

## THE ASCENT OF CAYESH AND ATTEMPT ON THE VIRGIN EAST RIDGE OF HUASCARAN

By L. R. STEWART

**T**HE Cordillera Blanca of Peru remains the most attractive climbing area in the Andes. To us in far-off New Zealand it appeared that the virgin Nevado Cayesh in the southern area of the Blanca was the outstanding problem remaining, although there are still many others, such as the centre peak of Pucahirca, the lower peak of Chacaraju, and the East ridge of Huascarán South Peak.

We on our side marshalled all our resources: our party was in the main composed of five friends living in the same New Zealand Province; Warburton, our competent leader, whose organisation carried the day, Ryan, Davis, Wood, Stewart, while the sixth, Crawford, came from another city but was highly recommended to us and proved in fact an ideal companion, so that the essential harmony of such a team was complete. The equipment was good, high altitude gear (Meade tents, down jackets, primus stoves, nylon ropes) which had had service in Antarctica and the Himalayas, loaned by the New Zealand Alpine Club, locally made japa over-trousers and canvas over-boots and all the more personal essential mountain gear.

Our food was a judicious combination of New Zealand and Peruvian, and generous in quantity.

Great assistance came from friends in Peru such as Colin Derbyshire, who has helped many foreign expeditions (e.g. to Pumasillo), and Vincent Schultz, a N.Z. accountant in Lima, and their charming Peruvian wives.

Michael Nelson, following an expedition into the Peruvian Andes by a party of New Zealanders domiciled in the U.S.A., sent us invaluable information in a pithy letter, and Leigh Ortenburger obliged by sending some of his famous pictures.

We quickly found the speaking of Spanish to be not merely an advantage but a real necessity, from dickering with customs officials to hiring donkeys; tourists who cannot or will not speak Spanish are looked on with contempt and even hostility. In any case there was the fun of interpreting the shouted comments of the small boys who thought the gringos would not know their language!

So that the hectic months before the expedition became a reality perforce included a few lessons from *Teach Yourself Spanish*, and these proved their value over and over again.

It seems to have become customary for Andes expeditions not to arrive in one piece, and ours was no exception to the rule.

Four members went by boat to Panama; there, two transhipped with the gear to Callao while the others flew direct to Lima. Two flew from N.Z. through San Francisco and Mexico City, arriving at Lima airport an hour before the others. One remained in Lima to await the arrival of the boat with the last two and equipment nine days later, also to organise passage through customs and transport to the mountains. The other three proceeded by *colectivo* to Huaras in the Santa Valley, there to acclimatise, organise donkeys and choose the best approach to Cayesh. Like all preceding parties they combined acclimatising with sight-seeing in this fascinating valley, visiting copper mines in the Cordillera Negra on the coastal side, exploring the famous Canon Del Pato, and decided the best approach to Cayesh by climbing a long mountain ridge in the Cordillera Blanca directly above Huaraz.

So that, when the last three arrived from Lima, having broken all records for rapid passage of gear through customs at Callao—one hour—and transshipment by truck to Huaras (one rode with the gear—a most trying experience—to guard it), they found the first three fit and well acclimatised. These then threw themselves with enthusiasm into the mammoth task of unpacking the cases, sorting the gear and repacking in suitable donkey-loads. Negotiations with the donkey agent were satisfactorily concluded with the able assistance of Senor Matellini, the popular patron of 'Los Pinos', that delightful pension of Huaras which is nowadays the Mecca of most overseas expeditions to the Cordillera Blanca.

Within two days the advance guard set off complete with donkey train, *arrieros* and one Peruvian *muchacho* (to guard Base Camp). They experienced for themselves all the trials and tribulations of donkey transport, hauling a jibbing donkey bodily across a long bridge, lifting others to their feet when they lay down and refused to rise, repacking loads which broke loose, and sorting out the chaos resulting from the meeting with another train. They slowly wended their way up the long track to the Quebrada Quilcayhuanca, where a local coca-chewing character had erected a barrier across the valley and insisted on a propina of 20 soles, reduced by argument to 10 soles, before he would open his crude gates. Higher in the valley snow peaks began to appear, set off by a foreground of bubbling stream and cattle grazing amid the obvious traces of ancient Inca civilisation.

The Quebrada has a surprisingly flat floor, but forks higher up, the left fork climbing to Tulparaju Lagoon, overlooked by the mighty ice peaks of Chinchey and Tulparaju, while the right fork, the Quebrada Cayesh led up to the ice-fall from Nevado Cayesh.

Our friends were exhausted by the time they reached a suitable spot

near the ice-fall, it had begun to rain heavily and darkness fell (being near the Equator, daylight lasts but 12 hours). Incredible confusion in the dark was soon blanketed in falling snow, and they slept miserably badly in hastily erected tents.

A fine dawn however, restored their spirits enough to get Base Camp shifted and soundly organised in a more beautiful spot.

Meantime a desperate drama was being enacted back at Los Pinos. During the night Crawford developed an annoying cough. By morning he was seriously ill with a pulmonary oedema, and by the evening it was clear he would not live through the night unless oxygen could be obtained. Once again Senor Matellini filled the breach and managed to get some from a local mine, and his medical friend Dr. Ramirez procured a reducing equipment which had arrived at the Huaraz hospital only a few days before. The threads fitted, the mask was screwed on, and within a short time Crawford began to recover. He had been suffering from high-altitude pulmonary oedema, a condition which is now recognised by doctor-mountaineers as a serious risk in high-altitude mountaineering, and is actually caused by heart failure due to over-exertion before becoming properly acclimatised. Dr. Charles Houston of K2 fame is particularly interested in this subject and is anxious for reports of similar cases.

Crawford now made a steady recovery, within two days the oxygen administration was stopped, and after a short convalescence he began anew a more careful acclimatisation programme. Wood in the interim had left, alone, for the Cayesh Base Camp to rejoin the others, and a few days later Stewart followed, having been well satisfied with Crawford's progress.

Warburton and Davis had meanwhile climbed up the ancient Quechua track leading over a high glaciated pass beneath Nevado San Juan to Huari on the Amazon side, a route now abandoned in favour of a motor(?) road further south, particularly as it was reputed to have been the cause of fatalities due to exposure and high altitude.

They noted a good route up a tributary stream to the north which led to the Cayesh glacier névé above the ice-fall, and set about establishing Camp I at the edge of the snow. This done, with the usual great effort demanded by insufficient acclimatisation early in an expedition, they set about their reconnaissance. Warburton had in N.Z. picked a route on Ortenburger's pictures, up a subsidiary ice peak which butted on to the Cayesh face, then across to the North ridge. Davis and he now pressed on to investigate this peak but found the technical difficulties such that the time involved in carrying a camp over the peak made it out of the question. This left the face as the only possibility, so Ryan, Warburton and Davis crossed the névé next day to investigate it. Although obviously very steep and difficult, they felt it was not impossible,

and worked out a route moving diagonally up across the face to the left, to strike the North ridge high up. They began moving up the face after crossing the bergschrund on a good bridge, and higher up placed a fixed rope, then returned. On the upper névé an ice avalanche suddenly fell on them. They threw themselves flat in the snow but both Warburton and Davis were struck in the back by blocks of ice. Davis fractured a rib and Warburton received a severe bruise and possibly a spinal injury. Ryan, unhurt, helped the badly shaken pair back to Camp I. Meanwhile Wood who had come on up from Base Camp had fallen victim to acute sinusitis so that when Stewart and Jacinto the porter arrived next day they found the party in their sacks and morale very low.

Ryan, however, was in good shape, and next day he and Stewart crossed the névé to prospect the face, while Wood went back to Base Camp to speed up his recovery. Stewart had always favoured the South ridge to the summit, however studded with ice pinnacles, and Ryan now picked out a promising line across the face leading to this ridge. He first climbed back to the fixed rope to pick up pitons and hammer left the previous day, but they were gone, swept away, an ominous sign. Nevertheless the expedition did not encounter one more ice or rock fall while working on this mountain. Ryan and Stewart made rapid time traversing horizontally across the face just beneath a band of snow, then turned directly up the face on steep rock and ice, finally to reach the ridge at a flatter portion of snow, ideal for a camp. They fixed a rope on the steepest ice slope, and returned to Camp I, with snow now falling lightly, dusk rapidly enveloping them, and on the lower part of the face, Stewart peeling off down a main avalanche gully, but well held by Ryan. Warburton came across the névé in the dark to guide them back to Camp I, now already well blanketed in snow, while Davis wrestled with the primuses to make a first-class meal. Next day they rested; in any case, it snowed steadily until late.

The deceptive ease with which they had reached the summit ridge led Ryan and Stewart to plan to take the summit by storm in one day from Camp I, a ridiculous under-estimate of the difficulties of the ridge. They left at 5 a.m. next morning and by 7 a.m. were on the face. Here they received a nasty shock. On the steep ice-faces all the steps were filled with loose snow which had laboriously to be cleared, while the rock was coated in treacherous verglas. They were very much behind time when they turned up the steepest part of the face and it now snowed steadily and heavily. The snow poured down the steep rocks like water, making progress still slower; further, Stewart was soon exhausted by inadequate acclimatisation, so that the wild optimism of the early morning, which included a night out if necessary, was replaced by a heavy pessimism which truly forecast that they would not in fact reach

any higher than previously. Once again they turned back down a face much more dangerous, so that meticulous and slow care barely took them to the névé by nightfall and another trudge across the snow in the dark.

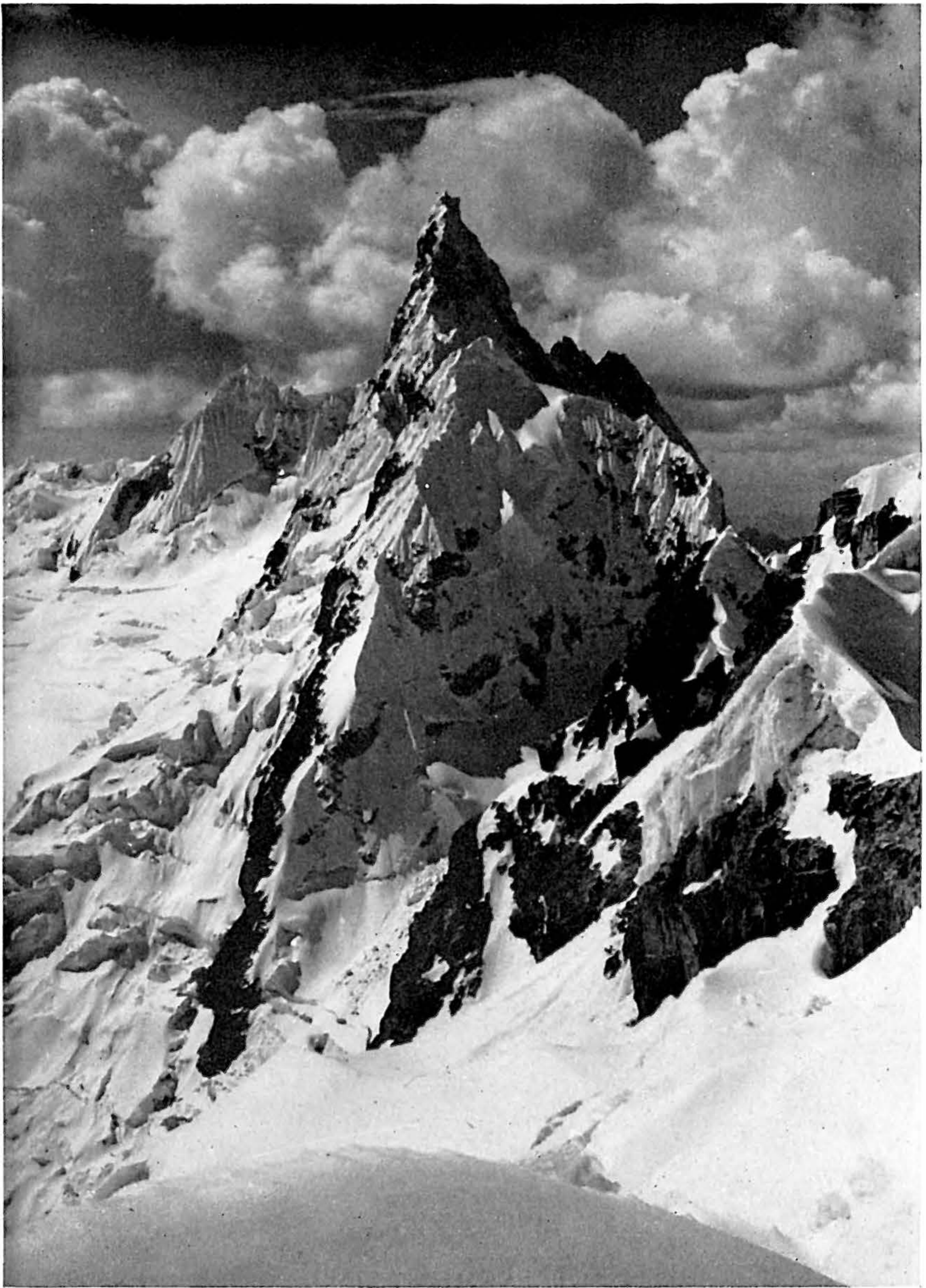
It was now clear that a proper siege was necessary, with a high camp on the ridge, but the weather became particularly bad, with snow every afternoon. They went down to Base Camp to bring up another tent, accompanied by a much improved Wood, leaving Warburton at Base as his back was still very painful. Next day they took the gear across the névé and dumped it close to the face, but Stewart again was unfit and during the night developed kidney trouble which kept him confined to bed. In the morning while getting water Wood with a fearful clatter slipped on verglas, falling some 20 ft. on his back. He was badly shocked with pain in back and stomach, and Stewart considered he had probably damaged his spine.

This left Ryan the only really fit person, but Davis, in spite of his fractured rib, was keen to continue, and they were now strengthened by Warburton, feeling better, and Crawford, who had arrived from Huaras feeling fit and well after his desperate brush with death. Wood and Stewart helped one another down to Base Camp, there to watch the struggle to establish Camp II.

Davis and Ryan had spent a cold night at a temporary intermediate camp beneath the face and were soon joined by Crawford and Warburton, who had left Camp I at 5 a.m. Carrying heavy loads they all moved painfully slowly, particularly up the steeper slopes. The two down at Base, following their progress anxiously, became thoroughly alarmed as it became increasingly obvious that they would not reach Camp II site until very late. In actual fact Crawford and Warburton dumped their loads on the ice face beneath Camp II and returned carefully in the evening and night to Camp I, arriving at 11.30 p.m. after a most exhausting time. Davis and Ryan, successfully established Camp II in an ideal little snow hollow and settled down to a quite comfortable night, secure in the knowledge that the summit was now within the grasp of the party after their tremendous exertions that day.

Tired, they rose late but set out cutting steps across the ice-face above Camp II. As the crest of the lower part of the summit ridge proved impossible, they were forced out on to the West face, and only once regained the ridge about half-way to the summit. There they were held up for a long time and finally returned to Camp II for a stronger attempt next day. Once again they struck serious difficulties in the same region, Ryan dropped his axe, which fell over the edge, and they returned exhausted having barely risen a further 50 ft.

It now transpired that two days' continuous step-cutting at that height was all each party could stand. These two next day returned to Camp I and Base Camp, while Crawford and Warburton made their way up for



*Photo, L. R. Stewart]*

NEVADO CAYESH FROM THE SOUTH.



*Photo, L. R. Stewart]*

NEVADO CAYESH FROM SLOPES OF CONDOR.

their attack. Through an unfortunate misunderstanding they took no fuel, and had to get their water from snow melted over candles. Stewart, chafing with inactivity at Base Camp, with the porter Jacinto made an ascent of the snow peak to the south of Cayesh, to secure magnificent views. The party had named this peak Condor, as they had seen two of these giant birds on the summit from Camp I.

Warburton and Crawford with their cooking difficulties made a slow start, but soon reached the vertical section of ridge which had held up the previous pair. Here they moved out on to the West face, then up a steep pitch of rock where Crawford left a piton, and so back to the ridge which again required such care that time too quickly ran out and they returned to Camp II and the arduous task of again melting ice with candle flame. It was clear that return to Camp I for fuel was imperative, so they descended next day.

Ryan, on whom the brunt of the climbing had so far fallen, now became grimly determined to finish off the ascent. Davis was having considerable trouble with his fractured rib, Wood was far from recovered from his spinal injury, leaving Stewart, greatly improved but not fully fit, as his companion. These two went up to Camp I in the afternoon, then up to the névé to watch the progress of the summit pair. These were sighted crossing the lowest snow band, moving so slowly that it was feared they might have had some accident. Stewart and Ryan hastened across the snowfield but were relieved to find their friends merely exhausted with altitude and dehydration, and their spirits rose, particularly when Ryan caught sight of his ice-axe lying on the lowest snow band, having fallen clear from the summit ridge. Wood and Davis, despite their injuries, this day climbed Condor.

Steady snow next day postponed the final Cayesh attempt, but enabled Crawford to recover from his dehydration well enough to join Ryan and Stewart the following day. They recovered Ryan's axe, somewhat bent, then made surprisingly quick time up to Camp II, where so comfortable a night was spent that the foot of the tent blew down without the occupants being aware of it.

At daybreak on July 21 the three left, Ryan and Crawford taking turns at leading while Stewart's main task in the middle was giving encouragement (and invective). They soon reached the previous highest point, but thereafter progress became painfully slow as they were forced out on to the face by overhangs, chiefly on steep ice. Here they passed a cave formed by a wide ice-crack and noted it as a possible bivouac, as time was fast going. Above this Crawford led up a steep rock ridge, then avoided a large overhang by entering another similar ice cave, breaking out through the icicles hanging over the outer edge, and cutting up the outer slope. Followed a 'cheval ridge' of ice with light showing through several feet below the crest, then more overhangs requiring traverse to the face. On

the second Ryan replaced a tiring Crawford and moved round an almost vertical slope whose snow adhered by no obvious means to the ice beneath. Here he had to cut a channel for his shoulders and head, round to the easier face slope. Up this, across a further ridge dip, then the last 50 ft., the only easy part of the climb.

He stood on the summit of Cayesh at 4.30 p.m., quickly joined by his companions.

The first feeling of joy was quickly followed by thankfulness that they had not let down the N.Z. Alpine Club and Everest Foundation, both strong supporters of the expedition.

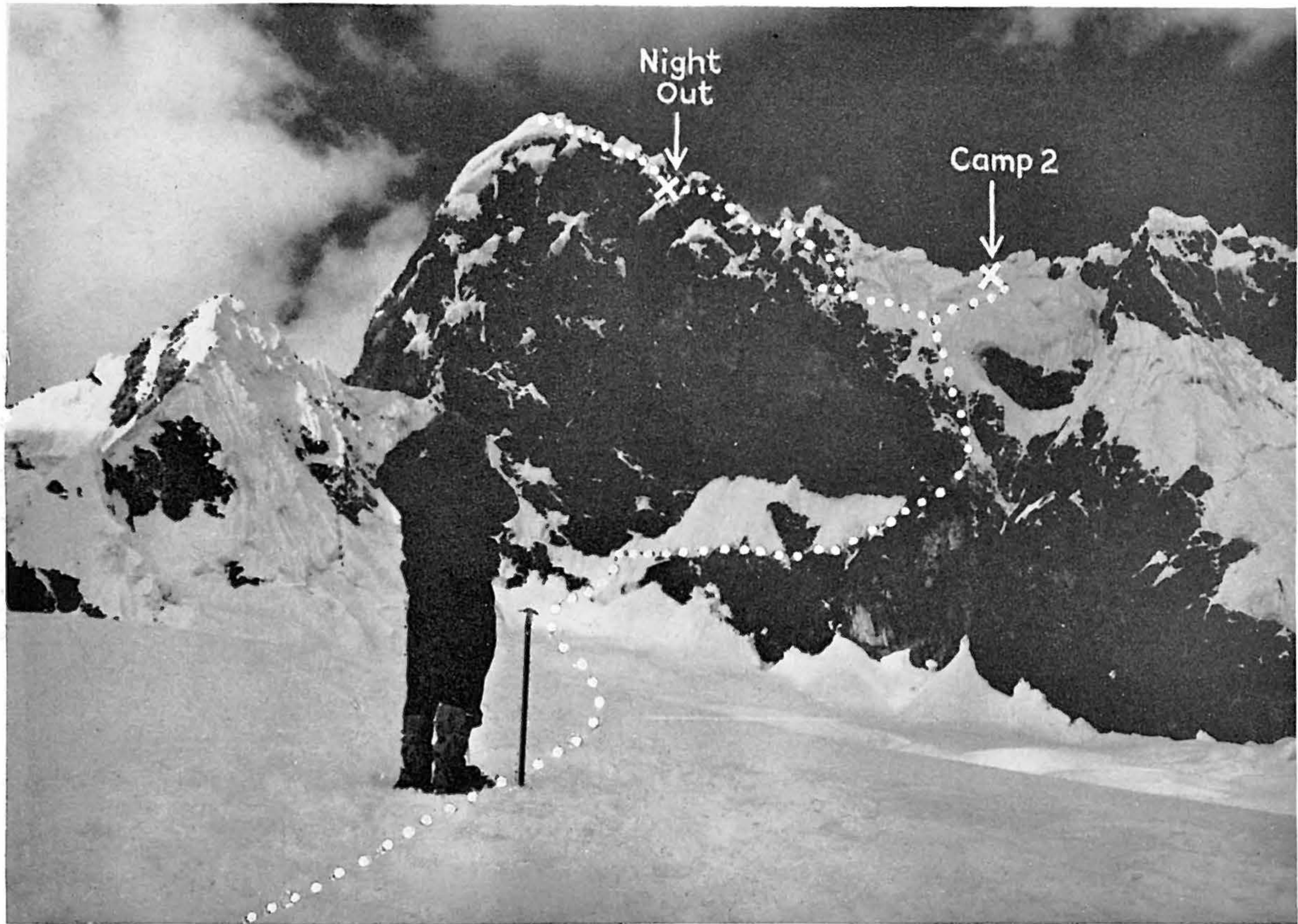
A burst of smoke from fires lit by their enthusiastic Base companions rose in the now darkening valley as they carefully began the descent down this exposed ridge. By dusk at 6.30 p.m. they were on the steep ice just above the proposed bivouac cave when Crawford with a shout and a clatter disappeared over the edge. The others were well placed and his fall was checked actually quite near the mouth of the ice cave, to which he traversed across steep rock after being lowered a little further. It was now dark, but by using extreme care and a piton the other two lowered themselves to the cave, where an uncomfortable but not unbearable night was spent. The weather during the day had been ominously cloudy, but cleared in the evening and now was perfect.

The long Peruvian night slowly passed and at dawn, although stiff with cold, they were obliged to move off down a steep ice slope, which quickly restored their circulation. Reaction now slowed their descent, so that Camp II was not reached until after midday.

A meal, and camp was struck and packed, but it soon became apparent that the loads were dangerously heavy for the steep ice descent. A considerable portion was dumped in a schrund and the descent continued. Wood and Davis had come across the névé to remove the unnecessary fixed rope on the power portion of the face, accompanied part way by Warburton, who then remained at Camp I to prepare a large meal eaten with gusto by the returning men. Ryan had tripped on the ice just above Camp I, spraining his ankle, so when it was decided to push on to Base that night, he hobbled painfully down on what in any case was a nightmare trip lit by two poor torches. All was soon forgotten round an enormous celebration fire, with singing and yarning till 2 a.m.

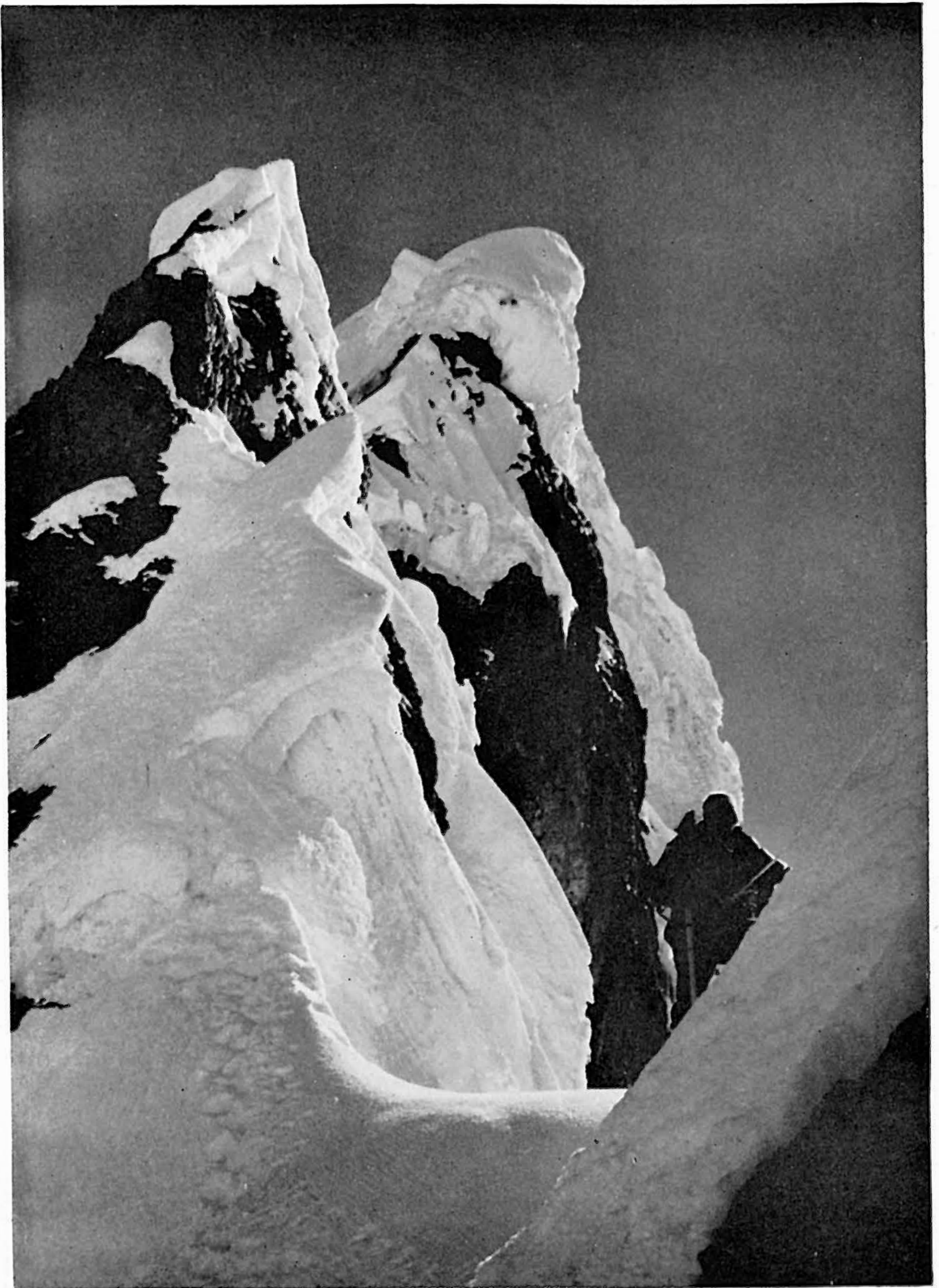
Jacinto had been despatched to Huaras for the donkeys, and the party variously filled in the two days of waiting by visiting the beautiful Tulpuraju lagoon in the next valley, going up the old track towards Condor, and (Wood and Crawford) returning to Camp II for the remaining gear, this last being a tremendous effort from Base Camp and back.

A happy party then trekked out to Huaraz in time for the July 28 (Independence Day) celebrations, and to repack gear for the second part of the trip.



Photo, L. R. Stewart]

WEST FACE OF NEVADO CAYESH.



*Photo, L. R. Stewart]*

ON SUMMIT RIDGE OF CAYESH.

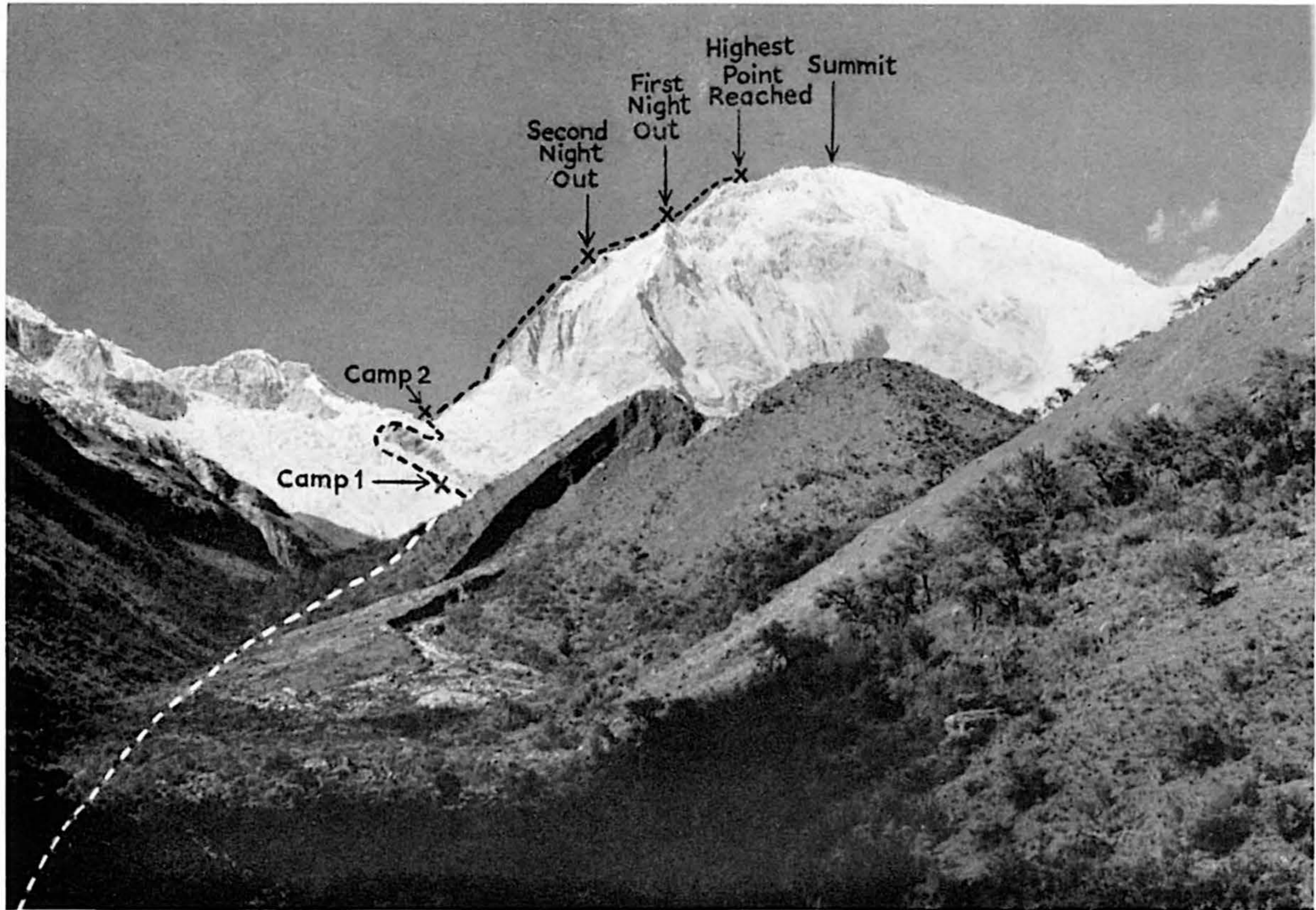
Their eyes were now fixed on the virgin East ridge of Huascarán. They had taken longer than planned over Cayesh, leaving a bare fortnight before they must be in Lima to ship their gear back to New Zealand.

A truck took them down the beautiful Santa Valley to Yungay, then up the spectacular scenic road through the Llanganuco gorge to the first lake, where they spent the night and part of the next day awaiting donkeys from Yungay.

An arduous walk up the main route to the east, during which loads fell off donkeys with monotonous regularity, brought them at dusk to a suitable Base Camp site in Huascarán Quebrada. Next day they set out immediately to establish Camp I at the apex of the moraine beneath the saddle between Chopicalqui and Huascarán. This involved climbing up a narrow valley, crossing a lateral moraine and its glacier floor, then up the other moraine and following it up to its origin. This day was most arduous and its evening saw Crawford and Stewart ferrying up loads the others had dumped to give them time to return to Base. Bad weather now took a hand, in fact the upper hand, as although at the newly established Camp I it snowed only lightly and intermittently, at Base it rained heavily for two days. Crawford and Stewart after one rest day prospected a route to the saddle, then carried up Camp I to the saddle in two trips to establish Camp II, leaving the others to come up in support, re-establish Camp I, and strengthen Camp II.

Next morning the first two left to prospect a route up the steep buttress of the lower Huascarán ridge suitable for carrying up a camp. Before long they were in a series of difficult chimneys, and as they rose higher, began to doubt the possibility of getting a camp up in the short time available. They then decided to push on with all speed to make a more thorough investigation of the higher parts of the ridge. After moving across the Ulta face of the ridge for a considerable distance they reached the crest and from here were able to exchange shouts with their friends who had now reached Camp II. Their progress was good; it now appeared faintly possible that they might make a bid for the summit providing they spent a night out. After Cayesh this held no fear, so they pressed on, up a steep sharp snow ridge, then on to the North face, finally in the evening to reach a ledge beneath the ridge, finding a narrow horizontal crack in the ice on which they could lie full length. A very cold night ensued, with fits of uncontrollable shivering.

Even after dawn they took a long time to get moving, having no water left and but a handful of sweets. They first reached the ridge up a steep ice slope, then crossed a nasty break in the ridge by an unstable bridge, followed by interminable cutting across a high ice face to reach an easier slope. They moved increasingly slowly and were well behind time when they finally surmounted the final pinnacle in view, expecting to find easy slopes leading to the summit. Instead, to their dismay were some fifty



Photo, L. R. Stewart]

HUASCARAN, SOUTH PEAK.

yards of extremely sharp arête surmounted by pinnacles of loose snow, with the summit still a considerable distance off, although not much higher. Fog suddenly blew up, shutting off the view, and a little snow fell. They realised the summit was still four or five hours away, it was now 2 p.m., and a further night out was inevitable. To go on meant spending that night on or near the summit, and undoubtedly a third night out on the descent. With no food nor water they felt they could not survive the third night, so immediately set off on their return. As speed was out of the question on the exposed ice, they were benighted on the ridge while still above 20,000 ft. They sat on an ice ledge all night with an occasional gust of wind and skiff of snow, which froze on them. At one stage Crawford said his crampon straps were frozen tight but he could not loosen them, and in any case his feet felt all right.

When dawn broke they waited for the sun to slacken their stiff limbs but perversely it hid behind cloud, so wearily they set off on their third day above Camp II, making slow but steady progress. After leaving the ridge to descend the final stage Crawford who was leading stood on a large, apparently safe, rock which however was just balancing. This bounded off down the slope, taking with it showers of snow, and lower down, rocks.

Meantime Warburton and Ryan, seriously perturbed about the length of time spent away from Camp II, had decided to push up with all speed to lend support and aid if necessary. They had reached a more difficult part of the face when they were showered by these rocks of all sizes, and by hugging the face were not hit, although fine rock dust filled their hats and clothing. They now had to decide whether to continue up what to them was an obviously dangerous slope, but while they were discussing it the men above suddenly caught sight of them and a happy exchange of shouts ended their anxiety.

Lower down, on the face of the buttress above Camp II they were able to shout to Davis and Wood who had come up in support, and who now set about preparing a large and welcome meal before descending to Camp I. Crawford and Stewart finally had a somewhat emotional meeting with Ryan and Warburton, then together by double roping from a fixed piton, reaching camp at 5 p.m.

Retiring after a good meal, Crawford found his boots frozen on, and removed them, to reveal all toes frozen white. Followed several hours of bathing in lukewarm water until finally all the toes returned to good colour except the great toes.

Time had now run out, so next morning they struck and carried Camp II right down to Base, preceded by Wood and Davis, who did likewise with Camp I.

By the time Crawford arrived one large toe was in a sorry state, but the others were in quite good shape. Next day's donkeys were obtained

from the local 'hacienda', and the party set off on its return, Crawford riding a donkey. This same night a truck was obtained to take them through to Huaras and the haven of Los Pinos.

Their adventures were not yet over, for during a temporary halt on the Pan American highway on the way down to Lima the *colectivo* driver had a copious stomach haemorrhage and fainted away on the road. Davis had perforce to drive the *colectivo* to Lima, ignoring police posts *en route* while Stewart supported the stricken driver until his home was reached. The other four had a most exciting bus drive over the Negra by a narrow winding road to Casma, thence to Lima and a happy celebration dinner with their Limeno friends.

From this expedition several important points emerged.

- (1) In a properly equipped party, before dawn and after dark climbing is just as feasible (and even necessary) as in New Zealand.
- (2) Nights out at 20,000 ft. are reasonably safe.
- (3) Acclimatisation should take at least 5 days, and for the first week the party should remain within reach of oxygen.