

81/17

KASHMIR HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION

81

FINAL REPORT

KASHMIR 81 HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION

Patrons

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw CH MC DL MP
Christian Bonington CBE FRGS

Team

Stuart Hepburn . Expedition Leader and UK Co-ordinator
Robin Andrews . Equipment Organiser
Simon Brown . Expedition Doctor
John Hall . Transport Organiser
Bill Hodgson . Food Organiser
Girish Sah . Indian Liaison Officer

Brenda Perry . Expedition Secretary

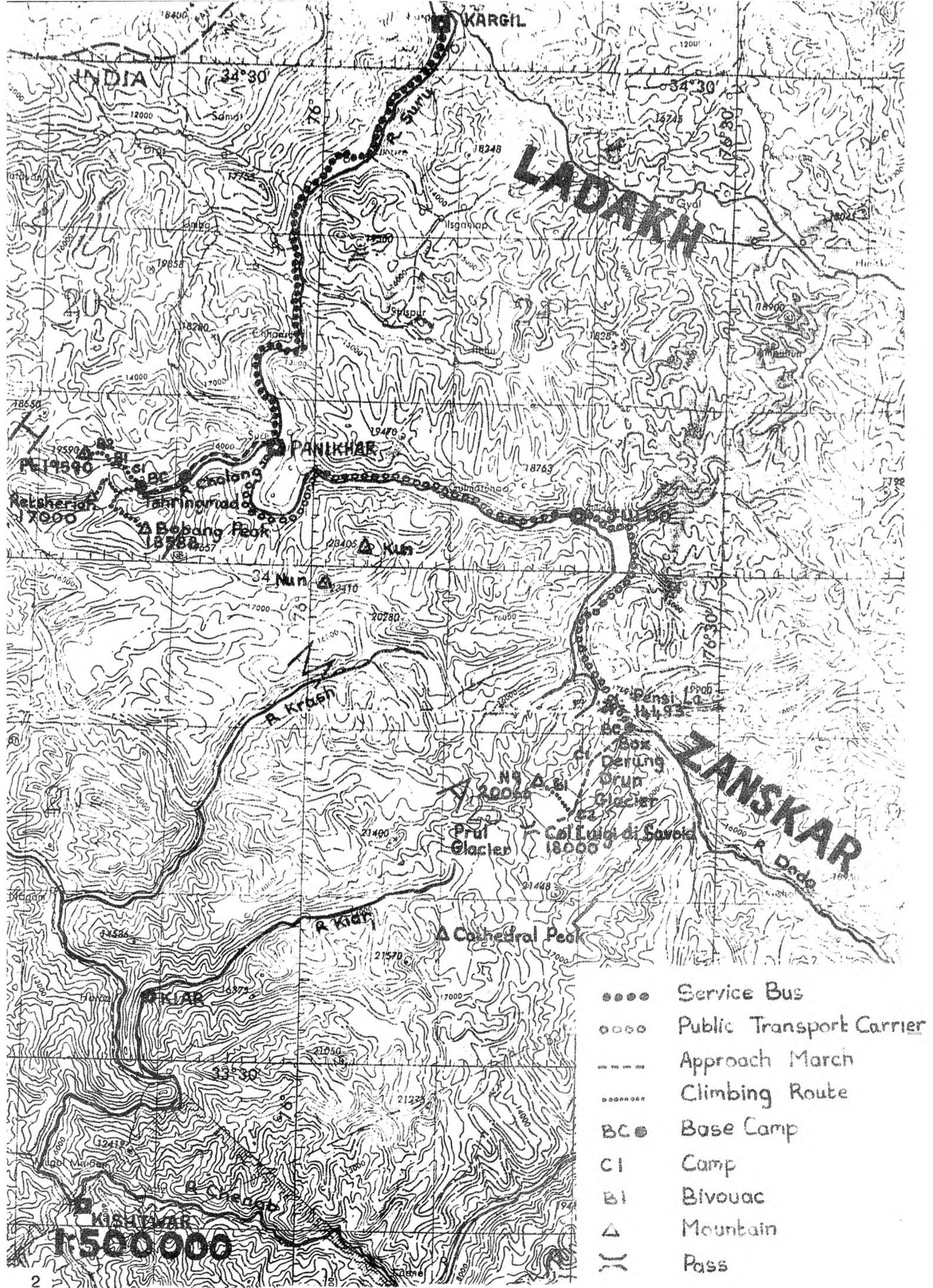
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PREFACE

Between 26 August and 20 September, the Kashmir 81 Himalayan Expedition succeeded in climbing three peaks, Retsheriah (17,000 ft), Bobang Peak (18,588 ft) and N9 (20,066 ft), and narrowly failed on a fourth Pt 19590.

The first base camp at Tshringmad was reached in two days from Panikhar. The east summit of Retsheriah was climbed for reconnaissance purposes on 27 August by Bill and Sah.

Between 29 August and 2 September Pt 19590 was attempted. It took three days to reach the foot of the east ridge from base camp. The ridge was heavily corniced and uncompromisingly steep. A Japanese team had been defeated by it two years earlier and their fixed ropes were still in place but we had no recourse to use them. We tried twice to climb the ridge but were beaten first by treacherous snow conditions and finally by technical difficulties which so prolonged our ascent that reaching the summit in the one day we had allowed was out of the question. Staying on the ridge overnight without a sleeping bag would have been asking for trouble and we reluctantly turned back from our high point of about 19,000 ft on 1 September. We had proceeded beyond the fixed ropes, but had failed to reach the summit. Our fuel had run out and food was scarce so we had little option but to return to base camp.

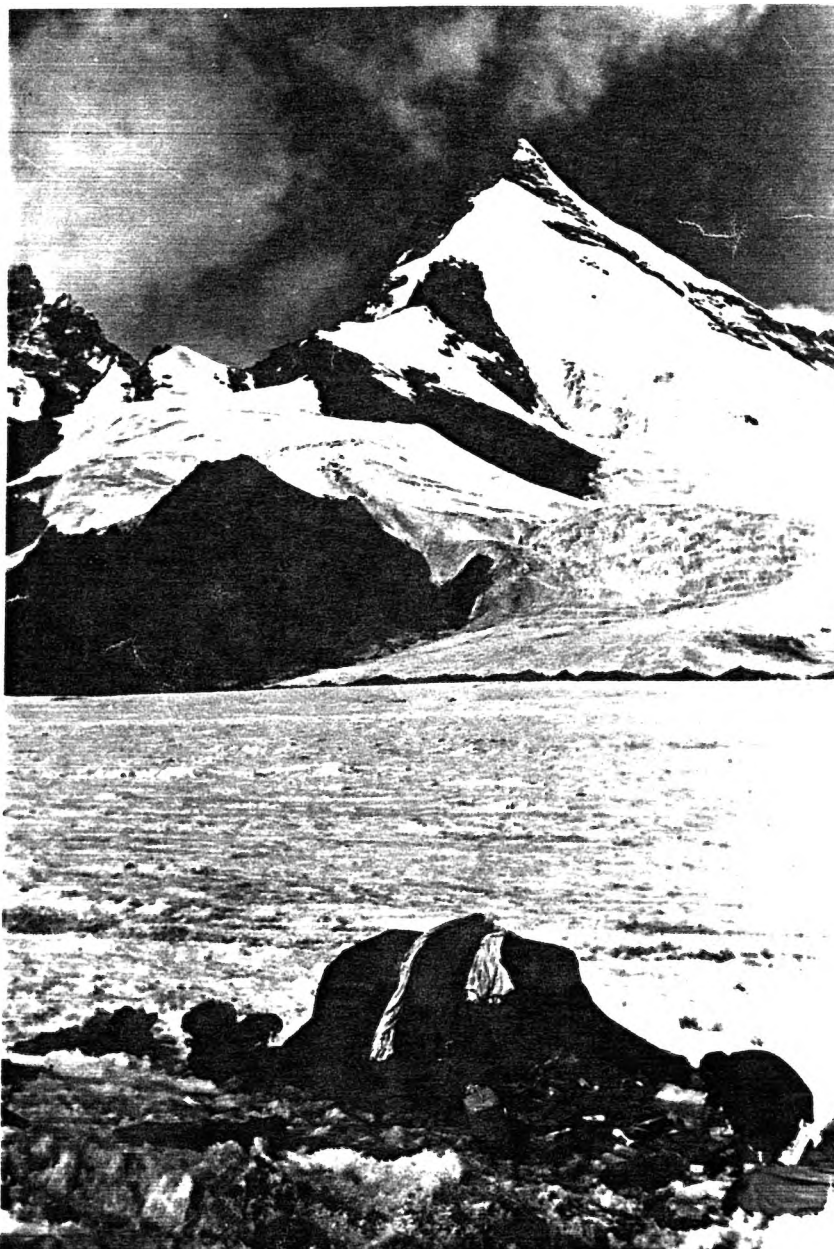
With two days in hand before the ponymen would return, our thoughts turned to Bobang Peak. On 3 September, Bill, Simon and I climbed to the south summit in eleven hours from base camp, reaching the top in whiteout conditions at 1530 hrs. The badly crevassed East Bobang Glacier had to be negotiated on the ascent and this was avoided on the way down by descending the steep flank of an ice ridge on the left side of the glacier. We left base camp for Panikhar the next day.

On 7 September, we set off on a two day truck ride to Zanskar which brought us to Box, a name on the map and nothing more. Ahead of us lay the huge Derung Drun Glacier and there wasn't a porter within miles. Our aim was to get ourselves and all our food and gear over to the Kiar Nullah for an attempt on the unclimbed Cathedral Peak. In between lay a 30 mile glacier crossing involving the scaling of an 18,000 ft pass referred to on one map as the Col Luigi di Savoia. Our packs, containing food for a fortnight, weighed upwards of 100lb so double carries between glacier camps were necessitated. After six days slog on a diet of curried potatoes, dal, chapattis and honey, it became clear that even if we crossed the col there would be insufficient time to climb Cathedral Peak. We decided to cut our losses and climb one of the peaks at the head of the glacier system we were already on instead.

Sah, who had gone round to Kishtwar by road and would already be on his way to Kiar to hire porters for our proposed march out, had to be told of our change of plan so Bill and Stuart, who were due back in England anyhow, left the next day, bound for Box, Kargil and then Srinagar, where a telegram could be sent to Sah.

Robin, Simon and John, who only joined us for the second part of the expedition, decided to tackle an attractive triangular-shaped peak on the north west side of the glacier. The three of them reached the summit by

the south ridge at 15.00 hrs on 17 September. The only troublesome part was a 300 ft rock step near the top. The soft yellow rock had a consistency of cheese and climbing it was very unpleasant. Two bivouacs were required during the ascent. Later investigations indicated that this was possibly N9, a peak climbed by a 10-man Italian expedition led by Giorgio Mallucci in 1930.



N9 from Camp 2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the following people and organisations for making the Kashmir 81 Himalayan Expedition possible. Without their encouragement, advice and generosity, planning the expedition would have been exceedingly difficult and our objectives would probably have remained unfulfilled. They made our aspirations a reality and we are grateful to them all.

Our special gratitude goes out to our two patrons, who once again gave so much support to our efforts and were continuously interested in what we were doing. They really are the best patrons an expedition could wish for.

Also, we wish to specially mention the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council, from whom we received very generous grants. We are obliged to them for their backing.

We cannot complete this acknowledgement without thanking Brenda, Telford before we went away and Perry when we came back, for all her patient good humour in tackling the mountain of letter typing and form filling that ventures of this type inevitably generate. She typed this report in record time and without one single complaint, a measure surely of just how fortunate we are to have such a good friend. Thanks, Brenda.

And, perhaps the biggest thank you of all should go to our long-suffering soulmates, be they wives, girlfriends, relatives or friends, and children, who must sometimes wonder what they have done to deserve so little attention. By dedicating this report to them we cannot replace those lost weeks and days, but we hope it goes some way to explaining what we were about.

If we have missed anyone out, we apologise. We have tried to remember everyone.

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw CH MC DL MP
Christian Bonington CBE FRGS

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And, finally, the wonderful Panam stewardess at Heathrow, who allowed us to freight out about £500-worth of excess baggage for less than half that price and whose name we shall never know.

1. JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS

Stuart Hepburn
Bill Hodgson

1.1 A Change of Plan in Delhi

When Bill and I checked into the YWCA International Guest House in Delhi at 4 o'clock on that uncomfortably muggy August morning, all we could think about was bed. Hauling two travel-weary bodies, two bulging sacks and £230-worth of excess baggage up three flights of stairs to our room was a trial and sleep came easy. We met our Liaison Officer, Girish Sah, two days later and I was pleased to see that he and Bill hit it off well right away. One of our main reasons for travelling out a week in advance was to lay in provisions for the expedition and it was already clear that Bill and Sah would make a first rate job of this all-important task as, indeed, events proved. The other main reason was to make sure all our papers were in order so that speedy access to the mountains could be achieved once the others arrived.

We went to the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) on the outskirts of Delhi only to find our climbing permits had not yet arrived. As it happened, this delay was opportune. Whilst waiting to see Mr Krishnan, the IMF official with whom I had been corresponding, we decided to find out what we could about Bobang Peak from their library.

According to a letter I had received from Mr Ashraf, Deputy Director of Tourism and Recreation for Jammu and Kashmir (J & K) State, the previous year, "Bobang Peak (about 20,000 ft) between Suru Valley and Wardhwan Valley (is) an unclimbed beautiful pyramidal peak involving steep ice-climbing. Japanese attempted it last year (1980) but failed to climb it." Thumbing through some Himalayan Journal indexes then, I was surprised to find Bobang Peak mentioned and read the relevant report with a mixture of increasing disappointment and anger. It had been written by Major E A L Gueterbock in 1936 and was entitled "The Mountains South of Dras". In it appeared the following passage: "Bobang Peak (17,500 ft) Climbed by Gueterbock, Marriott, Tashi Tendrup and Ang Tempa on 26th August 1936". I could hardly believe my eyes.

Two doubts immediately gripped my thoughts. Had I been totally misinformed by Mr Ashraf or was he, in fact, calling another mountain Bobang Peak? The discrepancy in heights indicated the latter.

A rapid change of plan was called for which would gain immediate acceptance from the IMF. It seemed to me that persuading Mr Krishnan to let us tackle another mountain in the vicinity of Bobang Peak might be the easiest way out of our problem. Bill, Sah and I examined the photographs in the report and were attracted to Pt 19590, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles north west of Bobang. The only picture of it was of the opposite side to the one we would be climbing on but, even so, gave us a reasonable impression of what the mountain was like. We were attracted by the east ridge which, in the climbing notes, was described thus: "Route 2 - the shorter - is up the east side of the main south glacier to the upper part of this glacier, where a camp would have to be established at about 17,500 ft. Then on to level ridge east of Pt 19590 and up very steep ice to summit." This was a remarkable route appraisal considering the author could at no time have been any closer than three miles from the peak. Little were we to know at this stage that Pt 19590 was the very peak that Mr Ashraf had been referring to all along as Bobang Peak!

We put our revised plan to Mr Krishnan and, in the light of our discoveries, he gave his instant approval. We paid the balance of our peak booking fee and obtained official letters of reference to give to district officials in the Suru Valley. Our climbing permits eventually arrived from the Ministry of Defence and the way was clear to leave Delhi. I wanted to move on to Srinagar as quickly as possible to meet Mr Ashraf and see what he had to say and was aboard the overnight coach to Jammu later that day.

1.2 Into the Vale of Kashmir

The journey was a drag and my sang-froid was sorely tested early next morning in Jammu when a truculent Sikh autorickshaw driver dumped me, my 60lb sack, 50lb of medical supplies and a broken handled holdall crammed full of tinned goodies several hundred yards short of the bus station from which my next bus to Srinagar departed. I could quite easily have murdered him but settled for refusing him baksheesh.

An ageing Australian hippy and two young Jewish sybarites, a Mexican senator's son and his girlfriend - a Juliet if ever I saw one - and a mischievous middle-aged Indian quantity surveyor from Kensington called Terence were my travelling companions on this leg of the journey which would take me over the Pir Panjal Range via the Patnitop and Banihal Passes. The Aussie and the Jews were on their way to join Hindu pilgrims on their annual Yatra to the Shri Armanath Cave. Situated at 12,800 ft, the cave contains a natural ice lingam, the symbol of Lord Shiva, and during the Yatra several thousand devotees make the four day trek to arrive at the time of the full moon in the month of Shravan (July-August). Luis and Sandra, my Mexican friends, were flying round the World and Terence was looking for a wife or at least a good woman.

Coming to the end of the $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile Jawarhar Tunnel onto one of the most beautiful views on Earth, the Vale of Kashmir at twilight, is an experience I shall never forget. The spontaneous whoops of delight from first-time visitors and locals alike gave voice to what all of us were thinking.

Three hours later and well into the evening, the bus cuts a swathe through a swarm of clamouring house boat owners' sons at the entrance to the Srinagar Bus Terminal. The law of the jungle rules and young hopefuls are pushed to the rear or under foot while their overbearing seniors press their unsolicited attention on the alighting travellers. Many travellers, forewarned of these dreadful melees, have already decided which houseboat they are going to stay in and depart the scene quickly, heading for Dal Lake, a dreamy shikara ride under the stars, the courteous welcome by the houseboat owner, an undistinguished meal and mosquitoes buzzing in your ear all night long. I am one of the lucky ones. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the British were keen to build houses in Kashmir, but the then Maharajah would not allow them to own land, so the British came up with the pragmatic solution of building wonderfully elaborate houseboats on the Dal Lake. In style, the boats have scarcely changed since the appearance of the first boat in 1888, and they are a relaxing haven of peace from the hustle and bustle of the town.

The next day, a Kashmiri tableau of hawkers and vendors drifts past the houseboat verandah, offering jewellery, papier mache boxes,

haircuts, beard trims, hand-tailored suits, saris, beer, cigarettes, soap, Limca and, when all else fails, hashish. You know the houseboat owner is getting his cut from the sales, but you are paying so little for full board that, for once, you part with your money without a fight.

I see Mr Ashraf in the afternoon to explain the change of plan arising out of our discoveries about Bobang Peak in Delhi. His face creases with a smile but no explanation is given and work continues.

Mr Ashraf is our contact with the outside world and operates the most efficient communications network in Kashmir by a system of telephones, telegrams, mail runners, walkie-talkies and bush telegraph. Given the impossible terrain of the Himalaya, it is a system that has to be seen to be believed and yet work it does and very well too. At the focus of it all is Mr Ashraf. We are later to make good use of this system. But, for the present, I return to the houseboat, no wiser after our discussion, still wondering whether his Bobang Peak is the same as the IMF's.

I have been told the early morning floating vegetable market must not be missed and order a shikara for six o'clock. "I still remember with rather too much melancholy that dawn meander around magical Dal Lake. I still marvel at Luis's ability to sleep and dream of enchiladas as our boat gently nudged its way through the floating vegetable market, a vibrant hubbub and so early in the day. Cucumbers, some prickly, others as big as you've ever seen, lotus roots, bartha (aubergines), brindi (lady's finger), lak (superspinach) and all those chillis and tomatoes that I had earlier seen growing on the floating garden, tested the buoyancy of many a shikara. And still the gardeners and wholesalers paddled in, balances at the ready, some selling, some buying, the unsuccessful negotiations signalled by a gentle pushing away by hand.

From the broad lake we had taken to the narrow canals of Old Srinagar where we interrupted the early morning ablutions of devout Muslims, who would be going to the Mosque later that Friday."

Bill and Sah arrive in Srinagar on the evening of Thursday 13 August. For them too, the bus terminal is choc full of touts, beggars and con men but, after some initial confusion during which Sah almost comes to blows with one particularly irascible fellow, they manage to ascertain my whereabouts and arrive at the Houseboat Rainbow, just in time for dinner.

I am already thinking about the next stage. An extra hand with the shopping is going to be of limited benefit, Kargil is an unknown quantity that needs to be sussed out and the next bit is anybody's guess. Also, I have a hankering to visit Leh, the capital of Ladakh, but only so far as expedition priorities will allow. There is little more I can do in Srinagar and Bill and Sah are already well organised on the food-buying exercise. If I can register the expedition with the police and the Tourist Officer in Kargil, enquire about buses and trucks to Panikhar and obtain permits for the purchase of paraffin supplies in the Suru Valley during the overnight stop in Kargil, there is no reason why I should not travel on to Leh the next day and spend some time there. In the event and much due to the help

of Sadiq, a local hotelier, I manage to register the expedition and find out about transport, but obtaining fuel permits is thwarted by the temporary absence of the District Commissioner. When I discover he is in Leh for a few days, my fate is sealed.

1.3 Into Ladakh

The following extract from my diary describes the journey from Srinagar to Leh along the World's highest main road. It takes two days and 25 hours driving to cover the 270 miles.

"We are in the Vale of Kashmir and we have just departed Srinagar and all that dreadful touting and squalid commercialism. Soon too we are leaving the valley, so famous for its abundant fruits and vegetables, that tract that could so easily have been the land that Moses gazed down upon, that land in which legend has it Jesus spent his forgotten years - it is not so difficult to believe.

To Sonamarg, our road steadfastly climbs, zig-zagging to avoid inclines too steep. The trees thin and greens become browner, but on this alp, this jet-set ski resort for the future, we pause and eat well. The price, for once, is not a rip off.

The browns now become rocky, precipitous earth, gravity-defying boulder-clay cuts and mightily Zoji-La nears. And again we can believe the unlikely when we're told an Indian captain has driven his vehicle off the road and perished and 40, or was it 60, have followed, not daring to question his command. Legend or fact, the environment transcends mortal possibilities.

And then over the pass, no immediate change but now you can sense the approaching desert in much the same way as you know at one end of a long tunnel that a train has entered the other. The analogy is not quite as poor as it first seems because the increasing sparseness of vegetation, townships and people is accompanied by a gradually increasing wind and here and there we see dust devils.

Kargil is unspeakable. Vitamin B12 is provided courtesy of a fly, lacking either aerobatic skills or nous, which has landed in my tomato curry.

Next day - the journey takes two - untold loveliness, grandeur in the superlative mould, the many-hued sands and rocks exposed by the deep incision of the Indus. Purples, oranges, verdi gris. Crazy folds and faults and improbable wind-eroded sand sculptures. Across the highest part, the battered but dogged B Class bus negotiates hairpins too numerous to count and army convoys too numerous to count. Military installations abound. We drop thousands of feet into the gorge, the masterful Sikh driver revelling in the challenge, his matchless skill a reassurance, to be sure.

Mani walls keep us straight, chortens, like sentinels, guard our inexorable progress to the capital. It is dark and we are crawling up the last long slope to Leh, to hidden surprises, to priceless treasures, to unimaginable Buddhist artefacts, but first of all to sleep in that sanctuary of many an Indian traveller, the PWD Dak Bungalow.

Ladakh has been referred to as "the moonland", as "little Tibet", as "the last Shangri La". The names are well deserved. Lying in the northernmost corner of India's most northerly state, Ladakh is a barren, dessicated land where the awesome power of creation seems less that a tremor away. To the south lie the Himalaya, a barrier to rain-laden clouds from the south that are dissipated in their remorseless progress to the mountainous desert and oblivion. Ladakh is as dry as the Sahara, it is a dun-coloured moonscape relieved only by a thin ribbon of green which is the Indus and a thousand glistening snow peaks. It is an amazing place. In my diary, I record my initial impressions of Leh and an extraordinary experience during the first day there.

"There was no mistaking whatsoever I had come to a land that was different. It wasn't the gompas or the myriad chortens, nor the fantastic road that threaded its way through the eye-rubbing scenery of mountains and desert, nor was it the transparent contrast between the brash commercialism of the otherwise jewel of a city, Srinagar, and the generous nature of the citizens of Ladakh with their handsome Tibetan faces. All of these should have been enough in themselves. But, instinctively, I looked for more and found that extra something that is often the unfulfilled dream of even the most patient travellers.

High up in the nine-storey Leh Palace, came the first inkling that something unusual was about to unfold when we happened on two women. Their quite uninhibited smiles revealed a most unexpected sight for, instead of four incisor teeth top and bottom, they both had five, the fifth narrower and in the centre. There was nothing at all unbecoming about this. Rather, their broad smiles enhanced their many charms and made both highly attractive. One was 32 and did not mind me holding her hand as I looked at her jewellery and trinkets. We laughed a lot.

Soon after we found two lamas sitting cross-legged in a dark room. Around the room were various bric-a-brac, including the ubiquitous transistor radio. They were drinking and offered us chang, which was most agreeable to the palate. And tsampa too, drier than I had expected. I dunked mine in the chang.

The two younger lamas, who had exacted five rupees a piece from us earlier and had then proceeded to play games with us about what we could see/photograph and what we could not, joined us and with them a child of four. It was hardly noticed at first and then it was hard to notice anything else. The child, son of the 32 year old woman, had two thumbs on his right hand. I had read that there was a higher than normal incidence of unusual genetic mutations in the region, but did not imagine for one minute that I would see one, never mind three. This, for sure, was a day to remember."

Later that evening we go to Sankar Gumpa where John, one of two Edinburgh University students I had met - the other was Richard - offends the monks so much by carrying his plimsolls through the building into the private quarters of the head lama that we are unceremoniously ejected from the premises. As we are shown the gate I remember thinking how lovely the sunflowers in the monastery garden were!

Hemis Gompa is a better experience even though one of the junior lamas spits at me for refusing to give him five rupees to see into one of the locked rooms. I counter phlegm with metaphorical phlegm and score something of a moral victory for he stops bothering me after that.

Hemis is famous for its Setchu, a festival that occurs every year on the eleventh day of the fifth Tibetan month. It is perhaps even more famous for its gigantic tanka, one of the largest in the World, which is shown once every eleven years, a sort of oriental "Turin Shroud". Unfortunately, neither of these events is available to me, although I was able to see some of the dance masks used in the day-long Setchu, a symbolic struggle between good and evil in which the virtues of Buddhism triumph over infidel demons. And I do get quite a thrill when they push open the huge doors of the Lakhang, the main chapel, and there before me is a large gilded statue of Buddha Shakimuni with electric blue hair. Lamas seated full lotus in front of it read from the Kandshur, "the translated word" of the Buddha.

There is no upsetting the rimpoche (head lama) this time and I drowse off in the monastery garden in the heat of the afternoon intoxicated by what I have seen, light headed from the thin air.

Before leaving Leh, I see two more monasteries, Tikse and Shey Gompas. The first houses the largest contingent of Gelugpa Sect (Yellow Hat) lamas in Ladakh, about a hundred, and was visited by the Dalai Lama in 1973 and 1976, for whose visits a special chair was constructed in the Lakhang. Another interesting feature of the room is the electric lights, not something you would necessarily expect to see in a lama monastery, and I wonder whether a prospective visit by the Dalai Lama had brought about this somehow incongruous addition to that trove of Buddhist art works.

Shey Gompa, formerly the "summer palace" of the Kings of Ladakh, was built about 550 years ago. It has the largest golden Buddha in Ladakh, a 40 foot high statue worked out of gold and gilded copper sheets and again the blue hair. No artist would dare look the Buddha in the eye so the all-seeing pupils, I am told, were painted over the artist's shoulder, with his back to the idol.

Our bus back to Leh is, as usual, overcrowded so it is difficult to gain an uninterrupted view through the windows. The Choglamsar Tibetan Refugee Camp, set up after the Chinese incursions of 1959, is pointed out to me by a couple of locals and the Leh Golf Course, with its asphalt greens, is an unexpected sight.

It is time to get back to Kargil. Retracing my journey of three days ago - there is only one other way of getting into Ladakh and that's by air - I try to count the number of hairpin bends in the Langro Curves that climb up to the Fatu La, at 13,430 ft the highest point of the road, but give up after about 50 and two hours snail-pace driving, I shiver at the thought of the craggy isolation of Lamayuru Monastery, the first and now the last in Ladakh, I am still overawed by the absolute barrenness of it all.

1.4 Shopping in Srinagar

Whilst I was swanning about in Ladakh, Bill and Sah had been hard at work in Srinagar. Of that week, Bill recorded the following.

"Unfortunately, once Stuart had departed from Leh, Sah and I had to abandon our houseboat in favour of a room in the Tourist Hostel, which was a more practical base for our operations. I had planned that most of the food for the expedition, with the exception of eight days high altitude rations, would be purchased in Srinagar. To this end, Sah and I spent the whole week shopping in the "downtown" bazaar of Lal Chowk, where we purchased everything from a pressure cooker to the atta (flour) for making chapattis. Oddly enough, some items which seemingly would be easy to purchase, proved to be the hardest to obtain. We found it completely impossible to acquire a machete, or small axe, even though we tried every workshop in the bazaar, where most of the lathes were turning out barrels for rifles and shotguns! Once the food and equipment had been purchased, the next task was to divide and pack everything into suitable porter loads and here we were helped by the arrival in Srinagar of Robin and Simon. Eventually everything was sewn up into jute sacks and, with our 21 loads prepared, we were ready to set off from Srinagar."

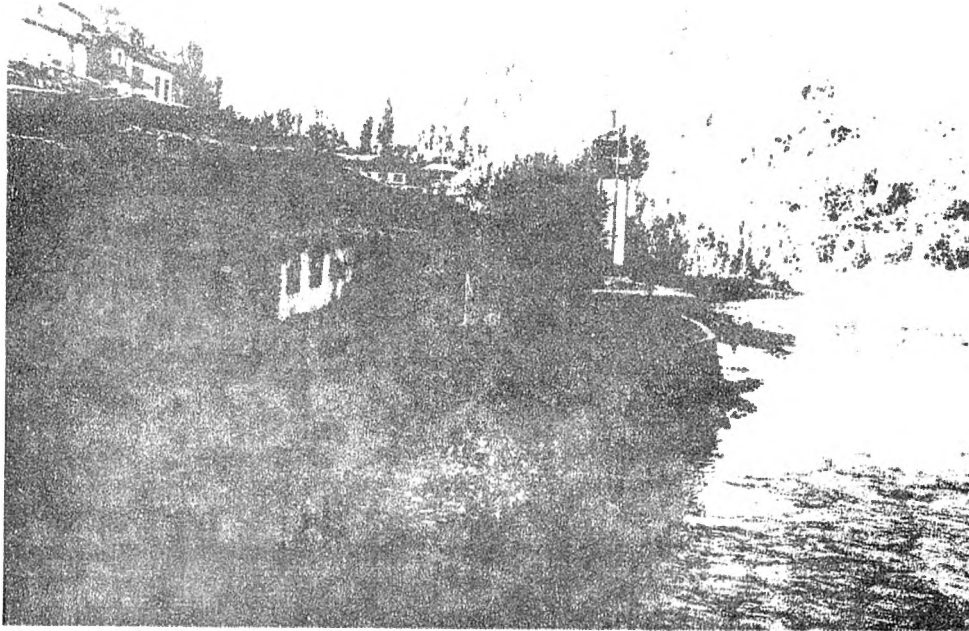
1.5 Kargil

In Kargil, I spent two anxious days fruitlessly checking every bus as it arrived willing my mates to be on each next one. I had given up hope of them arriving on Friday 21 August and was about to go to my bed when word came they were here and already booking into another hotel. I rushed up the street, caused something of a commotion and a degree of embarrassment to my friends by informing them I had booked into another hotel, and helped them transfer their baggage to the Yaktail. Their crossing of the Zoji La had taken 15 hours due to numerous hold ups by army convoys and they were ready for a meal, albeit the mediocre fayre the Yaktail dared call food. At breakfast you couldn't see the food for flies. I wondered at my earlier decision to book in at any place that boasted the name Yaktail Hotel. My friends were clearly unimpressed by my ability to sniff out cheap lodgings. At five rupees (40p) a night for a mattress in an upper room or a sepoy on the roof, a sporadic trickle of suspect water from a communal tap, a water closet that would have made Chadwick turn in his grave, bed bugs, gastro-enteritis and a temperamental generator that kept you awake half the night, this really was one for the wilderness travellers. I endured five days of purgatory in that filthy, disease-ridden sewer, waiting for permission from the District Commissioner to buy paraffin in the Suru Valley. The others moved on to Panikhar to prepare final loads for our trek into the mountains.

1.6 Panikhar

Our accommodation for the first couple of days in Panikhar was at the house of Mohamed Iqbal, the local godfather. He seemed to have a monopoly on all the tourist/trekking operations in the area and exerted rather too much influence on the hiring of ponies and the price to be charged for them. The critical negotiations were a three-way dialogue between Bakhar, the owner of the ponies, Sah and myself under the beady-eyed scrutiny of the dom, ever mindful of his cut. The

loads were examined by Bakhar and Mehadi, his mate, and a price acceptable to all was fixed. Had the horses been hobbled for the night, we could have set off soon after first light. They were not and it was almost midday by the time four climbers, one Liaison Officer, two ponymen, four ponies, one foal, five personal sacks and six loads of stores and communal equipment were on their way.



River Suru at Kargil

2. SUMMITS AND SURPRISES

Stuart Hepburn

2.1 Approach March

By the time we set off from Panikhar, I was ready for a walk. A fortnight's peregrinations through the Punjab, Kashmir and Ladakh had left me with a mild attack of "traveller's bottom" and I was in need of exercise.

Base camp we thought was about two days walk. I say about, because we were still not sure, even at this late stage, where our mountains were. I had, in my mind's eye, an image of Bobang Peak and another of Pt 19590 both from pictures in that 1937 Himalayan Journal. This was not much to go on, since Bobang Peak, as it happened, could not be seen from our base camp and remained obscured until we had climbed up out of the valley and Pt 19590 had been photographed from the opposite side so, at best, would appear to us as the mirror image. At worse, it would have no recognisable configuration. Even so, the uncertainty caused us minimal anxiety.

As the day wore on, we slipped into automatic, mesmerised by the rhythmic pace and the still air, drifting in and out of private blue sky reveries. We reflected on our twin fortunes of choosing to climb where we now were almost two years ago, and of miscalculating the number of ponies we would require for the carry to base camp two days earlier. What would have been a redundant pony was now heavily laden with Robin's, Sah's and my own sack. Bill, who has always favoured the Whillans approach, was honing himself to perfection on the walk in by carrying a very heavy sack and Simon, a newcomer to the art of coarse mountaineering, was left holding his sack when all available pony space had been greedily taken up.

For the first ten miles or so, we followed Mohamed Iqbal's legacy to the world, a roughly hewn but nevertheless impressive length of track wide enough for fully laden ponies to pass. The path was not steep and Majgain Maidan (13,580 ft) was reached with hardly a sweat. A flat grassy area where cattle, sheep and goats grazed, it was the obvious place to halt and we decided to camp there for the night. We made swift work of a tin of panir (cream cheese) to assuage our hunger before pitching tents and cooking a proper meal. Mehadi lit a fire from some dry straw, a few sticks and four dried yak turds and kept it alight for two or three hours without any trouble. I set about making the first of many batches of chapattis whilst Sah concocted the first of his many excellent Indian meals which, to Bill and I with our asbestos throats, were something else, but to Robin and Simon were something less.

A group of Bakharwals (goat herders) approached us on horseback in the evening. One of their sheep had broken a leg and they wanted to sell us its carcass. It had, at one stage, been our intention to take a small goat with us to base camp and slaughter it for its meat once there. A goat of suitable proportion had followed me for five miles or so up from Panikhar and I was already thinking of ways to kill it when it decided it didn't like me after all and ran off down the track. We never actually saw the sheep the Bakharwals were trying to sell, but gathered that it was large enough to render any subsequent demise with a Swiss Army knife nigh on impossible. The

sheep was spared and so, I suspect, were we since no one was particularly relishing that task.

We only had a thousand feet of altitude to gain the next day, but route-finding did present problems. Robin crossed the Chalong River at one point and we lost him for some time in the camouflage of moraine and boulders. He came into view an hour later walking along a lateral moraine on the opposite bank. At the time, we were picking our way across a large rock slab which sloped several hundred feet down towards the river.

Pt 19590 came into sight gradually as we rounded a bend in the river and a lunch stop was suggested. We gazed with a certain amount of awe at this pyramid of rock and snow, still several miles away, but already dominating the horizon. It had a perfection of shape that reminded me of the Weisshorn in Switzerland.

It was only after we had walked for another hour, and then another, that the size of our mountain took on any meaningful proportions. As a friend once said of the walk up the Allt a'-Mhuilinn toward Ben Nevis, and which now applied equally well, "it doesn't get any nearer, just bigger". Pt 19590 certainly felt like that.

A troublesome river crossing at Tshringmad was the last excitement of the approach march and were we ever grateful to the stalwart ponies which carried us across the icy river barring our way to base camp and rest. That they did so with both us and the loads on their backs said a lot for the strength and surefootedness of these hardy beasts of burden. We flopped down on the opposite river bank, putting off the moment when tents had to be pitched and a meal prepared.

A surprise was in store for us when we unpacked one of the tents. A friend in Cumbria who comes to the Himalaya a lot, Ron Rutland, keeps equipment in India to avoid the air freight charges each time. We had picked up two of his tents from Srinagar on our way through. The deal was for us to take them to Delhi afterwards so that Ron could then collect them later in the year on his way to a winter attempt on Makalu in Nepal. To our dismay, one of the tents was just a flysheet and there was no sign of an inner tent or a groundsheet. Erecting what was left of it was no easy matter and for the rest of the expedition the only use it could be put to was as a base camp cook tent. This meant we were a tent short and, although this was never too much of a problem, it did mean my lightweight tent ended up being used in situations for which it was never designed. The improvised bivouac which also became necessary, was christened "Billy Smart" by our resident wit.

2.2 Reconnaissance

Next day, Thursday 27 August, was T-shirt weather and ideal for reconnoitring the different approaches to the upper reaches of our mountain. From base camp three routes looked feasible. Across the braided river system to our left looking up the valley, Bill and Sah made towards an erratic jumble of lateral moraine and scree which they followed for about 1,000 feet to a stone gully. They were heading for a grassy notch in the skyline from where it was

possible to make out whether the glacier separating the mountain they were on, Retsheriah from Pt 19590 could be safely and quickly crossed. When they reached the notch it was obvious that another route would have to be found. The glacier crossing was fraught with hazard and quite unsuitable for our purposes. By way of consolation, the two continued up the east ridge of Retsheriah and made what is probably the second ascent of this delightful little peak of 17,000 ft, surrounded on five sides by glaciers. The peak was first climbed by Gueterbock, Marriot, Tashi Tendrup and Ang Tempa on 27 August 1936, exactly 45 years earlier to the day. From it there was a commanding view of the surrounding higher peaks. As well as being able to assess the climbing difficulties on the upper reaches of our eventual route on Pt 19590, they saw Bobang Peak for the first time on this expedition, over to the south east. It matched the photograph we had seen in Delhi.

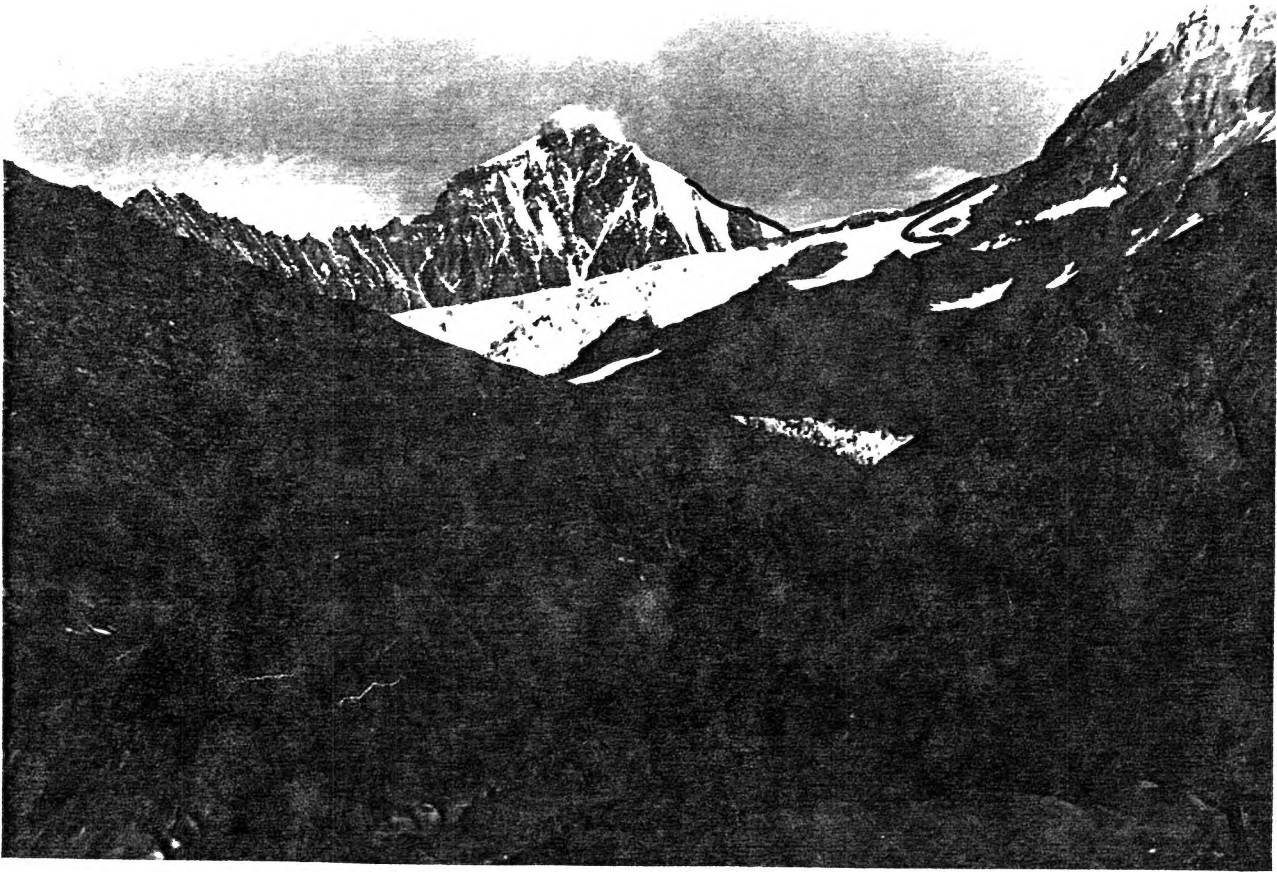
The second possibility was the rocky gully at the valley head which might gain easier access to the screes higher up on the right hand side of the valley as viewed from base camp. Robin and Simon tried it the next day and it did not. The third and eventually the actual route we took was by a steep grassy gully leading to a long concave boulder slope, which you walked along for ever towards a snow notch in the rocky ridge horizon. Simon and I spent a day exploring this route and I wrote about it in my diary.

"Yesterday, Simon and I wallowed in the unconstrained freedom of climbing high, untrammelled by heavy sacks and layers of hermetic clothing. T-shirt, jeans, Big-T's, water bottle, altimeter, camera; these that time that place were all my possessions, all my needs. My sustenance every hour, perhaps on the hour, who cared, was a thirst-abating fruit drop.

Cautious steps up the deceptive grass gully, less steep than had been imagined, wary upward progress on stacked rocks that the ravages of time had made unstable, hands and knees thrutching across even less stable ground and, in between, body-jarring unevenness of juvenile moraine. Eventually, a short rise and on that vast expanse of rock, precipice and scree just where it was needed a two-tent plot with a small trickle of water close by. We built a cairn for future reference.

Across from us, over the textbook glacier and atop the far ridge, two silhouettes wended their way through the "chimney pots" to a rocky summit, one of three. Bill and Sah were also enjoying themselves.

And thus exhilarated, we were spurred on into a system of shallow stone gullies that led in time and space to a notch on the containing ridge. And then we would touch the snow. But incipient snowflakes, at first imagined but soon for real put an end to our euphoria and prudence prevailed. We turned back at 17,000 ft, certain a feasible route had been found, but perhaps thinking more about getting back safely before the weather really did break. A few minor detours fixed the best line of approach to Camp 1 and we felt we had done a good job. Several times we were forced to run the gauntlet of swollen afternoon streams before base camp was reached. Rain stayed off until then, but only just."



Pt 19590 from Tshringmad Base Camp showing route



East Bobang Glacier



East Bobang Glacier

We resisted the temptation to go to the pub that night and discussed our plans for an attempt on Pt 19590. Simon and I had realised from our exploratory walk that the mountain was bigger than it looked and thought that just reaching the final ridge might take three days. The ridge would be another day and descent perhaps two more, six in all. We packed for five. The resulting 50lb packs made us wonder why we had ever described ourselves a lightweight expedition but there was nothing we could safely leave behind. Like camels, we stocked up on food and on Saturday, 29 August, we started our climb.

2.3 19,000 ft on Pt 19590

Unaccustomed to the heavy packs and not yet used to the altitude, we laboured across the interminable moraine. A gully crammed with dangerously perched boulders gave us a few anxious moments and Bill and I found ourselves committed to a trying struggle up a short vertical section composed of earth and boulders. Our carefully constructed cairn of two days before was not the landmark we had hoped it would be, and the stream that we eventually managed to locate was little more than a trickle. We followed that up to our Camp 1 site.

The ground was sloping and the uneven soil scarcely covered the underlying rock. We set about building a dry stone retaining wall behind which we formed a level earth shelf, a terrible desecration of the indigenous ecosystem but a means of ensuring a decent night's sleep for some of us at least.

That night in Billy Smarts Mark II, I cooked the most revolting spaghetti bolognese ever and my credibility as a cook took a downward plunge as a result. The pasta was like wallpaper paste and the tomato puree - dried mushroom and onion - parmesan cheese sauce was, in a word, ugh! Some people will do anything to get out of cooking the meals! My stomach wrestled with the revolting concoction all night and the tube attached to it wondered what it had done to deserve such a going over most of the following day.

Underfoot was a disintegrating mountain, the screes and boulders a different colour and texture to the country rock, and up to the snow notch was a treadmill. At the snow notch we were puzzled to find a stone cairn. This was the first evidence of previous exploration.

Ahead of us lay a snowfield, bound on the right side by the ridge whose crest we had just reached and on the left by a complex serac fall. The way ahead was as clearly defined as if it were a line on a map. We skirted the edge of the containing bergschrund towards the steep headwall and, at a place that Sah thought suicidal, but which Simon, Bill and I thought perfectly suitable for pitching a bivouac tent without poles, we started digging a ledge in the snow.

Sah's uneasiness grew all through that night and by the next morning I could tell he was no longer interested in the climb. There were quite a few crevasses, just above the bivouac which the previous visitors to this area had seen fit to fix with rope. We took a line further to the right which Sah questioned. He queried our choice of line for the next snow slope as well. So, just to maintain the mutual

respect that had so far been a feature of our friendship with Sah, we followed his advice. We came to the top of that rise and gazed out across a pristine snow wilderness, a hugevallee blanche. Above it towered the final pyramid of Pt 19590, an uncompromisingly vertiginous challenge. Sah took about three seconds to make up his mind - he'd seen enough. We didn't see him again for four days.

In his rush to get off the mountain in the shortest possible time, he made one costly error of judgment which was to rob us of a second attempt at the summit when our first one failed. To reduce the loads that the rest of us would have to carry down during the descent, Sah decided to strip Bivouac 1 and Camp 1 of items no longer required. Unfortunately for us, this included the remainder of the fuel which we needed for cooking and melting snow for drinking water. Simon, Bill and I trudged on across the snowfield blissfully unaware of all this. Robin, who had climbed up from Camp 1 that morning was the first to realise the consequences of Sah's blunder, but it was to be several hours before he met up with us, so it was an optimistic threesome that clambered up towards the start of the summit crest. Totally miscalculating the steepness of the final 1500 ft or so of ridge, we started up it about noon of that day. Our rush to reach the summit however was more headstrong than headlong and we had barely gone a rope length before good sense prevailed. It was noon and there was no way we were going to get to the top that day. Even if we went on further, it was highly improbable that there would be any point on the ridge flat enough or wide enough to pitch a bivouac tent. The surface conditions were rather treacherous, slabs of hard packed snow sloughing off with each upward footstep, and to continue might have been foolish. At the foot of the ridge there was a reasonably flat area and we decided to site our second bivouac there.

It was a miserable place. Plates of friable slatey rock, interleaved with khaki-coloured clay, had to be chipped away to form a ledge for the tent. The problem of tent poles was solved this time by the timely discovery of some gear abandoned by our predecessors. Metre long dexion strips combined with large slabs of rock were used to construct a piled retaining wall behind which a tolerably level surface was prepared.

In the afternoon Bill and Simon went down to Bivouac 1 to get some food for two more days. When they met Robin halfway back across the snowfield the realities resulting from Sah's blunder became clear.

As Bill and Simon completed an already exhausting day with one final pull back to Bivouac 2, they already knew we had one more day left to reach the top. Without fuel, we could not melt snow for water and without water we were beaten.

We crawled into our pits that night knowing perfectly well what we had to do the next day. For the second time in my life I took a sleeping pill, Normison, and regretted it. Robin took two and was twice cursed. We were like zombies the next morning. For a couple of hours we stumbled around like old old men.

It was not until we reached the first rock step that increased verticality and unstable rock forced us out of our lethargy and onto our toes, literally. From then on we could not afford to be anything less than fully awake. We moved with the utmost care.

Gradually, exhilaration pushed out every other feeling and we moved well. But time was the hunter and we the prey and even before we had reached a third of the way we knew we had lost. I remember hanging on to the steep wall of an ice tower, my two axes firmly placed, crampons scratching the thinly iced rock and gazing for a while to the north and the hazy creamy mass of Nanga Parbat, and then for a while to the south and hundreds of Himalayan peaks, some towards Kishtwar, others towards Kulu Manali and others, I suppose, stretching even further. It had taken us three and a half hours to reach that point, there remained about eight to ten pitches of equal or greater severity still to do and all of these and the six we had already done would have to be reversed before nightfall if the relative safety of Bivouac 2 were to be reached. Staying out on the ridge overnight without a sleeping bag or a bivouac tent would have been courting disaster. We had been beaten by technical difficulties, not insurmountable ones, but rather ones that had prolonged the duration of our ascent and stretched our resources, in every department, to the very limit.

The descent from our high point of 19,000 feet was a prolonged affair due to the steepness and hardness of the ice and we had to exercise extreme caution. We resisted the temptation to use the fixed rope that ran out just below our own high point even though there were times we felt it would have been useful. And back at the rock tower, we found a Japanese karabiner and realised that this was the "Bobang Peak" that Mr Ashraf had been referring to in his letter. So, at least that little mystery had been solved.

On our way down to base camp we discussed what we should do next. Robin was keen to have another crack at Pt 19590 although he realised that time was against us. It was two days down to base camp and three days up again to the final ridge, the summit would take another day at least and then two more would be needed to get back to base camp, eight days in all. We only had two left before Mehadi would be back with the ponies. We could of course delay our departure from Tshringmad but six days delay would have thrown our programme too much out of phase for the next stages of the expedition.

2.4 A Day in the Life of Bobang Peak

My thoughts were beginning to turn towards Bobang Peak itself. This was, after all, the peak we had been given permission to climb and it appeared from our vantage point high up on Pt 19590 that the right hand peak of Bobang would go in a day, given the right conditions. We were not given them, but climbed it all the same the next day in seven and a half hours, base camp to summit.

Nine o'clock wasn't such an early start for us, but compared with what we had been on, Bobang wasn't such a big mountain or at least that is how it seemed at the time.

Wispy cirrus streaks portended poorer weather to come and gave the lie to what had started a promisingly bright day. We thought "anticyclone" and for our optimism bought murky depression. But it did not seem to matter. We had decided to go for the summit that day whatever.

I don't know why but all three of us, Bill, Simon and I, seemed to be moving much better that day and we were past the three boulder scoops leading to the East Bobang Glacier in hardly any time at all. We stopped to put on crampons and then crossed the flat glacier for about a mile and a half. Ahead of us lay a heavily crevassed head wall and brooding black clouds.

By the time we had reached the bergschrund we were in thick mist and it became nearly impossible to distinguish between snow and sky. We zig-zagged past yawning crevasses and jumped across dark groaning voids, "a cheval" here, "walking the plank" there, for two nerve-wracking hours. All that was left now was the final snowfield, which we ascended in whiteout and the summit was ours. We spent half an hour traversing the corniced summit crest, some of the time on our hands and knees the snow was so soft and punishing to walk on, to locate its highest point. At 3.30 we were satisfied the top had been reached and we stayed there just long enough to be chuffed by what we had done.

It was snowing quite heavily by the time we started downhill and we lost our way several times. In order to avoid the crevassed area we took a line along a ridge to the side and descended from that. What I had thought would be a 150 ft descent on steep ice to just below the bergschrund turned out to be nearly 400 feet and the three of us used up quite a few kilojoules of nervous energy before that particular nightmare was over. We raced down the glacier and arrived back at base camp just after nightfall, tired but pleased with ourselves.

2.5 The Outward March

Reliable as ever, the pony man had arrived with his ponies that evening and the following morning we set off on the long march back to Panikhar. It was a super walk and I was able to take in a lot more than I had on the way up. At one point I took a short detour and happened on a perfectly concealed hamlet of stone huts built amongst the rocks and boulders. A cursory inspection located about half a dozen "shelters" with an intricate maze of paths between each. My mind briefly conjured up images of stone age dwellers and such nonsense but this was quickly replaced by a more reasonable explanation. Earlier we had seen a very large herd of goats at Tshringmad tended by a few bukarwals (goat herders) and their families. The cluster of dwellings I was standing amongst was sited at one of the few places in that part of the valley where good grazing was to be found. The huts had probably been gradually built over the years by the nomadic herders, during their overnight halts. Perhaps the site had been used since the stone age, after all!

Further down, we rested at a stream crossing a small meadow and watched marmots gambolling in the heat of the afternoon sun. We reached Panikhar and a famous welcome in the early hours of the evening.

3. ZANSKAR

Stuart Hepburn
John Hall

3.1 Into the Hidden Kingdom

Two days, sixty cups of tea, and as many games of cards later, we were well rested and, since John was not actually due to meet up with us until 8 September, I decided we should press on to Zanskar straight away to get started with the glacier crossing that would take us over to the Kiar Nullah and Cathedral Peak.

Bill, Robin, Sah and I hitched a ride on a public transport carrier the next day and were subjected over the next twelve hours to as bone-jarring a journey as I am ever likely to have. Now I know what it must feel like to be inside a washing machine. We creaked and crunched our way along the Suru Valley past the Nun Kun massif and away from the last Moslem outpost into the Buddhist kingdom of Zanskar. Panikhar had been warm enough for shorts and T-shirts during the day so we were ill-clad for Juldo when we arrived there after dark. I stepped out of the lorry to check in for the night at the PWD Overseers' Quarters. Juldo, at 12,700 ft whilst sunny and warm during the day, chills down considerably during the night and the ever-constant air stream produces a wind chill which freezes you to the marrow. In the short distance between lorry and building I started shivering and by the time I clambered back into the relative warmth of the truck cab I was nearly an exposure case and a statistic.

Once ensconced in our dormitory room which the resident Survey of India geologists had kindly made available to us I began to feel my fingers and toes again so, wrapped in several layers of clothing by now, we walked over to the Juldo Hotel for a splendid meal of rice, channa (blackbean curry), potato curry, raita (yoghurt), chapattis, Glucose biscuits (Simon had developed such a penchant for these Indian sweetmeats that carbohydrate poisoning could not be ruled out as a potential hazard) and, of course, cups of sweet tea. The yoghurt was the best I have ever tasted. A request for chang met with a wry smile but little else from the young proprietor who, several times that night, tried to set the roof alight with a temperamental pressure lamp.

I loved Juldo and was really taken with it the next morning when we picked our way amongst the dzos, a cross between the bad-humoured yak and the more docile domestic cow, back to the low-ceilinged room where we took our meals. The early sun streamed into the doorway and highlighted specks of dust in the still morning air. I felt I could have sat there forever and nothing would ever have changed. Our truck driver brought my reveries to a rude halt with three sharp blasts on his horn, the signal to go.

Meanwhile, John had arrived at Panikhar where Simon, who had stayed behind, filled him in on the story so far. The following extracts from John's diary give something of the flavour of the next few days.

"8 September approx 1700 we arrived at the village of Juldo. We half expected the other expedition members to be here but found a message to say they had already moved

on to Box. We stayed the night in one of the local's houses

9 September Left Juldo approx 0630. Problems with fuel drums leaking so stopped numerous times to rearrange and resolve leaks - ours and the drums.

Arrived at Box base camp at 1315

In the afternoon I went for a walk up the south side of the Derung Drun Glacier to help acclimatisation

On my return to Base Camp, several trucks were waiting and Sah was preparing to leave with them, so we rapidly packed our excess equipment for Sah to take with him to Kishtwar."

A note of explanation is required. On crossing the Pensi La, Sah had taken one look at the Derung Drun Glacier and decided we were all mad. He was complaining of swollen lips and nausea and suggested he might travel round to Kishtwar by road, via Kargil, Srinagar and Bathote. He thought he might save us a lot of trouble by walking to Kiar, three days away from Kishtwar, hiring porters there and getting them to our proposed Cathedral Peak Base Camp by 22 September in readiness for our march out. I was quite aware of the advantages this strategy meant to the rest of us, but was at a loss to understand Sah's motives, unless they were actually altruistic.

3.2 Derung Drun Glacier

"10 September

Weather poor - overcast

Today we went up the eastern side for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles and then crossed to the depot left by the others yesterday. In total about 5 miles up the glacier. The journey took $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours to Camp 1. I found it quite reasonable at first but soon it became obvious that acclimatisation was going to restrict. After about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles I found it necessary to stop about every 700 paces to allow my pulse rate to slow down. I would walk until my pulse rate reached between 150 and 160 then I would stop to allow it to fall to about 108

The journey down took 2 hours. I was very tired, the altitude had affected me far more than I had expected. My pulse rate never dropped below 108 all evening.

11 September At Box. My pulse rate at 0700 = 96

After moving around during breakfast my pulse rate was up to 136.

1000 struck camp and prepared loads for carrying up to Camp 1. Gave some of the extraneous equipment to the local herdsman at Pensi La. He was very grateful to receive sugar, flour, an axe head and potatoes. He decided to refuse Bill and Stuart's favourite pickle. He did sample several pieces but spat them all out with disgust

sensible folk these Zanskaris.

I was so much better today and was going like a train

..... arrived at Camp 1 in $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours"

And so on, a double carry between each camp to ferry our 500lb of gear and food up the glacier, we laboured three more days trying to reach the ever-elusive Col Luigi di Savoia and, on its far side, Prul Glacier and the long downward climb to Cathedral Peak.

Sunday 13 September was a critical day. After breakfast, Robin and I set off from Camp 2 to try and reach the col. From our camp, there were two possible routes, one to the left of the serac fall higher up the glacier, and the other skirting under the cliffs to the right. We opted for the easier looking line to the left. Distances were very deceptive and even from the highest point we reached that day it looked as though it would still take another day to reach the col. We still did not know how difficult the descent on the other side was going to be and were becoming concerned about time running out on us.

That night we discussed our position. Crossing the col to the Kiar Nullah might take so long that no time would be left to tackle Cathedral Peak. On the other hand, staying where we were, surrounded by several attractive peaks, there were many climbing options available to us. One problem was Sah round in Kishtwar and this could only be resolved by one of us walking out to send a telegram calling him back from Kiar. Since Bill and I were due back in England before the others and we had less time to play with than Robin, Simon and John, it was decided we should leave the following day, taking with us as much equipment as we could carry, but only the barest necessities of food, and try and get to Srinagar as quickly as possible to inform Mr Ashraf of our change of plan and arrange for telegrams to be sent. We took three days to get there and the all important message was sent. It was not until Sah strolled up towards us over a week later in Delhi that we had confirmation our message had reached him in time.

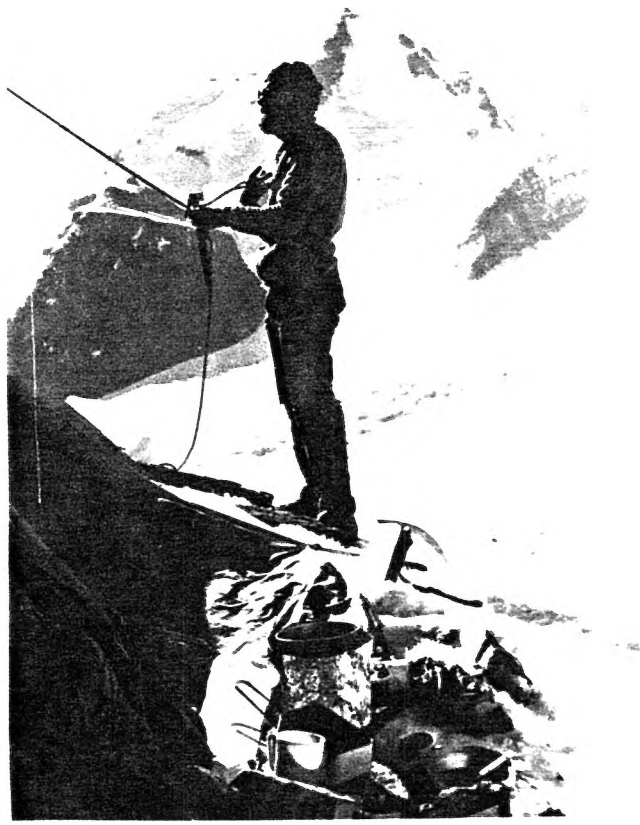
Robin picks up the story from here.



N9 from Camp 2 showing route



Simon on Derung Drun Glacier



Robin at Bivouac on N9

4.1 Reconnaissance

On the afternoon of Monday 14 September, Stuart and Bill set off down the glacier to Box, leaving John, Simon and me in possession of Camp 2. Once again we were able to appreciate the sheer size of the Derung Drun Glacier, which had frustrated our plans. For a long time the two figures seemed almost stationary on the immense expanse of white, and then we looked up again and they had vanished, hidden by one of the ridges which are so deceptively concealed by the flat colouring. Not for the first time I thought how easy it would be to lose a man or a whole camp here in bad weather.

Our position was in many respects an enviable one. We were camped high on a glacier, unencumbered by a liaison officer, surrounded by fine peaks of around 20,000 ft, from which we could take our pick. We had at least a week before we needed to think about returning and we had ample supplies of food. Along with Stuart and Bill, our chief enthusiasts for Shipton-like reliance on local food, we had said goodbye to a diet of parathas, dal and curried vegetables. The bulk of the high altitude food intended for six people was now ours to share between three, and we set to right away, beginning with some delicious greasy Polish salami. Later that afternoon I walked for about two hours up a tributary glacier to the east, in order to inspect the approaches to Doda Peak, a formidable lump protected on this side by steep bands of rotten-looking rock. I enjoyed being on my own in this lonely spot, for once without a heavy pack, as I picked my way over morainic boulders, round rock tables and across little streams flowing on the surface of the ice. I saw a huge raven perched on a rock, and high above my head, at the vanishing point of a dizzying perspective of cliffs, the tiny outline of a bird of prey almost transparent against the blue sky, like the ghost of an eagle.

Doda seemed too much of an undertaking in the time available. On the next day John explored across to the west side of the glacier and up the lower slopes of a likely looking peak, a shapely cone of ice with an obvious route up it, straightforward apart from a problematical rock step near the top. Meanwhile Simon and I recovered the cache of climbing gear we had left higher up the glacier before abandoning our attempt to cross the pass. John returned well pleased with his reconnaissance, having dumped some food at his high point.

4.2 Ascent and Descent

On Wednesday morning we set off with two ropes, a rack of gear, bivvy tent, MSR stove with two full fuel bottles and food for three days. We moved separately across the glacier, following John's tracks in our own time. The weather was perfect, although it promised to be very hot later. Rhythmic movement across rough terrain is like a drug. The ache and labour is there but seems to recede to another plane, leaving the mind free to wander, until one clumsy step breaks the spell and physical exigency rushes back with the thin air you gulp into your lungs. The trance-like state can levitate you effortlessly, but can also lead to dangerous inattention. Experienced climbers induce it when they wish to, but also usually manage to control it - a part of them stays watchful. This morning I was sunk in reverie and,

without thinking, twice leapt a large moulin - a hole where a river of melt water is swallowed by the ice - which was barring my way. It was like stepping down in the dark onto a non-existent stair. I landed on the far lip with a jolt which shook me into wakefulness. A little later I reached a crevassed area where the snow of the glacier gave way to the "neve", the snow of the mountain. I put on crampons and continued steadily, enjoying the crisp bite of the points. Glancing back I could see Simon and John not far behind.

We were proceeding up a broad gully, and three hours after setting out from base, we reached the point on the rocky buttress to our left where John had cached the food. I made some "Rise and Shine" orange drink with a trickle of melt water, and ate a bar of chocolate. We continued up the next steepening towards a prominent rock tower. The top of the tower was joined to the main mass of the mountain by a col, a neck of snow which might provide a good bivouac site. We entered the snow bowl below the buttress and my leg went through as far as my thigh, so we roped up. The snow bowl was a sun-trap, sheltered from the wind and stifflingly hot. We kept coming across crows footprints, like the arrows which traditionally adorn prison clothing, and all the arrows pointed down. It required an effort of will to keep going for the col, still well above us, but Simon and John were adamant, quite correctly as it turned out, that we should make the extra height.

The bivouac site was a sloping ice ledge backed by a wall of rock. We levelled it as best we could, and found anchorages for the bivvy tent in the rock face. In front the ground dropped steeply to a large crevasse. It was like making camp on the first three feet of the Cresta Run. The thought of something giving way and the tent and its occupants tobogganing into the abyss so preyed on the minds of Simon and John that they prevailed on me, as the one nearest the entrance, to get out in the middle of the night and secure an extra rope round the front of the tent. Quite apart from this, I spent a miserable night. The tent was very small for three people; we could only sit on our sloping ledge with our backs to the rock, and kept sliding down into a cramped huddle held in by the bulging front tent wall. The cold struck through where the sleeping bags were compressed, and my bent knees felt freezing. Half way through the night I took my sleeping bag outside where I could lie full-length, and this was marginally better, although I was still cold without the protection of the tent. In the morning the sun crept round towards our bivvy site with excruciating slowness, but at last blissfully warmed us and thawed out our frozen boots enough for us to put them on.

At 9.00 on Thursday 17 September, we set off for the summit. We left our bivouac tent in place, intending to return to it that evening. We moved unroped at first. The snow was breakable crust, that most infuriating of surfaces. For two, three or a dozen steps it takes your weight as you walk on eggshells, trying to think yourself lighter. Then you sink through up to the knee, your rhythm is destroyed, and a series of clumsy, crust-breaking steps follow before you are back on the surface again. After a while the snow improved, but we came to a tricky crevassed area where we had to rope up. The three of us had never climbed together before this trip, and had discovered that we have radically different approaches to moving uphill. I like to get into a steady plod, no matter how painfully slow, and keep going. Simon and John prefer to climb in bursts with

short rests inbetween. As a result we preferred to move separately, although when we had to rope together we all adapted a little.

After picking our way through the crevasses we gained a broad snowy ridge which led to the foot of the rock band which looked as if it would provide the crux of the route. We reached the base of the rock step in about four hours from the bivouac site. The rock proved about as stable as a dry stone wall perched on a 45° slag heap. Parts of it had the colour and consistency of cheese. At least if you wanted you could carry your holds up with you. After a pitch I reached a ledge with a small overhang above it. Tucked in under the overhang, in one of the relatively more solid pieces of rock was a newish looking piton with a short sling attached to it. So someone had been here before us, and quite recently, too. Oh well, the peg would help in the descent. When the others heard the news there was some ritual cursing, but I don't think they were too upset. This was a very minor peak, one among hundreds. Its ascent was important to no one except the ascensionists. The fact that someone had preceded us took a little of the uncertainty out of our adventure, but we weren't going to complain too long or loud. The Ulysses Factor was present in our party, but in a fairly diluted form.

Another pitch of bad rock gave onto steepish snow-ice which led in three rope lengths to the summit. From there the ridge dipped and then rose again to a top very much the same height as our own. It was very hard to estimate whether we were on the true summit or not - if we were it was only by a foot or so. It was now three o'clock and the other point was perhaps an hour away. We decided unanimously that we had reached the top. Photographs were taken. Far to the north we could see the snowy giants of the Karakoram, and nearer at hand, Nun and Kun. Views to the south and west, into Kishtwar, were tantalisingly obscured by cloud welling up from the North Indian Plain. We did catch a glimpse of what we thought was the Prul Glacier which we had hoped to descend. It looked heavily crevassed and we could also see that it was a long way from our high point on the glacier to the pass.

On the descent of the rock band the abseil ropes jammed as we tried to pull them down, a sure sign that the party was getting tired and careless. We reached the bivvy again at about 6 o'clock. We considered continuing down to base camp, whose Spartan conditions seemed like luxury compared with the bivouac, but we had already been moving for nine hours, and would certainly have to cross the glacier in the dark. We decided to wait, and make a leisurely descent in the morning.

4.3 Back to Box

On Saturday 19th we struck base camp and began the descent to Box. Despite the fact that we jettisoned large amounts of food and inessential equipment, our packs were huge. Simon presided over a bonfire of atta, sugar, dehydrated apple rings, a plastic bowl and various other items, feeding the flames with our surplus paraffin. As the fire was dying down, we heard a series of sharp reports, followed by the tinkling fall of glass uncomfortably close to us. Simon walked over to inspect the cause. The ampoules of drugs from some discarded medical stores had exploded, showering the area with broken glass.

On our way down we came across a few burnt tins and scraps of paper with Japanese characters on them. Was this a remnant of the ill-fated Japanese expedition? It was a cold, overcast day, and the weight of the packs was such that you needed to find a rock or an ice shelf of a suitable height to rest on. If you once sat or lay down it was extremely difficult to get up again. After five hours of back breaking work we were approaching the snout of the glacier. John and Simon were both some distance ahead of me and out of sight. As I topped a rise I saw Simon over to my left, just beside the stream which bounds the glacier on that side, and merges into the river which flows from the glacier snout into Zanskar. He was out of audible range, but saw me, waved, and made swimming motions with his arms. I took this to mean "go the other way, if you come here you will have to swim". I had covered some distance on the right (east) bank of the river when I saw Simon and John on the far side, proceeding purposefully towards our camp, and realised that he had meant just the opposite. I was exasperated, physically tired and also suffering, I think, from an insidious mental lethargy. I had a feeling that the expedition was really over, that we had left danger behind us. For whatever reason, I did a foolish thing. Rather than retrace my steps, which would have taken perhaps an extra forty minutes, I tried to wade across the river. It was not very deep, but was moving fast and was very cold. I had not gone more than a yard or two from the bank, in knee deep water, when I lost my footing on the slippery cobbles of the river bed. The weight of my rucksack now took over and pinned me down into the icy water. My position was both ludicrous and potentially lethal. I could not get rid of my sack quickly, as I was fastened in with a hip belt as well as shoulder straps. The force of the water was carrying me quite fast downstream, bumping along the bottom. By rolling over and over I managed to reach the bank, gasping and swearing. I was soaked to the skin, it was now about 6 o'clock, night was drawing in and a bitter wind was blowing. We had been going all day with very little to eat. The danger of exposure was ringing in my mind with the insistency of an alarm bell. I unceremoniously dumped the heavy climbing gear which made up the bulk of my load on a bank of shingle, put on the only two particularly dry items of clothing I had in my rucksack, a duvet and a pair of overtrousers, and set off back towards the glacier. I was walking very vigorously, spurred on by the urgency of the situation, but nonetheless was shivering violently by the time I reached the others at the road. Simon and John looked after me magnificently. I was soon stripped off in a dry sleeping bag, inside a tent, and being fed with hot food and drinks. Simon took my temperature which was 35.4 C. 37 C is normal. When it drops to about 33 C, Simon explained, the shivering reflex fails, and deterioration is very fast. So the time to worry is when you stop shivering.

That night there was a spectacular storm, but fortunately the next day was fine, and I was able to dry out my wet clothing in the sun. The rest of our trip was a gradual return to normality; a bone-shaking journey in an open truck to Kargil, a lift with an Indian engaged in a geothermal survey, ("What charm you find in barren hills?" he asked with genuine puzzlement. "There's something very strong about them", John replied lamely), a pleasant stay on a houseboat in Srinagar, train to Delhi, plane to London.

5.1 During the Journey

Fortunately the expedition was not marred by any major medical problems. Most of the complaints were of diarrhoea symptoms of mile altitude sickness, and cuts and grazes. "Brulidine" antiseptic cream was applied to fresh cuts and this prevented delayed healing due to infection.

The appropriately named Yaktail Hotel in Kargil seemed to be a haven for human parasites especially fleas and bed bugs. The only person who acted as host to them on the trip to Panikhar was, of course, the doctor. Fleas do, however, have a disliking for a cold environment and were dealt with by a thorough wash in the glacial river.

At Panikhar, we found the furthest reaches of the Indian health service, where a small cottage hospital had been built. Although there was a resident doctor, there was no medical equipment or beds in the hospital as yet. The doctor was hoping to buy a couple of beds and some equipment each year from funds that were allocated to him. At present he operates like a General Practitioner so this meant that I did not have a large number of villagers coming to me for medical assistance.

5.2 On the Approach and on the Mountains

The walk from Panikhar (12,100 ft) up to Tshringmad Base Camp meant gaining only 1,000 ft each day. This helped to gently break us into the altitude. The commonest symptoms of altitude sickness experienced were lethargy, fatigue and frontal headaches. Robin was affected by altitude sickness during the time at base camp and on the mountain and only recovered when we returned to Panikhar. Previous experience enabled him to gauge his physical activity according to the symptoms he was getting. His condition was aggravated by an upper respiratory tract infection that we all suffered from at this time but which cleared up without antibiotics.

The only water available at base camp was from a heavily silted river which took in excess of two days to settle. We tried to filter this out using a strainer and muslin specially purchased for this purpose. This was not successful but the tea improved dramatically.

Three days after leaving Panikhar, four members reached a height of about 17,000 ft during a lightweight reconnaissance from base camp. This would indicate that some degree of acclimatisation must have taken place during the bus journeys to Panikhar despite no physical exercise being performed. It is unlikely that anyone flying from sea level would be able to climb to this height without developing moderate to severe altitude sickness.

An interesting observation during our first night at Camp 1 was that Bill, Stuart and myself had signs of mild pulmonary oedema whereas Robin's chest was clear. However, Robin was suffering more from cerebral symptoms and had puffy eyes. Those of us with pulmonary signs were able to carry on the next day but Robin had to rest.

Sah's decision to take the bottle of spare fuel down with him to Camp 1 provided us with an unpleasant night at Bivouac 2. The necessity to preserve fuel meant that we could not melt enough snow to properly rehydrate. We each took a short-acting sleeping tablet but after two hours good sleep we all woke up with severe headaches which lasted through the rest of the night. This was either due to dehydration or to our hypoxic condition. Robin having taken a second tablet during the night found he was too ataxic to continue the climb.

The chances of surviving a forced bivouac on the summit ridge in the condition we were in without developing frostbite would have been slim, so the retreat was well advised.

On return to base camp we all suffered from sunburnt noses and lips. In future I would recommend that a sunscreen which provides a complete ultraviolet block should be used high on the mountain. If nose shields are used they should protect the nose from sun reflected off the snow.

5.3 On the Glacier

When John joined us on the Derung Drun Glacier he had the task of starting to carry loads at about 14,000 ft without previous acclimatisation. He completed his carry to Camp 1 on the glacier (a rise of about 1,000 ft) and then descended to the road. Despite the descent being without a load he felt exhausted to such an extent that he had to stop every quarter of a mile. I felt similar symptoms on the walk to Tshringmad Base Camp. During the acclimatisation period it seems that if you tire yourself through strenuous exercise early in the day, you do not recover until you have had a long rest and some food.

Robin had the misfortune of falling into the river during the return from the glacier and was mildly hypothermic by the time he reached the camp. He recovered quickly once inside a sleeping bag and well nourished.

One unfortunate sequel to the expedition was that Stuart contracted hepatitis soon after our return to England.

6. FINAL ACCOUNT

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Mount Everest Foundation Grant	600	Travel	2698
British Mountaineering Council Grant	400	Food and Stores	673
Donations by Sponsors	512	Equipment	607
Personal Contributions	3400	Hire of Labour	56
Fund-Raising Activities	113	Administration, Stationery and Postage	169
Deposit Account Interest	43	Miscellaneous	
		Insurance	231
		Climbing Permits	246
		Fund-Raising Activities	92
		Public Lectures	120
		Final Report (Estimate)	70
		Other Costs	106
	<u>5068</u>		<u>865</u>
			<u>5068</u>

7. DIARY OF EVENTS

- 8 August - Bill and Stuart fly to Delhi.
- 10 August - Girish Sah, our Indian Liaison Officer, joins the team at the Indian Mountaineering Foundation Headquarters.
- 11 August - Advance party meets Mr S R Krishnan, Administrative Assistant of the IMF and obtains official permission for change of objectives.
- 12 August - Stuart travels to Srinagar.
- 13 August - Bill and Sah travel to Srinagar. Stuart meets Mr M Ashraf, Deputy Director of Tourism & Recreation for J & K State.
- 14 August - Bill and Sah start buying and packaging stores in Srinagar.
- 15 August - Stuart travels to Kargil and registers expedition with the Police Department and the Tourist Office.
- 16 August - Robin and Simon fly to Delhi. Stuart travels to Leh and meets Mr S Dorjay, Tourist Officer for Ladakh.
- 18 August - Robin and Simon travel to Srinagar.
- 20 August - Stuart returns to Kargil. Bill, Sah, Robin and Simon complete packaging of 11 loads.
- 21 August - Stuart visits District Commissioner's Office to arrange meeting with DC for fuel permits, Tourist Office for advice about onward transport and Bus Terminal to book seats to Panikhar. Bill, Sah, Robin and Simon travel to Kargil.
- 22 August - Bill, Robin and Simon travel to Panikhar.
- 23 August - Stuart and Sah obtain fuel permit and official access permits from the District Commissioner.
- 24 August - Simon and Bill visit Medical Centre. Stuart and Simon travel to Panikhar. Robin and Simon collect kerosene from Superintendent of Supplies. Team pack loads for ponies.
- 25 August - Team leave Panikhar with two ponymen, Bakhar and Mehadi, four ponies and a foal.
- 26 August - Team reaches Tshringmad. Base Camp (14,670 ft) established.
- 27 August - Bill and Sah reconnoitre left hand route and climb Retsheriah (17,000 ft), attaining eastern summit at 1500 hrs. Stuart and Simon investigate right hand route and reach about 17,000 ft before turning back at 1530 hrs.

- 28 August - Robin and Simon check the centre route up a rock stone chute.
Stuart, Bill and Sah pack loads for attempt on Pt 19590.
- 29 August - Camp 1 (16,300 ft) reached.
- 30 August - Bivouac 1 (17,500 ft) established.
- 31 August - Bivouac 2 (18,400 ft) established.
- 1 September - Attempt to reach summit of Pt 19590 by its east ridge. High point (19,000 ft) reached at midday but team turned back due to technical difficulties prolonging length of time on the climb, shortage of food supplies and lack of fuel for melting snow to drink.
- 2 September - Team returns to Base Camp.
John flies to Delhi.
- 3 September - Bobang Peak (18,370 ft) climbed in $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours from Base Camp, summit reached in whiteout conditions at 1530 hrs. Summit crest traversed to ascertain highest point. Descent takes $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours.
Mehadi arrives at Base Camp with 2 ponies and the foal.
- 4 September - Team descends from Base Camp.
John travels to Srinagar by bus and taxi.
- 6 September - John travels to Kargil by bus.
- 7 September - Stuart, Bill, Robin and Sah travel to Juldo by public transport carrier.
- 8 September - Stuart, Bill, Robin and Sah arrive at Box. Base Camp (14,000 ft) sited in stone shelter at roadside.
John arrives at Panikhar and with Simon continues on to Juldo by public transport carrier.
- 9 September - Camp 1 (15,000 ft) established on Derung Drun Glacier.
Sah travels to Juldo by truck.
- 10 September - Camp 1 occupied.
Sah continues to Kargil by truck.
- 12 September - Camp 2 (16,200 ft) established and occupied.
Sah travels to Srinagar by bus.
- 13 September -- Stuart and Robin attempt to reach Col Luigi di Savoia but turn back at a height of 17,600 ft and about 15 miles along the glacier. With two more carries required just to reach the col and perhaps four to descend Prul Glacier and expedition time running out, it was decided to abandon the proposed attempt on Cathedral Peak and concentrate instead on climbing one of the peaks at the head of the Derung Drun Glacier.

- 14 September - Robin reconnoitres ice fall to south east of Camp 2. Stuart and Bill descend to Box and travel to Juldo by truck.
Sah travels to Bathote by bus.
- 15 September - John reconnoitres approaches to N9 across Derung Drun Glacier.
Robin and Simon recover gear dumped at 17,300 ft during attempt to reach col.
Stuart and Bill travel to Kargil by truck.
Sah travels to Kishtwar by bus.
- 16 September - Bivouac (18,100 ft) established.
Stuart and Bill travel to Srinagar by truck.
- 17 September - Summit of N9 (20,070 ft) reached at 1500 hours after a troublesome 300 ft rock step had been climbed near the top.
Descent to Bivouac takes 3 hours.
- 18 September - Team descends to Camp 2.
- 19 September - Team descends Derung Drun Glacier to Box.
- 20 September - Robin, Simon and John travel to Sankoo by truck.
Stuart and Bill travel to Jammu by bus.
- 21 September - Robin, Simon and John travel to Kargil by truck.
Stuart and Bill travel to Delhi by train.
Sah leaves Kishtwar by bus.
- 22 September - Robin, Simon and John travel to Srinagar by jeep.
Sah travels from Jammu to Delhi by bus.
- 23 September - Stuart and Bill visit Agra.
- 24 September - Robin, Simon and John travel to Jammu by bus.
- 25 September - Stuart and Bill fly home.
Robin, Simon and John travel to Delhi by train.
- 26 September - Simon travels to Nepal.
- 27 September - Robin and John fly home.
- Mid October - Simon flies home.