

For the moment, Needham and Wilkinson found no adherents among their countrymen. No other English traveller ventured to explore the far recesses of the Graians, and soon the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars made travel difficult. Already, in August 1789, had Dr. Rigby found at the inn at Chambéry, 'some of the French runaway Noblesse'; and in April 1794 there was some desperate fighting on the Little St. Bernard, when an ill-equipped French division drove the Austro-Sardinian forces down to La Thuile. Savoy itself came under French domination; and Napoleon attached such importance to the Mont Cenis that between 1803 and 1810 he spent seven million francs on the building of a first class road. (In 1810, the pass was traversed by 2911 carriages, 14,037 carts and waggons, and 37,255 horses and mules³²).

(To be Continued)

THE NUSHIK LA

I. THE NUSHIK LA IN 1943

By R. C. F. SCHOMBERG

[This pass, which crosses the watershed to the S. of the Hispar Glacier in the Karakoram Himalaya, has been mentioned frequently in the records of Himalayan exploration; but so far as is known only three European expeditions have crossed it. The account of the most recent of these, by Colonel Schomberg in 1943, has an added interest by virtue of the fact that it indicates that considerable changes in snow and ice conditions have recently occurred. His article will therefore be followed by a brief account of earlier crossings of the pass.—EDITOR.]

IT may be of interest to have an account of this pass, which has been so seldom crossed by a European, and which was traversed in 1892, at the time of the expedition of the late Lord Conway. There is an account of the journey in his book, *Climbing and Exploration in the Karakoram-Himalayas*.

The Nushik La lies almost due N. of Arandu in Baltistan, and is the only pass that gives access to the area drained by the Hunza river from that which is drained by the Shigar river and its very considerable series of tributaries. The Hispar valley with its formidable 'wall' can nowhere be crossed except at its head, over the pass of the same name, and lower down over the Nushik La. The Hispar Pass is practically

³² W. Brockedon: *Illustrations of the Passes of the Alps*, 1828-9.

never used, either now or in the past, as it entails a long *détour*, and really leads nowhere. The Nushik La, however, whatever it may be now, was certainly much frequented in old times.

Neither passes are used nowadays, as there is no reason why they should be, since the flow of traffic has been diverted elsewhere. The Nushik La almost certainly ceased to be used after the occupation by the British Government of Hunza and Nagir, some sixty years ago. One Balti was met who had crossed this pass when going to Gilgit to look for work, but others prefer to reach Gilgit by the Indus valley, and the people of Nagir who would be most interested in this short cut to Baltistan have now no need to go there, as all their wants can be met in Gilgit, which is also the administrative centre of their area. In the old days it was a different matter and, judging from the marked resemblance to the Balti in the people of the Nagir state, it is probable that there was considerable intercourse with Baltistan in former times. In that case, the Nushik La was certainly the easiest and nearest way.

In 1943, Mr. F. P. Mainprice, I.C.S., and I decided to cross the pass. We reached Skardu from Srinagar via the Deosai plains, and from there travelled by Shigar, up the Shigar river, and so to Arandu, the last village in Baltistan on that side of the pass, and which is consequently the place where arrangements have to be made for the onward trip.

After several days spent in palavering with the Baltis at Arandu, we finally came to an arrangement with them, and on very generous terms too. The distance to the pass was not very great, and is probably not more than forty miles, though mere mileage means nothing in mountainous country.

On leaving the village, we crossed the Chogo Lungma Glacier, and turned up the Kero Lungma valley and its glacier, which leads to the crest of the Nushik La. This nala, with its abundant grass, and its accessibility to the village, was a popular grazing ground; and it would, indeed, be difficult to find better pasture. We passed a number of herdsmen's huts and camping sites on our way up.

Our first camp was at Domok where we had, too, our first altercation with the Baltis. These went back on their contract, and refused to go on unless they were paid more. After considerable argument, we agreed, as indeed there was nothing else to do. The next day we reached Kiatbu Brangsa, which was the last place in the valley where there was any fuel. Our camp was in a sheltered depression, and the water came from a patch of melting snow. The scenery was fine, and the dolomite-like formations of the adjacent peaks were particularly impressive.

The third day from Arandu brought us to the last camp in the Kero Lungma nala, at Stiatbu Brangsa. The distance was not great but the lightly laden coolies made very slow progress. The route lay mostly over medial moraine, and was for the most part very easy. The coolies, however, did not know the way, and consequently made several useless *détours*, which was proof enough of the disuse of the pass. A good deal of extra fatigue was the result of this ignorance, as we found

ourselves climbing over ridges which we might just as well have walked round.

Stiatbu Brangsa was very close to the crest of the pass. Here we were fortunate in finding a heap of wood left by some traveller. The coolies said that it was twenty years old, which perhaps explained why it was so dry. At any rate, it showed that no one had come this way, as assuredly no traveller could have left this fine pile of fuel in a place where it was cold, and there was nothing to burn. From this camp my headman, Daulat Shah, walked to the top of the pass, and had no difficulty at all in the ascent.

Starting off next morning, August 24, we walked gently and very easily over a smooth snow slope to the crest of the Nushik La (17,300 ft.).

Looking down on the Nagir side we saw that the descent was really precipitous. On our right as we gazed down, was a great bergschrund and an icefall of vast proportions, with crevasses, and abrupt jagged sides, and all the ingredients to make any descent on that side out of the question. On the left of the pass, was a cliff with snow and ice, and no way of surmounting those obstacles. Below, at the foot of the pass was the smooth Haigutum Glacier, flowing into the Hispar Glacier which we could see beyond. Immediately beneath was the way down, and this was a sheer cliff most unpleasant to the eye, chiefly made of rock and crumbling stone. The longer we looked at it the less disagreeable it became, and, as it was the sole means of descent, we realised that we had to try it. Like most things which at first look bad, it proved not nearly so difficult. The two real trials were the steepness of the drop and the friable or crumbling nature of the face of the cliff. Daulat Shah went down to have a preliminary look, and came back to say that it was not so bad. Our problem was to make the Baltis follow him, as he went ahead to pick a way. Two or three went a few yards down, but their courage soon failed. To make an end of the tale, the whole gang deserted us, except two, one coolie who was slightly 'wanting' and another man, called Rahim Shah, who was not a Balti, but a Brokpa, or an immigrant from the Gilgit area.

Picking up a few necessaries, Mainprice and I, with Daulat and another Hunza man leading, and my other men, set out down the precipice. The descent was awkward, but we reached the bottom of the pass and found ourselves on the Haigutum Glacier without any mishap. From the foot of the pass it was easy work over the smooth surface of ice, and all we had to do was to dodge the numerous crevasses. We went on and on, seemingly interminably, till we reached the camp place at the left of the Haigutum nala, height 13,880 ft., where we made ourselves as comfortable as our scanty kit permitted. Fortunately there was a good deal of dwarf willow, so the most immediate need was filled.

We stayed there for several days till the coolies from Hispar village arrived. These men went up the pass, and brought down our kit which was still lying in the snow as we had left it. We had, of course, piled it up before we had gone down the pass. The men of Nagir are rather

poor coolies, and are not very good on snow or rock, but the fact that they went up the pass and brought down all our belongings without demur shows at once that the Nushik La is not the terribly difficult pass it is supposed to be.

Both Mainprice and I failed to understand the evil reputation of the pass. By far the worst feature was the cornice on the actual crest, but a little care solved that obstacle. In 1945 I crossed both the East Mustagh and the Hispar Passes, and with the same men, who declared that the Nushik La was easier than either of these passes. Both these passes, however, have a 'bad press.' I must say that I could find nothing to justify the alarming accounts that I had read of them. No high pass is ever really easy, and some degree of difficulty must be expected; but to place the crossing of the Mustagh, Hispar, and Nushik La in the category of major mountaineering feats, as has been done, is absurd. A party properly equipped and travelling at the right time of the year and, above all, in good weather, should meet with no difficulty.

2. EARLIER CROSSINGS OF THE NUSHIK LA

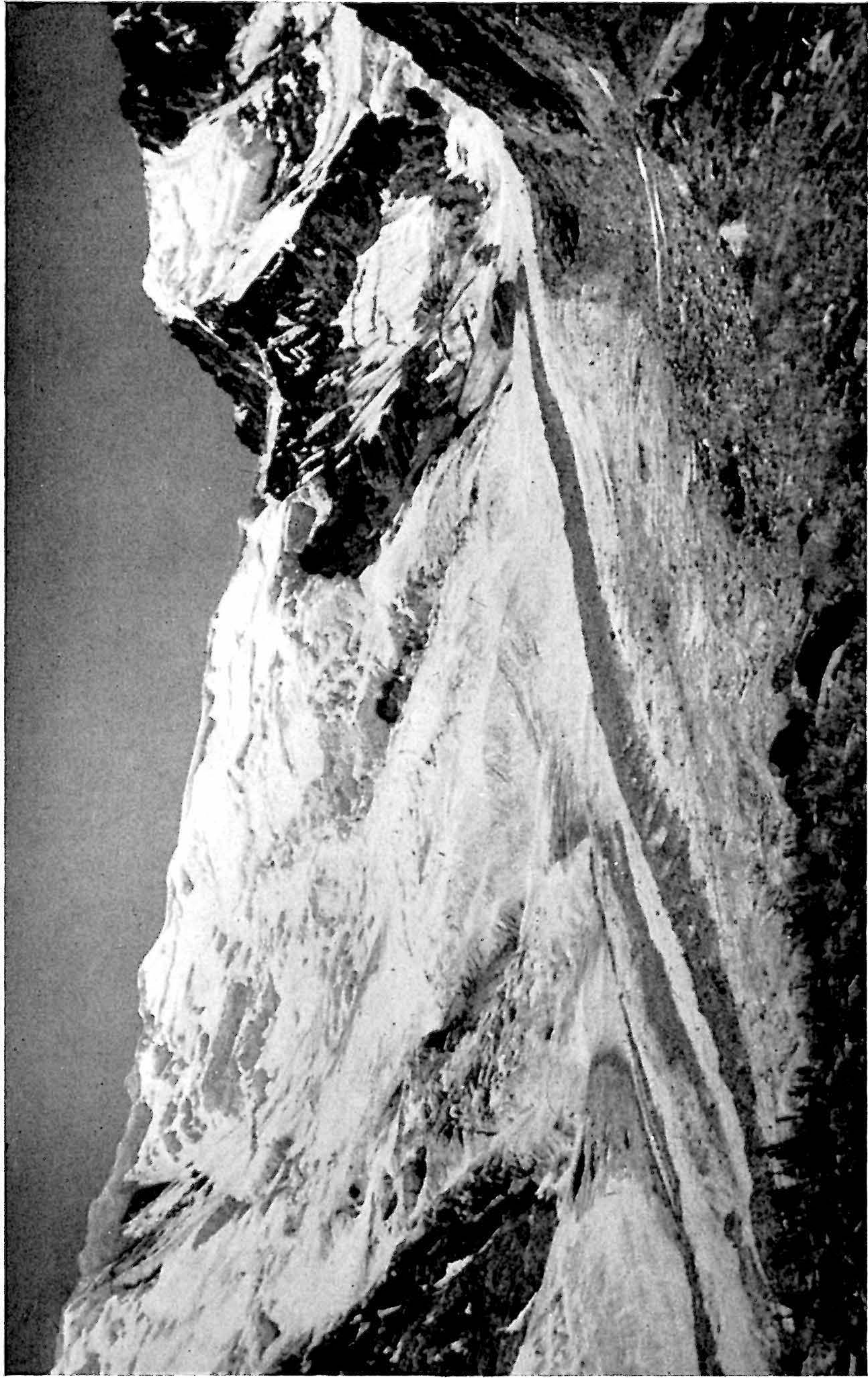
BY SCOTT RUSSELL

IN Nagir and Baltistan the Nushik La is traditionally regarded as an important historic route over which even cattle were perhaps taken. It is stated that a fort above Arandu was built to defend that village from invaders from the N., while Lord Conway (*Climbing and Exploration in the Karakoram-Himalayas*) considered that *sangars* which he found beside the Hispar Glacier in 1892 were built as a protection against a possible British crossing of the Nushik La during the 'Hunza War.' The detail of such reports may be questioned, but there seems no doubt that the pass was at one time frequently used. Since the middle of last century it has, however, been rarely if ever crossed by native parties.

The first European visitor was Colonel Godwin-Austen in 1861. He reached the pass from Arandu—as Colonel Schomberg did in 1943—but he did not cross to the Hispar side. Godwin-Austen's route has been followed by several later parties, among them Neve's expedition in 1895, of which a description follows. Many travellers, too, have seen the pass from the Hispar Glacier, but, prior to Colonel Schomberg's journey, it appears to have been crossed by members of only two expeditions—Conway's in 1892 and Shipton's in 1939. Two parties of the former expedition crossed from N. to S. and one from S. to N.; in the latter expedition one crossing was made in each direction. Since the Nushik La is comparatively accessible the possibility that other parties have crossed it cannot however be excluded.

Brigadier-General (then Lieutenant) the Hon. C. G. Bruce and Mr. O. Eckenstein made the first crossing (July 3, 1892). They

PASS
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Photo, R. C. F. Schomberg.]

THE NUSHIK LA FROM THE HAIGUTUM GLACIER.

started from Haigutum on the Hispar Glacier and ascended snow slopes to the E. of the pass (*i.e.* left of the pass in the photograph facing page 64) and reached the pass some 50 ft. to the left of its lowest point after a climb of $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Steep and difficult slopes had been encountered near the summit. Ten days later Mr. J. H. Roubush and Matthias Zurbriggen made the second crossing. They kept to the left of Bruce's route and reached the crest of the range beside the small snow dome over 500 ft. above the pass. (The dome can be seen in the photograph facing page 64). Both parties had difficulty with their porters but a comparison of the descriptions of the two routes (Conway, *loc cit.*), suggests that Zurbriggen's was the better line of ascent. To gain the pass he was, however, faced with a steep descent over rock, during which he found it necessary to help his coolies down one at a time (these rocks are not visible in the photograph).

In 1939 a route close to that of Zurbriggen was taken. It was reconnoitred as far as the crest by the writer and the Sherpa Gyalgen Myckje on July 20. Two days later Messrs. A. F. Betterton, Campbell Secord, Dr. Eadric Fountaine, and the writer made the crossing with three Sherpas and one local coolie. Apart from some delay due to heavy loads on the rock descent to the pass no difficulty was experienced. Good névé snow permitted steps to be kicked practically throughout the ascent. A week later the party (except for Betterton who travelled via Shigar to Srinagar) returned by the same route.

It is interesting to attempt some comparison of the condition of the pass in the three seasons when it was crossed. No photographs from the Conway expedition are available but Conway's record (*loc. cit.*) gives no indication that ice conditions were greatly different from those in 1939. The description of Dr. Neve's attempt, which follows, gives a similar impression. Between 1939 and 1943, however, very considerable changes apparently took place. This is suggested both by photographs and by the experiences of the two parties. In 1939 the greater part of the slope immediately below the pass on the northern side was steep ice; rocks were visible in only a few places. A direct approach was rejected, as it had also been in 1892, both on account of the labour of the step-cutting and because it would have been difficult to safeguard the porters. Between 1939 and 1943 the steepest ice slopes disappeared and Colonel Schomberg found the face 'chiefly made of rock and crumbling stone.' He was able to descend it and thus made a much more direct route than any of his predecessors. It may be noted that the névé on Zurbriggen's route appears to have been considerably more crevassed in 1943 than in 1939. Possibly also the rocks rising from the pass to the snow dome had become more difficult of access; Colonel Schomberg did not consider them as an alternative route, although his party were reluctant to descend the precipice.

These conclusions must be treated with reserve as the records are insufficient for a detailed comparison to be made. There can, however, be little doubt that a very significant decrease in glaciation occurred. It would be most interesting to know whether this is continuing; if

it is, some routes may be expected to become increasingly difficult, others increasingly easy. The history of the Nushik La suggests that it belongs to the latter class. The Hispar Pass, however, may belong to the former, since in 1945 Colonel Schomberg's party found it more difficult than the Nushik La. In 1939, on the other hand, the Hispar Pass had been long and tedious but in no way difficult. So long as these changes in glaciation continue expeditions can expect to find that their estimates of difficulty differ greatly from those of previous parties.

3. DR. NEVE'S VISIT TO THE NUSHIK LA IN 1895

BY G. W. T. TYNDALE-BISCOE

IN the summer of 1895 Dr. Arthur Neve of the Kashmir Medical Mission was starting for Hunza-Nagir and asked me to go with him. The Gilgit road was not available for non-official travel, and the only alternative route was through Baltistan, and over the Nushik La. We left Srinagar on August 12 and three weeks later were at Arandu.

The Wazir of Shigar had come with us to help in the matter of transport for the pass, a matter of some little difficulty, as the local people were averse to the pass being reopened. Dr. Neve has told the story of our trip in his *Thirty Years in Kashmir*, and in justice to the Balti coolie I think I may quote this statement of his (page 86). 'The Arandu colony is not Balti, but Nagir, and only came from Haigutum three generations ago . . . we made big demands upon them for porters and mountain guides, and the community showed its displeasure. Their allegiance to the Kashmir Maharajah or to the Rajah of Shigar is a grudging one, and unlike the Baltis they grumbled freely.'

We left Arandu a party of 50, which, besides the Wazir and his men, included 24 coolies and 6 local shikaris. We made three marches up the Kero Lungma nala and glacier to Stiatbu Brangsa, where there were some stone shelters on the old lateral moraine of the Nushik Glacier, at the height of about 16,000 ft. An old Arandu man, who said he had been over the pass thirty years before, had come along as guide. For the last two miles he had left the glacier and led along the khud on the right, across slopes of débris and the two small glaciers. This seems evidently the traditional route. Next morning, September 4, it was an hour's walk up easy snow slopes to the col. The view to the N. across and up the great Hispar Glacier was magnificent, with a dozen peaks and summits of 23,000 to 24,000 ft. in view. The old guide led some 300 ft. up to the right to where there was a crack in the cornice. This névé widened out, making a tunnel down to the slope below. The cornice here was running uphill. The slope was ice, very steep, with a thin layer of fresh snow, and ended in a cliff a little way down. With some difficulty Neve got the shikaris to cut a path in the ice for some 20 yds. and then tread a path as the snow became thicker. With

crampons Neve was able to get about and keep the men at it. A rope was then stretched across from the tunnel to where the ground was a bit safer. In going across I made a slip in the snow, but I had a hold of the rope and a shikari helped me up. I may here remark that till this trip my experience of snow or ice on a slope less level than on a pond had been nil. I then held the end of the rope while Neve went back to bring on the coolies. A dozen of them refused to come on at all, the remainder agreed to do so only without their loads. The shikaris then brought these latter one by one down to a quite safe position below, and then brought down the loads. So far we had advanced 100 yds. in four hours. We now went on diagonally down the snow slopes roped in three parties. Below, on the left, was the ice cliff, which further on became a bergschrund. At about a mile from the tunnel, and 600 ft. below it, we were brought to a halt by a very broken icefall in front, which extended far up the slope, with crevasses and séracs, into which the bergschrund below became merged. Neve and the shikaris went on to reconnoitre, but found no way through. They then tracked right and left along the bergschrund, which was from 15 to 30 ft. wide and 30 to 60 ft. deep. The coolies were now weeping, rubbing their knuckles in their eyes. After an hour, finding no way across, Neve came back and gave the order to retreat. Below the schrund there were still 2000 ft. of unknown snow slopes to descend and two or three miles of glacier to cross to reach a camping place at Haigutum. By sunset we were back at the col, where there was much congratulation and embracing on the part of the men. We were all hungry, so decided to remain where we were. Neve and I bivouacked on some nearby rocks, and the men were all covered up together with the tents. It was a brilliant moonlight night, and the beauty of the snow scene was worth a rather sleepless night.

Neve writes: 'That we with a few selected men could get down to Hispar was probable, but on the other hand it was certain they could not return alone, and a very small fall of snow would close the route behind us, as it was so late in the season.'

I took photos from the col, copies of which I sent to Lord Conway. In acknowledgment he wrote: 'I cannot thank you too warmly for the photos of and from the Nushik. They are of indescribable interest to me. . . . I expect the descent on the N. from the Nushik La would be very dangerous late on in the season, though probably there is always a route by keeping far away round to the right, where the old traditional pony-track (!) went—if there ever was such a thing I cannot conceive—report says, away down rocks to the left.'

Note.—It would seem that Dr. Neve's party kept somewhat lower than Bruce and Eckenstein, and for this reason got into difficulties. Since they had not seen the entire face from below it is not surprising that they took this route, which must have seemed the obvious one from the crest. With the ice conditions as they were in those days it would have been considerably easier to cross the pass in the opposite direction, as the 1892 and 1939 parties did.—SCOTT RUSSELL.