

MOUNTAINEERING IN THE CAUCASUS, 1929.

BY UGO DI VALLEPIANA.

THE most difficult part of the expedition, and one which gave us the most worry and trouble, testing our patience to the utmost, was the obtaining of passports for Russia. We had decided to start on July 1, but mid-June saw us still waiting and wondering whether we should not arrange another trip on more modest lines. At last, however, through the kind offices of General Vacchelli, Commissioner Extraordinary of the Royal Geographical Society of Italy, of Signor Cottini, Federal Secretary of the Milan Fascio, and of Signor Grassi, Vice-President of the Milan Section of the Italian Alpine Club, the long-wished-for permit was granted, and our kit being ready, we were able to take the train on July 1 as previously arranged.

To insure the success of a trip of this kind, two essentials are called for; first and foremost the choice of one's companions, and in this I could not have been more fortunate. The initiator was Signor Leopold Gasparotto, a lawyer, of the Milan Section, and Mr. Ralph Herron, of the Florence Section, both Members of the Italian Academic Alpine Club. To these were added a Bavarian named Rolf Singer, and myself who for many years, indeed from the time I was a student, had longed to make such a trip. Perfect agreement reigned between us, greatly contributing to the successful issue of the expedition. The second essential is the knowledge that one has everything necessary and nothing superfluous, for the great enemy is weight. The four of us had not more than 350 kilos of luggage among us, divided up into 12 sacks and one case. It included a tent for the base camp, two small tents, rations of foodstuffs and sea-biscuits sufficient for 30 days, Primus stoves and petroleum (this we had bought in Russia), photographic cameras, personal effects and mountaineering kit. Little though this might be, I should probably take less were I to repeat the trip, a thing I hope to do at some future time.

During the railway journey we took advantage of the various stops, when trains had to be changed, to pay a flying visit to a few of the towns passed through, employing speedy motor cars. Thus we now have a nodding acquaintance with Vienna, Cracow, Leopoli and Kiev. On July 8, at 3 o'clock in the morning, we reached Naltshik, the last station to be found on the northern slopes of the central group of the Caucasus. Our usual Sunday trips had sufficiently hardened us to stand the seven days' journey in a third-class compartment.

To the S., at four days' march, a silver altar sparkled in the distant dawn, as if seeking to defend itself from the unhallowed



Photo, U. di Vallepiana.

BOGKHOBASHI
from the *Point of the Italians*.

eyes of the madding crowd. A majestic triptych, upreared upon a dull green tableland of low-lying hills, stood clear-cut beneath the sky of two continents: Dychtau, Koshtantau and Giulchi. The last of these three peaks seemed to seek a unique loneliness, surpassing all its rivals with its beauty. Hitherto the lure had been the renown of its enchanting loveliness and its dauntless resistance to man. To us profane mystics, the object of our desires appeared even more beautiful and grander than we had ever dreamed, while, despite the distance, the difficulties besetting our path to the summit could be anticipated if not actually seen. Thus, at first sight on a dewy July morning of 1929, did our goal impose respect. Nor could it be otherwise, for it was quite impossible that the chief summit of a separate group of mountains, hitherto unscaled, should not contain in itself all those virtues that the mountaineer seeks. One cannot conceive an important conquest without a struggle.

'The noble peak of Giulchi' is the expression used by Freshfield.¹ The history of the early explorations of the high Caucasian peaks is interwoven with English names. Nevertheless, among them is one noted and dear to us Italians: Vittorio Sella. After the war² came the Germans and a fearless band of Italians. The first attempts on the highest peaks were made in 1868, when Kasbek and the E. summit of Elbruz were scaled by Freshfield; six years later, in 1874, Grove reached the W. and higher summit of Elbruz. Then came the turn of Koshtantau, Shkara, Dychtau and Ushba and, little by little, all the central range was explored, as were also the chief summits of each single group. One only did man leave untouched. To the E. of the Cherek, in the wild Balkar district, springs an interminable row of crests. They are the beginning of the Giulchi-Sugan group, a spur of the main chain, facing at its E. end Stir-Digor on the left bank of the River Uruk. To the N. the mountains sink towards the plain, but before ceasing

¹ I may be allowed to call attention to the fact that I was, on my first visit to the Caucasus in 1868, so much attracted by the picturesque shape of Giulchi that I made a sketch of it which appears on p. 411 of my *Travels in the Central Caucasus* (Longman, 1869). In the Appendix to *The Exploration of the Caucasus*, 1896, I made the following reference to Giulchi (vol. ii, p. 269):—

'Giulchi, 14,680 ft., is a fine mountain very precipitous towards Karaul, but probably accessible by a glacier on its S.E. face that is drained by a torrent forded at the W. foot of the Shtuluvsek. It culminates in two snow-points and a rock of almost equal height. It may be accessible on the N. side, of which nothing is known to climbers.'—*D. W. F.*

² Previous to the war, among others Herren Rickmers and Pfann led very successful expeditions, as did Signori Piacenza and Ronchetti.—*Editor.*

altogether, they split up into several minor groups, flinging upwards long dolomitic walls, of over 3600 m., capped by towers, pinnacles and gigantic castles. Sella declared that he had been greatly impressed in 1889 by this group of high mountains covered with massive glaciers and beetling cliffs lying between Digoria and Balkaria. Above Stir-Digor are to be found the lower crests, gradually increasing in height, appearance and difficulty till they reach the dominating mass of the Bogkhobashi Mountains, the bold Doppakhntau and the lofty Sugan, ascended by Sella in 1896.³

The chain is divided into two parts. To the W. of Sugan, 4490 m., a deep depression separates this group from that of the Giulchi lying still further to the W.

It is the Urziwachi Pass, an attractive col, covered with the only easy glacier in the neighbourhood, a fine open stretch from which flows an enormous river of ice strewn on its lower slopes by detritus, gradually collected from the glaciers on the E. slopes of Giulchi. From the said col a valley takes its name, running almost in a straight line as far as Balkar. The two systems are therefore quite distinct and separate. The region is vast, yet it was only in 1909 that Professor Vittorio Ronchetti, with Dr. Colombo and the guide Confortola, made the welkin ring with the music of his iron-shod mountaineering boots as they struck the rocky crags of the Urziwachi. He then made his way over the glaciers towards the ridge away to the N. of Giulchi. But fortune was unkind to him, and he had to resume his march towards the distant Adai Khokh by way of the Urziwachi Pass, after having climbed a point standing immediately above it. The Urziwachi Valley had yielded its secrets, but though Professor Ronchetti returned several times it was neglected by both explorers and mountaineers, and there is not more than the slightest reference to it in any of the works of Freshfield, Grove, Déchy, or Merzbacher. It was now left to us to complete the good work begun by others.

Naltshik is too small and uncivilized to be named a town; it is too populous to be called a village. To-day it is reached by rail, but beyond the station, immediately after a small beflowered square has been passed, there is no sign of a road, but only a vast stretch of waste land ploughed into deep ruts by the local carts.

With respect to the principal chain, Naltshik is in somewhat the same position as Ivrea is to Mont Blanc. There is some sort of a tourist organization, viz. two so-called 'bases' that are something between a very humble inn and a mountain hut, standing in the middle of the town. One of them is run by a Touring Agency, the other by the Proletariat Excursion Society. We put up at this latter place and received every attention. At these 'bases' are to be found some fine types of Soviet tourists. It is necessary

³ *A.J.* 18, 473; 25, 462; the latter furnishes many valuable references.

to bear in mind that touring and mountaineering in Russia, with very few exceptions (from what I have seen there are extremely few real climbers), are most primitive, both with regard to equipment and ideas. We seem to be back in Toepfer's times, when a mountaineering excursion meant nothing more than a walk to see the scenery. These Russian tourists are extremely sociable, not only with the very occasional foreigner with whom they are glad to carry on a long conversation, ending, however, always by becoming political propaganda, but also among themselves. They usually make their trips in large parties, and pretty nearly always go in couples, the lady partners being very useful, if for no other reason than in preparing the meals!

We lost a day searching for a kind of touring permit which we could very well have done without. Then one morning we loaded our belongings and ourselves on to a characteristic little springless cart and set off. The journey was not over long. It lasted about two days, but was so varied and interesting that we never had time to get bored. The road was every now and again broken by some torrent or river in whose waters herds of lazy buffaloes sought to cool themselves and to escape from the intense summer heat. The crossing of the rivers always presented, I will not go so far as to say grave anxiety, but, at least, much uncertainty. If we had to ford them, it usually happened that in mid-stream the horses refused to budge further. On the other hand, where torrents were crossed by bridges the latter were so badly put together and swayed to such an extent that we feared they would collapse.

We spent our first night by an idyllic little lake, similar to those on the Carso, thence we continued on our way, occasionally passing natives who seemed to ignore the invention of the wheel, for they made use of a kind of rough sledge. Later we entered a deep fantastic gorge leading to the secluded Balkar district and Kunnium, the last village of the Cherek Valley.

Here we were received with every kindness by the Mayor of the place (*Ispolkom*), who took a lot of convincing that we were Italians and not Germans. I say 'a lot,' because in Russia, and especially in the Caucasus, they regard all foreigners as Germans owing to the numbers who go there. For instance, this year no fewer than five German parties were expected, though only two of the expeditions came off. The Mayor gave us the choice of two forms of accommodation, one on payment and the other free. We chose the latter, and, therefore, installed ourselves in a schoolhouse, quite deserted at this season. We were, of course, the object of the most curious attention on the part of all the boys and girls of the village, for whom everything we did was a cause for wonderment or merriment. However, they were not long before they decided that we were no different from other men, and left us accordingly.

Kunnium is a typical village of this part of the N. Caucasus. It certainly cannot be called beautiful. Built of puddled earth,

the flat roofs of the houses are of the same colour as the ground, which renders them almost invisible, even when quite close. An aeroplane could easily fly over the village without discerning the slightest sign of habitation. The buildings, save for a couple of more modern erections used as a school, council chamber, etc., have all the characteristics of the houses of Central Asia. There are, however, a few peculiar towers, some of which in former times served for defence and others as tombs.

In some respects Kunnium may be regarded as an industrial centre, though it must be clearly understood, on a *very* small scale indeed. There are any number of extremely primitive water-mills and a few hand-loom. What the former were for I could not find out, for the entire countryside is so poor and bare and the rye-fields so few and far between that a couple of hand-stones, as used in Abyssinia, would suffice to grind all the flour these people might require. Weaving is a domestic industry, the women making a rough kind of cloth similar to that produced in Sardinia, where it is called *orbace*.

The origin of these mountain people—called sometimes Mountain Tartars—is obscure. They are generally held to be a Turkish colony from Central Asia interpolated between the Ossetes on the E. and the Kabardan Circassians on the W. By religion they are Mohammedans and look to Mecca as their spiritual home. They seem—the men at least—to have lost the traditional jealousy of their race. Indeed, on several occasions we were able to take photographs of their womenfolk, few of whom could lay claims to beauty. They showed, however, a feminine desire to look their best, several of them rushing to their homes to get some personal ornament such as a silver belt, while the men showed much pleasure in our admiration of their womenkind. They are, as a rule, very fine fellows. Perhaps the hard life they are obliged to lead has something to do with it. All, however, have a certain air of dignified pride natural to the Oriental living far from the seaports. Once a week the Mayor calls a meeting of the notables of the village, and since all consider themselves such, the result is a general assembly in the most absolute sense of the word. It offers an unequalled chance for studying local types and for taking photographs. In accordance with ancient tradition the men would like to go about armed, but being no longer allowed by Moscow to carry guns, they content themselves with wearing Cossack cartridge breast-belts and a broad dagger something between a long knife and a sabre. From my own experience, however, I found them the most peaceful and kindly people in the world.

It may be remembered that they refused to join in any of the struggles for freedom made by their neighbours in the nineteenth century.⁴

⁴ See *The Exploration of the Caucasus*, i, 162.

To convey our belongings to the base camp it was necessary to provide ourselves with donkeys. The word having gone round, a dozen, at least, were brought for our inspection, each more bandy-legged and worn-out than the other. Bargaining was a long job; at last, however, all was settled and three of the animals, which turned out to be even worse than they looked, became ours. We left some of our luggage behind at Kunnium, not wishing to overload ourselves needlessly. We set off over the first bare slopes, then for a day and a half we followed the Urziwachi Valley, where at about 2400 m. we pitched our base camp, sending back our donkeys in charge of a driver who had followed us to this point.

Giulchi reared its lofty head above us, and as our aim was to climb it, we at once turned our undivided attention to it. As previously stated, it was the most important unclimbed peak in the Caucasus. I say the most important inasmuch as it was the last peak, the chief summit of a group standing by itself that had so far resisted the repeated attacks of preceding parties. Indeed, only a few days previously to our assault a climbing party of three Germans, whose tracks we found on the glacier, had renewed the attempt but had not succeeded.⁵ The first few days were spent in spying out the lay of the land and trying to find out which side of the stronghold offered the fewest difficulties. We soon convinced ourselves that the way others had declared to be the easiest, viz. the N. arête, extremely long and serrated, was not suited to our purpose. Then one fine day, after having climbed up to an unnamed saddle christened 'Forcella Sugan,' joining the Urziwachi to the Psegan Valley, we thought we discerned in Giulchi, rising before us, the weak point we had been seeking for so many days: the S.E. face. This is a huge wall of ice rising from a col which we named the Giulchi Pass. The approach was not easy owing to the number of crevasses in the way. The face or wall itself, that is to say the part rising from the col, is about 500 m. high and leads to a kind of saddle situated between the peaks of the mountain. From where we stood the face of the wall appeared to be frightfully steep, but a more careful examination revealed a kind of gangway amid the séracs by which one could climb. We decided accordingly to make the attempt. Following the best traditions of warfare the attack, after this accurate preparation, was carried out with the greatest determination.

On the 24th our two small advanced camp tents were pitched on the Giulchi Pass at about 3900 m. It was a wonderful night, and although the nearness of battle warned me that it was wiser to take advantage of the few hours' sleep that the short night allowed, I felt too happy not to want to enjoy things awake. At 3.40 A.M. we were already on the move, and then by dint of hard climbing and the use of our crampons, found ourselves on one of the two

⁵ *A.J.* 42, 102.

peaks at 9.15, whence we soon climbed on to the other. The highest peak (4475 m.) is the rocky one, and on this we erected a cairn. The other two snow-clad peaks vary in altitude according to the thickness of the shelving cornice; therefore the rocky peak must be reckoned the summit. We stayed up there more than two hours in order to enjoy the view which, perhaps, we might never see again, and then, returning by the way we had come, regained our tents in fairly quick time. During the descent we had twice to lower ourselves with the doubled rope on the glacier, because the sun had partially destroyed the steps previously cut and rendered dangerous and insecure the enormous séracs among which we were descending.

To express any opinion as to the difficulty of the ascent is not easy because, as is well known, every first ascent, especially in a completely unknown country, offers a number of general troubles which greatly influence one's opinion as to the degree of real technical *difficulty*. Moreover, one does not go to the Caucasus with a view to accomplishing purely spectacular ascents. The aim is far higher and the satisfaction gained of quite another nature. However, I think the climb may be likened to that of Mont Blanc by way of Mt. Maudit, or perhaps Monte Rosa by the Macugnaga face, with this difference, that the descent must be made over the same ground as the ascent. Furthermore, it is necessary to bear in mind that all ascents in the Caucasus, especially if made, as in our case, without guides or local carriers (who do not exist, and if they did, would be useless for lack of the right footwear to reach any higher ground than the upper camps), have to be made while carrying full kits. Setting up an advance camp means loading oneself up with sacks weighing 40-45 lbs. Ascents, too, the length of which cannot be known beforehand, must never be attempted without providing oneself with the necessaries for an unforeseen bivouac.

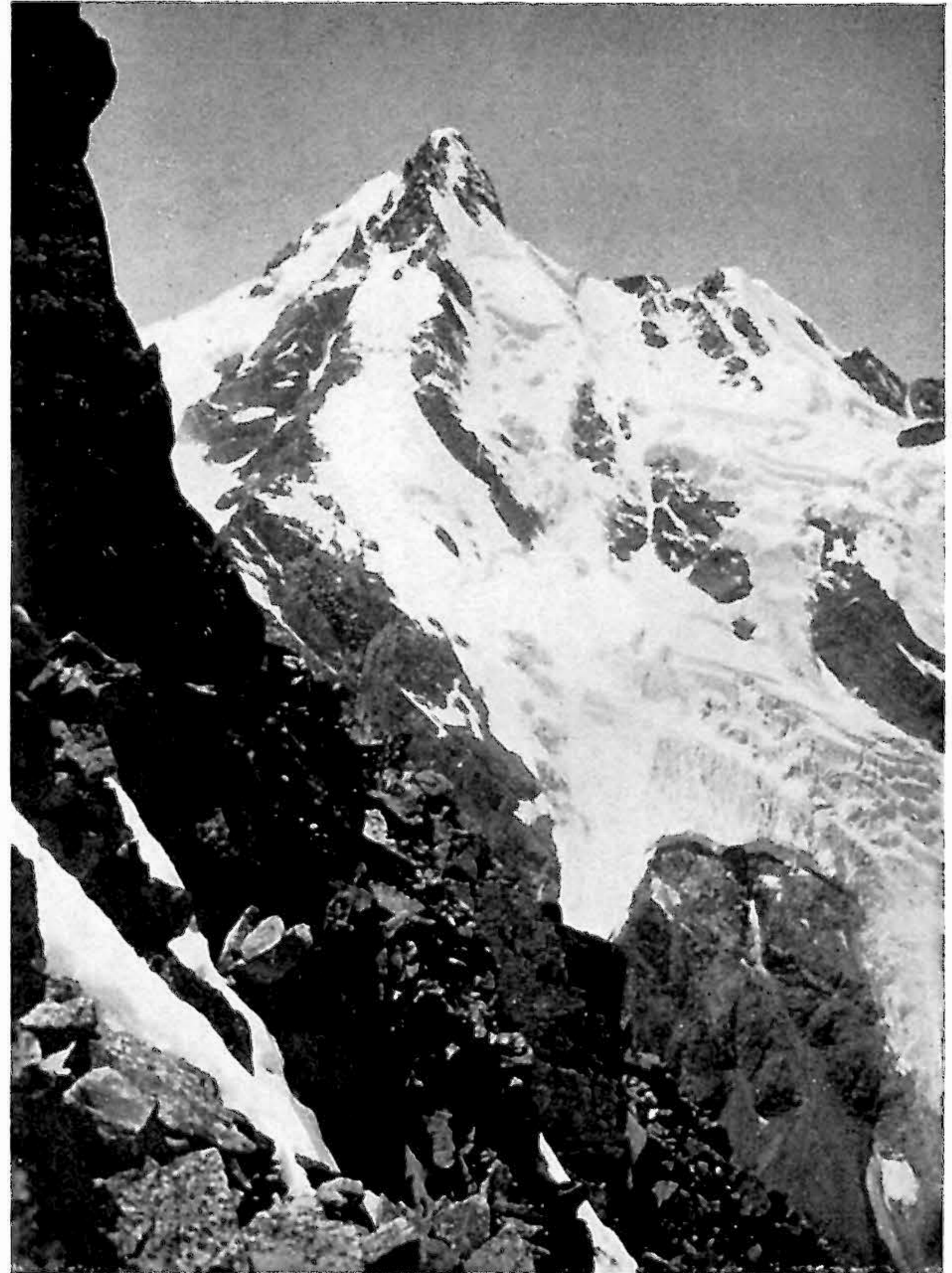
Moreover, in such slightly illustrated country, the photographic side is far more important and interesting than it is in the Alps. Indeed, I might almost say that whereas with us, owing to the magnificent photographs available everywhere, one has scarcely any wish to take photographs, in the Caucasus photography becomes a necessity. It is natural, therefore, that a fairly large camera should be taken, and this, of course, will add materially to the dead weight to be carried on one's back. Personally, I greatly regret not having taken with me a long focus camera, though I did take a 9×12 instead of my usual smaller apparatus.

On our return to the Giulchi Pass, one of us began to suffer from inflammation of the eyes. As the victim was obliged to lie up, I set out on the following day with my friend Gasparotto to climb the rocky height standing opposite Giulchi and S. of our col. It is an extremely beautiful peak and reminds one of the Matterhorn from one side and of the Crast' Agüzza from the other. From the

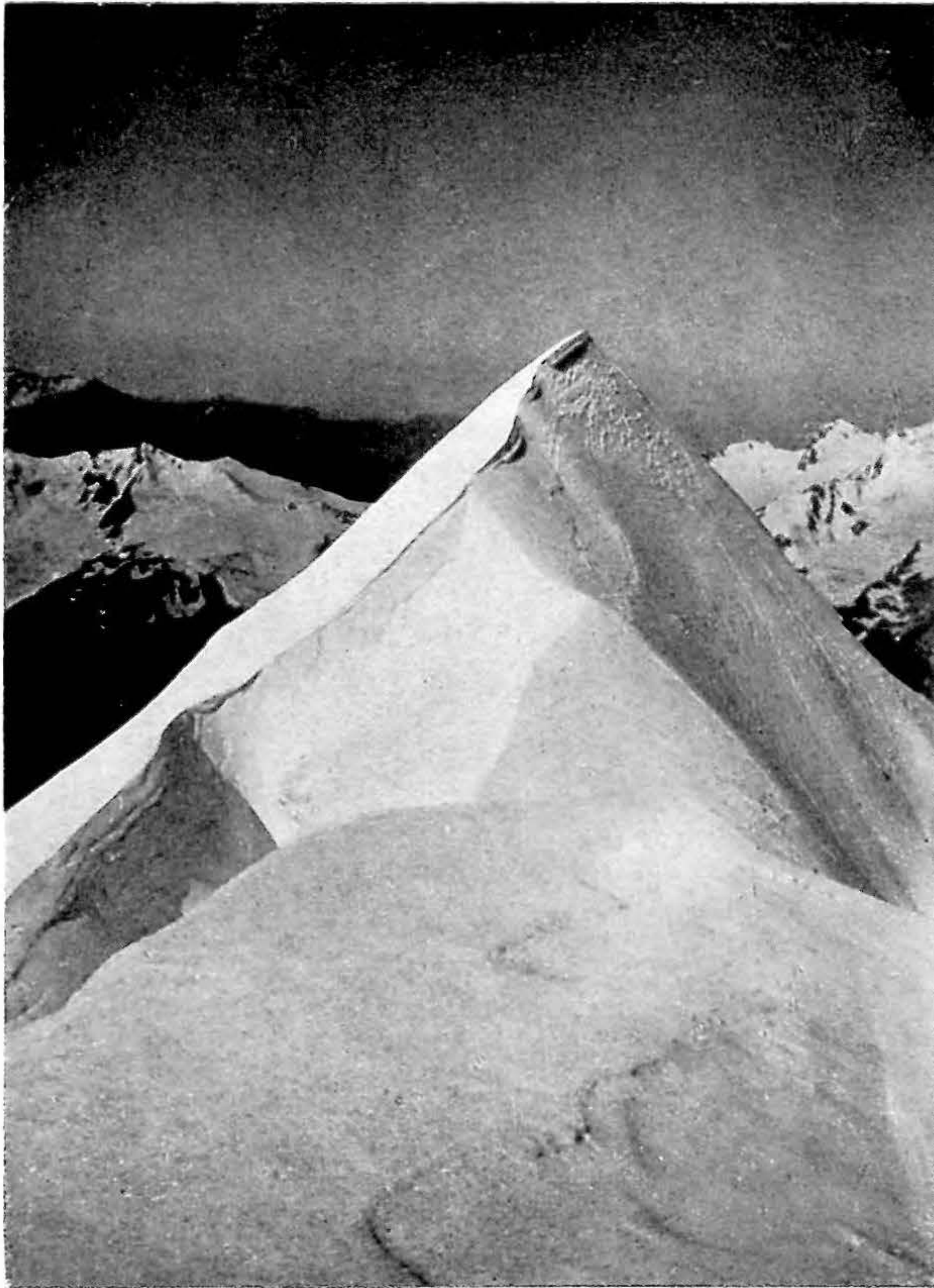


Photos, U. di Vallepiana.

GIULCHI from "PUNTA RONCHETTI."
(Showing Route.)

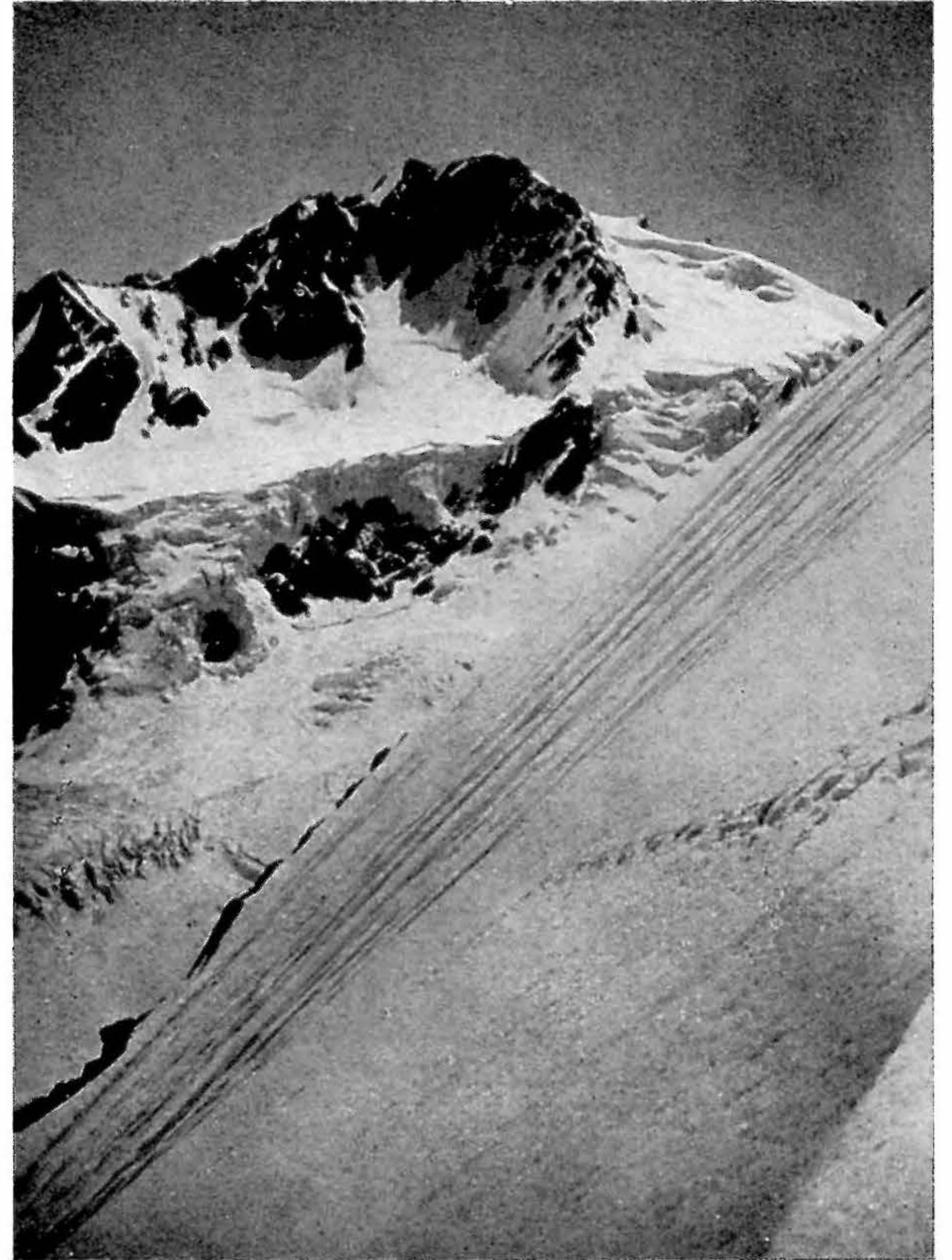


GIULCHI from SUGAN Pass.



Photos, U. di Vallepiana.

GIULCHI, Snow Peak
(from the Rocky Peak).



SUGAN from "RONCHETTI Pass."

beginning of our early explorations we had eyed it longingly. Starting from the Giulchi Pass, we passed on to the glacier round the N.E. face, then through séracs and a steep slope of ice reached a col, whence we went E.N.E. along the crest and over some interesting rocks, one of which we called 'The Bronze Horse,'⁶ arriving on the summit (about 4200 m.). To it and to the col below we gave the names of 'Punta' and 'Colle Ronchetti,'⁷ in honour of the Italian who first examined the possibilities of climbing Giulchi. 'Punta Ronchetti' provides a magnificent view; Giulchi, just conquered, is especially well seen. We never tired of photographing it from every possible standpoint: sometimes shining clear, at others veiled by mists. The face of Giulchi climbed by us, when seen from opposite appears almost impossible: in any case, much more difficult than it really is.

How long did we stay up there? Who shall say? But we suddenly perceived that it was becoming late and had to beat a hasty retreat. 'Punta Ronchetti,' considered in the same light as Giulchi, may be compared to the Matterhorn from the Swiss side.

The day following, viz. the 27th, we struck our Giulchi Pass camp and returned to the base. The descent was far from easy, both because the bridges over the crevasses had been worn away by the hot sun and because our companion, whose eyes were still bandaged owing to the painful inflammation, had to be guided by touch and helped with ropes. Only where the route was more than usually difficult and dangerous did he force himself to keep his eyes open.

At the base camp, a place of sheer delight, of sybaritism, of hyper-nutrition and . . . shaving, we found a party of Russian excursionists who were very kind and very simple, but extremely badly off for equipment. They took the most lively interest in our mountaineering outfit. For our part we were much more interested in the kitchen, for we had been living on the holes of our belts for some time and were eager for a good square meal.

When we had been prospecting around for a route up Giulchi we had noticed, facing the Sugan Mountain and not unlike it in shape, a fine isolated peak seeming to afford an excellent coign of vantage whence to observe the surrounding country. By common consent we named it the Little Sugan. Its height, as given on the map, is 3900 m.

On July 29, after having crossed the previously attained Sugan Saddle, I climbed Little Sugan by the W. arête with Gasparotto and Singer, taking a rather fine obstacle in our stride. On our

⁶ A tooth on the summit ridge of Monte Disgrazia is thus somewhat fancifully named.—*Editor*.

⁷ These 'personal' and 'Italian' names were given doubtless for the convenience of the party only. They are most unlikely to be perpetuated on any Russian map.—*Editor*.

return we pitched camp with the intention of continuing to Sugan on the following day, but the weather, which was decidedly bad, drove us down. So we returned to Kunnium to enjoy the favours of civilization, materialized by fresh eggs and pipe tobacco supplied to us by an old Persian trader stranded there by some freakish whim of fate. Just at this time a most happy event took place; 'happy' in the real sense of the word, for one of our donkeys presented us with a descendant, thus increasing the number of our family.

Here the party divided: Herron and Singer wished to cross the main chain and make a trip into Suanetia. Gasparotto and I had still an old score to settle in the high Psegan Valley. From the top of the Little Sugan we had discovered another mountain, some 4300 m., and unmarked on the map. In short, it was what might be called a pure virgin, a species daily becoming scarcer among Caucasian peaks.

Consequently, on the morning of August 1 one of our donkeys was laden with a light tent and stores for a week, and we set off on our way. We passed through a wide grassy col, rich in pastureland and enclosed on the N. by a characteristic wall of a typically dolomitic nature. It stood out in strange and striking contrast, making us almost believe we were on the Sella Pass admiring the E. face of the Langkofel. From here we made our way, drenched to the skin by numerous showers, into the Psegan Valley. Near the ford of a mountain torrent we found a group of wandering shepherds. Their most striking feature was their absolute lack of curiosity. One might have thought they had done nothing but meet mountaineers during their wanderings. I cannot even say that they deigned to glance at us; what they did do was to pass as if we were invisible, and as if they had learnt from their peregrinations that nothing exists at all. I could not help contrasting their behaviour with that of some of the folk staying in our villages even to-day when climbers are about, and I came to the conclusion that I preferred the nomads.

We continued on our way up the valley; a deserted sheepfold seemed to offer us shelter but it was too dirty, so we pursued our way until 7 P.M., pitching our tent at the foot of the glacier. Nearly every stitch of clothing we had was soaking wet from the rain, but next morning a luminous dawn and a fantastic view of beetling peaks, almost unknown for the greater part, fully repaid us for our toil and wetting. Whilst Gasparotto undertook the thankless task of striking the tent, loading the moke and seeing to everything being carried higher up, I, with the excuse of photography and of seeking a route leading to our unknown peak, slipped off to explore among the crevasses of the glacier over which were scattered huge erratic boulders. Unusual gaiety marked my return, for I had found a practicable way up the mountain and Gasparotto had both the camp and supper ready.

On August 3, at 2.45 A.M., we started first by way of the moraine of the glacier, then up a precipitous slope followed by an awful stretch of loose stones, and finally along an inclined channel running through mounds of débris. This brought us to a col in the N. arête of our peak at a height of about 3900 m., which we called the 'Col of the Italians,' as we were both of that nationality and the first to stand there. To the S. our peak, festooned with snow and corniches, rose high above us. To the N. were grey bare mountains characteristic of Central Asia. The peak we wished to climb appeared to divide two worlds. We descended on to the glacier from the opposite slope and then, having crossed it, came to a ridge which, though easy, was dangerous because of terribly friable rock. This led to the upper plateau forming the summit. As seems to be usual in the Caucasus, there were two summits instead of one, so we climbed both: the 'Point of the Italians,' about 4200 m., was conquered. From 11.30 till 1.45 in the afternoon we stayed up there to enjoy our victory, the blessings of height, of absolute solitude and the view of the Doppakhntau and Bogkhobashi. For the present there is no need to be afraid of cutting oneself with pieces of broken bottles! With a glance of farewell we began our descent, reaching the tent by 7 P.M.

After a day spent in rest and photography, we returned to Kunnium where we sold our moko for a mere song. What a job it was to get rid of the natives who flocked round us, envying and admiring our mountain boots which they wanted to buy at all costs! Taking one of the usual little carts, we made our way to Naltshik. Along the road we met some workmen to whom we offered cigarettes. In exchange for our kindness one of the men donned a fearsome kind of devil's mask and improvised in our honour a *saraband*, consisting chiefly of wild jumping and much skipping about.

At Naltshik we separated. My engagements called me back to Italy. Attractive as was the idea of ascending Elbruz on ski, the wish to travel through Russia as far as Moscow and St. Petersburg and see a country organized on lines so different from ours, was even stronger. Gasparotto thought otherwise, and so was obliged to complete the first ski ascent of Elbruz, 5629 m., without me. As I took no part in the venture I cannot say anything upon the subject. The only thing I will state is that to him and to him alone belongs the honour of this first ski climb. It is true that in 1913 two Swiss made the attempt, getting no farther than the col between the two summits.

The valley leading to Elbruz differs from others on the N. of the Caucasus, not only because it is in parts rich in tree growth, but also because some of the native buildings greatly resemble our Alpine cottages. Besides, this district is relatively the most frequented, so much so that there is a 'base' at the end of the valley belonging to the Soviet Club, and on the shoulder of Elbruz, at about 4000 m. up, there has been erected a primitive sort of

hut. Gasparotto, finding himself friendless, as Herron and Singer were late in getting back from Suanetia, made the first attempt alone, reaching a height of 4900 m. by way of a difficult glacier beyond the Priud hut which, he tells me, is somewhat like our 'fixed bivouacs' in the Alps, without, however, their equipment. Bad weather drove him down again. Meeting with two Austrians, Slezak and Tomascek, he arranged to make the attempt with them. Thus on August 13, after overcoming many difficulties, he set foot on the second summit of Elbruz, the highest mountain in Europe: a 'first' ascent on ski.

I had been touring meanwhile, visiting the chief towns of Russia and highly interested in the many things I had seen and observed. On August 24 I got back to Milan and, on the Monday, the 26th, resumed my daily occupation; for the superiority of mountaineering over all other sports is that it never becomes, and, let us hope never will become, however mildly, a profession. It offers no scope for profit, only a means of obtaining perfect satisfaction.

[We wish to express our indebtedness to Count di Vallepiana for his interesting paper.—*Editor*, 'A.J.']

VARIOUS NOTES.

THE SOUTH-EAST FACE OF MONT MAUDIT.

THE bad weather of August 1929 disappointed a number of mountain lovers eager to make big ascents in the Alps, but fortunately an unusually long spell of fine weather was enjoyed almost at the end of the season. At the beginning of August my friend, Mr. F. S. Smythe, attempted to work out a new direct route up the Italian precipices of Mont Maudit, with Messrs. Parry and Harrison of the Scottish Mountaineering Club. They bivouacked at about 1000 ft. up the cliff, but, assailed by a heavy snowstorm during the night, were forced down to Courmayeur at daybreak. On the moraine on the E. side of the Brenva Glacier, Mr. Parry had the misfortune to hurt his knee so badly that he had to be carried down to Courmayeur. Two days later it was arranged that I should take the place of Parry, but owing to continuous bad weather, I was unlucky enough to be unable to make the trip in such congenial company. This intended expedition ended gloomily, and a disheartened party returned to England.

On my arrival again at Chamonix at the beginning of September, I heard that some Italians were after the same climb.¹ The weather

¹ The first ascent was made on August 4, 1929, *A.J.* 41, 403.—*Editor.*