

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE KARAKORAM
EXPEDITION, 1961

BY A. J. M. SMYTH

PERHAPS more expeditions than we realise start off as club meets, designed by the committee to keep the members quiet, acquiring pretentious names and objectives as the organisation proceeds. Ours, at least, start that way. Moreover they have a way of keeping their true intentions secret, even from the leader, until the last possible moment. In 1955 we switched our entire region of campaign a hundred miles westward after late winter snows had made the original area quite unsuppliable in the time at our disposal. The year 1961 was no exception. At press conferences before the start we were continually pressed to state just what we were going to do, but we avoided being too definite because we did not know ourselves. We sat like bridge players at the table, waiting for the cards to be dealt, confident that we should be able to play an interesting hand when the time came.

At the end of 1958 there was a feeling in R.A.F.M.A. that the time had at least arrived when we should pack our rucksacks, and the mandate given us by the Annual General Meeting was in every way a command. Waiting only for Mr. Stevenson of the Royal Geographical Society to come back from his winter holiday, I went straight to him to discuss our requirements. It seemed inevitable that we should go to the Himalayas, since the Andes were beyond our pockets, nor did we have the necessary time available to make use of cheap means of crossing the Atlantic. We liked to think of ourselves in Base Camp ten days from the final airfield, and this, together with our rather sensitive political status, shut off the deeper recesses of Asia. Also we wished to take with us as many members as we could usefully employ, suggesting two climbing parties and a survey party in action at one time; this made us think of unsurveyed country of about 20,000 ft., but we wished there to be one mountain of 23-24,000 ft. for us to try our strength on should we feel fit. The result of our discussion was that we chose the Batura and the Hushe valley. The Batura plan was rapidly vetoed by the Pakistanis who were even then looking for bodies of an Anglo-German expedition in the area, and so we were left with the Hushe.

It may surprise the many who have passed up the Hushe from Khapalu on their way to Masherbrum that I should count it as unsurveyed, but it is one of those many pockets which have been left untouched since the original topographical survey of the pundits in the

middle of last century—rated 'poor' on the map as compared with the 'good' of Fanny Bullock Workman a little farther east. No one who has experienced such maps in the Himalayas (and Karakorams) can ever accuse the pundits of lack of imagination. Above Hushe (pronounced Hooshay) village, the valley splits into five glaciers—the South and North Chogolisa glaciers, the Chundogero, the Masherbrum and the Aling to name them from east to west. The Masherbrum expeditions seem to have kept themselves very much to their own glacier, and only the Harvard party with Nick Clinch in 1957, who looked at the South Chogolisa, covered any of the rest. If we were to imagine Masherbrum as the head of a father-figure, stretching out his arms southward toward the Shyok, then Hushe village would lie in his lap, Chogolisa peak on his left shoulder, and K6 on his left elbow. It turned out that we were to spend most of the time on his right shoulder.

The year 1959 was taken up with preliminary work, and it was not until the beginning of 1960 that the signals went green for full speed ahead. We took the good example of the Inter-Service Expeditions and invited our own Chief of Air Staff and the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Air Force to become our Patrons, little realising how magnificently they would serve our cause. We received £500 from the Everest Foundation for which we are extremely grateful. Support came liberally from industry and from R.A.F. non-public funds, and, after dipping deeply into our own pockets as well, it became apparent that we could go. The usual chaos of packing (why did we ever put that jam in polythene bags?), and then we stood straining like Spitfires on the strips awaiting the signal from the tower.

On June 6 Mervyn Hughes and myself, as advance party, together with about half a ton of our stores found ourselves filling up a Britannia bound for Karachi. It was well that we had come early. The normal way for expeditions to import their stores into Pakistan is through the maritime customs at Karachi. The import of four tons through Karachi was something which air customs were unable to comprehend, and they were not prepared to recognise the customs immunity already granted us by the Ministry of Foreign Relations. The additional fact that the Government was on the move to Rawalpindi did not help matters either. If the affair was eventually cleared up, it was due to the diplomatic handling of the situation by Hughes, and the fact that the main party was delayed, giving a couple of weeks' leeway. They arrived in Karachi but a few hours after the last obstacles had been removed.

The U.K. members of the expedition now numbered twelve, of whom eleven were R.A.F.—Squadron Leader John Sims as deputy leader and chief of the climbing group, with Flying Officer Peter Nichols, Sergeants Wilkinson and Bottomer, Flight-Lieutenant Mervyn Hughes as chief

of survey, with Squadron Leader Jimmie Aitken and Flight-Lieutenant Peter Addis as surveyors, Flight-Lieutenant Norman Ridley as equipment member, Flight-Lieutenant John (Doc) Jones, Squadron Leader Shaw Close as transport officer, and myself as leader. Last, but by no means least, came our guest artist, Chris Jonson, a Petty Officer of the Royal Navy. We were to be joined by Squadron Leader (late Major) Shah Khan of the P.A.F., together with Flight-Lieutenant Beg, and Mr. Saib Shah of the Pakistan Survey.

It is always annoying to be held up at the beginning of an expedition, especially when you have already taken eight days to travel five thousand miles, as had most of the team, but Karachi put on just the sort of show that we needed for our film. Saturday, June 24, was the day of the processions of Muharram which commemorates the death of Hussain at the Battle of Kerbela. Karachi is the stronghold of the Shia sect and Hussain was their founder, so, as might be expected, the feast was well celebrated. Millions of people were on the streets, either watching the procession or taking part in it, carrying their vast paper 'tarzias'—tombs of Hussain—along the crowded streets to be ceremonially cast into the sea at the end. A small procession of the more enthusiastic equipped themselves with knives on chains and flogged themselves with these, leaving blood-washed tarmac in their wake. We filmed ecstatically for a time, but when we wished to change places, there was no other way but to join the procession, which explains why three heated Europeans traversed Bander Road in the company of the prostitutes on their camel carts.

From Karachi the P.A.F. flew us onward to Chaklala (Rawalpindi) and on June 28 we landed at Skardu after the usual thrilling flight up the Indus gorge. By noon we had been ferried by the kind offices of the local Army Service Corps, and were duly installed at the Rest House. Here, at last, the physical work began. In an audience with the Political Agent, Mr. Faizullah Khan, I heard two points of news which I awaited eagerly. Firstly it was confirmed that the Austrian party, which had just returned from Sherpi Kangri and the Mount Ghent group, had not climbed K6, for which they had permission. Secondly, it was confirmed that ponies would be available for us when we wanted them. The jeep road to Khapalu had now been open a month, but, as yet, jeeps in number had not arrived in Baltistan, so that we shall probably be the last expedition to travel this route on foot.

Before we could get down to serious climbing, two problems had to be tackled. We had to have a look at K6—declared by the Austrians to be unclimbable from the east, and thought to be unclimbable by the Harvard party from the north. What would it be like from the Ngamah valley, the south-west approach? Then we had to tie on our survey to Pakistan which involved the ascent of a Trig Point, notably the mountain

of Ombartro (17,201 ft.) which lay on our route. A small light party was therefore formed of Sims, Nichols, Wilkinson and Bottomer who could go ahead with all speed to reconnoitre K6, while another small party of Saib Shah and Addis would leave us three days out for Ombartro. We therefore said good-bye to Sims after only one day in Skardu and got down to the arduous job of sorting out stores and hiring High Altitude Porters (H.A.P.s).

We never had any trouble in engaging H.A.P.s, either at Skardu or anywhere else. We took on Ghulam Rasoul at the recommendation of the Austrians, and thereafter crowds sat at our doorstep waiting to be taken on. On the afternoon of our second day at Skardu, the local doctor came back in a jeep and told us that the advance party were finding it very hot in the desert stretches and advised us to march by night—advice we gratefully took. Even so the rear party found it very hot over the twenty miles to Gol, our first stop. Here we tried to cram the expedition into the small Rest House, and spent a very uncomfortable time. Not only was the accommodation scant, but patients came in their hundreds to see the doctor, and we spent much of our time ministering to their needs. Luckily we had something like five hundred pounds' weight of medical supplies given us by the medical suppliers for just such an occasion, so we were unwilling to turn any away, even though many were obvious malingerers. A busy day ended in an orgy of tooth extractions.

We now left the Indus and gained the Shyok, making the sixty-two miles to Kharpalu in four days. We were relying mostly on our own commissariat, though we rarely bothered to pitch tents except for the sick in the heat of the day. On the second day, the number of sahibs riding ponies became alarming, but the crisis was soon over. At Korphuk we sent off Saib Shah and Addis to Ombartro as planned, and at Khapalu we paid off our ponies which had served us honestly and (comparatively) cheaply. After being entertained by the Rajah, we crossed the Shyok in 36 *zacht* loads, experiencing for the first time the terrors of the goat-skin raft. We were now at the mercy of 136 local porters, whom we paid at the excessive rate of Rs. 10 per day laid down by the Government. It is therefore not surprising that we had no labour trouble. In fact several porters sub-contracted their loads to others not so fortunate at about one-third of the rate we were paying. We were now in the Hushe valley, climbing but slowly to the 10,000 ft. of Kande where the Ngamah valley flowed in.

I had hoped that Sims would be at Kande to meet us with news that K6 was climbable. There was only a message to say, in so many words, that I had better come up and look at things for myself. We had arrived at Kande at ten o'clock in the morning, but, being still fairly fresh, Wilkinson and I, with two H.A.P.s left at noon for the Ngamah.

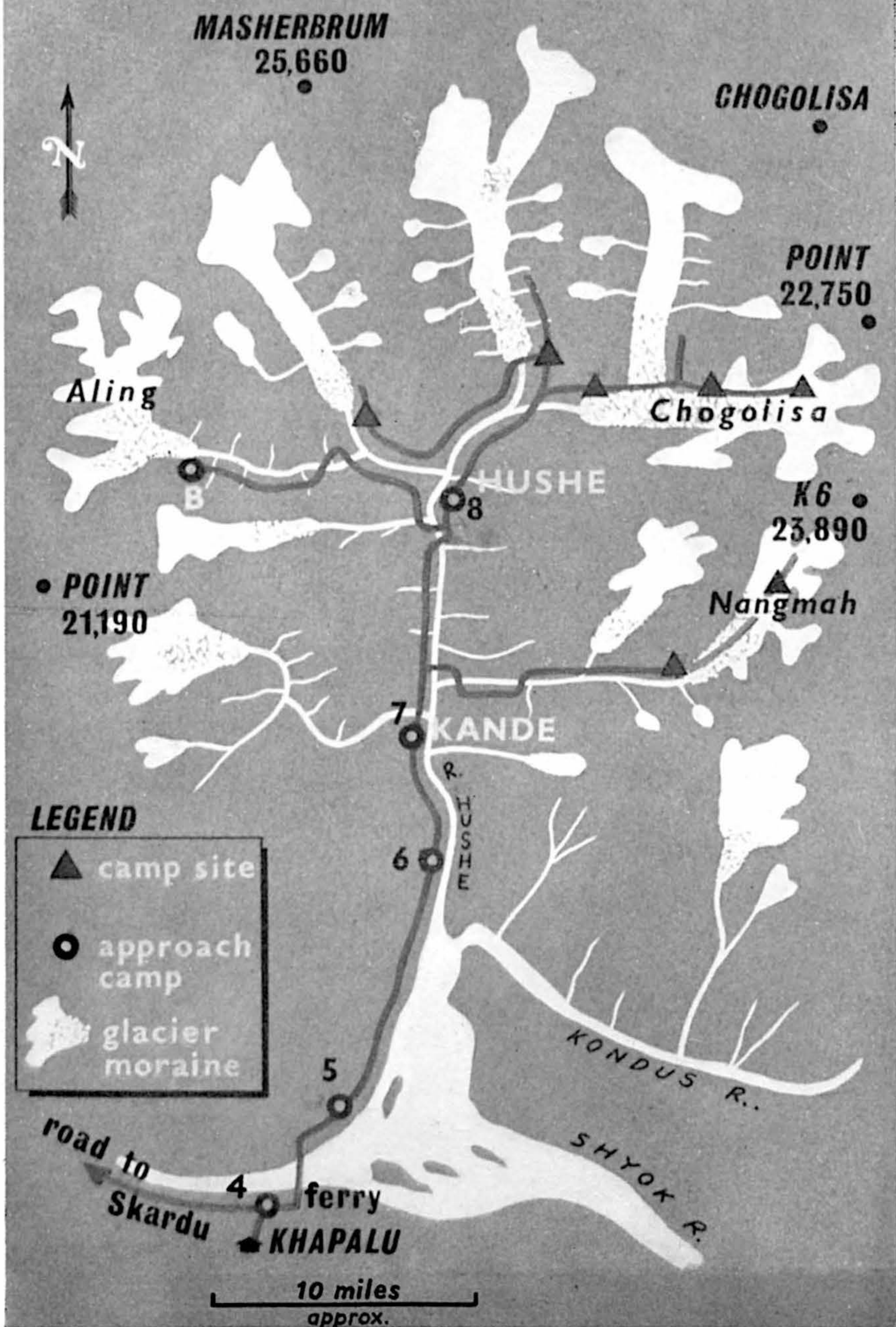
We entered it through a notch in the Hushe wall, perhaps a third of a mile wide and fully a mile high with vertical sides. There was a bridge to cross the main river at the village of Minjlu (10,000 ft.), and thereafter the path rose steadily for 2,000 ft. to the delightful summer village of Ngamah. Here wheat and barley grew in an area irrigated by the purest of streams which had fallen many thousand sheer feet on their way down the sides of the valley. I remarked as we lay down that it was like sleeping in Fifth Avenue because so little of the stars was visible between the tops of the cliffs above.

We were up before dawn and came upon Sims' camp at 7 a.m., just as he was setting out for a day's climbing. It was on a superb alpine pasture, carpeted with edelweiss and purple vetch at the base of the usual vertical cliff. He had called it 'The camp of the Beasties' because wherever he went, even up to 15,000 ft., he saw signs of cattle, yet never once did he see a single beast. We afterwards found that these pastures are only grazed every other year to ensure their survival, and this was not a Ngamah year. After a quick breakfast we went on up the valley, now over glacier moraine, to a view point at about 15,000 ft. from which K6 could easily be seen, and where we held a conference.

The advance party had already spent three days on the Ngamah face of K6, establishing a camp at 16,000 ft. and climbing to an estimated height of 20,000 ft. on one ridge which petered out into a vertical cliff. There appeared but one way up. Across the face in an ascending traverse led a gallery, similar to but steeper than Heather Terrace on the East face of Tryfan. Unfortunately a difficult ice-fall led to this, and it was not an easy place to visit on a reconnaissance. The greater difficulty was to estimate how far this terrace stood out from the main face, because just above it were poised hanging glaciers throughout most of its length. Nowhere was a safe camp site seen, yet camp sites there must be, for the terrace rose from about 17,000 ft. to more than 22,000 ft. Had this been the only objection to the route, we would have taken it, but it led to the Western summit. To reach the Eastern, or true, summit involved some two miles of high traverse, the latter part of which involved difficult rock at nearly 24,000 ft. Having in mind the strength and unstated objectives of the expedition, we sadly decided to leave K6 alone.

In order to give K6 just one more chance, we decided to look at it from the north in case Clinch had overlooked some hidden route. While Sims went on up the Hushe and on to the Chogolisa glacier, I went back to Kande to pick up the rest. We made a temporary camp outside Hushe village, and put an advance base camp at the snout of the Chogolisa which could serve both as a base for our look at the North face of K6, and as a main survey base for the mapping of the area. After finding the way up the complex moraine of the Chogolisa, Sims

THE HUSHE VALLEY



R.A.F. KARAKORAM EXPEDITION: FIRST PHASE.

suggested that Jonson and I have a look at K6 from this side while he and his party took a well-earned rest. With protestations of unworthiness, I accepted the honour.

After the usual 4 o'clock start from 'Chog Camp', Chris Jonson and I started up the Chogolisa moraine and soon gained the side gallery which seems to form the main route up the lower reaches of most of these glaciers. For five hours we plodded up, slowly gaining height, sometimes passing cross-breed yaks, but never a drop of water until we came to the junction where the North Chogolisa led off. This meant descending onto the glacier and finding our way through the usual maze of crevasses and boulders. Here and there we came across cow-dung, which was rather deflating. We were making for a side glacier which the map showed, and which we estimated should lead to K6. When, at last, we reached it, we found it only a bay in the main glacier, and were forced to come back. At about 15,000 ft., yet still in the dirty portion of the ice, we were obliged to make our camp by the necessity of sending back our H.A.P.s if they were to reach Chog Camp that night.

The afternoon passed pleasantly for me, reading *Swann's Way* (idea borrowed from Noyce—I never finished it), and the night was only just below freezing. The next morning we were off at first light to discover that only half a mile separated us from smooth ice. We could have driven a jeep the last five miles, so that, by eight o'clock, we stood beneath the breath-taking Northern walls of K6. There was no doubt at all that Clinch had been right. There was no possibility whatsoever of making a route up the North face which rose 7,000 ft. at an almost vertical angle. In fact, when seen later in profile, some thousand feet proved to be actually overhanging. We spent some time ensuring that there was no route between K6 and the next peak, but the valley between was blocked by cascades of cliffs. Only several miles westward was there a possibility of reaching the K6 ridge, but from there several mountains had to be crossed to reach it. With K6 firmly behind us, we concentrated our forces on the Aling.

The Aling is probably the least visited of the Hushe glaciers. In fact we have only heard of one visit previously—that of the U.S. Consul in Peshawar in 1960 when he ascended the main ice-fall and remained above for two days. His objective seems to have been photographic rather than climbing. It was obvious, therefore, that the Aling offered us quite a good area of virgin territory encompassing a number of fine peaks with heights up to 22,000 ft. which we had already seen from the Ngamah and Chogolisa. Moreover they looked climbable, which was more than could be said of most of the peaks we had previously looked at. On July 14 we loaded up our porters once again and made our last big move to the top of the Hushe river, and ten miles further up the Aling where we were stopped by the ice-fall. Here we camped at



Photo, R.A.F. Karakoram Expedition, 1961]

LOOKING UP THE EAST ALING GLACIER AT CATHEDRAL AND MITRE. CAMP 1A IS AT EXTREME RIGHT BOTTOM CORNER.

about 12,000 ft. where a few roses relieved the monotony of the debris left by the retreating glacier. A hundred yards away the Aling foamed out of an icy cavern, and every few minutes a massive block of ice crashed down into the river.

The first thing to do was obviously to get a general picture, and this Sims, who was one day ahead of the main body, having come direct from the Chogolisa, nearly losing a porter at the fording of the Masherbrum on the way, proceeded to get by climbing Green Mountain. A more convenient view point was scarcely conceivable, for Green Mountain stood by itself in the middle of a cirque of higher mountains, and from it nearly the whole Aling stood revealed. The flanks were, strangely enough, green, illuminated by many kinds of wild flowers, and supported several herds of ibex. The summit just touched the snow line which seemed to be at a steady 17,000 ft. throughout July.

As a result of his deliberations on Green Mountain, Sims decided to attack a peak directly to the west, which he called Aling I, leading to Aling II, the latter being about 22,000 ft. On the next day, while he and his band flagged the ice-fall which led up the Aling West glacier, the rest of us tried to discover a satisfactory way up the main Aling glacier, locating a passable route up a gallery on the east side, rather similar to the route up the Chogolisa. On 17th there was hard work for everyone as we ferried loads up the West glacier and over the steep slopes of Green Mountain to the little knoll on which Sims had chosen his Camp I. We left a small party there to work on the upper ice-fall while we went down for more loads, and to send off another party under Norman Ridley to look higher up the main glacier.

From now on the situation needed careful handling for, quite apart from the surveyors, there were always two climbing parties operating at once, sometimes three days' march apart. After seeing the upper Aling party supplied, I decided to spend a few days with the Camp I party, principally to film their struggles with their ice-fall. This would be difficult for it appeared that the West Aling Upper glacier was very unstable, being safe only between midnight and 8 a.m. As I arrived at Camp I with the convoy, I saw the road makers just entering camp having got about half way up the fall, a distance of only a thousand feet. The reports were not promising for the ice was in bad shape and footsteps arduously cut in the ice were disappearing almost as quickly as they could be made. The weather was far too warm, and a thin layer of cloud formed in the afternoon. It was obvious that we were in for a change of weather, which had been perfect for the last month. In the late afternoon it started snowing, and throughout the night it rained. The next day was so wet that we decided to go down to Base Camp since the ice-fall would obviously be bad for several days.

Any plans I might have for a further visit to Camp I were promptly



Photo, R.A.F. Karakoram Expedition, 1961]

CAMP 1A ON THE ALING GLACIER AT 16,500 FT., LOOKING BACK DOWN THE GLACIER (NOTE HOOP TENTS).

altered by the arrival at Base Camp of Doc Jones with the news that Pete Nichols had gone down with pneumonia at Camp Ia, as we had christened what was to be our advanced base camp up the Main Aling. A relief expedition speedily formed, but I had little idea that it would take me to two 20,000 ft. peaks in my walking boots. We had one oxygen set—a relic of Annapurna II—with us, and when we tried it out, it worked perfectly, proving the excellence of the design thought out by Alf Bridge for Kangchenjunga. The route to Camp Ia was one of those minor purgatories of rubble and scree and moraine which led us for eight hours along the north-east bank. Originally we had a mid-way camp, but in our initial freshness we abolished this, only to find that few could do the double journey at the end. Camp Ia lay on top of a lateral moraine at the junction of the North-east and North-west streams, at about 16,000 ft. When we got there we found Nichols, responding well to massive doses of tetracycline, sitting up cooking us a meal. The oxygen set seemed a little superfluous.

The weather was now clearing, so it seemed obvious that we should go flat out and bag a few peaks before it deteriorated. At 3 o'clock, then, on the 22nd, five climbers and five H.A.P.s set out up the North-east glacier where Nichols had been when he began to feel queer. The ice-fall was complicated but needed little cutting, being passed at the top by a climb on the loose hillside which looked as though it would be dangerous in the late morning. The glacier then split, continuing in two streams separated by a thousand-foot cliff—the East Aling and the North-east Aling. By 10 o'clock we were on a broad expanse of almost level snow about 18,000 ft., and within easy striking distance of two peaks. In our ignorance we called them Sceptre and Mitre because of their shapes, little knowing that there was another Mitre within twenty miles.¹ We sent down the H.A.P.s and prepared, in the intolerable heat of the afternoon, to climb on the morrow.

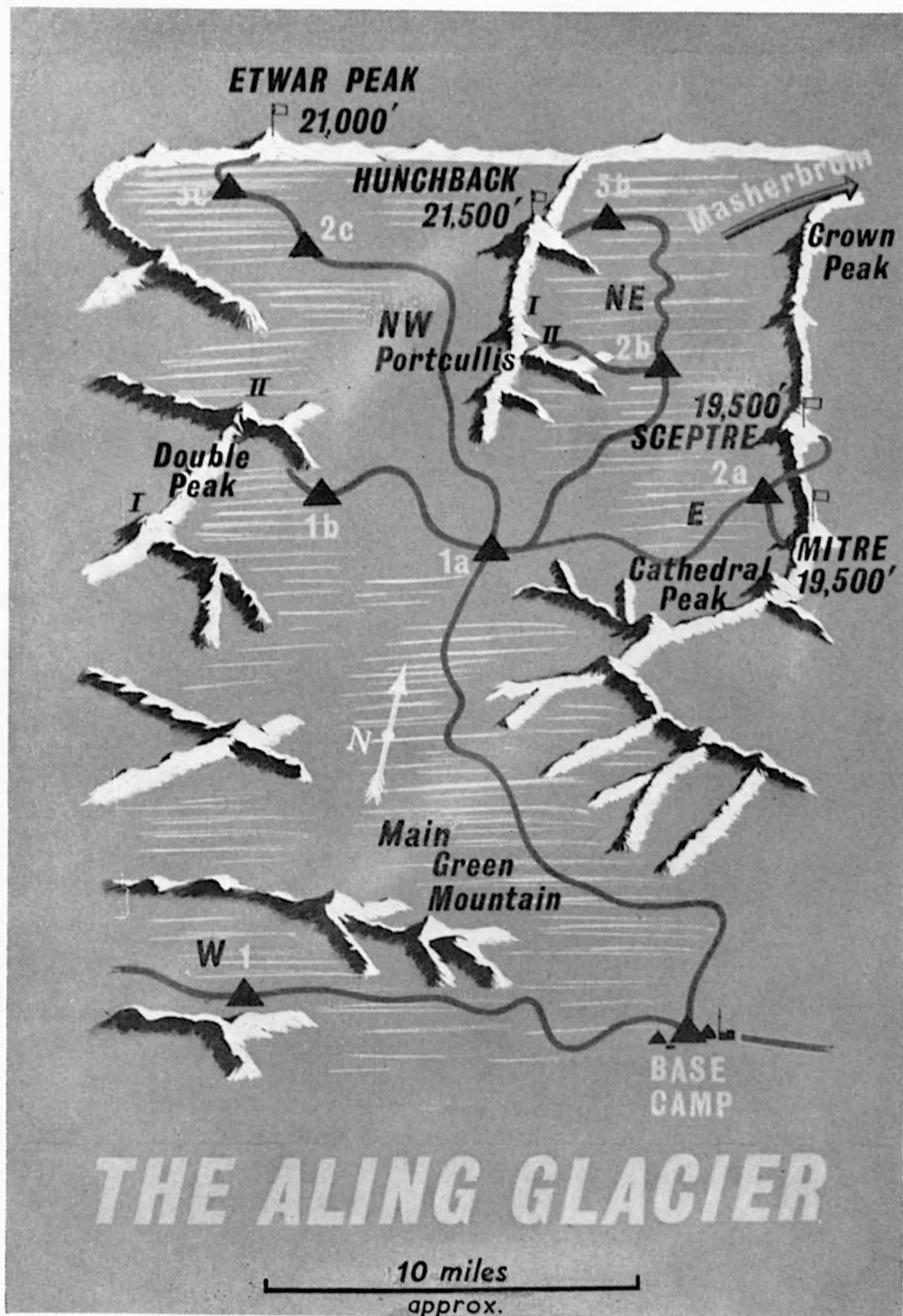
The original plan was that we should attack both Sceptre and Mitre at once. Chris Jonson and I should have a go at Sceptre by the South-west ridge, and Ridley, Shah Khan and Jones should try Mitre by the North ridge. We were all up at 3 a.m. on the 23rd, and Chris and I left camp before 4 a.m., crossing the glacier quickly on the just frozen snow. In fact the weather was still far too warm to give us peace of mind. We soon reached the ridge where the rock fell away to the North-east glacier, and then up the steadily increasing slope where the arête merged into the West face. The gradient was now about 45 degrees, and steepened a little more higher up. At about 19,000 ft. in the growing light we began to have serious doubts about the snow. The surface was ideal for crampons, but the ice-axe sunk easily to a foot, to be brought up suddenly by solid ice. There were indications that the

¹ Mitre, 6,010 m. Above the South bank of the Baltoro glacier, at Concordia.

recent snow had not yet bound itself firmly to the old stuff which had become ice in the month of fine weather. This was all right at 5.30 a.m., but what would it be like at noon? There was nothing for it but retreat.

Without delay we rushed down unroped and went breathless up the glacier to the col between Sceptre and Mitre, overtaking the others like a sports car on M1. On the col we threw off everything we could—duvets, rucksacks, ciné and still cameras—and started up the South-east ridge at six o'clock. Above us were just over a thousand feet of ridge at an average of 40 degrees. Beyond the col, the rock fell sheer to one of the Masherbrum glaciers, beyond which the great peak rose monumentally. It was as pleasant a climb as I have ever known. Where we could keep to the ridge there was no trouble, but soon we were forced off by the great size of the cornices. We were forced to take a series of zig-zags, traversing two or three hundred feet of steep snow, and then climbing an arête of rock to gain the ridge again. Always we were troubled by the thought of what the snow would be like on the way down. We climbed singly, myself leading, because we found that this would give us the rests we needed without the whole rope ever having to pause. We could see that the others had abandoned their attempt on Mitre, and were engaged in filming our progress. At last, a slab of about V. Diff. standard led into a chimney which took us to the summit, where we arrived at 9.30 a.m. Without even bothering to open a bottle of Bouvier, we turned straight round and started the descent. We gained the impression that Sceptre was exactly the same height as Mitre, and round about 20,000 ft.—a fact which has yet to be worked out in the survey.

The descent from Sceptre by the same route was not as bad as we feared, nor did we have any bad slides on the portions where no belay was possible. We were down in camp by 11.30 a.m. for another roasting afternoon. The next day tended to be rather a repeat of the programme with a change of scenery thrown in. This time we climbed in different order, I leading Doc Jones, while Ridley led Shah Khan and Jonson. But from the south side, Mitre provided none of the cornice-jewelled razor edges of the north side. A simple valley, a steep rock and ice couloir, quiet when out of the sun, and a delightful steepening ridge led us quickly to the summit, although this alone was unapproachable because of its enormous cornice. By six o'clock we were on top, and would have stayed for a magnum had it been possible to get out of the freezing shadow, for the weather seemed much colder than on the previous day. On the way down we passed the others coming up, a thoroughly fine climb which compared with any standard ordinary route in the Alps. By nine o'clock we were all back in camp, and by six in the evening had covered the extra fourteen miles back to Base Camp.



R.A.F. KARAKORAM EXPEDITION: SECOND PHASE.

The weather had now settled down into a sequence of three days' poor weather followed by four or five good days—just enough to get the slopes into good condition before the next deterioration. Under these conditions, we had little difficulty in persuading Sims to give up Aling I. It was obvious that an attempt on this would take a very long time, and a sudden change in the weather might involve someone in an emergency descent of the ice-fall under very dangerous conditions. Practically all the equipment was brought down from Camp I, but a couple of lengths of glacier ladders and a lot of fixed rope with fixing pitons were abandoned. While this was going on, Nichols and Jonson moved a camp across the Main glacier from Ia for a reconnaissance on Double Peak, a fine mountain just opposite which offered very fine climbing. Jonson and H.A.P.s established a camp at about 17,500 ft., for Nichols was still on light duties, but this lead was never exploited. We preferred to develop a thrust on the North-east glacier.

By now the surveyors had completed their work in the Chogolisa, Chundogero and Masherbrum systems and had moved over to join us at the main Base Camp. After a very fine day on Green Mountain, Saib Shah and Aitken moved off to the Ngamah where they found the food dump completely decimated by bears. The effect of bear teeth on tins of food was extremely impressive, and caused considerable loss of sleep while the party were at Camp of the Beasties. After a short visit to the Apo Brok valley above Kande, the party moved down to the Lower Hushe, joining us on the way out. Meanwhile Mervyn Hughes and Peter Addis set about the Aling, but they were severely hampered by the weather which now brought more cloudy days than fine ones. They had hoped to set up a station on top of Mitre, but they were lucky to get observations from the Sceptre/Mitre Col before the cloud layer immersed them.

Our No. 1 climbing party consisting of Sims, Wilkinson and Bottomer had now (July 29) established a camp (IIb) at about 18,000 ft. on the North-east glacier from which, on the 30th, they attempted a fine snow peak they called Portcullis II, getting to within a few hundred feet of the top before they were turned back by hard vertical ice-walls. This central rib of the Aling system obviously had to be climbed, so a Camp IIb (20,000 ft) was carried up the end of the North-east ice-fall and set up on a flank of Hunchback, a great mound of snow and ice which seemed to be one of the highest in the system, and to which the height of 22,000 ft. was given—conservative estimates now say 21,500 ft. They sent down the H.A.P.s, planning, on the next day, to climb Hunchback, and, by a traverse, to finish off both Portcullises. In worsening weather they plodded up finding complete 'white-out' conditions at the top; heavy falls of snow, with more threatening,

compelled them to evacuate Camp IIIb rather than be isolated in avalanche conditions.

Meanwhile a string of disasters poured over the radio broadcasts—tales of floods, suspended ferry services, flooded airfields, and blocked airways. We still did not know the date of our return air passage to within a week, so we were forced to bring forward the date of our evacuation of Base Camp by one week to allow time for improvisation. Nevertheless, if we were to be on our way by August 9, there was yet time for one more venture. There were at Camp Ia Ridley, Nichols, Jonson, Doc Jones, Shah Khan and Hughes. I wanted these with me in case it should be necessary to get the others out of a jam, but, in response to entreaties, I let them all go their various ways on the 3rd, remaining alone in urgent prayer for the safety of Sims. Luckily he arrived with all his camps at 2 p.m. Addis also came in a little after and dashed after Ridley to get in just one mountain peak.

The summit Ridley had chosen was originally called Cairngorm, but it ended up with the rather unoriginal name of Sunday, or Etwa in Urdu. It lay up the left arm of the North-west glacier, and had been previously reconnoitred by Nichols and Jonson during one of their two day trips away from Camp Ia. The party left at dawn and spent three hours threading their way through moraine before they came to two small and easily negotiated ice-falls. They then reached and crossed a large, even snow-field which must have been at about 17,500 ft. before camping beneath a bigger ice-fall together with three of their six porters. The next day was one of intermittent snow, and the main body remained in camp, which allowed Nichols and Jonson to flag the first half of the ice-fall, and Addis to catch up. Most of the available time of the 5th was taken up in climbing the steep and rather difficult ice-fall, at the top of which Camp IIIc was pitched at about 19,500 ft. The porters were sent down to Camp IIc, and the rest of the day was spent cutting up the next 500 ft. of steep ice to the ridge and fixing a rope.

On the 6th Ridley and Addis left at 4.30 a.m. for the summit, while Nichols and Jonson left later with a high camp. The ridge, once reached up the staircase and over the bergschrund, was fairly straightforward. The odd crevasse, one ice step and several cornices all required care in the 6 in. of new snow. The sky was overcast with high cloud, and the wind was gusting up to 30 m.p.h. at times on the ascent, while very strong gusts of up to 60 knots were estimated during the descent. The summit was reached at 9.30 a.m., and it does not seem to have been worthy of note. On the descent, the two parties met at Camp IVc which was being erected on the ridge. From this, Nichols and Jonson made an easy ascent the next day. Well they might, for they had only about 500 ft. to climb. Because of an acute shortage of kerosene, Ridley and Addis kept going until they reached Camp Ia after



Photo, R.A.F. Karakoram Expedition, 1961]

LOOKING EAST DOWN THE ALING GLACIER FROM NEAR THE SUMMIT OF ETWA PEAK (BASE CAMP IS JUST ROUND THE CORNER IN UPPER CENTRE OF PICTURE).



Photo, R.A.F. Karakoram Expedition, 1961]

NICHOLS AND JONSON ON THE SUMMIT OF ETWA PEAK.

dark. When Nichols and Jonson reached Base Camp it had virtually ceased to exist, and, after eight more hours, it, too, was on the move.

The way back was as smooth as could possibly have been imagined, none of the emergencies having materialised, with the result that a lot of time had to be wasted in Rawalpindi and Karachi. However it was better that way round. We had no reason to be ashamed of ourselves. It is true that we had not climbed K6, but that will only fall to an expedition which is both strong and unhurried; it may need a further reconnaissance expedition before the proper route is found; it may be many years before it is climbed since it lacks the height (23,890 ft.) to draw a sufficiently strong attempt. We had climbed four peaks where with a little luck from the weather we might have climbed seven or eight; but these are very different mountains from the Central Himalayas where we climbed everything we tried, and experience must be bought. We believe we have brought back all the information for a good map; Saib Shah is very happy with his results. It only remains for us to work out the results, and Hughes is hard at work. We would like to thank all our supporters without whom the expedition would not have been possible.