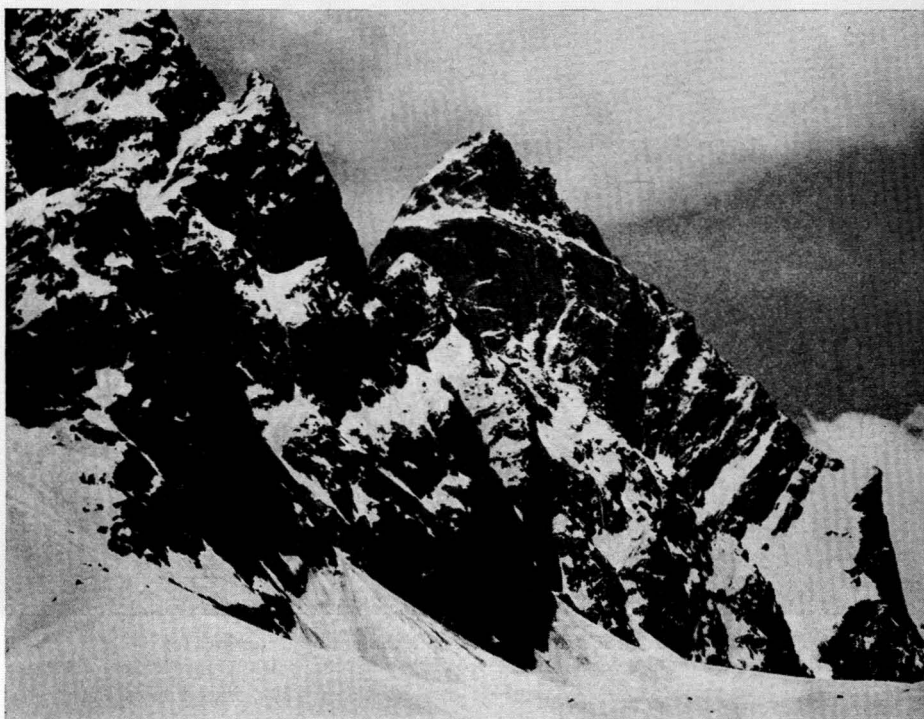


# First ascent of Ali Ratni Tibba, 1969

Fred Harper

Approaches in Kulu are short and it took us only four days from our roadhead at Jari to march up the beautiful Malana Nulla to our Base Camp at the snout of the Ali Ratni Tibba west glacier at about 11,000 ft (map at *A.J.* 71 237). It gave a splendid southerly view up the glacier to our objective, a great stark granite pillar rearing 5000 vertical feet above the upper glacier at 13,000 ft. Resting at Base Camp, sorting out the loads for carrying up the glacier to our Advanced Base 2 miles up the glacier at the foot of the mountain, we had lots of time to be suitably impressed with its appearance and to plan a tentative route up it by the West face and then by the West ridge to the summit.

Before we left Scotland we had had a good deal of advice concerning the period of best weather, but this advice conflicted so we had decided to make the earliest possible entry to the mountains in order to have the whole pre-



7 *Ali Ratni Tibba from the north, showing the West ridge on the right* The route followed the prominent snow ramp to join the ridge, and then followed this direct to the summit. On the descent, the ramp was avoided by abseiling down the lowest sections of the ridge. This and next photo: Dave Nicoll. See also [116]



8 *One of the unclimbed Manikaren Spires* Excellent opportunities for Alpine-style climbing—see p 193

monsoon season if necessary. Thus we set up Base Camp on 10 May just in time for a week-long period of really bad weather, during which time it snowed continuously. No doubt we had come too early, but not much, as we eventually waded out of Base on 16 May for Advanced Base.

We put Advanced Base in the centre of the glacier, well away from the considerable wet snow and powder avalanches pouring from the valley walls. In six days we had three tents up there and enough food to last five of us for at least fourteen days, long enough we reckoned to climb Ali Ratni Tibba as well as one or two of our minor objectives.

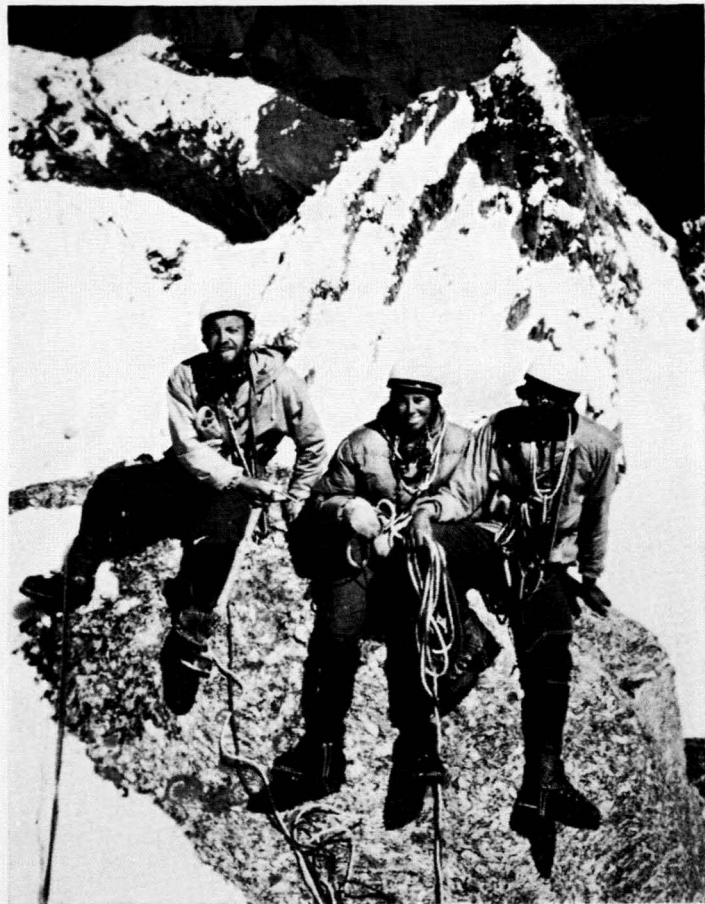
While reconnoitring the approach to the foot of the Ramp on Ali Ratni Jim McCartney went through a crust-covered crevasse, falling about 60 ft and cracking two ribs. He was lucky indeed to get away with so little damage, though for him any thought of climbing had to be discarded and off he staggered with Wangyal and Zangbo, our two Ladhaki porters, to recuperate in the far-off Kulu Valley.

Jim's accident galvanised us into action and that same evening, 24 May, we packed four days' bivouac gear and food, leaving for the climb at 3am on 25 May.

By 8.30am we had completed the steep snow Ramp and were standing at the foot of the West ridge taking in the splendour of a sparkling dawn. Already 3000 ft of climbing was complete, though it had been very straightforward cramponing on which we had moved together.

From the foot of the West ridge we could see little of the whole ridge, 4000 ft long, but only the lower parts, which were our immediate concern. Setting to work on the steep red granite was cold work on the fingers, and we made slow progress on the first few pitches, which seemed quite hard, about IV. Nevertheless, we began to move fast over the steep little ice-fields and up the horizontal bands of granite separating the ice. The climbing was always interesting and we pressed on hard, until at 4pm we collapsed, exhausted by a hard day's work with heavy packs, on what seemed the only likely bivouac site for a long way ahead. As ever, it was pleasant only in retrospect. A long night fighting for comfort and sleep, neither of which ever really came, until eventually the arrival of a chill black dawn put an end to inaction, discomfort and cold. After a rushed breakfast we were off again for the last 1000 ft to the summit.

We had a blissful hour lying there by the topmost granite blade until the western sky was flecked with cirrus and the time had come to go. We abseiled



9 On the summit of *Ali Ratni Tibba* looking west to one of the unclimbed *Manikaren Spires* (c 17,000 ft). From left to right: Dave Nicoll, Marjorie-Anne Harper, Fred Harper. Photo: C. Radcliffe

all the way to the top of the Ramp and then south over the great South face slabs to the névé of the glacier. Snowing now and cold, it was not good for a night out, so we pressed on to Advanced Base, and were brewing there by 9pm.

Gallons of tea and soup and it's all over now, the thing is done happily and satisfactorily. No fixing, all free as the wind. Elegant and first, still friends, what's more. Even the food was always good . . .

SUMMARY Punjab Himalaya, Kulu. *Ali Ratni Tibba*, 18,013 ft. First ascent 26 May 1969, by West ridge. F. Harper, Mrs M. A. Harper, D. Nicoll, C. Radcliffe; J. McCartney retired at foot of mountain through injury. Technical standard of the rock often III with occasional IV; snow and ice broadly comparable. Route length: 8000 ft. Vertical height of final climb: 5000 ft. See *A. J.* 71 246 for 1966 reconnaissance, and p 193 below for future scope.