

ASCENT OF THE NUN

(23,410 ft.)

By Pierre Vittoz

FOREWORD

Tilman has said that he who hears the call of the Himalaya would do well to find the road there. However, I cannot help comparing this road to a difficult steeplechase, the major obstacle of which—its big ditch—is obtaining authorisation. Thank God! it had been secured, not without difficulty or delay, forty days before departure. In all innocence and as if to intensify the difficulty, we had asked for authorisation to enter a region that was politically aflame and suffering from spasmodic outbreaks: Kashmir. No more, no less! But has not Corneille's hero claimed that "To conquer without danger is to triumph without glory"?

The aim of this expedition was the Nun (23,410 ft.), the highest point in the Nun-Kun massif, situated east of Srinagar. Why the Nun? Our jobs forced us to undertake a Himalayan campaign during the summer and we had to escape the monsoon; Kashmir seemed to be sheltered from it. We then had to look for a mountain of 7000 m. (23,000 ft.). In my search I came upon a sentence by Marcel Kurz—that doctor of alpine science—in *Berge der Welt*, V, 1950, page 194:

"Is it not strange that the only seven-thousander in the 700-km. stretch between the Garhwal and Nanga Parbat, only 100 km. from Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, should be virgin? Mountain-lovers take note!"

They did, and they numbered seven: a Swiss, two Indians and four French: an international expedition.

The Swiss, a missionary, had been brought to my notice by Kurz (him again!). Having lived for three years at Leh (Ladak), 100 km. from the Nun, Pierre Vittoz converted souls while occasionally tormenting the six-thousanders. The two Indians had both participated in Himalayan expeditions, Capt. K. C. Johori on that to Kamet in 1952, and Lt. N. D. Jayal (who had flown over Everest after its conquest) on that to Kamet and, in 1951, one to Trisul. The four French already knew something about climbing distant mountains: Claude Kogan (of the so-called weaker sex) and Dr. Guillemin were members of the Franco-Belgian (1951) and Franco-American (1952) expeditions to the Peruvian Andes. Michel Désorbay had led an expedition to Spitzbergen, and Bernard Pierre, after participating in an expedition to the Hoggar in 1951, was the promoter of the Franco-American expedition to Salcantay in 1952.

As to the principal actor, the Nun, it had been the object of two serious British attempts, one in 1934 and the other in 1946, which came to nothing (by the eastern ridge). On the other hand, the western ridge seemed to offer a better chance of success. My conviction was supported by the reconnaissances carried out by Waller in 1937 and Vittoz in 1952.

New Delhi was the assembly point for the members of the expedition and the Sherpas (Pa Norbu, Ang Phutar, Ang Kami, Gyaldzen, Pemba Norbu) under the orders of that remarkable sirdar, Ang Tharke. Only Pierre Vittoz was missing, for his filly «Authorisation» (authorisation

to leave Ladak!) almost fell at the last fence. But taken well in hand, it caught up with the bunch at Doda on July 14th. It was at this little town, situated south of the Nun-Kun-massif (the route from Srinagar to Leh having been forbidden at the last moment) that the approach march of about 150 miles began. More than 90 miles of typically Kashmir valleys were first ascended with two tons of material on the backs of mules. At Yurod the mules passed their loads to a hundred coolies. On July 26th the expedition at last delightedly caught sight of the Nun.

I hand over the story to one of the craftsmen of the victory—and what a craftsman!—Pierre Vittoz who, it might be said in passing, seemed to me the perfect model of the Himalayan in heart and limbs and wind, and above all with a stomach ready to digest every kind of preserved food there is (container included).

Bernard Pierre.

Impatience made me force the pace: the Nun ought to appear at the bend of the valley. Slowly a rock face slid to the left and made it possible for me to see a great snow crest. How beautiful it was! While marching, I began to work out an itinerary on those vast slopes. But what was this? Behind the rock face that was moving aside appeared a ridge of ice. A few more steps and this new ridge was as high as the white crest. Then it was even bigger and the face that supported it became enormous. Where would this immense and rectilinear crest come to an end? At last the pyramid of the Nun rose up in its entirety. Crystalline, glittering under the September snow, it does not dominate any other summit; it asserts itself simply and indisputably. The Tibetans have given it a charming name: *Shel Changma*, "the crystal willow". Even the K'un, almost its twin in height, seems planted there like a dark and hunched subordinate, to form a contrast with the whiteness and purity of its lines.

In that autumn of 1952, a few days sufficed to settle my mind: of the three routes suggested by the mountain's structure, the eastern ridge seemed too long and difficult; the northern ridge led to summit slopes that were too precipitous; the western ridge, steep but regular, was easy of access from the north, whence I was coming, and seemed the best. It remained to climb it.

The Nun-K'un massif is 60 miles east of Srinagar and had already interested more than one Himalayan. In 1903, Sillem discovered the great northern glacier¹ and the snow plateau which separates its two main summits. In 1906 the Bullock-Workman pair spent three months in the massif, climbed Pinnacle Peak (22,737 ft.) and ascended the great Shap'at Glacier to the east. In 1913, Piacenza, the conqueror of the Furggen, climbed the K'un (23,246 ft.). Only in 1934 did anyone attack the Nun (23,410 ft.) the highest summit between the Garhwal and Nanga Parbat. By way of the Shap'at Glacier, Harrison and Waller reached the White Needle (reckoned as 21,980 ft., more probably 21,650 ft.), a shoulder of the east ridge. In 1937 Waller came back to try the west ridge, but with him he had

¹ An ignorant cartographer has named Sillem's Glacier *Ganri* (for Kangri), which is simply "glacier" and truly lacking in originality. I suggest *Parkashik Glacier*, from the name of the hamlet near its tongue.

The name of the great glacier to the east of the massif, had at first been rendered *Shapbat*, which is correct; later it was *Shafat*, which is not. It is a matter of an aspirated *p* and not an *f*, which is unknown in Tibetan.

only three coolies and, following a paroxysm of toothache, had to turn back with an interesting photo as his only trophy. In 1946 Berry took up the east ridge again, but did not get beyond the White Needle.

Following upon their Peruvian explorations, Madame Claude Kogan of Nice, and the Parisians, Bernard Pierre and Dr. Jean Guillemin, began to take sidelong glances at the Himalaya. With one young man from Lyons, Michel Désorbay, they organised an expedition to the Nun for July and August 1953, and were kind enough to invite me to join them. While I continued to live withdrawn at Ladak on the Upper Indus, they arranged all the details, secured their visas, enlisted two Indian officers, Flight-Lt. N.D. Jayal and Capt. K.C. Johori, and engaged Ang T'arke, with Ang P'ut'ar his brother, Gyalzen VII, Pa Norbu, Kami and Pemba Norbu.¹

There was only one annoyance: we had to approach the Nun from the south, which I did not know.

On July 14th we came together near Jammu at the foot of the Chennab Valley, which we were to follow through Kishtwar in order to continue due north, ascending the Marai and Krish Nai rivers. The sun was crushing. Half-naked, we grumbled our way through six stages, always hesitating between the sweat of walking and the grilling that riding on the wretched mules became. The temperature was phenomenal to the point of reducing even the Parisians to silence. The Sherpas were more talkative and as they had come straight from either D'aulagiri or Everest, their reflections on André Roch and John Hunt gave me some good moments. As merry as they were devoted, Ang T'arke and Gyalzen were to entertain us with their repartee and pranks for two months.

At the end of the mule track, at Naopachi (Napaz to the topographers), a village where all the coolies had to be recruited, there was the traditional comedy: impossible to go higher, since the bridges were destroyed. Besides, there never had been a road there. Moreover, bears were so numerous that no one was willing to leave his village. The conclusion was that the porters demanded seven rupees a day. But Bernard Pierre, with his experience of Arabs and South Americans, was a worthy expedition leader: he secured an overall price of eighteen rupees per coolie for what was to be six days' ascent and three days' return. Luckily there proved to be only one destroyed bridge; a patrol sent out on reconnaissance was able to rebuild it in two days. As to the bears, an inexhaustible topic of conversation, two of them were seen one evening by a party which had probably had too much cognac.

Apart from the bears, our preoccupation was how to approach the Nun. We were fully agreed to attack the west ridge. But how were we to reach it? The

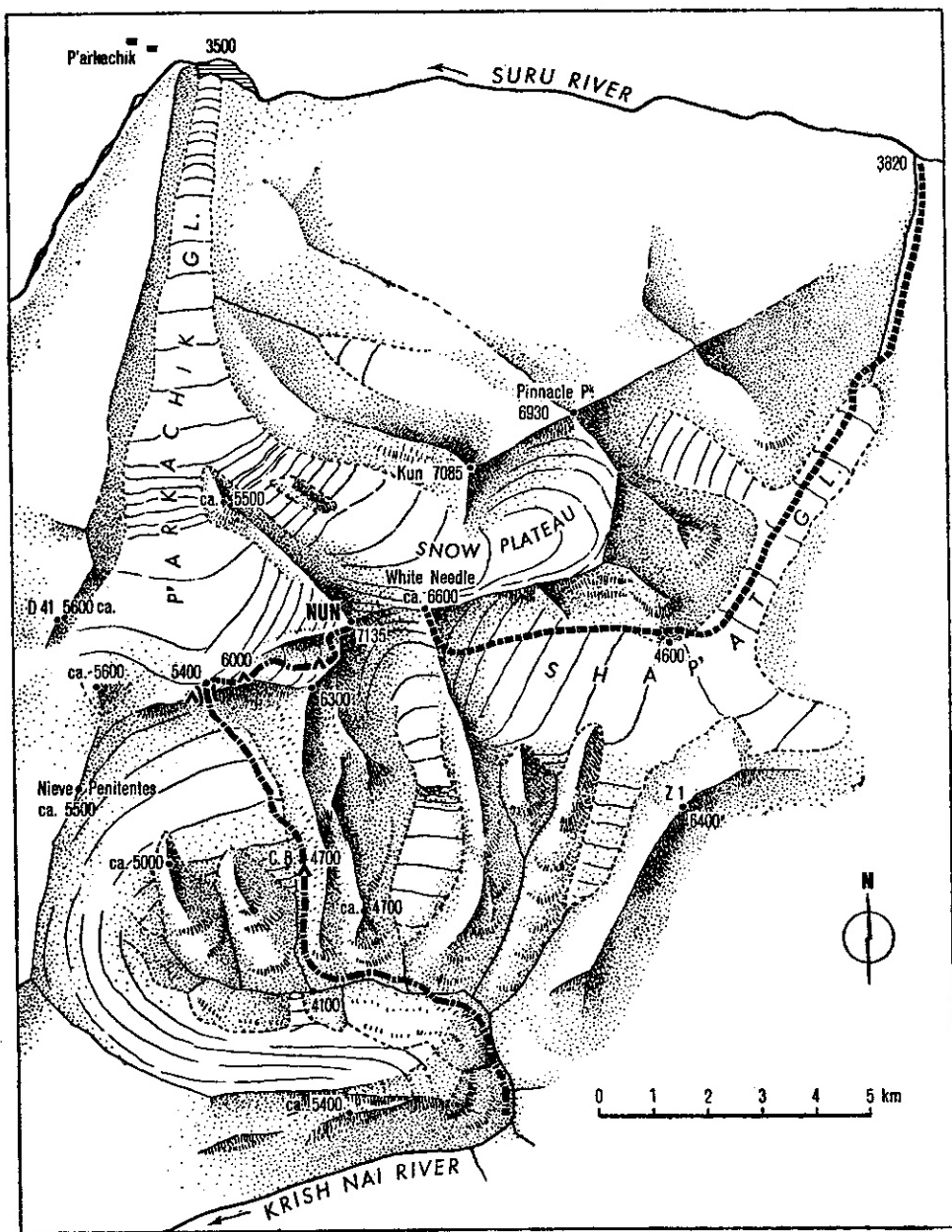
¹ Registration numbers: Ang P'ut'ar 186, Gyalzen VII 163, Pa Norbu 161, Kami 180. Pemba Norbu, not yet enrolled, was on Everest with Hunt. The names of the Sherpas are often mutilated: I write "Gyalzen", as the name is pronounced, instead of the official "Gyalgen", which is wrong both phonetically and etymologically. For simplicity's sake, and to make the aspirated letter clear, I have put an ' instead of the ordinary h. Thus, Ang P'ut'ar and K'un.

Krish Nai Valley took us to 13,000 ft., at the foot of the southern side, a formidable precipice. Could we find from there a track to the pass at the base of the west ridge, which was placed at 18,700 ft.? This point, which seems never to have been reached, we called the "Col de Bonne Espérance" (Pass of Good Hope), because we presumed that what followed would be simple. But to get there we had no other data than a vague and fanciful map. So it was with the pleasure of upstarts that Désorbay and I, ascending grass slopes and moraines, on July 29th discovered a gentle glacier which descends straight from the pass, and there we chose the site of our Base Camp near to its tongue.

The next day we led the whole caravan thither and began excavations on the crest of the moraine at 15,420 ft. The Nun was too close to stand clear; its black monstrous rampart overwhelmed us. On the other hand, opposite us, behind a wide white summit, a snow face, cut into grooves, formed a Himalayan counterpart to the fantastic slabs of the Fitz Roy, and we never tired of watching the light and the clouds playing among the hitherto unknown but soon familiar ridges.

On August 1st Pierre, Jayal, the Sherpas and I left in the direction of the pass. The moraine and the glacier were easy and we rose regularly, while the summits surged up around us. At the foot of the pass we halted. Should we climb straight up or seek a way elsewhere? The Sherpas did not fear the slope and after a hard effort we dumped our loads on the dry and sunny side of the Col de Bonne Espérance. A glance at the altimeter showed it was only 17,700 ft., so there were still another 5,580 ft. of the ridge before the summit. While Camp I was being set up, we passed the glasses round, surprised and then anxious: the west ridge (the base of which was at our level, 300 yards to the east) at first rose in two great leaps, then lost itself in the south-west face. A secondary rib, issuing from the precipices of the north-west face, then replaced it and rose straight to the summit. Between them, a hanging glacier plunged in séracs to our left after being fed by the upper slopes of the south-west face. But this is what was so serious: the two leaps of the lower ridge seemed impassable. They were too steeply inclined, especially the upper one, which culminated in a large tower. To the right they fell in a vertical wall towards the Base Camp; to the left they were armoured with ice that was too steep.

The following morning, while our companions took photographs on the plateau to the north of the pass, Ang T'arke and I went to prow about on the staircase of séracs on the north-west face. All the slopes were streaked with avalanche tracks. We did some fine ferreting in every corner, but the staircase was too rickety. And then it became steep; I saw this from the pace of Ang T'arke, who was recutting the steps which I had carelessly made with a blow of my axe. We quickly tired of these unhealthy slopes and went back, passing around the foot of the west ridge. Briefly, this ridge was not so bad; it could be climbed,



The accompanying topographical sketch, based on the official map reproduced in the *Himalayan Journal*, 1947, cannot claim to be exact, for we had not the time and the instruments. Its sole purpose is to illustrate our route and to clarify: a) the complexity of the ridges of the Nun; b) the disposition of the glaciers south of the massif; c) the extent of the upper basin of Shap'at; d) the importance of the elbow described by the Krish Nai and of the massif that it surrounds. For photographs see page 77.

it had to be climbed! Strengthened by this certainty, which confirmed what I had seen the previous year in profile, I returned to Camp I. Pierre, Désorbay and Guillemin had just arrived and were incredulous and recalcitrant listeners: "You're dreaming! Climb that tower at nearly 20,000 ft.? It would be difficult even in the Alps. It's a trap! How are you going to get the Sherpas past it?" In reply, the next day brought a squall that chased us back to the Base Camp.

On August 6th, Ang T'arke, Pa Norbu and Gyaldzen, the three best of the Sherpa climbers, and myself welcomed Madame Kogan to Camp I. The porters made up their minds to tease their missionary: "Precious body, where shall we erect the tent for the lady chief?"—"The lady will sleep in my tent, little brother."—"And what about the proprieties?"—"That will be no trouble."—"But, precious body, you are a lama..." When, a month later, some romantic journalists wanted to headline "a woman and a priest", Gyaldzen, in a sententious tone, commented jokingly: "I told you so; you should take care!" But the lady chief, seated on a stone, did not understand or seemed not to understand. With the glasses to her eyes, she disparaged my find: "We'll be fine on that tower; one day of snow..."

However, the next day we reached the foot of the ridge. The first tower, 650 ft. high, had to be turned on the left through a small valley of ice. The slope was steep but cutting was easy. Bent over the white page of my imposition, I sometimes cast a glance backward to see how my "tourist" was getting along. Perfectly at ease on her crampons, she soon insisted on relieving me. The astonished Sherpas followed lightly with small loads. Half-way up, a rock outcrop provided relaxation for arms and eyes. The slow ascent continued and for lunch we reached the saddle beyond the tower. We did not resist the desire to get to the top of this first tower while Ang T'arke was already searching for a terrace on which to pitch camp. "Just a minute, elder brother", we said, "the day isn't finished yet." The main buttress rose above us for another 1300 ft. Distorted by perspective, it looked easy. And it was. By slopes of broken stone and névés we had soon ascended a third of it, as far as the foot of a ramp of very steep ice overlooking a couloir on the south face. There a rope had to be fixed. The Sherpas installed themselves on the highest rock and began to unroll the thin nylon rope tied to my belt. At the end of two hours they had unrolled about 400 ft. and Madame Kogan went with a snow-scoop to get water for her exhausted companion. Then she took the lead and led us leftwards over some snow-covered rocks. I knew that from this precise point, by crossing the rib of snow that rose up for 60 ft. on our left, we might be able to turn the summit of the tower by a ledge of séracs. But the rib seemed to us too steep and we continued straight on into a mixed terrain that was quite difficult. A little before 5 p. m., Madame Kogan came out on the summit at about 19,700 ft. and began

the descent of the other side, along a thin ice ridge. It would not go; it was too steep and long, and it would be ridiculous to make the expedition pass that way. Tired and bad-tempered, we ascended to the summit again. The south side of our tower was a frightful precipice; on the north, the bulging slope vanished after a rope's length. How were we to cross this single obstacle? Beyond it everything seemed easy: by zigzagging in the nearby hanging glacier, we would reach 21,300 ft. and a snow-slope leading to the upper west ridge and the summit of the Nun. One chance remained to us: the ledge of séracs in the north face. The Sherpas were waiting for us below the tower; I found difficulty in admitting to them that they had brought their sacks up to no purpose, and we went down again all on one rope. At the marked spot, Madame Kogan secured me from above and I crossed a sheet of snow undermined by the heat of the sun. I approached the rib and touched it. Hurrah! On a sérac, a few yards away, began a large glacier ledge which cut the whole northern side of the tower. As soon as they heard the news, the porters placed their loads in a corner and scurried off before twilight, pursued by two triumphant climbers.

After an interlude of snow and rain, on August 10th it was the turn of our three comrades to climb the towers. Bernard Pierre fixed a rope for crossing the snow rib and set up Camp II on the ledge of ice on the far side of the main tower, at 19,200 ft. The next day, with Désorbay, Ang T'arke and Pemba Norbu, despite the mist and the very heavy snow, he ascended the hanging glacier to 20,200 ft., where he pitched a tent. Meanwhile we had arrived at Camp II, where we welcomed them on their return. They were dog-tired and pessimistic: "It's immense, really a world of its own; there will have to be a supplementary camp." On the other hand, the summit slopes—what an illusion!—seemed as easy to them as to us. Madame Kogan, Guillemin and I wanted to improve their track, but the wind and mist sent us back to the Base Camp. This time the weather had completely broken, although Jayal and I had affirmed that the monsoon scarcely touched Kashmir. Humid days stretched out in tents which seemed to grow smaller from hour to hour. Luckily, having found a pack of cards, we were able to kill time.

One night Pierre shook me: "Have you a moment?"—"Yes, even two."—"We're mouldering away here and the days are slipping by. Good weather or no, we must go on up and in force. Three attacking ropes, with Jayal and all the Sherpas in support." It was true; we must act. In the morning the powerful attack conceived by the leader was organised and began to unfold. First of all, the Sherpas went to re-equip Camp I and put its tents in order. On August 19th we followed like thoroughbreds that were being spared. The sky had cleared and the mountain gleamed under fresh snow. There came to me again the impression that the Nun had left with me the previous year: beyond the enormous slopes of

the tower, and far beyond the waves of the hanging glacier, the pyramid stood out in soft and elegant lines. "Crystal Willow!" How right that name was!

Snowfall and wind had made a mess of the staircase on the great tower. I had to recut it throughout the upper slope while sleet beat upon my waterproof hood. At Camp II, the spectacle was comic: the pneumatic mattresses were floating from side to side of the tents; the wind had forced the snow inside and the water from its melting had not been able to escape through the nylon ground sheets. A long job of bailing out—reminding me of happy days on the Lake of Geneva—was necessary in order to return these improvised canoes to their original use.

From Camp II the track was marked by a few flags; first a long oblique ascent to the left, then a slope to the right, finally a circuit in a combe and we halted at the point reached by Pierre ten days before. In the sleet, my friend Bernard drew back his shoulders: his great breadth and his beard had earned him the name of "Black Bear" among the Sherpas. The tent was folded and we went on in snow that became ever deeper, my ski-sticks making a great contribution. At 21,000 ft., at the very foot of the snow face that falls from the summit, we dumped our sacks on a small plateau and installed the third and last camp. Nanga Parbat emerged from the clouds. The afternoon was radiant, with spangles of snow hovering in the sunlight. At nightfall, Guillemin and Désorbay joined us with Kami and Gyaldzen. The other porters, except for Ang T'arke, had gone down again and we were five Europeans and three Sherpas impatient to be on the summit the next day.

The Himalaya certainly mocked our attack in force. The 22nd was not a day of victory, but a day of storm and infernal wind. We rashly sent Kami and Gyaldzen back, to learn later that they spent the whole day straying from sérac to sérac, as also did Ang P'ut'ar and Pa Norbu, who had vainly tried to bring us provisions. The next day, not in the least discouraged, the Sherpas once more left Camp II to join us. During this time we had had to resolve to go down. The snow and the mist were such that we wandered along with compass and altimeter in hand. Ang T'arke and his memory for places came to our rescue, and we were approaching Camp II when we heard our straying porters call. At the same moment the slope slid under our feet. There followed a furious struggle against the snow and a tug of the rope. Guillemin had succeeded in anchoring his axe in the old snow, holding Madame Kogan and me after about 150 ft. The other three disappeared in the fog and the eddies of snow. A mad anguish seized me. Unroped, I ran down the channel cut by the slip. Two men remained on the surface. Ang T'arke hurled himself upon a hand that was sticking up through the snow. He freed a white and contorted face; it was Désorbay, who was suffocating under the pressure of the snow and the rope. Like madmen we scraped around his chest, cut the rope and straightened his horribly arched back.

Guillemin and Madame Kogan ran up, followed by some Sherpas. They freed Désorbay completely, sat him down and rubbed him. Pierre and Ang T'arke were sitting, dazed, groaning at each breath. Surrounded and supported, all three got to Camp II which was only a hundred paces away. Guillemin was busy with oxygen and injections: "Désorbay must get down the towers before the pain revives." We went down in three ropes. Huddled up and strengthless, staggering against his will and despite the track made for him by two Sherpas, Désorbay set out on the great vanishing slopes and step by step drew near to the glacier that appeared between patches of mist. What a nightmare, and how my heart convulsed at each false step and every hesitation! In this new snow, might not another avalanche carry us off? At last we came to the plateau and Pierre's and Ang T'arke's groups emerged from the mist. Thank God we had avoided a catastrophe.

Once more we were at Base Camp. Guillemin declared that there was nothing serious. Bruises and nervous shock prevented Pierre, Désorbay and Ang T'arke from starting out again and the doctor would himself stay near them, with Kami who had taken a bad chill. It was sad to see my comrades eliminated. Now there was only Madame Kogan, our last chance... but a good one. She was by far the best and most active climber of us all and perfectly acclimatised. With her, a light and rapid attempt had every chance of conquering the Nun.

We left as soon as the weather improved. Despite his impaired condition, Bernard Pierre decided to accompany us to guard against anything unforeseen. Ang P'ut'ar, Pa Norbu, Gyaldzen and Pemba Norbu followed us to evacuate the camps. It was a sullen and impatient ascent. We were still suffering from the shock of the avalanche and our holiday was drawing to a close; but our desire to reach the summit grew, and we ascended moraine, open glacier, debris, talus and fixed rope without stopping until we got to Camp II. On August 27th we carried up a tent and sleeping bags to complete Camp III, partly evacuated on our retreat. The slope where we had slipped was absurd: scarcely 30 degrees. The whole surface had been remoulded by the wind and only a few large blocks on a shelf two or three hundred yards below us bore witness to the slide. The crust and powder snow forced us to great efforts and our fears became vocal again. A bridge over a huge crevasse cracked under my weight. During the halt half-way up, the sleet rattled on our hoods. Would we never get good conditions? The air was icy and Madame Kogan asked me to rub her chilled back. In a very respectful voice, Gyaldzen enquired: "Has she got fleas?" An enormous shout of laughter warmed us and made us optimistic, and I resumed the track with enthusiasm despite the fog and a foot of powder snow. Rather luckily we found a few flags again and reached 21,000 ft. The altimeter and the relief showed us that we were near the camp, but the tents were invisible. "Up there!" No, that

was a block of ice. "Down there!" No, another piece of sérac. All these blocks were strange; we did not remember them. Anxiety overtook us and we had presentiments of something unpleasant. There it was, in a gap in the fog: an enormous ridge of séracs had fallen from the flanks of the summit and Camp III had disappeared beneath it. This was too much for our nerves; each of us held his companion, his friend, responsible for this avalanche which could have crushed us like mice. A terrible and idiotic piece of abuse that was quickly forgiven.

With an air that I hoped was calm, I dug a terrace at the side of the ice debris. The Sherpas found this natural and willingly helped. But when Pierre asked them who would like to spend the night with us, Pemba Norbu was the only one not to make a wry face. With him we made a crowded foursome under the low roof of a tent for two. It was warm, but how thirsty we were! Over a candle, a little snow was melted. We sucked frozen fruit juice, and sugar which would not dissolve on our dry tongues. And to think that fifty yards away were two stoves and all sorts of nice things, as well as three of our cameras!

At last came August 28th, calm and radiant. A perfect day for the summit. A straight line would take us there by the snow-covered south-west face. But after our experience of avalanches, the smooth slopes had lost their charm. Leaving at 7.40 a. m., in powder snow where the ski-sticks were useful once more, we came to a rib which marked the bottom of the face on the right. This rib was easy, but towards 21,500 ft. it vanished into the summit slopes. Bernard Pierre, with his faithful Pemba, succeeded in ascending that far. But after the snow slide that had bruised his chest wall and rendered recent days painful, his resistance was undermined and he suffered from the cold. We saw him turn back with heavy hearts, he who had made the expedition possible and had directed it till the last morning.

500 ft. higher, the smooth slope was broken by two rocks. It was necessary first of all to reach these, wallowing in wind-crust that lay above bottomless powder snow. This kind of drudgery would not have displeased me too much if the haunting memory of the avalanche was not running round and round my head. When at last we were seated on this rocky perch, we could breathe again, for there there was no danger. But further on? Madame Kogan took the lead and climbed straight up to avoid cutting the slopes; soon she encountered great bands of windblown snow which rose obliquely leftwards towards the west ridge. Fearing that these sheets of snow would not support our weight, we followed their lower edge in a traverse that became more and more horizontal. It was a slow and delicate advance on a fragile staircase. Towards the end the slope rose up at 55 degrees, but the snow was firmer and my companion succeeded in planting her ice-axe into the crest at about 22,300 ft.

Having rested, we started off again at 1 p. m. in calm weather, although the mists gradually enclosed us. The completely snow-covered ridge was unstable; decayed snow to the right, powdery and unsteady on the left. Sure now of reaching the summit, we climbed at a good pace. But above 23,000 ft. the crest steepened and I came upon a succession of bosses without stability: snowdrifts through which we had to cut a veritable trench. Fortunately, my comrade was in great form and we could relieve one another from bosse to bosse for this exhausting labour. During the minutes of waiting I marvelled at the technique and the will of this woman, a fragile figure in her outfit of sky-blue nylon. The last snowdrift formed an advance summit. Three further rope-lengths, almost horizontal, a rock turret, and then arm in arm we followed the little snow crest beyond which there was nothing but the mists.

Having reached the summit at 2.50 p. m. we left it half an hour later. We quickly tumbled down the ridge, but the face seemed to us even more treacherous than in the morning. We descended it with infinite precaution, so as to break and to shake nothing. Then a short trot brought us to Camp III, where we fell into Bernard's arms and Pemba's saucepan. The Sherpas had brought the necessities up from Camp II and we spent a long and happy night, tirelessly supplied with drinks by our dear Bernard.

On the 29th the upper camps were evacuated and on August 31st we began the return march. At Naopachi, instead of descending southwards by the road we knew, we ascended north-west in order to cross a pass (the Margan Pass, 11,600 ft.) and enter the great valley of Srinagar. And already the passion had seized us again and we were dreaming of another mountain, higher still and further away.