Above and Below the Snow-line

A View to Kanjiroba

(for John Tyson)

The Langu runs colder by night,
cuts the rune of its passing deep
in bed rock, grinds boulders the height
of houses to sand while we sleep.

Dawn: across a gossamer bridge.
The white river spits, roars applause
at first stage-struck steps to the ridge;
deep icy fears begin to thaw.

At Dalphu, Tyson wrote, he found
'old friends', 'the toughest men' who will
carry long over savage ground.
Our sherpas shepherd us uphill

to this particularity,
this brush of cultures new with old.
But fretting on the quality
of light, my lens is held by bold

and bashful eyes: some tiny girls
carry baskets full of stones
from the gorge. On a word, they hurl
loads, again bend backs and small bones.

Rag-clad, mud-shod, they let the cruel
path re-claim them. Ashamed, incensed,
I want to ferry all Langu's
stone to atone for my presence.

From Dalphu there's a clear view through
to Kanjiroba we'd come six
thousand miles to see – and the hewed,
the hand-made trail where Tyson fixed

his tree bridges. Do the toughest
men move towards, always towards
the mountain, or find their longest
journeys are the journeys inwards?

Tim Noble

Tim Noble's journey and the above poem were inspired by John Tyson's expeditions to Nepal in 1961, 1964 and 1969 (see AJ67, 120-129; AJ70, 254-261; AJ75, 114-123).