

THE DERBYSHIRE HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION, 1961

BY ROBERT PETTIGREW

PART I

IN response to my inquiry about a suitable area for an impecunious climber intent on visiting the Himalaya, T. S. Blakeney drew my attention to Kulu in the Himalaya of the eastern Punjab of India when he wrote on February 28, 1958: 'You might make a trip from the Tos over to Andrasau,¹ a high mountain and probably a difficult one, that is unclimbed and not properly surveyed. If you made this your main, big objective, you would have pulled off probably a harder thing than Deo Tibba, and done a useful piece of work by mapping the glaciers of the mountain.'

Indrasan, 20,410 ft. (*alias* Andrasau), is still unclimbed after one brief skirmish and one serious assault. The first tentative probe inspired by Blakeney's letter and supported by valuable advice from Mr. A. E. Gunther, the late Hamish McArthur and Major Jeffrey Douglas, is described in the *Himalayan Journal*, vol. XXI, p. 102. It describes the expedition in which Basil Poff of the N.Z.A.C. and I reached the upper névé of the Malana glacier—the third shelf—which supports the final summit cone of Indrasan.

The second took the field in 1961 as the Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition and received generous support from His Grace the Duke of Devonshire, M.C., the Mount Everest Foundation, Messrs. Longland and Hodgkin and numerous other individuals and firms in Derbyshire. The total cost of the expedition was £4,500; one-third of this sum was contributed by the European members of the party.²

Other objectives were: to make a useful contribution to the map of the Kulu/Bara Shigri Divide, a job previously tackled by Colonel J. O. M. Roberts,³ ascend the 18,000-ft. ice-pass observed by Gunther in 1954 and believed by him to offer a way into the Bara Shigri from Kulu⁴; and reconnoitre the splendid granite obelisk of 18,000 ft., assumed by me to be Ali Ratni Tibba which dominates the head of the Malana nullah, a tributary of the Parbati (see sketch map).

¹ Indrasan, 20,410 ft. Unmarked on Survey of India Sheet 52H/SW.

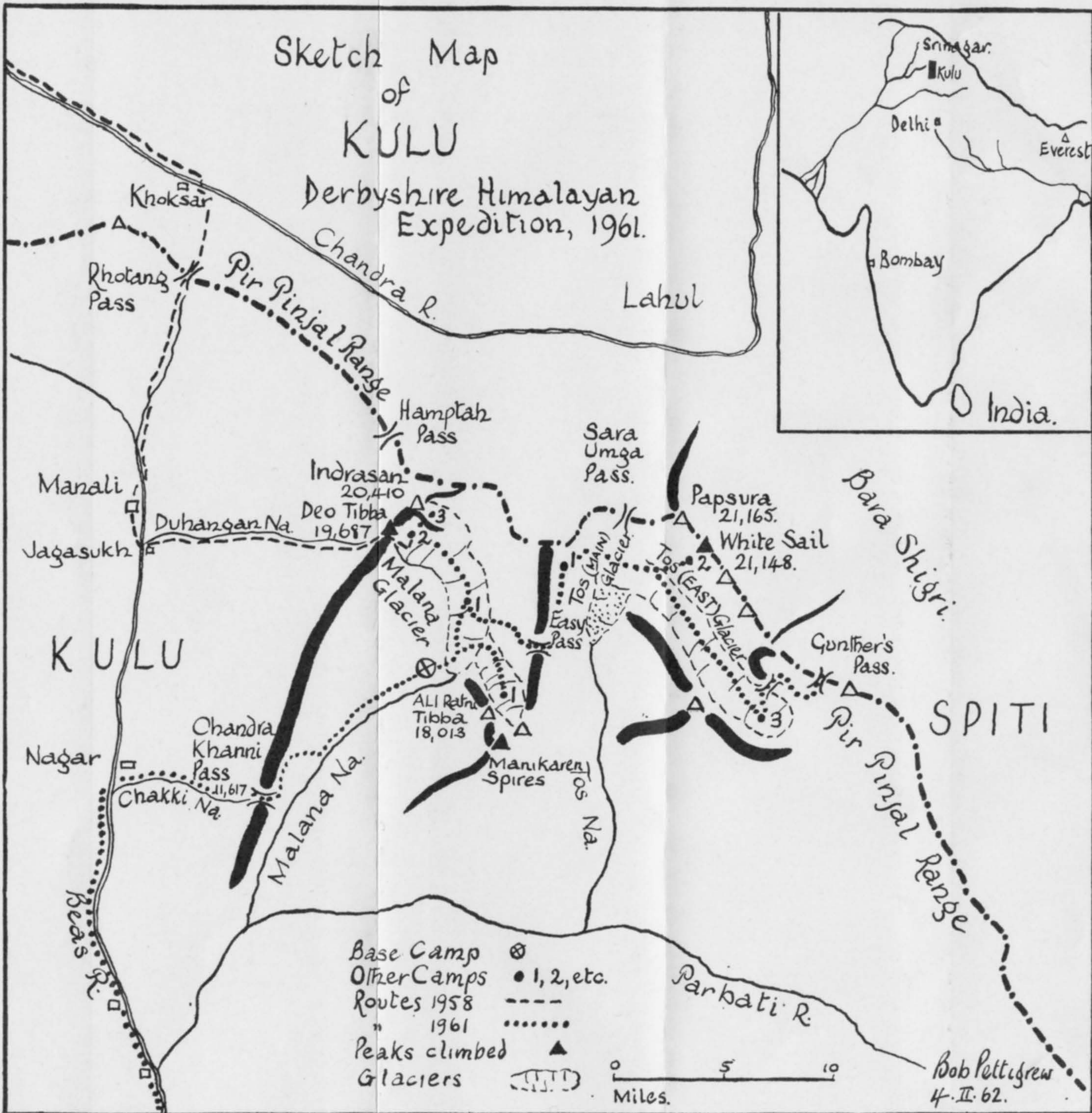
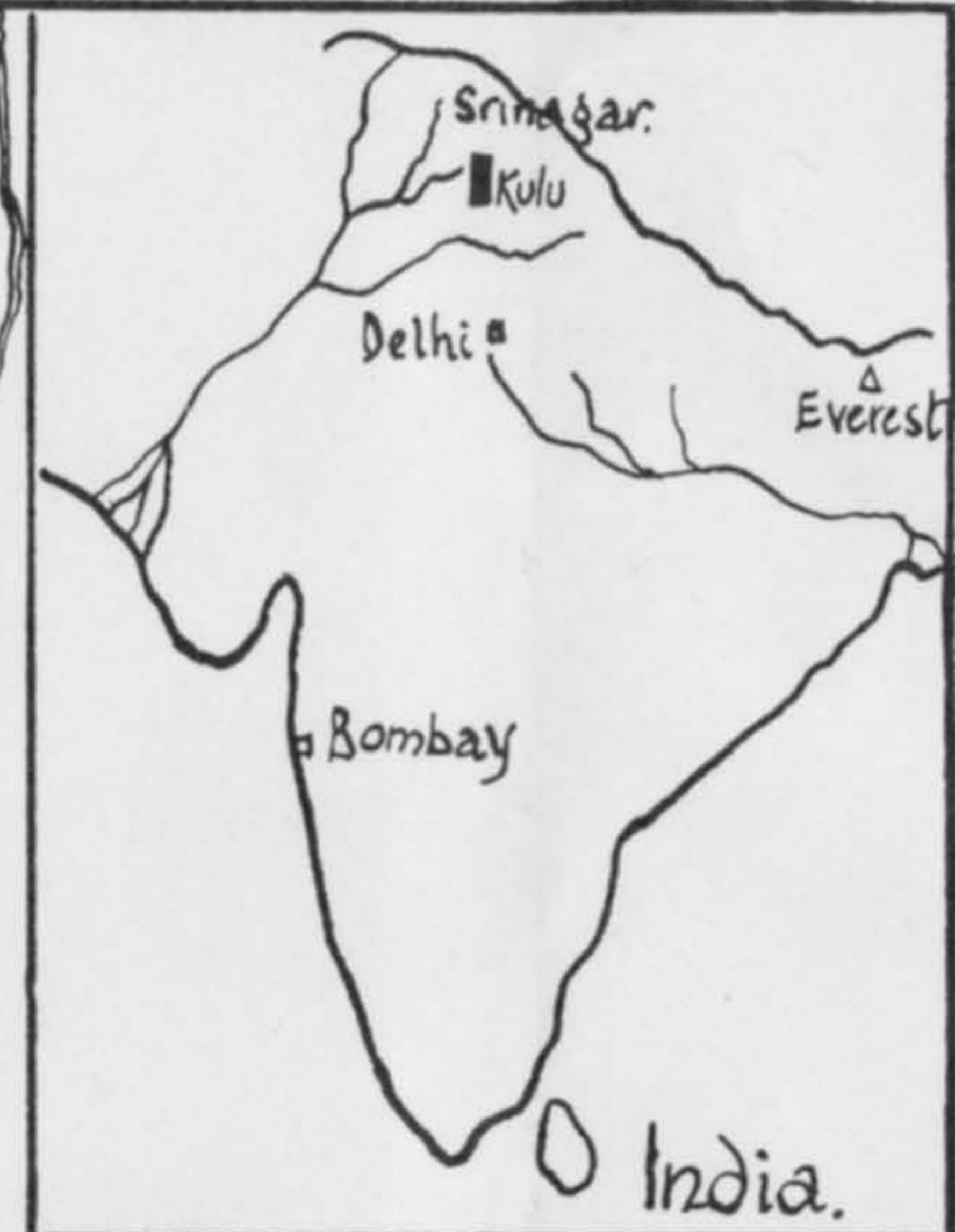
² J. Ashcroft, D. Burgess, D. Gray, R. Handley, T. S. Panther, R. G. Pettigrew, S. Read, N. Smythe.

³ *A.J.* 52. 233, and *A.J.* 53. 323.

⁴ *Geographical Journal*, vol. CXXI, 1955, p. 117.

Sketch Map of KULU

Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition, 1961.



- Base Camp ⊗
- Other Camps ● 1, 2, etc.
- Routes 1958 - - - - -
- " 1961 (dotted line)
- Peaks climbed ▲
- Glaciers [wavy lines]

0 5 10 Miles.

Bob Pettigrew
4.II.62.

We were all set to follow in the carefree footsteps of Kim without the hint of surveillance which an official liaison officer, however friendly, usually brings. Forty-eight hours off Bombay a cable to the ship announced that Captain Balgit Singh of the Regiment of Artillery, Indian Army, was appointed official liaison officer to the expedition. This was our first intimation of a ninth man. Later a letter which originated in the Ministry of External Affairs on April 29, 1961, was forwarded by air from England. It explained the situation, but had been sent by sea mail and the expedition sailed from Liverpool on May 5! There were, we decided, two consolations from this appointment. First, Balgit Singh rapidly became one of us and made a significant contribution to the survey work. Second, we were sure that the fact of his appointment would persuade the powers that be to deal kindly with our request for exemption from Customs duty and sales tax on our food and equipment. The second shock, administered close on the first, was that the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, has no power to exempt expeditions from Customs duty or sales tax as suggested in the Mount Everest Foundation document: 'Baggage—Conditions to be observed by Expeditions going to Pakistan and India.' Any concessions must come direct from the all-powerful Central Board of Revenue, where our numerous appeals directed to such diverse authorities as 'The Chief Controller of Imports', etc., eventually ended. Perhaps slight concessions were made, but we boarded the Pathankot Express the poorer by £400. Of this sum £100 was a non-recoverable payment of sales tax on our consumable stores. The £300 was placed in bond against the re-export of our non-consumables. Almost more wearing than the handing over of expedition cash was the eight-hour vigil in the Customs House whilst a detailed re-costing of our gear was made by the authorities according to current prices in the Indian market. Our case was put by the admirably energetic Freddy Buhariwallah, a shipping agent heartily recommended to all India-bound expeditions.

Late on May 28 six travel-stained Englishmen descended from the dust-coated train at the terminus of the broad-gauge railway, Pathankot, to be met by the immaculate Captain Balgit Singh. Motor transport had been arranged from Pathankot to the Beas valley in Kulu as being more convenient than the narrow-gauge railway to Jogindernagar. Adding forty gallons of paraffin and several thousand rupees to the paraphernalia now threatening the stability of the two Mercedes short wheel-base trucks, we roared off through the Pathankot bazaar *en route* for the tortuous but admirably engineered road through the gorge of the river Beas on May 29.

Our enthusiasm for the mountains was regenerated by the sight of the glittering ribbon of snow tacked on to the green mantled slopes of

the Dhaula Dhar range which forms the east wall of the Kangra valley and is now skirted by the road to Kulu, truly used by 'all castes and manner of men'. The town of Mandi is memorable for a shaky suspension bridge over the turbulent Beas and a marriage feast which brought atmosphere, but banished sleep, from the Dak bungalow in which we broke the journey for one night.

Forty miles on up the Beas at Nagar another bridge marked our disembarkation from mechanical transport twelve miles south of Manali, and the acquisition of fifty-seven ponies, eleven muleteers and, not least, our six Ladakhi porters headed by Wangyal, the Kulu veteran. John Banon, nephew of Major Henry Banon who is locally revered as 'Chini Sahib'—unfortunately taken ill with a stroke at the time of our visit—came down the valley to make arrangements for our mail and to speed us on our way. He brought with him Renu Ram a famous shikari who accompanied Major Jeffrey Douglas and Hamish MacInnes on their Kulu yeti-hunting expedition of 1957–8. Renu very kindly offered to see us over the Chandra Khanni Pass, 11,617 ft., as far as the site of Base Camp in the Malana nullah.

The next day, May 31, Burgess and Read equipped with large black umbrellas set off up to Chakki nullah, opposite Nagar bridge on the east side of the valley, to investigate disquieting reports about the impassability of the passes even at this date, when all the winter snow should have melted quietly away. Several mountaineers were of the opinion that we were rather late for this region of the Himalaya. However, Colonel Roberts has since told me that his preference would be for the month of June. Had we gone earlier it is certain we would have met with heavy additional expense getting our stores over the snow-bound passes and it is probable that we would have been valley-bound and bankrupt.

Meanwhile everyone fell to converting the shipping crates into pony panniers—each pair to weigh 120 lb. to be carried at a cost of 7 rupees per day as against 5 rupees for porter loads of 40 lb. This represents a saving in transport charges of 50 per cent in this region of the Himalaya provided, of course, the approach is negotiable by ponies. Burgess and Read returned on June 2 full of pessimism about the route. But the caravan was loaded and impatient and the same day we set off for the Chandra Khanni, some 7,000 ft., and eight miles away.

The Chakki nullah is memorable for its magnificent pine forests and lordly situations offering unforgettable views over the well-cultivated Beas valley. The first camp site—half a day short of the expected distance because the leaders had lost patience with the pony wallahs and had got themselves lost—was opposite the terraced village of Nagar, an ancient settlement from which the Rajahs and later the British once ruled Kulu. By noon on June 3 we reached the snow-line

bordered by clumps of rhododendrons near which we made camp. The track now disappeared beneath drifting snow which filled the terminal basin of the Chakki nullah and lapped up against the crest of the spur dividing the Malana from the Beas. The pony wallahs were unwilling to risk their ponies but each day's delay added £30 to the cost of the caravan. We agreed to spend June 4 preparing the route by digging trenches with the snow shovels, whilst at Renu's suggestion a runner was despatched to the nearby village of Phulinga to call up reinforcements for our man-power. At dawn on June 5 the caravan crossed the floor of the basin, floundered up steep slopes to the rim and then came to a full stop at the prospect along the crest.

On the east side the snow had long since melted and the springy turf was revealed in vertical slopes which fell uninterruptedly into the tantalisingly close Malana nullah. The true pass, a mile to the north, could only be reached along the west or Chakki side of the crest, and here the track was again covered by massive steep-angled drifts of hard snow lying the whole length of the precipitous wall. The unhindered passage by ponies could only be achieved by removing the panniers, which would be carried across the pass by man-power, and leading the animals across unladen. As temporary porters the men of Phulinga were excellent, cheerfully negotiating the steep drifts in bare feet bearing 60-lb. boxes on their backs by means of thin rope loops. Half-a-day's work earned them 5 rupees each and they saw us, a reloaded caravan, on our way into the Malana nullah with happy grins and waves. Returning in the monsoon rain along the same track, now reminiscent of the Heather Terrace on Tryfan, it was difficult to recall the scene of the distressed but tenacious ponies.

Enclosed in great forests of blue pine and deodar, spruce and fir, with occasional patches of horse chestnut, maple and walnut, the column wound up the Malana nullah which sweeps grandly round to the snout of the Malana glacier, for another two days. The second camp site in the nullah on a promontory above the swirling glacier torrent became 'Tick' camp since previous inhabitants literally got under our skins! The ponies' last day, June 7, was also the most arduous because, in its upper reaches, the valley narrows to a deep gorge and we had planned to place Base Camp at the highest level site on the west side of the river, the true right bank. The Ghaddi trail climbs steeply to gain a shoulder high above the chaos of torrent and moraine. Here, by a colossal perched block at 12,600 ft. surrounded by flowers and practically beneath the shadow of Ali Ratni Tibba, we made our Base Camp. Seven miles and 8,000 ft. lay between us and the summit of Indrasan. In the five-day journey from Nagar bridge only one item had been lost from a pony's back—a bale of sisal rope, of which we had plenty. The sturdy stone bivouacs of the nomadic shepherds were

requisitioned for the stores and one made an excellent kitchen which was soon occupied by Jigmet.

Next day, June 8, Renu and his retinue began the descent to Manali where he promised to meet and direct Smythe and Ashcroft who were due to join, and make arrangements for a return pack train on July 20. Handley and I left the same day to reconnoitre a way onto the glacier which is the main outlet for the vast Malana névés.

Indrasan, 20,410 ft., and its near neighbour Deo Tibba, 19,687 ft., comprise the superstructure of a triple-decked ice-cap as seen from the Malana nullah. The plan was simply to put a camp on each deck or shelf until we were in striking distance of the summit cone of Indrasan, some 2,000 ft. in height. From the upper plateau we also expected to climb Deo Tibba by the route of the first ascent (from the north-west), for an end-on view of Indrasan's West ridge as well as pleasure, photography and acclimatisation. Complications have arisen on account of the two distinct summits rising from a common plateau. Writing in 1914 Lt.-Col. the Hon. C. G. Bruce describes⁵ an attempt on the Deotibi ridge from the Hamtah nullah by his Swiss guide Fuhrer. He and a Gurkha orderly, Lallbahadur, got to the ridge at two points, 'after some rather exciting work'. Bruce goes on to describe the whole ridge leading from Deotibi to Penguri as wonderfully fine: 'the ice scenery is of a really high order, with masses of hanging glacier'.

In 1922 H. Lee Shuttleworth, I.C.S., when describing the Malana nullah,⁶ refers to Indrasau, a 20,417 ft. peak at the head of the Malana glen on the Beas/Chenab Divide. Accompanied by a different Lallbahadur (one assumes!) Colonel J. O. M. Roberts tried to get to grips with Deo Tibba in 1939.⁷ He reached the second shelf or lower névé from the Jagat Sukh nullah, but found the route to the summit barred by the transverse steep supporting wall of the third shelf. Returning to Manali, Roberts next gained a view of Deo Tibba from the Hamtah nullah. 'The survey map gives the height of Deo Tibba as 19,687 ft., and of a mountain to the north as 20,410 ft. This mountain is much less impressive than Deo Tibba, and there certainly does not appear to be a difference of over 700 ft. in their heights.' The mountain to the north is, of course, Indrasan. Charles Evans⁸ followed Roberts's and Peck's routes to the second shelf via the Jagat Sukh nullah and from there tried two lines on the ice-crowned wall of the third shelf, Piton ridge and Watershed ridge. Both failed to yield a route onto the upper plateau. In a brief reference to Graaff's

⁵ *Kulu and Lahoul*. By Lt.-Col. the Hon. C. G. Bruce, M.V.O. London, Edward Arnold, 1914.

⁶ *Geographical Journal*, vol. LX, No. 4, October 1922, p. 241.

⁷ *A.J.* 52. 233.

⁸ *H.J.*, vol. XVII, p. 118.

couloir Evans describes it as, 'uninviting, but perhaps worth a trial in certain snow conditions'.

E. H. Peck in a description⁹ of his observations from the second shelf at a height of 17,155 ft. refers to 'the rocky spires of the North summit, presenting an inviting bare red-rock surface in contrast to the icy gullies of the Piangneru (W) and the Hamta (N.) faces'. Is it possible that Bruce wrote Penguri for Piangneru?

Indrasan finally gets a separate identity from a composite article in *The Mountain World*, 1954, p. 218. 'It is a pointed rock summit vaguely resembling the Zinal Rothorn, and probably attempted by Fuhrer in 1912. On the Survey of India $\frac{1}{2}$ in. sheet 52H/SW it remains anonymous as height 20,410 ft.'

I find it difficult to credit that Fuhrer got anywhere near it. He is far more likely to have been involved in seeking a route to the 18,000 ft. col between Deo Tibba and Indrasan via the Piangneru face. But this was not the last word. Professor Kenneth Mason lumps the two together again. Writing of the Pir Panjal between the river Sutlej and the river Kishtwar, he mentions many rocky and icy peaks including the snow dome of Deo Tibba, 20,410 ft., visible from Simla, seventy-five miles distant. Later, when describing Kulu, he writes,¹⁰ 'Some of the glaciers are still only roughly sketched, and excepting Deo Tibba's two summits (19,687 ft. and 20,410 ft.), little has been attempted'.

To describe the mountain Indrasan as merely the North summit of Deo Tibba is to describe Lliwedd as the South-east summit of Snowdon. It also gives a false impression of the topography and scale of the upper névé, the third shelf. Every party that has stood on the col at 18,000 ft., has unhesitatingly conceded a separate identity to the fine mountains on either hand.

Having located a suitable site for Camp I, Handley and I returned to Base Camp to prepare for full-scale ferrying journeys which were to start immediately. Panther was very breathless and complained of feeling exhausted. We put this down to an acclimatisation failure since he had been ill throughout the march-in. However, on June 9, whilst ferrying loads to Camp I, he collapsed on the glaciated slabs just short of the snout of the Malana glacier at about 13,000 ft. He complained of severe chest pains, had difficulty drawing breath, and I estimated his pulse rate to be 180 to the minute. After a short rest he recovered sufficiently to move slowly back to Base Camp with the assistance of a porter. A few days later he decided, on his own initiative, to descend to Manali via Jari and Bhuin. After an arduous passage of the Malana gorge he reached Bhuntar and from there took plane to

⁹ *H. J.*, vol. XVII, p. 125.

¹⁰ *Abode of Snow*, p. 292.

Bombay. He then returned to England. Another early casualty was Captain Balgit Singh. He twisted his knee during the descent from Camp I on June 10. Fortunately for the strength of the party reinforcements were arriving in Kulu in the persons of Ashcroft, the surveyor, and Smythe—the last-named joining for a brief period of local leave.

Pathfinding on the gently inclined Malana glacier—the first shelf—Handley and I found easy going on the coverlet of winter snow which still persisted in the main stream of the glacier. Veering off to the west the route to the second shelf took a tributary ice-stream flowing from the lower névé containing the Dunhagen Pass first reached by Colonel Roberts in 1939.¹¹ A steep little ice-fall provided interesting diversions before we emerged on the undulating surface of the lower Malana basin at 16,000 ft., three years to the very day after I had reached this same place from the Jagat Sukh nullah with Basil Poff for an unsuccessful attempt on Deo Tibba.¹² Here Camp II of the current attempt was established. It was later to be shifted half a mile to the west opposite the lowest spur of Piton ridge. We descended the same day to Camp I, where successive ferrying parties had begun to stockpile, and we continued through to Base Camp. A large caravan returned over the glacier on June 11, spent the night at Camp I, then consolidated Camp II at the new site by the foot of Piton ridge on June 12.

From the second shelf there are three feasible routes up the transverse supporting wall to the final plateau. First, by the extreme western edge of the upper shelves, known as Watershed ridge, which was first climbed in 1954 by Herr Rott, after several parties had observed and recorded it as a possibility since 1939. Second, moving east across the second shelf, by a great couloir which was used by Jan de V. Graaff's party when he made the first ascent of Deo Tibba in 1952; this is thought to have been used by three Italian prisoners of war on parole leave (Bianchini, Fuselli and Mamini) attempting Deo Tibba in 1945 when the highest point reached was the southern edge of the third shelf immediately above the couloir, the Punta San Marco, 18,076 ft. The couloir was also descended by Basil Poff and me returning to the second shelf after climbing Watershed ridge in 1958. Third, on the extreme eastern side of the massif by the main ice-fall of the Malana glacier caused by the upper névé spilling into the valley glacier. There is no record of an ascent of the ice-fall. The least hazardous of the three routes seemed to be the couloir which was then chosen as the ferry route and main avenue between camps on the second and third shelves.

Burgess, Gray and Wangyal tackled the couloir for the first time on June 13 and succeeded in establishing Camp III—a four man Hillary tent on the third shelf at 18,000 ft. From the route between Camps

¹¹ *A.J.* 52. 235.

¹² *H.J.*, vol. XXI. p. 102.

Location of Deo Tibba
19,687 ft.

Indrasan 20,410 ft.



To face p. 330

Photo, J. Ashcroft]

THE ROUTE ON INDRASAN.

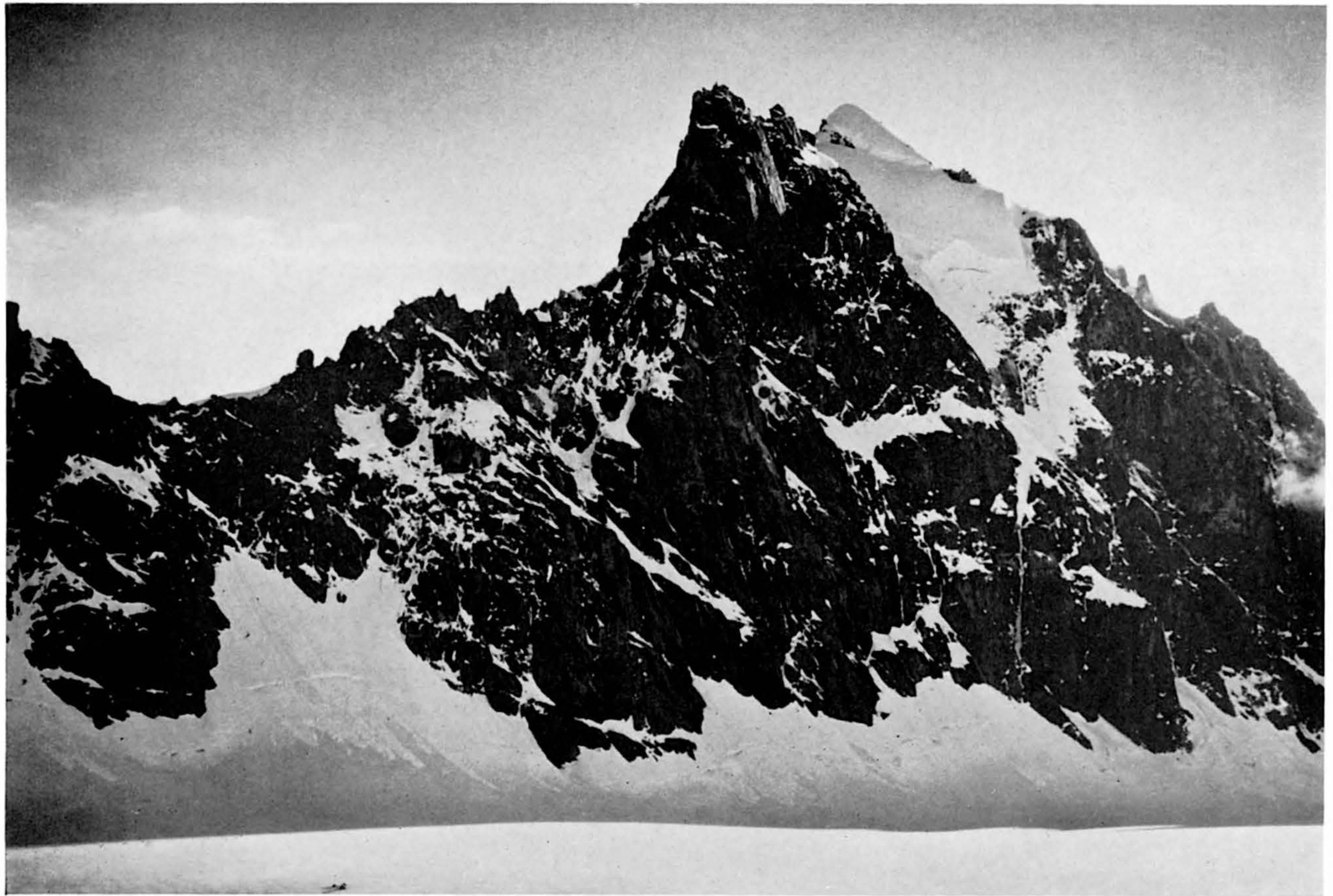
I and II they appeared as minute specks moving infinitely slowly two-thirds of the way up the couloir. Cloud and a rib of rock soon hid them from view, but they seemed determined atoms. We discovered their success on June 14 on arrival at Camp II with fresh supplies. However, they were unhappy about the practicability of a route which had taken them nine hours to climb and which ranged in angle from 45 degrees at the foot to 65 degrees at the top. Recalling my descent of the couloir in 1958, Handley and I next approached via Piton ridge. We climbed steep snow in the form of a ramp on the west side of the ridge to gain the prominent notch which is marked by a great gendarme—noted by Graaff. Hence we entered the couloir approximately half way up by contouring in from the left-hand, west, side. This proved a definite psychological aid and the climbing time was reduced to about six hours. Unfortunately Handley and I blotted our copy books by spending the night in the skeleton Camp III, 18,000 ft., without sleeping bags or food. We had taken refuge from a short but violent snowstorm and, since it got dark, we had to stay and make the best of it. To keep warm we pitched a Black's mountain tent inside the four-man Hillary and found this experiment reasonably successful. One drawback was that Ang Chook never really regained his good humour because of the fumes he imbibed whilst keeping a primus stove alight all night.

Early on June 16 Burgess, Gray and Wangyal anxiously climbed the couloir to locate us. Afterwards we fixed a 200-ft. length of sisal fixed rope hanging down over the route in the couloir from the rocks at its head. June 17 was spent resting on the second shelf and plans for a reconnaissance of the West ridge of Indrasan were worked out. The next day everyone climbed the couloir to install Burgess, Gray and Wangyal on the upper plateau.

Camp IV in the 18,000-ft. col between Deo Tibba and Indrasan, close to the foot of the West ridge, was occupied by the recce party on June 19; in worsening weather conditions they made the fifth ascent of Deo Tibba, 19,687 ft., on June 20. The weather, which had looked doubtful for two or three days on account of the rich colouration of the southern sky, broke completely during the night of the 20th and we were confined to our respective camps by heavy snowfalls for five days. Unless future parties on Indrasan can be equipped with 'walkie-talkie' radios (we could not afford them) there will always be the danger of complete isolation owing to the easy failure of normal communication between the second and third shelf. Life at Camp II dropped to a low ebb as each amusement was exhausted and we were reduced to playing 'Battleships'. We were fairly certain that the outpost at Camp IV would be similarly placed but laid plans to try and reach them if, after seven days, the estimated limit of their food and fuel, they had not withdrawn down the wall.

Camp IV (on Plateau)

Indrasan 20,410 ft.



Photo, R. G. Pettigrew]

During the early evening of June 24 a faint shout brought us rushing from the tents looking upwards at Piton ridge. Just discernible through flurries of snow were three tired muffled figures descending doggedly through thigh-deep stuff. They had beaten a successful retreat down the couloir which, in places, was chest-deep. The tension broken, we spent a riotous evening over a bottle of brandy, celebrating their safe return.

Heavy snowfalls over the last few days made avalanches imminent, the team was jaded through inactivity, and we agreed to withdraw to the foot of the glacier leaving the camps intact. The evacuation took place on June 25.

Having taught the Ladakhis to play cricket in the two-day rest, Burgess, Read and I with four porters on June 28 found an improved route high on to the Malana glacier by contouring the great spur on its true right bank. We ascended to Camp II the same day. That night an intensely brilliant moon gave light for the remainder of the team wearily to join us. At dawn on June 29 Burgess and I with four porters were plodding up the steep ramp which led from just above the site of Camp II to the brèche in Piton ridge. Here we rested before the flog of the couloir climb. Steep slopes fell away from the contour line to form the left retaining wall of the couloir. The saving feature of the great gully was the little rock outcrop on the left margin which enabled us to break the ascent into 'legs' and take a breather, under shelter, from the hard work.

(To be concluded)