

THE POLISH EXPEDITION TO THE HINDU KUSH, 1960

By BOLESŁAW CHWASCINSKI

I SAW the Hindu Kush for the first time before the war when I was working in Afghanistan. A range of over 600 miles intersected the whole country covering it completely with subsidiary ranges, which in bewildering conformation spread across the whole of Afghanistan.

When I climbed any peak near Kabul or Jalalabad I saw range after range all over the horizon dwindling away in the far distance.

It was fascinating for an alpinist to look at the peaks standing up in the intense sunlight. All were unclimbed, most of them unnamed and unmapped as no proper survey had yet been made in Afghanistan.

Opposite Kabul the peaks were from 15,000 to 20,000 ft. high. But in the far north-east corner of the country, in the narrow strip of Wakhan and nearby Chitral rose untouched giants covered with glaciers more than 24,000 ft. high.

It was not easy to reconcile professional work and mountaineering. Wakhan was so far that even holidays were insufficient. I had to postpone my mountaineering plans to the end of my contract. But then the war came. Again I had to postpone my plans and I left Afghanistan.

After the war mountaineers started to tear away the mysteries of the Hindu Kush. In 1950 Tirich Mir, 25,263 ft., the highest peak of the Hindu Kush, fell to the Norwegian expedition led by Prof. Arne Naess. In 1955 the third highest in the Hindu Kush, Istor-o-Nal, 24,271 ft., succumbed to man, climbed by the American party from Princeton. The fourth in the Hindu Kush, Saraghrar Peak, 24,170 ft., was attempted in 1958 by a British expedition from Oxford but owing to the unfortunate death of P. S. Nelson the party returned before reaching the summit. But next year, 1959, an Italian expedition led by Prof. Fosco Maraini came to the Hindu Kush and Saraghrar Peak had to yield.

But Noshag, 24,581 ft., the second peak of Hindu Kush, remained still unconquered, surrounded by hundreds of other virgin peaks.

There was a strong desire among many members of Klub Wysokogórski (Polish Mountaineering Club), to go to the highest mountains. Polish mountaineers practise their mountaineering in the Tatra Mountains. The highest peak of the Tatra, Gerlach, is 8,741 ft. high and there are no glaciers. The highest faces in the Tatra reach about

71°40'

0 1 2 3 4 MILES

AFGHANISTAN

71°50'

ACCORDING TO S. BIEL

SCALE 1:126720

MANDARAS VALLEY

ATRAK GL.

SOUTH ATRAK GL.

UPPER TIRICH GL.

CHITRAL

RAZI DEH VALLEY

BASE CAMP

KHORPUSHT-E-YAKHI

SAD ISHTRĀGH ĀN
1695218693
Ca 18650

RACH-E-DAROS

UPPER GAZIKISTAN GL.

LOWER GAZIKISTAN GL.

GHŪL LASHT ZOM
21868

21690

20878

17791

19662

19555

19360

ASP-E-SAFED
Ca 21160

21676

GUNBAZ-E-SAFED
Ca 22300

Ca 20010

NOSHAQ

24581

22963

22950

23778

24271

19530

UPPER TIRICH GL.

ISTORO NĀL

20472

21630

20965

19776

18763

19165

21754

20420

36°30'

NOSHAQ

[To face p.]

3,500 ft. The Tatra Mountains are smaller than the Alps but winter mountaineering, which is very popular by now, offers possibilities which are quite near to alpine ones. Many faces one can climb in winter require several bivouacs and a winter traverse of the main ridge of the Tatra takes over a fortnight.

Polish mountaineers cannot go every year to the Alps or Caucasus in great numbers, but some of them have done fine climbs there, as the North spur of Pointe Walker (S. Biel and L. Utracki, July 1959), the West face of Aiguille du Petit Dru (S. Biel, J. Dlugosz and Cz. Momatiuk, August 1957) or traversing the Peuterey ridge from the Aiguille Noire to Mont Blanc (August 1957) accomplished by a party consisting of eight members of the Club. They have also tried with some success winter mountaineering in the Alps, (first winter ascent of the Matterhorn by its East face, S. Biel and J. Mostowski, April 1959). In the Caucasus they climbed among others the North-west face of Peak Shchurovsky, 13,780 ft. (S. Biel, B. Kunicki, M. Stefanski and J. Wojnarowicz, August 1958), the Southern buttress of Dych Tau, 17,055 ft. (J. Dlugosz, B. Kunicki and J. Surdel—first ascent, July 1959), and the Northern buttress of Shkara 17,061 ft. (A. Gasiorowski, J. Krajski and S. Kulinski, July 1959 and J. Dlugosz, B. Kunicki and J. Surdel in the same month). In 1957 and 1958 they visited also the mountains of Spitsbergen.

It was natural that they wanted now to try their forces with the higher peaks.

The problem was not where to go. There are still so many unconquered great peaks in the world. But the problem was how to go with the smallest possible expense. Himalaya and Karakoram were out of the question on account of too great cost. But the Hindu Kush, to which the southern approach was more or less the same as to the Himalaya or Karakoram, was comparatively near for us when one was approaching it from the north. The railway through the Soviet Union could bring us almost to the foot of the Hindu Kush.

The peaks there were lower than those in the Himalaya and Karakoram. But they were still high enough for us. Besides, the Hindu Kush was quite unexplored, which I think even more attractive for a mountaineer than a colossal giant where the approach and all details of the future route are well known from many descriptions published by previous expeditions. The Hindu Kush was little visited. The part lying in Chitral was surveyed in 1928-9 but Dr. Herbert Tichy, the conqueror of Cho Oyu, 26,750 ft., who was rambling there in 1959, has written in *Der Bergsteiger* that he came across many peaks which were unknown, unnamed and unmapped on any map. And what could we expect in Afghanistan where no surveying was done at all?

There is very little in alpine literature about the Hindu Kush. A few years before I brought from London the book written by the

Norwegian Expedition which climbed Tirich Mir in 1950. Prof. Arne Naess, the leader of this expedition, describing the scenery from the top of Tirich Mir to the north, that is of the Afghan side, writes there:

'We saw their wild, hanging glaciers and sharp ridges with overhanging precipices in the rifts of the clouds. For one moment I wondered if we really were higher than these gigantic mountains. They looked so much grander than our own Tirich.'

And later: 'In Afghanistan, an enormous giant, the size of Tirich Mir reared up. This was unknown to us.'

He made a note however: 'Later it dawned on us, that the peak need not necessarily be so very high above sea level. What we could judge from Tirich Mir was that it was overwhelmingly high in relation to the surrounding peaks.'

We did not expect to discover another highest peak of the Hindu Kush but one thing was surprising for us. According to maps only Noshag could be this giant, then why was it an unknown peak for Arne Naess? After all, he must have had a map.

I wrote to a friend of mine in London asking for large-scale maps of the Hindu Kush. But unfortunately he could not get any proper maps. I received 1:1,000,000 maps only. Still, it was something, as they were relatively recently published.

But things were going to be still more confusing. The maps were published not long ago, in 1951 and 1956. They were not just published commercially but by the most official authorities. The map of 1951 gave the height of Tirich Mir—25,230 ft.—and of Noshag—24,556 ft. The map published in 1956 showed the same heights as 25,426 ft. and 24,606 ft. respectively. Arne Naess wrote in his book that the height of Tirich Mir was 25,263 ft. and surely he had got a reliable map too.¹

We thought, I think quite logically, that the newer map was the more correct, as probably some new surveying could be done in that time. But on all maps we could find in that area no other big mountain except Noshag. These discrepancies showed how little was known about the Hindu Kush. All the more it excited our imagination.

I put before the Club Committee a plan of an expedition to the Hindu Kush with the aim of climbing Noshag and discovery of this unknown giant mountain. The Committee accepted this plan and the President of the Club, Mr. Czeslaw Bajer, took up the idea with much enthusiasm. We could now begin to organise our expedition.

There were two main problems not taking into account of course many other usual problems which all mountaineering expeditions have

¹ The author is indebted to Prof. Kenneth Mason for giving him the proper altitudes of the highest peaks in the Hindu Kush and which are used in this article.

to overcome, such as getting permission from the government concerned, financial matters, equipment, obtaining long leaves for members of the expedition, etc.

The choice of the best time for carrying out the expedition was the first problem. The weather conditions in other mountains are well known from descriptions written by many expeditions. But the weather conditions in the Hindu Kush were completely obscure. There were no meteorological data at all, at least we did not know them. We studied carefully the only mountaineering book about the Hindu Kush, written by the members of the Norwegian Expedition on Tirich Mir, but we could not find there any definite answer. The Norwegians studied mainly the meteorological reports of surveyors but every one of them recommended and blamed a different month, beginning from April and ending in September. They have chosen after that June and July.

We approached the problem in a different way. As we knew at that time about two ascents in the Hindu Kush only, i.e. on Tirich Mir and Istor-o-Nal, we studied in detail the dates of all known ascents in neighbouring mountains. There were few ascents in the Western Karakoram but there were plenty of them in the Pamirs. The nearest range in the Pamirs, the Shakh dara Range, runs on a line parallel to the main ridge of the Hindu Kush in a distance of about 25 miles only. We thought that the weather conditions in such adjacent areas must be more or less the same. The overwhelmingly predominant number of ascents in those areas was done at the end of August. So we decided to go to the Hindu Kush for July and August.

The second problem was the proper number of the participants of the expedition. We were going to mountains where no expedition had taken place before. It is known commonly that in mountains which were never visited by mountaineers the local population is afraid of going on snows and glaciers. Even the famous Sherpas half a century ago did not give very much help to the first British expeditions. At the beginning of their career they served as coolies only, but after many expeditions they became not only highly qualified high-altitude porters but even self-dependent mountaineers. As far as we knew we were to be the first mountaineering expedition to the Afghan Hindu Kush. So we had to expect that all pitching of the higher camps would have to be done by ourselves. This necessitated having a fairly large number of members on the expedition.

We had also no idea about the difficulties of our future route. We did not carry out any reconnaissance and there were no photographs of Noshag taken from this side of course. All previous attacks on the highest peaks of the Hindu Kush were undertaken from the south. We planned our attack from the north. What could we expect there?

The kind and amount of different equipment depended after all on the length and difficulties of the future route.

We discussed all these things in Warsaw many times. Using the Caucasus scale we could expect there a big Elbruz or a Bezingi wall. So in spite of all the known disadvantages of a large expedition we decided to organise a large one.

We made some assumptions based on descriptions of many Himalayan ascents and calculated the number of higher camps and the weight of equipment and food which had to be brought there. The number of participants of the expedition was based on this calculation.

The mountaineering party of the expedition consisted of ten alpinists. The climbers were members of Klub Wysokogórski (Polish Mountaineering Club) from different localities of Poland. They were: Krzysztof Berbeka, Zakopane; Stanisław Biel, Cracow; Jerzy Krajski, Zbigniew Krysa and Stanisław Kulinski, all from Warsaw; Bronisław Kunicki, Ozimek; Jan Mostowski, Gliwice; Zbigniew Rubinowski, Kielce, and Stanisław Zierhoffer, physician from Poznań.

All of them were tried climbers having also Alpine and Caucasian experience. The Club Committee appointed me leader on account of my knowledge of Afghanistan and the local language. But none of us had any high-altitude experience. The highest peak reached by any of us was Elbruz, 18,465 ft., in the Caucasus.

We thought that a sojourn in unexplored mountains was worthy of a film. We came to an understanding with Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych (Documentary Films Studio) in Warsaw which delegated to our expedition two professional cameramen, Witold Lesniewicz and Sergiusz Sprudin. The latter specialised in mountaineering films and as a result of this has had climbing experience also.

We planned our departure from Warsaw for June 15, 1960. As usual, some formalities took more time than we expected and we left Warsaw a fortnight later.

We went by train across the U.S.S.R. via Moscow, Tashkent to Termez, a small town upon Amu Daria (Oxus River). Our luggage consisted of *ca.* 4.2 tons and was sent by the same train two days earlier. After full seven days spent in the train we reached Termez where our boxes were waiting for us.

We waited there a few days and embarked on a barge going to the nearby Afghan port of Tajguzar. We landed in Tajguzar with some anxiety. We knew that between Tajguzar and Mazar-i-Sharif, the nearest town situated on a highway, the road was covered over quite a large distance with dunes and there was no motor car traffic at all. We were prepared to organise camel transport.

But the hospitality of Afghans is one of the main features of this nation.

Major Mir Amanullah Khan was there with a detachment and some military lorries. He took us under his tutelage. Our luggage was loaded on three lorries and most of us went with him by jeep. The rest went by lorries. I never expected that a small jeep could take thirteen persons. But this number of passengers was very useful. Many times we had to push the car and to lift it when clogged above the axles in moving sands. In deep night we came to Mazar-i-Sharif and went to the hotel. I don't know how the lorries passed this road but it is sufficient to say that the distance of some 35 miles was covered in about 15 hours.

In Mazar-i-Sharif we hired a lorry and went to Aybak on the way to Kabul. The party stayed there for some days and three of us went to Kabul in order to deal with various formalities. We obtained there a letter of recommendation to the Governor of Badakhshan. We met in Kabul also our liaison officer, Mr. Mahmud Salem Bakhtyar. He was a young man holding the post of General Inspector of the Ministry of Education. He had to help us on our way to the mountains.

We returned to Aybak and on July 25 we started for Ishkashim which is situated on the borders of Wakhan. We went by a hired lorry with all our luggage on it and we were met in nearly every town with great hospitality by local governors. The road led us through Khanabad to Faizabad amidst beautiful mountainous scenery along the river Kokcha which forced its way across the mountains through deep ravines.

After Faizabad, following this river, we turned south and went along its tributary the Warduj River to Zebak and nearby Ishkashim. It was the same ravine which Mr. H. W. Tilman, despite his intention, had to pass on horseback in 1947 when returning from Mustagh Ata. Now a road was built and we went on a lorry but the journey was most exciting. The road was narrow and steep. It was cut in rocks which sometimes were overhanging above the road. It twisted, following the gullies and ridges in sharp and narrow turns and all the time, far below and close to it, the Warduj River streamed its foaming waters. At the wooden bridges and on steeper parts we had to unload our lorry and to carry the luggage on our shoulders. Sometimes we had to widen the road with our ice-axes.

But we were not left alone. The Governor of Badakhshan, Din Mohammad Delawar Khan, sent some officers with us and a telephonist who climbed the telephone poles from time to time and reported any obstacles to him. The Governor immediately ordered local authorities to help us. Several times the local population from nearby villages extricated us from difficulties. Thanks to the Governor's kindness we came at last to Ishkashim on August 2, met on the way by a cavalcade of villagers which was sent to us in case we could not pass one of the last steep slopes of the road. It was really moving to see how

hospitality and goodwill can be a perfect substitute for technical facilities.

The Hakim of Ishkashim, Ghulam Djeylani Khan, invited us to dinner. The next day we repacked our luggage and our host sent messages to neighbouring villages for pack animals.

In Ishkashim we met Prof. Sakato and Dr. Sawata from the Academic Alpine Club of Kyoto. Prof. Sakato was the leader of the Japanese expedition which came here in order to attack Noshag too. He came to Ishkashim from the Qazi Deh valley from which his expedition was assaulting this peak. They had already established Camp II at the height of 18,050 ft. They did not see the peak as it was hidden behind other ones and were going by map only. According to them the peaks lying on the opposite side of the valley were too difficult for a reconnaissance.

This was a sad disappointment for us. For so long we had dreamed about unconquered Noshag which for so many years stood alone unnoticed by mountaineers and now two expeditions from different parts of the world met here unexpectedly. We could not feel, of course, any dislike for them. They did not know anything about us and we did not know anything about them before. Alas! They came here first so the honour of the first assault rightly should belong to them. The thought of a race was repugnant to us.

But we did not want to change our plans. All the peaks in the vicinity were so much lower, unless we could discover the mysterious giant.

Then other disappointing news came. Colonel Sardar Afizullah Khan, the frontier commissary, told us that photographing in mountains was not allowed on account of frontier restrictions. We argued that nearly all the mountains of the world are situated in frontier zones and everywhere it is allowed to take pictures. But it did not help. The Sardar was open-minded and agreed with us. But he was a soldier and had to obey regulations. He had sent a telegram to Kabul asking for instructions but the answer had not come yet. I sent a telegram to Kabul asking for hastening the permission of photographing.

The Japanese were in the same position. They even had stopped the establishing of higher camps till they were able to take photographs. In addition one of them fell ill. So they were staying in Qazi Deh valley and resting.

On August 4 the caravan of horses and donkeys loaded with our luggage started along the Panja River for Wakhan. On one side we had the 20,000-ft.-high peaks of the Shakh-dara Range of the Soviet Pamirs and on the other the 23,000-ft. peaks of the Hindu Kush. Although the bottom of the valley was at only about 8,000 ft., the scenery was rather limited. The valley of Wakhan especially at its

beginning is very narrow and one can see the slopes of side peaks only, which are here about 13,000 ft. Like all valleys in Afghanistan it was a barren one, covered with sand and stones and sparsely growing coarse shrubs. Each village was an oasis surrounded by verdure.

After about 12 miles we reached a village, Qazi Deh. The village lay at the mouth of a tributary valley named Qazi Deh also and which ran at right angles to the main valley of Wakhan. We were told by the inhabitants that the Japanese had established their camp in this valley.

According to our map Noshaq was situated in the next valley to the east. We decided to climb some minor peaks rising above the Wakhan valley in order to have a good view of the whole Hindu Kush. We hoped that we should find either the mysterious peak of the Norwegians or at least another valley leading to the foot of Noshaq.

We divided ourselves in three groups. Krajski, Kulinski and Zierhoffer went to the next valley to the east running parallel to Qazi Deh valley and leading from Warg village. They came under the main ridge of the Hindu Kush where they saw lofty 23,000-ft. peaks festooned in glaciers. They were accompanied by two unarmed soldiers who formed a kind of an honorary retinue but on the other hand they had to see that no photographs were taken. It was a strange situation. The poor boys were determined to follow the mountaineers to the top even if they had no mountaineering equipment and we could become involuntarily responsible even for their death. But fortunately, before the whole party reached the first glaciers the rarefied air overcame them. They became sick, suffered from headache and began to vomit. They gave up and remained below. Krajski, Kulinski and Zierhoffer went on the glacier and climbed a steep icy gully reaching a col, 17,000 ft., in a branch ridge.

The second party, Biel and Mostowski with two other soldiers, also climbed a peak, 14,000 ft., between the valley of Qazi Deh and the one along which the previous party went.

The remaining mountaineers went along the valley of Qazi Deh.

The results of these reconnaissances were as follows. There was only one peak overwhelmingly high to the surroundings seen on the horizon. The only possible route to it from Afghanistan was leading through the valley of Qazi Deh. All other peaks were much smaller. Tirich Mir, the highest of the Hindu Kush was invisible, hidden far behind the other peaks. This peak could only be Noshaq.

We started to organise another caravan for Qazi Deh valley now. With the help of Second Lieutenant Khwaja Abdul Mahmud Khan, who came here with us on behalf of the Governor of Badakhshan, and Abdul Hamid Khan, the Head Clerk of Police sent to us by Hakim of Wakhan, everything went well. The first batch of our loads went upwards on August 7. But the villages in Wakhan are small and poor.

Although four neighbouring villages supplied all the animals they had, it took three days until the luggage was sent upwards to Qazi Deh valley.

The animals reached the height of 10,200 ft. only and afterwards the luggage went on the shoulders of Wakhani porters. They were excellent porters and with heavy loads they were nearly running over some not very easy places. While I was sending the luggage up from the village, my friends established Base Camp at an altitude of 13,500 ft. We reunited on August 13 at Base Camp.

On our way up we passed the Japanese Base Camp at 10,200 ft. We proposed then to Prof. Sakato to join our efforts and make a joint assault on Noshag, and he agreed. The Japanese expedition consisted of six members but only three of them belonged to the assault party. The remaining ones were scientists. One of their alpinists, Yukiharu Hirose, was ill and was staying at the Base. The other two, hearing about our arrival, left the Base before I reached it in order to renew their attack. They were somewhere above now and at that time it was not known how their attack was going.

The Qazi Deh valley runs southwards up to the main ridge of the Hindu Kush and then turns nearly at a right angle to the east forming at its end a narrow cwm. Our Base Camp stood on the side moraine of the glacier just above a tributary glacier coming down from a large dome-shaped peak covered with snow. From its icy precipices avalanches often fell but they followed the course of the tributary valley which was running in the opposite direction in comparison with our Camp. The main glacier of Qazi Deh valley was entirely covered with debris and looked more like a heap of dirt in a mining area than a real glacier. But from nearly every peak which rose above the valley, white, clean and abrupt glaciers flowed down.

Beside our tents stood the tent of four Afghan soldiers. Permission for taking pictures came from Kabul. We all rejoiced, but the soldiers were even more glad. They were not obliged to accompany us now over glaciers and precipices.

The route of attack led along the Qazi Deh valley through this narrow cwm which was situated below a wide saddle in the principal ridge. Camp I (c. 14,760 ft.) was established there where the valley was turning sharply to the east. The way to it was by the side moraine, covered with slate screes. Some of the Wakhani porters helped us to establish this camp but they refused categorically to go farther. So we had to carry our loads ourselves.

The glacier there was still covered with slate debris and screes but was sometimes split forming large and deep crevasses. It rose gently till c. 16,000 ft., where suddenly it started to rise with a steep icy slope which led to the cwm. The slope was covered with firm snow which

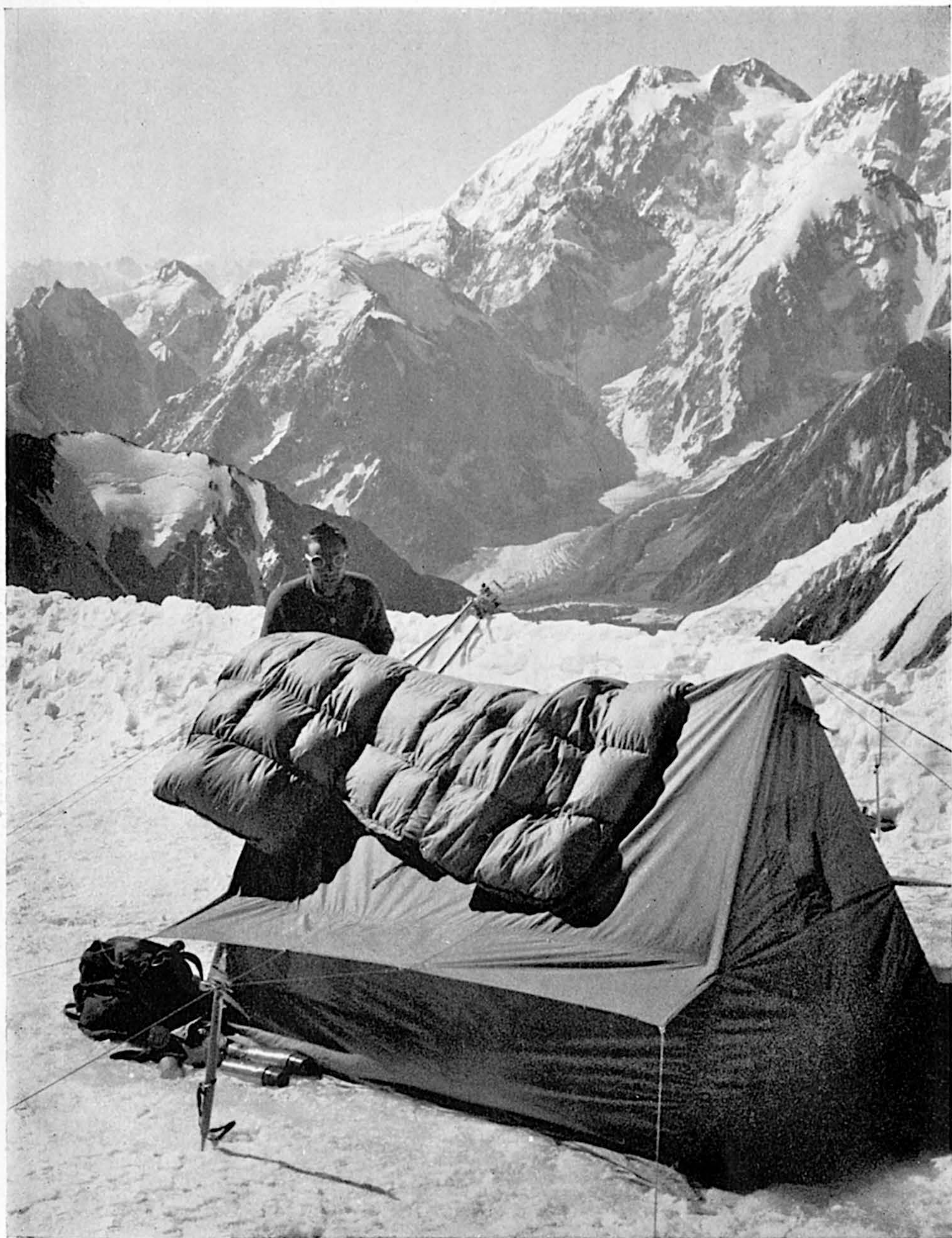


Photo: S. Sprudin]

TIRICH MIR, WITH CAMP III AT ABOUT 20,180 FT. IN THE FOREGROUND.

had a sufficient depth to avoid step cutting. It needed only zigzagging amidst crevasses.

The cwm looked rather unpleasant. The left part of it was dotted by black stones fallen from the vertical rocks of a branch crest shooting out from the main ridge. The right part of it was covered with clean snow which for some distance rose abruptly nearly to the rocky crest where big icy cornices hung threateningly. We pitched our Camp II (*ca.* 18,050 ft.) there, close to the Japanese camp, on August 13.

The Japanese had already established their Camp III on the main ridge of the Hindu Kush. Their altimeter went wrong and they thought that the camp was pitched at 22,310 ft. It turned out later that it had been situated much lower. So they decided to undertake now the final assault on the peak. They invited us to join them in this attack.

On August 14 Biel, Mostowski and Rubinowski reached the saddle (19,360 ft.) above the cwm. They all felt very bad as they were not yet acclimatised. Mostowski and Rubinowski reached *ca.* 20,180 ft. on the ridge and brought there one tent and some equipment. That day the Japanese proposed to us a joint assault on the peak. They intended to start it the next day.

But we were not yet ready. We needed at least one week of further acclimatisation. We were discussing these things with them in Camp I. The Japanese agreed to wait for us one or two days. But they were afraid of waiting longer on account of a possible change of weather. The excellent weather which we had all the time could not last for ever.

So we agreed that they go alone. Although we felt sorry we looked with sympathy at these two brave boys fighting alone with this giant mountain. As their altimeter went wrong we lent them ours and a light butane cooker.

On August 17 Goro Iwatsubo and Toshiaki Sakai reached the top of Noshag.

When we were leaving Warsaw we had decided to get to the top of Noshag by the most acclimatised rope even though consisting of two alpinists only. Now, when the first ascent was forfeited we decided that as many members of our expedition as possible should reach the peak. So we had to enlarge our camps and bring there more equipment and food.

But not everything went well. Berbeka and Biel fell ill. They were obliged to stay at Base Camp and could not take part in establishing the further camps, depriving themselves in this way of getting the proper acclimatisation. Dr. Ziehoff had to share their lot as he was our physician.

The route on Noshag led from the saddle (*ca.* 19,360 ft.) along the ridge towards the north. Camp III was established on the ridge at the altitude of *ca.* 20,180 ft. The ridge between the camp and the



Photo: W. Lesniewicz]

THE SOUTHERN RIDGE OF NOSHAQ

saddle was rather wide. It was an icy one covered with a thin layer of snow. On the ridge, close to Camp III, was a small frozen lake.

Tirich Mir covered the horizon from the south with its formidable North face and seemed to be so near that it was hard to realise that in reality it was over 10 miles away. It towered over all its surroundings. Istor-o-Nal blocked the scenery from the east.

Above Camp III the crest, although still a snowy one, became narrow. The snow was hard and step cutting was not necessary. At the height of *c.* 21,320 ft. rose a rocky cliff about 500 ft. high. The rock was fragile and unpleasant here. Mostowski and Rubinowski after spending a night at the foot of the cliff climbed it easily. After the cliff the snowy ridge rose very gently, but was still very narrow and exposed. Then again a second rocky cliff, higher than before, barred their way. This cliff was about 1,500 ft. high and seemed to be more difficult than the first one. They traversed its right icy slope beneath the overhanging rocks and later they crossed it to the other side. Here after crossing several rocky ribs and icy gullies they came to a large icy and snowy slope which led them onto the rocky crest again. Here, at an altitude of 21,650 ft., they left one tent and some equipment for the next camp. They returned to Camp III where they met Krajski and Kulinski who were taking up some more equipment for Camp IV.

It snowed the whole night but in the morning was clear again. Krajski and Kulinski brought their load to the same altitude where their friends had left equipment the day before and came back to Camp III.

It was August 21 and all preparations for the final assault were accomplished.

The next day the assault started. The expedition was divided into groups. Those mountaineers who had not taken part in establishing the highest camps were not yet fully acclimatised. They left the Base first in order to spend some time higher and to improve their acclimatisation. Those who had just returned from action, on the other hand, needed some rest. So they had to leave the Base later. All the groups had to meet together in Camp III. The day of August 25 was fixed as the date of meeting.

Berbeka, Biel, Sprudin and Zierhoffer came to Camp III on the 24th. I was waiting for the rest in Camp II and the next day I accompanied them to the saddle, 19,360 ft. We separated here. Krajski, Kulinski, Mostowski and Rubinowski went upwards to Camp III and Kunicki and I descended to Camp II.

Two members of our expedition did not keep company with us in our journey through Afghanistan. They were Krysa and Kunicki. They went by our car and owing to some transport difficulties had to leave Termez after us. They reached the Base Camp on August 16 and had no time at all to acclimatise. Moreover they did not feel well.

Kunicki and I spent the night in Camp II. After breakfast, as we lay in our tents, there was an avalanche of séracs, and we were overtaken by the tail end of it. We and the tents were carried several yards downwards. The tents were torn but it helped to get out through the holes. Luckily the only damage was some bruises and one broken finger, but the camp was in a terrible mess, covered partly with lumps of ice and snow and all things scattered around or buried under the snow.

We tried to clear up this mess and, after leaving a note for our friends we left for the Base.

In the morning of the same day Berbeka, Biel, Krajski, Kulinski, Mostowski, Rubinowski and Zierhoffer left Camp III. Rubinowski took a 16-mm. film camera and was filming on the way. They climbed the first rocky cliff and went along the snowy crest, traversing later the icy slope below the second cliff as before, and reached the ridge where the equipment was left. They took it, and their rucksacks now weighed about 55 lb. each. They traversed the rocks, again passing ribs and gullies, and later they ascended the ridge just behind the cliff, over a slope of firm snow.

The ridge was rather wide here. They pitched Camp IV here at an altitude of *c.* 22,640 ft. The next day they proceeded along the snowy ridge, crossing several icy crevasses covered partly with snow. After some time the ridge spread out in two branches. The principal ridge of the Hindu Kush turned sharply to the west. According to all maps Noshaq should be situated just there. But a higher peak was seen nearby in the ridge going from the branching-out point to the east.

They went in that direction along the branch ridge and after some 600 yards they came on a big icy, nearly horizontal, plateau. From this plateau rose the summit—a not very high cone covered with screes. The screes were here mixed. Some of them were of black slate like in Qazi Deh valley and some of yellowish granite like the peaks seen farther to the east.

They waited here for each other, unroped themselves and took off their crampons. All the seven reached the top. It was 5 p.m.

The sky was clear and cloudless. They were surrounded by thousands of peaks. Hindu Kush, Pamirs and, far on the horizon, Karakoram and Himalaya. Only Tirich Mir, 25,263 ft. was higher. Istor-o-Nal, 24,271 ft., and all other peaks were below them.

Everybody took pictures now, and Rubinowski busily filmed. They wrote a note and left it in a plastic box with two small flags, Polish and Afghan, under a cairn which they built. Biel found under the stones two wooden Japanese dolls left here by our forerunners. After an hour they started to go down and they reached Camp IV in twilight, where they spent the night.

Flashes of lightning lighted the whole sky from Tirich Mir to the



Photo: S. Zierhoffer]

ON THE TOP OF NOSHAQ, 24,581 FT.

Karakoram. This lightning occurred every evening after dark. There was no thunder. The dark silhouette of Tirich Mir was cut out clearly against this lighted sky.

They descended on the rope from the 'second' cliff and spent another night in Camp III.

The next day we were all reunited at Base.

But now a discussion started. Was it Noshaq which was climbed by both parties? Could the surveyors have made such a mistake and placed Noshaq on the map about two and half miles to the east? And was the height 24,581 ft. true for the climbed peak? Could the name of Noshaq be applied to the second peak of the Hindu Kush now?

Our pocket altimeters failed at about 22,000 ft. The local population does not know the name of Noshaq. The second peak of the Hindu Kush is not visible from the Qazi Deh valley above which it rises. It is hidden behind the other peaks. So they could not help us to solve this problem.

Or maybe this peak was the mysterious giant which was seen by Arne Naess from the top of Tirich Mir in 1950. According to the map he could see only the top of Noshaq rising behind the ridges which were standing in the foreground. But as Tirich Mir was visible from the peak from its foot to the top so *vice versa* this mountain should be also visible from Tirich Mir in its entirety. No wonder that it could not be identified by Norwegians as Noshaq and was then for them an unknown giant.

The rest in the Base Camp was short. On September 2 three groups started again. There was some equipment still left on the ridge which had to be taken down.

Krysa, Kulinski, Mostowski, Rubinowski and Sprudin went to the saddle, 19,360 ft. It began to snow when they were in the cwm below the saddle and the mist came. They had some difficulties in finding the proper way among crevasses on the saddle, but they reached it and spent the night there.

On September 4 all of them except Krysa, who reached for the first time this altitude and did not feel well, climbed along the snowy narrow arête the neighbouring peak, *c.* 21,160 ft. to the south. They named it Asp-e-Safed, White Horse, as in our Tatra Mountains we call a very narrow sharp arête where one must go astraddle—a horse. All the names by which we called these unnamed peaks were in Tajiks which is the mother language of the inhabitants of Badakhshan.

One of the main purposes of climbing this peak was to obtain a good picture of Noshaq. But alas, again the mist came and they could not take any photographs.

On September 5 Berbeka and Zierhoffer climbed from a tributary glacier of the Qazi Deh valley another unnamed peak, *c.* 18,650 ft. rising

on the principal ridge of the Hindu Kush. This peak was formed by a long crest where they enjoyed really beautiful climbing. They named this peak Rach-e-Daros, Long Ridge.

From the same tributary glacier, which we named the Glacier of the Poles (Piryakh-e-Polandi in Tajiks), Biel, Krajski and Lesniewicz reached on September 6 the top of Khorpusht-e-Yakhi, 18,693 ft. The approach to it led through a gully covered with a very forest of small ice pinnacles resembling 'nieves penitentes' in the Andes. Biel who was spending all his spare time on surveying the peaks took, as on some previous occasions, a light theodolite with which he took many bearings hoping to disentangle the riddle of Noshaq.

The weather started to deteriorate now. Heavy clouds covered the sky.

Biel, Krajski and Kunicki made an assault on Gunbaz-e-Safed, White Dome. This peak stood above our Base Camp and was about 22,300 ft. high. During the climb it started to snow heavily but between snowfalls they reached on September 8 the altitude of 20,670 ft. on its West ridge. There a violent snowstorm compelled them to halt. They spent a night in the storm at a height of c. 19,160 ft. and returned to the Base Camp.

It snowed for several days now. Our stay in the Hindu Kush was coming to the end.

On September 11 the Wakhani porters came up to Base Camp and we went down. We reconnoitred the great tributary valley Mandaras running from the Qazi Deh valley to the east along the main ridge of the Hindu Kush. Then we returned to Ishkashim.

As our lorry leaving Ishkashim was slowly mounting the road, all of us as if on a signal turned our faces towards the Hindu Kush. The sky was cloudless again. The lofty peaks covered with fresh snow were shining though in autumnal but still intense light.

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And what about the second peak of the Hindu Kush?

When we got home, Biel started to put his bearings on paper. It was a long and toilsome job as it was difficult to fix his standings having no proper maps of the Afghan part of the Hindu Kush, and not being a professional surveyor. At the beginning it seemed hopeless. As the route on Noshaq led along its Southern ridge which closed the Qazi Deh valley from the east, we had taken for granted that we had climbed the ridge between the peaks 22,963 ft. and 23,922 ft. We were surprised, however, that the peak 22,963 ft. was so high, as we climbed it, or at least we thought at that time that we climbed it, and we estimated it at 21,160 ft. only.

We were near to believing that there is no Noshaq and the second

peak of the Hindu Kush was really situated about two and half miles to the east in comparison with the map. But there were still some incomprehensible discrepancies between our pictures and the bearings.

However, the obstinate Biel was not giving up the contest. By trial and error he found at last the solution of the riddle. The Qazi Deh valley did not reach the ridge between the peaks 22,963 ft. and 23,922 ft. at all. It is closed from the east much nearer, by another ridge which was not shown on the map. And behind this ridge an unknown glacier was flowing from the foot of Noshag to the foot of Tirich Mir.

Now everything was clear. Noshag remained on its place on the map and was at the same time the unknown mountain of the Norwegians. All the other big peaks remained also in their old positions and all pictures taken from the different peaks fitted well to the bearings and the whole scheme.

We did not discover a new peak but we did discover a new valley.