

THE GERMAN GARHWAL-HIMALAYA EXPEDITION, 1938

BY RUDOLF SCHWARZGRUBER

THE German Garhwal-Himalaya Expedition, which was sent out by the Deutscher Alpenverein, consisted of five climbers with a medical officer: Professor Rudolf Schwarzgruber (leader), Edi Ellmauthaler, Dr. Walter Frauenberger, Toni Messner and Leo Spannraft, with Dr. Rudolf Jonas. None of them had had previous Himalayan experience, but three had spent two climbing seasons in the Caucasus. In India the party was joined by the transport officer, Lieut. S. H. J. Whitehead, Royal Garhwal Rifles.

In choosing the district for the expedition we had two points in mind: first, that the objective should be as little explored as possible, and secondly that the cost of the expedition should be kept as low as possible. In Marcel Kurz's monograph on the Himalaya the Gangotri district is mentioned as a worthy aim for an expedition of moderate size. After reading Marco Pallis' report¹ on his 1933 expedition to Gangotri, and after consulting Col. Kenneth Mason, we decided to make the mountains bordering the Gangotri Glacier the objective of our expedition.

In our preparatory work we were greatly supported by all British and Indian authorities concerned. Thanks to them, and especially to Capt. M. W. White, 9th Gurkha Rifles, who was to have been our transport officer but could not get leave as late as August to November, preparations went smoothly. When we left Germany on August 2, the Himalayan Club had already appointed Lieut. Whitehead to act as our transport officer. Arriving on August 15, we started from Mussoorie on the 20th with fifty-nine coolies and seven Sherpas, Lieut. Whitehead and our quartermaster Dr. Jonas having despatched another thirty coolies two days previously. The bulk of our coolies came from Lansdowne, with a smaller number from Rajpur and Mussoorie. The Lansdowne coolies proved excellent throughout the whole outward journey, so that we engaged them again for the return journey. Undoubtedly the smooth running of transport arrangements was due to the fact that the transport officer knew the coolies before they came on the expedition, and that he had that personal contact with them which is so essential for getting the best work out of them.

At Mussoorie we had the opportunity of meeting Major G. Osmaston, of the Survey of India, who supplied us with invaluable data and with a newly printed map of the Gangotri district, where he and his party had been working in 1937. Here also we were kindly received by

¹ *H. J.* vi. 106 *sqq.* *A. J.* 46. 306 *sqq.*

His Highness the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal, who did everything in his power to facilitate our journey through the inhabited part of his territory. He even went so far as to put a cheoprasi at the disposal of our transport officer.

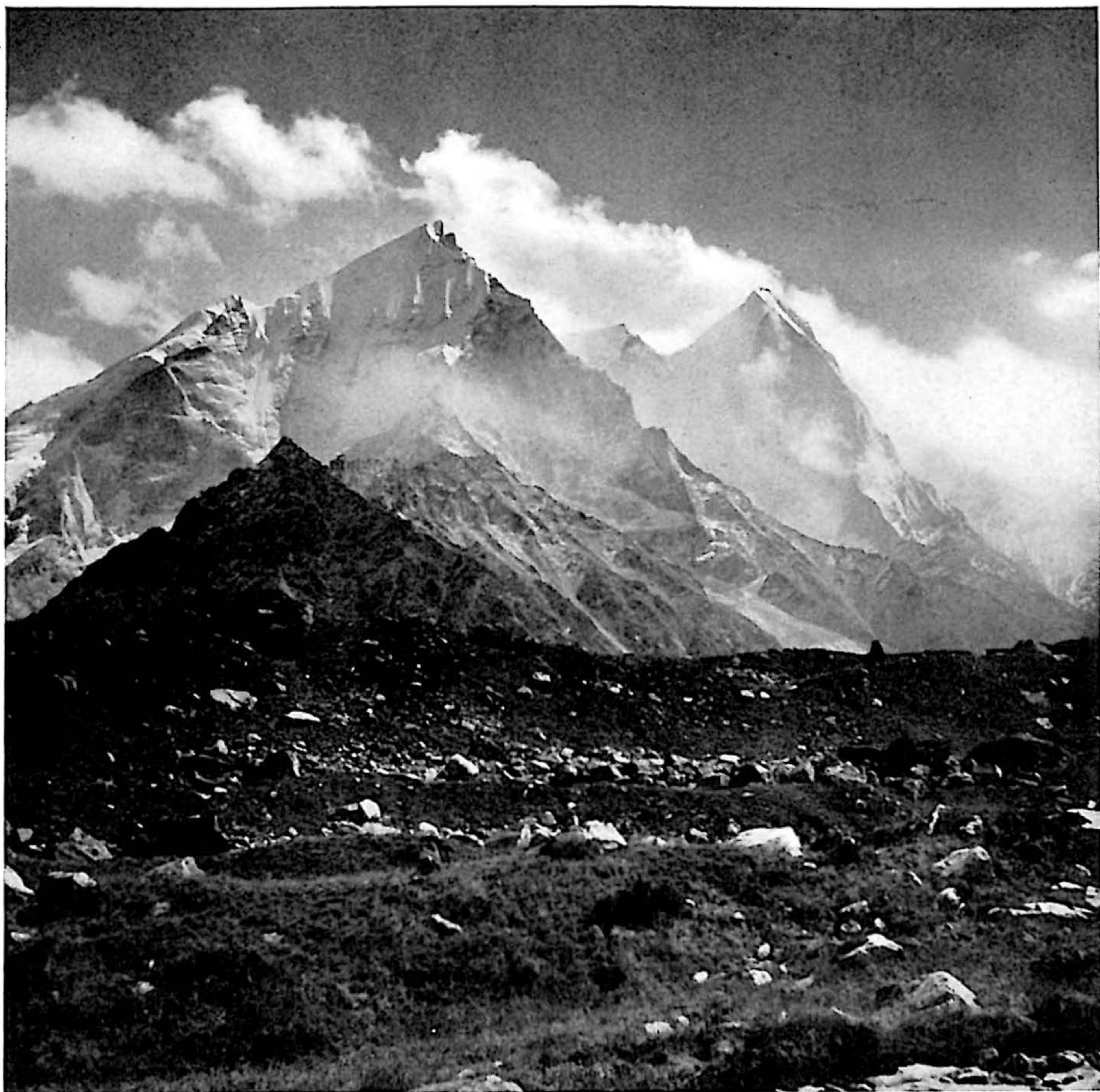
On the outward journey, we were extremely lucky in that the monsoon, which usually does not end before the first or second week of September, practically ended the day when we left Mussoorie for the base camp. At Harsil, eight stages from Mussoorie, we allowed ourselves a rest day, and dismissed eight Rajpur coolies. Two private dak runners were hired to bring our mail from the last post office at Uttar Kashi up to Base Camp once a week. We also made arrangements for supplies of potatoes, vegetables and fruit to be brought up with the mail. Later on these supplies proved to be invaluable.

The site of the base camp at 14,600 ft., about four miles above Gaumukh on the true right bank of Gangotri Glacier, was reached on September 4 at noon, after sixteen days' marching, including two rest days. The coolies were sent back and we set to work to establish the base camp. Unfortunately the leader fell ill with dysentery and two Sherpas went down with malaria. While the latter recovered soon through an injection of Atebrin and subsequent treatment with Atebrin tablets, the former was not able to do any mountaineering work for three weeks. It was lucky that the doctor took three weeks to acclimatize, for owing to this the lack of Sherpas was not felt so badly. For expeditions similar to ours, it is well to take about three Sherpas for two climbers instead of two as we did. On our expedition there was much more moving about than on bigger expeditions; high camps, for instance, were never occupied for more than two nights. There is also the likelihood of one or more of the Sherpas falling ill.

On September 8, two parties of two climbers each set out. Ellmauthaler and Messner started work where our predecessors, the Marco Pallis Expedition of 1933, had finished, on Bhagirathi North, 21,365 ft., called Satopanth North by Marco Pallis. The attempt in 1933 had to be abandoned on account of an early break of the monsoon on June 21. We were lucky enough to have good snow as well as good weather conditions. The top was reached on September 9 at 5 P.M. after a very hot and tiresome climb up the steep N.E. face through deep snow, and crampons had to be used for the last 2400 ft. of the ascent.

Frauenberger and Spannraft had a longer way to go to their objective, Chandar Parbat, 22,070 ft. They pitched Camp 1 at about 16,000 ft. on the true left bank of Chaturangi Bamak, just N. of Basuki Parbat, Camp 2 on the true right bank of Suralti Bamak at 17,700 ft., and Camp 3 on September 10 at about 19,600 ft., just below the snow-line on the W. ridge. Next day they followed the W. ridge to the top, which was reached at 12 noon. Good weather and ideal snow conditions were experienced. The climbers returned to Camp 2 the same day, and to Base Camp on the following day.

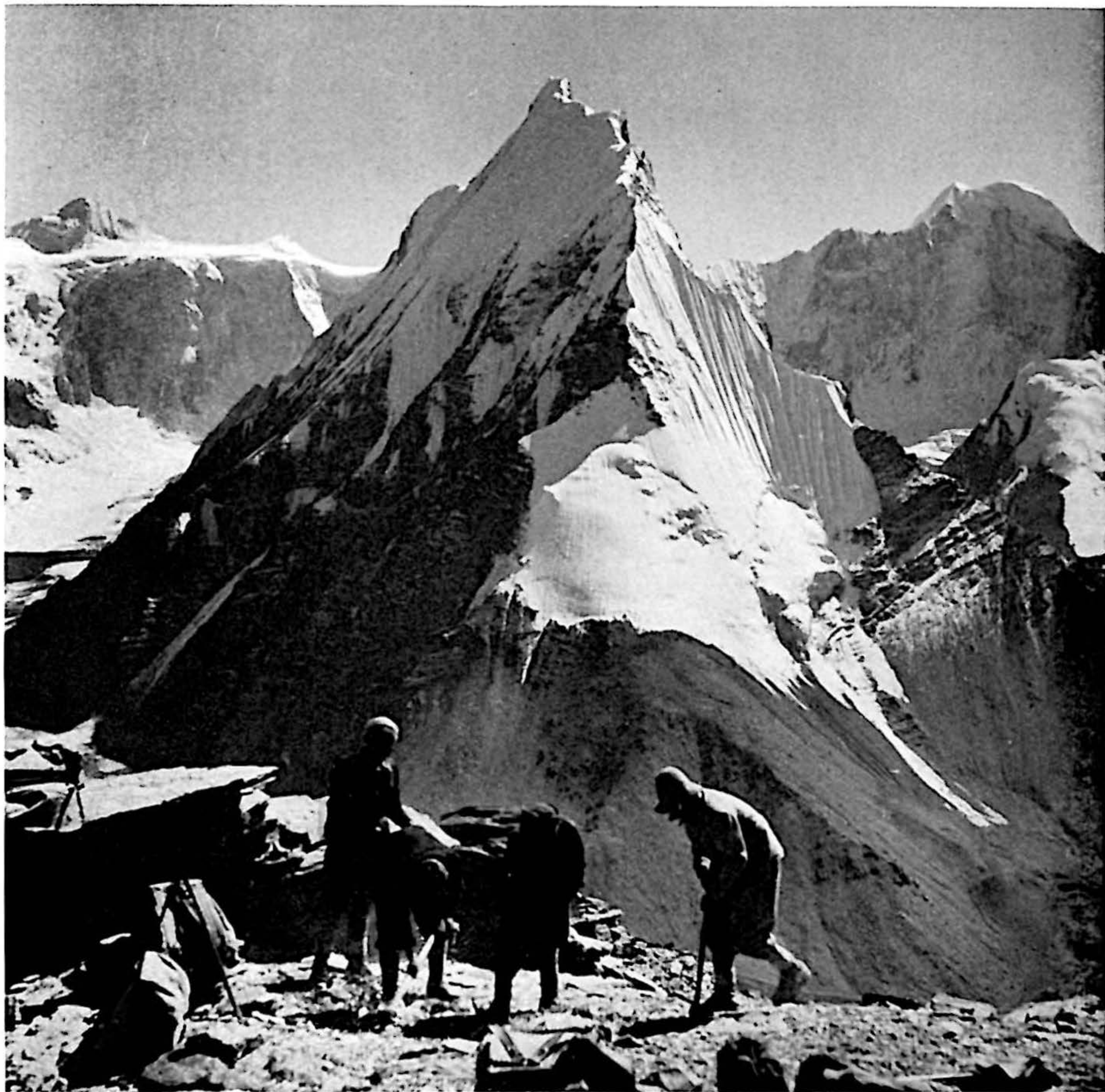
These two achievements raised hopes of further successes. It was,



Photo, R. Schwarzgruber.]

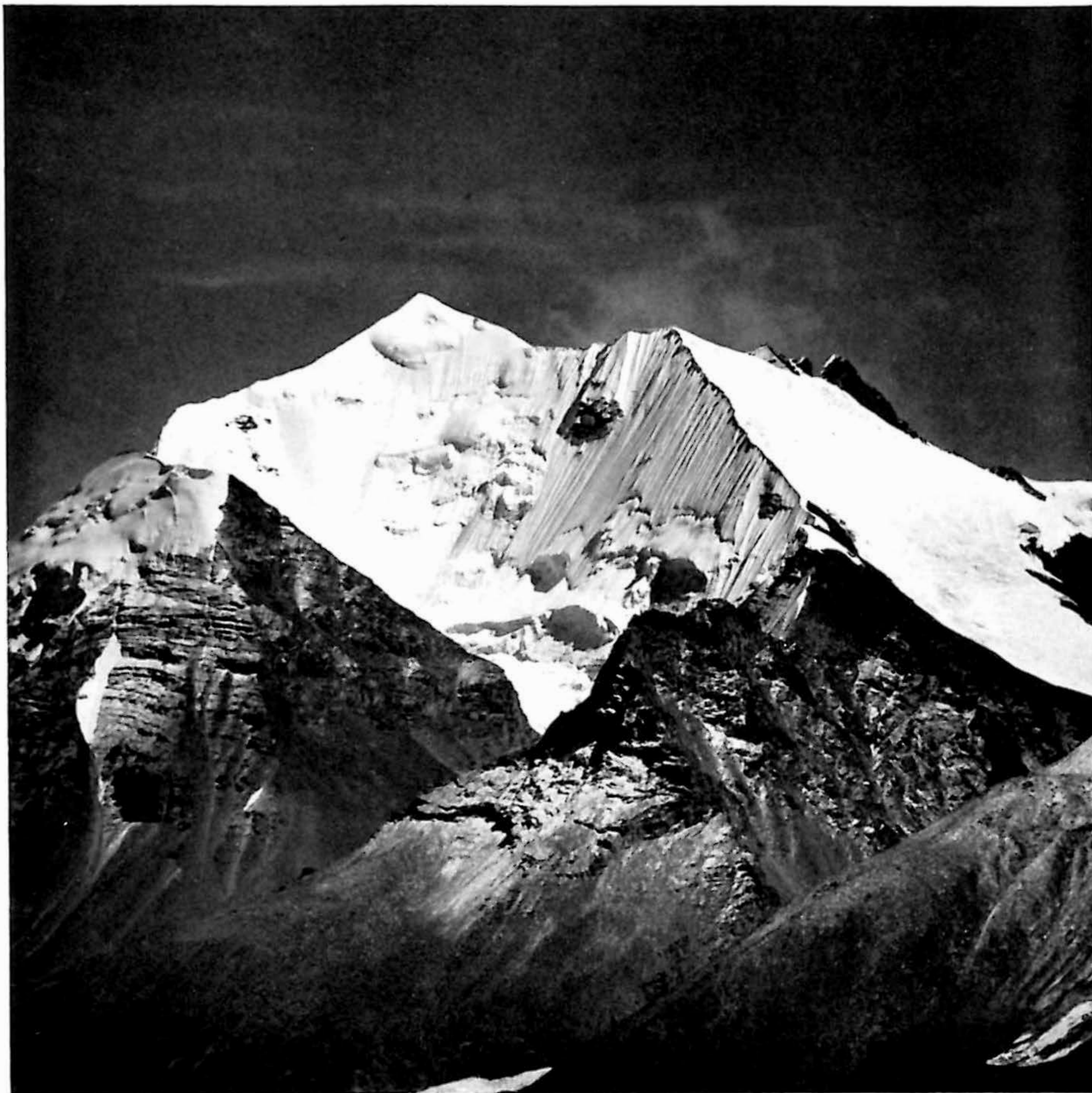
LEFT : BAGIRATHI NORTH (6512 m.) ; RIGHT : BAGIRATHI CENTRAL (6458 m.).

[To face p. 80.



Photo, R. Schwarzgruber.]

BAZUKI PARBAT (6792 m.).



Photo, R. Schwarzgruber.]

CHANDAR PARBAT (6728 m.).

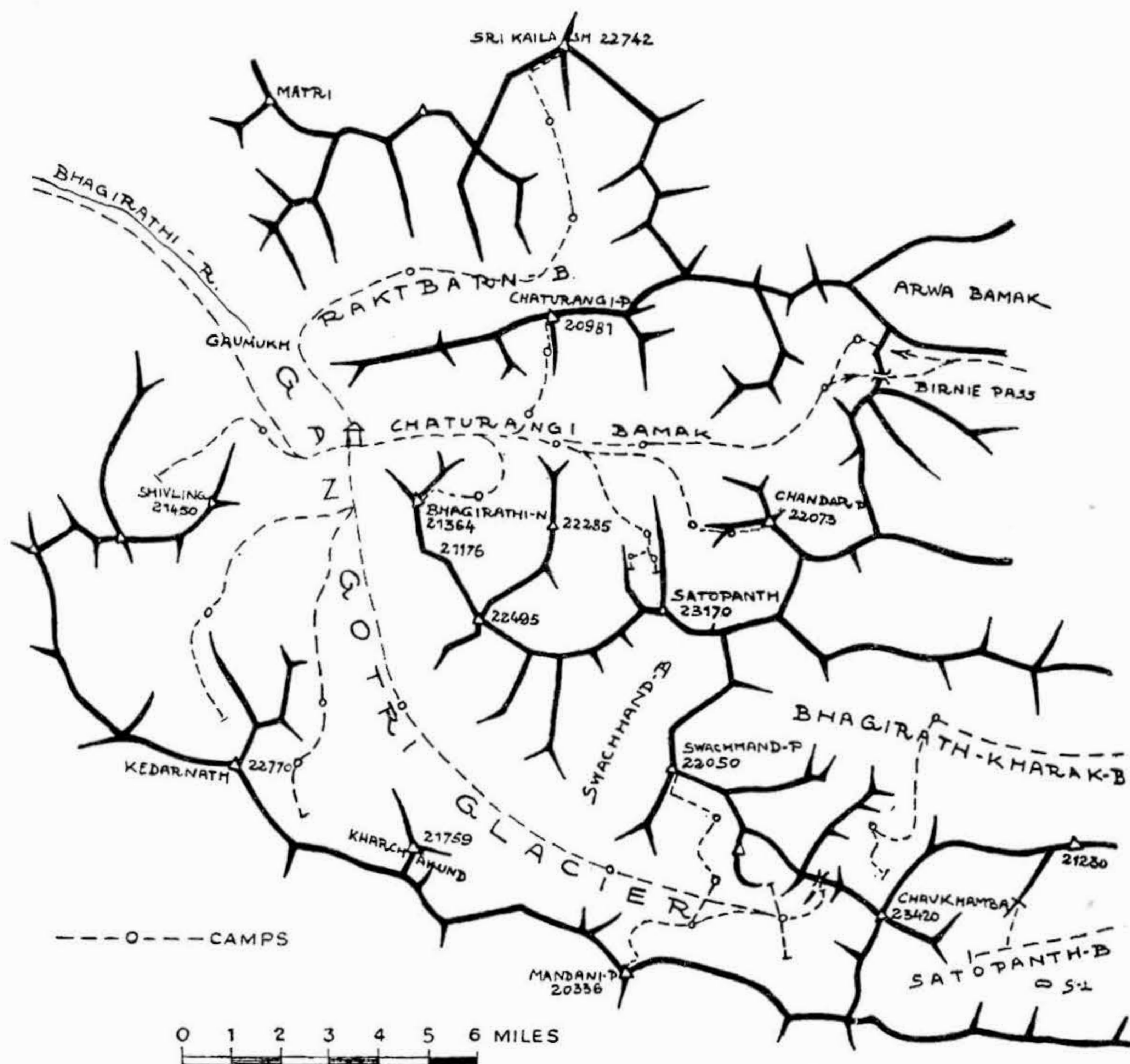


Photo, R. Schwarzgruber.]

SATOPANTH (7062 m.).

[To face p. 81.

therefore, a blow to us to find that neither Satopanth (23,170 ft.) nor Chaukamba (23,420 ft.) could be climbed by us. Another disappointment was caused by a reconnoitring tour to the N. of Shivling (21,450 ft.), called by the British 'Matterhorn Peak,' from its resemblance to the famous original. No feasible route up this mountain could be found, the only possible and extremely dangerous



SKETCH-MAP OF THE GANGOTRI GROUP.

way leading across the N.W. face, which is overhung by threatening séracs.

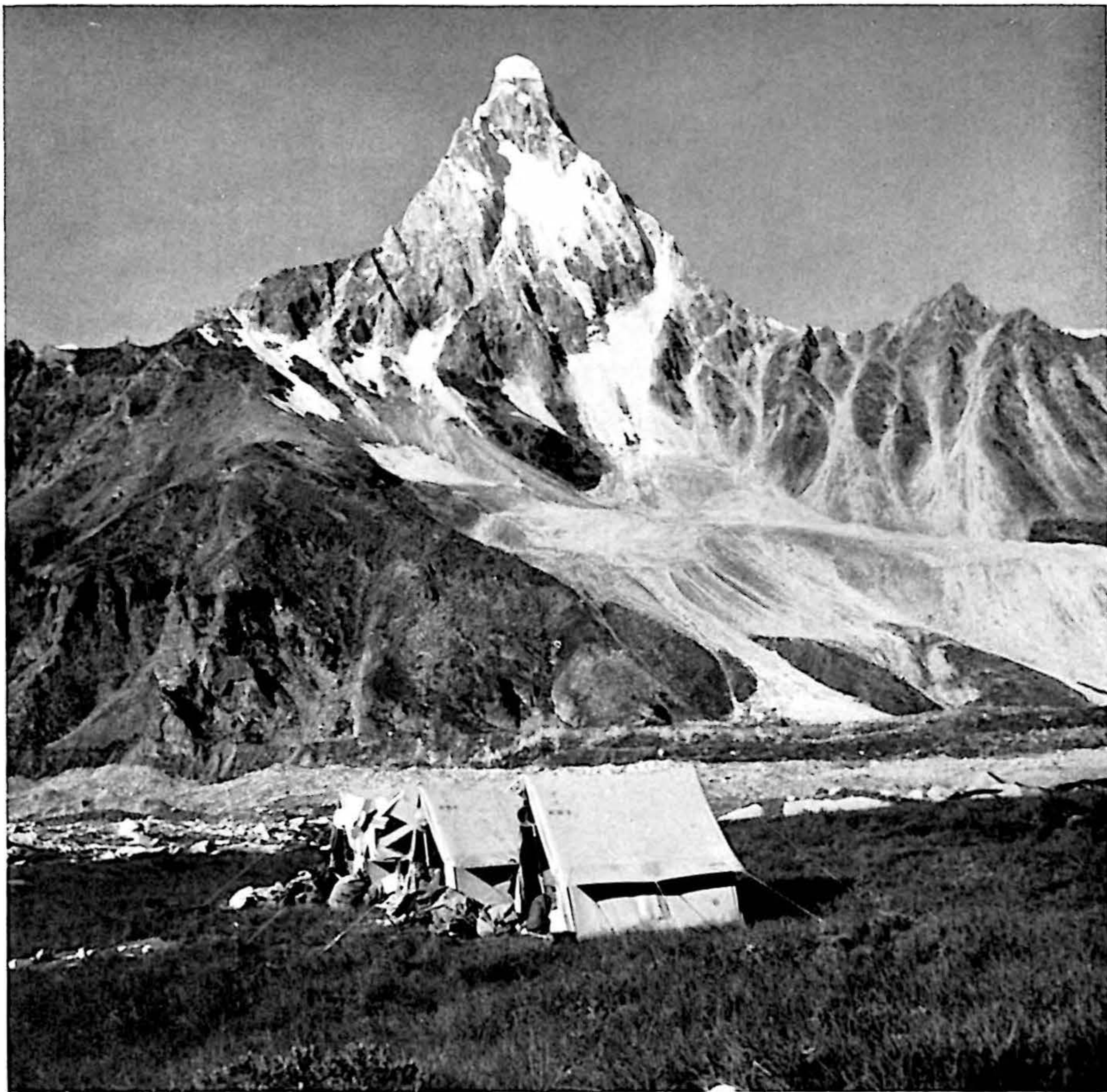
Another reconnoitring tour led to Ghanahim Bamak, which descends from the slopes of the ridge between Kedarnath and Kharchakund and joins the Gangotri Glacier N. of the Kedarnath massif. The impression was gained that from this glacier basin not a single peak could be climbed by any reasonable route. Kharchakund and its neighbour, Sumeru Parbat, will probably have to be climbed from the E.

It took a long time to find out that we could not climb Satopanth and Chaukamba. Ellmauthaler and Frauenberger made two attempts on Satopanth: the first over the very steep N.E. ridge, which they

had to abandon owing to deep snow, and the second by the N.W. ridge, access to which, at about 20,000 ft., was barred by a long rocky ridge, much too difficult to be tackled by two climbers only. Our view is that Satopanth should be tried again by a team of four or six mountaineers by the N.E. ridge, in the pre-monsoon period.

Toni Messner and Spannraft spent over four weeks in quest of a possible route up Chaukamba. At first they went to the head of Gangotri Glacier on September 15, and explored the possibility of reaching a saddle about 20,000 ft. on the W. ridge, which leads up to the top. Not only was the route up to the saddle found impracticable for laden porters, but the ridge itself was impossible even for climbers. There is not much hope of the top being attained by this ridge, which is not worth a serious attempt. The two climbers ascended Mandani Parbat (20,336 ft.) on September 20 by an arduous ten-hour climb from the glacier, in order to find a possible route up Chaukamba further south. As no practical result was obtained, they ascended 'Swachhand Peak' (22,050 ft.) as we named it, on September 23, a very steep ice pyramid at the N. end of the Swachhand Glacier, reaching the top at 5 P.M. by the S. ridge. But again they failed to discover a route up Chaukamba, and returned in disappointment to Base Camp on the 26th.

There were still the N.E. and E. sides of Chaukamba to be explored, and Spannraft and Messner set out to do this on the 30th. With two Sherpas, they crossed the Birnie Pass over to the Arwa valley, went down to Mana and Badrinath, hired coolies there, and ascended the Bhagat Karak Bamak. They pitched camp at the foot of the N. face of Chaukamba on October 9, and made an attempt to climb the saddle on the N.E. ridge. They had reached a height of about 19,000 ft. when suddenly, behind them, an ice avalanche came down, covering them with ice dust. The Sherpas were so frightened that they put down their rucksacks and refused to go any further, and the climbers were forced to abandon the attempt, although they think they might have reached the saddle without difficulty. Once the saddle were gained, the final ridge should be easy to tackle. There still remained the E. face of Chaukamba to be explored. The climbers went up the Satopanth Glacier, but they soon realized that any attempt from this side would be hopeless. After almost five weeks' hard work round Chaukamba, they are of the opinion that Chaukamba should be attempted by a strong party of four or six climbers, capable of dispensing with high altitude porters in case the technical difficulties should prove too great. The attempt should be made across the N. face to the saddle on the N.E. ridge, thence by this ridge as far as possible and perhaps crossing over to the W. ridge later. The pre-monsoon period would probably be preferable, but in September, soon after the break of the monsoon, snow conditions might also be suitable. On October 19 the climbers were back at Base Camp, having crossed over from the Arwa valley about half a mile N. of the Birnie Pass.



Photo, R. Schwarzgruber.]

BASE CAMP WITH ' MATTERHORN PEAK ' (SHIVLING, 6538 m.).

[To face p. 82.



Photo, R. Schwarzgruber.]

THE HIGHEST CAMP ON SRI KAILASH.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT : SATOPANTH (7062 m.), BASUKI PARBAT (6792 m.),
BAGIRATHI SOUTH (6866 m.), BAGIRATHI NORTH (6512 m.).

In the meantime, the four climbers who had remained at the base made an attempt at a peak on the N. bank of Chaturangi Bamak. In Major Osmaston's map its height is given as 20,981 ft. We expected this peak to give us a good view of the mountains to the N., and further there was the chance of breaking in both the leader, who by now had recovered from his illness, and the doctor, who had acclimatized. Camp 1 was pitched on September 29 at about 16,000 ft. on the true right bank of Chaturangi Bamak, Camp 2 at about 19,500 ft. on the S. ridge, and the top was gained on October 1 at 3 P.M. after a most arduous climb up the slate-covered ridge and finally up a steep, knife-edged snow ridge. The view from the top was magnificent, especially to the N., where a pyramid-shaped, snow-covered mountain rose from the glacier below, its height according to the map being about 22,300 ft. Beyond this mountain, the brown desert plains of Tibet appeared. We decided to tackle this mountain if time should permit.

To the S.W. of Base Camp, across the Gangotri Glacier, is Marco Pallis' 'White Mountain,' called Mt. Kedarnath on the map (22,770 ft.). From the day when we occupied Base Camp it attracted our curiosity and ambition, but at first we dared not attack it, not being acclimatized to such heights. But by now we felt that we were in good enough condition. An advance depot of provisions was dumped at the foot of Kedarnath and, on October 8, Schwarzgruber, Ellmauthaler, Frauenberger and Whitehead, with four Sherpas, left Base Camp for their assault on Kedarnath. Unfortunately it turned out to be a failure. From Camp 1 at about 16,000 ft., the party climbed well over 4000 ft., ploughing through knee-deep snow up the N. face until they reached a point below some huge ice crevasses. Here they realized that the snow on the steep face was too loose to justify their continuing the assault. The party retreated to Camp 1 the same day, arriving at Base Camp the next day. Kedarnath might possibly be climbed by two mountaineers over the adjacent peak (22,403 ft.) to the E., preferably in the pre-monsoon period, or perhaps also during the first two weeks after the monsoon, when snow conditions are probably better. Later on, temperature never rises high enough to enable the new snow to consolidate.

On October 13, Schwarzgruber, Ellmauthaler, Frauenberger and Jonas set out for their last expedition, which was to be an attempt on Sri Kailash, a peak which had greatly impressed us in the previous fortnight when viewed from Chaturangi Peak. This time there were five Sherpas with the four climbers, and also the dak runner, who happened to be with us and carried loads up to Camp 1. At first the route led down the Gangotri Glacier past the juniper which served as fuel for Base Camp, and then up the Raktbarn Bamak, where Camp 1 was pitched at about 16,000 ft. on the moraine. Next day saw us toiling up the moraine scree to where the glacier coming down from the N. changes its course to the W. Camp 2 was pitched at about 18,000 ft. on a moraine between two glaciers covered with ice

pinnacles. The third day we continued up the Raktbarn Bamak, and after about two hours' climbing turned to the left, where an attractive bit of glacier suggested a possible route between very steep and broken ice. We proceeded cautiously up to 20,200 ft. and put up our tents there, keeping two Sherpas with us while the rest returned to Camp 2. The night of October 15 was perhaps the coldest we experienced during the whole of our expedition; the morning of the 16th, after sunrise, the thermometer recorded a temperature of -16° C. Before we started at 8 A.M. we put on crampons, and these were retained right up to the top. It was bitterly cold on the saddle at the foot of the W. ridge, the wind taking our breath away. As we went on, however, the final ridge of about 1000 ft. proved not too bad, the snow being of excellent quality. The top was reached at 1.45 P.M. Our efforts were amply rewarded by the wonderful view we obtained from the top, especially of Tibet and the Garhwal mountains, including Nanda Devi, the Mana Peak and Kamet. After returning to Mussoorie, we learnt from the Survey of India that the exact height of Sri Kailash was 22,742 ft., and this was the highest point reached by the expedition.

On October 19 the whole party was reunited, Messner and Spannraft having returned from their Badrinath venture. We left Base Camp on October 22. The return journey was as uneventful as the outward journey, but much more pleasant as the temperature was considerably lower. We arrived at Mussoorie on November 3.

[We are much indebted to Dr. Schwarzgruber for his kindness in sending this article.]