

KHINYANG CHHISH, 1962

BY DR. P. J. HORNIBLOW

A STRONG reconnaissance, and an attempt on one of the two summits, of the Khinyang Chhish-Pumarikish massif was the object of this year's joint Pakistan-British Forces Karakoram Expedition. These two mountains are on the north side of the Hispar glacier, at a point where the states of Nagar and Hunza and the Ladakh Agency meet. Little was known of the area, and such information as we had was derived from the map made by Mr. Eric Shipton on his 1939 survey of the Hispar-Biafo glacial regions; correspondence with the late Mr. Wilfrid Noyce, whose ascent of Trivor in 1960 afforded a view of the North-west face of Khinyang ('Chhish' means mountain); and the secretary of the 1959 Italian expedition to Kanjut Sar. Photographs, taken half a century ago by the Bullock Workmans, also assisted us in our reconnaissance of the southern slopes of both mountains. An aerial survey by the Pakistan Air Force on behalf of the expedition was unfortunately carried out too late to be of value to this year's party.

Difficulties beset us from the start. The expedition was planned under the joint leadership of Major E. J. E. Mills, a member of the successful Forces expedition to Rakaposhi in 1958, and Captain Jawed Akhter of the Pakistan Army, who had scaled the East Peak of Malubiting in 1959 when he was a member of the British-Pakistan Forces Expedition under Major H. R. A. Streater, and had followed this success by climbing Masherbrum with the 1960 American Expedition. Unfortunately, Captain Akhter broke his leg playing football earlier in the year, and was not fit enough to join the party. Squadron Leader Shah Khan, of the Pakistan Air Force, another member of the Rakaposhi team, was nominated as his replacement, but he also had to call off through ill health at the last minute. A second P.A.F. officer also was prevented from coming.

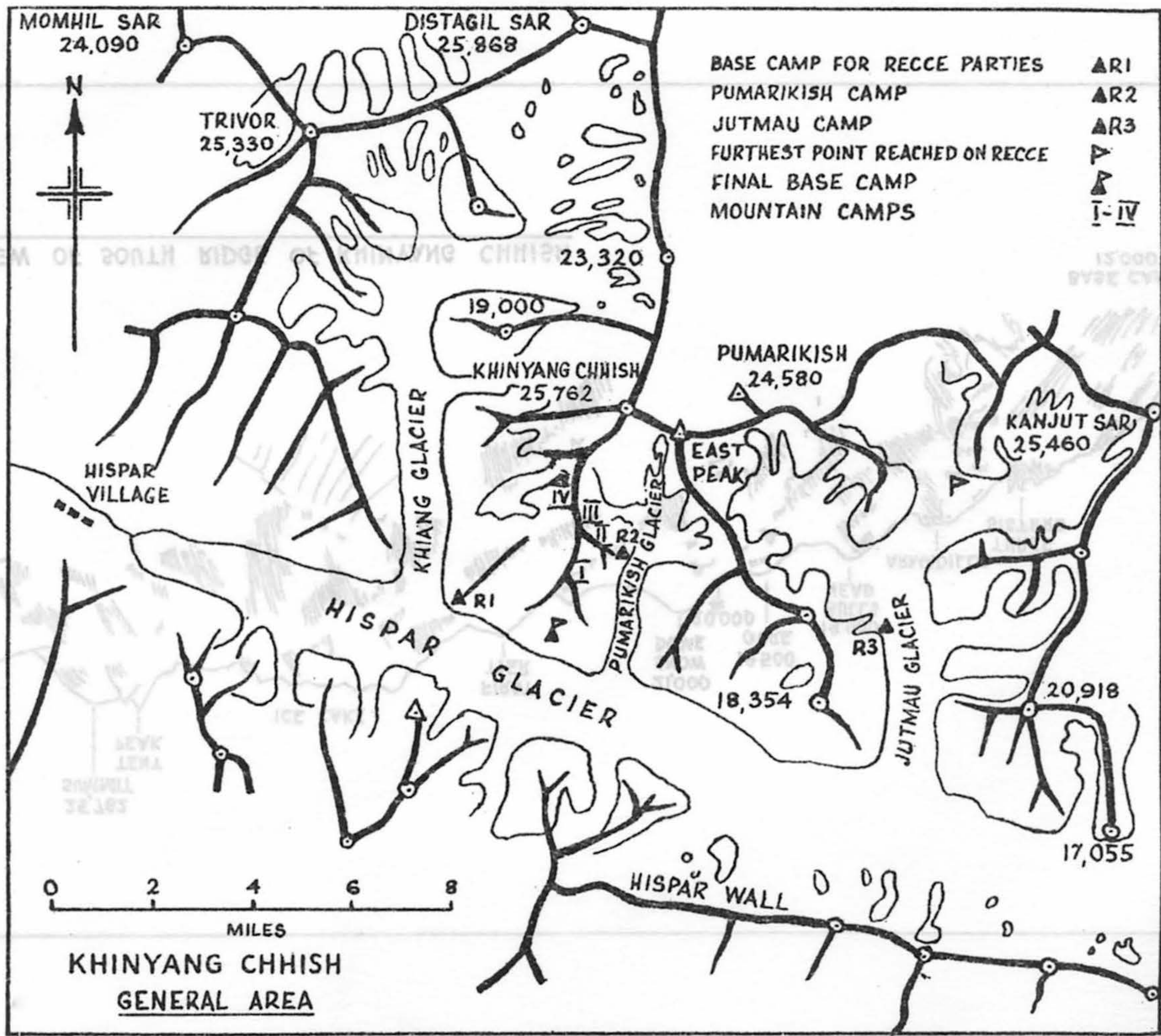
So the party that finally collected at Rawalpindi on June 6 comprised Major Mills (Leader), Captain M. R. F. Jones, of the Royal Fusiliers, Captain A. Hasell of the Royal Signals, and myself as medical officer. We formed the British contingent. Captain Saeed Durrani, Captain Khurshied Ahmed, and Lt. Nisar Ahmed, of the Pakistan Army, were its representatives. These three officers had been introduced to mountaineering by Major Mills when he attended the Quetta Staff College in 1960, and were very enthusiastic. Durrani in particular showed a

great natural ability for the sport. A late choice by the Pakistan Army was Captain Naqvi, who however was very inexperienced. The last member of the party was Dr. Karl Stauffer, an American member of the Geological Survey of Pakistan, who originally intended to confine himself to a mineralogical survey of the Hispar region, but who became a climbing member to strengthen the team in the absence of Jawed Akhter and Shah Khan. He had had considerable rock climbing experience in America and Alaska. Apart from Mills, I was the only member with previous Himalayan experience, but Jones had led a successful expedition from his regiment to the Canadian Rockies in 1960, and Captain Hasell had led the Army Mountaineering Association summer meet in the Alps in 1961.

Jones, as expedition secretary, had performed his duties admirably, and the party were ready to move off from Gilgit on June 12, having been flown there from Rawalpindi in a Pakistan Air Force 'Freighter'. It was a great sorrow to us when we later learned that the crew of this aircraft had been killed in a flying accident near Rawalpindi in July.

Mills had planned to reconnoitre the mountain in advance of the main party, and accordingly he, Hasell, Khurshied, Durrani and myself left Gilgit for Nagar by jeep on the 12th. This track along the course of the Hunza river is terrifying at the best of times, and recent heavy rains had played havoc with some stretches, so that our journey took twice as long as usual, and it was an exhausted party that reached Nagar at 11 p.m. that evening, having forded several streams, rebuilt a bridge, and cleared a landslide en route, as well as having had to push our over-loaded jeeps up the steeper hills. The inhabitants of Nagar compare unfavourably with their Hunza and Balti neighbours, and regard a mountaineering expedition as a heaven-sent source of revenue. Mills had managed to recruit six experienced Hunza porters while we were in Gilgit, but these were *personae non gratae* with the Wazir of Nagar, who proved extremely uncooperative until we were forced to dismiss them. Other porters were not forthcoming, and the loads they were to carry were reduced to 40 lb. The fact that we had chosen to arrive in the midst of the ten-day Muslim feast of Muharram was another handicap. Finally, we managed to collect thirty-five men to carry 60 lb. apiece, after the Mir himself intervened, but not before he had extracted a promise of 'baksheesh' to be paid *if* they worked well. I feel obliged to state that much of this financial bickering is due to the affluent Italian Kanjut Sar expedition, who dispensed largesse and equipment on an unparalleled scale in 1959.

The walk from Nagar to the village of Hispar, at the foot of the glacier, is remarkably unpleasant, up the forbidding gorge of the Hispar river, mostly trackless, and along sections of scree-slope that are as dangerous as any mountain. On our second night out, we were



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**KHINYANG CHHISH
GENERAL AREA**

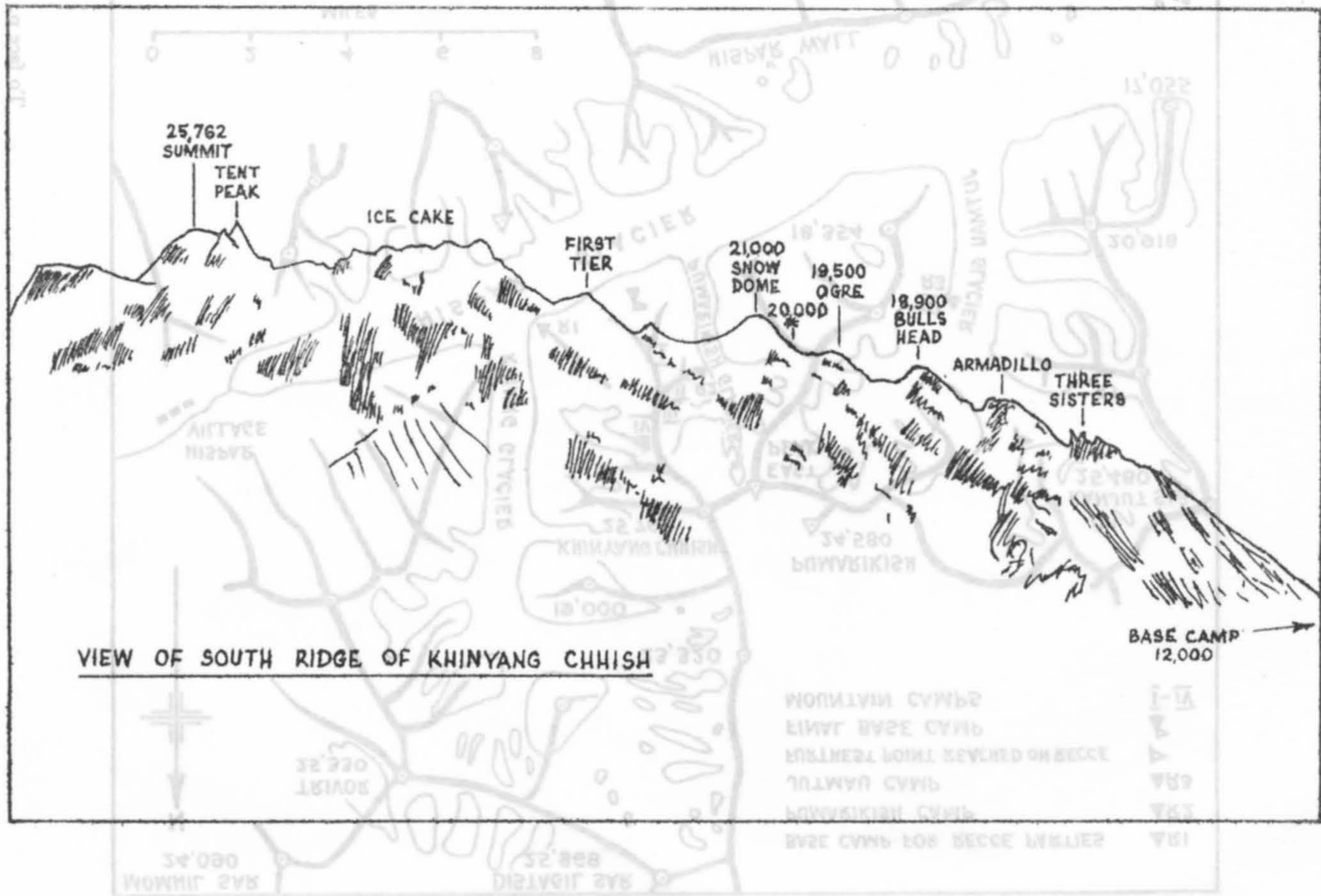
treated to the spectacle of an earth slide half a mile from our camp that covered the valley floor. The third evening we reached Hispar, where a villager excelled himself by asking for rent for the area we chose for our camp site because 'the grass would be damaged'. He was not rewarded. Two afternoons later we reached the foot of the South-west ridge of the mountain, and made a temporary base camp for the reconnaissance. This was a pleasant meadow called Bitanmal above the lateral moraine. From it we could see what we named 'Tent Peak' above us, which subsequently proved to be the penultimate peak on the South-west ridge.

Next morning, Mills and Durrani set off up the steep grass slope of the South-west ridge, whilst Hasell, Khurshied and myself continued up the side of the Hispar glacier to study possible routes up the mountain from the Pumarikish and Jutmau glaciers.

To follow the fortunes of Mills and Durrani first; they ascended to about 16,000 ft. on their ridge, but were soon discouraged by its broken nature. It was breached at one point, and beyond it was a rock wall that only led out onto an ice and rock face, giving no hope of a route. To the east however they could observe the South-south-west ridge in profile, and this was far more promising. In the event, it was the route chosen for the climb. Once a series of gendarmes—graphically named the Three Sisters and the Armadillo by Hasell—on the lower part could be by-passed, there remained a snow and rock peak—the Bull's Head—which looked as if it could be turned; another spire—the Ogre—which seemed possible; then two rounded snow hills—the Snow Dome and the Snow Cake respectively—and then a moderately steep climb to the summit. Should this prove difficult, there was a high snow basin on the west side which might afford a route to the summit. It must be said that a view of the summit itself proved most elusive, due both to a persistent cloud cap and to the very fact of its position, tucked away to the north-west, and usually hidden by the southern ridges. We still cannot foresee what—if any—difficulties another party will have above its higher camps.

Mills was satisfied with what he saw, and he and Durrani descended. They chose a Base Camp about two miles further up the glacier, at the foot of the South-south-west ridge, at an altitude of some 12,600 ft., another pleasant meadow, though lacking water in the immediate vicinity. From here, with the limited number of porters at their disposal, they began to establish Camp 1 at nearly 16,000 ft. on a southerly subsidiary ridge. This involved a three-hour climb up steep grass and rock to the mouth of a rocky nullah that debouched into a snow basin on the east flank of the South-south-west ridge. The snow level by this time (last week in June) was at about 16,000 ft.

Meanwhile, Hasell, Khurshied and I, having reached the mouth of



the Pumarikish glacier on June 18, were able to orientate ourselves with the help of one of Dr. Bullock Workman's photographs taken up this glacier from the Hispar Wall. There appeared to be a good chance of ascending the glacier, and then, from its north-east extremity, crossing a high 'la' or pass onto the Jutmau glacier and descending this to the Hispar again. That night we camped up the west side, amidst a sea of forget-me-nots and celandine, and the following morning ascended the slope above us. This was the south-east ridge of Khinyang. It was a pleasant scramble in the warm sunlight—the last we were to see for many days—and we were treated to the sight of a Sabre Jet of the Pakistan Air Force flying over at 30,000 ft. or so. This was one of the photo-reconnaissance surveys being carried out on our behalf. More suitably dressed for the tennis court than a Himalayan peak, we found ourselves forced on to snow when we reached the ridge, but were then able to see that the head of the Pumarikish glacier is enclosed by sheer cliffs of ice and rock, and that access to the Jutmau glacier is blocked by a fluted rock ridge that hangs like a theatre curtain a thousand feet high between a straight knife-edge ridge running directly up to the summit of the East Peak of Khinyang, about 24,000 ft., and a subsidiary peak on the east side of the Pumarikish glacier.

The East Peak of Khinyang is a fine rock tower, and is worth naming. It seemed probable to us that it was mistaken for Pumarikish mountain, hence the name of the glacier, when the area was first explored, but this is not so: the actual peak of Pumarikish, which we saw later from Camp 2, lies behind East Peak to the north-east. The ridge we were on followed a steep and irregular course to the north-west, where it seemed to fuse first with the South and then with the South-south-west ridge at the Bull's Head. It would be most unsuitable for porters.

Next morning dawned cold and wet and, crossing the Pumarikish glacier, we descended to the Hispar, and walked up to the Jutmau glacier. This is unpleasant to ascend, as there is no lateral track, and even the yaks are daunted by it. In our previous travels, we always followed yak paths, as these ungainly black beasts choose the best going at all times. Mist and rain befell us during our three days on the Jutmau, but it was clear that this glacier also afforded no outlet on to the upper slopes of either Khinyang or Pumarikish. The glacier head is formed by the east flank of Kanjut Sar, with its massive horizontal striations, clearly of very different origin from the mountains to the west; a narrow glacier descending from an unnamed 23,000 ft. peak to the north; the south shoulder of Pumarikish, offering little hope of the summit; and the Jutmau itself, descending from the 'hanging curtain' between it and the Pumarikish glacier. Near the head, Hasell found a tin, probably once containing milk, with the numbers CRJU-E428

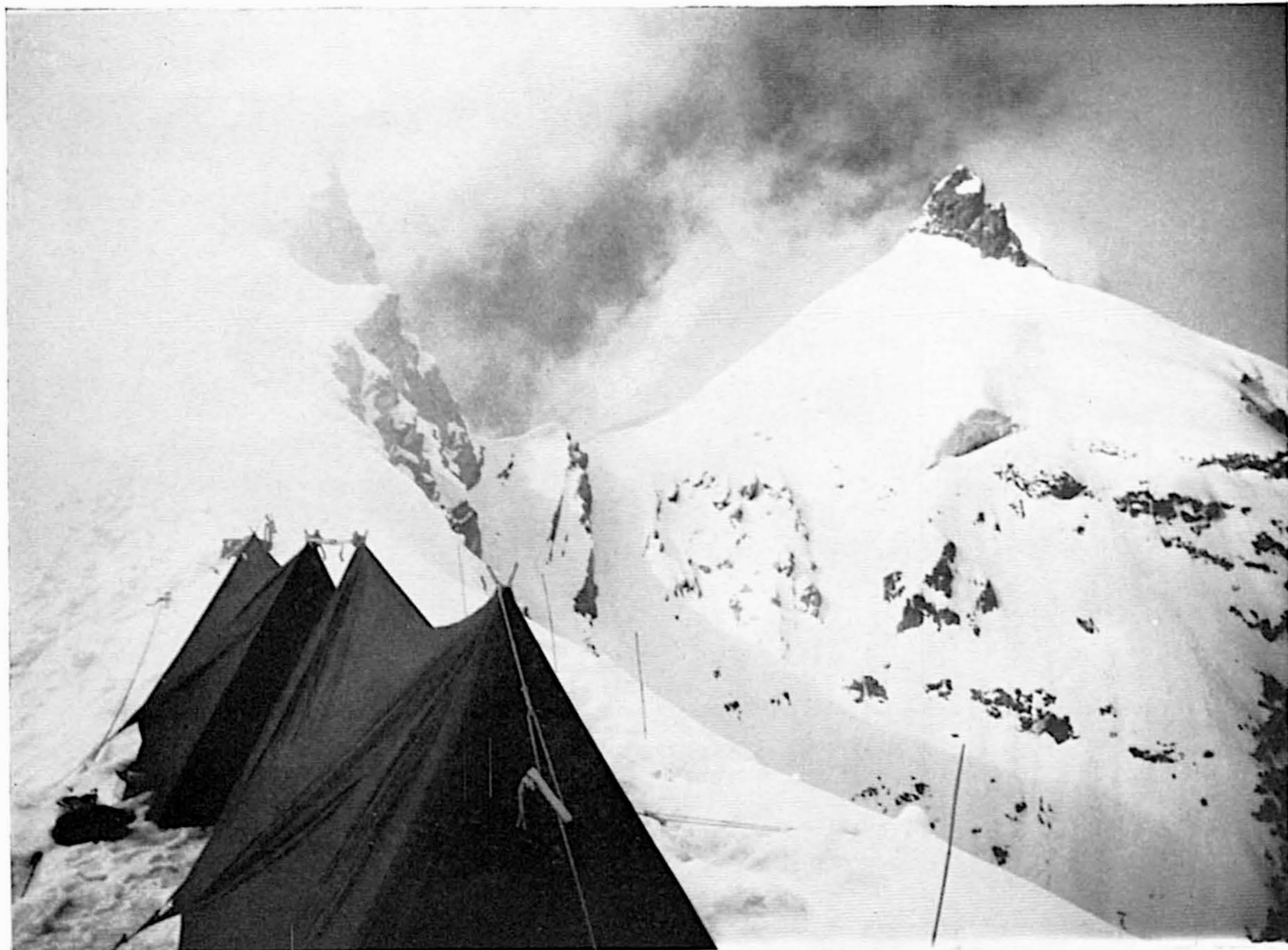


Photo. J. A. E. Hasell]

CAMP II KHINYANG CHHISH. BEHIND THE CAMP ARE THE BULL'S HEAD AND (*right*) THE OGRE.



Photo. J. A. E. Hasell]

HISPAR GLACIER AND SOUTH-EAST RIDGE OF KHINYANG CHHISH FROM THE BULL'S HEAD.

on it, possibly a relic of Shipton's party, although we appear to have travelled further north than his party.

We returned to Base Camp, and on the evening of the 25th the main party arrived. They too had had their vicissitudes with porters, and on one occasion, with the help of their few potential high altitude porters, had formed a 'thin red line' to prevent their mutinous coolies making off back to Nagar. However, little of value had been stolen, though a sack of ropes had been lost from a jeep, a fact that was to affect our plans later. Next day, whilst Jones struggled with the thankless task of paying off the porters, we erected a mess tent, and stacked it with the luxurious rations that Mills had obtained for us in England.

During the next few days, all hands were engaged in ferrying supplies up to Camp 1. The weather remained persistently bad, and on July 1, the Camp 1 party, consisting of Hasell, Durrani, Stauffer and Khurshied, returned to Base Camp, as they could make no progress beyond the snow basin. Mills sent them back up again next day though, as the weather showed some signs of clearing, and on July 4 they managed to climb out of the snow basin on to the end of the South-east ridge where it turned westwards to join the South-south-west ridge near the Bull's Head. This involved a steep snow ascent on a slope prone to avalanches, and the four of them worked hard to fix ropes totalling a thousand feet.

On July 6, Mills, Jones, Nisar Ahmed, and I passed through and established Camp 2 at about 18,000 ft. on the lip of the snow basin. This was a knife edge ridge, and tent platforms had to be dug. Over the other side, the ridge dropped vertically for about 3,000 ft. onto the Pumarikish glacier. Sleep in this camp was disturbed until one got used to the airiness of the site. The same night, Hasell, with the help of Ayat Ali, one of our high altitude porters who had served as a linesman in the Northern Scouts, managed to finish laying a telephone cable from Camp 2 down to Camp 1, which thereafter worked faultlessly. These special light-weight telephones were of great use to us, and solved the whole problem of communication between the two parties. I built an ice water-closet on the slope, which, providing one wore a safety rope, added comfort to one's early morning chore.

Now we were faced with our first serious problem. During the next seven days, whilst Hasell, Durrani, Khurshied and Stauffer slogged up and down between Camps 1 and 2 with the porters, the other four tackled the Bull's Head. From Camp 2, we followed the South-east ridge upwards for some 500 ft. to the top of the Bull's Head. At first, it seemed as if we were balked, for there was a sheer drop on the other side. It was impossible to by-pass the Bull's Head to the west, and the east face was vertical rock—interesting enough for a summer's afternoon

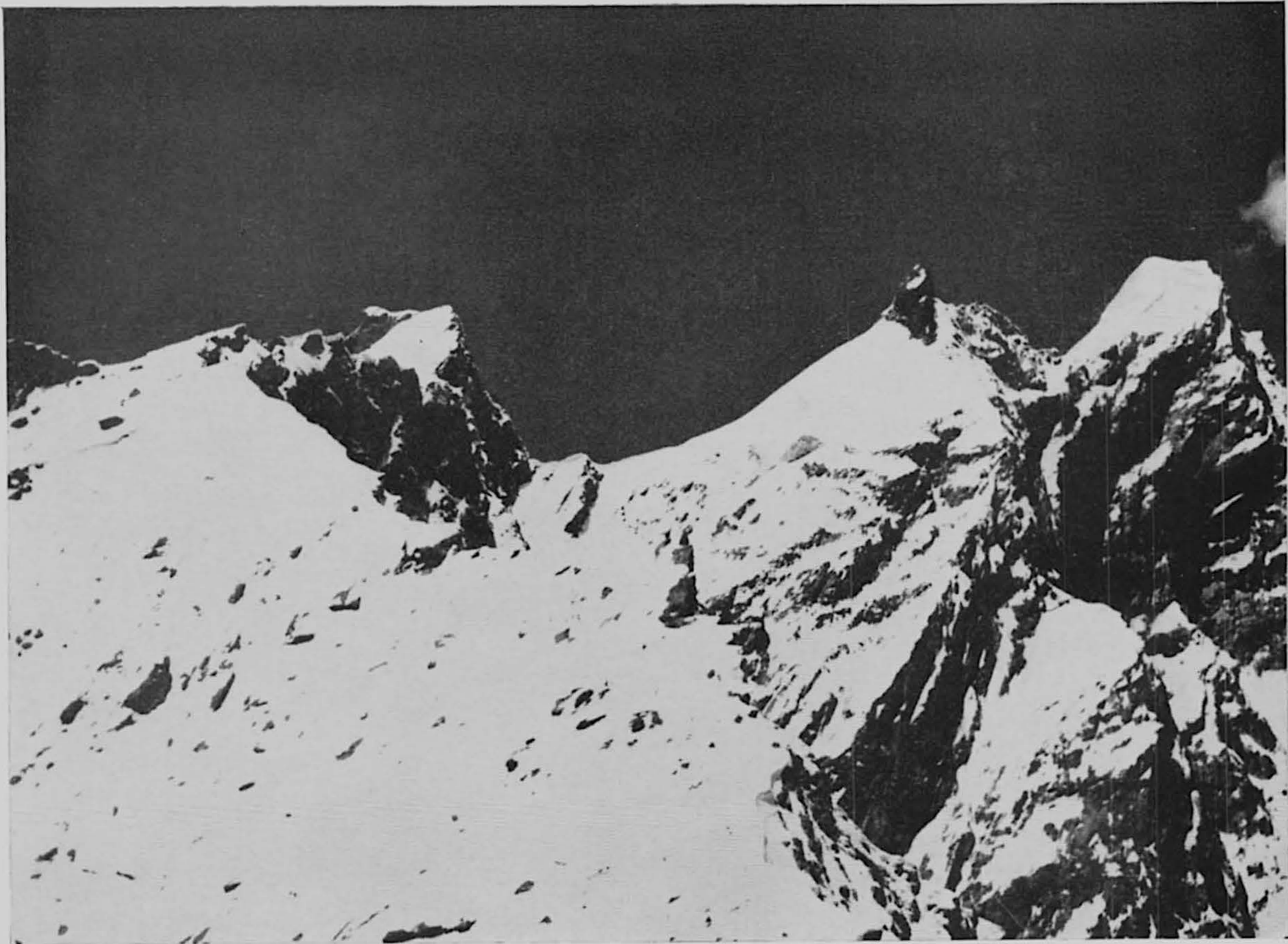


Photo. J. A. E. Hasell]

KHINYANG CHHISH: BULL'S HEAD (*left*), OGRE AND SNOW DOME FROM THE EAST.

in Wales but no route for a laden climber or porter. Eventually Mills decided to go straight on over the top. Breaking through the cornice, Jones and he descended a steep snow-face, then traversed on to the east rock face. When they finally reappeared, Nisar Ahmed and myself were delighted to hear that they had found a difficult, but possible, route down to the col on the South-south-west ridge leading across to the Ogre. It was a fine piece of route-finding by Jones, sustained by the unquenchable enthusiasm and caution of Mills. During the next five days, the party slowly descended this face, fixing corlene ropes as they went, and returning to Camp 2 each night. About 1,300 ft. of fixed rope were used to descend this face whose vertical height must have been about 500 ft., and included two exposed traverses and a chimney. The weather remained bad during this period.

It was now that the loss of the sack of rope earlier on was appreciated and Mills sent a message back to Gilgit asking for another 4,000 ft. As it happened, it was perhaps fortunate that it was not available. On the 15th, Mills' party crossed the Bull's Head and climbed a steep snow slope to the foot of the Ogre. There they found that, though the ascent of the south face of this rock tower offered no great difficulties, the far side was a narrow, overhanging ridge that was surely unsafe. So they made a tent platform at the foot of the rock, as it was clear that it must be by-passed on its eastern flank. Despite its steepness, and the rotten snow, it offered a chance, and so Hasell, Durrani, Stauffer, and Nisar Ahmed moved through to the temporary site of Camp 3, until they could find a route across the Ogre to the foot of the Snow Dome. Mills and his party moved back to Camp 2, where Captain Naqvi had arrived with the last load of supplies; he was suffering very much from the altitude.

The morale of the rest of the party was somewhat affected by the poor mail service. The Pakistan postal authorities seemed unfamiliar with the State of Nagar, and our mail was routed via the dead letter office in Lahore, Merdan, and Swat, so that it was a month old by the time it reached us—if it did. My wife sent me nine letters during the course of the expedition, none of which arrived. The continuing bad weather also did little to raise our spirits, but it was now that Mills' leadership was so much felt by the whole party. His enthusiasm and optimism, combined with his quiet, sympathetic but firm grip of affairs, held us all together. We all had complete confidence in his sound, experienced judgement.

On the morning of July 18, after a night of heavy snow, Mills, Jones, Khurshied and I set out for Camp 3 with four high altitude porters, all carrying 40-lb. loads. New steps had to be kicked up the Bull's Head, and we missed the help of half of our porters, who were sick. Again it must be said that as a high altitude porter received Rs. 5 a day

and his food at this height, even if he did not work, there was no great incentive for him to turn out of his sleeping bag. They persistently ignored the advice of Mills and myself to wear snow goggles, with the result that usually at least one of them had snow blindness. Towards the end, I found it necessary to issue 'malingering' chits to those who did not wish to work without good medical cause, as the drain on our finances was becoming too great.

Reaching Camp 3, we lunched, and then went to the start of the Ogre traverse—or Nymph's Traverse, as Hasell named it. We were glad to find that he and his party had roped a route, which emerged, by a stroke of good fortune, at the one place on the col between the Ogre and the Snow Dome that offered access on to the ridge. The traverse was some 400 yds., and at one stage involved going on all fours under the overhanging rock. We reached the col shortly after 2 p.m. to find Stauffer and Durrani had levelled a tent platform on the west slope of the foot of the Snow Dome, and Hasell and Nisar Ahmed just descending the ridge of the Dome itself, happy to have found what Hasell described as a 'football field' for a camp at the top, some 800 ft. away.

Whilst the six of us rested, Mills and Jones set off up the ridge in the footsteps of the other two. The steps were well on the west side of the ridge, which was the side of the prevailing wind, where the snow would normally be hard packed. The ridge was a single arête, with no cornice on its eastward aspect; and the angle of ascent could not have exceeded 35° , making roping unnecessary. They had ascended some 200 ft. by the time Khurshied and myself noticed them, and as they were laden, it was clear that Mills had decided to take supplies to the proposed Camp 4 site. So Khurshied and myself shouldered our packs and set off in their footsteps. It was still snowing and visibility was poor, and we lost sight of them.

Suddenly, Khurshied shouted that he had seen something fall on the eastern side of the ridge, something yellow and moving at a terrific speed. This could only have been one of our bright yellow sleeping mattresses which we normally carried tied on to our rucksacks. I crawled to the edge, and saw two ice-axes lying in freshly fallen snow on the slope below. One was buried up to its head, and the other, sixty feet lower, lay on the surface. Khurshied and I turned and slowly made our way down to the tent platform. There were the few moments of utter disbelief that anything could be amiss. Then the mists lifted for a few moments, and above we could see the empty ridge, with a piece of snow, 200 ft. long, 30 ft. wide, and about 2 ft. deep, bitten off about 400 ft. above us. It had slipped down the eastern side of the ridge, but it had taken with it the crest of the ridge and some of the top snow on the western side. Above and below the gap on its

extreme west edge were the steps of the previous two climbers. Hasell and I descended to a point on the traverse where he was able to study the slope below the ridge. It fell clear over a cliff about 5,000 ft. down onto the Pumarikish glacier.

Hasell and Nisar Ahmed spent the night at the new tent platform, whilst the remainder of us returned sadly to Camp 2. The snow grew heavier, in fact it was another seventy-two hours before it stopped. The following morning, Durrani, Stauffer and Khurshied made their way round to the head of the Pumarikish glacier, which they reached on the afternoon of July 20. There, in a snow basin at the foot of the ridge below the Ogre, filled with stones and debris from avalanches, they saw the strap of a pack sticking up through the snow. It proved to be Dick Jones'. Further search would have been hazardous and fruitless. They collected stones and laid them in a Cross near where they had found the pack. Meanwhile, the rest of the party brought down as much equipment as they could carry from beyond the Ogre to Camp 2, and the survivors gathered in Base Camp on the night of July 20. The expedition was over.

On the morning of the 22nd, Khurshied and I left Base Camp in thick mist, and reached Nagar two nights later. The bad weather had broken the Nagar-Gilgit jeep track in numerous places, and we had to hire horses. We reached Gilgit on the 26th, and I flew to Rawalpindi next morning to break our sad news. Meanwhile the rest of the party made their way back to Nagar where they were able to use one jeep belonging to the Political Agent which had been cut off by the floods. We were all reassembled in Gilgit by August 9, and then had to wait five days for the weather to clear enough for a P.A.F. 'Freighter' to fly us out to Rawalpindi and home.

This country can ill afford to lose such men as Jimmy Mills and Dick Jones. They were fine leaders and tireless workers. They will be an inspiration to all of us who were fortunate enough to have known them and to have climbed with them.