

The Kishtwar Himalaya Expedition 1971

Charles Clarke

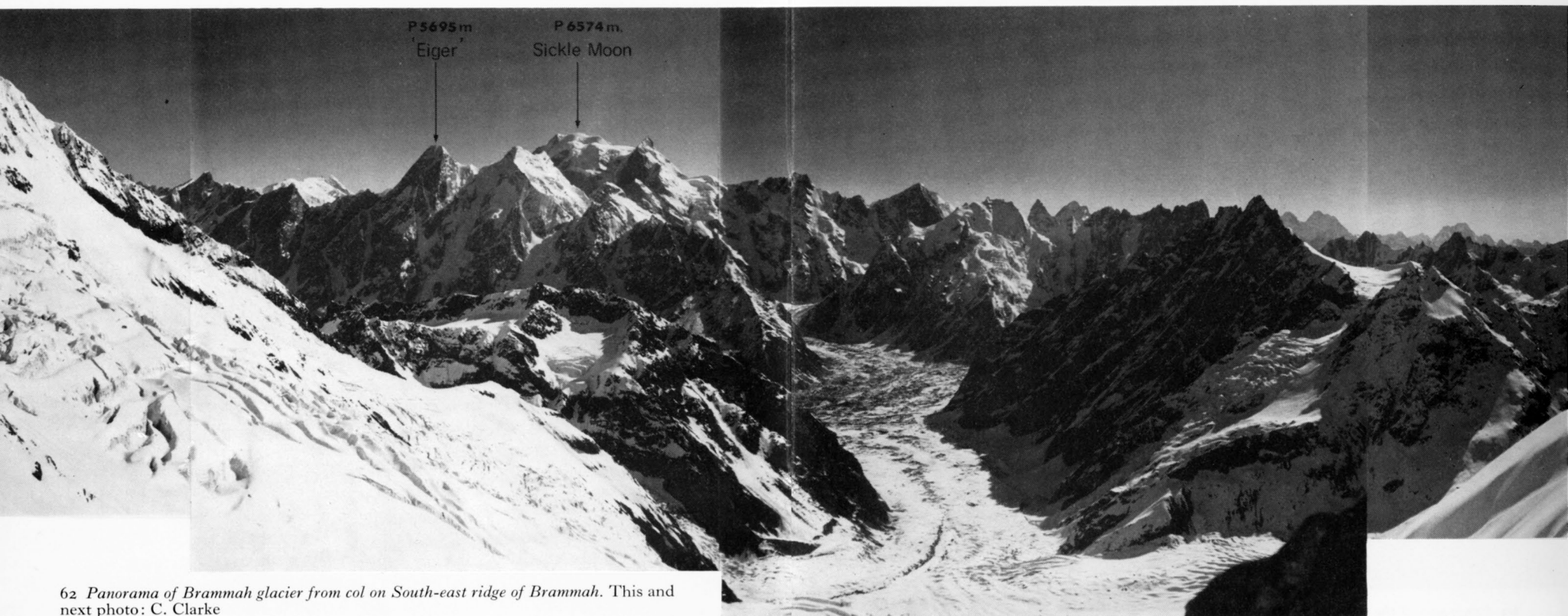
The aim of this expedition was to make the first ascent of Brammah (Pt 6416 m) between the Kibar nullah and the Nanth nullah in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir, India. The trip followed two British expeditions in 1965 and 1969 supported by the Mount Everest Foundation and led by Charles Clarke.

We met in New Delhi late in April to spend a week packing 700 kg of food and equipment before leaving by bus for Kishtwar on 4 May. From the experience gained on the previous two visits we chose to attempt Brammah by its South-east ridge; this begins from a col in the snow basin above the Kibar ice-fall. We established a Base Camp at about 3600 m on 11 May at the head of the Kibar nullah and climbed through the ice-fall at its northern edge to reach the col. Our progress was hampered greatly by fresh snowfall which we were told was unusual for the time of year. On 18 May we set up Camp 1 at 5300 m at the base of the South-east ridge and began to reconnoitre the initial snow covered section which rose in a series of small snow domes, sometimes steep and heavily corniced to the north. Once again poor conditions and fresh snow-fall made progress slow but six days later we had Camp 2 well stocked with food

THE KISHTWAR HIMALAYA EXPEDITION 1971

and equipment in preparation for the assault. A long steep rock ridge runs upwards from Camp 2 to the summit snow-slope and on this section lie the principal difficulties. Furthermore Brammah is a mountain isolated from high peaks in the south—the prevailing wind direction—and is the subject of frequent storms. For four days we prepared the rock, fixing 600 ft of fixed rope over difficult gendarmes but we were unable to pass the last and highest pinnacle: more important the ridge was consistently so narrow that only bivouac camps were possible.

On 29 May Edmundson and Gundry left Camp 2 for the summit attempt and after one bivouac camp below the final gendarme (at about 6100 m) traversed its northern flank to gain the summit snow slope. This final slope presented no great technical difficulty, but at the time was in poor condition: deep loose snow lay on ice and there was obvious danger of large slab avalanches sweeping down the South face of the mountain. The assault party could be seen clearly from Camp 2 and turned back at 16.00hrs on 30 May about 100 m from the summit. After a second bivouac they came down to Camp 2 to rejoin Clarke. Almost immediately a violent thunderstorm broke directly above us. The ridge nearby was struck by lightning and we were lucky to escape with little more than a small but very real electric shock. We descended the following



62 Panorama of Brammah glacier from col on South-east ridge of Brammah. This and next photo: C. Clarke

day to Base Camp without further incident and rested in the meadows which were by this time a carpet of flowers.

The problem of a second assault on this difficult peak resolved itself by a change of plan. We felt that instead of gaining the last 100 m we would prefer to explore the highest peak in the area, Pt 6574 m ('The Sickle Moon') and having dismantled the high camps on Brammah a small party (Major Chauham, Edmundson and Gundry) set off for the Kiar nullah on 8 June. The rest of us returned to Dacchan with the baggage and during the other party's absence trekked to the meadows of Sattarchin at the head of the Nanth nullah.

The expedition re-united in Dacchan on 18 June and the next day set out for Anantnag and the Vale of Kashmir. (Major Chauhan agreed readily to this change of plan but returned direct to Kishtwar.) The British members arrived in Srinagar on 24 June. We wish to thank the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, New Delhi, for their great help in organising the visit to the area and for arranging for such an excellent liaison officer. We are very grateful to the Mount Everest Foundation for their generous grant.

Transport Delhi to Kishtwar by regular bus (2 days). On the approach march we used 12 mules or 24 porters: for the return 6 mules. We paid Rupees 15 per mule per day and Rupees 7 per porter (without food).

References

A.J. 71 137; 75 186 (with map).
Cambridge-Indian Kishtwar Expedition. Report (1965).
A.A.J. 1971 448.

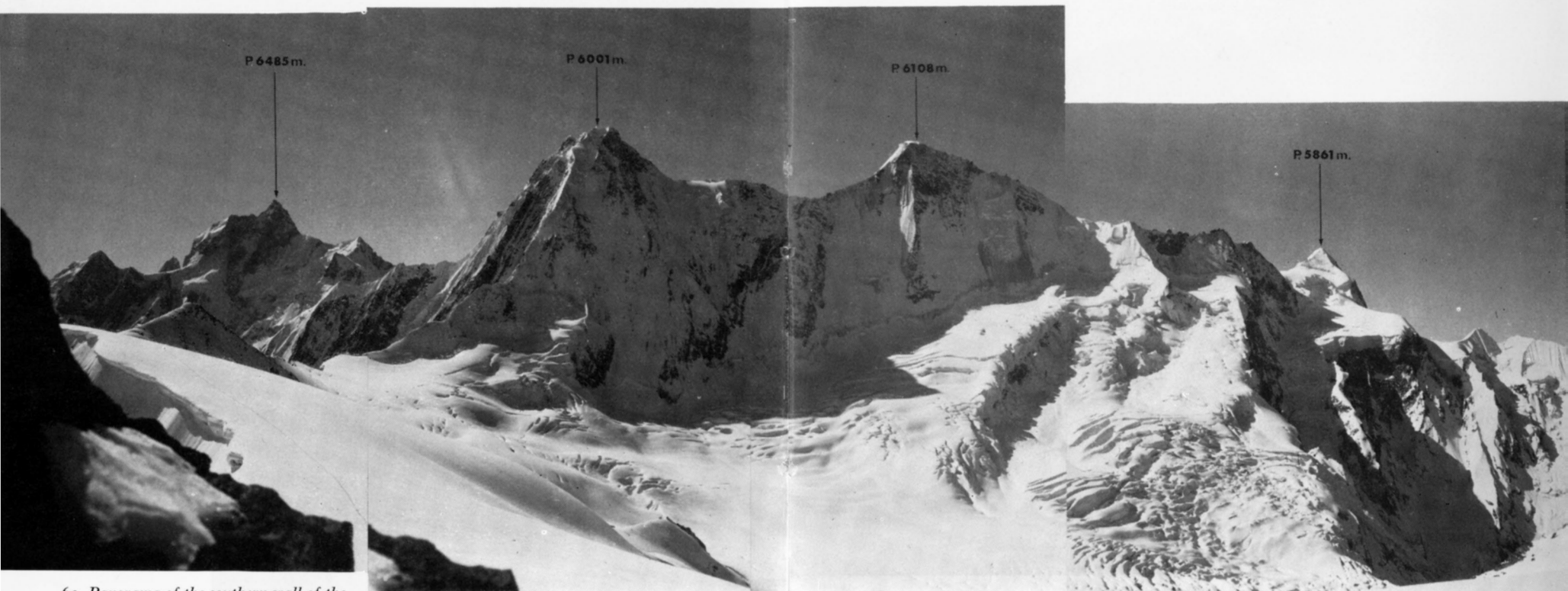
Maps and names of peaks

The Government of India were generous enough to lend us (in the charge of the Liaison Officers in 1969 and 1971) the relevant maps of the area. These are the new 1:50,000 series (1965) which are excellent.

The peak marked 'Brammah' Pt 6108 m in the Kibar nullah on Sheet No 52 C/3 does not correspond to the mountain local people have long revered and call Brammah which is Pt 6416 m and the one we were climbing.

Base Camp on the 1971 expedition lay on the northern side of the Kibar nullah just east of the first glacial tributary.

SUMMARY Kishtwar Himalaya Expedition 1971. Members: Dr C. R. A. Clarke (leader), Mrs Ruth Clarke, H. N. Edmundson, D. R. T. Gundry, Dr Sara Endean and Major A. P. S. Chauhan (Liaison Officer). Pre-monsoon visit to Brammah (6416 m). Assault abandoned 100 m from the summit.



63 Panorama of the southern wall of the Kibar Nullah from col on South-east ridge of Brammah