

road—after all, climbing on limestone at that time was *not done* in this country, besides it was horribly public and it would be dangerous to traffic and passers-by. We looked at Churchill Rocks and bestrode them for a not very satisfying bit of fun, but we really enjoyed ourselves on the early routes of Avon Gorge, despite the crowds. The gorge was a good place for pitons, and where else might one drive a piton without evoking cries of disapproval? But for the crowds which drove us to climb very early in the morning and my own aversion to early-morning starts, we might have learnt much more about climbing with artificial aids and have gone places correspondingly. As it was, the pull of the caves and our rather guilty consciences about aided climbing on an artificial rockface bade otherwise.

Now in my old age I look back and wonder what might have been had we not met those people from the Cavern and Fell; there was an ambitious climbing programme ahead of us, for we had hardly begun the more serious stuff, but as I read the achievements of the present-day cave-divers, I have no regrets. I had a hand in triggering that off and I am content.

Schoolboys on Kolahoi

Richard Gilbert

We watched hypnotized as the massive rock, the size of a double decker bus, slowly toppled over, slid down a band of snow, accelerated and smashed to pieces before sweeping down the central couloir and finally coming to rest on the glacier 600m below. We were belayed on a rib of rock to the right of the couloir 70m away but the sulphurous fumes drifted up into our nostrils and we sighed with relief. I suppose at that point we should have turned back. After all we were only a school party and I had Charles, Simon and Patrick in my care, sixth formers aged only 17 and 18. But another 3 or 4 rope lengths would see us to the summit ridge and after 18 months planning and intensive training we could not admit defeat; besides I would have had a mutiny on my hands.

We were climbing the S face of Kolahoi, a beautiful pyramid of rock and the highest peak in the Kashmir valley area at 5456m. Our party of 13 was from Ampleforth College in Yorkshire and we had the distinction of being the first ever party from a British School to climb in the Himalaya. I had 2 assistant leaders, a doctor and 9 boys chosen from over 60 applicants from the school.

Base Camp was on the moraines below the N glacier snout of Kolahoi 2 days walk up the idyllic Lidder valley from Pahalgam. We had acclimatized for 6 days and had managed to find a route that avoided the main ice-fall by ascending the E glacier. Camp 1 was at 3800m on the lower slopes of the E glacier and Camp 2 was tucked under the long E ridge of Kolahoi at 4400m. The entire expedition had carried loads to establish and equip Camps 1 and 2 but my hopes of putting 2 small tents at the very bottom of the S face had had to be abandoned. The snow-field at the base of the cliffs was littered with avalanche debris and recently fallen stones. There was no safe place for a camp so I had decided to launch the assault from Camp 2.

From our reconnaissance the previous day I had underestimated the height of

the S face. Climbing in 2 ropes of 2, Charles and myself and Simon with Patrick, it took 15 long rock pitches to reach the summit ridge. The S face was exposed to the sun's rays from dawn and although we rose at 3.00am and started up the rocks at 7.00am the stones had already begun to fall.

We had felt pleased with ourselves as we perched on the lower ledges above the bergschrund and took off our crampons. In spite of $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours cramponing up to about 4875m we had not noticed the altitude. As soon as we started rock-climbing, however, and began using hands and arms as well as legs we suffered the well-documented symptoms. Heaving and gasping we struggled up the pitches hardly conscious of the stones winging down over our heads or the magnificent panorama of peaks coming into view behind neighbouring Bur Dalau and Buttress Peak. Along with most British parties abroad we felt at home on the rock, in spite of the horrible looseness, for most of our training had been done on Yorkshire outcrops and in North Wales. We were all competent to lead up to hard severe at least and we preferred to find routes up smooth slabs of rock which although steeper were at least sound.

There were plenty of placements for nut runners and we were entirely engrossed in the climbing but time was slipping by. It was 11.00am when we completed the final (hardest) pitch at Grade IV and paused on the summit ridge for some biscuits. The exposure was monumental; 2000m down the sheer N face we could just make out the Base Camp tents. Charles announced he was going to be sick, the half cooked porridge prepared in the tent at 3.00am had not agreed with him.

The true summit was a snow-cornice 200m along the ridge and it did not look 'tantalizingly near'. The first obstacle was a nasty overhanging gendarme 30ft high. We managed to descend a pitch and traverse across a gully of rotten snow to bypass the gendarme but the climbing was distinctly tricky and I was extremely worried. The ridge was composed of slivers of rock stuck in at crazy angles and nothing could be trusted. Dislodged rocks would crash down on either side and bound down to the glaciers in a most unnerving way.

At 1.30pm after 6 pitches along the ridge we assembled at the last rock belay before the snow-cap. Individually we kicked steps to the top of the cornice and planted a small Union Jack (after all it was Jubilee year!) but were far too exhausted and shattered to feel much elation. Monsoon clouds had built up in the N and we were denied distant views of Nanga Parbat and K2. To the SE however we could clearly see Nun Kun, only 40 miles away.

We were far behind schedule and foremost in our minds was the thought of the return along the ridge and then down the unending and loose S face. It is to the great credit of the boys that without delay we turned round and climbed down steadily for 6 hours non-stop until we reached the glacier. No one put a foot wrong. The first down on each rope left runners to protect the last man. In general we preferred to climb down rather than abseil since it would have been time consuming to find secure abseil points or cracks for pitons, although we did abseil the last pitch before the glacier. Dashing down the glacier in a rope of 4 and jumping crevasses in near darkness we reached Camp 2 at 8.30pm.

Unfortunately there was no welcome for us at Camp 2 for we had made our climb 2 days earlier than expected. The main party was down at Base Camp enjoying goat curry and duty free whisky. Wearily we melted snow for tea and forced down leathery chupatties and jam.

I had cut 2 days off our planned schedule for several reasons. Firstly the weather



69 Kolahoi (Photo: R. Gilbert)

had been fine for 4 days running and I did not think the spell could last. Secondly we were so excited and mentally geared up for the climb that no one was sleeping and we were physically deteriorating at a great rate. Thirdly the food situation at Camp 2 was desperate. We had not brought any staple food from UK and had not been able to buy English type tinned food in Kashmir. The rations at Camp 2 comprised 3-day-old chuppaties cooked at Base Camp by Ram our Indian cook, porridge, biscuits and Kendal Mint Cake. Nutri-nuggets of concentrated artificial protein were inedible unless curried and our pressure cooker was at Base Camp so we could not cook rice. Growing boys need large meals at regular intervals.

There was no question of mounting a second assault. None of the other boys had sufficient expertise, the objective dangers were too high and anyway the weather broke the following day. I was much heartened when later I asked the other boys if they were disappointed not to be chosen for the top and they replied they were very relieved!

It had been a team effort throughout. The other boys load-carried and established Camp 2 while we 4 sunbathed at Camp 1. Our chances of success would be raised if we were nursed as far as possible I told them! The route from Camp 1 to Camp 2 was 600m of steep crevassed ice-slope and this tested everyone's tech-

nique to the limit particularly when carrying heavy loads. The week we spent snow and ice-climbing on Lochnagar in March was barely adequate. We had two crevasse incidents but luckily nothing serious.

The first ascent of Kolahoi was in 1911 by Neve and Mason who climbed a snow-couloir on the S face. We had originally hoped to climb the mountain by this couloir but we could not identify it. Hunt and Brotherton had climbed the S face in 1935 via the Central Couloir and the rocks to one side of it. This was the couloir in which we had witnessed the rock avalanche. In 1977 there was far less snow than usual which forced us to take a rock route all the way. The long E ridge has also been climbed in its entirety but the NW and SW ridges and the stupendous N face await first ascents.

Later on in India we were privileged to meet Col Kumar (just back from Kangchenjunga) and Major Ahluwalia (of the 1965 Everest expedition) who told us we were only the second party to have climbed Kolahoi since 1970, 3 different Indian expeditions having failed on the mountain.

At the conception of the expedition I was worried about the attitude of the climbing establishment to taking schoolboys to a big mountain. Everyone I spoke to however was extremely encouraging and we received much useful help and advice both in this country and in India. In particular I must mention Lord Hunt our official adviser and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for giving me a Fellowship as leader of the expedition.

We got a tremendous amount out of the expedition. None of us had been to the Himalaya before and we were able to experience ourselves the joys and tribulations such an expedition had to offer.

There was no bitterness, envy, backbiting or jockeying for the lead and the boys were always cheerful and co-operative. Volunteers for load carrying were always forthcoming. In this way a school expedition scores over an adult team of ambitious climbers although there are disadvantages. The boys have limited experience and one has to be constantly on the look-out for careless belays, balled up crampons and other safety points which adult parties can take for granted. On the face proper though we were climbing as equals and the 3 boys realized the seriousness of the climb and that their lives depended on their own ability. They responded to the challenge and they will never forget the experience.

India itself provided another major experience for us. The time spent in the foothills and in Srinagar, on our overland journey from Kashmir to Delhi and in Delhi itself was as eventful as our time in the mountains, but that is another story.

Too much snow on Piz Glüschaint

Walter Kirstein

In contrast to the extremely dry summer of '76 the summer of '77 in Switzerland was anything else but dry. Torrential rain and hail storms at the end of July caused widespread damage in the agricultural areas and made the planning of higher climbs rather difficult.