NUPTSE

By J. WALMSLEY

WE1 WERE seventeen days' march from Katmandu. The following day, Chris Bonington and I left the expedition encamped at Thyangboche. As well as resting after the long march in, a series of ascents and descents, without end it seemed, across the mountain ridges, the expedition would check equipment, cut marker flag sticks, mark mountain loads, and acclimatise by climbing local peaks. Chris and I with two Sherpas, Nima and Tashi, had five clear days ahead of the expedition in which to reconnoitre the South face of Nuptse. We had to be reasonably certain about a route on the South ridge, a line of weakness only seen on photographs and by our Patron, Sir John Hunt. Nobody else had ever tried to climb on this ridge before or even climb on the mountain. There was a chance, too, of an alternative route. From Thyangboche we had seen a ridge directly beneath the summit of Nuptse which would obviate the two-mile-long traverse at c. 25,000 ft. from the South ridge. But was this Central ridge possible?

We tramped towards Bibre at a brisk pace. It was a long day's march away and once there at the foot of the Nuptse glacier we could start our reconnaissance of the South face. We should also be able to save a day on the expedition's time to Bibre and thus have six days reconnaissance time. As we turned aside from the way towards Mt. Everest I thought of the many expeditions that had travelled this way. In a fit of romanticism I saw a procession of years roll by with the many and varied parties. I best saw those of pre-war years wearing Berwick tweeds, puttees and hob-nailed boots, carrying long Alpenstocks and smoking the elegant Meerschaum. By the late evening we had reached the small hamlet of Bibre. It was indeed a small place of a few buildings, the summer quarters of the boys and women who brought the herds of yak and goat to graze at heights of 15,000 to 18,000 ft. We made camp in a small enclosure and settled down for the evening. The solitude of our position and now having few companions was a veritable pleasure after the mass activity of the expedition. Not so very far away and towering above our camp was Ama Dablam, a beautiful peak standing proudly apart from the mass of ridges and peaks about us. At the head of the Nuptse glacier rose the South face of Nuptse, about seven miles away. It was virtually a

1 A list of members of the party is given at the end of the article.
long high wall bare of snow in many places because of its steepness. This was the scene of our reconnaissance.

For two days we climbed around the South ridge from the Lhotse and Lhotse-Nup glaciers. The ridge was certainly very formidable in its upper reaches. There was a steep rock buttress joining the ridge to the Summit ridge and it was almost bare of snow. This latter feature was a bitter disappointment since a covering of snow of reasonable depth would have covered the difficulties. However, snow covered or otherwise, there were but two ways to negotiate the buttress as seen from below and both of these were very exposed in position and steep, without any break or rest for camp in their upward sweep. Though the expedition was strong in rock-climbing talent, it would be a very difficult task to get over the buttress and the rock wall above it at c. 25,000 ft. And then there would be the long high-altitude traverse after this major difficulty. But the lower sections of the South ridge were much easier. There was a delightful subsidiary ridge, short in length and leading into the main ridge. In the middle section above there was a long stretch of snowfield at an easy angle with some danger from avalanches. Whilst climbing from the Lhotse-Nup glacier we examined the Central ridge but could get no worth-while opinion from this side of the ridge.

On the third day it was very quiet and any sound was muffled. Outside the tent was a world of falling snow, piling up around the tent, and covering the landscape with a carpet of white merging into the white mist of snow flakes and cloud. There was little or no visibility, making any attempted reconnaissance a waste of time, so Chris and I stayed in our sleeping bags and played a game of monopoly. Our sleeping bags were warm and comfortable, and we could hear the sounds of Tashi cooking our meals, brewing our tea, and talking almost incessantly against the roar of the primus stove to the locals of Bibre, who were very curious about our invasion from the outside world. Nima had gone to stay with his wife at the next small hamlet down the valley and would be back with us early the next day. His wife was expecting a child and Nima took every chance of being with her.

Chris was not feeling well on the fourth day so he stayed behind in camp. Nima and I climbed high above the Nuptse glacier to scout around the west end of the South face and to gain a high viewpoint of the Central ridge. Besides our excursion, Tashi was climbing up the Nuptse glacier to scout around the lower reaches of the Central ridge. Then we should have an all-round estimate of the ridge besides having some knowledge of the West ridge if required.

Nima and I climbed to a height of about 19,000 ft. We could now scan from the West ridge to the Central ridge in one sweeping glance. It was certainly an awe-inspiring sight. Between the ridges was a
tremendous rock wall, rising quite steeply and stretching many thousands of feet in all directions. There were many small snowfields balanced precariously in nooks and crannies, as though plastered on the wall, and causing periodic avalanches. But the weakness of this challenging mass lay on the ridge. The West ridge was obviously very long and it rose steeply towards the summit, but the Central ridge showed great promise. The general angle of this ridge was reasonable. It rose quite high and was almost in direct line with the summit. The only apparent difficulty lay in a rock band above the ridge, but there were many points of access on the band giving plenty of scope for possible routes. Also, above a section of the rock band there was an overhanging snowfield which might break away almost any time, but this could be an accepted risk. Beyond the rock there was straightforward climbing across a steep snowfield, into a couloir and on to the summit ridge and the top. This was all very heartening and, when we got back to camp, Tashi confirmed our thoughts with his description of the day’s events. His talk waxed most enthusiastic about our chances on the Central ridge, and we were very pleased to listen to his confidence.

On the fifth day when the expedition would be moving up from Thyangboche, all of us, including Chris who was now much better, climbed along the Nuptse glacier to see the Central ridge in order to be as sure as possible about our choice of route on it. Besides this we could find a suitable Base Camp site and a route to it which would be good enough for our porters who would be carrying heavy loads. As the ridge came into view and we got nearer to it our chances appeared progressively better. We traversed the full length of the glacier and through binoculars surveyed every possible aspect of the ridge and the snowfields and rock band above it. Access was good but the ridge would be a difficult proposition. There was a continuous thin line of ice towers and overhanging séracs above the broken rocks and the steep flanks of the ridge. Above the ridge were steep ice slopes with no obvious technical difficulties except the rock band which might prove to be awkward. However our rock-climbing experts were confident about any rock problems. The overhanging ice-cliff above the rock band was still an obvious danger, but our chances were good: the ice-cliff would probably only break away once across a small section of the route; and the rock band was long enough to give plenty of scope for a breach.

There was no doubt, the Central ridge must be the best way. Now we must find a Base Camp with running water which was quite a problem. Everywhere we searched was dry until, when we thought of having to use the camp site by the lake, about half-way down the glacier, Tashi appeared over the brow of a ridge with the glad tidings
of having found a spring. It was truly a fine camping spot—running water, a clearing covered with edelweiss, moss and short tufted grass, sheltered by rock walls and with a clear view of the Central ridge. The only disadvantage of the camp was being on the far side of the glacier from the ridge. However we would get some of the porters to stay behind a few days and help to carry the mountain loads as far as the start of the serious climbing. We returned to Bibre well satisfied with our choice of route and that we had finished our task in time for the expedition to arrive and be able to move straight away to Base Camp.

Early morning, April 11, the expedition moved into sight. They were very pleased to hear about our success over the last five days and the good news about the Central ridge. Since seeing the ridge from Thyangboche, it had been a favourite with the expedition. At Base Camp, after a long haul up the Nuptse glacier, the porters were all paid off except for ten who were retained for moving loads from Base to a dump on the glacier. Tents were erected; food was prepared over the camp fire; the expedition was at last assembled and ready at the foot of Nuptse. The sun swung over the mountains and the evening star shone before an increasing array of stars as the evening settled in towards the night. The clear starlit sky was a good omen for tomorrow's weather.

The next morning, April 12, Les Brown and I moved away from Base to reconnoitre the route to the ridge. Other members of the expedition with the ten porters followed behind with gear and food in order to establish a glacier dump. We traversed the glacier moraine and slid down on powdered rock debris to the glacier below. All around was virtually a battleground of ice and rock. The unceasing forces and movement of the ice shifted tons of rock blocks and rubble which crashed into crevasses and rumbled over the glacier. We climbed over mounds of unsteady rock and ice, sometimes slipping and falling, skirted around craters of ice, and occasionally climbed through fangs of ice set like spears to catch animals. There was no hint of a track nor was it worth while making one for the later crossings, but cairns were built to show the best of a rough passage. Everything was tottering, broken and unsteady, and so it was a great relief to reach the far side of the glacier and step on to hard snow. We then rested awhile and admired the shapely spire of Ama Dablam. I thought of Mike Harris and George Fraser near the summit in 1959, and then my thoughts wandered away.

From the glacier it was a series of easy snow slopes which in the latter parts rose steeply into the flanks of the ridge. We climbed slowly beneath the hot sun and soon reached the spot where Camp I was established later. From this site the shortest and easiest way on
to the ridge appeared to be via a short chimney, but this proved to be much steeper than we had anticipated and was also very dangerous. Almost every other movement in the chimney disturbed loose rock—this was certainly no route for anybody, with or without a load. So we moved over into a couloir whose most obvious feature was a trail of debris from broken rock. The couloir had been seen from Base and earmarked as an alternative to the chimney, but the ‘avalanche’ trail of rock had made me want to try the chimney first.

At the beginning and for some considerable way up the couloir the route lay on loose broken stones on a slope of dirty ice. Almost every other foothold was unstable. We seemed gifted or fated to choose the most tortuous and arduous ways at first, later an easier passage was used to the right of the couloir. About half-way up the flank of the ridge, having left the couloir behind we moved into a shallow chimney of steep ice and rock slabs. At first we climbed on to a fluted ice rib at the side of the chimney but progress was slow. So we then decided to follow the line of the chimney. It was similar ground to the ice, rock and snow we had climbed below, just above the couloir, and we had moved with little pause or hesitation. There were loose slabs on the chimney route which required care but our progress was fairly rapid, and soon we were not far away from the crest of the ridge. By now we were beginning to feel the effects of having climbed all day long in the hot sun with little pause for rest. It was also late afternoon and we had no idea how long it would take us to return to Base. About 150 ft. from the top of the ridge we saw no obstacle ahead, the way was now clear to the ridge. So we returned towards Base; there was no advantage going any further now. We fixed rope down the slopes and abseiled over the most difficult sections. At the couloir we climbed most carefully on the loose broken stones, but quite often we slipped on the dirty ice. It was a relief to get back on to the snowfield below, and be able to move quickly and safely. But crossing the glacier was a tiring business indeed. Heavy legs and shortage of wind power made the crossing far too long, and the ascent of the moraine was sheer agony. We reached Base just before dark and thought with satisfaction of the rest day tomorrow.

The following day, April 13, Dennis Davis and Nawang Dorje established the route on to the ridge. They avoided the shallow chimney on the flank of the ridge and climbed over the fluted ice rib to a steep snowfield which they ascended to the crest of the ridge. This certainly gave a better and easier route to the position of Camp II on the ridge. Chris Bonington, Jim Swallow, Simon Clark and three Sherpas moved up in support and occupied Camp I. We were certainly doing very well at this time. In the space of two days we had climbed well over 2,000 ft. from Base and made a route as far as VOL. LXVI—NO. CCCIII
Camp II. Also at this time we received a great moral boost with mail from home which had been brought into camp by Ed. Hillary’s mail runner from Mingbo. This was certainly a very welcome and generous service from the Hillary camp.

Chris took over from Nawang Dorje the next day thus leaving J. S. and Simon with four Sherpas for carrying loads to Camp II. J. S. and Simon also moved Camp II to a better camp site further along the ridge, just past a rock gendarme which had the shape of a bishop’s mitre. It was a much bigger site with room for a number of tents and a stack of food and gear. The site was also the home of ravens, who proved a mixed blessing: their nest was on the gendarme and they provided colour, raucous song and extra life to the camp, but when camp was vacant they attacked the ration boxes with their strong beaks and stove the snow with tinned foodstuff and the broken remains of packet soup, porridge oats, blocks of chocolate, bags of sugar, etc. During this high-level activity the rest of the expedition carried loads between the Glacier Dump and Camp I in preparation for the big push along the ridge as soon as the way was clear.

Chris and Dennis moved to Camp II with personal gear and later explored the route along the ridge. From Camp I the ridge rambled along in a broken fashion with no great rise in elevation until the way was barred by a rock wall with steep ice slopes above it. Chris and Dennis traversed below the wall to the first natural break which was a Vee chimney with smooth side walls and an ice-filled crack about 3 in. wide at the back of it. At this point the snow traverse had tapered into a smooth ice slope beneath the chimney, sweeping down for over a thousand feet to the snowfield below Camp I. Looking up, there was a small overhang at the top of the chimney, and a trace of the ice slopes above it against the blue sky. Chris jammed his way up the chimney by using the friction of his body and legs against the smooth walls of rock. At the overhang there was a crack on the right wall which gave a good jammed foothold and a welcome rest. Chris knocked in a piton in the side of the overhang for security and then climbed round and over it. It was a very fine effort on a severe rock pitch at c. 19,000 ft. After regaining breath he brought Dennis up to the stance, and then they continued up the ice slopes above.

The two climbers made steady progress cutting steps, knocking in ice pitons and placing fixed rope on the 50° ice slope. The climbing position on the ‘nose’ of ice could not have been more exposed. When the ice slope became less accommodating they aimed for a chute gouged into the ice by the side of a rock pillar. Their line of approach was along a traverse that gave everything a climber wanted; exposure and steepness with good footholds and handholds, and the
intoxicating sense of having to climb with good balance and careful movement. It was a very fine traverse which led without undue difficulty into the chute, which was ascended for about 200 ft. to the top of the pillar. On the last 40 ft., handholds as well as footholds had to be used to climb the very steep ice-wall. On the platform where the tents were erected for Camp III, there was little or no space to spare—6 to 12 in. on the sides and about 2 ft. at the ends. Behind the tents was an overhanging ice-wall; all about was space; and in the distance wonderful views of the mountain ranges. Camp II was within sight and hailing distance; and down below there was now a line of red fixed rope marking the route from the Vee chimney.

Back at Base, Jim Lovelock and I spent the whole of one day doing 'office' work. There were 900 expedition postcards to send out to many parts of the world, a newspaper report to prepare giving up-to-date progress on the mountain, correspondence to send out arranging for the return of expedition gear, etc. I never thought I'd have to be slogging away with pen and paper after months of expedition correspondence at home. In addition we set an oft-repeated pattern of ransacking Base for anything which might be useful on the mountain. J. L., our Base Officer and News Correspondent, viewed this with a watchful eye in case the camp was left with nothing. In the evening John Streetly and Trevor Jones returned to Base, feeling the effects of high altitude effort, carrying loads to Camp I. The camp radio programme was interrupted by a commercial, 'Are you not feeling well? Try an Aspro!'—this was a daily adjuration and quickly caused prompt retorts as one drank tea tasting of burnt juniper, or ate sticky porridge, or felt a splitting headache, etc.

On April 16 J. S. came down from Camp II to Base. He was not feeling well and was in need of a rest. Les and I met him on our way with loads from the Glacier Dump to Camp II. Simon and Tashi were lifting between Camps II and III that day, so when we arrived at Camp II we planned to await their return and get to know the position beyond Camp III. At 3.30 p.m. Les returned to Base with the Sherpas. There was no point in us all waiting, and risking the chance of returning to Base in the dark. I waited until 4.30 p.m. hesitating whether to stay or go, and then Simon came into view, returning it seemed ever so slowly. At last he arrived and with the worst of all coughs that I had heard for a long time. It was a rasping noise from the back of the throat and from deep in the chest. I was anxious about his welfare, but Simon said that he was feeling fine and was climbing well. He said the boys ahead were making good progress and that all was going as well as could be expected. The ridge beyond Camp III was a complicated structure of ice pillars and seracs, and consequently any advance was slow work. Then he produced a list
of requirements for Camps II and III with first and foremost the need for a rope ladder in the Vee chimney. At the moment they were using a knotted fixed rope. The ascent of the chimney with a load on one's back was about the most tiring thing possible and a rope ladder should make it easier. Could I make this top priority? I then left Camp II with every possible speed and reached Base just before darkness at 6.45 p.m. It had been a rapid descent which just about wore me out.

We made a rope ladder from split wooden stakes and old nylon rope. The stakes were carefully notched near the ends with a kukri, to take the twist and knot of the nylon rope without it slipping off. As an added measure I tied string round each of the knots to stop them moving, even though J. L. assured me that his patent knot would tighten once the rung was trodden on. The finished result was a strong but crude form of ladder. It was slung over a big rock for testing, and then we found no rope, cord or anything for holding the ladder, which spoke well for our efforts in robbing Base for the mountain. Eventually we tested the ladder by dint of man-power and the mechanics of 'rope friction on a circular object'. It stood up well to the weights of J. S. and J. L. and we thought this sufficient. But the project had taken us much longer than was anticipated, so that Les and I were not able to depart until the early afternoon. Les was taking his personal gear for residence at Camp II where he would help Simon to lift loads to Camp III and also fix the rope ladder in the chimney. I went as far as Camp I with a ladder and a ration box, and then passed the ladder over to Les who would take it on to Camp II. I returned to Base. The wind was blowing quite strongly and bringing dark cloud and traces of snow flakes. This was the first sign of bad weather; since our arrival at Base six days ago we had had nothing but a series of fine clear days; it had been too good to last.

Meanwhile Chris and Dennis were making the route from Camp III. They were finding it to be the most difficult part of the route so far. Almost as soon as they moved from camp they had to climb steeply on the East side of the ridge and were then forced to climb to its crest to avoid vertical rock walls and broken snow. From the crest they had to use the East side again and descend to a niche by the side of a small rock gendarme. It was best to traverse around the side of the gendarme, and a small boss of ice virtually stuck on the rock wall required extreme care for fear of it breaking away. There was a visible sigh of relief when they had both crossed the boss and were back on the relatively safe ice ridge. They moved round a pillar of ice into a further niche which brought them out on the West side of the ridge. A tunnel appeared which they easily crawled through and out on to the East side again. An awkward mantleself movement followed by a rising traverse led them into yet another niche. The twists and turns of the
ridge were most confusing, so much so, that Chris and Dennis thought there was little point in going on like this. The ridge was quite a long one and they were filled with dismay at the thought of these complicated moves all the way. But they climbed on, most of the time on the West side, and they now found, as a form of reprieve it seemed, that the way was more open and straightforward than before.

The route continued with a series of ‘knight’ moves along the ridge, with nearly every position protected by fixed rope. Two places were especially difficult where the climbers were pushed outwards as the ice-wall leaned over from the crest. Handholds as well as footholds had to be cut as big as possible before reaching and climbing over the top. As Dennis and Chris climbed higher they reached an amphitheatre where they paused and deliberated which way to go next. This amphitheatre was truly beautiful in form. It had the shape of the cutting edge of a scimitar gouged into the ridge and plunged like a chute into the depths below. The way resolved itself into a traverse on the steep curved wall which once started proved to be much easier than had appeared at first. There was a fracture below the crest which gave reasonably easy footwork. Shortly after this section there was a gendarme with a steep wall facing the ridge. From the amphitheatre it appeared to be a difficult problem, but closer inspection revealed a broken corner and a cracked ledge which led fairly easily to the top. The route now eased away from the steepness below but alas, there was no room anywhere for a camp site. Every possible place seen from a distance proved on closer examination to be too small. But at their farthest point along the ridge they spotted a small hollow which would just take a small tent. This would have to do as a temporary camp site unless something better could be found or made. Dennis and Chris returned to Camp III and intended on the following day to descend to Base for a rest period.

On the day, April 19, that Chris and Dennis returned to Camp III, Trevor and I accompanied John to Camp I, where he stayed overnight before climbing up to Camp III to join Les. During the second lift from the Glacier Dump to Camp I, Trevor had to rest frequently. His face showed the strain of his climbing effort. He did not know what was wrong except that his legs felt very tired and heavy, his lungs were panting for breath, and his head was splitting with an aching pain. I left Trevor resting about half-way along the snowfield and continued up to Camp I. As I approached Camp I, I met Simon with Tashi returning to Base Camp for a rest. Simon had the most sickening of headaches. Every step gave his head a severe jolt and pain. He gave me news about advance on the mountain, general requirements, etc., and went on down to Base. At Base that evening, Trevor was advised by J. S. to stay down until he felt decidedly better,
and then gradually to work back into carrying loads and climbing high. Simon rested all evening and night, eating very little and trying to shake off his headache with the various tablets in our medical kit.

I left Base early morning with Captain Prabaker (Noddy), our Liaison Officer, and Angtsering Cook. We rested by the Glacier Dump, and sunbathed in the morning sun. The warmth was most pleasant and comforting, I was almost drugged to sleep. I listened to the splitting, crunching sounds of the moving glacier and lazily wondered if the ground might split open beneath me. Then I thought of having to go to Camp II and that I must shift myself. Angtsering Cook, ever alert and fast, was well in front now and had tea ready in time for Noddy and me on arrival at Camp I. This is one of the principal joys of high altitude climbing—to arrive at camp with heavy limbs and panting breath and to be greeted with a mug of steaming tea. After the tea I was ready to help, besides being interested in the erection of the pneumatic Igloo tent. But alas, the tools for the job were either not there or not ready. There were few or no pegs and we had to scrounge sticks or pitons from the camp site. The pump was not working since the leather ‘cup’ and metal formers were lodged at the bottom of the tube. The pump body was not made to dismantle so we had to fish for the parts with the end of the pumping rod. It was most aggravating. The midday sun was uncomfortable; the snow reflected too much light into my eyes as I squinted down the dark unfathomable interior of the pump body and poked and prodded with the rod: would we ever get these parts out and the tent erected?

At last there was movement from within the tube and somehow the parts were fished out. The pump was assembled and we started to pump in relays until Noddy, Angtsering Cook and I had hardly any strength left. Slowly the tent took a rigid shape, and was erected at last. I left the others and set off for Camp II. It was fine and clear, with the evening star twinkling in the sky. The shadows gave depth and dimension to the valleys, ridges and peaks and several times I rested and absorbed the peace and beauty of the mountains. Soon the stage effect of the setting sun behind the mountains prompted my exit from the scene to join Pemba at Camp II.

As Pemba and I prepared loads for the daily lift to Camp III, Chris appeared on the slopes above the Vee chimney. He travelled down quickly. Was there anything wrong? Pemba prepared more tea. Chris said that he was feeling very fit and would like to stay high and help John and Les at Camp IVa. Since Chris’s kit was still at Camp III and there was nobody else available then, I agreed. Chris also gave me a list of requirements for the two camps on the ridge. Pemba and I altered our programme and went down to Camp I for the necessary items. We rejoined Chris and then moved on with our loads.
to Camp III. At the fixed rope before the Vee chimney I began to
feel weak and lethargic. I watched Pemba haul himself over the
steep broken rock and felt that this would be too much for me on this
occasion with a load on my back. So I returned to Camp II, dosed
myself with whiskey and aspirin, and got into my sleeping bag.
I shivered, felt cold and sweated, and then took some sleeping tablets.
I must have been asleep when Pemba returned since I did not hear or
see him again until the next day.

Very early next morning I was forced out of my sleeping bag.
Reluctantly I struggled from the warm bag and against the ice-covered
sides of the tent. I fought with the sleeve entrance and its fastenings
and plunged into the first shades of dawn. There was an icy cold
wind blowing across the ridge. Unfortunately I chose a wind channel
by the gendarme so that the wind whistled around my bent position,
making me physically sick and very sore. I returned to my sleeping
bag and awaited the noise of the primus stove which meant the
beginning of breakfast. It seemed a very long time before the dawn
light filtered over our camp and I could hear the sounds of Pemba’s
movements. The Sherpas could always sleep well any time and any-
where, or so it seemed. After breakfast Pemba and I climbed towards
Camp III with food and equipment.

We reached the Vee chimney and the rope ladder, which swung and
gyrated in all directions as we climbed on it. Each rung was a single
gasping effort. In the construction I had left loose ends on the strings
which helped to secure the rungs of the ladder. My crampons tangled
with the string ends. I jerked the points of my crampons free only to
stab myself and rip my trouser leg. I cursed and swung with almost
every movement. Before the overhand the ladder swung inwards and
left me hanging backwards, with my load assisting the forces of gravity.
I coiled my arms around the ladder and hung resting before the supreme
effort of climbing over the overhang. I jammed my right foot in the
crack just beside me, pushed myself clear from the overhang, then
stepped as high as possible on the ladder and pulled myself over the
top to land on a sloping slab in the narrow cleft above. There was
just enough room to remove my load and hold it in a resting position.
What a relief to be without the biting straps of my rucksack—perhaps
the head-band support used by the Sherpas would be better. After a
short time I called down to Pemba to start climbing and moved on to
the slopes above to make room for him.

The red fixed rope above the chimney made the ascent of the ice-
slopes relatively easy, provided the sun’s rays had not melted the steps
away. The exposure on the ‘nose’ of ice and along the traverse made
climbing on this section a joy almost any time. I found some of the
ice-pitons loose from the action of the sun and knocked them more
Nupste; the ridge between Camps III and IV.
firmly into the ice. I also salvaged pitons and karabiners by readjustment of the fixed rope. There was a shortage of these items now and we had to economise as much as possible. Pemba and I went up the last steep wall before Camp III—it must have been about 20° from the vertical—and climbed over the edge of the platform and straight into the entrance of the first tent. There was nobody about. We left our loads at a dumping spot a short distance along the ridge behind the camp and then rested awhile. The position of Camp II was a veritable eyrie. I thoroughly enjoyed the place. All around were mountains, fresh air and space. I could see Cho Oyu, Ama Dablam and Makalu most clearly and best of all. But what was this around the base of the tents? There were cracks and signs of the ice possibly breaking away. Was the site safe enough? As yet there were no signs of disturbance beneath the tent and, apart from the cracks near the edge of the platform, the base of ice on the rock pillar appeared firm and solid. If necessary we would have to use the dumping spot along the ridge as the camp site. On the return journey I wrapped surgical tape around the rope ladder here it showed signs of wear against the sharp edges of rock. I also took rough measurements for short safety lines on the ladder where breakage could occur.

At Camp IVa John and Les had established themselves with a small tent in the hollow. There was insufficient room, and the sides of the tent fitted badly in the restricted space and hung so loosely that the strong wind across the ridge worried the tent like a dog with a bone. They climbed further along the ridge placing more fixed rope until, after getting over two awkward rock platforms, they reached a notch in the ridge which certainly offered more camp space than at Camp IVa site. The rest of their day was spent moving the tent, provisions and gear from the hollow to the notch, now Camp IVb site. Chris, Nima, Nawang Dorje and Angtsering Cook who had just lifted loads from Camp III gave them a hand with this task.

When John and Les continued from Camp IVb they climbed near the crest of the ridge and more often than not on thin blades of ice. As they used their ice-axes the shafts frequently went through the ridge from one side to the other. It was obviously a dangerous route. They tried several times to climb lower down but smooth rock slabs below their position prevented escape or break through from the edge of the ridge. So they had to return to camp without any material success except the useful knowledge that any other way must take a lower line. They settled in camp again amongst all their damp gear. This did not give John’s suspected fibrositis much of a chance to improve. He had had a lot of trouble and pain with it in the relatively salubrious quarters of Base Camp. Les, too, was feeling the discomforts of their camp. His length of 6 ft. 3 in. did not fit into the
small tent, even though the small stature of John gave him the best possible room. His frame poked into the sides of the tent and into John as well. They were not feeling well enough, and were dispirited and disjointed, so they returned down towards Base, giving Simon and Chris a chance to move forward into their places. (Simon was then taking ciné film of climbing action along the ridge.)

When Chris and Simon moved from Camp IVb they knew about the danger and difficulty of climbing high on the ridge and went straight from the camp on a long horizontal traverse. This way was well below the line taken by John and Les, and proved to be more accommodating. The rocks jutting out from below gave more stable snow conditions and much safer climbing. They came to an interesting section of steep ice-walls which they had to traverse across for several hundred feet. The angle was just right for easy careful movement, and when the thin rope handrail was fixed the stretch was quickly traversed. At long last the main mass of the mountain was coming within easy reach and measurable distance. A steep, direct rise of approximately 200 ft., followed by a long traverse below the crest led Simon and Chris to the end of the ridge. Where the ridge joined into the face there was plenty of room for tents. Now we could have a permanent Camp IV above which could be seen steep ice slopes having no apparent technical difficulties except for the dark rock band. On April 28 Simon and Chris established Camp IV with tents, gear and provisions.

J. S. and Dennis were most disconsolate with the lift between Camps I and II, so I sent them ahead to Camp III to support Chris and Simon. It was arranged that these two parties would climb alternately in the lead and as support. Les and I would support their advance. Then I went down to Base with Angtsering Sirdar who was not feeling very well. I think the two lifts to Camp III in the one day had sapped his strength. I also wanted to make certain that there was no more equipment at Base. I met Trevor en route. He said that he was much better now and wanted to be active again. Seeing my hesitation he stressed that J. S. had made it clear he could return as soon as he felt better. I confirmed that there was plenty of room at Camp II and said that I would see him there later that evening. Not long afterwards I met Nima, Nawang Dorje and Angtsering Cook on the moraine footpath. They were going to Camp I I, also after a couple of days' rest at Base camp. They were very cheerful and smiling. At Base John was still laid up, and was now receiving massage treatment from J. L.; I sympathised very much with his condition which I knew was most painful and uncomfortable. J. L. did not know of any gear about Base which I could take on to the mountain, but by rooting around the cookhouse I managed to unearth
some climbing rope, long metal tent pegs to use as ice-pitons, and food which I thought would be better on the mountain than at Base. The wife of Angtsering Cook, a most charming, slim young woman, was acting as camp cook. She prepared soup and tea for me before I left at c. 1.30 p.m. and tramped off towards the ridge in light falling snow. There was little or no wind, and the snow fell evenly all around. The view was a typical winter scene in the U.K. as I moved at a steady pace 'neath the darkening sky. I became anxious about keeping the right direction towards Camp II but the visibility never deteriorated badly enough for me to lose my way. Eventually I reached camp feeling tired. After dinner the whiskey in my load of food from Base helped to carry me into the land of dreams that night. The following day, April 28, I spent rearranging the fixed rope between Camps I and II and collecting pitons and karabiners. Then I joined Trevor at Camp I and helped him to lift medical oxygen supplies, food, tents and paraffin.

On April 29 Chris came down to Camp II from Camp IV. Because of the deterioration in the weather he thought it best to plan a quick assault. I agreed with the idea and went over the list of items which he had brought down with him. Rope, pitons, certain tents and food were needed for the assault which was best planned as a light party of two with a bivouac en route. Dennis and Simon were extending the route from Camp IV today to above the 'whale back', and there was a chance of being short of rope, especially if the rock band was a hard nut to crack. I had already foreseen this possibility and written J. O. Roberts in Katmandu to send rope if possible, but it might arrive too late to be of use. So I went down to Base again to send for rope at Thyangboche and Khumjung. We had already had the offer of an 'Everest' ladder from the monastery and they might have rope. Also Noddy had told me about a possible supply at Khumjung village. Fortunately I met Noddy at the Glacier Dump with a load of wooden snow stakes. I asked Noddy to arrange to get the rope from Thyangboche and Khumjung. I rested awhile, talked about expedition affairs and general matters then later took his load and moved back towards Camp II arriving there about 4 p.m. Chris and Les were going up to Camp III later but stayed for dinner when Chris saw the beans in tomato and chocolate pudding. Trevor and I had stored these away with the thought of two good meals at least. About 5 o'clock Chris and Les departed for Camp III, and soon after, Trevor and I settled into the lumps and hollows of our tent floor. The tent would certainly have to be lifted and the ice base hacked flat again. It was just a matter of getting round to doing it. I had difficulty in sleeping that night despite a dose of sleeping tablets. I was most conscious of laboured breathing and had to go outside frequently to
urinate. The struggle from warmth to cold; the ice covered canvas flapping against my face from the wind; and the cold night air: all contributed to a restless night. I was feeling far from well the next day, and the breakfast of 'glue' porridge and fried dried meat with no appetite did nothing to get me out of the tent, so I stayed in camp all day. As Trevor and I read and whiled away the day Chris appeared, having come down from Camp III. He had a hoarse throat and a bad cough and was feeling ill. Shortly afterwards J. S. appeared, having come down from Camp III on a social visit. Before Chris went down to Base for a rest and some medicine, we all played poker with matches for stake money. Everybody's luck was out except for J. S., who won almost all our matches, but we had plenty of matches in camp besides our gas lighters. Later, J. S. went back to Camp III and Chris down to Base.

The following day, Trevor and I dropped our tent and hacked the site level. Then we climbed up to Camp III with Tashi. There was the usual struggle up the ladder whilst carrying a load, then Trevor and Tashi went on leaving me to repair the ladder which was now showing signs of wear again. First I knocked an additional holding piton into the ice and tied a safety line to support the ladder if ever the main supporting tie gave way. Then I tied further safety lines across the wearing points on the rope supports. My fingers were bitterly cold so I donned my third pair of gloves, which made my work even clumsier and more awkward. By the time we were all at Camp III a call came from Camp II. It was Pemba at Camp II with extra rope from Thyangboche and Khumjung. This was very welcome news.

There was a great deal of cloud and falling snow around Camp III on May 2 as I left camp at 8 a.m. with Tashi and Pemba. It was very cold indeed and my gloved right hand was so stiff with ice that it would not uncurl from around the head of the ice-axe until I had prised it away. Thereafter I took good care to keep my gloves pliable. At the side of the small rock gendarme I had to climb over the ice boss which was apparently just sticking to the rock wall, so I placed a fixed rope for protection in case the ice ever broke away with somebody on it. The whole ridge was certainly a freak of nature. There were broken pillars, séracs and tunnels in abounding number and also the most wonderful shapes that the wind and the hard-driven elements of nature could devise. There were many fixed ropes en route and but for the load on my back and the effort at high altitude it would have been a joy to move on that steep broken ice with a high exposure on an intricate route. Tashi and I at times rearranged a few of the fixed rope positions to better places and knocked some of the pitons in more firmly. We were impressed by the skill of the route-finding. At 12 o'clock we reached the hollow in the ridges and saw the remains
of Camp IVa. It was easy to appreciate the difficulties of the cramped camping space. We checked on the items in the hollow which had to be taken further along the ridge and then moved on to the rendezvous point at the notch in the ridge with the fellows from Camp IV. Not long after reaching the old site of Camp IVb, J. S., Les and Nawang Dorje appeared from out of the mist of falling snow. They gave me news of movement from Camp IV and a list of requirements. A site for Camp V had not yet been located as the weather over the past few days had interfered with activity above the ridge.

We returned to Camp III in worsening weather. The veil of wind-driven snow became thicker and we could not see beyond a few yards. The fixed ropes were concealed and had to be dug out when discovered. The steps were all filled in with snow and had to be found and remade. I was most conscious all the time that we might make a mistake by using the wrong side of the ridge and get into difficulties. When the storm seemed at its worst and we felt that we must be somewhere near to Camp III, Tashi showed himself a wizard at recognizing the way down. There had been some very good pictures of ‘climbers in the storm’ but I just did not have the enthusiasm or felt we had time enough to work the camera. We arrived back at Camp III plastered with snow. Trevor helped me to clear the tent and make more room but, alas, the tent floor was full of bumps and hollows, my clothes were damp, and there was little room for movement!—I then thought of home comforts—there was certainly little that I could do now about improving the comfort of the tent.

Next morning Trevor and I began to collect our gear together. He was going down to Base with the list of items wanted at Camp IV, and I was going up to Camp IV to join the advance party. There was little room for movement in the tent. The tent floor was inclined to a hollow shape, and the sides were hanging inwards. I let Trevor get ready first—it was easier to lie in my sleeping bag and get ready later. Next door, in the four-man cooking tent, Pemba and Tashi were getting ready for another lift along the ridge. Then Trevor was ready and went down towards Base. I set about collecting and sorting my own gear from the debris. There were books, clothes, paper, etc. left by other members. I took so long that I had to send Tashi and Pemba ahead without me. Everything that I packed or laid aside was damp. I folded my wet sleeping bag and shuddered at the thought of another uncomfortable night. I poked my head outside the tent and was covered with wind-driven snow. I then looked at my watch—it was 11 o’clock—and gave in to the thought of having the tent to myself with the comfort of drying my clothes and perhaps having a good night’s sleep. I then laid my clothes to dry, and filled the hollows of the floor, making a flatter surface to lie upon. The rest of
my day was spent, writing letters, bringing my diary up-to-date, sorting gear and thinking about our activity on the mountain. Tashi and Pemba arrived back about 3 p.m. I immediately felt the warmth of companionship again and lost the empty, silent world inside the tents.

As I was settling down in my sleeping bag at about 6.30 p.m. I was disturbed by the smell of burning Profol, a solid methylated fuel. Tashi had heard a shout from outside and was lighting the stove to prepare a brew for the unknown visitor. Then I heard the second call a few moments later and thought it must be Chris returning from Base. I looked outside and down the ridge but could see nobody in the swirling clouds of snow. Tashi called down to Angtsering Cook at Camp II but got no reply. The voice was much nearer now but the wind and snow muffled the sound and gave no hint of direction. Then there were voices as Tashi greeted the visitor at his end of the two tents. It was Simon. He had left Camp IV at 4 o’clock, thinking that he had seen me on the way up. He had come down to make room for me but had left it so late leaving camp that there had been occasions on the ridge when he doubted being able to find Camp III and thought of having to spend the night in one of the hollows, tunnels or caves on the ridge. He was very tired. Besides the descent from Camp IV, he had also done an early morning lift from the stage dump at the old Camp IVb to Camp IV. He was plastered with snow. Tashi took his crampons off whilst I brushed the snow from his clothes and fitted his gear inside the tent. Simon had a hot meal of soup and tea, followed by a whole tin of fruit which we managed to unearth for him. We talked until 8 o’clock and then shared our few sleeping tablets.

The following morning I was ready and determined to leave Camp III. I had awakened at 5.0 a.m. and packed my gear whilst Simon slept. It was still as awkward as ever in the restricted room, but I had already sorted my gear. I set out at 8 o’clock with Tashi and Pemba breaking trail in the fresh snow. My foam mattress bulging on top of my rucksack caught the projecting ice-formations and I wished for my air mattress which Simon was sleeping on. I cut steps to improve the route and wondered how long they would last before the next snowstorm. During the morning the weather was fair, but by mid-day snow-flakes were spattering our faces. By the time we reached Camp IVb stage dump the snow was falling quite heavily. Then Nima and Nawang Dorje appeared covered in snow. They approached rope length by rope length, and I was impressed by their care and attention as they climbed. When with us in the ‘notch’ they spoke about a shortage of rice and tsampa at Camp IV. I asked Tashi to fetch these items as soon as possible from Camp III. The Sherpas were eating our rations, but their principal bulk food was rice and tsampa.
Nima and Nawang Dorje then roped up again on a short length of climbing rope and led off along the ridge towards Camp IV. I followed behind keeping them well within sight. The route had few deviations and took almost a direct line across the flank of the ridge. The ice covering on the rock slabs was thin in parts and sometimes took quite a lot of effort to negotiate and keep in balance with a firm footing. I reached Camp IV at 2.30 p.m. and was greeted by Dennis, J. S., and Les. We had a social gathering and exchanged climbing news and general conversation. The chief difficulty of climbing above Camp IV had been the poor weather. Every day the route to the ‘whale back’ was covered with fresh snow which had hindered progress. It was then decided to establish a Camp V just before ‘whale back’ and stage onward progress from this camp. Dennis and J. S. would occupy this camp and Les and I with the two Sherpas would support them.

At 9 a.m., May 5, Les and I sat in our tent awaiting Horlicks drink and biscuits after the porridge course. The morning sun had just crept round to us and was beginning to warm the tent and dry our sleeping bags and clothes. They were damp from the drips of melted ice off the tent walls. This was a plague almost every morning. At 10 o'clock we struggled to get outside through the 9 in. gap between our tent and the Sherpas’ tent. The tents were close together for fastening the sleeve entrances and communication between tents. I began to break trail with Dennis, J. S., Les and the two Sherpas behind me and found it very hard work. Where the slope steepened there was a fixed rope and a flag marker to show the line. I dug out the old steps but more often than not made my own. It was heavy going with a load on my back. My gloves were often in the hard snow and soon frozen solid. This did not matter until I wanted to change my grip on the ice-axe and found I could not prise my hand away. After a struggle I got my glove free and thereafter kept my hands away from the slope as much as possible. At about half-way up the slope Dennis took over the task of breaking trail and continued to the top before the ‘whale back’. Here, Dennis and I hacked a camp site from the frozen ground, and erected the two small tents. It was a good place and would do as a permanent camp place. Les and I then followed after the two Sherpas who would by now be almost back at Camp IV, where no doubt they would have tea ready on our arrival. We got back to Camp IV and found Nawang Dorje not feeling very well and no tea—there was no tea supply in camp at all. Simon had said that he would send some up from Camp II, so we would have to wait for it. During the evening I could hear sounds of avalanches. I looked out of the tent several times but the nearest of any consequence came from the far end of the rock band.

The clouds were low and had enveloped Camp IV and the ridge
below. All around was falling snow. The cold wind whipped across
the camp site, pinching our noses, making our eyes water and spattering
us with snow as we peered upwards thinking of lifting loads to Camp V.
There were occasional breaks in the clouds, revealing the upper reaches
of the South face, but visibility was very poor. The uncertainty of
hidden crevasses and the thought of carrying loads through deep snow
persuaded us to make it a working day at Camp IV.

The loads were scattered about camp so we dug them out, then
sorted and stored them near the tents. The snow was piling high
against the tent walls, threatening their collapse. So with a shovel,
plates, bowls and ice axes we relieved the weight of snow. The tent
floors were also levelled by shifting the tents and hacking the ice into
a roughly level surface. For a time afterwards we were thumping the
groundsheets, trying to push the ice lumps beneath into a more
comfortable position.

In the late afternoon we were surprised by the appearance of Tashi
and Pemba. They had climbed from Camp III as previously
instructed, but I had not expected them to do it in this sort of weather.
It was a tonic to see them both and I congratulated them on their fine
performance. Next day the sky was clear of any threatening cloud
and there were patches of blue. The four Sherpas, Les and I, prepared
the remaining loads for lifting to Camp V and then we saw a figure
descending. It was Dennis, curious to know if all was well about Camp
and if we were lifting any loads to Camp V today. He was surprised
that nobody had been to Camp V the day before, since he had been
across the ‘whale back’ and on to the snowfield below the rock band.
The weather had been reasonable most of the time. It appeared that
Camp IV had suffered a local storm. Dennis’s descent had certainly
broken trail for our ascent in the freshly fallen snow, which was a
blessing. So off we plodded through the deep snow, beyond the deep
crevasses, towards the long length of fixed rope which led up the steep
ice slope, and on to the rounded crest before the ‘whale back’. As we
ascended we could see the lonely figure of J. S. climbing across the
side of the ‘whale back’. We concentrated our attention on the slope
and the next available foothold. By the time we reached Camp V Jim
had returned from his excursion. There was too much windslab on
the slopes and he did not relish the insecurity of being carried away on
any chance avalanche.

We all rested awhile at Camp V and talked about our chances on the
rock band which was quite clearly in view. At the nearest point of
access the rocks appeared to be at a relatively easy angle—in fact they
appeared to be broken and accommodating without any challenging
steepness. There was a snow rake leading across and upwards to the
upper snowfield which gave an obvious line of approach. Conversation
waned and the thought of going to Camp VI dump became a certainty after our rest. We roped together in four pairs and went slowly by rope lengths across the side of the 'whale back'. There was windslab which we avoided as much as possible. Below, the slope swept away like a giant helter-skelter between the flanks of the South face and the Central ridge. It was a breath-taking and awe-inspiring sight. The ice and rock debris seemed like the missiles of giants on a giant's playground. We climbed to the crest and on towards the snowfield. The Sherpas rope technique was very good as they climbed carefully across the steep ice and belayed and paid out rope in turn. We wanted to reach the dump as soon as possible as the clouds were gathering in packed formation. At last we reached it—just a place at the edge of the snowfield, but it meant leaving our loads and being able to enjoy unrestricted climbing. Camp VI site was at the back of a wave of ice, about 150 ft. above out position. I felt reasonably satisfied now that our assault was taking shape. There were now ten man loads at Camp VI dump and Camp V giving about 400 lb. of food and gear. We returned towards Camp IV. The weather was deteriorating and we descended quickly; we were tempted by the ease of a glissade down the slope between Camps V and VI, but the yawning space between the face and the ridge deterred us.

The following day, May 9, Les and I went towards Camp IVb stage dump, to pick up any loads. As we were kicking steps down the slopes covered with fresh snow, the sound of shouting floated up to us from down the ridge. I saw two climbers on the flank of the ridge. We continued down and eventually joined Simon and Chris. Simon was planning to leave us. He had to be back in the U.K. in time for his wedding and to arrange for his subsequent departure to South America. He had previously arranged to use Hillary's Expedition plane at the end of May, but had since heard that the plane was immobile due to engine trouble. As John Streetly also had to leave shortly he thought it best to accompany Simon.

Our build-up was now almost ready on the mountain and I was now concerned about the amounts of available food and paraffin in case of sustained effort on the mountain. Then I was surprised to hear Chris ask if we were coming down. Apparently at Base there was opinion that we were having monsoon weather. Hillary's Liaison Officer had sent news about it based on wireless reports. Also, Angtsering Cook had spoken about seeing insects above the snow level and this was a sure sign of the monsoon period. Weather conditions since April 17 had certainly been poor, but surely it was too early for the monsoon; the earliest known was during the middle of May. Anyhow, there was supposed to be a monsoon lull which might give us a chance.

I instructed Chris to join us at Camp IV tomorrow and promised to
send Nima and Nawang down to help him with the lift from Camp III tomorrow. Then we went back to Camp IV with a load which Chris and Simon had dumped the other day on the side of the ridge. Chris went down the ridge and Simon returned with us to Camp IV. Simon discussed the food position, which he had managed in U.K., and also the film which he had been taking on the mountain. We were sorry to see Simon go and sorry, too, about John’s departure. Then Les and I were left to our own cooking devices. Les had no culinary art whatsoever, so my elementary knowledge had to meet our needs until the Sherpas came back. I got cramp and backache bending over the primus for several hours melting snow and cooking food for a three-course meal, but I doubt if the result was worth the discomfort. After Les and I had washed the pans and cleared the rubbish, I was bone weary and glad to crawl into my sleeping bag.

Pemba and Tashi had moved up to Camp V and were relieving Dennis and J. S. of similar cooking troubles. Then the four of them moved loads to the site of Camp VI on top of the ice ‘wave’ at the end of the lower snowfield. The route was steep all the way but straightforward climbing with no technical difficulties.

On the last stretch before Camp VI a fixed rope had been placed, which made progress easier whilst carrying heavy loads. On May 11, Dennis and Tashi occupied Camp VI with a tent and gear. The following day they left camp and climbed up the snowfield. The ice flutings on their right side forced them into a groove of hard snow, making it necessary to cut steps. Tashi insisted on alternate leads. They came to a deep, wide crevasse, covered by soft snow. There was no other way so they had to wade across and hope that the soft snow would not collapse and bury them in the crevasse. It was a relief to get across and on to the shelf leading into the rock band. Here they used the snow rake clearly seen from below. Soft snow on broken rock was the chief difficulty, and not severe rock climbing as had been envisaged from below. Every step had to be pressed firmly into the snow and consolidated for security. Dennis’s feet were feeling like blocks of ice with so much footwork in deep snow. Eventually the rake turned round a corner avoiding the obvious line of ascent up a diedre of rock covered in soft powder snow. Dennis led the way, jamming his crampon points into the rock walls, knowing by the feel of the biting points as to whether his footholds were firm or not. There was no room for a rest or stance, so Dennis had to climb on to the top. He now felt robbed of any feeling of action due to climbing in deep snow conditions. To get out of the diedre at the top, he tore off his gloves and plunged his hands into the deep snow above and hauled himself over the top. Having brought Tashi up the chimney they advanced a short way, but the distance to the upper snowfield was
too far for the time available so they turned back towards Camp VI, fixing a rope in the chimney on their way down.

The next day they pushed the route further forward, as far as the edge of the upper snowfield, where they located a site for Camp VII beneath a line of rock buttresses standing proud from the steep ice slopes. As Dennis and Tashi moved back towards Camp VI, Pemba and J. S. moved over from Camp V to join them. Below Camp V Chris and Les, with Nawang Dorje and myself carrying supporting loads of luxury food, climbed up towards Camp VI dump. N. D. and I left Chris and Les at the dump and just saw the figure of Pemba coming down from Camp VI to carry a load from the dump, but we did not wait even to say hello, but plunged along the ridge and back towards Camps V and IV.

The sky was fine and clear on the following day, May 13, and having decided to review the overall position on the mountain I descended with N. D. to Camps III, II and I and Base, assessing the amounts of fuel and food. At Camp IV there was very little, only two pints of paraffin and about 6 man-days of food. En route to Camp III I met Trevor and Nima carrying two ration boxes to Camp IVb stage dump. Trevor gave me general news and said they now had the walkie-talkies at Camp III and were in communication with Base—previously the sets had not been working properly. Angtsering Cook met us at Camp III with small boiled eggs and cups of tea. It was most enjoyable to meet him again and be greeted with such helpful and cheerful service. He showed me half a gallon of paraffin and about 20 man-days of food. Camp II was desolate except for the ravens who flapped away and on to the gendarme at our approach. About six broken ration boxes and half a gallon of paraffin completed the tally at this camp. At Camp I there was no fuel and a few ration boxes. The paraffin supply was thus the most critical item for a sustained effort on the mountain and the food would have to be supplemented by local produce. The decision to get more food and paraffin depended upon the outcome of the assault party working from Camp VI. Given a fine spell of several days they would no doubt reach the summit. At Base Camp I spent two most anxious days peering through binoculars at the face, not knowing whether to send for food and paraffin or not. Our finances would not allow the easy way of just getting these items, in any case.

On May 13, Chris and Les climbed from Camp VI and occupied Camp VII with a tent and gear. Dennis and Tashi carried supporting loads for them and returned to Camp VI. The tent was pitched on a rock slab at the edge of the snowfield. They were disturbed by some falls of rock and snow about their camp from the rock buttresses above, but there was nothing to cause real concern. The next morning
at 10.30 a.m., not long after the sun had moved round and filtered through the tent canvas, they started to climb across the snowfield and towards the couloir. They moved slowly by rope lengths, belaying on every pitch with their ice-axes, climbing diagonally upwards towards the rock buttresses and then along by the side of the rock where it joined into the snow-ice. It was a steep hard surface on the snowfield and they had to cut steps all the way. In front of them the slopes inclined to the summit rocks which rose sheer for about 2,000 ft. to the summit. It seemed a very long way to cross beneath the rocks and round to the hidden couloir. They felt exposed and very much alone. A small subsidiary rock buttress barred their way, pointing down into the snow slopes like a finger. They climbed across the snow-covered rocks with crampon points feeling for every available crack. On the snow-ice again they were able to make better progress and eventually began to cut steps on a rising incline towards the couloir. It was now 4.30 p.m., and they had been cutting steps for about 6½ hours. There was no great distance now to the foot of the couloir, and they returned to Camp VII arriving back by about 6.30 p.m. It had taken a long time to make the route on the snowfield, but with the ready-made steps progress to a Camp VIII site would be much quicker the next day. At Camp VII they found Tashi and Dennis who had cleared a space in the snow above their camp and pitched a tent. The evening meal was already cooked and gratefully they climbed up to the other tent and joined in the meal. It was a fillip to their spirits to be waited upon rather than have to cook an evening meal. When it was time to descend to their tent, they found the steps slippery and dangerous in the dark without crampons and ice-axes, so they had a top rope from Dennis.

Monday, May 15, Dennis and Tashi left Camp VII at 9.30 a.m. and made very good progress across the snowfield in the steps made the day before by Chris and Les. As the weather had kept fine they did not have the backbreaking job of remaking old steps in fresh snow. By noon they had reached the farthest point of yesterday's traverse and began to make their own tracks. Their progress slowed down, but by 3.0 p.m. they had reached a suitable site for Camp VIII on a rock shelf below a steep rock island in the snowfield. Not far behind were Chris and Les, carrying supporting loads on this stage of the push for the summit. There was some cloud and snowfall about but luckily nothing to hinder progress. By the time Chris and Les had arrived, dumped their loads and set off back to Camp VII, Dennis and Tashi were busy clearing the shelf and making room for their tent. Hewn ice blocks were banked against the shelf sides to broaden the space and the tent was erected with little space for the guy lines. Later in the evening they felt the tent lean over, then suddenly slip away on one
SUMMIT OF NUPTSE.
side. The ice blocks had melted and broken away. The tent was left hanging down the slope with drooping canvas all around. There was still sufficient room for sleeping and the tent felt secure enough. The wind caught the tent, which flapped against its tugging force.

At 7 a.m., May 16, Dennis and Tashi left the tent and began the long ascent up the couloir. It was slow hard work, cutting steps continuously. They took alternate leads, with Tashi always zigzagging in his tracks, whilst Dennis in turn climbed straight up. After 6 hours of step cutting up the couloir they reached the summit ridge with relief. Most of the way had been in the shade giving very cold conditions, and only in the last quarter of the ascent had the sun managed to reach the couloir and warm their bodies and spirits. After a brief rest they started along the summit ridge. They now traversed on the North side of Nuptse, and climbed on soft snow over rocks. The angle was relatively easy and they made quite good progress. They managed to keep on snow all the time. Two minor ridges barred their way, and beyond they could now see the summit, which seemed to be miles away. Tashi advised their return. The hour was late, 3.30 p.m., and to go on might mean a bivouac. They were enticed along to the first minor ridge to see how far beyond the summit lay. The next minor ridge was not far away and when they reached it, what a terrific and heartening sight to see the summit, only a few rope lengths away. They reached this summit but found it false, however the true summit was just a short distance away. At 4.15 p.m. they were on the top, there was nothing in front that went higher. The sides of Mt. Everest were a black mass holding little snow. Lhotse was wreathed in a scarf of cloud. The ridge dropped away towards the South ridge, with a sharp and very broken crest. It was certainly a very long way towards the South ridge. If the attack had come from that direction it certainly would have given the expedition a formidable task. Directly beneath their position the northern slopes swept away and down into the dark abyss of the Western Cwm. Beyond the Everest horseshoe stretched the brown mountains of Tibet. They remained on the top for about a quarter of an hour and then set off back down the ridge. They were tired and weary, and even in the steps in the couloir there was no sense of relief until they had reached Camp VIII at 7.0 p.m. They found Chris and Les, J. S. and Pemba in two tents below their camp. Ledges had been cut out of the slope beneath the rock shelf. The small Italian assault tent had lost a pole down the slope and one side was drooping at a most uncomfortable angle. The end of the tent was hanging down the slope, and Les and J. S. were finding it most uncomfortable inside, since they were virtually inside a close fitting envelope of canvas.

At 6.45 a.m., Les and Chris left Camp VIII followed shortly by
J. S. and Pemba at 7.0 a.m. They made very good time up the couloir arriving at the summit ridge by 10.0 a.m. They were on the top by 11.30 a.m. and all back in Camp VIII by 2.0 p.m. Climbing conditions had been much the same as on the previous day and they had made very good time on the ready-made track. They were tired and glad to get back to Camp VIII, and their thoughts were now on the return journey back to Base. The four climbers returned along the traverse of the snowfield. Les slipped off the track several times but managed to hold himself steady with his ice-axe. Between camps Pemba took his goggles off because of the difficulty of seeing the steps. He got temporary snow blindness and so had to stay behind at Camp IV.

Over the remaining days, Trevor and I with Pemba, Nima, Nawang Dorje and Angtsering Cook cleared the mountain from Camp VI to Base of gear and any food which would be of use on the return journey to Katmandu. At Camp II we were met by Tashi and Taki who had come up to help clear the supplies on the mountain. I took the opportunity of sharing gear amongst the Sherpas. We later brought the fixed rope down from between Camps II and I for the Monastery at Thyangboche. All the other fixed ropes between the camps, including the rope ladder, were left behind.

On May 24, we prepared to leave Base. The porters had arrived the previous evening and with the Sherpas they were now packing the gear and food. The weather was perfect with blue sky and warm sunshine. Over the past few days the weather had been cloudy but still there was no sign of the monsoon, which did not, in fact, appear until the beginning of June. As we left Base Camp, and several times on our way down the Nuptse glacier, I looked back at the South face but at no time did it appear as dramatic as when we first came this way not knowing the outcome of our endeavour. In the flat lighting effect the face was without any dominant feature. No longer had it snow in every available nook and cranny but was almost as dry as the surrounding countryside thirstily awaiting the monsoon.

Expedition members:

J. Walmsley
Chris J. S. Bonington
Les Brown
Simon G. M. Clark
Dennis P. Davis
Jim Lovelock
G. John Streetly
Dr. J. Swallow
C. T. Jones

Angtsering, Sirdar
Tashi
Angtsering, Cook
Nawang Dorje
Nima Tensing
Ang Pemba
Taki, Cook-boy
‘Edgar’, Cook-boy
### Camp heights:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camp</th>
<th>Height (ft)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base Camp</td>
<td>17,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glacier Dump</td>
<td>17,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp I</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp II</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp III</td>
<td>19,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp IV</td>
<td>20,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Camp VI</td>
<td>22,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp VII</td>
<td>23,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp VIII</td>
<td>23,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit</td>
<td>25,850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The camp heights are approximate and taken mainly by observation with the help of a map.