MORE CLIMBS IN SWAT

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(Four illustrations: nos. 55–58)

In the *Alpine Journal* for November, 1963 (*A.J. 68.* 251), Trevor Braham described his explorations in Swat and Indus Kohistan, that range of mountains in West Pakistan forming a watershed between the Indus and the Swat River to its west. In particular, he drew attention to a group of mountains surrounding a high plateau east of Kalam and known locally by the unfortunate name of Sira Dara ('Head of the Pass'). One of these, he thought, was that indicated by the Survey of Pakistan for many years and marked on its maps as 20,528 ft. Some of the peaks, he suggested, might even be higher than this.

Swat is sufficiently far west to escape the monsoon, and this area became the objective of the Cambridge Chitral Expedition, 1964, after it had suffered the same setback as several others and been refused permission to climb in Chitral. 'Cambridge Swat Expedition' did not roll off the tongue satisfactorily, and our headed notepaper was already printed, so the original title was retained.

The expedition was led by Henry Day, a member of the Alpine Club, and the other members were John Peck, Hugh Samuel and myself. All were members of the C.U.M.C. With the help of Mr. Ian Stephens, C.I.E., we were put in touch with the Waliahad of Swat, who gave us a most encouraging welcome. Unlike the central government, the rulers of Swat seem to have no inhibitions at all about allowing climbers on their territory.

We received generous support from the Mount Everest Foundation, and other sources too numerous to list. Some, however, must be mentioned: the Army Mountaineering Association, who lent us a great deal of equipment (two of the party being lieutenants in the Royal Engineers); Trevor Braham, who put us up on our journey and gave us virtually all the information we had about the area; and Colonel Buster Goodwin, host to almost all expeditions passing through Rawalpindi, who averted a crisis when we found we had lost our ice-axes en route.

The party travelled overland both ways, and contrived to carry all its food and equipment in one short-wheelbase Land Rover. We left in mid-June in a chaotic rush—common, I suspect, to most expeditions—and arrived in Rawalpindi a month later. After a few days' travel, our organisation improved and accommodation for four in the vehicle was reasonably comfortable—three in front and one on top of the mountain

of gear in the back. Little need be said about the route—Germany, Jugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Iran—except that the southern route into Pakistan through Zahedan, Baluchistan and Quetta cannot be recommended in midsummer. The roads are bad and Baluchistan earns its title, 'the end of the world'—a name used, apparently, even by the local inhabitants. Our return journey, by the southern road through Afghanistan, was considerably more pleasant; the Khyber presents few terrors, Afghan visas are free, and by 1965 the whole road between Peshawar and Herat may be tarmac. Another worth while variation is the Caspian coast road in Iran—considerably cooler and greener than the inland alternative.

In Rawalpindi we discovered that we had lost our axes from the roof of the Land Rover. This could have been disastrous, but Buster Goodwin immediately offered to borrow some replacements from a Canadian Karakoram expedition which was due to return shortly.

To avoid delay, we continued to Swat with one borrowed axe, driving over the Malakand Pass, and up the gradually narrowing and very attractive Swat valley—the 'Switzerland of the East', according to our brochure. After a night at Saidu Sharif, the capital, we continued to Kalam, the roadhead village, where we reorganised ourselves for the walk in. With the help of the English-speaking Tehsildar, the village headman, and a remarkable telephone service, we enlisted fifteen porters —militiamen from the fort at Matiltan, a short way up the valley—and arranged to meet them early the next morning, July 17.

The porters arrived only three hours late and the caravan set out in light rain. The first leg of the journey was one hour non-stop; but this was not to continue. Before the end of the day it was moving for five minutes and resting for ten—but we could hardly complain, as we were incapable of doing more ourselves. At this stage rumblings were heard against the Jamadar, a sort of shop steward among the porters, who was paid an extra rupee a day, carried nothing and initiated all the halts—but, two days later, at the top of the pass, he proved his worth.

Our route lay east from Kalam, up the Sho Nalla valley and over a pass, the Sho Ho Dara, crossed in the opposite direction by Trevor Braham. This appeared to be a regular trade route: we met several small parties carrying goatskins of maize, flour and *ghee*—a kind of fat—over to Kalam from the valleys of Kandia. On their return journey they carried principally rock salt.

About mid-day on the second day we reached the glacier snout, and in worsening weather began picking a way through the moraines. Prospects of crossing the pass that day were slight, and when a descending party suggested eight more hours to the top our porters gave us no chance to hesitate. They were off across the glacier immediately, heading for a grassy knoll on which was a group of small huts

stocked with wood. The atmosphere inside these soon exceeded that in the C.I.C. hut on Ben Nevis. We preferred to camp. This was an impressive place, below a huge, icy wall which appeared periodically from the mist. Unknown to us at the time, this was the North-west face of Mankial (18,765 ft.), one of the peaks of our group.

A short reconnaissance that night failed to reveal the pass: all we saw was a semicircle of rock walls shrouded in mist. Next morning, however, the weather had improved and our route was obvious—up a long moraine crest and a final snow-slope to the col, the only break in the rocks. Three of us were suffering slightly from altitude effects coupled with lack of exercise for the past month, and here the Jamadar came into his own, carrying a full load, kicking steps at the head of the party and returning at each halt to carry one of our packs.

Over the pass we were on rock and grass, and the porters stopped for prayers and a chilly siesta. Occasionally the cloud cleared, and we were pleased to see the plateau and ice-fall just as Trevor Braham had described them—though the ice-fall looked rather steep, and we wondered if we had enough fixed rope and ice pitons.

Descent into Kandia was long and steep, but fairly rapid, and we pitched Base Camp in the valley bottom about a mile from the snout of the glacier, at a height of about 10,000 ft. We paid off the porters with some difficulty, and they started their return the next morning.

Although the only trees growing were extremely stunted junipers, wood was quite plentiful on the moraines; woodland must have been more extensive in the past. Later, firewood was collected from down the valley by our two policemen. These had been seconded to us from the fort at Ushu; they were full-time soldiers and wore a uniform of dark grey shirt and pantaloons, black beret and a bandolier of cartridges, ammunition for their elderly, home-made rifles. We hoped that they would stay with us the whole time, and intended to train them as high altitude porters, but their tour of duty comprised nine days on and five off, and every week they were replaced. Consequently, they served only as washers-up and guards. The first pair, Isakhan and Wazir, were the only ones to have pronounceable names; we knew their successors only as Boots and Ginger.

After a day spent organising Base Camp, Hugh returned to Rawalpindi to collect our replacement ice-axes, while John, Henry and I began prospecting a route up the ice-fall. We climbed a moraine ridge for a close view of the true right bank, recommended by Trevor Braham; but the view across the valley from here suggested strongly that the left bank would be easier. The next day we tried this and found a reasonable route at our first attempt. A steep moraine-covered rib, a gully and a rocky gangway decorated with wild chives and rhubarb led us up through the steep lower wall of the U-shaped valley, and we came out onto pleasant grass slopes, interrupted occasionally by sections of



Expedition photo]

SIRI DARA ICE-FALL AND PLATEAU FROM THE NORTH-WEST. LEFT TO RIGHT: DROITES, COURTES, SNOW DOME, SWAT BREITHORN.

(No. 55)

scrambling. I say 'pleasant' in retrospect, but at the time I was not nearly fit enough to enjoy it; and later, after four or five return trips, it became very monotonous.

Our next camp was established on a small platform a few hundred feet below the snowline, next to two long parallel moraines—a remarkable formation which, we had seen, gave access to the plateau at the only point on its lower edge free from séracs. After several carries to this camp, a journey taking about three hours from Base, we pitched a tent and stayed the night. The next day, we investigated the plateau, found the route to be as straightforward as expected, and climbed two small rock peaks, Adam and Eve. Eve lived up to expectations with some interesting scrambling, but Adam was a singularly insignificant, horizontal, loose ridge—not at all the fine summit it had appeared from below. From these we could see the whole plateau, and with rare imagination began naming the peaks—Verte, Droites, Courtes, Snow Dome. Central Peak had been named for us by Trevor Braham, as had the Swat Breithorn (indicating its resemblance to the Zermatt Breithorn). The big peak behind our aiguilles, whose far side, we realised, we had already seen, was also named, but it later became clear that this was in fact Mankial, first climbed by R. L. Holdsworth in 1940 (*A.J.* 53. 319). At the time we thought that Mankial was a considerable way to the south.

We returned to the valley, expecting to meet Hugh; but he was not back, so we marked time with a casual and rather abortive attempt on the Verte (18,000 ft.) direct from Base Camp. This appeared to be purely a rock climb, but high up we saw that the last few hundred feet were on quite steep ice, so we retreated. When Hugh returned we went up to Camp 1 again and climbed Central Peak (17,500 ft.). The approach to this lay through a line of large crevasses, first penetrated by an alarming route across the false floor of one of them. Later, we found a considerably simpler and safer way, feasible at all times of day. Beyond this obstacle, the undulating plateau led to the foot of our peak, which gave a pleasant snow climb of about 2,000 ft. The morning was memorable for our only view of Nanga Parbat, far to the east.

From the summit we had a superb view in all directions, and spent a couple of hours arguing over the relative heights of peaks and the relation of the valleys. Our rather elementary survey equipment provided further amusement—a hand clinometer and prismatic compass, and a gadget for taking panoramic photographs with an ice-axe as tripod. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the resulting map was constructed at Base Camp on the cardboard sleeve of a food-box, and is based on compass and clinometer readings[1]. Most of the details were filled in at the time by eye—the panoramic photographs were not

[1] The map is reproduced in *Cambridge Mountaineering*, 1965, facing p. 21.

used very much. Bases for heights and distances were Falak Sar (19,415 ft.) and a base line of nylon rope later measured by surveyor's tape.

Descent from Central Peak was uneventful, and we returned to Camp 1. The next day, John, Henry and I carried a camp up to below Mankial; Hugh, who was suffering again from a stomach upset, stayed behind. Unfortunately his condition deteriorated and it was later confirmed that he had dysentery. Thalazole tablets eventually cured him, but he was prevented from taking any further part in the climbing.

Camp below Mankial was pitched in a snow hollow apparently sheltered by a gendarme. Later, in our sleeping bags, we realised that the hollow was wind-formed; but fortunately the night was calm. Next morning we rose early, by our standards, and were away before eight o'clock. We had already found that afternoon snow conditions were quite reasonable, better than is usual in the Alps, and very early rising seemed unnecessary.

The ridge we had selected gave some interesting climbing, but on very poor rock and, later, on rather treacherous snow. At several points we found small, regular piles of stones, and the same thought must have occurred to all of us; but nothing was said until we found an old tin bearing a label 'Made in Peshawar'. From here to the top was only two or three hundred feet; our peak must have been climbed before. As mentioned above, we later found that this was Mankial, and that we had climbed the next ridge south of that ascended by Holdsworth. The tin must have been left by a more recent party, whom we have not been able to trace. We found no sign of them on the other peaks. It is possible that they approached the plateau directly from the west, as did Holdsworth.

On the summit we discovered—now to our horror—that this was marginally the highest peak in the group. A short way west, along a ridge, was a subsidiary peak, the Lip, a fantastic sight as its sharp summit bore an enormous cornice. The weather was not too good, so after a few minutes we descended by the same route.

Next morning, we dismantled the camp, carried it down and dumped it on the plateau, and the following morning we set out for the further parts of the cirque, collecting our dump on the way. Progress was much slower than we expected—especially for Henry, who was on skis and found the deceptive undulations of the plateau difficult to move over. Mid-afternoon saw John and myself moving slowly up a long, gentle rise which seemed to go on for ever. At four o'clock we made a dump and radioed to Hugh at Camp 1. From this stage onward, the expedition's two-way radio sets (loaned by Pye Telecommunications, Ltd.) were invaluable in co-ordinating two distant camps.

Without loads the long walk back passed very quickly, and we were soon removing crampons at the top of the moraines and shouting down

to the others in camp. Next day we carried up the rest of the gear; and ten minutes' further walking, to our joy and surprise, took us over the hump and down to another depression. This was clearly not a wind hollow, so we pitched our tent in its bottom. We later discovered a crevasse three feet to one side, but there were fortunately no mishaps.

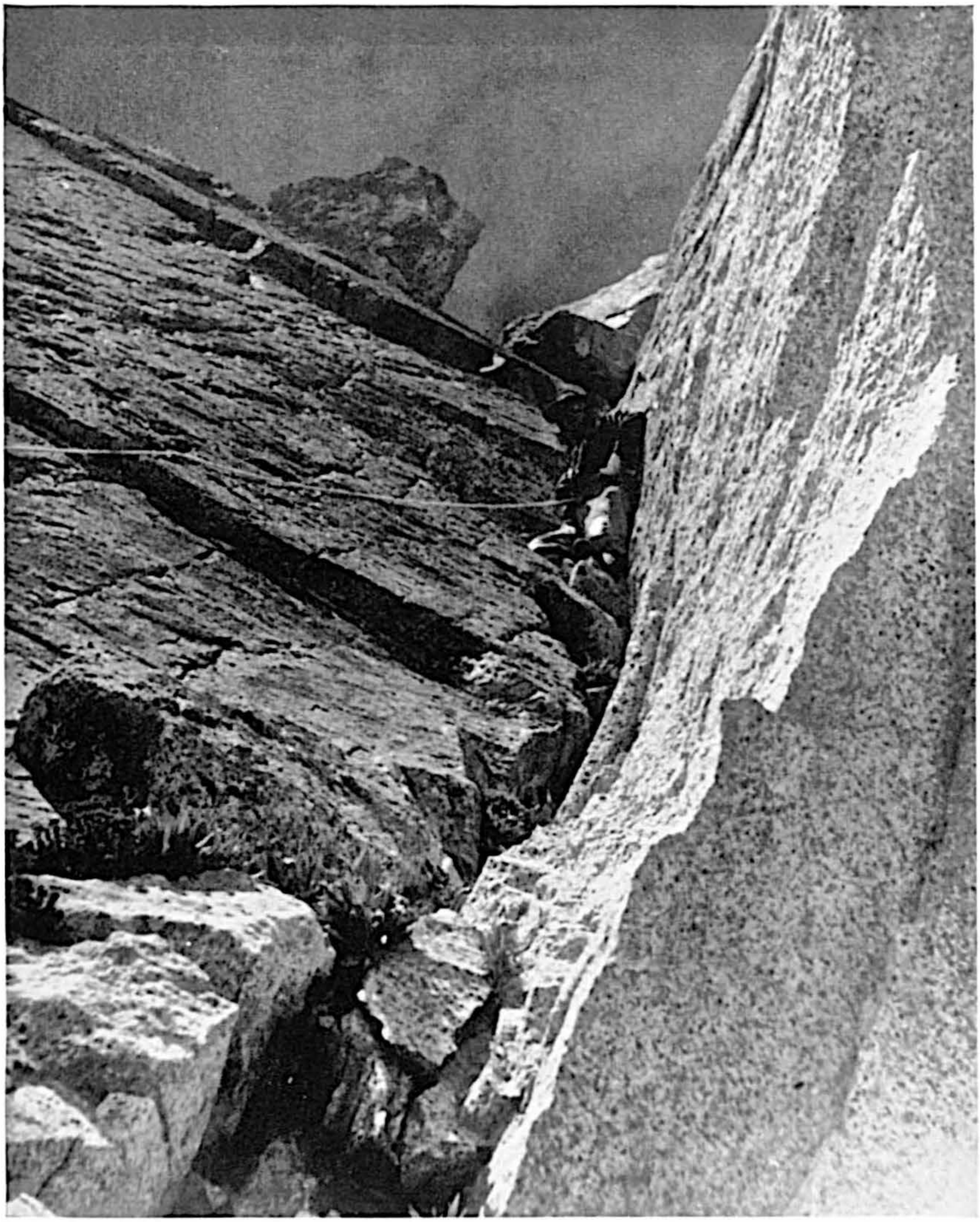
Our main objective from this camp was the Swat Breithorn, a splendid peak which formed the gable-end of a long ridge. However, two days' heavy work caused us to lie in late, and at eleven o'clock John and I set out to climb Pudding Peak (18,000 ft.), a rather unimposing mass in a corner of the plateau. This gave a much more interesting climb than we expected, and we were able to traverse the mountain over two sharp snow and ice ridges. The return to camp was enlivened by leaping a bergschrund and landing up to our thighs in the only really soft snow that we encountered.

Our camp was superbly situated on the edge of the plateau, at a point where it was contained by a low, rocky rim. A gap in the rim behind our tent was known as the Window, and provided a beautifully framed view of some lower peaks to the west. In the morning and evening, these were often the only projections from a huge sea of cloud, covering the plains and extending far up the valleys. On the very edge of the rim, above a long drop, was a niche in the granite which became a favourite haunt at sunset.

The next morning we climbed the Breithorn. Our route followed a broad spur on the West face, and to reach this from the best crossing-point on the bergschrund involved traversing a steep snow couloir. We had just crossed this when a rumbling from above announced a rock fall. We crouched under a small, conveniently placed overhang, and for several minutes rock debris and large blocks flew all around us. Fortunately no one was hurt; we were just across the couloir in time. The rock fall was a surprising occurrence, as the sun had not yet touched the West face, and everything seemed well frozen: later, we found that a portion of the summit ridge had come away, probably loosened by sun from the opposite side.

After this, the rest of the climb hardly seemed exciting, but again we had pleasant scrambling on faultless, yellow and grey granite, finishing up a snowfield and a final, narrow snow arête. We were able to see Falak Sar from the summit and were disturbed to find it higher than any of our peaks. The peak of 20,528 ft. was simply not there, and how the legend arose we do not know. Descent by the same route seemed to be tempting fate, so we took a long route down the South ridge, over innumerable gendarmes, to the col below the Pudding.

That night, our regular radio conversation with Hugh, now in Base Camp, was more significant than usual. He was feeling very ill and needed attention. Next morning we descended and did what we could



Expedition photo]

PECK'S DIÈDRE (PYRAMID PEAK): JUST BELOW THE CRUX.

(No. 56)



Expedition photo]

SWAT: CONFUSION (*Left*) AND BATIN PEAKS FROM THE SOUTH. CONFUSION WAS CLIMBED UP ITS RIGHT SKYLINE.

(No. 57)



Expedition photo]

MANKIAL FROM THE SOUTH. THE ROUTE LAY UP THE RIDGE DIRECTLY FACING THE CAMERA.

(No. 58)

to rouse his spirits. After a day or two he improved considerably, and eventually his course of pills produced a temporary cure.

After these idle days, sun-bathing and cooking pancakes, we returned to our top camp, to find it sitting on a 2 ft. pedestal of ice—an instance of the speed of ablation. We re-pitched the tent, and next day climbed Pyramid Peak (17,000 ft.), a small aiguille directly above the camp site. The summit was no more than 800 ft. above us, and its easiest route scarcely merited attention; so we looked for a hard way. This was supplied by 'Peck's Dièdre', a superb granite corner 300 ft. high, named after its discoverer. The crucial pitch was at least grade IV by alpine standards, and excellent climbing above and below this made for a pleasant day. The easy route, in descent, took less time than those from some Welsh crags.

Our eyes now moved further left round the cirque: in particular to the Snow Dome, which offered a very interesting climb up a snow and ice ridge rising from a heavily crevassed part of the plateau. Plans were laid for a moonlight ascent, but nothing resulted, as the weather, which had been perfect for almost four weeks, promptly broke up. Rain began in the early evening, and continued—as rain—for most of the night; with three in a two-man tent, we regretted having no fly-sheet. Crisis point came when we spilled the supper inside the tent: vegetable soup everywhere. After a miserable night in wet sleeping bags, the weather was no better, and the visibility poor; so we decided to pack up camp. We had food for a further two days, but were apprehensive that, if the weather deteriorated further, we should have difficulty finding our way back over the plateau.

After a long, tiring day, carrying wet gear down to Camp 1, we radioed to Hugh, and organised a combined move of both camps. He had recruited several local goatherds, led by one Peroz whose ambition, it seemed, was to come to London with us; and these and the policemen moved Base Camp, while we traversed round the rocky hillside to meet them. The route out lay back over the same pass and down Sho Nalla to Kalam—but, a short way over the pass, we camped in a glorious meadow of buttercups and edelweiss, and prepared to climb a last peak, which at the time we thought was one of the Batin peaks, climbed by two New Zealanders in 1957. We paid off the goatherd; and Peroz seemed to forget entirely about London, rushing off to Kalam to spend his newly found wealth.

We wasted another brief spell of good weather in this idyllic camp, cooking pancakes and contemplating the huge face of Mankial and the Lip, now fully exposed before us. The face is about 5,000 ft. high and offers no obvious line of attack in its mile and a half length. After two days the bad weather returned, and consequently our climb, which was rather uninspiring, told us less about the geography of the area than

we had hoped. We also planned to climb a peak further north, which was a little higher than any of the Siri Dara peaks, but saw that it was separated from us by a deep valley, leading into Kandia. Later observation from the Swat valley suggested that this, in fact, was one of the Batin peaks; so our peak was re-named Confusion, perhaps a fitting commentary on the cartography of the area even now.

Lack of food now drove us down to the valley, assisted by more local goatherds. The move took one long day, and in the late evening of August 23 we reached Kalam, civilisation and six weeks' mail.

Further scope for mountaineering expeditions in Swat is limited. Falak Sar, almost certainly the highest peak in the state, has been climbed; and we saw little outside our area to merit the attention of an expedition from this country. Exploration and mapping, however, are far from complete, and another expedition on a similar scale to ours, devoted mainly to survey work, might be very rewarding.

To end on a financial note: the total cost of the expedition, after re-sale of the Land Rover, was £650, for four people for thirteen weeks. This included all our food, film, petrol and what little equipment was bought, and should encourage other expeditions on a similar scale.