TO THE MONK'S HEAD ON RAKAPOSHI

By ROGER CHORLEY

As we passed the signboard announcing Rawalpindi on the long straight road from Peshawar, the car's mileometer clicked up another mile: we had arrived. We had left London on April 28 and now, June 9, we were in Rawalpindi 7,585 miles away so the tachometer said. We had only thought of the idea of going out to the Himalayas by car in the New Year: Fisher, Wrangham and myself would drive out and the other three, Tissières, Band and Fraser, kept by the Cambridge term until the beginning of June, would bring it back again. But the idea of a party from Cambridge visiting the Himalayas was born as long ago as the winter of 1952, and indeed we nearly got away in 1953, but as permission, and then only 'in principle,' arrived in the middle of the Tripos, that year did not seem a very propitious one. However, for 1954 permission arrived in February, and now we were in Rawalpindi.

During the course of the next week the other three, together with the luggage, arrived variously and in driblets, so that by June 18 we were ready to fly into Gilgit. At the last moment the party was powerfully augmented by Major-General M. Hayaud Din, Chief of General Staff of the Pakistan Army, who decided it was an appropriate moment to do a tour of duty in the Gilgit area. The presence of a Chief of General Staff in the party suggested that as far as the difficulties of getting to the mountains were concerned we should not have much trouble. And indeed, the promptness with which he dealt with the first crisis, the breakdown of the only civilian plane on the Gilgit flight, emphasised this. With a mere three days' delay, he arranged with the Air Force for us and our baggage to be flown into Gilgit on June 21.

This flight to Gilgit must be one of the most spectacular in the world, for you fly up the barren Indus gorge at 10,000 ft. with the mountains rising above on either side to culminate in the huge bulk of Nanga Parbat, its summit only a few miles away and still fully 15,000 ft. above you; but on the 21st Nanga was closely covered in clouds. This one and a half hour's flight saves a march of ten days through not very interesting country and enables you to spend longer among the more exciting valleys of the Karakorum. The suddenness with which you are suddenly set down in the heart of the mountains is worth while.

I should perhaps say something about our plans. To be respectable an expedition must apparently have plans and we, because of the presence of an Austro-German expedition in the same area, were required to be very explicit. (Once in the mountains however this didn't seem to matter much.) Our general idea was to spend the first fortnight in

the Kukuay glacier area north of Chalt climbing, getting fit, and sorting some topographical problems that arose out of the Anglo-Swiss expedition's brief visit in 1947. Then we would go over to Rakaposhi (25,550 ft.), and if there was any time left we would travel up through Hunza and Nagar to the Hispar glacier and Distaghil.

In Gilgit we heard that the Germans were in the Kukuay area, so reluctantly we chose a small but unknown valley to its west, the Karengi. With the General dismissing obstacles in a forthright manner, we were off from Gilgit on the 22nd. Six jeeps, loaned by the Northern Scouts, took us to Chalt, 34 miles to the north, and in addition we had six Hunza men from the Scouts to act as porters.

Two days later we were pitching our first Base Camp about two miles below the snout of the Karengi glacier. For the first day or two it was difficult to get a clear idea of the geography of the valley, as the district seemed to be getting its proverbial annual four inches of rain in a single instalment. However, the valley turned out to be a simple one: a glacier five miles long with an ice-fall at half-distance and spreading out into snow basins around its head. Two peaks were attempted, one of 19,180 ft., the only one which seemed reasonable and close at hand, but discretion was superior to valour on an 'avalanchy' slope a few hundred feet from the summit, so it remains for someone to complete its ascent. A combination of bad weather and distance prevented us launching the final attack on the second peak: a mountain much the same height as the first, and near the head of the glacier.

We learnt several important things from this trip: our Scouts did not seem to be too good, or keen, as load carriers: the mountains seemed to start much lower down than in, say, Nepal: and the weather seemed to be Alpine in character—usually bad, with good spells. On July 3, a typical Welsh day of rain and mist, we were coming down to Chalt again. Our 'acclimatisation period,' to use a fashionable phrase, had not really been a great success. The weather had been almost uniformly bad and our fortnight had been cut short at one end by the flight delays at Pindi and at the other end by an invitation from the Mir of Nagar to come to his Ginani or Harvest Festival at Nagar on July 7. The Ginani is a semi-movable feast for the first week of July. The Mir had already moved it as much as possible to suit our convenience, and it would have been sad to miss such a unique opportunity for the sake of a few more days in the Karengi.

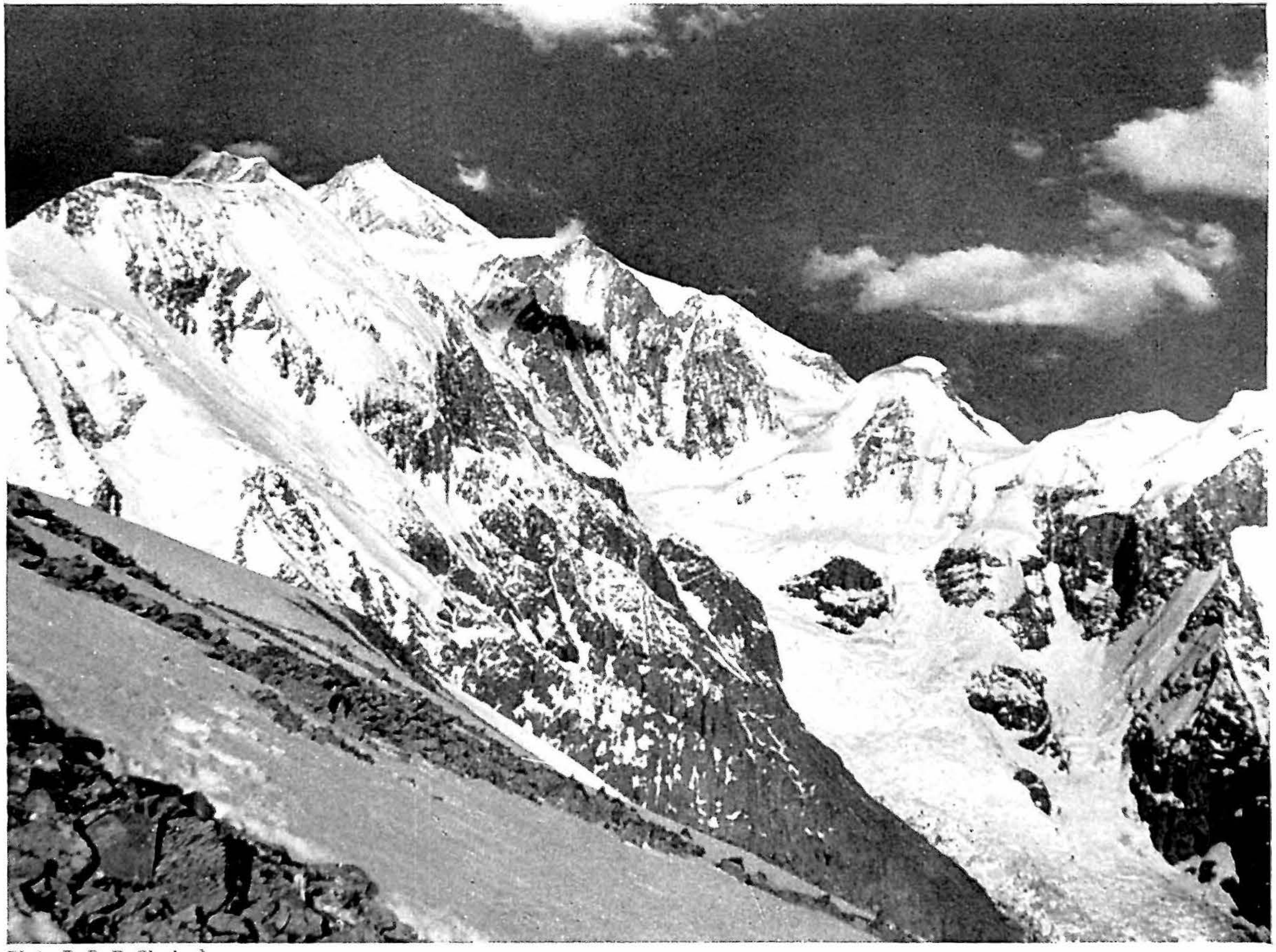
We went to Nagar by way of Hunza. From Chalt you cross the Hunza river by a simple but precarious method: a soap-box suspended from a cable by a pulley. The middle of a long rope is tied to the pulley and villagers from either side pull you across. We walked the first five miles to meet the equestrian half of the expedition. (We were by now a large party, for the Colonel of the Northern Scouts and his camp followers had joined us.) As most of the climbers had never ridden before, it was only in order not to lose face that we were induced to mount these animals on a narrow path that picked its way between a tangle of boulders. Certainly the well-known Bengali proverb of a

distinguished predecessor of ours on Rakaposhi that ' the sight of a horse makes the traveller lame ' was not immediately applicable. The saddles in this part of the world are of wood and apparently their owners have them tailored to fit. One knows one cannot successfully wear someone else's clothes, and much the same would appear to be true of tailored saddles ; by the end of the day we were all extremely sore. Control of the animals we also found tricky, and most of us had Gilpin-like episodes at one time or another.

It is magnificent country, this gorge of the Hunza, ' difficult to describe without indulging in superlatives . . . the ultimate manifestation of mountain grandeur ' to quote Eric Shipton. An arid country in browns and greys with a track sketched improbably across the great cliffs and scree slopes ; over these sections you should walk your horse. Yet here and there, as if to emphasise the impression, is a dab of green, an oasis of cultivation on an alluvial terrace stuck as it were to the slope of the hillside. Each terrace has its village with the polo ground as the main ' street ' ; each is a centre of cultivation with, in early July, the wheat just ripening. The path leads under swaying poplars and fruit trees, without disturbing your equilibrium in the saddle you may reach up and pluck ripe apricots. And the fruit here is to be remembered. As a backdrop there are the mountains : the 24,000-ft. mountains behind Baltit to the left and to the right the magnificent north face of Rakaposhi, unified in design and unbelievably steep : 15,000 ft. in about as many horizontal. We reached Baltit, capital of Hunza state, for lunch on the second day. The Mir of Hunza, jovial and thick-set, and dressed in sports jacket and grey flannels has wintered in Cannes and shops in Bond Street ; his new palace is, apart from circular doorways, European in feeling. I must confess to a romantic disappointment at this lack of the proper trappings of a remote Eastern potentate. Our stay at Hunza was all too short for we had to cross the river the following morning to lunch with the Mir of Nagar.

It is difficult to put one's finger on the difference between Hunza and Nagar, yet a distinct difference is felt. Certainly Nagar seems more verdant and perhaps, too, there is an impression of less squalor and a cleaner and more Alpine air. The situation of the Mir of Nagar's palace is superb. Lying on a hillock set off from the main mountain slope it is approached by a stately avenue of poplars. In the distance to the east is the 22,000 ft. Golden Peak with a buttress of three Walkers piled on top of each other ; in the other direction the valley appears shut off by the peaks behind Baltit. The day and a half that the Harvest Festival, a sort of Highland gathering, lasted was crowded and exhilarating. Tent pegging followed an archery competition conducted at full gallop ; then the representatives of the villages arrived in a motley crowd and each village performed a ceremonial dance before the Mir. A bird-like hopping affair these dances to the tune of a ten-piece jazz-type band, whose youngest member was perhaps five, and the oldest, sixty. The climax to the whole festival was of course the polo match, in which the home side narrowly lost 9–8, after a frantic

[To face p. 48.



Photo, R. R. E. Chorley.]

RAKAPOSHI. THE SUMMIT PYRAMID AND THE MONK'S HEAD ON THE RIGHT.

hour and a half's play and no change of horses. The beauty of polo here is that there are no rules, and therefore no disputes, the chivalrous would receive short shrift and the lifeman would be at a loss.

Someone once complained to me that the trouble about articles on the Himalayas is that there is far too much of the approach march and far too little of the climbing. It is of course almost a truism that if you want to go climbing, the Himalayas is the last place to go, and for the participants the approach march is often the most enjoyable part of the expedition. And although we ' did ' Hunza and Nagar in a breakneck six days, I for my part found it more continuously interesting and enjoyable than any other part of the expedition. Like many other parts of the Himalayas ' civilisation ' has begun to creep in : the Mir of Hunza has so many visitors now that he is thinking of starting an hotel ; in a few years, it is said, the jeep road will have been pushed up to Baltit and Nagar. *Après moi la déluge* one cannot help thinking : it was good to have been before it.

We reached Nomal late on the afternoon of July 9. Near Nomal you can cross the Hunza river by a classic Himalayan suspension bridge, this one for variety being made of birch twigs. Five miles upstream you turn up a nullah to reach the village of Jaglot and the approaches to the western side of Rakaposhi. While the rest of us went down to Gilgit to collect the rest of our kit, Fraser and Tissières left on the 10th to look for a site for Base Camp. We followed with the coolies a day later, spending the first night at Jaglot. Above, the valley rises in a series of cultivated steps, and we spent the night at the highest one, a beautiful little alp in a forest of firs. It turned out to be only a few hours from the site of our proposed Base Camp—the topmost alp named Darakush : a necklace of small meadows linked by a stream amongst a chaos of boulders and birch trees. It lies in an ablation valley with the immense ice-fall of the Biro glacier, nearly twice as high as the Khumbu ice-fall, rising immediately behind, and 13,000 ft. below Rakaposhi's summit. An enchanting spot this, perhaps as beautiful as Nanga Parbat's fabulous Fairy Meadow.

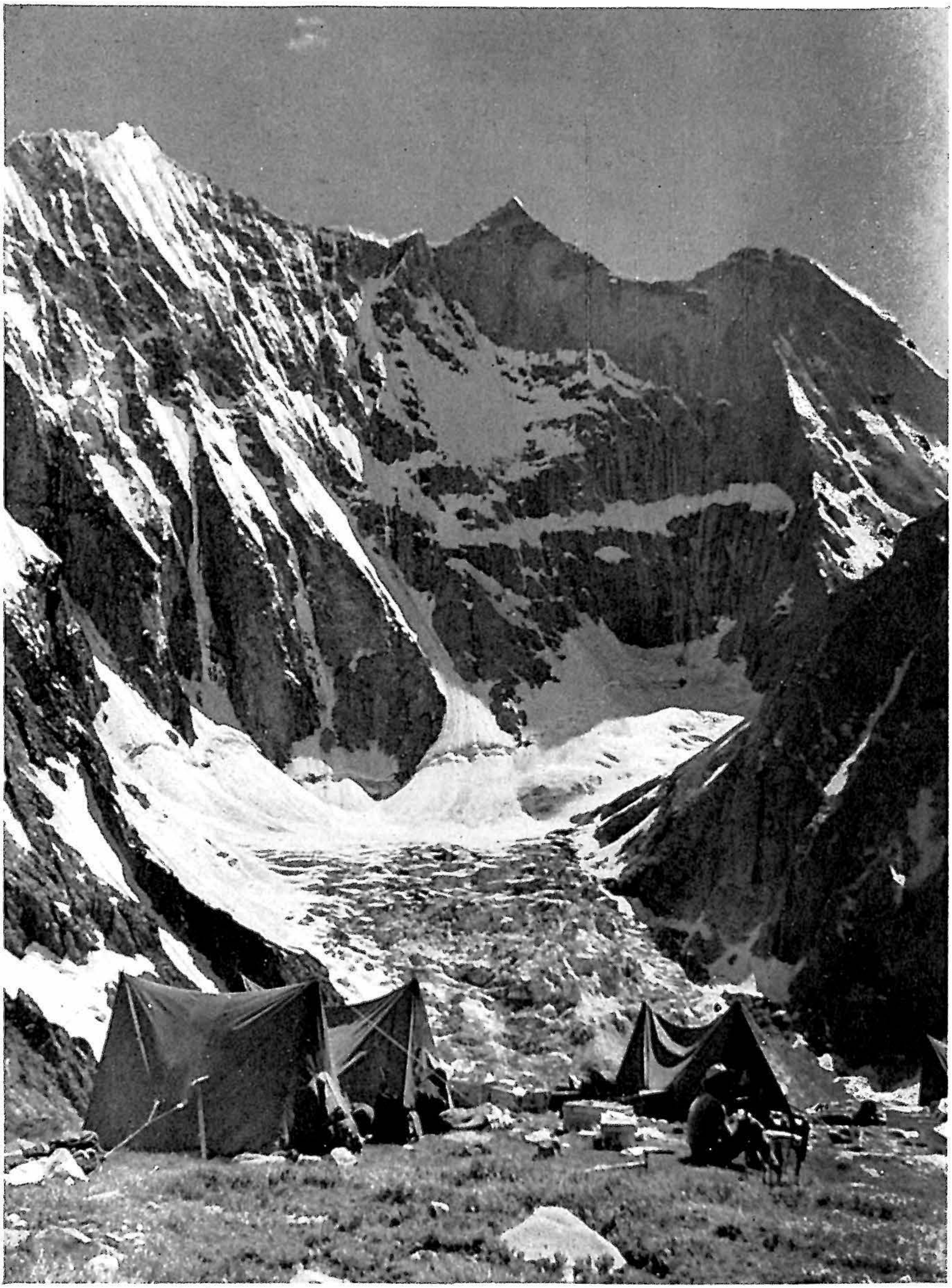
' History,' Mr. Ford remarked, ' is bunk,' but perhaps an historical digression is useful. Luckily the history of Rakaposhi is brief : remarkably so considering its accessibility and attractiveness as a mountain. In 1938 Secord and Vyvyan approaching from the west climbed a small peak of 19,700 ft. at the end of the north-west ridge and were not impressed with the idea of the north-west ridge as a route. The 1947 Anglo-Swiss expedition, which included Secord, again approached from this side. They first attempted a route up the Biro ice-fall (enclosed by the north-west ridge and the spur of the south-west ridge). Objective dangers apart, it is attractive as a route because an easy corridor of snow leads from the top of the ice-fall on to the point where the south-west ridge proper and the south-west spur join, and above the crux of the latter, a 2,000-ft. ice dome known as the Monk's Head. (Indeed for a few hours we toyed with the idea, until an ice avalanche swamped the whole of the head of the ice-fall.) Dismissing

the south-west ridge proper out of hand, they then turned to the south-west spur approaching from its other side and pushed along it to reach a point at about 19,500 ft. with a view of the Monk's Head half a mile away. This seems to have upset them (with the exception of Secord) and they retreated. They met with even less success on the north-west ridge and only got on to it after a long, difficult (' comparable to the Old Brenva ') and dangerous climb. Later on they inspected successively the south-east or Dainor face, the north face, and the east or Bagrot face ; all were impracticable. Earlier in 1954, the Austro-German expedition, according to newspaper reports, had made a thorough inspection of the mountain and the only possible routes they thought were either too difficult or too dangerous.

All this was not very encouraging. It was clearly to be either the south-west ridge or the north-west. I myself would have plumped for the former as photographs showed that the Monk's Head wasn't more than 45°. While the north-west ridge, via the Point 19,700 ft., involved a longish and steep descent and after it you would still be miles, over difficult ridge, from the summit plateau. However, the north-westers were backed up by the additional argument that to attack the south-west we would have to move our newly-established Base Camp, and if we failed on the south-west we would have to move back again. And after all Darakush was such a lovely spot. . . .

We managed to get away from Darakush on July 16 up the steep fellside behind the camp that leads up to the south ridge of the Point 19,700 ft. Our coolies carried magnificently, barefoot virtually, over rugged scree and rock to leave us at 16,000 ft. Only a timely administration of tea and acid drops by the General persuaded them to repeat this carry next day. By the 18th we were in a position to leave Band and Tissières camped below the final upsurge of the peak and we watched them climbing it as we continued relaying next day. As Band remarked on their return on the 20th, they had had a very good climb, that is to say, it was probably too difficult to take our inexperienced Scouts over, moreover the descent on the other side looked long and very steep and the ridge beyond difficult too. In short this was no route. While the others returned to Base Camp, Fraser and I went up to the top camp to climb the peak for the sake of the climb, for it is not often that one makes a third ascent in the Himalayas. We were robbed of it by a storm blowing up and beat a chilly retreat. So I have still actually to climb something in the Himalayas.

We were left with the south-west spur. By July 24 we had all moved round to our new Base Camp above the Kunti glacier (contained by the south-west spur and south-west ridge proper) and Tissières and Wrangham following the 1947 route had been up the couloir to the col on the south-west spur. Our new Base Camp at 14,100 ft. was as attractive in its own way as Darakush : higher and more austere, a small patch of grass and flowering primula lost in a wilderness of moraines. Also more secluded, and shut in by a fine circle of 19,000-ft. peaks each presenting an Eigerwand. On the 25th Fraser and I went up the couloir



Photo, R. R. E. Chorley.]

THE SECOND BASE CAMP.

to fix ropes at the two awkward points and on the same day we established Camp I on the last moraines about 500 ft. below the foot of the couloir—the coolies could carry up to here. The couloir was relatively easy although the rotten snow of the last few hundred feet was trying. By the 28th we were established on the col (Camp II) at about 17,500 ft. with nearly a month's food. A long slope leads above to the shoulder of the spur proper ; Band, Tissières and myself cut steps up this slope and continued along the ridge to find a place for Camp III. The only possibility seemed to be a site almost on the crest of the narrow ridge : a ledge which we built from a mixture of snow and shale.

We had now to make an important decision about our Scouts. Over the course of the last few weeks we had come to like them well and indeed when unloaded they were fast and moved excellently. But as porters we were disappointed. The concerted load-carrying up the couloir seemed to have taken the stuffing out of them. It was only with difficulty that we persuaded them to carry 45 lb., sometimes less than we were carrying ourselves. There were many complaints and reputed illnesses. The climax came when the two laziest who had been on Nanga Parbat in 1953 began to boast of their load-carrying on Nanga. When asked how they accounted for their comparative failure in this respect with us, they replied, ' Oh, the Germans gave us medicine three times a day and you only give it us twice ! ' Logistically, therefore, it seemed hardly worth while persevering with them, and in any case the technical difficulties along the ridge appeared too much for their limited experience. We decided, however, to keep the two best, Alijehat and Alidad, to make up our numbers to eight. The General, too, had reached his limit, although he had made a sporting visit to the site of Camp III.

The position then on July 31 was that four of the party were installed at Camp III, and Band and myself were waiting at the col to move through with the two Scouts as soon as a site for Camp IV had been found. As it turned out this was the last good day for the next ten days, and indeed, of the first seventeen days in August only two were really good. It wasn't until the 3rd that we were able to move up to Camp III, having to remake most of the steps on the ice slope. Here we re-roped : Tissières, Band, Alidad and Wrangham, followed by myself, Alijehat and Fraser fifteen minutes later. The first half-mile of ridge is typically Alpine except for the truly huge cornices. And these were to prove our undoing.

The second rope was following along to where the others seemed, through the light mist, to be having a rest. Such, however, was not the case ; it was only when we were quite close that we saw there were only two : Wrangham and Alidad had evidently fallen through the cornice and Band had been able to practise the classical injunction of the text-book and throw himself down the other side. They must have been 20 ft. from the edge and several tons of snow had collapsed, neither was hurt much and Alidad was soon brought up : Wrangham on the other hand was some 60 ft. down and hanging

over a small ice-cliff. There were the usual difficulties of communication, unropings, the cutting of Alidad's waist-loop to free him, that seem to be associated with such incidents. To recover Ted was more difficult. Pulling him up directly proved impossible and so he was lowered to the bottom of the small cliff and Tissières, by a fine piece of climbing, cut down to him by a circuitous route. First his rucksack was brought up, then he came. And so we were all once more united at the top. Luckily it wasn't many minutes further to the site of Camp IV (at 19,000 ft.), but such is the time that these affairs take that it was twilight as we pitched the two tents and quite dark when Band and I finally turned in after another relay from the broken cornice. During the course of the accident, Fraser had gone back to Camp III to collect Fisher, ropes and tents : afterwards Fisher escorted the two Scouts back to Camp III, followed later by Fraser (who had helped us to carry to Camp IV). There had been much wandering about the ridge that day.

Wrangham and Alidad were luckily only bruised, but it was clear that they must go down to Base Camp for a few days to recuperate. We despatched them with Alijehat next day. We had also to recover all the odds and ends that had been dropped in the excitement—notably two tents. By a stroke of luck the cornice collapsed at the only point on the ridge where there was a snow terrace some 300 ft. down—everywhere else it drops straight to the glacier nearly 5,000 ft. below. At the end of a mammoth top rope I was lowered by Band to collect them. Looking up at the impressive bite out of the ridge, with large overhanging snow masses on either side, and the tracks of a respectable snow avalanche, I decided it was no place to linger, and I returned to the top as quickly as the difficulties and my condition as an overloaded Christmas tree allowed.

The week that followed was one of increasing irritation. On some days we would be completely cooped up in our tents by storm, but often it would clear in the evening and our morale would rise. Even the mornings maddeningly were sometimes fine until after breakfast and then down came the weather again. On other days there might just be cloud and wind, but with the tracks snowed over, it was impossible to tell how close you were to the cornices, and so progress was impossible. Here was a case for marker flags one felt. On one isolated and relatively fine morning Tissières and I went up the Gendarme remaking the tracks (those who had been at Camp III on August 1 had already been along the ridge and up it). The Gendarme rises about 500 ft. above Camp IV and it is in its upper part an extremely thin corniced arête dropping away steeply on either side. It gives splendid climbing, traversing under its crest : a slope of more than 55° of snow on ice followed by a rather messy mixed rock and snow section. Once a track had been made, however, we were quite nonchalant about this traverse and even carried 60 lb. loads over it. If one remembered Longstaff's dictum that in the Himalayas slopes are steeper than they appear, then it is not surprising that the 1947 party turned back here. For the sight of the



Photo, R. R. E. Chorley.]

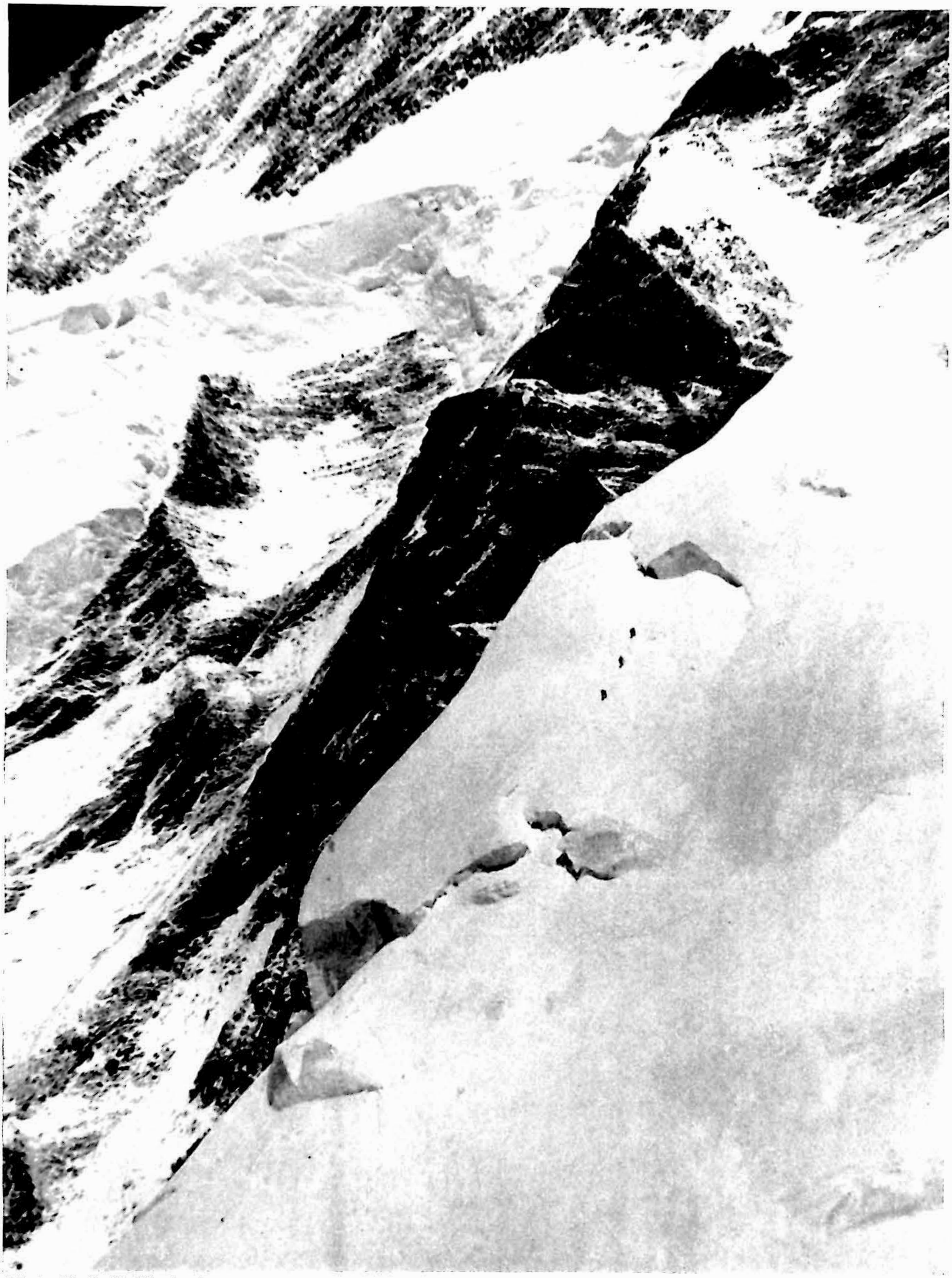
THE GENDARME AND CAMP IV.

Monk's Head from the Gendarme, still more than a half a mile away across the gap, is intimidating. In fact when Tissières and I returned to Camp IV judicious tapping of the barometer of our morale would have sent it to 'unsettled.' Luckily a visit from the two who were still stuck at Camp III, and whose exiguous position had begun to affect them, helped by contrast, to send it up several points.

Finally, on August 11 we had the first of two really good days. We decided to put everything into leaving three of us established below the Monk's Head that day, and a small lottery decided it should be Band, Fisher and Tissières. After so much snow the going was not good and the descent from the Gendarme seemed steep and insecure. There followed a long rising dome of snow with our feet balling-up at each step with pounds of snow. It was not until 4.00 P.M. that we reached a good spot for Camp V at 19,200 ft. a little way above the col below the Monk's Head. Fraser and I returned buoyantly along the ridge to snatch a few minutes' basking in the glorious late afternoon sun in the remains of Camp IV. We could think more hopefully about our prospects now, but everything turned on how easily the Monk's Head went next day. For once the sun set through a clean cold sky.

The next morning, too, promised a good day. We were off in good time, carrying as much as we felt able. As I led up the last rocks and snow that form the top of the Gendarme I felt slightly nervous with expectation and hope: where would we see the others? So much depended on the Monk's Head. They were strung out over the whole length of a 120-ft. rope and moving at a speed which suggested that they were certainly not having to cut steps. Over lunch at the camp we watched their continued progress after a short halt: it was steady until at about three-quarters height they were halted by a slight nick in the obvious route up the left edge. It must be a crevasse. They descended a rope length or two and then swung out to the right on to the face proper, a face dull with the glint of ice. When we left to collect some loads that had been left under the Gendarme nearly a week earlier, they were making slow progress up the ice, but by the time we were back at Camp V again they were out of sight—evidently behind the broad crest of ridge near the top of the Monk's Head. At about 4.15 P.M. they reappeared and descended rapidly, by 5.45 P.M. they had disappeared into the dip that forms the col below the Monk's Head, and half an hour later, exactly nine hours after they had set out, three rather weary men plodded the last few yards into camp. Over mugs of soup protracted into supper they told us about it.

They had had about six hours of good climbing: the slope they thought to be about 45° but whose angle did not relent for 1,500 ft., but out on the edge there were a few inches of snow on the ice and until they were forced out into the face they had not had to cut steps. In short the steep part of the Monk's Head was up to our most optimistic expectations: not easy, but reasonable for load carrying without having to resort to fixed ropes. On the top part of the Monk's Head, about 21,000 ft., they had the familiar experience of heavy snow balling at



Photo, R. R. E. Chorley.]

THE UPPER HALF OF THE MONK'S HEAD (Telephoto).

every step. As the meal progressed through brews of tea, we turned to the question of the immediate future. It was a nice problem how best to dispose of our rather slender forces of five with no porters (we were at a loss to think of what could be keeping Wrangham back). The ideal solution, at this stage patently academic, would be for a party of six (or eight) all to carry in one go to a Camp VI at the top of the Monk's Head, leaving four up there: two to support an assault pair with one or possibly two more camps. The two (or four) remaining below the Monk's Head would be useful to back up in case of bad weather. With only five, however, it would clearly take two days to establish Camp VI and all five of us would have to stay above the Monk's Head if any purposeful assault could be made, and we would have to rely on only one more camp above Camp VI. By modifying our rations we thought we could get food and fuel for a week (plus four days of a more meagre ration) up in two carries. The problem of Rakaposhi was now defined, four days should see its solution. However, 'l'homme propose . . .'

Although the morning of the 13th was fine, a slight lethargy was apparent in Camp: this turned itself into the argument that we had to modify our rations to make them lighter and in any case it was important to bring up some food that was still at Camp IV. Band and I went back for this; contrast our time of 40 minutes on the return with the 4 hours of two days before, such is the difference of a good track. As we came into the Camp a storm blew up and for the whole afternoon the snow came in great gusts of wind and we retired hurriedly to our tents.

It began to look as if the weather had fallen into a rut again: wind and snow every day. One day Band, Fraser, Tissières and myself did sally out through the low cloud to where we thought the Monk's Head's bergschrund was, but eventually thinking better of it we returned. We were soon down to a week's food, plus a few days' reserve, and the counsel of retreat began to be heard. The morning of the 16th made these counsels unanimous: a good deal more snow had fallen in the night and there was a sharp wind and stinging snow for the after-breakfast sortie. And so we decided to give it up.

We stumbled back through snow waist-deep at times. The reascent of the Gendarme gave some uneasy moments and a fresh storm blew up as we were on its traverse. We could not afford to leave anything of value behind and, from Camp IV on, some of us were carrying 80 lb. When leaving the top camp in the morning I had fondly hoped that we might be able to get down to Base Camp that day, but it was not until 6 P.M. that we arrived at Camp III to spend a somewhat cramped night. The ice-slope leading down to the col had to be re-cut and then we had to go up again to pick up our loads. In fact it was not until 6.30 P.M. on the 17th that we arrived at the little patch of grass which was Base.

Three rather surprised Scouts came out to meet us: no Wrangham, no General. We were a little alarmed, and peevish, to learn that they and three Scouts (including Alidad) had decamped to Gilgit. Until

the General arrived next morning we could only speculate. It transpired that about a week earlier, Wrangham with the Naik (or Corporal) and Alijehat had set off to rejoin us but by the time they reached Camp I Ted's bruises were so painful that he was forced to come down again. The General accordingly took command and insisted that he go down to Gilgit. Luckily, as it turned out nothing major was wrong with him.

This brought the climbing part of the expedition to an end. We had been perhaps a little unlucky with the weather, but one has the impression that the weather in this area is Alpine in character with no long good spell, unless you are lucky. We had not in fact been much higher than the previous party, but the crucial question of the Monk's Head had been successfully solved. There is now a good, if difficult route, and a future party basing its plans on taking porters certainly no further than our Camp IV (Camp III, incidentally, could be omitted) and equipped more lightly should be able to complete the ascent. It may be, too, that local men from Jaglot would prove better porters, for I have the impression that our Northern Scout Hunzas, being better educated, considered themselves gentlemen and therefore should not carry much. This indeed is the only reason I can put on our comparative lack of success with them, for they were well handled by the General, and were well fed and equipped. One does not like, too, to make these strictures of such likeable people. Logistically, a month's food from the col would seem to be the upper limit; all that is then needed is good weather.