might be imagined to have been constructed by the Demon of Kangchenjunga for the express purpose of defence against human assault, so skilfully is each comparatively weak spot raked by the ice and snow batteries.'

The Editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL commenting on the heroic Bavarian attempt, 1929 : '. . . a feat without parallel, perhaps, in all the annals of mountaineering.'

Dyhrenfurth, on the International Expedition, 1930 : 'A high cracking sound was the first thing I heard. Then I saw that at the very top of the cliff—somewhat to my right—an ice-wall perhaps one thousand feet wide was toppling forward quite slowly. . . . There were after all, only three possibilities. I could be knocked out by the ice-blocks, suffocated by the snow-dust or swept away by the avalanche, and hurled into the great crevasse. . . . I lay in the snow and awaited death in one form or another.'

[1] *A.J.* 59. 428–31. The official report of the 1954 Reconnaissance Expedition to the S.W. Face of Kangchenjunga, on whose information we were acting.
A.J. 60. 83–95. A summary of the exploration and previous attempts on Kangchenjunga.

Smythe, examining the South-west Face through a telescope from Darjeeling : ' There would seem to be little justification for a further attempt from this side.'

Sir John Hunt : ' There is no doubt that those who first climb Kangchenjunga will achieve the greatest feat in mountaineering, for it is a mountain which combines in its defences not only the severe handicaps of wind, weather, and very high altitude, but technical climbing problems and objective dangers of an order even higher than those we encountered on Everest.'

I was soon discussing the expedition with Charles, and these quotations are included not through any sense of vaingloriousness but to show how lowly we then assessed our own chances of success. Our task was to examine the upper part of the mountain, with the limited objective of reaching the Great Shelf—a conspicuous ice terrace stretching across the Yalung (South-west) Face at about 24,000 ft. (So far, no party had been above 20,000 ft. on this face.) At the same time, just in case things proved easier than expected, Charles was planning to take oxygen and sufficient equipment to launch an attack on the summit. This was to be a reconnaissance in force.

THE TEAM

Among mountaineers the rival merits of the large, sponsored expedition lavishly equipped, where the atmosphere is necessarily formal, and of the small frugal expedition of three or four adventurous friends, are sometimes hotly disputed. In choosing a compact team of nine—eight climbers and a doctor—six with considerable previous Himalayan experience, Charles Evans hoped to have the best of both worlds.

NORMAN HARDIE, 30, civil engineer and an experienced New Zealand climber, distinguished himself last year as a member of Sir Edmund Hillary's expedition to the Barun Valley. Charles nominated him as his deputy, a position which he thoroughly earned by reason of his terrific capacity for work. He had a restless bounding energy that found its outlet in chopping steps for hours, tinkering with oxygen equipment for which he was responsible, or perpetuating the songs of the Sherpas on his tape-recorder.

JOE BROWN, 24, Manchester builder and weekend climber, whose unpretentious ways hid the fact that in recent years he had set a new standard in British rock-climbing. In the Alps in 1954, he astonished Continental mountaineers by repeating the West Face of the Dru in twenty-five hours' climbing and forcing a new route up the West Face of the Blaitière with Don Whillans (*A.J.* 60. 25). Small and muscular, he was the youngest in the party and had not been to the Himalayas before.

JOHN CLEGG, 29, Liverpool University anatomist, was our doctor. A Territorial Army paratrooper and a hefty rugby forward, he was also a competent all-round Alpine climber, and became a great asset socially for his inexhaustible repertoire of medical student songs.

JOHN JACKSON, 34, a sturdy Yorkshire schoolmaster, had many years

of Himalayan experience; in Kashmir with the wartime Aircrew Mountain Centre, Garhwal, and Everest, where he had joined in the hunt for the Abominable Snowman and then trekked over to join his brother, who was with Kempe's Kangchenjunga party last year.

NEIL MATHER, 28, Manchester textile technologist, had qualified himself pre-eminently for the ice-work of the Yalung Face by his achievements on the great Alpine snow and ice climbs. Unlike many of the modern school of English climbers, he was an enthusiastic walker and regaled us with stories of seventy-mile winter-weekend jaunts over the Pennine fells. This was his first Himalayan season.

TOM MCKINNON, Glasgow pharmacist and the only Scotsman. At 42, he was the oldest in the party, but his age merely reflected his greater stamina and experience. Never guilty of a hasty decision, he was a strong goer and had a long record of climbing and exploration at Himalayan heights—heights which the concurrent Merseyside Expedition were going to reduce substantially in their survey work. He co-ordinated the still photography, and would spend agonising minutes pondering over the combination of cameras, lenses and filters required to capture some fleeting scene of cloud and colour.

TONY STREATHER, 29, Regular Army captain, has had a remarkable mountaineering career. While serving with Pakistan's North-west Frontier Force he accompanied the Norwegian Tirich Mir Expedition as transport officer. Conscientiously, he went right to the summit wearing, as he told us laughingly, a golfing jacket, without an ice-axe and carrying a twelve-pound bedding roll. His second climb, in a similar role, was with the Americans to K2 in 1953. Again he went to over 25,000 ft. and was a great asset during the terrible storm and unlucky accident. Kangchenjunga was his third big climb. Once more his knowledge of Hindustani and his proved ability to go high were of tremendous value. The expedition's coolie train was his big responsibility.

I was 26, and since the Everest Expedition had climbed on Rakaposhi. With some experience of messing during Army service, I took charge of the food. I was popular at first, but, as there were few villages en route, after some months the craving for fresh meat, eggs, fruit and vegetables became too strong. I was constantly reminded that, 'Just in case you're getting swollen-headed, Band, the grub's b—— awful.'

The duties of the leader of a serious expedition have always struck me as being particularly onerous. Not only must he plan and organise down to the very last detail, he must make decisions which, if wrong, may mean death. He may have to drive himself to his physical limits so that others will succeed by his example. And throughout, he must remain unruffled and sympathetic in the most adverse conditions on the mountain, while satisfying a sponsoring committee back at home. In addition, Charles Evans found time to all do the ciné filming, hold the expedition's purse-strings, and write regular despatches to *The Times*. He is 36, and a Liverpool surgeon.

We were very fortunate in our choice of Sherpas and in our relations

with them. This was largely due to Charles' great knowledge of and close friendship with them gained during his many trips alone in their company. He chose as sirdar, his old retainer, Dawa Tensing, who was now about 45 years old but still very strong. (He is unrelated to Tenzing Norkay, G.M.) The Swiss gave Dawa the title of ' King of the Sherpas ' because of his natural dignified bearing and fine character. He also has tremendous stamina : he went twice to the South Col on Everest in 1953. Once he was climbing a small snow peak with Shipton, Gregory and Evans, but kept going too fast. To slow him down they put him in front to break the trail. Still he went too fast. So they piled their rucksacks on him, but even then he was a good match for them.

Dawa was asked to bring some thirty Sherpas with him from Sola Khumbu. Sixteen were expected to go high on the mountain, the rest up to about 22,000 ft., and all were equipped accordingly. He chose Annullu (who was first with Noyce on the South Col in 1953) to be his deputy.

In addition, the expedition would require some three hundred coolies for the approach march. These would be engaged in Darjeeling, which we planned to leave in the middle of March.

PREPARATIONS AND EQUIPMENT

Our equipment came from many sources, and was developed for us by that same great army of helpers behind the scenes who made the ascent of Everest possible. Much of it was the same equipment—our windproof clothing, for example, and our eiderdown jackets—but much of it had been modified since Everest. On the basis of our experience there, we got a high-altitude boot made on the same principle, but with less insulation. The result was a smaller, neater boot, with a closer fitting which was better suited to difficult climbing. On snow, it was covered by a canvas overboot. One's normal crampons still fitted over this combination, and the risk of frostbitten feet was almost negligible. These boots were used all the way from Base Camp to the top.

After Everest, the search for a lighter oxygen cylinder and a less clumsy oxygen set had continued. In both fields, the makers had made advances, and the result was an unqualified success. Oxygen has contributed more than any other single item in the climber's apparatus to recent high-climbing successes, and, however much it complicates the porter problem (about three-fifths of the weight carried to any high camp consists of oxygen gear), it is worth its weight in loads. It made Everest possible ; it made the final stages of Kangchenjunga swift and more sure, and it played a significant part in this year's astonishing French triumph on Makalu, when Jean Franco succeeded in getting nine of his expedition to the summit.

We relied on open-circuit sets, although two closed-circuit sets were taken for further trials and used on the first lightning reconnaissance to the Great Shelf. With one 1600-litre cylinder, the former now

weighed 24 lb. as against 30 lb. for a set of similar capacity on Everest in 1953. Above 22,000 ft. we used (during the assaults) an open-circuit set while climbing, and a simple lightweight mask for breathing the gas during sleep. As a result we slept well and woke refreshed, and during the day were able to make good distances (about 1,700 ft.) between camps. Altogether, twelve men were to reach 26,900 ft., the site of the highest camp, number VI.

Perhaps the greatest change was in the food. While we retained the Everest ' Compo ' pack—with much greater variety—for low-altitude use, we discarded the small vacuum-packed man-day ration for high altitudes, preferring to take our food in small bulk—a ten-man-day pack. In this way jaded appetites could be tempted by a greater variety of foods without increasing the total weight, and the man who likes tongue and hates salmon can eat all the tongue (while his friend eats the salmon), and is not forced to eat small amounts of each, a practice which on a mountain usually results in his eating the small bit he likes and throwing the other away. 'A pickled walnut in the belly is worth a pound of pemmican in the snow.' Although well below the pre-war Everest standards, our catering was sybaritic in comparison with Polar diets. But where the porter problem is not too severe, good food pays dividends by keeping the whole party fit, and Sherpas soon finish off any surplus, so that nothing is wasted. We took four months' Sahib's food and were only away three, but there was very little left at the end. However, as soon as the porters are left behind and the Sahibs have to carry their own food, I'm all for a light diet.

THE JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAIN

Our many friends and well-wishers gave us a grand send-off when we sailed from Liverpool on February 12. The sea voyage gave us a fine opportunity to become well acquainted, and every day at noon, Streather, sitting stripped to the waist and cross-legged on his bunk like a Hindu guru, instructed us in Hindustani. It rapidly became obvious from the old hands that a little knowledge can be made to go a long way and our teacher soon found the sort of phrase that was most easily remembered.

Hardie and McKinnon chased our six tons of luggage across India, while the rest of us had a smooth journey to Darjeeling, where we became the very privileged guests of Mr. and Mrs. Henderson at Rungneet. Their bungalow is perched among the tea gardens on the side of a steep ridge, one mile north of Darjeeling. From the lawn in front of the house, when it was clear, we could look over the foothills to our mountain, forty-six miles away.

More than any other of the great peaks, Kangchenjunga is open to public view, and no one who has seen it from Darjeeling can forget it. Rosy at dawn, brilliant and remote in sunshine, cold and repellent in shadow, it seems to float above the haze and darkness of the valleys between, its great mass filling the north-western horizon.

Europeans are not alone in admiring it, for the devout Sikkimese,

in whose country the whole East face lies, accord it the reverence given to a god, and to them we owe its name, Kang-chen-dzö-nga, meaning ' The Five Sacred Treasuries of the Snows.' In their view, any attempt to climb the mountain, even from the Nepalese side, would be a form of sacrilege, so it was necessary for Charles Evans to make a special journey to Gangtok to discuss the problem with the Dewan (their ' Prime Minister '), representing the Sikkim Durbar. His friendly and understanding mediation resulted in permission for us to continue with our plans, provided that we pledged ourselves to observe two conditions: not to go beyond the point on the mountain at which we were assured of a route to the top, and not, however high our reconnaissance might take us, to desecrate the immediate neighbourhood of the summit. It was a happy solution, to which we, as mountaineers, were glad to agree, and one which promised better for our future friendship than a stiff ungenerous attitude on either side would have done.

Back at Rungneet, all was furious activity. Streather had arrived first to meet the Sherpas and recruit porters. Now crates were being broken down into coolie loads, and the croquet lawn was covered with boxes and bags laid out in neat rows, each box made up with a small green bag of *tsampa* to exactly sixty pounds. In the garage John Clegg was medically examining the Sherpas. Those who were still awaiting their turn outside peered nervously through cracks in the doors to see what was going to happen to them. Considering their reputation, John was impressed by their relatively poor physiques.

On March 14 we left Darjeeling—a convoy of dilapidated trucks filled to bursting with baggage and piled high with chattering coolies. We were bound for Mane Bhanjyiang, a sixteen-mile journey to the last big village at the foot of the Singalila Ridge. That same afternoon we toiled up to Tonglu at 10,000 ft., the first of the three Government rest-houses on the crest of the ridge. Altogether we had needed 319 porters—about half of our loads were food—so we split into two columns, and one-third of our number, looked after by Streather, McKinnon and Annullu, travelled a day behind the main party.

Since we did not have permission to enter Sikkim, our approach march was a devious one over a hundred miles long which would take us in about ten days to the snout of the Yalung Glacier. So early in the year, it was important to avoid any high passes which might still be blocked by the winter snow, so, on the recommendation of last year's expedition, we followed the Singalila Ridge past Sandakphu to Phalut and then plunged into the steep jungly valleys of Nepal. The ridge divides Nepal from Sikkim, and, undulating between 10,000 and 15,000 ft., it runs northwards almost to Kangchenjunga. So on the return journey in June, it would be better to cross the high passes at its head and follow the crest back throughout its length, thereby avoiding the leech-infested valleys during the monsoon.

A sudden hailstorm surprised us on our second day just as we were passing a sad-looking hamlet named Black Pool. Soon we were sheltering and warming our chilled bodies with tots of *rakshi*. The

storm cleared the air, for at Sandakphu we had a fine dawn view of Kangchenjunga and a momentary glimpse of Makalu, Lhotse and Everest. At Phalut, the rear party were caught in a fierce thunderstorm, after which they had an even finer view with the whole range seeming close at hand in a cloudless sky. So far the ridge was broad and the track wound over rolling downland. 'At any moment,' said Charles, 'we might have surprised a party of picnickers from Guildford.' But the scenery changed abruptly next morning when we descended 7,000 ft. before breakfast and came to Chyangthapu. The next few days' march, passing through intensely cultivated, terraced and shadeless Nepal, were enlivened by the unfamiliar birds : yellow and scarlet minivets, drongos, redstarts, tree pies and bul-buls. We woke each day before dawn and marched early in the cool of the morning.

We now began to have coolie trouble. Apparently some of the Darjeeling men we had pressed into service—for the generous ' union ' wage of four rupees a day—were quite unused to carrying loads ; one, indeed, had never worked as anything but a garage hand, and the sudden change must have been a startling experience for him. Our policy, when coolies left us, was to stack their loads and ask the headman of the village to send word round that coolies were wanted next day. In this way, when the rear party arrived, Streather was always able to find and persuade men to bring along what we had left behind.

At Khebang our troubles were forgotten when we were fêted by the whole village. As we passed under arches of flowers, garlands were thrown about our necks. School children sang for us and we signed their visitors' book. High above us was the pass into the Yalung Valley. There was a long trudge to it, up a ridge where recently there had been a forest fire and where now all was blackened and dead, save here and there a single rhododendron which had survived and defiantly threw out a great blaze of scarlet. On the other side was thick jungle. We walked along soft tracks carpeted with dead leaves and bordered by rhododendrons in full flower or by mossy glades resplendent with purple dew-petalled primula. We camped in the forest by a river and lit great fires. Close to us, squatting beneath a rock, was a ragged old coolie singing a tuneless lament. We asked Dawa to translate for us :

> ' The Sahibs are feasting like Rajahs over there.
> Here am I, all alone in my poor corner,
> But there's no baksheesh coming my way.'

The forest gradually gave way to the glacial outwash gravel. We continued up the ablation valley on the western side, past Tseram, until we reached Ramser. Here, at 13,000 ft., we camped and paid off the coolies. We were on the site of a ruined monastery, but now only one tumbledown shack remained, with yaks grazing round about. Steep, scrub-covered hillside hemmed us in on one hand, and the lateral moraine of the Yalung Glacier on the other. Up the valley we could see the gleaming snows of Ratong and Kabru. This would be an ideal base for our programme of acclimatisation.

ACCLIMATISATION

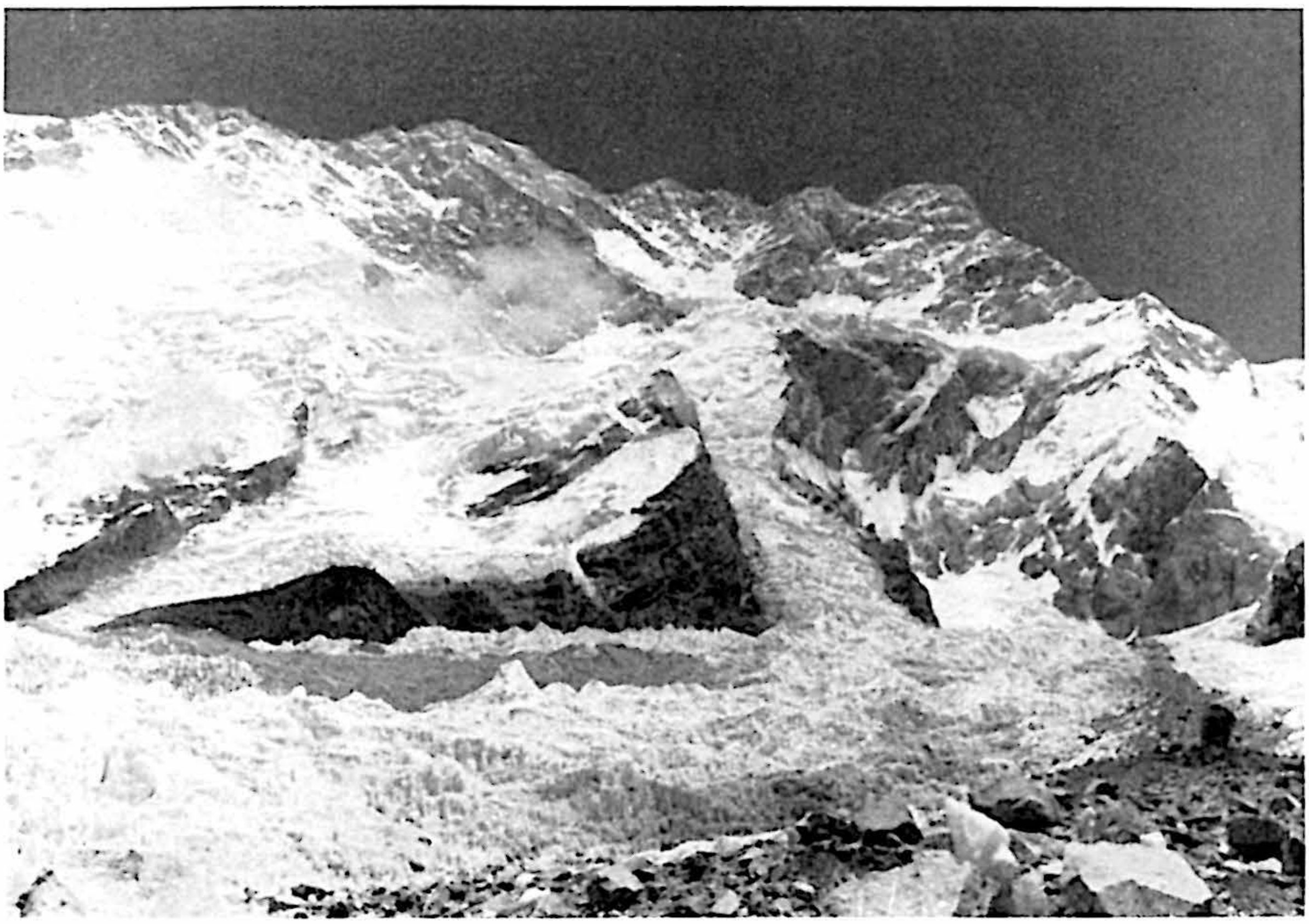
Three tasks demanded our immediate attention. We had to arrange for supplies of Sherpa food—*atta* and *tsampa*—to be sent over from the nearest village, Ghunza, two days' march away. Secondly, the coolie-lift from Ramser to our future Base Camp at the foot of Kempe's Rock Buttress had to be organised. Thirdly, with the aid of his theodolite, Hardie wanted to measure the heights of the salient features on our proposed route : the top of the Rock Buttress, the bottom of the Upper Icefall, the limits of the Great Shelf, and the altitude of the West Col. In addition, we planned to fit in as many climbs as possible on smaller peaks to accustom our lungs and limbs to high altitudes.

Jackson, Mather and I went with three Sherpas by way of the Mirgin La and Sinon La to Ghunza. Snow began falling as we arrived, so we made straight for the headman's black, smoky living-room. Out came buttered tea, boiled potatoes, and our cigarettes, in return. As the party warmed up, *chang* pots were filled. These are wooden brass-bound cylinders containing a mush of fermented cereal, mostly millet seed, to which hot water is added. The drink is sucked up through a thin bamboo tube passed through a hole in the lid. Conscious of the Sahibs' love of cleanliness, the hostess sluiced the bamboos vigorously with water, then dried them by drawing them through her armpit.

When our mission was accomplished we returned over the Lapsong La, stopping on our way to explore the Yamatari Glacier and being rewarded by magnificent views of the precipitous south face of Jannu—a peak to rival the Muztagh Tower in sheer impregnability.

Meanwhile, the work of carrying loads up the bleak and broken glacier, a four-day journey through Moraine Camp, Crack Camp, Corner Camp to Base Camp, was greatly hampered by snowfall and unusually severe weather for this time of year. The route to Corner Camp, which had been carefully prospected, ran mostly along the moraines or across the debris-smothered surface of the glacier itself. 'It was my idea of hell,' said John Clegg, 'and deadly dull into the bargain. You were walking on sharp-edged boulders that kept on slipping from under you, up and down the whole time, and feeling that you were getting nowhere.' One morning at Corner, the camp was lashed by a fearful wind. The big Dome tent, weighing 80-lb. was blown, metal framework and all, for more than 200 yards, leaving no trace on the ground between. Two Sherpas who were sleeping beneath the Dome peered out of their bags, decided that the baleful sky above was not what they wanted to see, and withdrew, closing their bags over their heads again. Dawa Tensing summed up the situation with an expressive grimace of distaste, saying : 'They are not good, the gods of Kangchenjunga.'

The results of Hardie's survey gave us another slight shock. Kempe's party had considered the top of the Rock Buttress—the highest point they had reached—to be about 21,000 ft. Now Hardie said it was only 19,000 ft. ! This gave us another 2,000 ft. of virgin ground to cover. About this time, too, there arrived some impressive air photographs



1. KANGCHENJUNGA, S.W. FACE FROM CORNER CAMP.

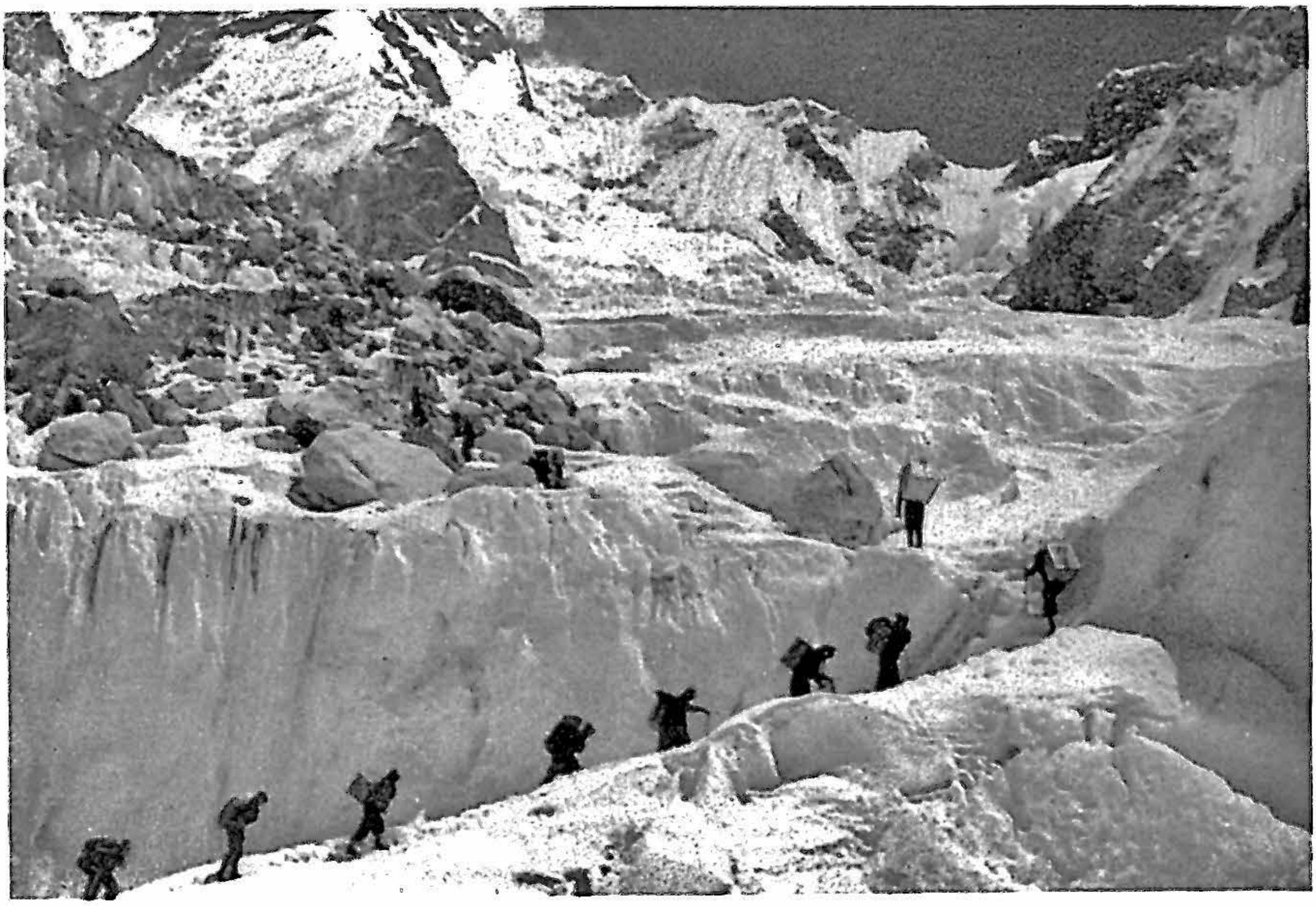


2. KANGCHENJUNGA, S.W. FACE FROM SLOPES OF TALUNG PEAK, SHOWING UPPER ICE-FALL AND GREAT SHELF.

[*To face p* 212.



3. BROWN AND CLEGG, RESTING BELOW BASE CAMP.



4. ON THE WAY TO FIRST BASE CAMP : LOOKING TOWARDS TALUNG SADDLE.

taken for us a month ago by the Indian Air Force. They were not encouraging. The final ridge looked even worse than we had feared ; a jagged knife-edge with a clump of pinnacles halfway and with tremendous cliffs on either side. It was all rather depressing. 'We might as well go back to Darjeeling straight away,' some of us joked. But we had braved the mountain very early in the year. If we carried on stubbornly, with the melting of the winter snows the track should become easier.

We all took turns in escorting the teams of porters, but relieved the monotony with an occasional climb. Hardie, Brown, Jackson and their three Sherpas had one excellent acclimatisation trip. They set off to climb Koktang, 21,000 ft., a peak on the ridge south of Ratong and Kabru, but failing on this in poor weather through trying it with too few camps, they made up by ascending two twenty-thousanders to the south-east.

KANGCHENJUNGA

On Easter Sunday, I joined Charles at Corner Camp, where the Yalung Valley turns to the east. It was a dramatic place. Ranged in an enormous circle round about us was a fantastic array of peaks. On our left, the upthrust fang of Jannu was linked by a great white wave of ridge to Kangbachen—the rounded West Peak of Kangchenjunga. This led to the rocky pyramid of the main summit, which from this viewpoint seemed scarcely higher than the southern peaks—a series of castellated towers. From the last of these the ridge swept down to form the Talung saddle and rose again into Talung peak itself and the massive whaleback of Kabru on our right. The majestic mountain faces were daubed with masses of hanging ice which discharged their debris into the high snow-basins feeding the great glacier curving round at our feet. And all the time the clouds raced across the summit ridges from west to east and the wind made a continuous far-off roar like that of a giant waterfall.

Directly before us lay the South-west face of Kangchenjunga, which we had come so far to see—a series of contorted ice-falls and precipitous snowslopes buttressed by steep walls of red-brown rock. The most prominent feature was the great shelf of ice stretching across it at 24,000 ft. Above the shelf a narrow steep gangway of snow led towards the West ridge, in the direction of the top. Below the shelf, a great ice-fall flowed down to the west. It was in two parts, the Upper Icefall, smooth walls of glistening ice alternating with shelving snow-covered ledges, in all 3,500 ft. high, and the Lower Icefall, a jumble of extremely shattered and active blocks riven by enormous crevasses, in all 2,000 ft. high.

The 1954 party climbed Kempe's Rock Buttress on the east side of the Lower Icefall and thought that from there one might climb the remaining 600 ft. of the Lower Icefall, and continue up the Upper Icefall to the Great Shelf, and thence by way of the snow gangway, reach the West ridge and so to the top. It was a complicated route,

and at the time we had little faith in it, for the avalanche dangers, let alone the technical difficulties, might make it totally unsafe or impossible And could we find safe sites for our permanent camps ?

KEMPE'S ROCK BUTTRESS AND THE LOWER ICEFALL

Our immediate interest was the route to the proposed Base Camp, near the foot of the Lower Icefall. Evans, McKinnon, Streather, Mather and three Sherpas had put in a lot of work on this. The problem was to keep away from the left bank of the glacier, which was threatened by avalanches from Talung Peak, and to find a way through the broken ice and maze of crevasses in its centre, which always tended to force one to the Talung side. It was rather like the lowest part of the Khumbu Icefall on Everest, and one was roped up for half the journey. It was certainly the most difficult approach to any base camp that I have ever had. But as the weeks went by, the route was improved so much until, as Jackson said, 'You could wheel a pram along it.'

Evans, our two Sherpas and I were the first to occupy Base Camp on April 12. As it snowed continuously next day, I was able to spend the first twenty-four hours ticking off each avalanche on the tent frame with a pencil stub. At the end of the day forty-eight ticks were there, and since I had been asleep for a third of the time, this gave a frequency of one avalanche every twenty minutes. Our camp was carefully sited in a shallow depression protected by two slight moraine ridges, but once, later on, thousands of tons of ice broke off a hanging glacier on the Talung face and a gigantic cloud of pulverised ice enveloped us. When it finally subsided two minutes later, our tents looked as if they had been in a snowstorm.

At our first attempt on the Rock Buttress, because of the snow, we could hardly get two feet off the ground. The gods were still against us. Humiliated, we retreated to Corner Camp. Three days later Hardie, our two Sherpas and I tried again. We fixed 400 ft. of rope on the steeper parts and pitched our tents on the site of last year's camp at the top of the buttress. We had always been mystified as to why the previous party had not penetrated the ice-fall itself just here. Now that we could see it ourselves, we understood. The main mass of ice which rose in a sheer cliff was separated from the rock by a deep rift, precariously bridged in places by partly refrozen chunks of ice. 'Let's see how far we can get this evening,' said Hardie. I gulped, pretended I wasn't tired, and tied sheepishly on behind. We made about four pitches in two hours. I got absolutely frozen standing motionless belayed in the shade beneath a kind of gigantic crystal-blue chandelier of ice with tiny caverns and tunnels running through it. Even though I was lashed to a rickety ice-piton, I didn't feel a bit safe. Norman was hacking away with incredible persistence and fashioning a five-yard horizontal traverse across the vertical cliff to less steep ground beyond.

We spent two days of the most exhilarating ice-climbing of our lives, trying to find a route through before Evans and Jackson came to join us. Charles thought I was kidding when I said that it made the

Khumbu Icefall look like a children's playground, but he soon agreed. The chief problem was to find a way up out of a valley, whose upper wall, stretching across the ice-fall from side to side, was about fifty feet high, always sheer, frequently overhanging, and threatening to contribute at any moment to the blocks on the valley floor, among which we were standing. Eventually we succeeded, after about six hours, in climbing the wall at a point where it was only vertical and about forty feet high. The last fifteen feet was solved by artificial means. This was a new experience for Norman, and, on ice, it was for me too. Soon he was playing me from below, 'dangling,' as he put it, 'like a puppet on strings.' One moment, when I was perched thirty feet up on three crampon spikes, using both hands to insert a piton, I remember him shouting, 'Wow! Show this to the New Zealand Alpine Club. Put your other foot on something, George, for God's sake.' But there was more difficult ground ahead, and we knew already in our hearts that this ice-fall, unmistakably unstable, was not a place through which we could with any justification take our Sherpas. Were we to be defeated so soon?

THE NEW ROUTE

Fortunately, Hardie had already noticed an alternative possibility. Looking up to the left, we could see a small glacier cleaving the ice-fall's right-hand retaining rock wall. Beside the glacier a steep but smooth snow gully descended from the very crest of this Western Rock Buttress, as we called it, to near the top of the ice-fall. If we could but reach the crest of the buttress from the other side and descend the snow gully, we would almost by-pass the Lower Icefall. There was still hope. The change of route involved a tedious change of Base Camp to the foot of the Western Rock Buttress close by Pache's Grave at 18,100 ft. We found other relics of this ill-fated 1905 expedition, untouched for half a century: rusty kerosene tins and even an old champagne cork.

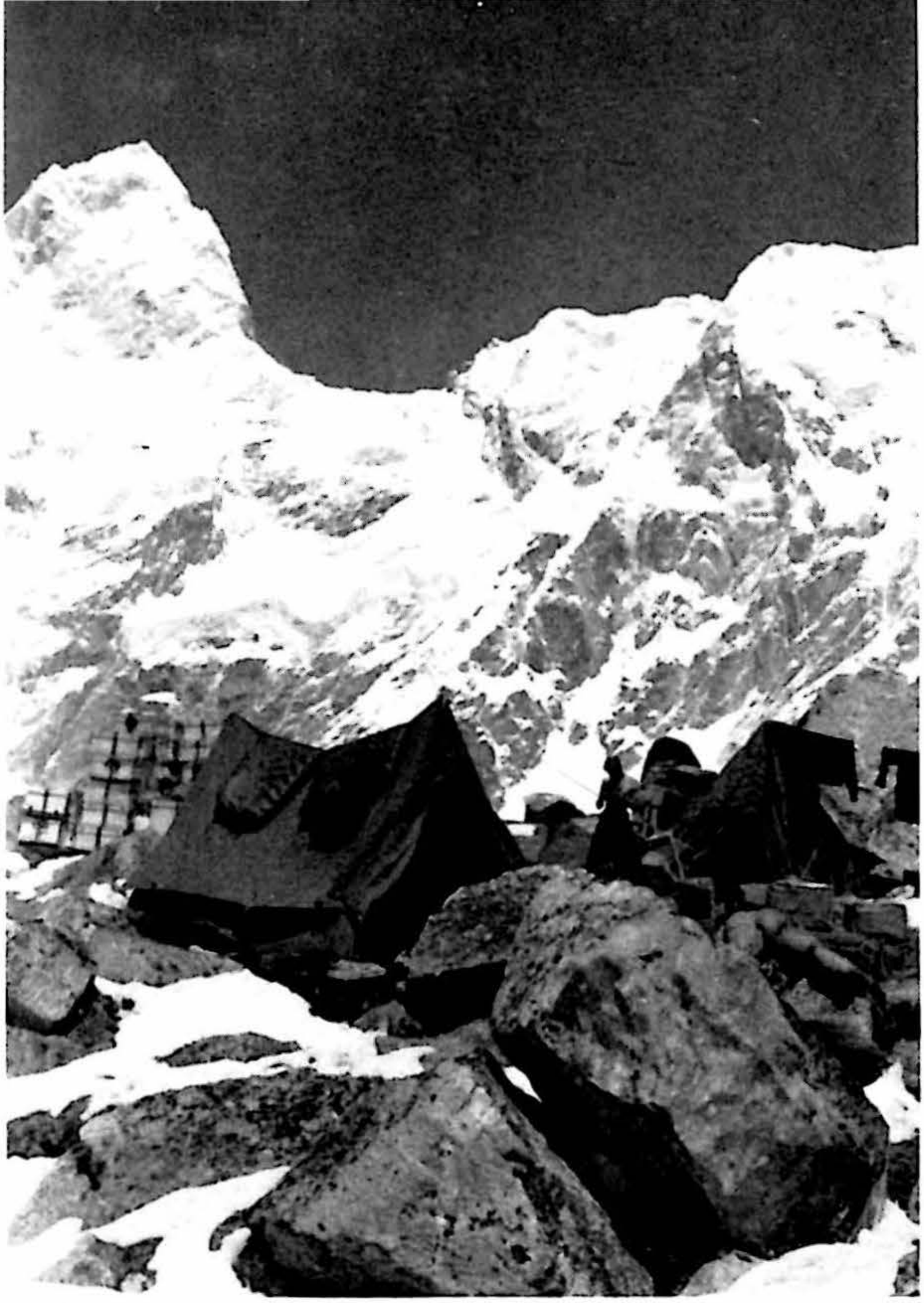
Charles was kind enough to allow Hardie and me to try and finish our task. On April 26 we pitched a new Camp I at 19,700 ft., two-thirds of the way up the west slope of the Western Rock Buttress. It was a snow-slope throughout, very steep in parts, and menaced in a few places by ice-cliffs, but the dangers of ice or surface snow avalanches seemed far less than the unpredictable terrors of the Lower Icefall. We left camp at 6.45 A.M. next morning before dawn. It was bitterly cold. Threatening grey clouds were creeping up the valley and only the tips of Jannu and Kabru were in the sun. Our tent was in a natural hollow just below a series of huge crevasses which had been invisible from lower down. We could avoid all but one, which was 20 ft. wide and 60 ft. deep, and bridged by a shaky arch of snow, an inverted arch which sagged in the middle. The far wall of the crevasse was sheer ice, and Hardie had to cut a foot-wide traversing ledge to the right for 15 ft., until the angle relented and it was possible to reach the steep snow-slopes above. Despite the 200 ft. of rope which was eventually

fixed here, plus an aluminium ladder to strengthen the bridge, this obstacle was always very tricky for the Sherpas. They would shuffle uneasily along the ledge, muttering prayers as they stared down at the yawning greeny-blue depths into which their bulky loads were threatening to overbalance them.

On the slopes above, we couldn't help recalling that hereabouts, by starting their own avalanche, Pache and three porters had met their deaths. A heavy snowfall on these treacherous slopes could maroon any parties higher up the mountain for days on end. This actually happened to Evans and Brown. They tried to return to Base because of lack of food. In Joe's words: 'We started down and the snow was waist deep. The angle at the top was about forty degrees. I was leading downwards. Suddenly there was a cracking noise in the snow, the usual thing before an avalanche occurs. I stopped. I think Charles hadn't heard this; he thought probably that I was tiring, so he decided to take the lead. As he was passing me, the weight of two of us on one point caused the snow to crack again, and a crack appeared in the snow that ran out for several yards in each direction and opened about two inches. We both stood there looking at one another for a few seconds, and then turned round and ran back up the way we had come, just regardless of the lack of oxygen.' I don't know what they had left to eat. Fortunately, their appetites were beginning to decrease with the altitude, but, simultaneously, food fads were developing. For one breakfast Joe chose Cheddar cheese laced with tomato ketchup, and a couple of Mars bars to follow. He held it for half an hour.

Hardie and I eventually reached the top of the Western Rock Buttress, or the 'Hump' as we christened it, crossed an awkward crevasse on the rounded crest, and found ourselves at the top of the snow gully, the key to our outflanking movement. It proved to be about 400 ft. high and at about forty degrees. During the easy descent, we could look down over the last hundred yards of the Lower Icefall and trace a route through its debris to our Mecca—the horizontal snow plateau beyond. As we wound in and out of the ice-blocks plastered with soft snow, we were in a blistering sun-trap. The air was still and muggy until, forcing our way up the final twenty-foot ice-wall in an hour's cutting, we emerged breathlessly onto the soft snow shelf. We had penetrated a new world. At last we were getting somewhere. There was plenty of room for an avalanche-free camp site—Camp II (20,400 ft.)—and above us rose the Upper Icefall, seeming more stable and less terrifying than we had expected. It was slightly rounded, so that the avalanches from the Great Shelf would not sweep it, but would be diverted on either side.

Next day we helped to install Charles and Joe at Camp II and returned very happily, feeling that at last we had earned a short rest at Base. We gorged ourselves on fresh yak steaks, and afterwards, lying snugly in bed beside the radio listening to the Hallé Orchestra playing Beethoven's Egmont Overture, I almost imagined myself back in the Free Trade Hall. It had snowed that afternoon as usual, but



5. SECOND BASE CAMP, LOOKING WESTWARD, SHOWING PART OF JANNU.



6. ON THE UPPER ICE-FALL.



7. Camp III on Upper Ice-fall, showing (in the middle of the Western Rock Buttress) the gully leading down from the Hump.



8. Band on Gangway during first assault.

our daily met. report forecast still more Westerly Depressions with a deterioration in the weather on April 30.

The others had been busy stocking the original Base Camp and now began transferring everything to the new site—a dreary task—but some of them had enjoyed a little climbing on Talung Peak (23,080 ft.). During a reconnaissance, Mather and McKinnon reached about 21,500 ft. after surmounting all the difficulties, but a storm came, and now that all our tents were required on Kangchenjunga, a serious attempt had to be abandoned. Talung would be a nice peak for a small party some day.

THE BUILD-UP AND AN ADVANCE RECONNAISSANCE

As reconnaissance parties worked on the Upper Icefall and others improved the route to Camp II, we entered the ' build-up ' phase of the climb. A ' low-level ferry ' would carry stores from Base to Camp II, sleeping at Camp I on the way, and a ' high-level ferry ' based on Camp II would relay up to our Advance Base, Camp III, at 21,800 ft. This camp was to be halfway up the Upper Icefall, safely situated beneath a great overhanging wall of ice, on a platform forty feet long by fifteen feet wide. Below, the ice-walls, rapidly becoming festooned with marker flags, ropes and rope ladders, fell towards Camp II.

Each carrying team consisted of six to nine Sherpas with one or two Sahibs. After one party had taken up bridging materials and food for Evans and Brown, who were pioneering the route to Camp III, the true carry began on May 1. Brown and McKinnon ran the H.A. ferry first of all, later to be relieved by Mather and Streather. The rest of us went in turn on the L.A. ferry. It became a monotonous task ; days of mist, fresh snow and uncertain tracks alternating with others of fierce, enervating sunshine, soggy steps and balling crampons. An early start was the thing, and, as the route improved, the teams would return to Base sooner and sooner, until one even surprised us at our mid-morning coffee. The weather began to get better and we wondered whether the pre-monsoon lull was coming too early for us.

This phase continued for a fortnight until we had piled up the necessary ton and a half of stores required at Advance Base and above.

Friday, May 13, was a great day for our expedition. We still did not know if we could reach the Great Shelf, or get far enough up it to place a camp within striking distance of the summit. Evans decided to take Hardie with him on a lightning reconnaissance to find out. Above Camp III they wore closed-circuit oxygen apparatus. On the previous day, accompanied by Annullu and Urkien carrying loads, they had rapidly climbed to the top of the Upper Icefall and put Camp IV at 23,500 ft. But still a barrier of crevasses separated them from the Great Shelf. Could they find a way through ? The morning was overcast. The west wind had blown hard all night, and the driven snow still spattered against the tent. Although they had slept on oxygen, they woke feeling ill, their morale low. At nine-o'clock they

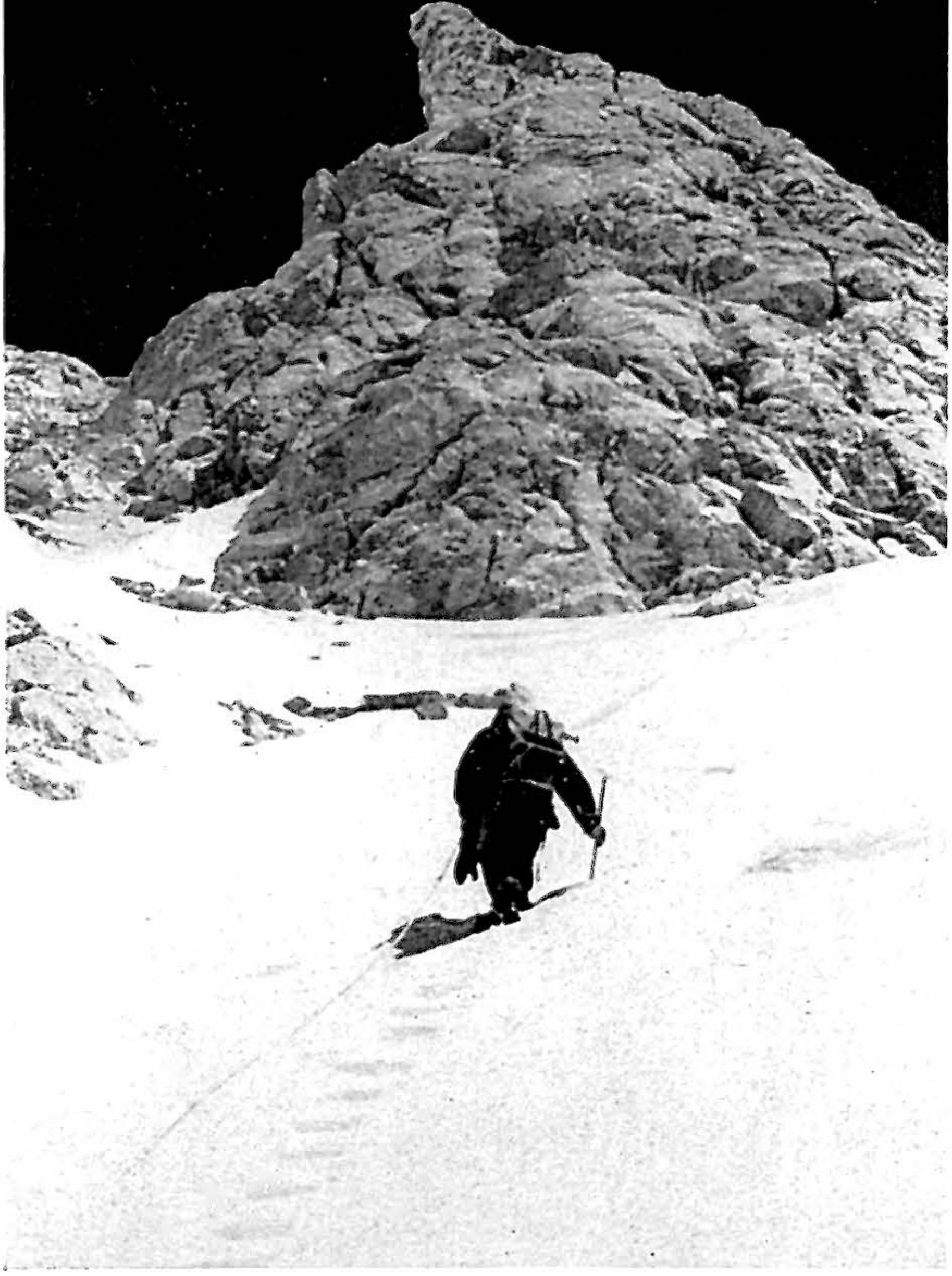
made a tentative start. Unable to see a clear line, they cut their way along a great whaleback of ice, and from the top saw that it took them past the worst crevasses. Some intricate route-finding and they were standing on the Great Shelf at last. The expedition's first objective was achieved. Now we could make plans for the summit ridge. They went on till noon, toiling up the snow-slopes towards the Gangway, until at 25,300 ft. they found a site for Camp V in the shelter of a vertical ice-cliff—higher now than man had ever been on Kangchenjunga. They had reached what was to us, on this mountain, the equivalent of the South Col on Everest. They returned. While Streather and Mather and their Sherpas began to stock Camp IV, the rest of us gathered to snatch a rest at Base Camp.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSAULT

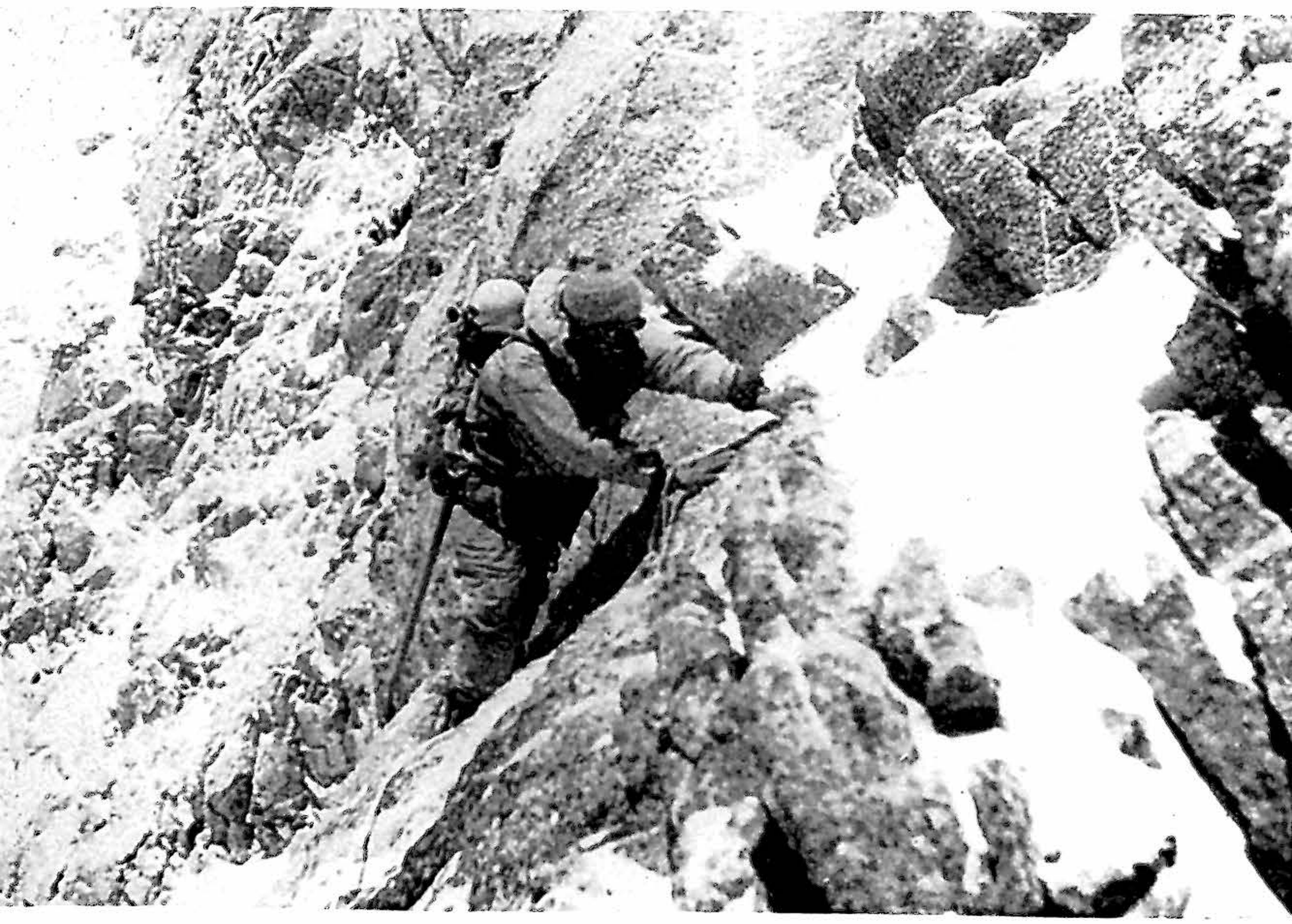
There was an air of expectancy about the camp as we awaited Charles' arrival. We knew that he would be allotting each of us a vital task during the assault. Since we were all fit, every one must secretly have longed to be chosen for a summit bid, but ready at the same time to take on any job, however unspectacular. Charles came in while we were lunching and, with a mug of tea in his hand, quite suddenly, without any preliminaries, told us his plans. Tom McKinnon and John Jackson would lead Sherpa teams carrying vital stores to Camp V. Then the first summit pair, Joe Brown and myself, with Charles, Neil Mather, Dawa Tensing, Ang Temba, Ang Noru and Tashi in support, would move up from camp to camp a day behind. Their supporting role was to put Camp VI—the last one—as high as possible near the top of the Gangway. To double our chances of success, Norman Hardie and Tony Streather would form a second assault team, supported by Urkien and Illa Tensing, and they would follow up a day behind us. On the upward journey, Sahibs would start using oxygen for climbing and sleeping above Camp III ; the Sherpas only for the final carry above Camp V.

Tomorrow, May 15, Jackson and McKinnon were leaving, so we had a good supper together just in case it would be the last one : tomato soup, stewed steak, roast potatoes and peas, followed by pineapple and custard, and then Ovaltine. We opened the second and last bottle of rum and made Mummery's blood (rum and black treacle) and a hot lemon punch. Waving the empty bottle, Tom, with his matted red beard, heavy ribbed jersey and scarlet nightcap, resembled a jovial pirate plucked from the pages of ' Peter Pan'. I didn't sleep at all well that night.

The first hitch was in stocking Camp V. When using oxygen, we found that any slight leak from the top of our masks made our goggles fog up badly. In order to see, one tended to push them up momentarily rather than bother to wipe them. On the journey up to Camp IV Jackson tried this once too often, became snowblind, and spent a sleepless night in agony. ' I felt as if powdered glass had got under my eyelids,' he said. In the morning he could hardly see but, still in acute



9. BROWN AT TOP OF GANGWAY DURING FIRST ASSAULT.



10. BAND ON THE ROCKS ABOVE THE GANGWAY, FIRST ASSAULT.

[*To face p.* 220.

pain, he insisted on going and was roped between two Sherpas, whom he could encourage, even though he couldn't see where they were going. There was deep soft snow, and it took all day to get up the Great Shelf. McKinnon and five Sherpas reached Camp V and set up a tent. But four others, who were behind and nearing exhaustion, had to dump their loads—forty to forty-five pounds—on the steep slope below the camp, or risk being benighted. One, early in the day, had dropped his load into a crevasse and, all alone and overcome with shame, he'd stayed to recover it. Now far behind, he struggled along in the wake until the returning porters met him and forced him to abandon it.

We met them all at Camp IV, where we'd arrived to spend the night, and cheered them on their journey down to III. Jackson could not see well enough to go on down, and McKinnon, shepherding in the exhausted Pemi Dorje, arrived too late to do so. We made room for them gladly, pleased at the success of the carry, and thinking that tomorrow they would go down to III, we would go on to V, and Hardie and Streather would come up to IV.

That night there was an ominous change in the monotony of our weather forecast. Winds, as usual, would be forty to fifty knots, but they would be from the south-west instead of the customary north-west. We were warned that the monsoon might come in three days' time. If it did we were sunk.

When we woke in the night, which was often, we heard the perennial wind screaming across the barren site of our camp and the snow battering against the canvas. Had we looked out we would have seen that this was not merely driven snow but a raging blizzard. It lasted for sixty hours. Visibility was down to a few feet, and the new snow piled up on the windward side of the tents. No upward progress could be made. We had to sit and wait while our chances seemed like sand running away through our fingers. 'Another b—— white Christmas,' said Joe, thrusting his head out through the tent sleeve on the second day. That afternoon the storm moderated sufficiently for McKinnon, Jackson and Pemi Dorje to attempt the descent to III. Joe and I escorted them down the first and steepest part. Deep fresh snow banked up all the hollows, and small avalanches were frequent. In the wind and cold, progress was very slow. We were relieved to hear by radio of their safe arrival below.

Early on the morning of the third day—May 22—Tashi, my own personal Sherpa, looked out and shouted excitedly, 'Sahib, it's clear. I can see all the way round from Darjeeling to Everest.' It was blowing as hard as ever, but the wind had veered slightly and we got ready to move. By ten o'clock we had pulled on our boots, drunk two mugs of tea, and rolled up our sleeping-bags. We were ready—but not quite. We spent the next half hour vainly prodding the deep snow round our tents, hunting for our ropes and cursing our stupidity in leaving them outside. At last we got going for Camp V ; Charles and Joe in front, Neil and I behind, each with our Sherpas. It would be a four-hour journey we thought, but we didn't allow for struggling through the

new snowdrifts, nor for the sudden furious gusts of wind in our faces. To save my energy for the future, Neil led most of the way. He sank in to mid-calf, for the tracks of the first party a few minutes ahead were already filled in. It was mid-afternoon before they reached the steep slope below the supply dump. All at once they realised that they were wading in the debris of a new snow avalanche. Ahead, what looked like a Primus stove was sticking out of the snow. They were too tired to assess the magnitude of the disaster. Between them and Camp V the ice was swept bare, where the stores had been, and here and there a food-box, a tent, an oxygen cylinder, stuck out of the snow. We had to recover all we could, add it to our loads, then, gasping for breath, trudge the last few yards to the camp site. They were the longest yards on the whole expedition. The sun here had set and it was desperately cold. My friends' faces were blue and pinched ; icicles hung from their nostrils and beards. When Charles saw us arrive, he wondered if he too looked so like the dead. Every movement to dig or pull brought on a furious panting, and while we searched for buried belongings and tried to rig up our tents, the wind lashed our faces and the concealing snow mocked our efforts to find the necessities of life. This moment marked for our little party the nadir of our spirits. Even my air mattress chose this occasion to be punctured. At last we crawled thankfully inside the tents. There was no supper that night, but somehow the Sherpas lit a stove and produced mugs of hot tea. We thawed out our sleeping-bags, turned on our oxygen, and slept.

We were too tired next morning to make an early start, and this was essential if we were to get Camp VI as high as possible. So we put everything back a day and reorganised ourselves. By great good fortune the afternoon was calm and sunny and we began for the first time to enjoy Camp V. Before us lay the snow-white table-top of Kabru ; to the west was the twisted spire of Jannu, high as ourselves ; all around and beyond were measureless acres of billowing cloud stretching away over the plains of India.

The Sherpas started melting snow at four-thirty in the morning, but it was nearly nine by the time we left in the bitter cold before the sun had reached the tents. Slowly, with an excitement that no weariness could dull, we worked our way to the foot of the Gangway. It sloped steeply in two directions, up towards the West Col, and down beneath our left hands towards the snow hollow under the Sickle—that conspicuous crescent of rock visible from Darjeeling. We had always wondered about the condition of the snow on the Gangway. We were lucky ; it was good and firm. Three strokes with an ice-axe made a step. We forged steadily ahead. Charles, Neil Mather and Dawa Tensing led in turn on the first rope so that Joe and I could spare our energy. We were all—Sherpas and Sahibs—using oxygen and carrying loads up to forty pounds.

We paused to rest each hour. After four hours, I began to look around nervously for a camp site. One by one, we began to run out of oxygen, but strove step by step to gain all the height we could. At

2 P.M. we reached an outcrop of broken rocks and dropped our loads with one accord. 26,900 ft. But there was no place for a tent. The only thing to do was to hack a ledge out of the forty-five-degree snow-slope with our ice-axes. The exertion was beginning to prove too much for us when I noticed that Tashi's oxygen set was still pumping away. There was quite a lot left—he must have climbed with it switched off for an hour without realising ! I buckled it on, and, with the supply valve turned to the full, gained a final burst of energy. Even so, the ledge was too narrow, for we had hit rock at the back and the tent hung sadly over the outside edge. The others left with fervent handshakes, wishing us good luck, and Joe and I were left alone to decide who should sleep in the outside position. We drew matchsticks, and I lost !

TOWARD THE SUMMIT

While I got the sleeping oxygen ready, Joe lit the primus and began melting snow for drinks. We were determined not to let ourselves get dehydrated. We made lemonade from crystals and then a mug of tea each, with lots of sugar. Supper consisted of asparagus soup from a packet, a tin of lambs' tongues with mashed potatoes, and a nightcap of drinking chocolate. I think that's a better meal than most summit parties have had. Then we crawled into our sleeping-bags, keeping on every scrap of clothing—even our boots. We didn't want to risk ours getting frozen hard like Hillary's on Everest. I wore my boots solidly for three days and nights during the assault.

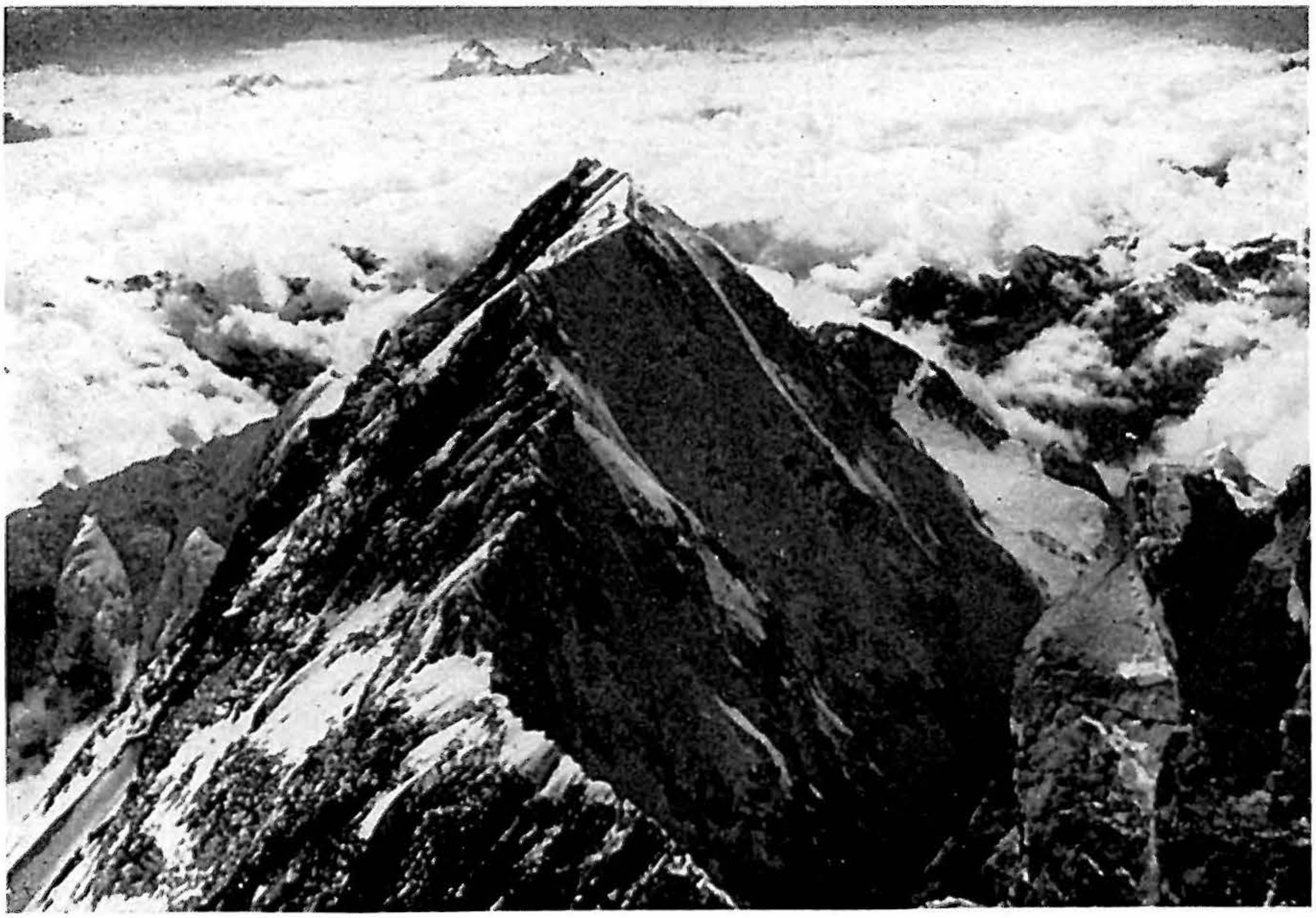
We shared a yellow 1600-litre cylinder of oxygen between us. Being not quite full, it gave us nine hours' supply at one litre per minute each. I didn't sleep as well with it as usual. Perhaps it was the excitement. As we lay side by side, fragments of snow kept skittering down the slope and hitting the tent. Sometimes I thought it was a snowfall beginning, at others I wondered what might happen if a really large lump or a stone came. We had stayed roped up just in case and tied the middle of it round a spike of rock close to the tent. I prayed for fine weather to-morrow, otherwise we would not stand a chance. The others had done their utmost to get us as high as possible, so we must not let them down. An awful responsibility lay upon our shoulders. I cursed myself for working with my bare fingers just a moment too long that morning for now they were slightly frostbitten ; the tips all blistered. I hoped they wouldn't handicap me next day.

The God of Kangchenjunga was kind to us, for May 25 dawned fine. We woke automatically when the oxygen was exhausted at five o'clock. We breakfasted on a couple of pints of tea and a biscuit or two and made off up the Gangway at 8.15, swerving out left to meet the sunshine. Near the top of the Gangway we had planned to turn off right at a string of snow patches and climb across the face, because we had seen earlier through binoculars that the West ridge itself was extremely broken and difficult.

Unfortunately, we had very little idea as to how far up the Gangway we really were and we turned off too early at the wrong snow patch. By



11. Looking N.E. over the West Ridge at the Bavarians' N.E. Spur.



12. Kangbachen, the West Peak of Kangchenjunga, from near the Summit. Makalu and Everest massifs in distance.

the time we had realised our mistake and turned back, an hour and a half of precious time was lost. So we hurried on up the Gangway as fast as possible to try and make up time. Apart from the snow of the Gangway, most of the climbing would be on rock, so we had left our canvas overboots behind, and now, when we reached the first rocks, we took our crampons off.

We were aiming for a little subsidiary snow-ridge which would lead us back to the main West ridge beyond its worst difficulties. The approach to this snow-ridge was steep and we had to climb pitch by pitch for about three hundred feet. There was one tricky section where you had to swing round a corner on your hands. It might have ranked as ' difficult ' at sea-level, and Joe safeguarded it with a piton since I had a poor belay. Just above was an impressive ice-slope, sixty degrees in places, which required two pitches. There was a sensational rocky eyrie half-way ; one seemed to be poised in mid-air thousands of feet above the Shelf and the glacier below.

Because of the time we were taking, every breath of oxygen was vital, so we cut down our supply to the minimum rate of two litres per minute, only increasing the flow when wrestling with some difficulty. This low rate seemed hardly sufficient for a person of my size and weight, and may have accounted partly for the fact that Joe was now definitely going better than I was. I had led at first, then we had a period leading through, and now Joe was in front. He offered to stay in the lead, and I was happy to agree.

We came out on to the crest of the snow-ridge and the summit pyramid was at last visible, culminating about 400 feet above. We had been climbing for over five hours without a rest, such was our feeling of urgency, so after cutting up the snow-ridge, we joined the west ridge and sank down in a little hollow behind and above the cluster of pinnacles. My throat was parched. We took off our oxygen masks and had a quick snack of lemonade, toffee and mint cake.

A strong breeze was blowing up the North-west face, carrying flurries of snow over our heads. I looked over at the North ridge and then photographed our route ahead. The ridge was easier at first, and by keeping a little down on the right we would avoid the wind. But at the last a nose of rock reared up, sheer and smooth. We could have no idea what it held in store for us. It was 2 P.M. We only had a couple of hours' oxygen left.

' We ought to turn back by three o'clock, Joe,' I said, ' or we may have to spend the night out.'

' We've just got to reach the top before then,' he replied.

We carried on. The West and South peaks of Kangchenjunga were now well below us. We skirted below the rock nose, round a corner, and up a little gully. There above us the wall was broken by several vertical cracks about twenty feet high, with a slight overhang to finish. Joe was keen to try one. As he said later : ' I knew that at sea-level I could climb it quite easily, but at that height you don't know just how long your strength's going to last you if you hang by your arms for



13. Talung Saddle, Talung Peak and Kabru from near the summit.



14. South Peak of Kangchenjunga, from near summit.

any length of time. You might just fall off in sheer exhaustion.' Turning his oxygen to the full six litres a minute and safeguarding his lead with a couple of running belays, he struggled and forced his way up. It was the hardest part of the whole climb ; perhaps ' very difficult ' had it been at normal altitudes. From the top, I remember him shouting, ' George, we're there ! '

I joined him, with no more than a tight rope I'm glad to say, and there before us, some twenty feet away and five feet higher than the ground on which we stood, was the very top, formed by a gently sloping cone of snow. It was a quarter to three. We had come as far as we were allowed.

We took photographs of each other and of the view round about. There was a great sea of cloud at 20,000 feet, so only the highest mountains stood out like rocky islands with the waves lapping round about them. To the west, beyond the sharp ridge of Kangbachen, were the giants Makalu, Lhotse and Everest, eighty miles away, silhouetted deep blue against the faint horizon. Sikkim was hidden by both cloud and the concealing curve of the summit, but over to the north were the snow-streaked, drumlin-like hills of Tibet. Close at hand, we could just see the summit of the Bavarians' north-east spur and, through rents in the cloud, the grey snake of the Kangchenjunga Glacier beneath us, where Dyhrenfurth's party had tried in vain.

We turned to descend. After an hour, the oxygen finished and we discarded the sets and carried on down, feeling very weary. Once, when crossing a patch of unstable snow, a foothold suddenly broke. I slipped, rolled over on to my stomach and dug my axe-point into the snow to arrest myself. In a split second it was all over, but I had to lie there panting while Joe said : 'It makes me breathless just to watch you do that.'

Guided by shouts, we reached our tent as darkness fell. As planned, Hardie and Streather had arrived there ready for a second attempt in case we had failed. They had been waiting anxiously, as we should really have gone on down to sleep at Camp V, but now, in the dark, it was too dangerous. So the four of us squeezed into that tiny two-man tent, overlapping the narrow ledge, and they plied us generously with tea and soup, and more tea and more soup. I'd never felt so thirsty in my life before. There was no tossing up for the outside position this time ; they reckoned I knew all about it, so there I went. The sewing of the canvas would creak beneath me, and each time I thought : ' Supposing the stitching goes ? '

Somehow we managed to pass the night. We insisted that Hardie and Streather used the two sleeping-bags and some oxygen because they still wanted to have a crack at the top. Joe was in agony through snow-blindness—again caused by removing fogged-up goggles—but fortunately we were still able to see ourselves down early next day while the other two repeated our ascent. It was May 26, the day of the General Election at home.

Hardie and Streather had brought plenty of oxygen, as they felt that

shortage of it would be the first reason for failure on our part. So when they left Camp VI at 8.30 A.M., they carried a yellow (1600 litres) and a blue (800 litres) cylinder each. They followed our route and, being able to use traces of our old steps in places, they made good speed. Incidentally, unlike us, they wore their crampons the whole time. But, as Streather says, they didn't have everything their own way :

'Hardie was leading and I shouted to him to stop, for I noticed that the windproof jacket on his frame was loose. He stopped, and swung the frame off his back. As he did so, his large oxygen cylinder slid out of its straps and went sliding down the mountain. The valve was knocked open, and I can still remember the cylinder hissing as it rushed down the face and out of sight.' So they had to share the remaining oxygen, Hardie carrying the yellow cylinder and leading, and Streather the two blue cylinders on a special one litre per minute flow rate.

At last they came to our vertical crack near the top. Joe and I had left a sling half-way up for them and were wondering how they would like it. They didn't, so they went on a few yards round the wall and there was a perfect little snow-ridge running easily up to the summit ! They arrived at 12.15 P.M. and spent an hour there. Streather changed his cylinders round and left the exhausted one behind. Unfortunately, a misconnection rendered the second one useless, so he had to make the whole of the descent without oxygen, and they, too, ended by spending the night at Camp VI.

Charles and Dawa Tensing were waiting at Camp V when they came down. When Charles shouted, 'Have you been to the top?' there was no answer. It seemed a silly question ; where else could they have been all that time ? A little closer, Norman shouted back, 'Who won the Election ?' Charles didn't think that one worth answering either.

By May 28 everyone was off the mountain. But our great jubilation over the double success of our Kangchenjunga Reconnaissance was marred by some very sad news on our return to Base Camp. One Sherpa, Pemi Dorje, had returned exhausted from the high carry. Three days later he seemed recovered, but suddenly developed the symptoms of cerebral thrombosis and, despite all that John Clegg could do, he had died on May 26—within the very hour that Hardie and Streather had reached the near-summit. So, to the Sherpas, it seemed that, after all, the God of Kangchenjunga had demanded the sacrifice of one of the keenest and most likeable of their number. We buried him near the site of Pache's grave, under a rock carved by the other Sherpas with his name and the eternal Buddhist prayer, *Om mane padme hum*—'Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus.'



15. Band, lost on return journey.



16. The Leader.