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British Haramosh II Expedition 1995

Expedition Report

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Illustrations (all taken from colour slides)

Haramosh II from the north	(A. Park)	Front cover
Brian Davison on bergschrund at c. 5450 m.	(D. Wilkinson)	p. 12
Haramosh II from the Haramosh Glacier	(D. Wilkinson)	p. 13



A Dream

To the south we saw an unknown mountain, a sharp peak of snow and ice gleaming white in the sun against a perfect blue sky. This was a fairy-tale mountain, and we had the child-like wish to climb it. Paul and Geoff shared this dream, Paul as an old and trusted friend, Geoff as a new friend but not a lesser one. They were kindred spirits in this exploratory urge for the unknown.

Introduction

During the summer of 1994, Dave Wilkinson, Brian Davison and two others, were climbing small peaks above the Garumbar glacier, a tributary of the Hispar, in the western Karakoram. They saw, to the south, a prominent and beautiful mountain which they did not recognize at all. Later inspection of maps and photos identified it as Haramosh II, 6666 metres. The Alpine Club's excellent Himalayan index, run by Mike Westmacott, was then consulted, and this revealed that the mountain was unclimbed, with only one previous attempt (ref. 1). Our 1995 expedition was then formed, with Dave and Brian being joined later on by Paul Nunn, Geoff Tier, and Colin Wells. Paul was amused by the mountain's numerological height, and we joked that it was well that we were not superstitious; ironical in view of what finally happened.

Haramosh II's name and height are taken from Jerzy Wala's map (ref. 2). The mountain should not be confused with the nearby Mani peak (6684 m.), as was done by one recent obituarist. Mani peak is a different mountain, lying midway between Haramoshes I and II. It *was* called "Haramosh II" in the book "The Last Blue Mountain" (ref. 3). This old naming is likely the cause of the confusion. The sketch map on page 14 makes the locations clear.

As the mountain's height exceeds 6000 m., Pakistan's rules require the formalities and expenses of peak fee and liaison officer and all that follows on. Dave dealt with these formalities.

Most equipment was loaned to the expedition by the members, items which needed purchasing were generally acquired at favourable rates through trade contacts of Paul and Brian. Five tents were kindly loaned to us by Phoenix of Morpeth.

Flights to Pakistan were with P.I.A., who are highly recommended for their sympathetic extra baggage allowance on the outward leg. Food was purchased in Pakistan, except for a few specialist items not available there. Local transport and porters etc. were organized on the spot, without the use of expensive "tour operators" or any other middle-men, except for Nazir Sabir whose company was employed as helicopter guarantor, and Ghulam Nabi who was employed as head porter.

The trip was run in as lightweight a style as was reasonably possible, given the necessity for a liaison officer etc. We received generous grants from the M.E.F. and the B.M.C., but the majority of the cost still had to be met from members' pockets. This cost was initially estimated by a remarkably simple calculation: "Nunn's Law", which we can now publish posthumously. Nunn's law states that the net cost per head of any expedition is about "a thousand quid". Of course, bigger and more distant objectives are more expensive, but Nunn's law recognizes that the scope for external funding is also greater, thus leaving the net cost roughly constant. The law is surprisingly accurate, and may be used for all expedition planning. If a trip costs significantly more, then there's something wrong with its objective, style or planning.

Approaching the Mountain

Dave and Geoff flew out as “advanced party”, arriving in Rawalpindi on 3rd July. They spent four hectic days buying and packing supplies, dealing with formalities, arranging onward transport, and making arrangements with the liaison officer. As Haramosh II is in an “open area” with no military control, the Government had detailed a civilian as our L.O. He was Mohammed Akram Awan, a government statistician. He enforced the rules meticulously, but proved very helpful in dealing with formalities, hiring head porter and cook, and especially near the end of the trip he was very sympathetic and helpful with the consequences of the accident.

We met our head porter, Ghulam Nabi (“little Nabi”) and our cook, Mohammed Khan (both from Hushe) in Rawalpindi, where they were touring the hotels together looking for work. They were known to some of our party previously, but we put them through some hard bargaining before agreeing to take them on. They both served us very well indeed.

Paul, Brian and Colin arrived on 7th July, and we left in our privately hired minibus the following morning. The two-day drive to Skardu was uneventful (if that road can ever be so described), and we arrived in Skardu on the afternoon of 9th July.

We had decided to approach our mountain via the Chogo Lungma glacier. A quicker but less straightforward approach would have been possible, from Sassi in the Indus valley over the Haramosh La. In spite of being shorter and potentially cheaper in porters’ wages, we rejected this alternative because of the problems with weather and stonefall which the pass (approx. 5,000 m.) might have posed, and also we had heard disquieting rumours about past troubles with porters on that approach.

We spent a day in Skardu, where Dave and Akram dealt with more bureaucracy, while the others completed purchasing our supplies. Nabi hired some porters in Skardu, and others in just about every village we subsequently passed, so that no village was deprived of their share of the lucrative employment. We left Skardu by jeep early in the morning on 11th July, arriving at the village of Doko that afternoon. Our walk-in started from here early next morning.

The Pakistan government *do* still have their standard porter wage rates, but these seem to be interpreted more as guidelines these days. In recent years, these rates (in rupees) have increased, but *not* in line with inflation; the “stages”, i.e. distances done (supposedly) in a day have crept down, and two stages covered in a day is quite common. The exchange rate in rupees to the £ has risen so much that the total cost per porter has remained at about £5 per day, i.e. cheaper than it used to be in real terms, ...provided you can negotiate a good rate, which Nabi did for us, easily justifying his own pay. The agreed rate was the bottom end of the govt. guidelines, with six stages from Doko to base camp which were actually covered in four days.

From Doko we walked with our 24 porters for a day to the last village, Arandu, and then for a further three days up the Chogo Lungma glacier to our base camp at the junction with the Haramosh glacier. Most of this walk was in beautiful ablation valleys by the glacier’s north edge, through woods and cattle-pastures. But the base camp was among rubble heaps on the actual glacier, there being no convenient alternative.

Reconnaissance, Acclimatization and Funny Games.

Unfortunately, we could not see our mountain from base camp, it was hidden behind lower nearer peaks. The west face was the one we had seen from a distance the previous year, and appeared to have a good line for a route. In any case, we like west faces because the sun does not hit them till late in the day. A walk of 10 or 11 km. up the Haramosh glacier was needed to reach an advanced base camp below our proposed route. So when we paid off our porters on arriving at base camp, we retained three volunteers to do an extra day or two's carry of food and gear. However, we had not given them advanced warning of this, so they had no extra clothing or footwear, nor did we have any for them. We found that the Haramosh glacier was much more badly crevassed than previous visitors had suggested, and the snow level was low after an exceptionally snowy winter. So our three men refused to go more than a quarter of the way, where we encountered crevasses covered by soft snow. This refusal seemed quite reasonable, so we dumped their loads and had to be content with that.

Then things became decidedly Rum-Doodlish. We carried some of the cached loads up to the A.B.C. site for our first close-up look at the mountain. Geoff was not feeling well (base camp lassitude?), so Brian and Colin went together, followed by Dave and Paul. The former pair, with the advantage of youth, pulled ahead on this walk, as they always did subsequently. Paul and Dave, with the slowness of older age, and also the wisdom, took the view that on a long run tortoises often beat hares, and adopted a more energy-conserving gait, moving along like a slow bicycle race. Neither pair saw the others again till back at base, in spite of the upper part of the glacier being relatively level, crevasse-free and narrow. Both teams dumped their loads, but saw no track or sign of the others, and assumed some sort of mishap or turning back. However, we could now see our proposed route from close, including the lower quarter which had been concealed in our distant views. We were encouraged by what we saw.

The weather had been perfect during the walk-in and up to that point. Now it became less good, but we had had our view, and the weather was still good enough for walking up the glacier. After a day's rest, Brian, Colin and Dave went up to the lower dump for another carry. Brian and Colin were surprised to find a tent and other items, which they seemed to remember carrying up two days previously, but were now back at dump I. Dave derided their absent-mindedness, but arriving at the site of their upper dump, on a prominent boulder, there was nothing there. It must have been carried back down by the "appalling snowman".

At least the mystery of the two separate upper dumps was resolved. Brian and Colin's was closer to the mountain, for fast access, whereas Paul and Dave's was near the far side of the glacier, for a less foreshortened view. They were consolidated at a single A.B.C. site.

The missing loads mystery was solved back at base camp. Akram had been visited by a party of men from the Sassi valley, across the Haramosh La. Our side of the pass, they are persona-non-grata with their traditional enemies from Arandu, who regard it as their patch. They were over this side on a gem-hunting raid, a popular and lucrative activity in this region, since the government relaxed their rules on prospecting rights. They had apologized profusely to Akram for taking our things, their story being that they had found the stuff at our upper dump, presumed it had been abandoned by an expedition some previous year, and taken it as fair swag. When they found the lower and much larger dump, they realized their mistake and left the booty there. Better for us than losing it totally, but this is the sort of portering we could do without.

There followed a spell of 10 days of bad weather. It rained or snowed almost continuously, and we stayed in base camp most of the time, with the occasional walk on the glacier when there was an hour or two's respite. Some relief from the tedium was provided by visits from the Sassi men. They had come across in force to seek their fortune in emeralds or whatever, split into three groups of four to six each. Shod in plimsols, trainers or suchlike, they had crossed the Haramosh La, steep loose scree on the far side, snow-covered crevasses on this side. One of the teams had a short length of "rope" (old washing-line calibre) for security on the glacier. Some were equipped with lengths of concrete-reinforcing rod as ice-axe substitutes, for crevasse-probing. Of course, they had no tents, sleeping bags or stoves, and limited food supplies. They were staying on the glacier margins, sleeping under boulders or whatever shelter they could improvise, and cooking on fires of dwarf willow which is abundant in the area, but now rather wet. Their food was running out, and they were stranded by the weather, which had put down a lot of fresh snow on the upper glacier and col. Retreat *down* the valley would have involved slipping past Arandu, and many other unfriendly villages lower down. They were hard men. Some carried guns. But they must have been feeling miserable. However, they still had their pride, and did not ask us for food and shelter, which we would scarcely have had the resources to provide. We did give them brews of tea and a snack, and one of these groups scrounged a little paraffin for firelighting. The "reverse portering" group came with a splendid gift for us. To survive, they had shot an Ibex, and gave us three days' supply of the meat. It was a delicious and welcome variation to our diet. This conciliatory generosity *may* have been genuine, but we heard a story which offered a more cynical and perhaps a more realistic explanation. A few years ago, an expedition's base camp had been looted in their absence, with much money stolen. The Sassi men were strongly suspected. The police visited them and made inquiries but no individual suspects emerged, so every man in the village was beaten up by the police. They did not want that again.

As the rain continued, major inroads were made into our stock of books, and also into our food and drink supplies. That most vital of all mountaineering qualities, patience, was tried to the utmost. We even started on the first of our two barrels of home-brewed beer. At last, one afternoon the sun re-emerged, and spirits raised. The mountains reappeared, covered anew with white. Paul and Dave reflected beerily on the amazing fact that of the many peaks they could see, as elsewhere in the Karakoram, the majority were still unclimbed. Next morning, we plodded back up the glacier through the fresh snow, intent on reducing that majority.

At advanced base, another unpleasant surprise awaited us: our food dump had been seriously ravaged. We had seen these birds several times here and at base camp, and were aware of the risk, but not aware enough. We had packed the food in big cardboard boxes, covered in thick polythene sheeting, and then hessian sacks, but the ravens' pecking power was too great, and they trashed about half of what we had stored there. Fortunately, we had had the sense not to leave any of it in our tents, otherwise, no doubt, they would also have been pecked into submission. This seems to be a growing menace in the region, specially for small parties without L.O. and cook. It would be unwise to leave base camp sites unoccupied if there is any sign of big black birds in the area. Recommended protection for food left unattended would be metal boxes, or, as we subsequently used, covering with cairns of stones, which seemed to work.

Success and Tragedy.

It was time for some climbing. Our west face was littered with ice cliffs, some of which looked very dangerous indeed, and discharged massive serac falls several times a day. We had now spent some time at advanced base, which gave us a good view of the serac falls. There was a discontinuous spur in the middle of the face which seemed to give a feasible and safe line: none of the falls hit it. Half way up, a level section of ridge offered a safe camp site. But starting the route looked non too safe. The spur itself started with a loose-looking rocky section. Turning this on the left was possible, but could have been hit by the edge of some of the regular serac falls. On the right was a dirty and icy looking slope which was totally free from serac fall, but in the afternoons was raked by stonefall from a higher section of the spur. Brian, Colin and Dave climbed this slope with a pre-dawn start, leaving a small food and gas dump on the rocky top of this lowest quarter of the route. The couloir formed between icy slope on the right and rocky spur on the left held a little snow and so was less icy than we had feared. Paul was suffering from cold symptoms, and Geoff had indigestion, so they stayed at ABC, and missed out on this reconnaissance. With hindsight, their slightly inferior acclimatization could be seen as the cause of their later demise. Two days later, we were all back to actually do our climb.

The same team of three went first, followed by Paul and Geoff. Three on a rope might sound cumbersome, but has a load carrying advantage with items which do not need to be duplicated. And in any case, we were not on the rope all the time. On such middle-grade snow and ice, most of the climbing could be done unroped. We reached our previous high point, loaded our sacs even fuller, and roped up for a crevassed section, followed by two bergschrunds. We unroped again for a long 50 degree slope of sugary snow over ice. This took us to the crest of the middle part of our spur, and an easy snow ridge then led to level ground where we made our camp I (top camp as it turned out!). As we ate a leisurely lunch and drank and drank; relaxing in the sun, we felt content with our day's work; a thousand metres with full loads is quite enough at this altitude. We contemplated a similar height rise to the summit the next day, but the weather gave us a rest day. Before Paul and Geoff joined us, it had closed in, and snowed for the next 24 hours. It had been Dave's idea to take only two tiny tents between five of us, so he had to sleep outside in the bivi bag, but positioned himself within easy brew-grabbing reach of a tent door.

By early evening the stars were coming out, so we settled down early, and set the alarm for 10.30. After our enforced rest day, we decide to blitz it to the top and back in one day, the extra altitude being offset by light sacs. We left camp at midnight in the same teams of three and two. A bump in the ridge above the camp was followed by short descent to a col. Above this, the ridge soon petered out into a short slope beneath small seracs. This looked not too risky, and we had seen nothing fall in all our scrutiny. A berschrund gained a gangway slanting rightwards out to safety. Another berschrund and a 50 degree slope led to the long upper part of the mountain which lay back at an easier angle. As daylight drew in, so did the weather, but limited itself to light snow showers. We were now snow-plodding, zigzagging round small ice cliffs and over yet more bergschrunds. This was tiring going, the big snow dump of the previous fortnight was only part-settled, and gave us a few worrying moments with creaking noises and a small wind-slab slide which nearly took Brian with it. We alternated the trail-breaking lead, the shifts becoming shorter and shorter as we tired. A corniced ridge then led to a flat place. Across this a snowy bump with a sharp-ridged top was the summit, which was reached at about 10 am.

We waited for the weather to clear and give us the hoped-for panoramas of K2, Nanga Parbat, etc., but we waited in vain. The best we got were sufficient views downwards in all direction to convince us that we *were* actually on our summit, and snatched glimpses of cloud-enveloped nearby mountains such as Haramosh I and Laila. Creeping cold encouraged us downwards. After 20 minutes, we met Geoff and Paul on their upward trudge, and stopped for a brief chat. Geoff was cheerful when we told him “only an hour to go”. He said he didn’t mind if he didn’t get to the top, as we three had done the job, but Dave insisted that the other two should also go on. Paul was uncharacteristically quiet, and had his determined look.

The team of three got back to camp I at about 3 pm, and the great brewing commenced. The weather was rather clearer down here, and soon the others appeared below the skyline following our tracks. They will have reached the top about mid-day. The snow was softening in the sun, and they climbed down slowly but surely. We were content, dozing in the tents, periodically looking out to see their progress. In spite of the unfavourable weather, we had reconnoitered and all climbed an impressive and previously unknown mountain, but our smugness was soon to end.

Down they went, out of sight below the bump in the ridge above us, but now we could hear their voices. The words were not audible, but the general tone was of contented banter. They would soon be with us. A brew was put on for them. Then we heard the crash of a detaching serac fall. At first it seemed a routine matter on this serac-swept mountain, but Brian popped head out of tent in time to see it fall. “I think it’s the little one above the route”. We had not seen that before, but surely they would be safely on the ridge by now. When the noise died away, the silence was ominous. Why could we not hear their relieved voices? In mounting worry, we put our boots on, grabbed axes, and staggered up the bump in the ridge to where we could see. No sign of them. Instead, the slope was covered in a mass of car-sized blocks of ice, with a line of footprints above and below. In vain we called their names but were mocked by a deadly silence. Their fate was clear - buried somewhere beneath that chaos of debris.

There was at least a merciful finality to it all, as we realized how helpless we were to give them any aid. The light faded as we stood in dumb witness to this icy grave of our friends. If mountaineers must die in action, this wild spot would be a fitting place for burial.

The three survivors were then trapped at this camp by two further days of snow-fall, before they were able to return to base camp.

Reflections

Unlike some kinds of climbing, exploratory mountaineering has not been made safer by modern technology. Nor would we wish it to be; that would destroy its essence and much of the reason for doing it. Paul and Geoff loved life, and loved this type of mountaineering. But they were not blind to the risks, and tempered courage with caution. They risked their lives for this adventure, but an unlucky chance made them victims of their adventuring. This could just as likely have been me or any other like-minded mountaineer.

Return

Dave and Akram left immediately to deal with formalities resulting from the deaths, and sent porters up from Arandu. Arriving at Doko which had been reached by jeeps on the way up, they found no jeeps available, the road having been washed away by the bad weather lower down. Another day's walk led to the village of Tissar, where the deaths had to be reported to the police. Akram was very knowledgeable about such formalities and very helpful during this trying period. But the day Tissar was reached happened to be Pakistan's independence day, a national holiday. The police station was open, but the head policeman was on holiday in Skardu, and a letter from him was required to be given to the Skardu police and assistant district commissioner, in order to get the death certificate. His deputy was not authorized to issue such a letter, and told us that we would have to wait for 2 or 3 days for his boss's return. We were in no mood to do so. We caught a jeep to Skardu that evening, and Akram pulled out all the stops, tracked down the Tissar head policeman, who proved very sympathetic, and the necessary letter was duly issued which enabled the death certificates to be issued a few days later without the feared return to Tissar.

Meanwhile Colin was enjoying a lone journey down from base camp, where he had stayed on to complete some rubbish-burning, and walked right past Brian and the porters without seeing them, continuing the Rum Doodle style of the trip. He continued as fast as he could, imagining he was still behind Brian. Meanwhile, Brian wasn't sure whether Colin was still behind, or whether the tracks he was following, which appeared to be made recent, were actually Colin's or not. Somehow, all got back to Skardu where the team were re-united.

The plan *had* been for Dave to rush back to 'Pindi as fast as possible to break the bad news through the usual channels via the British consulate in Islamabad, before inaccurate rumours had reached relatives back home. Past experience with bad phone lines discouraged any attempt to telephone Islamabad, lest inaccurate information should be conveyed - worse than none. However, delays with the death certificate, followed by bad weather closing the road and canceling flights, made matters more pressing, rumours were starting. Nazir Sabir, who was by chance in Skardu at the time, was at the K2 motel, where it had fallen to his lot to deal with an avalanche of inquiries from around the world about the deaths that had just occurred on K2. It seemed that the telephone system from Skardu had improved vastly in recent years, and Nazir had the British consul's phone number. So, on a very good line, the necessary informing of next of kin was set in motion, and once started, was completed very quickly and efficiently.

Diary of the Expedition

3rd July Dave & Geoff arrive Rawalpindi.

7th July Paul, Brian and Colin arrive Rawalpindi.

8th July mid morning, leave 'pindi by minibus.

9th July mid afternoon, arrive Skardu.

11th July early morning, leave Skardu by jeep. Mid afternoon arrive Doko.

12th July early morning, leave Doko with porters.

15th July mid morning, arrive base camp.

16th to 22nd July reconnaissance & acclimatization.

23rd to 30th July bad weather - confined to base camp.

1st Aug. Brian, Colin & Dave to 5200m.

4th Aug. all members to camp 1 (c. 5700m.)

5th Aug. rest/bad weather at camp 1.

6th Aug. all members to summit, Brian, Colin & Dave return to camp 1.
Paul & Geoff killed by serac fall a few minutes above the camp.

7th & 8th Aug. the three survivors stuck in camp 1 by bad weather.

9th Aug. descent to glacier and back to base camp.

11th Aug. Dave & Akram leave B.C. early morning and reach Arandu in evening.

14th Aug. Dave & Akram arrive Skardu late evening. Brian, Colin & porters leave B.C.

16th Aug. Colin arrives Skardu, followed by Brian two hours later.

21st Aug. arrive 'pindi by public bus.

27th Aug. fly home to G.B.

Accounts

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Grant from M.E.F.	1000.00	Travel and transport	
Grant from B.M.C.	1000.00	5 air fares @ £528	2640.00
Members' contributions	7205.20	Buses 'Pindi - Skardu & return.	241.04
(5@ £1,441.05)		Local buses & taxis	37.67
Total income	<u>£9205.20</u>	Jeeps	172.92
			3091.63
		Porters etc.	
		Porters' wages & allowances	1278.54
		Cook's wages	270.83
		Cook's clothing etc.	40.21
			1589.58
		Liaison officer	
		Clothing and equipment	467.33
		Food allowance	316.42
			783.75
		Food	
		Food bought in U.K.	100.00
		Exped. food bought in Pakistan	500.46
		Food in hotels, cafes, etc.	261.77
			862.23
		Other supplies	
		Paraffin	14.58
		Epigas	48.00
		Pots & pans, packing, etc.	124.04
			186.62
		Accommodation	308.58
		Peak fee	793.00
		Pakistan environment fund	129.33
		Visas	120.00
		Insurance	
		Members' insurance	775.40
		Porters, L.O. and cook's ins.	56.73
			832.13
		Costs of money handling	
		Travelers' cheque commission	67.50
		Loss on re-exchange of reserve funds	101.66
		Loss on re-exchange of bonds money	133.26
		Cost of servicing helicopter & environment bonds	19.79
			322.21
		Sundry costs in Pakistan	40.14
		Sundry costs in U.K.	146.00
		Total expenditure	<u>£9059.20</u>

Notes on Expenditure

1) L.O. food allowance. The Pakistan expedition rules allow a liaison officer to opt to eat the expedition food, *or* to cater for himself (in case he does not like the sort of food the expedition eat). In the latter case, he must be given a food allowance of \$10 per day, an unrealistically high figure in this country and one which would be hard for an L.O. to refuse. To simplify the catering, we agreed to feed the L.O. *and* give him a compromise figure of \$7 per day, which is the £316.42 recorded here.

2) The £129.33 is a non-returnable sum (\$200) paid for general litter clean-ups or whatever. In addition, we had to supply "environmental bond" of \$1000, returnable if we do not leave litter or cut down trees, etc., and "helicopter bond" of \$4000, returnable if we do not use a rescue helicopter. This \$5000 does not appear in these accounts as it was returned to members who provided it after the expedition. But the loss on changing it to dollars and back to pounds still had to be met and so appears here as £133.26.

3) Equipment costs do not appear here (except for the £124.04 which includes base camp equipment for cooking etc.). Most of the mountain equipment (apart from tents) was loaned by the members.

Acknowledgements

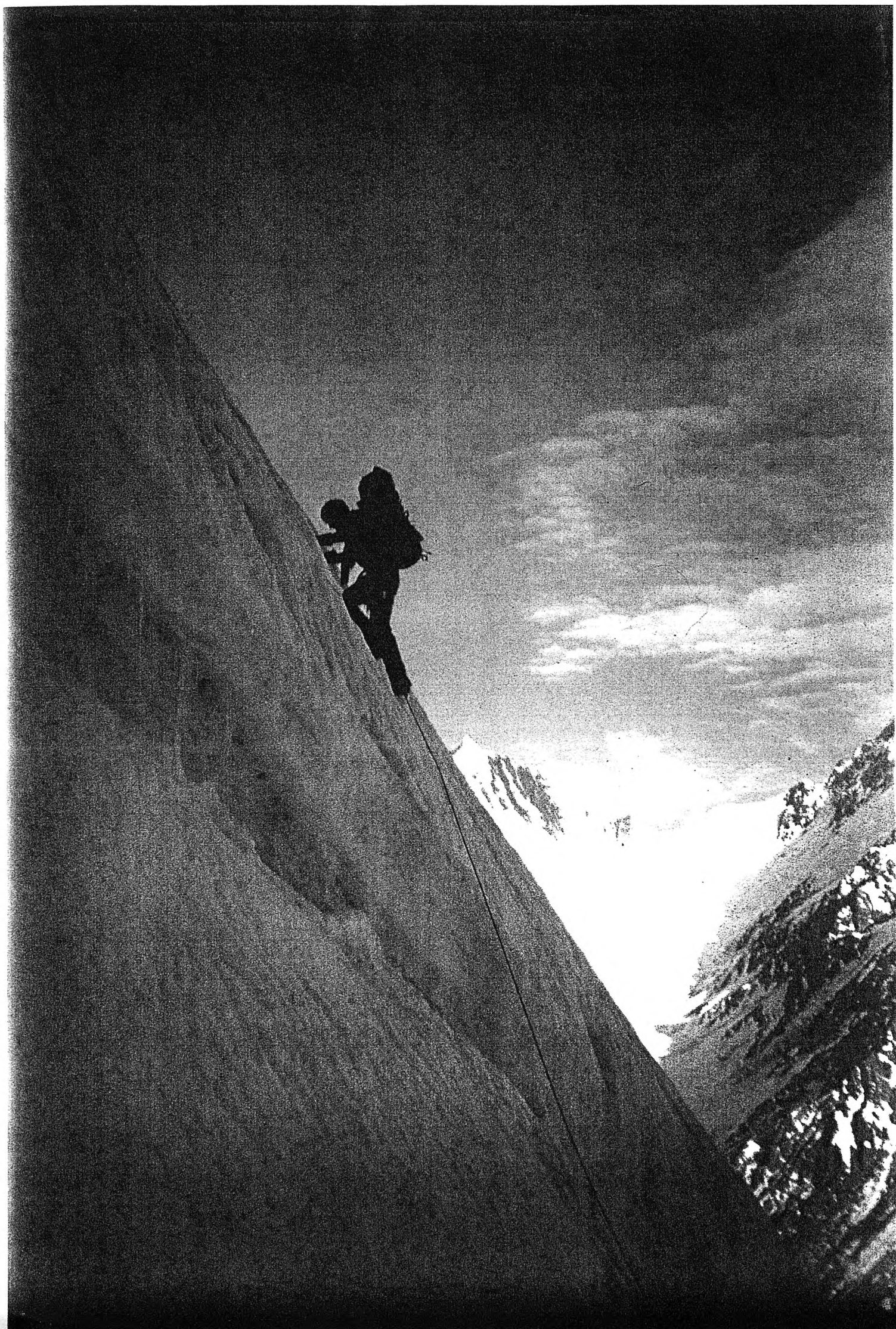
For money. We were given generous grants by the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council (money provided by the Sports Council). Our thanks to these organizations.

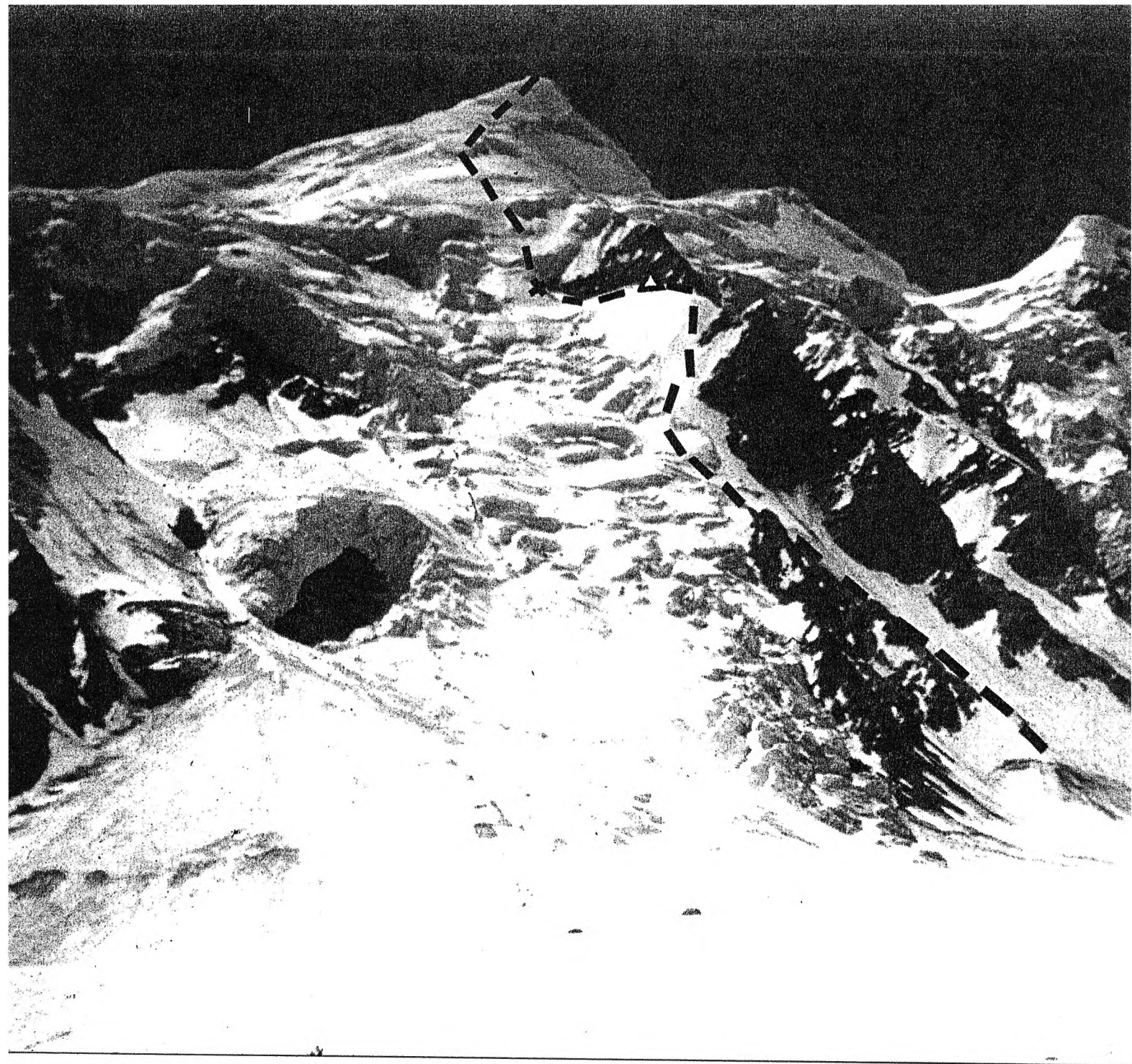
For Equipment. Phoenix Ltd. of Morpeth kindly loaned us five of their tents which proved very robust and useful. We would like to thank them for this loan. Our thanks also to the following equipment suppliers who provided us with a wide variety of equipment at concessionary rates: Clive Rowland, Rab Carrington, North Cape, Durham Mountaineering, Wild Country, Mountain Technology of Glencoe.



For Food. Booths Supermarket, a Lancashire based company, kindly donated a generous supply of instant mashed potato and instant soups, two supplies which are very useful on the mountain and unobtainable in Pakistan. Our thanks to Booths.

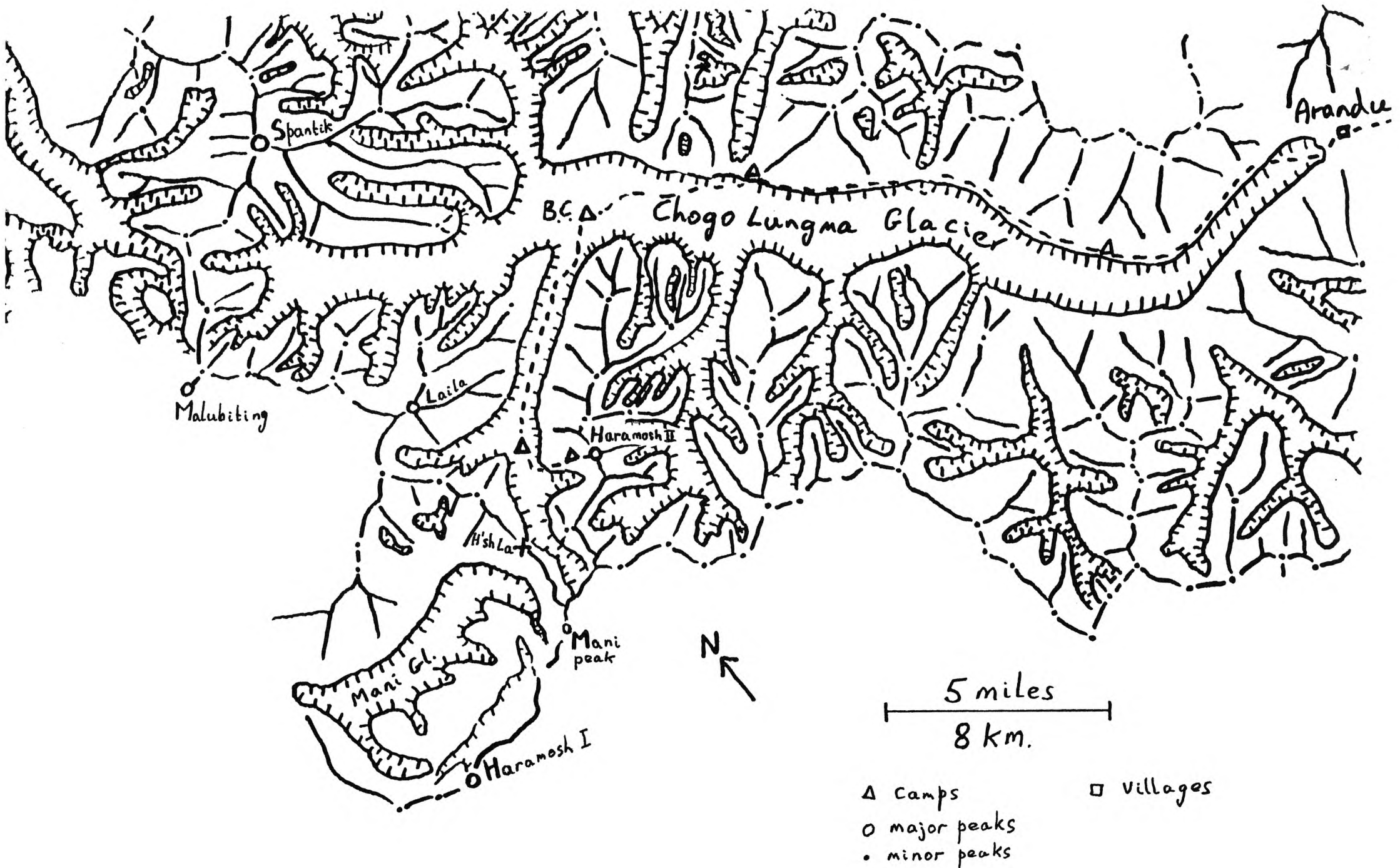
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- 1) American Alpine Journal 1989, p292.
- 2) Orographical Sketch map of the Karakoram, by Jerzy Wala, Krakov, Poland; published by the Swiss Foundation for Alpine research, Zurich, 1990.
- 3) The Last Blue Mountain by Ralph Barker, Chato & Windus, 1959.





Haramosh II from the Haramosh Glacier, showing the approximate line of the route : - - -
site of camp 1 : 
and site of accident : 



□ Sassi