

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION

By MONICA JACKSON

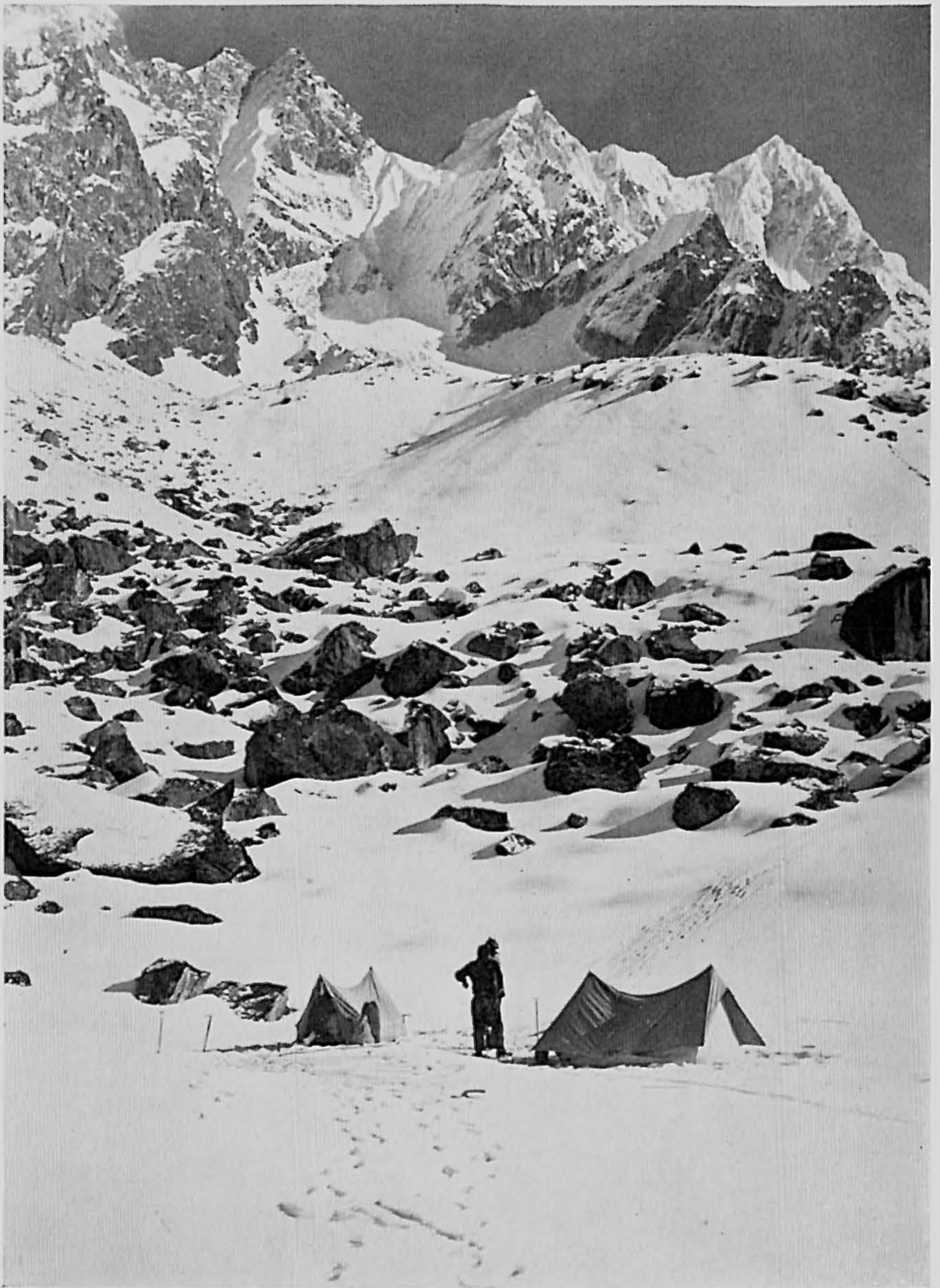
IN the spring of 1955 three of us, obscure mountaineers with no claim to fame, became the first expedition composed entirely of women to explore and climb in the High Himalaya. But I should like to make it clear that this aspect of our venture was unpremeditated, and it was not until our plans had already begun to take shape that it occurred to us that we might be creating a precedent. When we realised this we were quite pleased because we hoped it would help us to get financial backing, but we also realised that we were likely to encounter a good deal of prejudice. Both these surmises proved correct.

We were careful to avoid premature publicity, knowing that if we should come to grief we could expect no mercy from our critics, whose general reaction would have been, 'What else can you expect of women?' This, too, was the spur which drove us to make immense efforts to be well organised. Indeed, we may possibly owe to it the fact that nothing at all went wrong from the time we left Kathmandu to the time we returned. There is no doubt that we were also lucky, but I feel we can say with Mark Twain that the harder we worked the luckier we were.

Before going any further I must record our deep gratitude to the Everest Foundation for taking us seriously and giving us their support. And I must add in all fairness that once we had received our permit nearly everybody with whom we had to deal was most kind and helpful, in India and Nepal as well as at home.

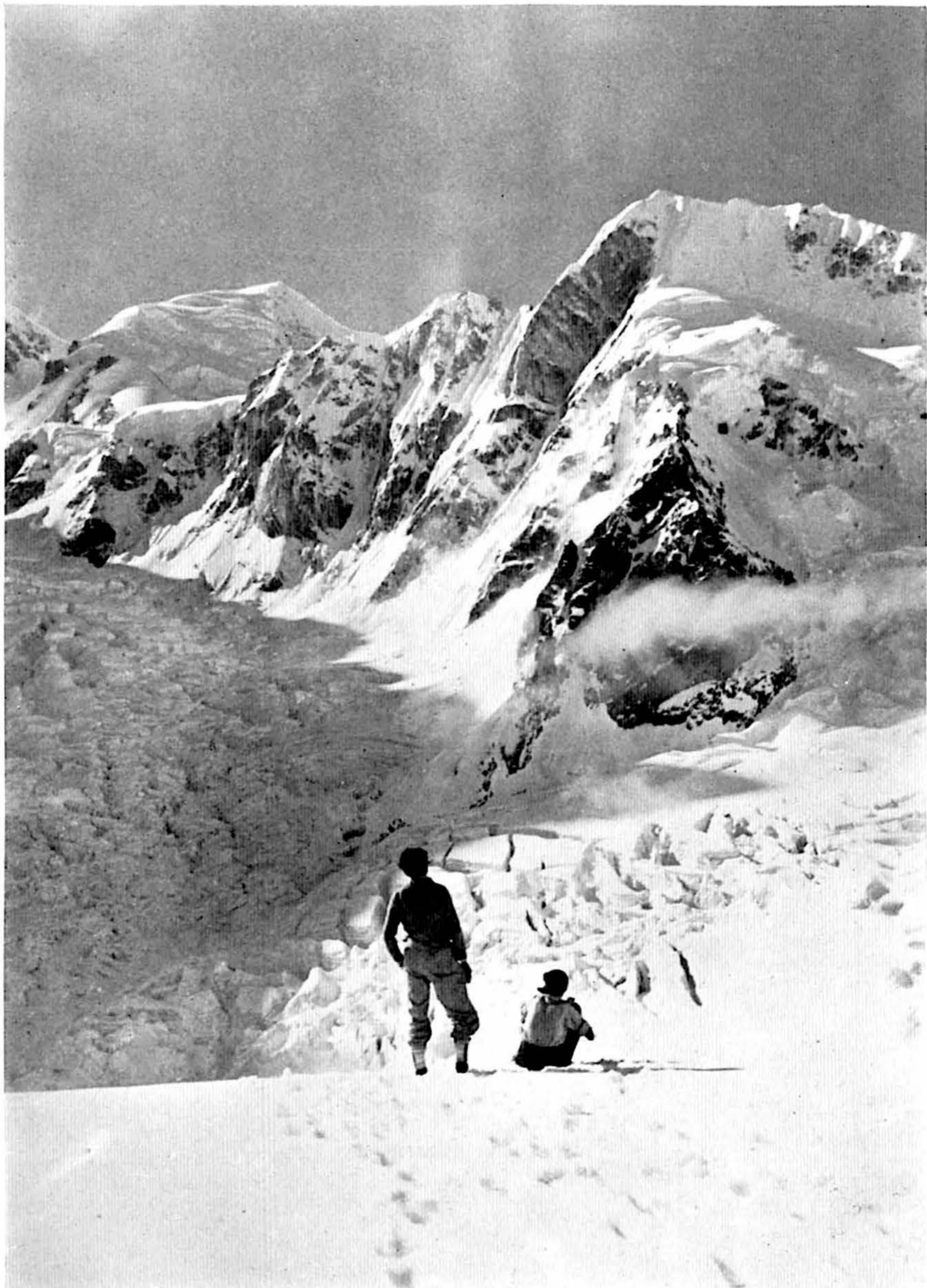
All we knew about the Jugal Himal was that it was supposed to be extremely inaccessible and that the mountains which composed it were exceptionally steep and difficult, though not very high by Himalayan standards. Tilman's report on them in his book *Nepal Himalaya* was discouraging. Due to monsoon conditions he had not been able to get into the area at all, but from what he could see of them from the neighbouring Langtang Himal the peaks of the Jugal appeared to be singularly uninviting. Nor, it seemed, had the people of Tempathang (the isolated Sherpa settlement which lies nearest to the Jugal, on the Balephi Khola, the river fed by its glaciers) been particularly co-operative. We did not, therefore, expect to achieve much, but since it was apparently the last large area of the Nepal Himalaya to remain unexplored we felt we were fortunate in being able to visit it at all.

As it turned out we succeeded in doing all we had hoped to do, and the fact that we also managed to climb an unnamed and unmapped mountain of about 22,000 ft. was something in the nature of a bonus. The approach through the gorges proved to be devoid of difficulty,



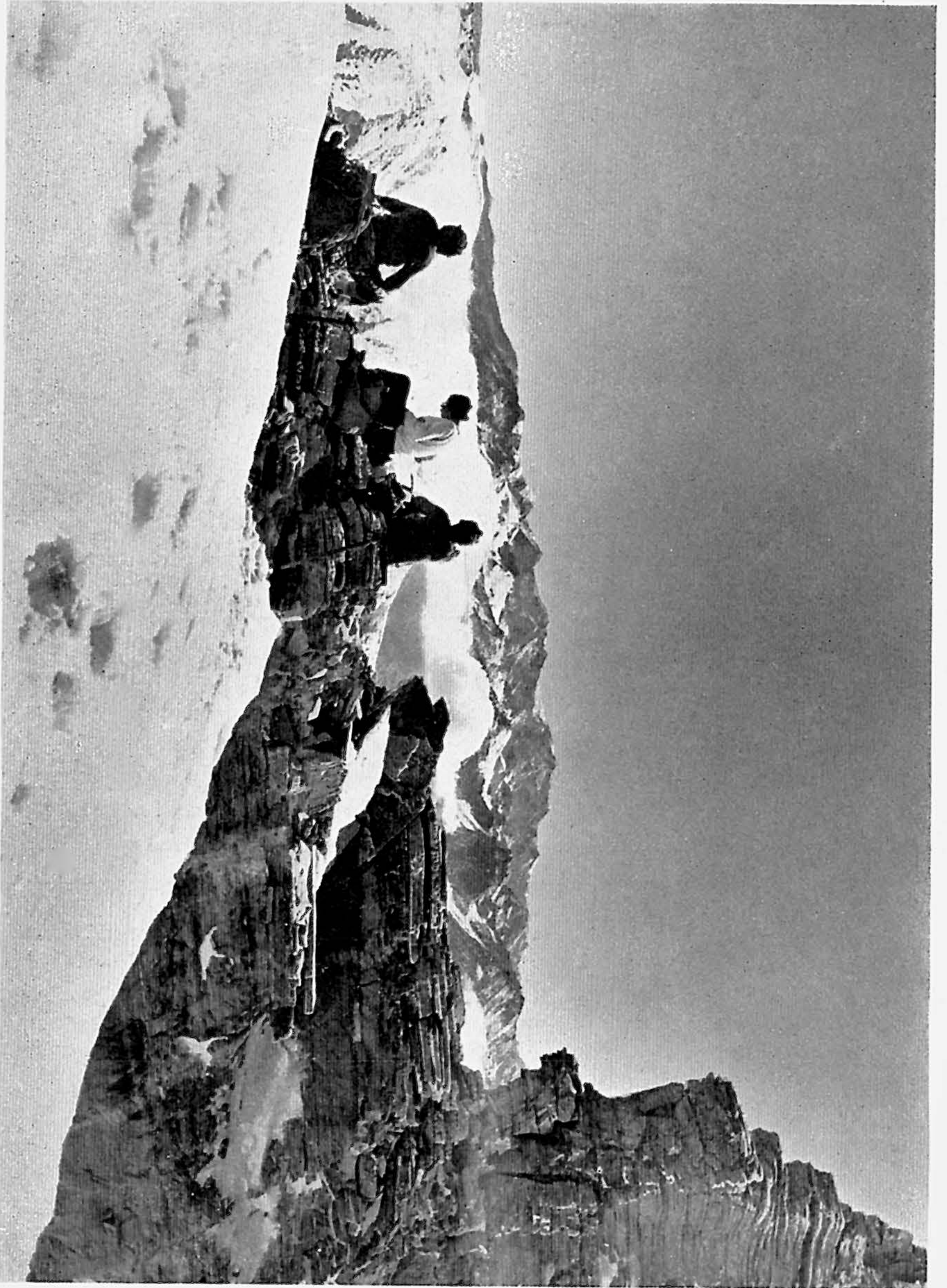
CAMP AT THE FOOT OF DORJE LAKPA.

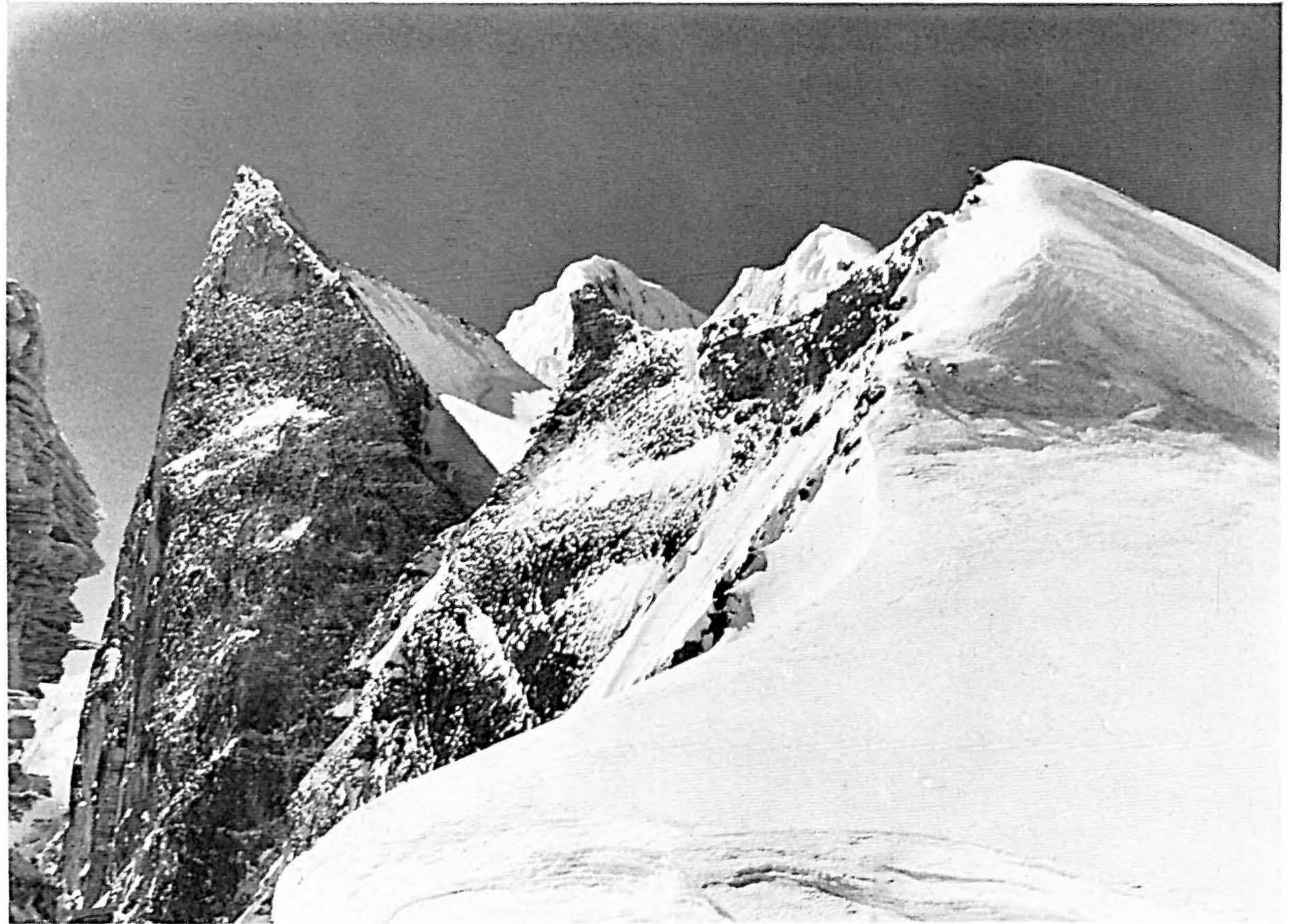
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THE LADIES' GLACIER. GYALGEN PEAK IS THE ICE-CAPPED MOUNTAIN TO THE LEFT.

LOOKING INTO TIBET FROM THE FIRST COL REACHED ON THE FRONTIER RIDGE.





THE TORTUOUS N. RIDGE OF PHURBI CHYACHU.



TAKING BEARINGS FROM THE S. RIDGE OF DORJE LAKPA, LOOKING WEST TOWARDS THE LANGTANG HIMAL.



ON THE LOWER ICE-FALL OF THE PHURBICHYACHUMBU GLACIER.

though I hate to think of what might have happened if the Tempathang Sherpas had not elected to show us what appears to be the one easy route for loaded men, which, avoiding the upper gorges of the Balephi Khola, led us to an excellent site for our Base Camp.

After finding a route up through its lower ice-fall we twice traversed one of the two main glaciers of the group—the Tempathang men called it the Phurbichyachumbu Glacier—and followed it to the foot of the frontier ridge. On our second trip we ascended the ridge and reached a col from which we looked down into Tibet. We then climbed a large subsidiary glacier, consisting mainly of ice-fall, which is not marked on the map and which we christened the Ladies' Glacier. From our fifth and highest camp on this trip Betty Stark and I, with two Sherpas, climbed to a second and much higher col on the frontier ridge, from which we reached the summit of our mountain. We named it Gyalgen Peak as a tribute to the enthusiasm of our friend and sirdar Mingma Gyalgen, a fine mountaineer. Evelyn Camrass had the great misfortune to be laid low by altitude sickness at Camp V.

Our purpose, as I have said, was exploration rather than peak-bagging, which was just as well, as the mountain we climbed was the only possibility for our party. For a larger party, with sufficient numbers and equipment for supporting camps, the unnamed 23,200-ft. peak, which is the highest in the group might go, though its summit ridge looked fairly spectacular. The truth is that the peaks of the Jugal are not exactly friendly, presenting as they do difficulties for a small party out of all proportion to their height, whilst hardly being worth the while of a large expedition.

We found two passes, one above Camp V on the Ladies' Glacier and one above Base Camp, leading to the second largest glacier valley, which looks on the Survey of India $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch map to be more important than the Phurbichyachumbu, though this is incorrect. This glacier, which the Tempathang men called the Nyakarkar and we called the Dorje Lakpa Glacier, after the fantastic peak which overshadows it, Betty and I subsequently crossed. We then followed the South ridge of Dorje Lakpa until we found another pass leading to the most westerly glacier valley of the Jugal. From this point we saw what looked like a very promising high-level glacier route from the Jugal to the Langtang Himal, but did not have time to try it out. Meanwhile, Evelyn with her party descended again to the Balephi, crossed it and ascended a ridge called the Chaksil Danda, a south-easterly spur of Phurbi Chyachu (the only other named mountain in the group). Accompanied by a Sherpa she climbed to a summit of about 18,000 ft. and looked over into the most easterly valley of the Jugal.

Though the map we had was sufficiently wrong to give us the pleasure of discovering at least five hidden peaks of over 20,000 ft. and the not inconsiderable Ladies' Glacier, it was quite correct in indicating a strongly demarcated frontier ridge. There are no through valleys or easily negotiable passes into Tibet from the Jugal. On the Nepal side the mountains sweep up to the frontier like a wave, the curling cornices

of which overhang the Tibetan plateau. It is a perfect natural frontier, and we sat in Nepal and dangled our legs into Tibet feeling comfortably virtuous.

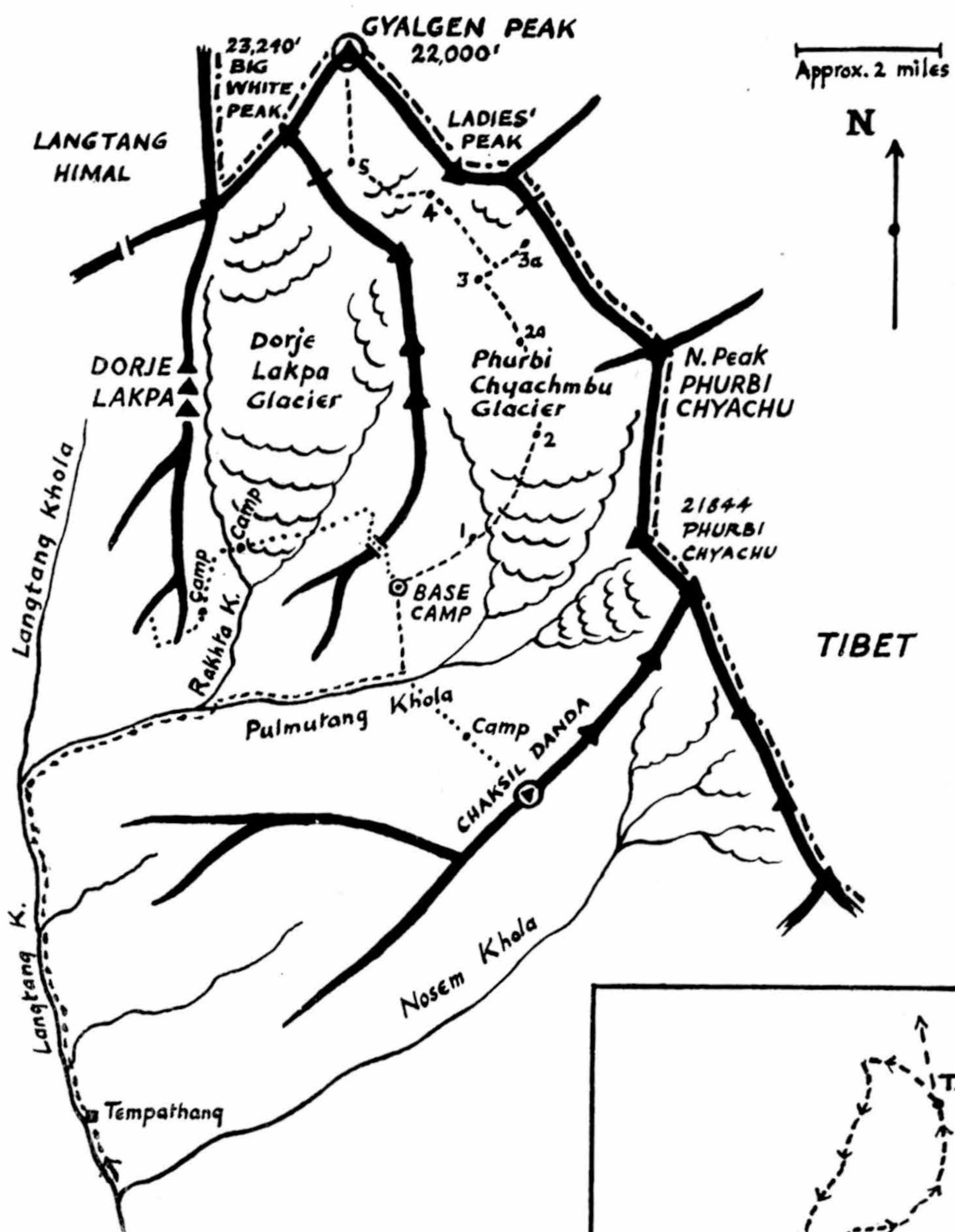
The frontier ridge, like most of the other ridges in the Jugal Himal, is extraordinarily narrow. With the exception of three cols, two of which we reached, and the mountain we climbed, it forms a tortuous curving knife-edge averaging about 20,000 ft. in altitude and embellished with ice pinnacles and cockscombs of rotten rock.

Our expedition was above all a happy one. We had no leader and divided the responsibilities between the three of us. For instance, Evelyn Camrass, our doctor, was also our very efficient treasurer; Betty Stark, whose arduous task had been the obtaining of supplies and equipment, was in charge of the commissariat and also dealt most successfully with the Customs, always managing to have the correct document up her sleeve at the crucial moment. Having climbed in the Himalaya before and having lived in India a good deal I was interpreter and dealt principally with the Sherpas, but I was also landed with most of the correspondence with India and Nepal. I think that in most cases it is advisable to have a leader, but as we were more or less united over policy we managed to resolve our occasional differences of opinion in quite a civilised way!

However, the chief credit for the high morale of our party must go to the friendly people of Nepal in general and to our Sherpas in particular—both our Sola Khumbu climbing Sherpas and the men of Tempathang. Nor should I forget to mention our one little Sherpani, the daughter of one of the Sola Khumbu Sherpas, who accompanied us to Base Camp as a porter. Our liaison officer (all expeditions to the Nepal Himalaya have now to take with them as far as Base Camp a young man, generally a student, who is supposed to represent the Nepal Government) also contributed to the general cheerfulness. He was a good-hearted lad who went well on the march, remained without fuss at Base Camp and put up with endless teasing by both Sherpas and mem-sahibs.

We had been a little uncertain of our reception in Tempathang, but we need not have worried. The people of that lonely village received us with open arms and lavish gifts of food. We were able to pay off our Kathmandu porters and take on Tempathang Sherpas to carry for us on the three-day march from their village to our Base Camp. Two of them stayed at Base till we were ready to return and then fetched up volunteers to accompany us back to Kathmandu.

Of the immense goodwill of all these people I cannot say enough. Their courtesy, kindness and enthusiasm for our enterprise endeared them greatly to us. When we left them all at Kathmandu we felt as if we were parting from old friends. That they in their turn seemed genuinely sorry to see us go was, I sincerely believe, far the most important thing we achieved in Nepal.



- Route
- .- Frontier
- Range
- ▲ Peak
- ☁ Glacier
- ~ River
- Camp

