

A JOURNEY TO WESTERN TIBET, 1929

BY E. B. WAKEFIELD

[The following narrative contains the first detailed account of a visit by a European to Rudok, in the extreme North-West of Tibet. Mr. Wakefield, now M.P. for W. Derbyshire, was twenty-six years old when he made this journey. He is the nephew of a former member of the Alpine Club, the late A. W. Wakefield (see A.J. 57. 408), well-known as a lakeland climber and as a member of the 1922 Everest Expedition; and is brother of our present member, R. C. Wakefield. He was a mountaineering 'pupil' of the late Geoffrey Winthrop Young.

The account which follows was written in 1929 after Mr. Wakefield, as a member of the I.C.S., had been deputed to inspect the British Trade Agency at Gartok, the capital of Western Tibet. Sanction for the visit having been obtained from Lhasa, Mr. Wakefield, applying a liberal interpretation to his instructions, 'to report on the suitability of the present marts', decided to try to reach Rudok.

Rudok was a closed town to Europeans. Rawling, who much wanted to reach it in 1903¹ and was headed off when close by, though the Dzongpen sent provisions to help him on his journey, observes² that the place was 'as jealously guarded as Lhasa'. In 1627, it is true, Fr. Andrade reached Rudok and established there a Jesuit mission which, some years later, was driven out. In 1895 Littledale³ got within sight of it, but did not enter, in order to avoid trouble for his followers. In 1904 Sven Hedin⁴ was in the vicinity of the town, but had to promise not to try and reach it. The only successful attempt, apparently, since Andrade's day, was that made in August 1906 by H. Calvert, Assistant Commissioner of Kulu, the brief description given of it being a picturesque village on a rocky eminence, but largely in ruins.⁵

In the absence of lengthy records of Andrade's and Calvert's visits, Mr. Wakefield's narrative is the first to be published concerning this remote town in Tibet. Although Rawling⁶ speaks of the 'sacred town of Rudok', its importance lay not so much in any special sanctity as in its position as a sort of guard post on the route between Kashmir, Ladakh and Lhasa.

¹ G.J. vol. 25, pp. 414 sqq.

² *The Great Plateau*, p. 151.

³ G.J. vol. 7, p. 453.

⁴ *Central Asia and Tibet*, ii, 539-543.

⁵ G.J. vol. 28, p. 633.

⁶ *The Great Plateau*, p. 129.

*The whole region was for long a semi-independent kingdom of W. Tibet and was absorbed into Tibet proper by conquest in the seventeenth century, since when it has been an important Governorship.*⁷

Whereas Littledale and others, approaching Rudok from the line of the Ladakh-Lhasa road, encountered opposition, Mr. Wakefield approached from the south (as had Calvert) and had no such trouble, even though, as will be seen, he met the Head Lama before he had reached his objective. However, Mr. Wakefield seems to have ingratiated himself with the Lama as much as he did later with the Dzongpen, and the improbable good fortune of the latter being an Old Rugbeian (!) smoothed away any difficulties.

*Major-General Richard Hilton has recorded in his book *Nine Lives* his highly informal journey from Leh to Gartok (in 1935), when he enterprisingly travelled with no permit, in the train of a party of Tibetan smugglers. His route, via Demchok (which his caravan astutely by-passed) would have crossed Mr. Wakefield's trails, but Rudok was not attempted. Captain (now Major) Robert Hamond informs me that as a result of his expedition to Gartok in 1938⁸ he obtained an invitation in Tibet to visit Rudok on his next trip, planned for 1940 (he also hoped to attempt the ascent of AlingKangri). The war, of course, put an end to all such hopes, even had it been certain that the invitation was not one of those sincerely meant politenesses of Tibetan officials which were apt to lead to nothing, for the official attitude in Lhasa was to refuse permission to travel off the established routes.*

When planning my journey to Kailas in 1945,⁹ I made tentative enquiries about approaching from Ladakh via Demchok-Gartok, with an unavowed ambition of diverging from the route after leaving Leh, to reach Rudok in the course of my journey. But I was told that the route from Ladakh would not be allowed, so the project dwindled to nothing.

It is possible that B. R. Goodfellow may have flown over or near to Rudok, when proceeding from India to Russia in 1959,¹⁰ but by the time he did so one fears that the sheltered existence of the lamas there had come to a harsh end, as in so many other parts of Tibet that have achieved 'freedom' at Chinese hands.—T. S. BLAKENEY.]

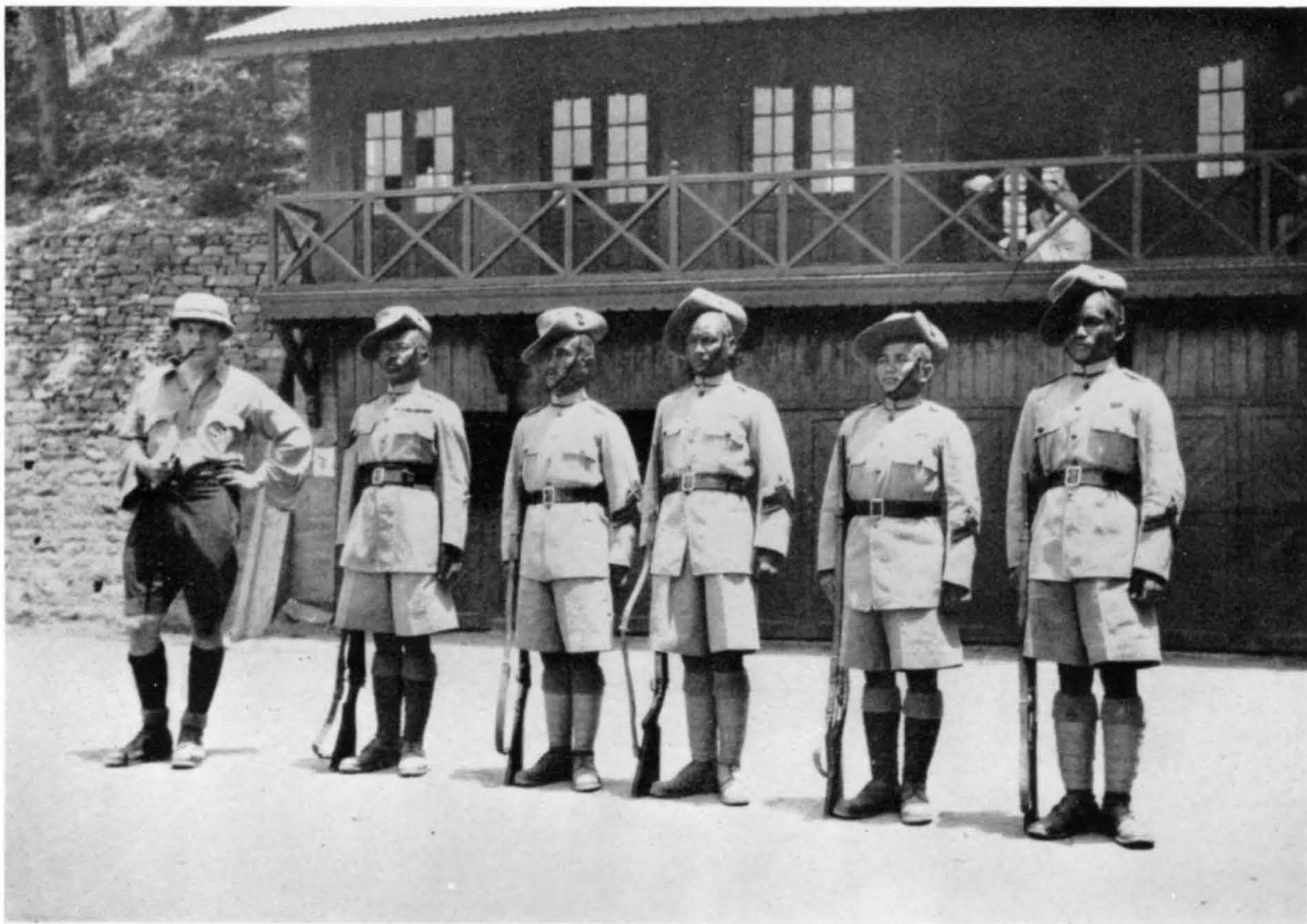
THERE is always the danger that one who has travelled in a little-known country will regard as typical occurrences which are in reality exceptional, and those who have no immediate acquaintance with the conditions described have small chance of discriminating between true and false generalisations on the part of the traveller. For this reason I have thought it wiser to give a brief nar-

⁷ Information from Mr. Hugh Richardson.

⁸ *G. J.* vol. 99, pp. 1 sqq.

⁹ *A. J.* 55. 316.

¹⁰ *G. J.* vol. 125, p. 468.



SIMLA, JUNE 4, 1929. E. B. WAKEFIELD AND GURKHA ESCORT.

rative of my own personal experiences in Western Tibet rather than to indulge in possibly false generalisations about the people and customs of that country.

The journey which I undertook occupied, including the time spent in halts at trading centres or for rest, almost exactly five months; and during that period a distance of over 1,300 miles was covered, the mileage being estimated in a direct line from place to place excluding all divagations in pursuit of game or mountain tops. The other members of the party rode at times on ponies or yaks when the route to be traversed was at a great altitude or for other reasons promised to be particularly arduous. I myself, however, walked on foot the whole way and, as a result, suffered less than the rest of the party from colds and headaches and those other bodily ailments which are inevitable in a country where fruit and vegetables are unobtainable. The climate and physical conditions encountered were similar in type, though more intense in degree, to those which a man would meet if he started walking round the coast of Great Britain in June and completed the circuit in December. Ice and snow, frost and hail and biting winds, were met with no less than days of sunshine, sometimes genial, sometimes tyrannous. Between Bashahr and the Indus Valley precipitous gorges and mountains were encountered up which adventurous men countless generations ago first forced their way in the tracks of wild animals. On the Tibetan plateau itself vast areas of grass and gravel, dotted here and there with dwarf juniper bushes, alternated with long stretches of boulder-strewn plain where walking, whether for man or animal, became laborious and exhausting. Rivers were forded, streams crossed and re-crossed, and more than once quick-sands had to be negotiated. But through all this, if there was some discomfort, there was little danger. Clothing was adequate; the supply of food, though it was not always of a suitable nature, never ran short; and our party seldom went where Indian traders and Tibetan shepherds, driving their flocks and herds, had not been a hundred times before.

I left Simla (Plate 1) on June 4, 1929, with a bearer and a cook, a Gurkha escort of one Havaladar and four Riflemen, and a baggage train of eighteen mules. The Agency Doctor, with the rest of the staff and another eighteen mules, had left nearly a fortnight earlier, before I had had the opportunity of meeting him. No information was available at Simla as to what tents or Agency files he had taken with him, and though I overtook the Doctor himself at Sarahan (93),¹¹ where he had waited for me, it was not until I had reached Pooh (192) that I was able to examine the tents and other Agency equipment which the Doctor had sent on ahead from Sarahan to avoid the expense of keeping

¹¹ The numbers in brackets after place names denote the total mileage covered when the place thus marked was reached.

the mules idle there until I had arrived. At Sarahan I was hospitably received by the Rajah of Bashahr, who told me of some of the difficulties with which his subjects were faced in their dealings with Tibetans across the border.

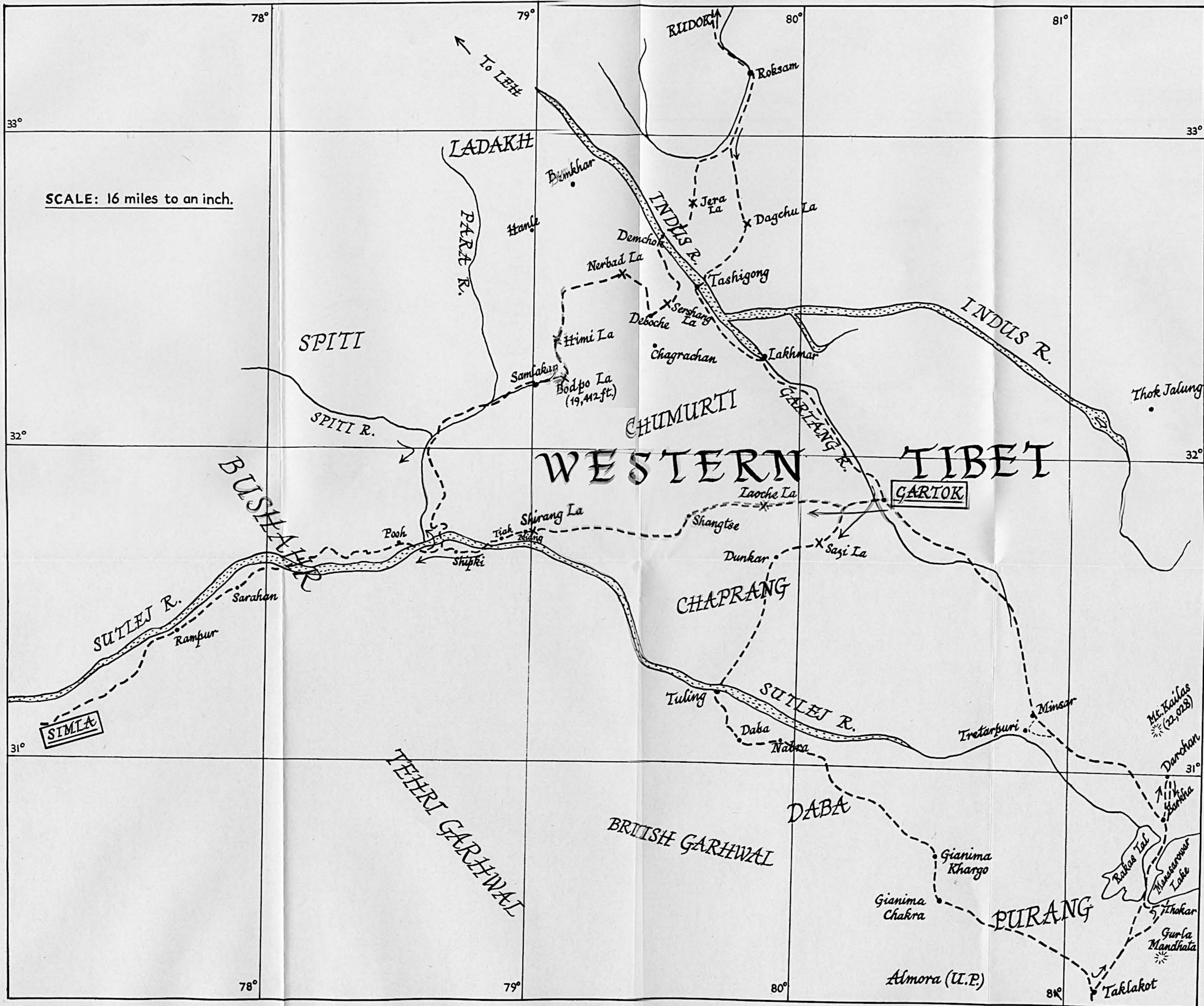
At Sarahan, too, I dismissed the interpreter previously chosen to accompany me as he appeared to be unable to read, write or talk the Lhasa dialect of the Tibetan language, which is the one generally employed in dealings with officials throughout Western Tibet. On the recommendation of the Rajah of Bashahr I appointed a trader of the name of Raghu Das to the post, and his life-long acquaintance with the customs as well as with the various dialects of Tibet later proved an invaluable asset to me in my work there.

The Hindustan-Tibet road as far as Pooh is an excellent one, and the daily marches proved to be without incident as far as that place. I had heard that part of the road between Taranda (107) and Nichar (116) was dangerous after snow or heavy rain owing to the fall of loose stones, and as there had been continuous rain during the night of June 12, the day on which I arrived at Taranda, and also during the early morning of the 13th, I decided to postpone the start of the day's march till noon. It was fortunate that I did so; for when we arrived at that part of the road which winds round the treacherous Taranda Spur, we found that there had been a heavy fall of rock not more than an hour earlier. There were deep dents in the rain-sodden soil of the path, where huge boulders had landed; whilst fresh powder on the scarred rocks directly above the path showed how recent and how heavy the fall of rock had been. Between Nichar and Pooh we were continually overtaking flocks of sheep and goats loaded with bags of grain; only a very small proportion of this goes into Tibet with traders, and that which does go is for the traders' own consumption. All the grain that we saw was for use in Upper Bashahr, which has a negligible annual rainfall and cannot grow enough grain even for itself.

I halted three days at Pooh in order to examine the Agency files and equipment and to make arrangements for the immediate future. The tent supplied for my use was entirely unsuitable, being too large and heavy to be carried without great difficulty over the rough tracks and high passes which lay before us. I finally decided to take a small 'shouldari', and this, though it was more than once carried bodily away by the wind and offered small protection against the cold, served my purpose well enough until I found a bigger and better tent in storage at Gartok. The tents used by the Gurkhas and the Chaprassis were less inadequate. I had been ordered to report on the necessity for making improvements along the Spiti Khad route into Tibet; I had received several applications from Bashahri traders asking me to go to Rudok to obtain the removal of the excessive dues which, I was told,

were being levied from traders by the Jongpon there; and I had also been asked to represent both to the Jongpon of Rudok and to the Chumurti Pon the necessity of suppressing the gangs of dacoits which were said to infest various localities within their jurisdiction. I determined, therefore, to follow the Spiti Khad route into Chumurti, and, after interviewing the Chumurti Pon, to follow the normal trade route to Rudok. Thence I proposed to go south via Tashigong and Gargunsa to Gartok. It would have been impossible to undertake this expedition with the whole of the Agency Staff and baggage, as the few scattered villages *en route* would be totally unable to supply the necessary transport. It was equally impossible to send on the main part of the baggage direct to Gartok without a responsible officer in charge; and I accordingly decided that the Doctor should take the major part of the staff and baggage to Gartok by the normal Shipki route whilst I set out with as few encumbrances as possible on the longer and more arduous expedition to Rudok.

I left Pooh on June 24 with my Gurkha escort, a cook, a bearer and one chaprassi. Thirty coolies were also requisitioned to carry our baggage. As far as Pooh, mules, hired at Simla, had carried our baggage. For the six marches beyond Pooh coolies were employed, and the whole of the baggage had to be unpacked and re-arranged in smaller loads. But after we had crossed the Tibetan border, animals, generally yaks, were exclusively used. We crossed to the left bank of the Sotlej below Pooh and recrossed the river the following day below Namgia (202). Then followed a steep ascent to the Bashahri Tashigong (208), an island of green high up on a bare, brown hill-side. The monastery here was built, centuries ago, by an aged Rajah of Bashahr in gratitude for the birth of a son and heir; he attributed his good fortune to the prayers of the Tashi Lama, far away in Tibet, whose aid he had invoked in his despair; and the monastery, founded and endowed in commemoration of the happy event, was given an appropriate name. From Tashigong our route followed, at a high altitude, the line of the Spiti River until the Para River was reached; and we crossed from Bashahr into the Tibetan Province of Chumurti at sunrise on the morning of June 30. On the way we had to halt for a day to give one of the Gurkhas time to recover from an attack of mountain sickness; and I had also been compelled to dismiss my bearer who had begun to adopt undesirable methods, which might have proved infectious, of fortifying himself against the cold. Beyond the Para River the country seemed to be less wild and rugged than that through which we had recently passed; the gorges were less precipitous, and the contours of the hills more rounded. The contrast, though less marked, was akin to that which the Sussex Downs would present if they were seen in juxtaposition to the Lake district hills. Following the trade route, we



marched along the Para River until it was joined by the Sumgil Dokpo at Raganda (245); then, going in a more easterly direction, we followed the latter stream to a camping place, some 2,650 ft. below the Bodpo La, known as Samlakhar (265). Here I learned, from a party of Tibetans who had crossed the Pass on the previous day, that the Chumurti Pon was away on pilgrimage and there was no chance of my meeting him at Chagrachan, the capital of his district, as I had intended. Chagrachan lay on the route to Tashigong, not on the route to Demchok; and I now decided to follow the route normally taken by traders travelling to Demchok. This route, which is not marked on any map, breaks off to the north from the Tashigong route beyond the Bodpo La and crosses the Himi La into the Ladakhi district of Hanle before going over a second range of mountains and descending into the Indus Valley. The cold at Samlakhar was severe and a biting wind blew up the valley; no fuel was available, and yak dung, with which we were to make a long and unpleasant acquaintance, had to be used for cooking the food.

The Gurkha who had so quickly recovered from an attack of mountain sickness a few days earlier was now suffering again from the same ailment, as well as from the cold. But it was impossible to halt for more than a night at a place so cold and inhospitable as Samlakhar, and I determined, if the Gurkha were no worse the following morning, to push on over the Bodpo La and give him a chance of rest and recovery in a more sheltered spot.

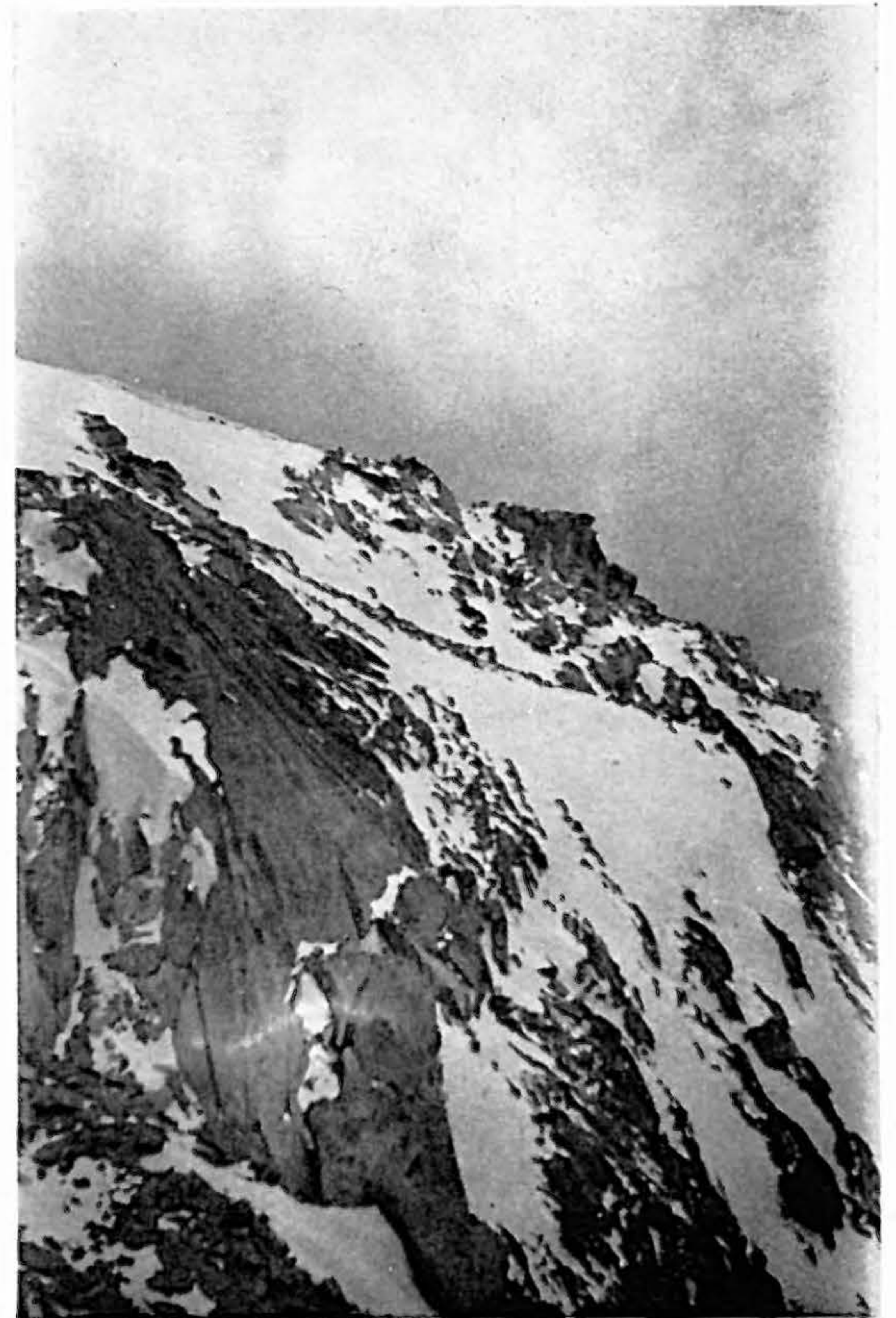
We set off from Samlakhar for the crossing of the Bodpo La on the morning of July 3. The sick Gurkha had enjoyed a good night's rest, and, wrapping him up as warmly as we could, we set him astride a large and quiet yak. The Bodpo La is marked on the map as 19,412 ft. The approach to the summit from the west is by quite gentle slopes; there is no difficulty with rock, and, at the time of year when we made the crossing, there was little snow on the Western slopes. The height, however, proved very distressing to a party not yet acclimatised to such altitudes. The cook, a Ladakhi hill man, went ahead with the Tibetans driving our loaded yaks; but, in spite of the aid which he got from holding on to a yak's tail, he collapsed twice on the way. I myself came next, accompanied by Raghu Das (the interpreter) and the Gurkha Havaladar. Both Raghu Das and the Havaladar suffered severely from cold and exhaustion, but, by taking turns to ride on the one pony with the party, they managed to reach the summit successfully. Mr. Calvert, who crossed the Bodpo La in 1906, described the descent from that pass as being 'very difficult and quite impassable for any laden animals whatever' (Plate 2). I should have endorsed his opinion if I had not seen our own heavily laden yaks complete the descent in safety. Beyond the summit the track descends steeply over deep snow and ice

PLATE 2



ICE LAKE BELOW BODPO LA.

PLATE 3



ON THE PONG BA, OPPOSITE DONGSIPUK.

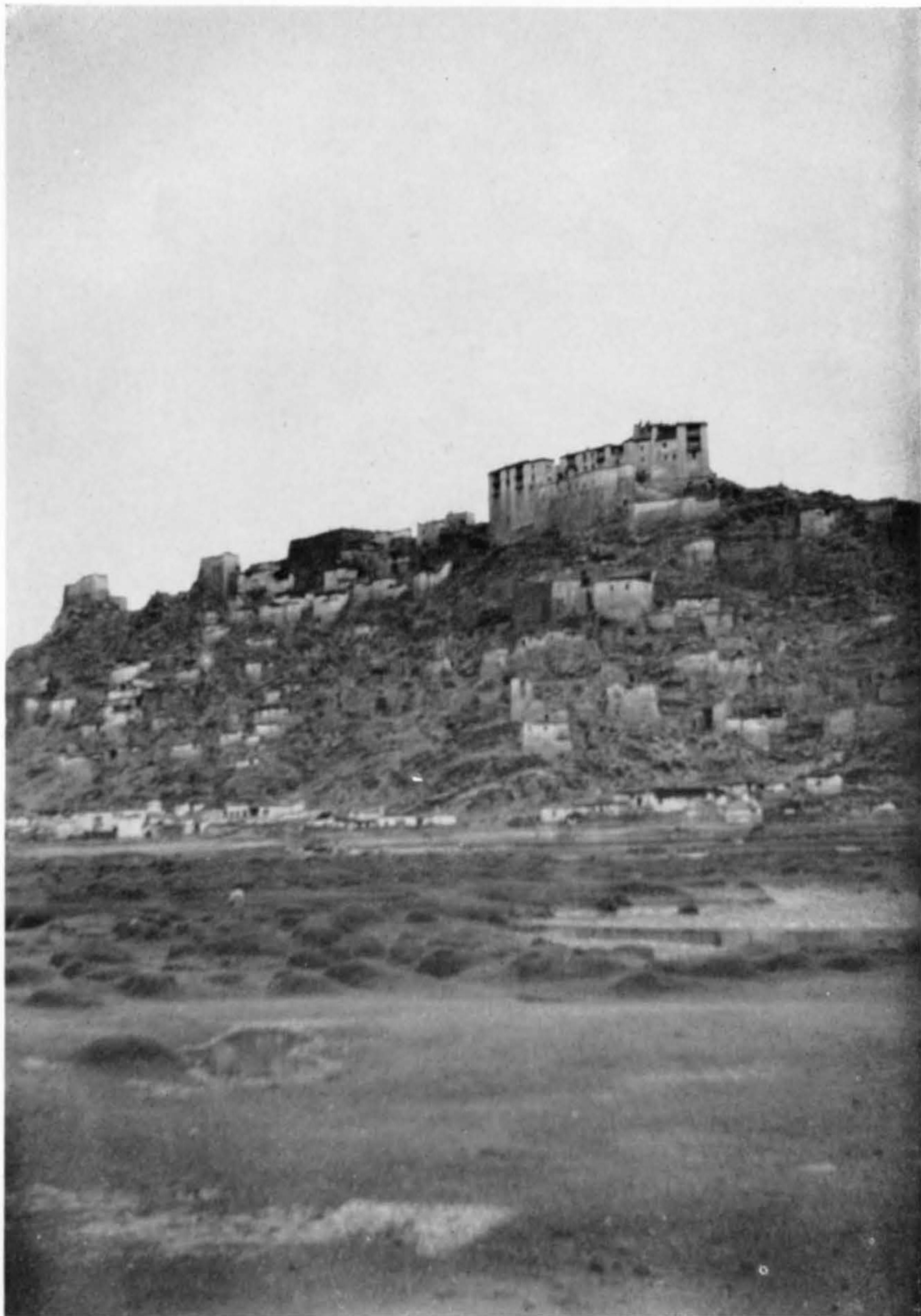
overlaying a foundation of jagged rocks; then, after following a rocky ridge for half a mile at an easier gradient, it descends steeply again and debouches on to a rough boulder-strewn slope beside a frozen lake. Raghu Das, the Havaladar and myself were, on arrival at the summit, some way ahead of the other Gurkhas and the Chaprassi; but, though the cold was intense, I decided that it would be advisable to wait for the others, as they might need help. They arrived at the summit in about an hour's time; the sick Gurkha, who had fallen off the yak on one occasion, had lost consciousness; and our efforts to revive him proved fruitless. The other three Gurkhas were also in a state of complete exhaustion and one of them actually collapsed while I was talking to him. Only the Chaprassi was capable of giving me any help; and together we assisted the unconscious Gurkha down the most difficult portion of the descent, while the yak, relieved of its burden, slid or stumbled down behind us. When the going was easier again we tried to tie the Gurkha on to the yak, but it was difficult to make him secure, and in the end I put up the Chaprassi too on to the yak and made him support the Gurkha from behind. The rest of the party made their way along as best they could, but it was dusk before they had all reached the camping ground on an exposed and fuelless hillside, being greeted, on their arrival, by a furious storm of hail and rain. The sick Gurkha was still unconscious on the following morning; but as he needed warmth even more than rest, I decided to move on a few miles and camp, beyond the Himi La, in the sheltered valley of the Shel Shel Dokpo. The march over the Himi La was an easy one and no difficulty was found this time in tying the unconscious Gurkha firmly to a broad-backed, docile yak. Our tents were pitched at Dongsipuk (282) (Plate 3); and here, on the fourth day of our halt, the Gurkha died without regaining consciousness. He was buried in the frozen ground on a sloping hillside to the north of the valley.

On the following day, July 9, we made a long march and crossed the Nerbad La into Tibetan territory again. Our camp was now only about 15 miles in a direct line from our immediate objective, Demchok. A chain of high mountains lay between us and the Indus Valley to the north-east and another range of mountains separated us from the Deboche-Demchok track to the south-east; at the same time I was not anxious to waste more precious days on making the 50-mile detour to the north via Bemkhar, the route which traders normally follow. Examination of a small-scale map, the only one I had of this portion of my journey, showed that there was, or had been, a pass over the mountains to the south-east; and it was obvious that, if we could find this pass and get our yaks across it, we would come down on to the Deboche-Demchok route, could make north across the Charding La, and be at Demchok in two days' time. Inquiries made from a passing party of

traders were not helpful: These men had never heard of a pass to the south-east; if there were one, they said, it would certainly be used, as it would save travellers to or from Demchok a full two days. Further inquiries were made from some Tibetan shepherds grazing their flocks on the lower slopes of the mountains; they had heard that, many years back, two traders had come over the mountains from the direction in which we were anxious to go; but they had lost their one pony on the way and had not repeated the experiment. Nor could these shepherds tell us where exactly this pass was to be found. Raghu Das and I spent the whole of July 10 exploring the mountains to the south-east in the hope of discovering some break in the huge barrier; our investigations proved fruitless—and yet not wholly fruitless, for we had eliminated a great number of possibilities; and I came to the conclusion that, if there was a pass, it must lie at the head of one particular stream which flowed down in a north-westerly direction from the range above us. Rejoining the main party, which had been waiting for us in the valley below, we marched upstream along the chosen route for several miles and camped soon after sunset in a violent and protracted thunderstorm. The next day proved my conclusions correct; we followed up the stream for another two miles, and found that it issued from a huge wall of solid snow which was obviously impassable. There was, however, a rough track made by Kiang (wild ass) up a steep and stony hillside to the east; up this we toiled and found, at the top, a broad, open space, snow-covered and surrounded by steep hills, but with an outlet to the south-east, as I had hoped, down which a stream flowed. We followed this downward for several miles, the yaks clambering over the rough rocks with difficulty; but precipitous hills to the north gave us no opportunity of breaking away to join the Deboche–Demchok track. We were only a mile above Deboche before we were able to leave the line of the stream; and then we learned with disgust from the two inhabitants of the tent which constitutes the village of Deboche that there was no Deboche–Demchok route; that the Charding La was a pass some 20 miles away leading in a different direction altogether; and that the Demchok La, which really did lead to Demchok, was impassable for animals—impassable, indeed, for any but active men unencumbered with luggage. The truth is that nobody ever goes from Deboche to Demchok; Deboche is on the trade route to Tashigong, and the route to Demchok was the one which we had followed over the Himi La and Nerbad La and which we had left in our desire to avoid an apparently unnecessary detour of fifty miles. One route was, however, left to us; the Ser Shang La provided a possible track across the mountains which still separated us from the Indus Valley; and though it brought us down nearer to Tashigong than to Demchok, I decided to follow it. We camped on the night of July 11 beside a frozen lake below the Ser Shang La, and

began the ascent before dawn the following morning. There was no snow on the southern slopes of the Sershang La, but there was thick snow at the summit, and the descent was made over a rocky ridge at the side of a steep slope of frozen snow. Only one large patch of snow had to be crossed, and this was frozen so hard that even the laden yaks did not break the crust but slid down with their forelegs firmly planted in front of them and a look of pained surprise in their eyes as they gradually gathered speed. It was 9.0 p.m. before the last of the party had arrived at Demchok (347), but fatigue was forgotten in the general delight at having reached, after so many delays and disappointments, the low-lying valley of the Indus.

On the following day we crossed the Indus by a ford two miles below Demchok. The water was not more than waist-deep, and the crossing would have been easy if the bed of the river had not been covered by rounded, slimy boulders which made it difficult for us to keep our footing. The Indus is often a serious obstacle to traders and sometimes they have to wait for weeks before the waters subside sufficiently to allow them to cross without danger. Yaks and ponies swim strongly and when men cannot cross by themselves they hang on to the tails of these animals. Sheep, and especially rams, are also comparatively strong swimmers and display more cunning than other animals in crossing flooded rivers. Instead of spending their strength in battling against the current they swim with it, gradually edging their way across to the further bank, and, in the case of a broad river, they will often land half a mile below the point at which they started. Goats are poor swimmers and generally have to be helped across. But the chief difficulty is with mules; and traders, to get them across a river which is out of their depth, tie a stout rope to their ears and, launching them on the waters, drag them across wholesale. The marches to Rudok (425) were long but easy, first across a stony plain and later over grass meadows which fringed a winding rivulet of clear water. The view from above Demchok of the Tibetan plateau to the east of the Indus had not been what I expected. I had expected to see a rolling tableland covered with grass, where sheep and goats could browse at will; actually I saw little of any plateau; there were only broad, bare spaces at the base of mountains equally bare; the colours were all browns and blacks and purples with no trace of green; and the mountains looked as if they had been dumped down there by some Celestial Power who had not had time to arrange them in any order or sequence. The marches to Rudok, however, proved my first impressions to be misleading. There really was a plateau, of a mean elevation of 15,000 ft. above sea level, and from this rose, to various heights and with their spurs running in different directions, the array of mountains which I had seen from my vantage point to the west of the Indus. Moreover, we had not left



RUDOK, CROWNED BY THE JONGPON'S PALACE.

the Indus more than 15 miles behind when we came to the pasture lands, previously hidden from our view, which clothed with green the lower slopes of the mountains and the shallow depressions between them. It was on the road from Roksam (399) to Rudok that I had my first interview with a Tibetan of the upper class. He was the Labrang, or Head Lama, of the Rudok Monastery, and was on a tour of inspection of the flocks of his Monastery, which owns many of the valley pastures through which we had recently passed. When I met him he had halted for his mid-day meal of tea and curds, and was seated, clothed in a rich robe of scarlet and gold, under a large black umbrella firmly fixed in the ground at his side. He proved to be very friendly and nearly two hours had passed in amiable conversation before I was able to get away without appearing to be discourteous. He displayed the greatest interest in the oddments which I happened to be carrying with me—compass, barometer, field glasses and rifles. But he was chiefly delighted with the map which I showed him, and marvelled at the knowledge of his country which I seemed to display when I read from it the names of villages in the neighbourhood of his home near distant Lhasa. Everything that I had with me he wanted to buy, at my own price; but he was in no way annoyed at my refusal to sell, and before we parted, he insisted on taking me aside with my interpreter, apart from the rest of the party, and giving me a piece of advice. The advice was this: 'Never trust the word of a Tibetan; if a Tibetan makes a promise, see that it is written down on paper and signed by him.' With these words, and with a parting salutation which was too akin to an embrace to be entirely pleasing to me, he went on his way.

The party arrived at Rudok (Plate 4) after nightfall on July 17. From several miles away I had seen it, a rocky hill, purple and black in the fading light, rising high above the level of the surrounding plain. But in the bright sunshine of the next morning this rugged eminence of rock, crowned by the Jongpon's palace, white and brown against a background of blue sky, seemed yet more beautiful and impressive and worthy of the sanctity, greater than that of Lhasa, to which it has always laid claim. On the morning after my arrival the Jongpon, K. K. Mondo, came to call on me; he proved to be a young man of about thirty who, with three other boys of his own age, had been sent to school in England in 1914 by the Tibetan Government as an experiment.¹² He had spent some years at Rugby before returning to Tibet, and was delighted to meet someone who knew his school and took an interest in hearing about his experiences there. He spoke English hesitantly and with difficulty, but it was perfect English when it did arrive; whilst I, no less than he, took pleasure in speaking that language again. Familiarity with the British

¹² See Sir Basil Gould, *The Jewel in the Lotus*, pp. 28–30, 237; Suydam Cutting, *The Fire Ox and other years*, p. 210.

seems to have bred in him a great respect for them; and when Ch. Pala Ram, the British Trade Agent, complained to him some years ago about the 10 per cent tax which he, like his predecessors, was levying from Indian traders, he immediately reduced it to 2 per cent and has made no subsequent attempts to increase it. Traders, indeed, had nothing but praise for his moderation and fair treatment of them, and it was fear for the future rather than present distress which had made the Bashahris so anxious that I should visit Rudok. His own subjects, however, had a different tale to tell, and spoke of him as the most oppressive of a long succession of tyrannical Jongpons. He told me himself that he had been beaten at Rugby for failing to do his 'Prep' properly, and this is the reason, perhaps, why he seldom has his subjects beaten. But this appears to be the one form of despotic abuse of power in which he does not indulge. His subjects are ground down by excessive taxes imposed or withheld at will. When he came from Lhasa to take up his appointment at Rudok he brought with him 300 mule loads of tea, for which, of course, he had free transport. This was sold at ten times its proper value to his poorer subjects and at twenty times its value to the richer ones. Every year he buys sheep at one rupee each from one section of his subjects and sells them to another section at six rupees each. When he buys anything, he pays in rupees at the rate of eight tankas to the rupee; when he sells, he demands rupees at the rate of $2\frac{1}{2}$ tankas to the rupee, the buying and selling price in every case being fixed in tankas. No method by which money can be extracted from impoverished subjects has not been put into practice by this avaricious Jongpon. To me, however, he was charming; and on the second day of my stay at Rudok he showed me over his palace and entertained me at dinner with a grace and courtesy which were unexceptionable. The palace is a vast structure made, for the most part, of mud, but with foundations of stone and layers of stone at irregular intervals throughout the walls. The ceilings are supported by large beams of wood said to have been brought from Leh. From the roof of the palace a fine view of the great fresh-water lake, the Nyak Tso, is obtained; whilst directly below, on the southern slope of the hill on which the palace stands, are the two hundred desolate and fifty tenanted houses which constitute the city of Rudok. The Jongpon, much to my surprise, also gave me permission to inspect the monastery. As he said, he had not been prevented from attending chapel at Rugby—in fact, he had been compelled to attend. We first passed through a narrow, stone-flagged passage into a courtyard, where we were faced by a huge locked door. After a short time a Lama came and opened this door and we entered a circular chamber whose walls were covered all round with richly coloured frescoes. The frescoes portrayed the figures of gods and devils and all kinds of strange animals, few of which were recognisable

as belonging to this world. From this chamber a short, wide passage led to another locked door. On either side of this passage, seated in galleries 6 ft. above the level of the floor, were two human figures, three times life-size, crowned and armed, with fat, bulging faces. The figures were of mud, with a waxen exterior which was painted with bright colours that can only have come from India. They had been placed there to prevent any unlawful intrusion into the sacred parts beyond the second locked door. But the Jongpon was himself a Lama of a high order, and, sponsored by him, we were allowed to pass beyond the second door into a great, low-roofed cavern hung with splendid tapestries which gleamed dully in the dim light of wavering candles. Past lines of cushioned prayer-stools we went, beneath rows of Chinese hangings swaying gently in the draught from the open door, until we came to the innermost shrine of all. In this were set tables with exquisitely chased silver ornaments on them; in the centre was a great figure of Buddha; while beyond, as far as the eye could penetrate into the dim recesses, were rows and rows of draperies and tapestries suspended from the roof. As we returned to the entrance we saw that the side walls of this mysterious and holy cellar were lined from top to bottom with sacred books. On the third and last day of my stay at Rudok I had intended to ride over to the Nyak Tso to get a closer view of the lake itself and to see what bird-life existed there; but the arrival at Rudok of the first party of Lahauli traders to get there this year, the simultaneous arrival of two traders from Lhasa and the request of some Ladakhi traders that I would make investigations into a case of dacoity in which they had been involved allowed me no opportunity to make the proposed expedition. In the evening the Jongpon came to bid me farewell, and I managed to elicit from him some information about his work. The Jongpons of Rudok and Chaprang are specially appointed by the Dalai Lama, and before they come to Western Tibet to take charge of their Jongs they have to serve for three years in one of the big monasteries at Lhasa. This is an expensive occupation, as they have to provide the food supplies, consisting mostly of tea, for all the Lamas there. The money thus spent they are expected to make up, with interest, out of the inhabitants of their Jongs during their three-year tenure of office. The Jong of Rudok is the biggest in Western Tibet, and the Jongpon collects all the dues payable on the extensive pasture-lands which belong to the Lhasa Government and are vested in the Jongpon during the term of his administration. The Jongpon has to pay about Rs. 2000/- annually to the Lhasa Government, and this sum is derived partly from taxes, partly from fines imposed in civil as well as criminal cases, and partly from other dues payable in accordance with custom or the Jongpon's will. The Jongpon also engages in trade, and the sum total of his annual profits from all these combined sources

must be very great. The Jongpon, like all Lhasan gentlemen of good birth, eats food of a Chinese variety; and, with the exception of rice, which comes from Ladakh, all his supplies are sent from Lhasa, a journey of over two months. Letters for Lhasa he sends by special messenger to Leh, a journey of ten days. Thence they go by British post to Gyantse, via Darjeeling; and thence by Tibetan post to Lhasa. Only on very special occasions are letters sent direct to Lhasa through Tibet by relays of mounted messengers; but the custom of sealing the despatch to the messenger and the messenger to his horse is one, I was told, which has long been discontinued. In Rudok there appears to be little criminal work for the Jongpon. The Jongpon has power to beat (and in cases of murder or dacoity, the complainant, as well as the accused, is always beaten as a preliminary to judicial proceedings), but can only have feet or hands cut off as a punishment with the previous sanction of the Lhasa Government. In practice, the punishment is inflicted first and the Lhasa Government informed later. There is much gold in the Rudok Jong, but the Jongpon has no power to interfere in the administration of the goldfields. These are under the Sarpon, an officer specially appointed from Lhasa to collect dues from the gold diggers and hear civil or criminal cases in which they are involved. The Jongpon parted from me with many protestations of eternal friendship, and gave a practical demonstration of his concern for my welfare by sending one of his servants in advance to ensure that there would be no delays in obtaining transport.

We left Rudok on July 21 in pouring rain and followed the route by which we had come as far as Churkang (471). Thence we followed the Tashigong route due south and, on the evening of July 23, after a waterless march of 20 miles over the Dagchu La, camped beside a diminutive spring at the head of a dry nala where my map had led me to expect a flowing river. On the following day we descended to the banks of the Indus for the second time, but heavy and continuous rain a week earlier had flooded the river to such an extent that it was still impassable, and even at the ford opposite Tashigong (502), the river was not only out of depth for a man but was running with such force that to attempt the crossing at that time would have entailed too great an element of risk (Plate 5). The river, I discovered, had already subsided since the previous day, and I decided to camp for the night on the right bank and attempt the crossing the following morning if conditions had improved by then. In the course of the night a terrific storm of wind arose which blew all the tents away; fortunately they were recovered before they had been blown into the river. On the next morning it was obvious that the river was flowing with less violence but, owing perhaps to the north-westerly wind of the previous night, it had not subsided as much as we had hoped. When the sun was well up I decided to test the

depth and force of the river myself. The river was about 85 yds. broad at the so-called ford; only 40 yds. proved to be in any way difficult, and the water never rose above my shoulders. The bed of the river was smooth and unencumbered by those slippery boulders which had made it so difficult for us to retain our footing when we had crossed the river opposite Demchok; and the main current, though strong, was not irresistible. I recrossed the river at a point higher up, but I was soon out of my depth and had to swim some 50 yds. before I touched bottom again. In covering the distance I was carried downstream about 150 yds. I decided that a crossing by the ford was perfectly possible and proceeded to make the necessary arrangements. Certain things such as flour, guns, ammunition and official papers had to be kept dry at any cost, and these were made up into separate bundles, each wrapped in a blanket, of not more than 30 lb. weight. Other things such as tents, bedding and tinned stores were either waterproof or could be dried later in the wind and sun, and these were loaded on to the yaks. These animals swim very low in the water and their loads were bound to get wet. My first idea was to place four men at 10-yard intervals across the deep part of the river whilst two or three men carried the light bundles across the comparatively shallow water which intervened between them and the bank. This idea proved, in practice, to be completely futile. The Gurkhas stationed in the deep part of the river could not hold their ground, but were hurried downstream by the force of the current; and the Tibetans who were in charge of the yaks, on whose help I had relied, could be induced neither by threats nor persuasion to enter even the most shallow part of the river. The one Chaprassi with the party, though courageous enough, was so small and light that he could only get across the river with the aid of the pony; the Ladakhi cook got half-way across, found himself being carried downstream, and scrambled back again to safety in a state of ludicrous terror; and one of the Gurkhas got across with such difficulty that he would obviously be useless for the task of carrying the bundles across. It was clear that I could only expect effective help from Raghu Das and three of the Gurkhas; and, abandoning my original plan, we decided that it would be best for each of us, taking one bundle at a time, to cross and recross the river until all the bundles had been landed on the further bank. This we did; I and the three Gurkhas each crossed the river four times with bundles balanced on our heads; and the pony, led by Raghu Das and with two bundles loaded at such a height above the saddle that they did not get wet when the animal swam, also crossed the river to the further bank four times. The yaks, loaded with the heavy baggage, gave no trouble; they were driven into the river by the Tibetans and pelted with stones from behind until they came to a point where the further bank appeared to them to be the nearer one also. But disap-

PLATE 5



THE MONASTERY AT TASHI-
GONG, FROM EAST BANK OF
THE INDUS.

PLATE 6



Photo, Major R. Hamond]

GARTOK—LOOKING NORTH.

pointment awaited us on the further side. The Tibetans of Tashigong, thinking that we could not cross the river for at least another two days, had no fresh yaks waiting for us. To take on the Churkang yaks another stage, especially when their owners were stranded on the other side of the Indus, would constitute an outrage of custom which even a Tibetan official would scarcely dare to perpetrate; and the Tashigong yaks, grazing high up on the mountains, could hardly be collected within a day and a half. The head Lama of the Tashigong monastery supported my efforts to make the local Goba or Headman use every endeavour to provide some sort of transport that day. A passing trader offered to lend us some of his baggage animals for the next stage and by 5.0 p.m. we had collected three yaks, six bullocks and two ponies. These, with the addition of Rugha Das' pony, were sufficient for our requirements; and we had started on the next stage to Lakmar (515) by 5.30 p.m. The light lasted for $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours; there were then two hours of pitch darkness, during which we stumbled over rocks and through streams or plodded stolidly over soft sand and shingle; then, at last, at about 9.0 p.m. the moon rose, and the latter part of the march was completed in bright moonlight. It was after midnight when the whole of the party had arrived at Lakmar.

On the following morning I visited the borax mines on the opposite side of the Gartang river. Here, less than a mile from the banks of the river, is a large area honey-combed with pits 3-4 ft. in depth. Beside the pits were heaps of excavated earth from which, by the use of running water, the borax had been separated. After the pits have been dug, and the earth and borax removed, water rises and fills the cavities. This water was hot, about 100° F., and its colour varied from that of white sherry to that of a deep, rich port. On the surface of the water was a thin crust of salt, whilst at the bottom was quite a thick deposit. This salt is not of such good quality as that obtained in the northern lake district of Rudok, but it is often used to mix with the better type. The borax is taken to Jagadhri by Indian traders in its crude form and is there refined. The supply at Lakmar would seem to be inexhaustible, for the same earth can be treated every four years and yield as rich a deposit of borax as it did before. The borax is excavated by the inhabitants of three neighbouring villages who alone have the right to work the mines. They pay 10 per cent on all sales to the Garpons who are supposed to forward the proceeds to the Government at Lhasa to which the royalties belong. From Lakmar to Gartok (575) our journey was uneventful, and we arrived at our Tibetan headquarters on the evening of July 28, having completed the journey of 150 miles from Rudok in eight days.

Gartok, the capital of Western Tibet, consists of some fifteen squalid mud huts huddled together on damp ground in the middle of a bleak and

desolate plain perpetually swept by cold winds (Plate 6). The Garpons, who spend the winter at Gargunsa, come to Gartok for five months in every year. Without special orders from the Lhasa Government they are not allowed to leave their headquarters; and only on one or two occasions during their annual period of residence at Gartok do they emerge for a short time from the malodorous warmth of their dingy hovels. The Senior Garpon's home is also the Court of the two Garpons, and here they administer injustice impartially to all. The mentality of the present Senior Garpon was of peculiar interest. Normally people speak the truth (even Tibetans do this) unless there is some particular object to be gained by telling a lie; but *his* conversation followed the reverse principle; and he only swerved from falsehood on the few occasions when truth seemed more likely to serve his purpose. The secular power of the two Garpons in Western Tibet is absolute, though theoretically appeals from their judicial decisions may be preferred to the Dalai Lama at Lhasa. The Garpons do not, however, interfere with the activities of the Sarpon, who administers the gold-fields, or the Jongchung, a Government trader of high rank appointed by the Lhasa Government; and the monasteries and lands under the control of the Khanpo of Tuling are also outside the jurisdiction of the Garpons. The two Garpons are of equal rank, and the terms Senior and Junior applied to them are mistranslations of the Tibetan words Gong and Hog, which mean Upper and Lower and have reference only to the relative positions of their houses. Socially the elder of the two Garpons takes precedence, but officially neither can do any act without the concurrence of the other, and the common seal is kept under double lock.¹³

(To be continued)

¹³ The two Garpons of Gartok are discussed in Sherring's *Western Tibet and the British Borderlands*, Chap. XV, and by Captain Hamond in *G. J.* vol. 99, p. 7. Heinrich Harrer's *Seven Years in Tibet*, p. 40, gives a more recent impression of Gartok.