

training for the past 5 years. Reconnaissance has been conducted twice before the full-scale venture, which has been encouraged by the unstinted support of the government as well as the *Hankook Ilbo*, one of the national daily newspapers in Korea. The entire nation is now expecting a success.

Meanwhile, another expedition is planned for a pre-monsoon ascent of Annapurna IV in 1978 by the Korean Alpine Club (CAC), which was inaugurated immediately after the national liberation of 1945. This club currently has more than 1500 members under its 12 local branches and 120 odd tributary organizations, all proud of their membership in this fellowship of year-long standing. With conservative yet liberal management, CAC had helped KAF at the initial stage of the latter's growth, conducting joint planning and training and offering experienced advice for the past several years. Since a reconnaissance attempt at Churen Himal (7363m) in 1969, a few ascents of the Alps and several others were carried out before the 2 reconnaissance trips to the Annapurna range. The MBC-TV and the *Kyungnyang Shimun*, another national daily, are sponsoring this event, for which hopes are also considerably high.

CAC has analysed the causes of the failures suffered by Korean mountaineering projects abroad and has come to the conclusion that the Korean alpinists have been over-ambitious in choosing their targets. By going the steady way, the club wants to advance rather gradually with development in its unique expertise and without making the sort of mistakes which would set the club activities and morale far backward.

Mountains and mountaineering in Korea present, in many ways, some aspects of the national and social upheaval the Korean peoples are undergoing nowadays.

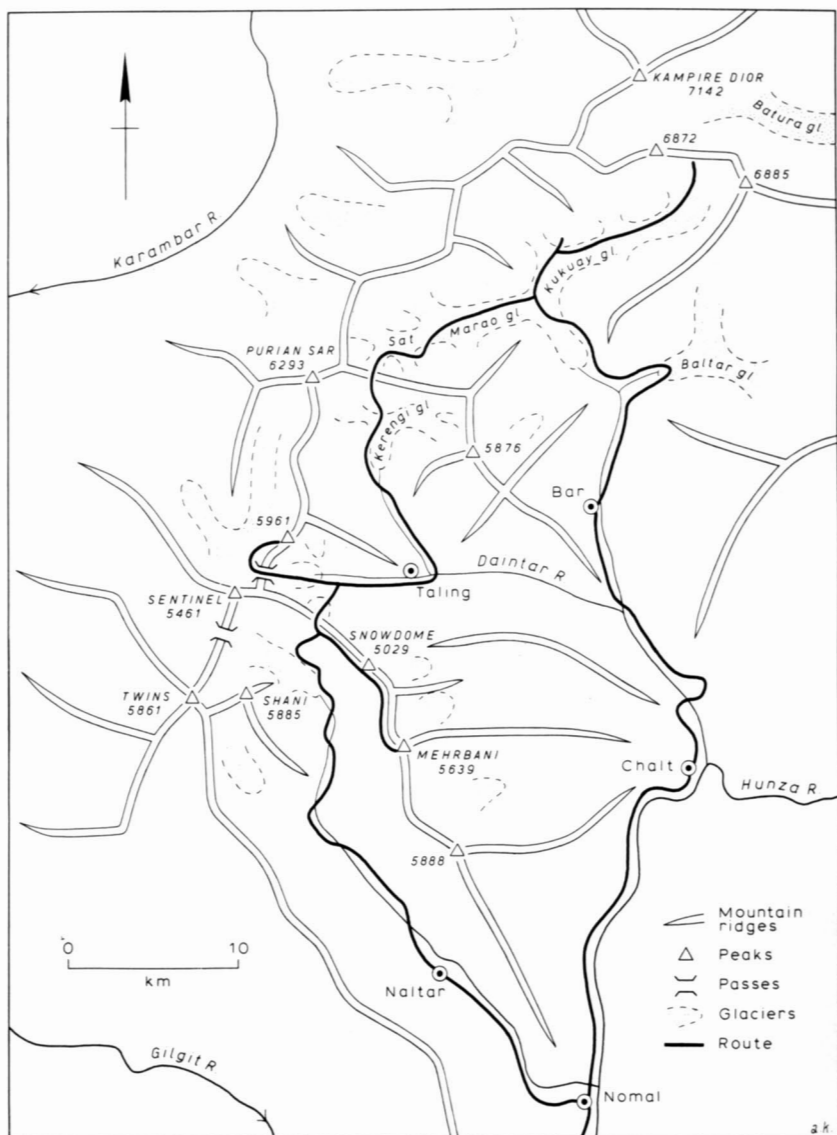
A summer in Gilgit (1975) Pt II

Rob Collister

Within a week of Rob and Dave's arrival we were in a position to climb something. It was not one of the Kukuay peaks but it was a mountain, and after the frustrations of the previous weeks, that was the main thing.

The auguries had seemed auspicious when, only an hour after reaching the village of Naltar by jeep, we had hired 3 porters and were on our way. And they were not proved wrong. Two short days of walking through a landscape of waterfalls, pine trees and flower filled meadows, very different from anything I had seen since the Ushu Gol in Swat, took us to a height of 3700m. Beside the stony and chaotic Shani glacier, at the foot of grass slopes where delicious rhubarb grew in profusion and where, to our astonishment, not only goats and cattle but even some water-buffalo were grazing, we paid off the porters.

Nearby, a convenient spur ran up through pastures and steep scree to the corniced crest of a 4600m ridge separating the Naltar from the Daintar valley. Despite the usual problems associated with unfitnes and acclimatization—headaches, lassitude, loss of appetite—during the next 4 days we transferred ourselves and our belongings to the top of the ridge, traversed perhaps a mile along it, and continued over a small peak of 5029m. This peak had been attempted in 1970 by an English party (thwarted by bad weather) and christened Snow Dome. The name



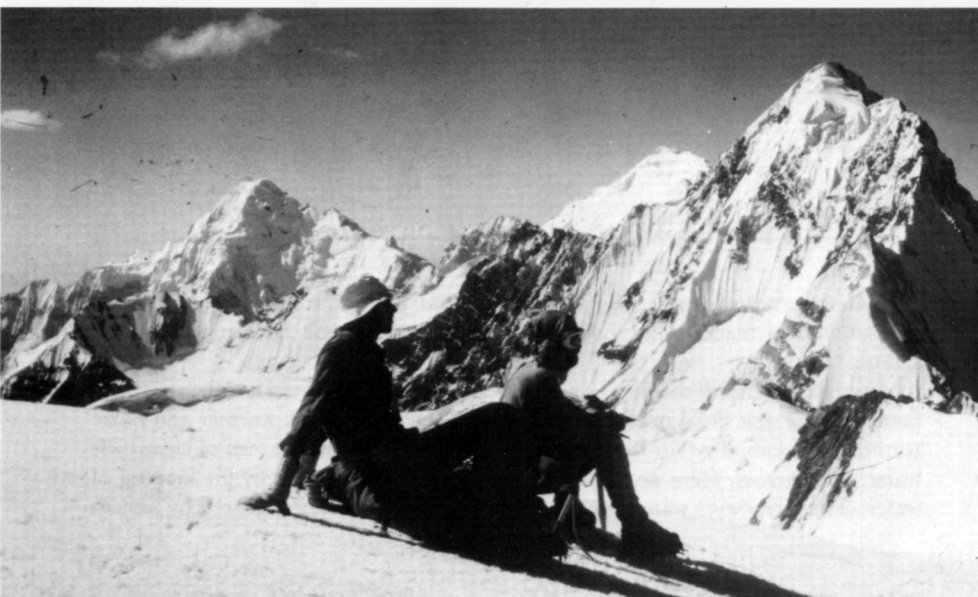
seemed apt enough until we came to descend the Janus face of the mountain—1000ft of black, evilly loose cliffs and scree that took far longer than the ascent.

On the col beneath them, however, was a camp-site that could hardly have been bettered. The tent fitted neatly on to a strip of shale—so much warmer and more comfortable than snow for camping on—beside a tiny turquoise tarn of clear melt water, 20yd across. Here we basked in the afternoon sun, lulled by the lapping of water, letting our eyes wander over the view. To the W it was obscured by an ice-

wall which served as a slight shield from the prevailing wind. But to the E one looked over green alps and wooded slopes to the brown, barren walls of the Hunza gorge and the magnificent peaks of the Western Karakoram, the massive cone of Rakaposhi dominating the whole scene in its proximity and symmetrical splendour. Above our heads was the mountain we hoped to climb, rising steeply in a series of snow slopes, arêtes and rock pinnacles to a tower which we knew to be only halfway up. From the top of Snow Dome we had had a better view of it. 5639m high, it was a midget compared with the peaks of the Hindu Kush and Hindu Raj in the distant W or the giants of the Karakoram, stretching from Kampire Dior in the NE right round through a roll-call of famous names: Batura, Pasu, Mohmil Sar, Trivor, Disteghil Sar, Minapin, Rakaposhi—to Nanga Parbat away in the SE. But for sheer beauty it could compare with any of them. In the valley it had presented a rocky W face and a steep-sided N ridge of snow broken up by rock steps. But from Snow Dome it took on quite a different character. The E face was revealed as a mass of deeply-etched flutings and snow smothered rock, while our ridge twisted and curled away in a set of bewitchingly malevolent cornices. It was a beautiful sight, and a little daunting too.

We left the tent at 3am, hoping to be high on the mountain before the sun should soften the snow. There was a waning sliver of a moon, not bright enough to dim the stars but enough to cast my shadow on the snow. Ahead, the other 2 were using torches, the circles of light probing leftwards for the cornice. A breeze sent particles of snow rustling across the slope and set the laces of Rob's gaiters tapping against his leg, like halyards on a mast. Occasionally there was a grunt as someone broke through the crust deep into sugary powder beneath. Zig-zagging up snow-slopes that steepened and eased and steepened again, faithfully following the sinuations of the ridge, we gained height steadily. With the first outcrops of broken rock the climbing became more varied. One moment we would be scrambling up and down along the crest of the ridge, the next dropping below it to avoid difficulties, traversing on snow or ice whichever side was easier.

26 Mehrbani from the top of Snow Dome (This and next two photos: R. Collister)



The terrain was serious—the rock loose, the snow unstable, the drops on either side, though we could not see them in the dark, huge. Yet, as with many a ridge in the Alps, to have climbed it in pitches would have taken days. One alternative was to move together. But the drawback to moving together on a corniced ridge is that if someone falls off you have to run uphill before you can throw yourself over the other side. If this is accomplished you are likely to find yourself dangling in mid-air. If it is not accomplished, moving together is quite likely to prove a way of dying together—too many lives have been lost through an over-reliance on the magical properties of a rope. For the time being, we preferred to do without.

The sky began to lighten, Rakaposhi took on a hazy, purplish hue, and as we abseiled down some overhanging rock the sun's rays spread fan-like from behind distant peaks. Briefly, we were engulfed in a flood of gold. Then we were continuing up shaded snow slopes towards the halfway tower, the ridge crest to our left glittering in the sunlight. The tower was by-passed on mixed rock and ice, steep enough for the rope, but after one pitch we moved together protecting ourselves with rock runners. The slope was becoming even steeper, however, and a buttress of black, dripping rock, the first of the real difficulties, lay just ahead. We belayed and began to move one at a time.

The next 600ft, steep throughout, were the crux of the climb. It was simplest for one person to do the leading and Dave, who had been discovering that load-carrying is not his *forte*, came into his own here and did a magnificent job. He coped with dangerously loose, wet snow with a speed and surety Rob and I would have been hard put to match: climbed equally loose rock with the same confidence: and handled with ease a long ice-pitch which would not have been out of place on Ben Nevis. The key pitch I, for one, would not have cared to lead. The difficulty here was caused by a deep gash, 12ft wide, that cut right through the mountain. It was spanned by a snow-bridge so tenuously attached at the far end that one could look through it. From this bridge it was necessary to step on to an all but vertical wall of snow overlooking the gully, roofed by icicles and, a few feet below, completely undercut. The wall had to be traversed for 10ft until a lattice-work of unsupported ice served as a bridge for the last few moves on to solid rock. How the whole thing held I do not know. Even following was an unnerving experience. If any of that fragile structure had given way, having first hit the gully wall with considerable force, one would have been left hanging with little or no chance of climbing out. Dave, however, simply took it in his stride in a remarkable display of *sang-froid*.

Above, the difficulties eased and we could move together again, but the climb was far from over. Time had been passing all too rapidly. Although huge cumulonimbus clouds had obscured Rakaposhi and the other big peaks from time to time, and the occasional outrider had drifted in our direction, the sun had been beating down most of the day. Breeches had long been saturated by soggy snow and dripping icicles, and mittens had needed wringing out periodically. Now the sun was sinking. Rob was muttering about bivouac sites, but Dave and I preferred not to hear. Over 2 rock bumps, then an unwelcome 100ft drop and an exposed climb out of the gap. More ridge, more bumps, and glimpses, looking back, of enormous cornices. At last, nothing but 300ft of open snow slope, with some crevasses to side step. Dave was tired, not surprisingly, and Rob was feeling the altitude. Glad to be able to contribute something after following in Dave's footsteps for so long, I went in front and trampled a trail through deep snow to the top.

The summit was a snow ridge, slightly corniced. We chopped it down and sat on the crest in a row. I do not think any of us felt particularly excited—just tired, and suddenly aware that both night and a storm were creeping up. The thunder clouds had become a uniform grey sheet which had spread over us and westwards, obscuring the sun. As we watched the grey began to drop and close in, obliterating peaks as it came. Alarmed, we descended, pursued by rumblings of thunder. For a few brief moments the sun reappeared, gilding the snow in eerie contrast to the darkness of the sky. Then it disappeared for good and the cloud was all about us.

There was a hold-up in the descent. Standing on the crest of the ridge, holding coils of rope, I waited impatiently. A few beads of hail fell and the surface of the snow seemed to be spluttering. My hair felt strange and putting up a hand, I found it was rising of its own accord. When my axe began to hum as well, I dived for the nearest boulder—sound practice I am told, but motivated chiefly, I must confess, by a desire to be out of sight of whoever sits ‘up there’ throwing thunderbolts.

However we were lucky. By the time we had dug out a platform and settled into our sleeping bags, the hail had stopped and there were even a few stars visible. There were one or two showers in the night, but by morning the weather was as good as ever, the big peaks having borne the brunt of the storm.

Four long abseils took us down the main difficulties, next day. By climbing straight down steep ice into a hanging glacier, we were able to skirt much of the ridge, regaining it just before the initial snow slopes. From this point one could look down on to the brilliant splash of blue on the col and the welcoming yellow speck of the tent beside it. At the sight, the elation which had been so conspicuously absent on the summit, welled up within me. Mingling with delight at our isolation and the sheer beauty of it all, it became a conscious, exuberant happiness as I hurried on down. Being conscious, it was accompanied by gratitude—to Rob

27 *Last cornice before the summit snow slope*



and Dave, to the weather, and above all to the mountain itself. Dismissing grammatical objections, we called it Mehrbani (pronounced 'Merra-bani') which, besides being suitably euphonious, in Urdu means, 'Thank-you'.

Having climbed Mehrbani, the prospect of clambering back up the disintegrating cliffs and mobile scree of Snow Dome, was as unwelcome as their descent had been unpleasant. Instead we dropped down a small glacier and contoured long across the hillside, passing beneath a cliff where a welcome spring of fresh water spouted forth as if the rock had been struck by Moses, crossing nullahs and projecting ridges, streams and snow patches, and finally scree-running a stone-chute of a gully to reach the high pastures. Cattle tracks led comfortably round to the spur we had originally followed, a mass of gentians, forget-me-not and cranes-bill making me feel that, truly, 'our days were a joy and our path through flowers'. We camped back on the crest of the ridge, where we had left a cache of food.

Next day we found an uncorniced section of ridge and after lowering the rucksacks the first 40ft, quickly descended 3000ft of snow, scree and scrub willow to the Daintar valley, slowed only at the bottom by 2 tiers of continuous cliffs. There we indulged in a rest day, a luxury we could ill afford with so little time at our disposal, and we were to regret it later. It was not even particularly restful, for we were plagued by flies during the day and by inquisitive cattle, attracted by the camp-fire, at night. With relief, we broke camp and set off to climb the peak of 5961m which overlooks the head of the valley.

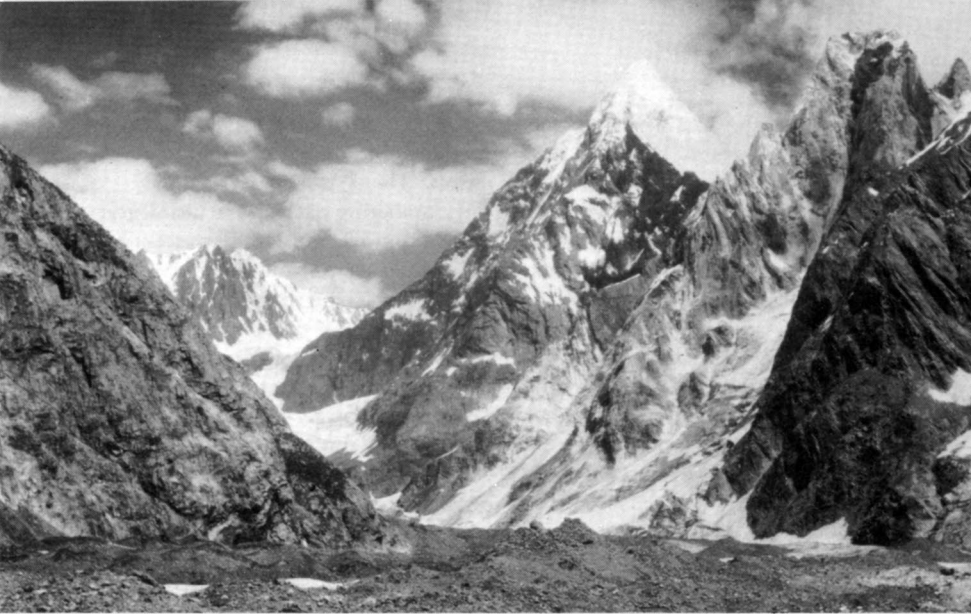
A harmless little glacier led to a col of 4900m where we were able to level out a platform for the tent among some rocks. To our amazement even here there was a trickle of melt water draining downwards. It was another perfect camp-site, with a superb view down the valley to Rakaposhi and our own peak, Mehrbani. Later we discovered that this col had been crossed by Younghusband, on his way to Ishkoman, in the 1890s, but it does not seem to have been visited since.

For the climb we started early again, and after threading a hesitant way through some crevasses by torchlight, gained height quickly on the broad snowfields that comprise the S ridge of the mountain. Only near the top did the ridge narrow and become corniced, forcing us to traverse steeply in a way which brought back memories of the Lyskamm above Zermatt. The summit was a small tower of rock and snow, which gave a flourish to the end of the climb, but nowhere did we need the rope.

It was not the climbing that was memorable but the surroundings. The whole of the Hindu Raj on the one hand, and the Western Karakoram on the other, unfolded about us, acquiring first shape, and then depth, and finally colour as the day dawned and we rose higher. We sat on top for some time, content just to gaze, and muse on what we saw. For once there were no worries about time, weather or the difficulties of the descent. Nothing mattered, except that we were alone with the rising sun in a high and beautiful place.

When we did descend, we moved rapidly and were back at the tent by 10am. Continuing down the glacier, we picked up the food we had hidden among some boulders and pressed on, following well-worn goat-tracks through birch groves and across moraines. On the outskirts of the village of Taling we stopped for the night, having descended nearly 10,000ft.

When Rob and Dave first arrived in Gilgit, I had persuaded them that while the 6800m peaks at the end of the Kukuay glacier were still worthwhile objectives it would be more interesting to approach them from the Naltar valley. On the map



28 Unclimbed peak of 6885 m at the head of the Kukuay glacier

the logic of this is not obvious as they are separated by 3 large and little known glacier systems, and 2 high ridges, only one of which had been crossed before. With little more than 3 weeks available to us, such a route could not but reduce our chances of climbing Kukuay peaks: indeed, one could not overlook the possibility that we might never reach them. But during the long days of waiting in Gilgit, my dislike of Bar and its inhabitants had grown almost paranoid. Moreover, for many of us who climb mountains, the urge is irresistible not just to stand upon summits, but to peer round the next ridge, to cross the next col, to 'travel always a little further'. The journey, I argued, would be a mountaineering challenge in its own right—probably as great as the ascent of any single peak could be—providing, at the same time, opportunities to climb smaller peaks on the way. Rob and Dave, weary from a fortnight of futile commuting to and from Rawalpindi airport and anxious only to escape into the mountains as quickly as possible, had agreed willingly enough to the change of plan. Now, having made 2 good climbs and reduced the amount of food to be carried on our backs, it was time to be moving if we were to have a chance of attempting one or other of the Kukuay peaks.

Taling lies at the junction of the N and S branches of the Daintar valley. Having just descended the S branch, we followed goat tracks up the N to the Kerengi glacier, hoping to find a way across the watershed to the Sat Marao glacier, which merges with the lower Kukuay.

The Kerengi glacier bore little relation to any of the maps in our possession. Instead of a vague pear-shape we found 3 major branches, one swinging round to the W, the other two to the E. Formidable ice-falls guarded the way up all of them, stretching in an unbroken barrier right across the valley. This was a surprise, for neither the Cambridge Expedition of 1954, warming up for Rakaposhi, nor Trevor Braham in 1970, had experienced any great difficulty on their brief forays up the glacier. Acting on what we had seen from Snow Dome and Mehrbani, we front-pointed a way through at the joint of the W and Central arms. There we left the glacier and toiled up 1000ft of old moraine to a small hanging glacier. At the head

of a gentle snow field lay the lowest point of the watershed ridge.

Reaching a col is always an exciting moment. But it becomes doubly so when one is 'the first that ever burst' upon that scene, and success, or a long walk back, depend upon the geography revealed. Cols are rarely easy on both sides and withdrawal, tail between legs, is a common experience in mountain exploration. For example, we knew it to have been the lot of both Tilman at the head of the Kukuay glacier in 1947, and of the Germans from Baltar in 1954, in their efforts to reach the Batura glacier. And our first glance over this col was not reassuring. The far side was a rock wall, steep and loose, 800ft high: the glacier below was no more welcoming, riven and fractured even before it dived away out of sight in a tangle of broken ice, littered with blocks fallen from above, and fed on either side by innumerable ice-falls, all highly active. We were so disturbed by the sight that we camped early that day, on the col, in order to reconnoitre the way down. In the event, the route we took was easier than expected, and only the last 100ft required an abseil. Moreover, being on the crest of a slight spur, it was protected from the stonefall of which there was ample evidence. Nevertheless, I doubt whether it will ever achieve great popularity as a pass. Like Whymper's Col Dolent or Mummery's Col du Lion it is more likely to remain simply a col which has been crossed.

Our passage down the glacier was long, complicated, at times even technical, and rendered unpleasant by steady drizzle. The weather which had been lowering for 2 days, had at last broken and was to remain unsettled for the rest of our time in the mountains. Once off the ice, our troubles were far from over. The best part of an afternoon was wasted in a tempting flower-filled ablation valley which petered out into the cliffs, leaving us to abseil back to the glacier as night fell. And on reaching the Kukuay glacier the going became truly horrible. The glacier itself was a choppy sea of ice-cored, boulder-covered waves, and the slight trough between it and a steep-sided moraine offered as alternatives only pools of slush, ice concealed by mud, and a fair chance of being hit by rocks sliding off the edge of the glacier. Eventually, having crossed a large tributary, we scaled the moraine wall, fought through a jungle of willow and birch scrub, and suddenly found ourselves in Eden.

In the ablation valley—really more a terrace than a valley—between the glacier and a mountainside of crag and scree, lay a rush-fringed lake of delicate pale green. On its shores willow-herb and golden rod were growing gaily. Mallard took flight as we approached and dragon flies hovered above the water. A pair of blue-throats flitted among the bushes. Happily, we pulled off boots and socks and paddled our sweating feet in the cool water. This was the place called Darrakush which Tilman had visited from Bar and which Dick and I had failed to reach. To our amazement, it was apparent that, despite the Kukuay glacier, the spot was regularly used by goatherds and their flocks. Droppings lay everywhere and the rickety roof of a crude brushwood shelter provided the only flat camp-site we could find.

Although the distance from Taling to Darrakush can be little more than 20 miles, it had taken us 6 days; and if to some extent this is a reflection on our speed and stamina, or lack of them, it is also some measure of the problems raised by heavy loads and awkward, unknown terrain. We were running short of food and to increase our chances of climbing one of the Kukuay peaks, we decided to split up. Dave, whose packframe had by now become a personal enemy, kept the tent and headed down the valley towards Bar on his own. Rob and I, with the stove, bivouac sack and 6 days' food, set off up the glacier. As there is a vertical interval of 3350m

between Darrakush and the summit of either Kukuay peak and a 2 day walk, at least, back to civilization, we had no time to spare.

To our relief, the going on the glacier gradually became easier until finally the stones gave way to ice and we could make rapid progress. The E of the two peaks, that on the right of Tilman's col, is a daunting spire of rock tipped with snow, which would be a magnificent but difficult climb. The W peak is more amenable, with a long snow ridge sloping down to the col. However, the ridge seemed much too long and we decided to reach it more directly by climbing a broad couloir-cum-ice-fall on the flank facing us. We bivouacked at the foot of this, at 4900m.

In the small hours of the morning it began to rain. When the clouds cleared at dawn, determined to be optimistic, we started up the snow—deep and unfrozen at first, becoming icy once clear of the lower ice-fall. We were fit, acclimatized and going well; probably, we would have reached the top that day. But it was not to be. We had climbed 1200ft and were perhaps a third of the way to the ridge, when the clouds rolled in again and it began to snow. We sat in the bivi sack for an hour drinking tea and feeling our toes grow cold, and then began the descent. There was nothing to be done but follow Dave down the valley. We simply did not have the food to wait for the weather; and, in fact, it continued to rain, off and on, for the next week. We were disappointed, naturally. But though the Kukuay peaks had originally been our main objective, the journey to them had long since become less a means than an end in itself. Disappointment there was, but no feeling of failure, or even of anti-climax—the journey was not yet over.

Having spent the night back at Darrakush, we crossed the Kukuay glacier (finding bear tracks in the sand at its edge) and picked up a path through birch woods in the ablation valley on its true left bank. Passing through 2 deserted goat-herd settlements, one of which, I realized, must be Toltar, we descended an unpleasant moraine wall, some hundreds of feet high, by a far from obvious path. We reached the valley bottom 100m above the spot where Dick and I had waited so fruitlessly for our porters, thus confirming our suspicions, for they would have had to pass us to reach Toltar. After a damp night in a cave, we caught up Dave the next day, near the Baltar glacier. He was glad to see us but even more pleased to see the stove, for his efforts at fire-lighting with sodden wood had met with scant success. The rain caused other problems during the next 3 days. Streams which Dick and I had jumped across, now had to be waded, with a rope; nearer civilization, paths and bridges had disappeared; and below Bar we found ourselves traversing a vertical wall of crumbling conglomerate, where once there had been a road, a few feet above swirling grey water. Nowhere, all summer, had I been so near to falling off; and nowhere would the consequences have been more dire.

The fields of Bar were rich gold in a watery sunlight, and full of women reaping. The apples were ripe but there were still some apricots on the trees. We were bidden to eat our fill and I had begun to revise my opinion of Bar when we were discovered by a mob of unmannerly children and hounded out of the village. At Chalt we relaxed in the tea-shop—only to learn that here, too, the road had suffered and we would have to walk a further 15 miles. Finally, at Nomal, we found a jeep and in company with 15 other passengers, not to mention suitcases, rifles, umbrellas and baskets of grapes, bounced our way inconspicuously into Gilgit.