' INVITATION ACCEPTED '

By JOHN KEMPE and MICHAEL WESTMACOTT

John Kempe's narrative

THE expedition was inspired by J. C. Oberlin's article ' Invitation to the Andes '[1] and our departure Westward prompted by the red tape and expense now associated with travel in the Himalayas of India and Nepal. After mentioning that the Andes should provide the kind of terrain which a private party with limited funds might explore and climb with success, Oberlin referred to the lesser ranges: ' Undoubtedly Huagaruncho (5,748 m.) has achieved the greatest notoriety. Several attempts have been made on it without discovering a certain way to the top. Although below the 6,000 m. mark it will be a great prize.'

Further reading elicited that there were at least two good alternative peaks in the area should Huagaruncho prove beyond the party's strength; that Huagaruncho was only two days' journey from Lima and the area, therefore, ideally situated for a limited holiday; and finally that the country was unmapped.

The other members of the party left before me and were fit by the time I arrived by air at Lima airport. To fly out is, as the Americans would say, ' Quite an experience '. To land thirteen hours after leaving London in New York is to be transported to a world more foreign than Bombay or Lima. To fly to Miami along the coast of Florida sitting next to a geography professor is to learn more in four hours than ever at school. To land at night at Panama City and to feel the touch of tropical evening air: to fly over the isthmus, and see for the first time the unique blue of the Pacific divided from the gaudy tropical jungle of the coast by a thin golden line of sand; to see Chimborazo and Cotopaxi, and then to spiral down blindly through cloud towards Lima airport like Dante and Virgil down on Geryons back, is to live nine different lives in forty-eight hours.

We had agreed to avoid customs duty by buying our food in Lima. Secretly I hoped that it would have been bought and packed before my arrival, but I was disappointed. Band, Streetly and Westmacott returned from the Cordillera Blanca shortly after I arrived and we completed our preparations between lunches, drinks, and lectures.

On the night of my arrival Westmacott introduced the Everest film to Peruvians interested in British mountaineering. The entertainment lasted two hours. The following evening Band and Westmacott showed slides of Everest to Peruvians interested in British mountaineering. The lecture lasted over two hours. On the third evening I

[1] *A.J.* 60. 69.

found that Band and I were to speak on Kangchenjunga to Peruvians interested in British mountaineering. After what I considered a modest introduction Band spoke and our combined talk lasted over two hours. Finally I was expected to speak about mountaineering after a Commonwealth lunch given for people interested in British mountaineering. Future expeditions may be asked to lecture, they will certainly be hospitably received, but it is open to doubt whether any people in Peru are any longer interested in British mountaineering.

We left Lima station on July 26, at 7 a.m. The line follows the valley for some time and one may see cotton, maize and some primitive buildings, while the river can support vegetation. The steep containing hillsides are arid desert. Then the train climbs steeply and at one stage shunts to and fro up a zigzag incline in a frantic effort to gain height. At 14,000 ft. an attendant brings round a rubber bag containing oxygen which he releases in the faces of those who are trying to sleep. The value, if any, is purely psychological. At 15,000 ft. a gentle descent begins and one arrives at 2.30 at La Oroya.

Mr. Wurdack, a mountaineering enthusiast and an employee of the Cerro do Pasco Corporation, met us with a lorry and station wagon. The road, after threading its way through some arid valleys, presently emerged into a level plain, where its progress was no less circumambulatory. We stopped by Lake Junin for a meal and arrived after a further two-hour journey at Huachon. The village boasts an hotel and the owner is able to find beds for visitors—but for six people only with difficulty.

Mules had been arranged for us by Mr. Wurdack and a guide arrived with them at 7.15 next morning. There are two axioms of mule-assisted travel in Peru, each as fundamental to travel in Peru as Euclidean axioms to the development of Euclidean geometry. First, only the arriero and his mate may load a mule. Second, no loading operation may take less than ten minutes. Two results follow. If you have twelve mules it will take you at least two hours to load. Secondly, if you say ' Quickly ' it will not help. The arriero will drop everything, turn to you with a seraphic smile, repeat ' Quickly ', and all with such pomposity that it will delay matters by about a minute. It is better to accept the inevitable.

The advance party left at 9.15. It consisted of Victor, the guide, Band, Tucker, Matthews and myself. Victor, who had been lent to us by an official of the Cerro de Pasco Corporation, brought with him three ponies, two of which were mounted by Band and Tucker, reminding me of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The guide dawdled behind with Victor and would no doubt have taken the baggage to the right place if we had gone to the wrong one. However at 2.45 we found a suitable camp site at the Western end of Lake Talenga and as this was the right place the guide and rear party joined us.

HUAGARUNCHO MASSIF

Miles
1 0 1 2

Triangulated points ▲
Intersected points +
Ridges & glaciers
Rivers & lakes
Heights in feet

▲Pk. 26
16757

Pass
Arturo
Pk. 29
17026
Cairn
Pass
Pk. 28
Base Camp
Pass
Pass
Pk. 30
17856
Col
HUAGARUNCHO
18797
L. Lechecocha
L. Suerococha
Pass
L. Talenga
L. Pacchapata
1st Base
L. Jayco
L. Altosmachay
Pk. 32
16804
L. Tarata
Pk. 33
16930

N

By courtesy of the Royal Geographical Society.]

[To face p. 436.

We operated from this camp for the next five days. Band spent a day with Victor exploring the area to the south of the col which we were later to climb. Tucker and I tried unsuccessfully to climb Peak A3, took a theodolite to the top of the Dome, to Mike's Pass and to another survey point. And Westmacott and Streetly crossed a pass with provisions for three days with the object of forming an opinion about possible routes from the north. I joined them on July 31. They had climbed a small peak to the north of Huagaruncho and had made out a possible line of attack. We weighed all the information so far collected and decided to return to Base Camp and move to a position from which we could investigate this route more thoroughly.

We left on August 1. The usual difficulties of an early start were aggravated on this occasion by the increased size of the party. Besides the six of us and three porters Victor had come to act as guide; and since he did not know the way he had brought with him another guide. The arriero had brought a mate to assist with loading and his son, aged ten, to counteract this assistance. None of them had brought food and we began to see that if we were to have enough food for ourselves we should have not only to discourage guides but to buy more food.

Victor had brought with him three ponies which he left unhobbled: I ordered an early start at 9 a.m. next day; my friends, with more experience of Peruvian travel, listened with scepticism. I left in disgust at 12.30, and at 1.30, from a point below the first pass, I watched twelve tiny figures spend an hour trying to catch three very fresh ponies. If it had not been raining I should have enjoyed it more.

We crossed the pass in cloud and rain and descended steeply to a valley which evoked memories of the Lake District, and at 5 p.m. we found a good camp site at Munio Pampas. The path is the trade route between Oxapampa and Huachon and on the way we met small parties driving mules and llamas laden with maize and oranges. At Munio Pampas we shared our site with one such party. They gave us oranges and baked maize to eat and later on we gave them cigarettes. The easy accessibility of the high Andes—a contrast to the high Himalayas approached through miles of foothills—does not detract from the excitement of exploring them, nor of meeting their people. Those whom we met (mostly Quechua Indians) were as foreign as any Spiti people and just as simple. Gifts were exchanged but no bargains were made. Each man gave what he wanted to give.

Next day, after an hour's walk we passed a small hacienda, unsupported by cultivation, pigs or hens, and farming only a few sheep and cattle on the wild hillsides. The means of livelihood seemed negligible. Then we turned westwards into a tributary valley. This valley was crossed every now and then by the terminal moraine of an extinct glacier and in places the moraines seemed, to one prepared to see

romance in Peru, to have been fortified. The cirque at the valley head also seemed to be fortified. Later, Tucker and I climbed to the highest point which we called ' The Castle ' and found a huge amphitheatre of rock which we thought must have been an Inca stone quarry. We had already agreed that we were following an Inca road when Tucker found a beautifully executed green stone Inca axe-head. There is obviously a great deal of archaeological interest in the area and many problems on which only an expert could give an opinion.

After we had crossed the first pass, the arriero, who insisted on wearing his wellingtons instead of carrying them, began to look tired and Tucker and I went ahead hoping that he would feel obliged to follow. The stratagem was unnecessary as he was good-natured enough to do what we wanted. We crossed the next pass—an extremely difficult one for mules—in snow. We had a fine glimpse of the West col and the ridges leading to Huagaruncho and Peak A before we descended by a path which was quite unsuitable for mules—indeed there was no path—to find a rather unsatisfactory site for a base camp before dark.

We dismissed the arriero with orders to return with four mules and more food as soon as he could do so, and we occupied our time in various pursuits for the next few days. There were duck to be shot on the lakes which seemed threaded to the streams like beads on gossamer in the valleys below. There were vizquechua to observe as they darted timidly from their rocky hiding places. There were brown trout and salmon trout to be caught, if one was prepared to brave the marsh by the lake shore. There was repacking to be done. There were intriguing valleys and watersheds to be explored and mapped and preparations for the climb had to be made.

On August 6, after two days' exploration of the approaches to the glacier and a reconnaissance of Peak A, we carried a camp from our base at 13,300 ft. to 14,500 ft. and left Streetly, Tucker and Band to find a route to the col. They succeeded and Band returned to Base Camp on August 7 minus his ice-axe which he had left at the top of a difficult pitch. On the same day Westmacott and I made a second abortive attempt on Peak A, realised, when we were about 200 ft. from the top, that we had chosen an impossible route, and returned and relieved Tucker and Band in camp on August 8.

Our two tents were pitched end to end and Streetly cooked in one whilst Westmacott and I lay in the other reading and waiting helplessly and expectantly like young chicks who hope for food to be placed in their beaks.

We woke at 5.30 next day and left camp at 7.30. Fixed ropes helped us up a steep ice gully and we reached the col by 9 a.m. Having first fixed a rope to help us on our return we descended 50 ft. of deep snow and crossed a small bergschrund. We reconnoitred a broad lip of ice

heavily covered with snow and falling precipitously at its lower end to the valley 2,000 ft. below, and then ascended to the highest point to tackle the bergschrund which must be recrossed if we were to regain the ridge. It took us the best part of August 9 to cross the bergschrund and to climb 30 ft. up the further side.

On the following day we moved 150 ft. horizontally, but only 6 ft. vertically. The snow on the south side of the mountain was deep and powdery and the angle steep. We had to clear away 6 ft. of vertical snow to leave a path 8 in. wide. If one trod on the outside edge it flowed down as easily as salt. It was a relief when at 2 p.m. we encountered ice again and could hammer in some ice pitons. Streetly swung himself onto this ice corner and after two hours' work we returned for the night.

Two days later it was something of a shock to hear Band and Tucker say that the path which we had left was not to be compared in difficulty with that which they had since prepared, and I felt some relief that I was not returning with Westmacott and Streetly at once. However it soon became apparent that a snow path made after midday had a way of dissolving if used at once, but that what remained froze during the night and appeared more substantial in the early morning than when it was first made. Later crossings were, therefore, usually easier than the first.

On August 16 Tucker and I returned early from surveying because of bad weather and as we arrived at camp it cleared and we saw Emilio waving wildly. ' Bravo, the senors ', he pointed to the ridge, ' Muy bueno.' Emilio always drawled the word ' muy ' as though intending irony : but he was very excited on this occasion and through binoculars we made out two tiny figures coming down from a point at least 1,000 ft. above the col. It was a great moment.

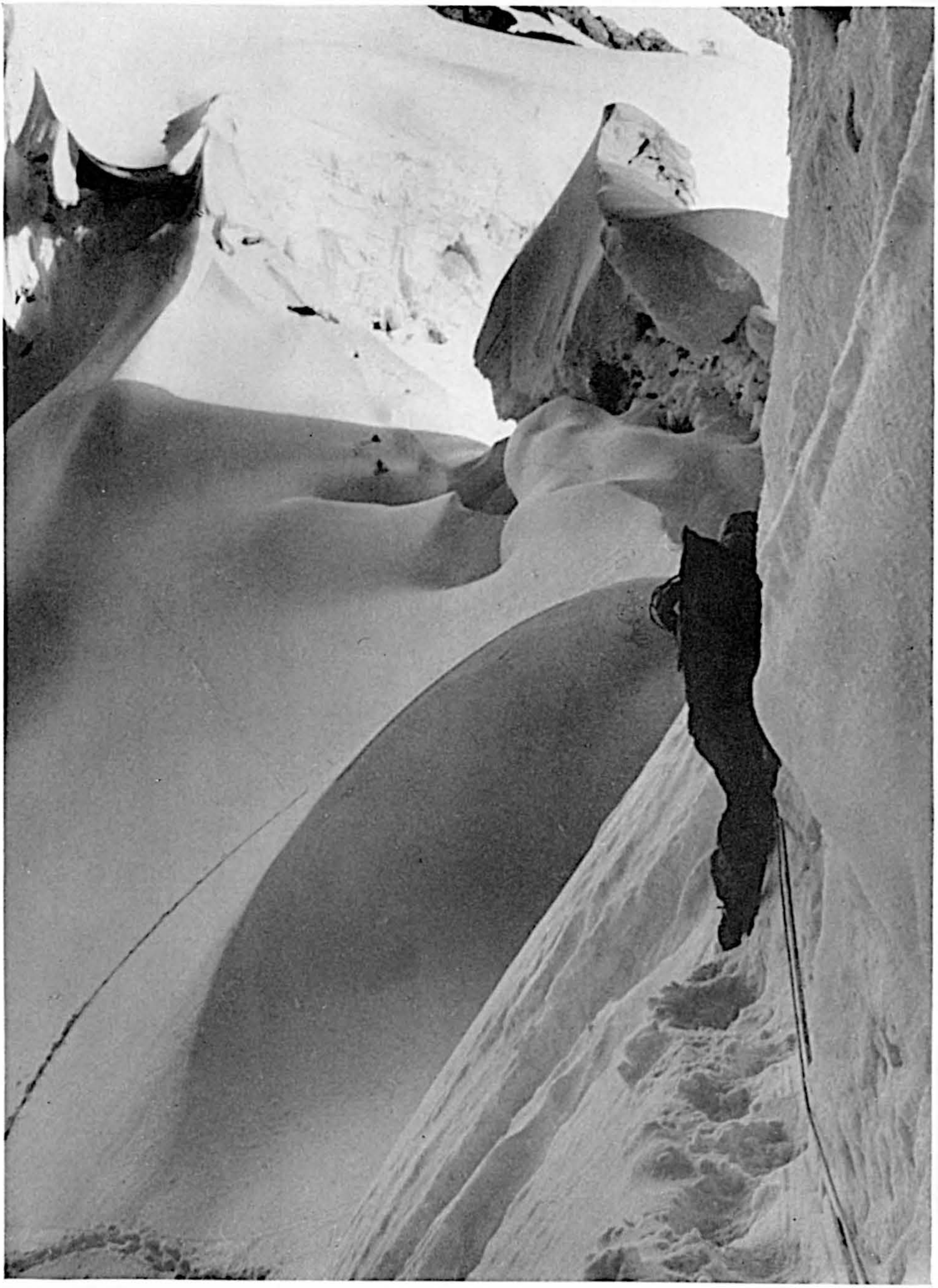
Band, Tucker and I reached Camp I at 2.15 that day. It was my turn to be cook. The hiss of the Primus precluded conversation and left the cook feeling isolated and lonely. It was some compensation to me that it was up to the others to provide snow. Streetly and Westmacott arrived in camp on their way down at 6.30 p.m. and we gave them soup. They thought they had been within 300 ft. of the top and that we should reach it next day. We doubted the 300 ft., mainly I think because we feared being disappointed—as one so often is—and we did not want to cherish any possible illusions.

I woke at 4.30 a.m.—an hour early—and started to cook breakfast. Although I got no thanks for this at the time it resulted in our getting away at 6.15 and the others were more kindly disposed later. I remember a beautiful morning and that there was a thin streak of stratus in the east. But I wondered whether a cloud no larger than a man's hand was ominous. We reached the col at 7.30 and regained the ridge at 8.15, where we encountered wonderful hard ice. There was one

difficult pitch up a steep and twisted ice cornice through the bottom of which if one dug one's ice axe hard enough it was possible to see the valley below, but it would not have been done to remark on this. At 10.15 we crossed a gentle slope of deep snow and ate second breakfast and then after crawling along a narrow ledge to avoid overhanging ice we started up a steep ice pitch overhanging the northern precipice. Streetly had made a beautiful set of pigeon-holes into which one's toes could just fit. The holes were as hard as steel, but my ankles were not, and by the time I reached the top I felt that my tendons would snap. The thought that we should later have to descend this pitch seemed too awful to contemplate and I tried not to do so.

A long bergschrund lay between us and the snow and ice wall which was the next defence of the summit, and we cast about for half an hour before finding a suitable place to cross. Band led, and after another half-hour I joined him on the other side. The snow was deep, the slope steep and the weather soon began to deteriorate ; it became extremely cold and a blizzard blew up. When Band was not responsible for throwing snow down my neck (I felt sure he was doing it on purpose) the blizzard was. Although he was only 20 ft. above me, he was soon invisible. At 4.30 when I joined him at the top of a pitch after three hours' climbing I suggested that we should go home. We were obviously a long way from the top, it would be dark in an hour and I valued my toes. Both Tucker and Band put up a reasonable show of disapproval and then agreed to a decision which seemed not to admit of argument.

By the time we had reached the top of Streetly's last pitch it was dark and the tracks, now filled with snow, could not be seen. I held the rope for what seemed eternity as Tucker led down this pitch, first vanishing over the edge of the precipice into the dark. It seemed quite unreal. As I came down it brightened and I could see above me a figure encircled by a halo of light reflected on the mist from the rising moon. The words of ' I saw eternity the other night ' came to mind but I could not get beyond the first four lines. Then it was Band's turn while I shivered at the bottom of the pitch, poorly belayed because the ice was too hard for an axe hold. When Band was half-way down there was an anxious moment when a step broke. I remembered some, more lines of the poem, ' And round beneath it Time in hours, days, years. Driv'n by the spheres. . . .' The mind struggles for words the body for warmth, the feet for something substantial. And then when Band arrived it was suddenly clear starlight and a full moon lit up a phantom world of black and white : but if beauty can bewitch, one is not, if one is in a predicament, consciously aware of it until afterwards. We were either belayed and occupied with cold or we were descending and occupied with movement.



KEMPE ROUNDING AN ICY CORNER ON THE SOUTH FACE OF HUAGARUNCHO.

[*To face p.* 440.

The lower route guarded by fixed ropes was more treacherous than ever. The path had not refrozen and seemed to dissolve at every step and it took us a long time to regain the col. We reached camp at 10.45, but the long-expected moment when we should once again be warm in our sleeping-bags was postponed for half an hour while, with the help of candles, we unfroze our crampon straps sufficiently to shake our feet free of crampons.

We returned to Base Camp next morning. Expectant eyes were watching through field-glasses hoping to interpret from our faces whether we had been successful or not, but it is satisfying when one has not been successful to delay the moment of confession until one's arrival. We were tired and relaxed.

(*Here follows M. H. Westmacott's account of the Huagaruncho summit climb.*)

The morning of August 16 had been anxious, as Streetly and I searched the West ridge with field glasses for any sign of the others. At last we saw Kempe on the boulder-strewn slopes above Base Camp as we were eating our lunch, and in a few minutes he had joined us and we knew that we were to take over the lead once again. By this time we did not need to be told (but we were, repeatedly) that more than 300 ft. had lain between us and the summit two days before ; we had come to that conclusion after studying the ridge from far below. At 2.30 we left base and made our way quickly up to the glacier camp.

After a night somewhat disturbed by the effects of too much supper, the alarm clock cut short an uneasy dream at 4 a.m. The thought of tinned sausages was revolting, but we forced ourselves to cook and found them quite tolerable when it came to the point. We left camp at 5.20, in pitch darkness, picking out the tracks on the glacier by torch-light. Dawn came swiftly as we climbed the steep pitch to the col—Streetly's sixth visit and my fifth. Grasping the fixed rope, we descended rapidly to the other side, then crossed the small hanging glacier and the bergschrund above it. The horizontal gallery above the bergschrund was frozen hard and firm under a light covering of newly fallen snow. The ice corner beyond was tricky, as always, but we wasted little time over it. The trench cut up the next steep 200 ft. of loose snow was half-filled with powder which had run off the slopes above it. We scooped some of it out with gloved hands and trod down the rest. We were back on the ridge in an hour and a half from camp.

Without pausing, we continued steadily up the ridge, both determined to make this the last time. Now tackling a difficult or exposed pitch one at a time, now moving together up wearisome slopes of deep snow, we climbed strenuously and in silence up the route we had first trodden three days before. At the foot of the snow- and ice-wall, we

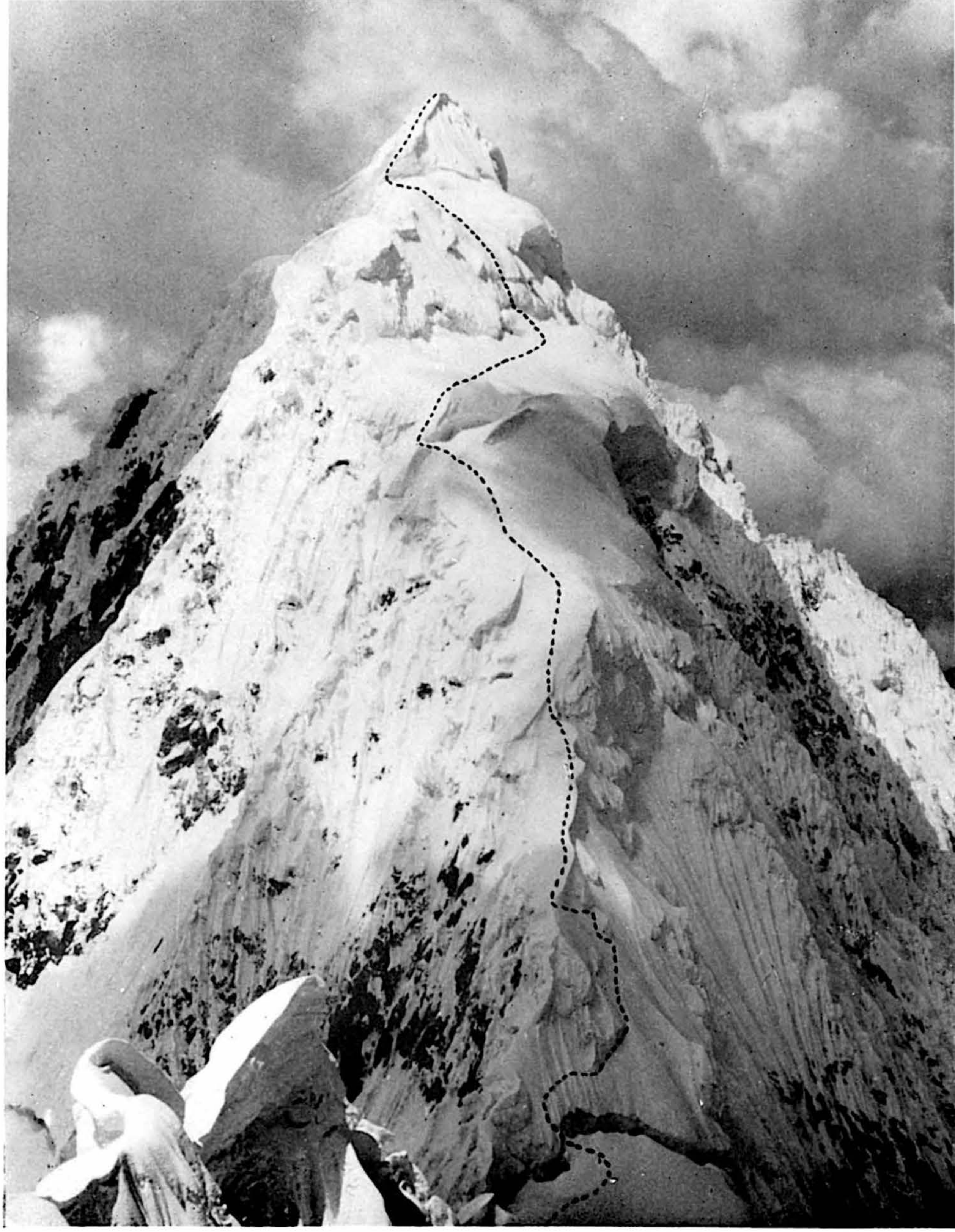
looked at our watches again. It was 8.15, and we had nearly four hours more at our disposal than had the other party, two days before.

It was sheltered at the foot of the wall, but we could hear the wind playing about the fluted ridges above us, and see cloud swirling past the top of the wall, so we stopped and ate and I put on an extra sweater. Then Streetly crossed the bergschrund to the piton we had left three days ago, grasped the rope fixed by the others, and started up the steep pitch prepared by Band. First there was the ice-wall that had previously stopped us—it was now straightforward—and then very steep snow up to and beyond the top of the fixed rope. Above the wall the angle eased as we approached the last great shelf below the summit pyramid. The tracks led up another 15 ft. and then stopped.

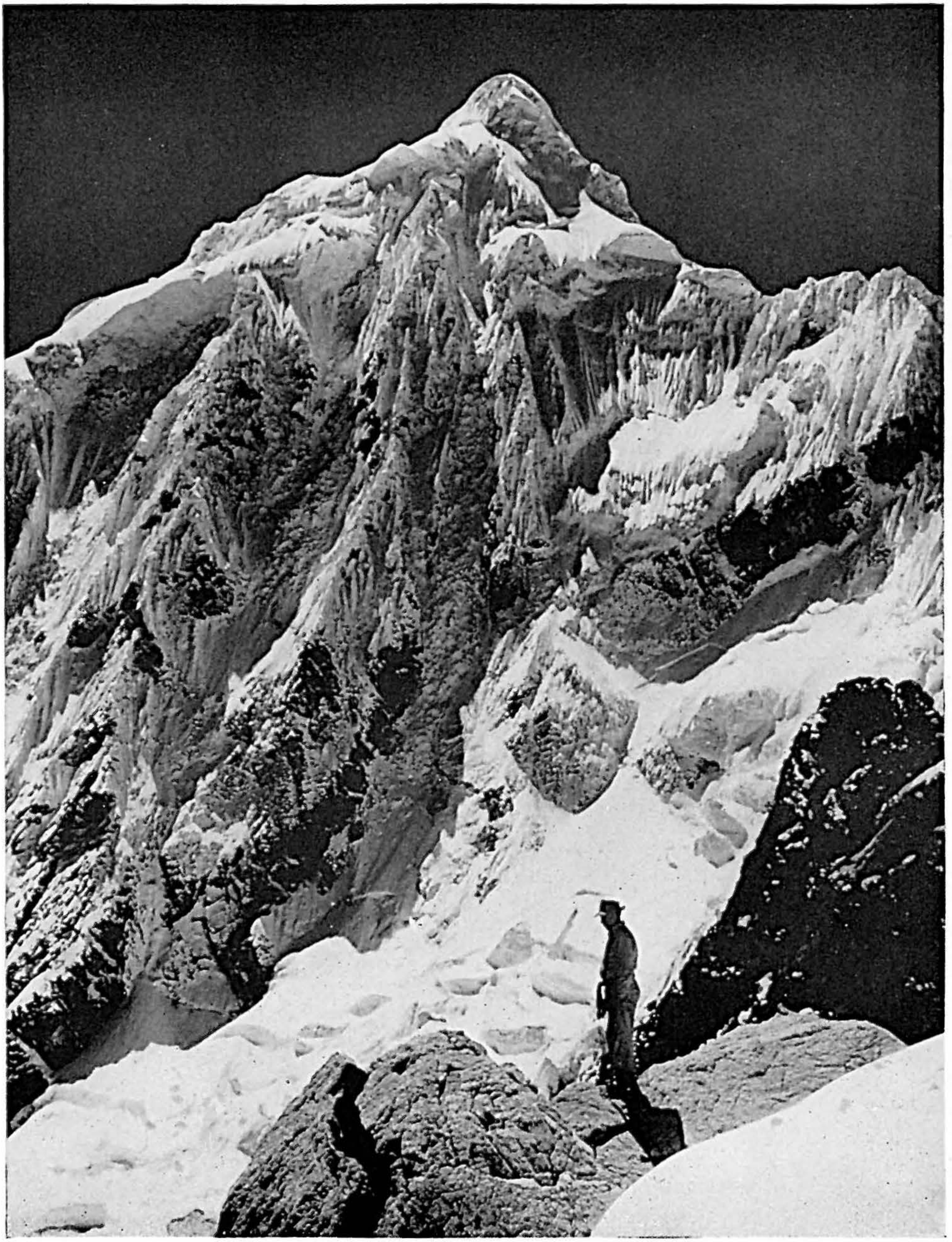
With Streetly belayed at the top of the wall, I made my way up and on to a ledge, as far as the highest point reached by the others. It was now necessary to cross, on a slightly rising traverse, a slope of about 40 ft. leading to the main shelf. The slope was not particularly steep, but the snow was very soft indeed. The ice-axe went through it as if through water, and I had to use my hands and my body to thrust great masses of snow aside. For about 10 ft. I was in snow up to my neck and began to feel that the summit might well be beyond us that day. Luckily, after another 20 ft. of heart-breaking work, the snow was hardly up to waist level and one could make a pretence of walking. After three-quarters of an hour, Streetly joined me and led through to the next obstacle.

Above us, we saw an ice cliff like the bow of a ship, jutting into the sky. We thought this might be the summit itself but, remembering previous disappointments, were not too sanguine about it. The ice cliff was vertical. To the right, it was about 150 feet high and encircled the mountain out of sight. To the left, it met the North face, which here was not very steep. Streetly led off to the foot of the wall and took a good belay, and then I descended a few feet, crossed a narrow bergschrund and attacked the wall at its lowest point. In a few minutes, I had traversed out on to the North face itself and was cutting steps up it. The pitch was not at all difficult, but I found it the most nerve-racking of the climb. The slope consisted of three or four inches of honey-combed ice, overlying soft snow. Every step felt unsafe, and I called to Streetly that he might have to hold me. To make matters worse, the crest of the ice wall was obviously not the summit. There was yet another pyramid, the top of which I could dimly make out in the cloud, at least 250 ft. above us.

In another 20 ft. I found a place for a good belay, and Streetly came on past me. We were now on the concave north slope of what really was the summit pyramid, and this time we were sure of it. We knew that the western and southern sides of the summit, to our right, were



HUAGARUNCHO FROM SUMMIT OF PEAK 'A', SHOWING ROUTE FOLLOWED.



ANDEAN ICE: THE SOUTH FACE OF HUAGARUNCHO. THE ROUTE FOLLOWED THE SHELVES ON THE TOP LEFT.

corniced, so we made our way up and across to the ridge on the left. The top layer of snow was soft, so we could not rely on crampons and cut steps for the next 250 ft. The last 10 ft. were very steep and, to emerge on to the ridge, it was necessary to drive in the axe and pull up on it. This was the last of the difficulties and the summit was only 30 ft. away. It was a good moment.

We stayed three-quarters of an hour on the top, hoping that the clouds which swirled around us would clear, but they did not. We took some rather misty photographs of each other as near to the highest point as we dared go, and started down at mid-day, remembering vividly an unpleasant descent late in the afternoon three days before. At the foot of the snow- and ice-wall, we were again below cloud level. We ploughed down slopes of loose snow, and then descended the long ice pitch with extreme care, thankful not to be doing it any later in the day or after dark, as the others had done. The snow had a tendency to ball under our crampons on the easier sections, but we made good time and were able to relax, at long last, when we reached the glacier camp at 3.30.

The others at Base Camp had seen us at 2 p.m. descending the ridge, and, with a touching faith in our luck, had surmised that we must have reached the top. Most thoughtfully, they sent up two of the porters to bring us down that night, so we were able to join them before sunset. There were handshakes, congratulations, fireworks and beer. And there was a happy feeling of relief that Huagaruncho had not produced an impassable obstacle near the top, to turn us back after we had all spent so many days of hard work on the ridge.

(*Here John Kempe resumes his narrative.*)

On August 18 the expedition split—Band, Streetly, Westmacott and Matthews to retrieve some ropes and climb Peak A : Tucker and I accompanied by Emilio, an arriero and four mules to survey to the north and along the route to Oxapampa which lay 80 miles to the east. We found a camp site at 4 p.m. and walked to the top of a nearby hill which we called ' The Cone '. We hoped that the clouds would clear sufficiently to enable us to survey in the evening. We had already been twice to the top of The Cone and on both occasions anabatic clouds sweeping up the valleys in the evening had frustrated us. We were no luckier on this occasion and had to return at 6.45 next morning to complete our readings. Our routine for the next five days was founded on the expectation of clear mornings and of clouds after mid-day. We used to leave camp at 6.30 a.m. and after a two hours' walk spend another three surveying and then join Emilio and the arriero at a pre-selected point for breakfast. Arrangements did not always work out as expected. Once we watched Emilio dawdling at camp as we completed our

survey. Our shouts and gesticulations were without effect; he was making an easy day of it and we were frustrated and furious as we reconciled ourselves to the two hours' wait which must follow. That evening we withheld his cigarette ration to punish his incompetence. After this he asked us every day, openly and unashamedly, for praise because he had been better. One could not be angry for long with someone who was so simple and so eager for people to think well of him.

On a later occasion we were longer than expected and Emilio showed initiative by moving on to look for us. We did not catch him up for breakfast until 3 p.m., but by this time we had long since given up all hope of efficient co-ordination.

Earlier that day we had climbed ' The Castle '. The huge granite slabs which formed the mountains were separated by gullies in which grew deep grass and thick semi-tropical vegetation. This was a pleasant contrast to the bleakness of the valleys through which we had been travelling before. Three hundred feet from the top the angle steepened and we scrambled over huge blocks of granite which seemed to have been piled one on top of another without great care by some giant who liked playing with bricks. The survey completed, we descended the southern side of the mountain and found a huge amphitheatre of stone cut out in a semi-circle in the form of a Roman arena. A few blocks, isolated for no apparent reason, made it seem probable that the site had been an Inca stone quarry, and the blocks in process of removal when work was stopped. Descending further through bamboo we came unexpectedly on a lake fringed by bamboos and coloured a vivid green. Duck swam on the lake and nearby was a small bright crimson pool. It seemed like a hidden fairyland and looking back on it the whole day had something of the quality of a dream.

Two days later we came to the montaña. The valleys, bare of almost all vegetation except panopa grass, gave way suddenly to thick jungle, and as it would have been quite impossible for us to reach the top of the valleys' sides in less than two days further surveying became impossible. Red, blue, green and yellow flowers blazoned out in the shadow of the tropical trees from the upper branches of which were draped festoons of ivy, like streamers thrown at the end of a ball. Dank moss grew at the edges of the path, parakeets shrieked and butterflies abounded. It was like going to a cocktail party after having lived for six weeks in solitary confinement.

As we descended, the valley widened and the jungle gave way first to clearings and later to scattered haciendas growing oranges, maize and coffee. On August 23 I dawdled, taking photographs, and did not catch up with the party until 5 p.m. when I found the tents pitched in a coffee grove outside the gates of a small hacienda. Tucker had changed the clothes which he had resolutely refused to take off for the last month,

he had washed, and was engrossed in combing his hair with a fork. The combing persisted for three-quarters of an hour, with no word of explanation. There could be only one conclusion, but it needed verification. After first feigning no interest and then applying a good deal of pressure I discovered that he had been asked out to dinner and that I might accompany him. I also set to work doggedly with a fork.

As we left dressed in our best and now looking no worse than English tramps we found Emilio and the arriero lying outside on their sleeping-bags. ' Buena noche ', they said, pointing at the stars and at our tents in a disparaging way which seemed to imply that only namby-pambies would shrink from the delights of sleeping beneath an open sky. ' Buena noche ', we said, feeling rather self-conscious. When we returned it was pouring with rain, Emilio and the arriero were soaked and looking as miserable as could be, half-hidden by a leaking tarpaulin. ' Buena noche ', said Tucker pointing at the sky and at our tents. Fortunately Emilio had an enormous sense of humour.

Next day a three-hour walk took us to the road-head at Huancabamba where we arrived dusty and thirsty and drank some beer before hitching a lift to Oxapampa on a lorry belonging to the saw mill which is the *raison d'être* of the town.

Oxapampa is like a Middle-Western town of the last century. Its newness is striking and it impresses with its atmosphere of pioneering activity. In the district there are two thousand German emigrants who founded the colony during the nineteenth century and have adopted Peruvian nationality. To them belongs the initiative which has developed the area.

We stayed at the Hotel Bolivar, a newish wooden building resembling a Swiss chalet. Downstairs was a bar and several rooms sparsely furnished with small tables and chairs. People came in from the surrounding districts, some with revolvers in their belts, to drink and to gamble. A Wurlitzer blared out modern tunes. Visitors shook hands and exchanged news and did business.

The bedrooms upstairs were reached by an outside entrance and Tucker, Emilio and I shared one. Emilio seemed reluctant to turn in. Thinking that his natural modesty prevented him from undressing in front of us, we offered to put the lights out. Once they were out, he got into bed, but the morning found him, in bed all right, but still in all his clothes, including boots and hat.

The next day at 8.15 we caught the bus for Tarma. While driving twice round Oxapampa the driver called out ' Tarma ' in the hope of attracting fares and stopped to talk to friends. One of these pushed me out of the front seat saying it was reserved for him, and after I had found an outside seat a woman sat down next to me with a hen and a baby which one surmised might very well be sick. It was. It took us

five hours, driving at about 15 m.p.h. over very bumpy roads to reach Merced. The valley was for the most part narrow and the sides steep and heavily wooded with tropical forest where they were not cultivated with coffee, bananas, oranges and papayas. At Merced the driver announced that the steering had broken down and we waited for two hours looking round the town and enjoyed the pleasure of being free from the smell of sickness. At 3.30 we set off through the Chuncha-mago Gorge and I began to appreciate the necessity for sound steering. The single track road was only just wide enough for one bus. It twisted between the rock wall on the left and the precipice over which I seemed to project on the right. At one point the driver refused to stop when flagged by a red handkerchief. Luckily a tractor drove across the track and a minute later ten explosions sounded from 50 yards ahead and tons of rock fell across it. It took half an hour to clear. We were now in front of a line of fifteen buses which our driver was determined not to delay, and the Peruvian who had so ungraciously taken my seat and had been lighting and throwing away cigarettes incessantly could no longer bear looking ahead and turned round in his seat and faced the back of the bus. One's satisfaction was equalled only by one's apprehension. Tucker said that the track rods had gone again. He said that one could always tell.

We arrived in Tarma at 6 p.m. exhausted. The hotel was gloomy and dirty and in the hall grew aspidistras covered with cobwebs. The bathroom repelled and the lavatory attached to our room with no outside window had not worked for months. After dinner we retired as usual in one room and from dirty beds studied the peeling wallpaper. Emilio remained dressed as usual. Just as I was going to sleep there was a knock at the door. The tapping persisted. I got up and opened it. A small boy had arrived. Emilio it seemed had no sheets. He got out of bed, with his boots and his hat and his clothes on and got back between rather dirty sheets which were, I am sure, no cleaner than the blankets from which he was so adequately protected.

PEAK A

M. H. Westmacott

As Kempe says, there are three peaks in the Huagaruncho massif which attract a climber's attention ; the mountain itself, Peak A, and Peak 29. The last of these is a strikingly beautiful mountain of about 17,000 ft., very steep, and rather isolated from the main massif. We saw it only from the south and east and we thought it dangerous and prohibitively difficult. From the safety of South Audley Street, one is not so sure, but at Base Camp below Huagaruncho we reckoned that a proper reconnaissance of Peak 29 would need three or four days, and an ascent

might take any length of time. With the three days left at our disposal, it seemed best to have another crack at Peak A, which Kempe and I had attempted twice before.

Peak A lies just to the west of Huagaruncho and is divided from it by the West Col. The ridge from the col is steep, twisted and heavily corniced. The North ridge is very broken, although not steep, but the western slopes of the North ridge provide straightforward if laborious access to over 17,000 ft.

Kempe and I, in the early, optimistic period when we thought a couple of days would see the others to the top of Huagaruncho, had made two attempts to climb Peak A from Base Camp. On the first occasion, apart from one short ice pitch and some interesting exercises in route-finding, it was a dull trudge up softening snow slopes until we were turned back by waist deep snow at about 17,000 ft. On the second occasion, profiting from our previous tracks, we managed to reach the summit ridge only 300 ft. below the top, on the western side. There we were stopped by a convoluted and unstable sérac, and then made the mistake of traversing underneath the summit and attempting a direct ascent towards it. We had no time for any more experiments in route-finding, and it was clear that the peak required a higher camp and a more systematic assault.

After we had finished with Huagaruncho, Band, Streetly and I, with two of the porters, established a camp at about 16,500 ft. on the north side of Peak A. We had allowed ourselves two days for the last 1,000 ft. —or rather, the last 300 ft., in which all the difficulties are concentrated. We left camp at dawn on August 22 and made our way easily up frozen snow towards the West ridge. We reached it at the point Kempe and I had visited a fortnight before, and I was gratified to hear Streetly pronounce the sérac impassable, as we had then. Now, instead of traversing and trying to go straight up in the line of the summit, we traversed a short distance only, recrossed the bergschrund, and regained the West ridge further along. There was a 100-ft. pitch of steep ice and snow, and a short crack between two rocks, to climb before we were again on the crest.

Looking along the ridge, we could see the summit itself, corniced on the right, extremely steep on the left, but immediately in front of us was a slender pinnacle of snow and ice, perhaps 50 ft. high, which we should have to pass first. On the left, the North face was very steep, and a traverse would have taken a long time and required many pitons. On the right, an easier line led round out of sight, but there was a crevasse in the way which was spanned by a rather dubious bridge. It was a few minutes before we could persuade Streetly that, as the lightest man, it was his duty to lead across it. He crossed successfully, knee-deep in loose snow, and followed the line over a jumble of ice

blocks round the corner. A few minutes later, he called to us and we joined him on the other side of the big pinnacle.

The summit now rose about 60 ft. above us, curling over like the crest of a wave to the right. Streetly first led across left to a notch in the ridge and looked to see whether we could take to the North face for the final pitch. Not liking what he saw, he returned to the right and started to make a route up a little ice gully towards the summit cornice. He put in a peg and reached the top of the gully after about forty minutes. He was now faced with a 15-ft. wall to the summit ridge. The snow was not hard and a lot of excavation would have been necessary in order to reach the top, so he decided to try the North face again. Clinging to a piton with his right hand, he reached across to the left and started to cut a hole through the ridge. After a few minutes, Band and I could only see his legs, partly obscured by showers of snow particles, and finally he disappeared altogether in the direction of the North face. A few moments later, he was standing on a ledge of his own making on the north side, and calling down to Band to follow him. The pitch had taken an hour and a half to climb.

At 12.30 p.m. we all stood on the top together. It was a perfect knife-edge, about 30 ft. long, the most airy and exhilarating summit I have been on. From it, we had a magnificent view of Huagaruncho and could see our tracks all the way up the West ridge We photographed the ridge over and over again, but we stayed no longer than was necessary for that and the other ritual duties one performs on summits. The weather was deteriorating rapidly and we had to be off back to Base Camp and civilisation. It had been a fine day's climb to round off the expedition.