North of Dhaulagiri

JOHN S. HUMPHREYS

So DHAULAGIRI has finally been climbed, and of the seventeen 26,000ers in the vast arc of the Karakoram and Great Himalaya the number of untouched summits has been reduced to two. As the four of us sat on a high ridge corner in late fall of 1959, under a dry and sparkling sky, and watched the screaming wind tear a majestic snow plume from the entire breadth and height of Dhaulagiri's frozen northern side, we had cause to wonder. To wonder at the force of will and system of values that could possibly drive men to 26,000 feet under such conditions, but also to wonder at the certainty felt by each of us that this would be done and the summit would be reached before long. We were mountaineers, and on a climbing expedition, but in a different sense from the grand, harsh and final struggles for the highest levels. The past ten years have seen such a rush of the latter that perhaps some words of explanation are needed to describe our feeling that it was completely satisfactory and worthwhile to travel half around the globe and then to spend 90 per cent of our time walking and never climb over 22,000 feet. Reiteration might be a better word, for these ideas are not new, and will persist when those who seek and find the utmost borders of human experience have turned their imaginations and others' pocketbooks to the mountains of the moon.

The lure of the unknown is forever powerful, but unless it can be expressed in human terms, it must remain sterile and useless as well. Usefulness here is meant on a personal level, though there is also present a certain sense of obligation to learn, and subsequently to add one's knowledge to the general store. To us the greatest fulfillment in the realm of mountaineering comes in dealing with an unknown, but knowable, geographical situation while in full possession of one's physical and mental faculties; able to react to fellow climbers in an essentially normal way, with the chosen location one of interesting culture and surpassing grandeur. The effect is tremendously enhanced if the members of the group are few and are good friends at the start and if the plans are fluid enough to allow for diversions of interest as they occur. This implies a relatively lightweight (and hence low cost) expedition with a general objective rather

than a specific one, and with no intention of pushing beyond the point where experience can be enjoyed in the present tense. To do this with a minimum of pressure and clutter, in a social environment as varied and colorful as that of the Tibetan hill people, is truly to escape for a time into an exalted version of life.

This was then to be an expedition inspired by the tradition of Shipton and Tilman, of Murray and Weir, and of Herbert Tichy. There were a fair number of climbers, friends from Harvard Mountaineering Club days, who I knew actively believed in this philosophy, having experienced the satisfaction of applying it on trips in the past. To collect firm commitments for definite plans, however, was something else again. The period between application for permission and arrival in India fourteen months later saw what I have come to think must be the usual amount of crisis correspondence and last minute luck. It worked, somehow; and by mid-August of 1959 John Noxon had wangled a term's leave from research duties at the University of Saskatchewan, Fred Dunn had completed a tour of duty with the U. S. Public Health Service and was eager for a trip before starting new studies, Casper Cronk had talked the U. S. Army into dispensing with his valuable services for another six months, and I had just finished my Ph.D. thesis, and hence my overlong student career. John, Fred and I had climbed together in Alaska and in the Karakoram, while Casey had been high in Peru, so we all had some knowledge of the discomforts of altitude, but none had seen Nepal before. Our mean age was 28 years.

The country had to be Nepal, from my point of view, for two reasons. Three of us had been to the Karakoram in 1955, finding in the process most of the smaller peaks incredibly spectacular but discouragingly unclimbable, and main interests lay in a new environment. Secondly, entry into any of the other areas of mountaineering appeal in the Eastern world (Pamirs, Garhwal, Sikkim, Bhutan) is for an American party close to a diplomatic impossibility. Exactly which area within Nepal to go to was a much less fundamental choice, since from the start we did not contemplate tackling anything higher than 23,000 feet. The country east of Kathmandu, towards Everest, seemed to have received and be receiving an inordinate amount of attention, from hunters both of peaks and of yetis, so we looked to the west. Immediately the eye was struck by the vast mountain area to the north and west of the Dhaulagiri massif, which is so remote from the mechanized world that until the installation of an airstrip at Pokhara in 1953 it was virtually inaccessible. Add to this an idyllic impression of cloudless skies and varied, colorful, majestic scenery from a set of October Kodachromes taken by Bob and Gail Bates just south of the Annapurna group, and the choice was made.

Specifically, we set out to get as close as we could to the Kanjiroba Himal, a rather vaguely defined group of peaks rising to about 23,000 feet some 20 miles south of the Tibet border and 50 miles northwest of Dhaulagiri itself. This meant a walk of at least three weeks up through the great gap between Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, and then around the whole Dhaulagiri group on the northern side, through a region called the Mukut Himal. It would be wrong to call this area unexplored. Since 1953, three parties had traveled west of the Mukut Himal, but none had done any real mapping or much climbing there, because their main energies were directed elsewhere. Herbert Tichy, alone with four Sherpas, was engaged in crossing the whole of Western Nepal in 1953, and it was his book, *Land der namlosen Berge* (Ullstein, 1954), that gave us the first fine detail, the first real tinge of excitement over the bleak Tibetan character of these high valleys. Roberts and Lorimer in 1954 were concerned primarily with the northern side of the Dhaulagiri massif, which proved extremely difficult of access; they were successful in reaching the top of Putha Hiunchuli (23,750 feet), as well as two lower Mukut summits. Colonel Roberts' sketch map of the peaks surrounding the village of Mukutagaon was very helpful to us in orienting ourselves later on. Finally, a primarily scientific Japanese party led by Jiro Kawakita was active in the fall of 1958, walking far around to the north of the Kanjiroba group, but again access was difficult, and ascents were limited to the Mukut Himal. (See *A.A.J.*, 1960, 12:1, pp. 66-7.) I was not aware of the latter trip until I had a very rewarding correspondence with J.O.M. Roberts in Kathmandu, but I later arranged to meet Prof. Kawakita in Tokyo on the way out, receiving thereby many valuable details and letters of introduction. The advice of these two men saved us many hours of worry and trouble, and we are all deeply grateful to them both.

Word of permission filtered through in November, 1958, five months after the application had been sent in, having been immeasurably helped along by both the official endorsement of the American Alpine Club and the efforts of Douglas Heck, first as First Secretary of the American Embassy in New Delhi and later as Chargé d'Affaires in Kathmandu. Finances were scraped together for the most part privately by expedition members, with some welcome help from a few individuals and a loan from the AAC Expeditions Fund. By late June, 1959, all goods were bought and ready for shipment, and we were committed; but it was August before I was really sure that we would have enough cash and that Casey Cronk would even be with us at all.

It was particularly important that Cronk join us, for one of the few really constructive things we intended to do was some detailed mapping,

and he had the needed experience. As a geologist-glaciologist he had spent more than a year at Wilkes Station, Antarctiça, surveying under the most adverse conditions. Casey managed to get for us a beautiful little four-pound Kern theodolite, and he set up a limited scientific program of mapping and geological collection, which was supported in part by a small grant from the Gilkey Research Fund of the American Alpine Club. His strong side interest in folklore was the cause of some apprehension, for he threatened to arrive in New Delhi laden with tape recorder and masses of tape. In fact he did, and I grudgingly added yet another porter to my ever expanding mental caravan; but we lived to be delighted with the results, forgetting all objections.

Fred Dunn, our medicine man, is by trade an epidemiologist, and he became considerably interested in the possibility of making a general medical survey of several of the high Bhotia villages through which we were to pass. These are social units which have a distinct way of life under difficult conditions, and which are almost entirely cut off from outside influence, so their public health status is of academic interest. Fred was also custodian of a casual commission to "pluck a few scraps off the crags"; more specifically to incarcerate and bring home any plants we could find that had the temerity to survive at altitudes of over 17,000 feet. Thus there were several items that could be listed under "Science."

On August 19, at last, as I flew with the sun, and the plains beneath gave way to forest, mountains, and then the endless sea, I began a journal that was to carry through 128 days, at least 300 miles on foot, and a vast and fascinating jumble of experience. To give here a few glimpses of this separate world is all I can hope to do. . . .

September 13, Kathmandu

It is Sunday, but Saturday is the day of rest in Nepal, so the bank is open and everything is in full swing. I must return again with Manik Tuladhar to the government palace this afternoon to visit Shardul Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, the young-looking official (most officials here are young-looking) who oversees expedition affairs. We are required to take along a "Government Liaison Officer," and I expected to find on my arrival some specific man assigned to us, but three days have passed and no name has been produced. Manik is the lad who came up to me on the street yesterday, started talking fair English in a friendly way, and then asked to come along. I treated this idea with some skepticism, but told him he could only possibly do so as our L.O. (Liaison Officer). Far from discouraging him, this statement made him decide to *become* our L.O.!

He is only 19, but many are the byways of influence in Eastern officialdom; it seems he may actually pull it off.

A week ago the four of us finally got together for literally the first time in New Delhi, after I had spent about eight days fussing (there is no better word) with Bombay Customs, freight agents, etc. The arguments seemed endless, yet I was assured that our goods were getting through in about half the time that is often required. More customs fuss in New Delhi, more of the many holidays on which nothing can be done, and then I came on ahead to Kathmandu for final arrangements with His Majesty's Government. Presently the other three are rattling through the North Indian hinterland on a train, headed for the border town of Nautanwa and a rendezvous.

Not only do they hope, with fingers crossed, to see our precious crates there, but also this is to be the meeting with our four Sherpa porters, arranged for months ago by remote control. In this instance our remote control has been the presence here of J. O. M. Roberts, whose knowledge of the area and of the Sherpas is unsurpassed. Other groups are having trouble with the division between Darjeeling Sherpas under Tensing and the Himalayan Society in Kathmandu, which, with government support, requires all expeditions to deal with it for high porters. Thanks to Roberts, however, I have had nothing but smiles, and we are well set with good men.

The weather is still moderately bad, quite normal for this time of year. In fact on Roberts' suggestion we are not counting on the Pokhara airstrip at all on the way in, since during the monsoon it often resembles a swamp. Instead, I will return to India and join the others by train, then find a truck to take us across the border to Butwal. We will walk from Butwal across the Siwalik hills and up the great gorge of the Kali Gandaki, the route taken by Herzog and his Annapurna party in 1950. It is lucky our plans do not depend on the plane, for operations of the Royal Nepal Airlines (all three aircraft) are indefinitely suspended at present. Reasons are unclear; something to do with nationalization; the best explanation the Times of India could come up with was "internal confusion."

October 6, Tukuche

Sprawled in the carpeted bedroom of Takoor Prasad, a cousin of one of the Subbhas (Big Men) of Tukuche, we hurriedly scribble what will probably be the last letters to the outer world for the next two months. This is the center of the Thakali tribe and a sizeable trading town, which we reached three days ago after two weeks of tramping with our 48 porters through the hot, humid lower valleys. Driving rain is turning the track

outside into a sea of mud, in what we can only hope is the last gasp of the monsoon. We are directly under Dhaulagiri, but have not yet seen more than a few glimpses of its vast lower walls. As a reminder that the season is indeed advancing, we were treated yesterday to the awesome sight of hundreds upon hundreds of wild geese streaming south out of Tibet in great V-formations, high above the valley floor. For a stretch of 150 miles along the chain of the Great Himalaya the narrow slice of the Kali Gandaki is the only gap which falls below 16,000 feet; so it is much used by both birds and traders, accounting for the high relative prosperity of the Thakali people.

By some miracle, everything and everyone arrived intact and on schedule at the Nautanwa railhead to start off the trip in. By the time I arrived with Manik in tow, the others had cleared everything with the customs officer, and were valiantly trying to get used to being waited on by our four Sherpas: Ang Dawa (Sirdar), Chhotare, Phurkipa, and Ang Norbu. I threw some sand in the gears at this point with the discovery that I had left a coat containing my passport on a cross-country train 50 miles to the south, but with a display of efficiency that would be remarkable anywhere and was incredible in India, calls were made down the line, the coat was found, and I was able to retrieve it next day (complete with passport).

Two days ago we had our final dealings with Rana Bahadur Rana, the proud, unsmiling little coolie contractor who did all the bargaining and provided all the men to carry our loads. His relative lack of stature in the large and aristocratic Rana clan is partially compensated for by using the name twice. Though he carried no load he was worth his pay, for once the initial six-hour bargaining session in Butwal was over, he stuck by the agreed rates and stages and kept the coolies moving with virtually no complaints that reached our ears. The men received per day six Nepali rupees (with no return pay), which can be bought for 79 cents in Kathmandu, though outside the metropolis the Indian-Nepali exchange rate is a matter for negotiation, and there are still those who will accept only silver coin (1000 rupees weighs 26 pounds). One of the items of recent argument with RBR was how much to make up the loss of one of the coolies who absentmindedly fell off a rather bouncy cantilever bridge into the Kali Gandaki two days back down the line. He was lucky to survive; his load was somehow retrieved, but all his belongings and cash parted company. In the end we paid half his loss.

The many days of tramping through the constant steam heat of the foothills were not entirely joyful, but this was a new world to each of us, at times staggeringly dramatic and always immensely varied. We generally

found a roof to sleep under, since rain was common and it is very difficult to find tent platforms in precipitous rice paddy country. By far the most fantastic of these abodes occurred early on, when we dropped down 3000 feet from a ridge through a jungly gorge to the banks of the Kali Gandaki for the first time. Here, amid a few dirty huts, we found ourselves in sole possession of an abandoned Rana palace, an enormous, decaying Victorian structure, complete with colonnades and many large rooms containing nothing but bat dung. We camped on an upstairs balcony, and nothing later quite equalled the evil, mouldy grandeur of that night.

Fred is still poking at a lump on his shin; a scrape which became inflamed a week ago on the march, and then gave us a good scare by turning into a general bloodstream infection. After the worst night on record at Dana, on the porch of what sounded like the local TB ward, Fred was flattened literally in the middle of the trail by this bug. The next four hours were anxious ones, with fever running up to 104.5°, while large doses of antibiotics took over the struggle. Such are the miracles of modern science that in less than 24 hours Fred was on his feet and able to keep up with the rest in what proved to be a long, tiring day. He has his fingers crossed that this will not kick up again during the next few days. Mules and ponies have been ordered for tomorrow to take our loads from the present 8000-foot level high into the hills at last. Our route will take us west out of the Kali valley, over three high passes, and from there into we don't know just what. So much depends on the weather, and on whether what is shown on existing maps is actually there.

Both Cronk's expensive little Nagra tape recorder and my Polaroid camera have been seeing extensive use here. Subbha Shankerman, whose guest we are, arranged a lengthy songfest for Casey with a group of Tibetan hill people, and I have been taking VIP shots right and left (VIP in down jacket, VIP with wife, VIP with kiddies . . .), trying to spread the honors around. Since there are strong local rivalries, and we are depending on these men for our supplies, this becomes a matter of some delicacy.

October 21, Mukut Base Camp

As the warm snow swirls down, and I loaf alone in our monster base-camp tent, I can guess at the discouraged thoughts of the other three, perched 3000 feet above in a two-man tent, on a col just under the 20,000 foot level. They are in an excellent position, attained as a result of four days of route finding and load carrying effort, from which to attempt the first ascent of a fine peak which looks to be the highest in the Mukut Himal. But our weather, almost uniformly good since leaving

Tukuche, has finally broken, and prospects seem poor. This peak, Hangde, rises to about 22,000 feet and proved too much of a temptation to resist, though we originally planned to go further west before stopping to climb. A clear route presented itself in the form of a long moraine ridge, a smooth, nearly unbroken expanse of glacier, a short avalanche chute, and then several hundred feet of rather placid icefall to the col. From here, access to the long summit ridge seemed easy. Fred, John and I marked a route through this icefall three days ago, and then trudged on to the top of a smaller snow dome just north of the col. While doing this, at perhaps 20,000 feet, we were highly startled to see a Tibetan crow (tongu) glide up the updraft on one side, give us the eye, and disappear rapidly over the other side, so this promptly became Tongu Peak.

I had not been acclimatizing well, and felt particularly exhausted and gaspy during that Tongu Peak day. The reason for a significant part of this became clear later that evening, when the early but unmistakable symptoms of pneumonia displaced sleep by chills, panting and then pain as I lay in the sack. Fred, when aroused, promptly pumped an astronomical quantity of penicillin into me by wielding the needle four separate times, but I was in no mood to object. By morning all discomfort was essentially gone, but all higher activity was out for me for awhile. I would not have been up to it even had Fred approved, so I descended from this intermediate camp while the others carried a camp to the col with Sherpa help.

The walk from Tukuche a week ago was everything we could have expected or hoped for. As the mules were gathering, the skies cleared, and remained so as we strolled up the open, flat valley of the Kali Gandaki towards Tibet. Then a sharp turn to the west, a rapid climb to 14,000 feet with more and more high snow peaks opening out to view, and a stop after four days to change transport again. Mules cannot handle the cold or the snow of the high passes, and so at Sangda we waited a day, a welcome day, while sufficient yaks could be rounded up. This is a truly Tibetan village, only ten miles or so from the border, and Fred took the opportunity to pass out pills, feel necks, listen to hearts and ask questions. Most of this had to go through three languages, since Manik speaks no Tibetan, and this produced some amusing tapes. The village men were wonderful specimens, each a character, strung about with knives, turquoise bangles, heavy felt hats and/or braids, with one arm in and one out of their shaggy sheepskin coats.

Four of them, with 21 yaks (each carrying 120 pounds), then took us in two days over the Khog La (16,600 feet), the Thije La (18,000 feet) and the Mu La (18,500 feet) to our present Base Camp; two days of

major effort, though the yaks expressed total unconcern. The intermediate night was spent on a remarkable open plateau at 17,000 feet called the Laptse Sharma, and the next morning our "scientific program" was begun, with theodolite observations from a baseline, and a hurried attack by Fred on everything botanical within a hundred yards that could be dug up or chipped off.

The surveying activity will continue here, before we push on to the west, as soon as the weather clears and the others return from their climb. We have a magnificent view of Dhaulagiri II (25,429 feet) just five miles to the south to act as a control point for this work. A small party of Japanese climbers sponsored by Keio University are based at the village of Mukutgaon, one day's march down the valley, trying to find a route onto Dhaulagiri II for a proposed future attempt. The virtually unbroken northern aspect presented by this major peak does not suggest that they will find this an easy task. (See *A.A.J.*, 1960, 12:1, pp. 67-68.)

November 2, Camp near Tekochen La

This bleak, dry spot at 17,000 feet just under a little-used pass is as far to the west as we will camp, and that only for two nights, while a baseline is set up, a few peaks are climbed, and observations from three survey stations are completed. We are just on the eastern fringe of what might be called the Kanjiroba Himal, though the main summits of this group are a good twenty miles further west and now well out of range for us, based on remaining time and money. It has been somewhat disappointing to discover that nothing in our immediate vicinity seems to rise higher than 19,000 feet, since the Survey of India sheet suggests an extensive area all over 20,000, but then, this is the sort of finding that we are here to make. The superb weather that we have enjoyed for eight days since leaving Mukutgaon is showing some signs of deterioration, but it has done this before and then surprised us by clearing off beautifully again without a trace of precipitation.

Unfortunately, the storm back in the Mukut Himal thwarted Fred, John and Casey in their attempt on Hangde with new snow, very poor visibility and heavy cornice formations dictating a retreat about 200 feet from the top. After a second stormy night at the col, they carefully rubbed the Tibetan good-luck charms we had all acquired in Tukuche and started wallowing down the icefall, whereupon the mists parted and the route lay revealed. Several days later, with a group of rather obstreperous yaks brought up from Mukutgaon, we were all together again and headed down into the Barbung Khola, a completely different watershed from the Kali

Gandaki. One yak saw fit to shake a five-gallon can of kerosene loose from its back at a spot where the trail was about six inches wide, and the can was totally demolished as it bounced 1000 feet or so down the mountainside. This seemed a significant catastrophe to us at the time.

After a pleasant meeting with the Japanese party, who happened to be all together at their base of operations as we passed through Mukutgaon, we progressed north up the Barbung Khola, perforce adjusting our pace to that of our yak train. The approximately one mile-per-hour gait of a group of yaks seems to be one of the immutable constants of nature, and while this can seem quite fast enough to unacclimatized lungs panting uphill at 18,000 feet, it is trying indeed to be forced to cover mile after mile of relatively level going at this rate. These effects are compounded by the fact that in order to find sufficient foraging the beasts must be turned completely loose at night. They may climb several thousand feet and roam for miles, and rounding them up come the dawn is no small task. On one occasion this process took more than ten hours, and we sat in one spot for an unwanted rest day. Starts before eleven A.M. were rare, and a five-hour working day was a good one. Our concept of the distance that could be traveled in our given time underwent considerable revision at this stage.

The trek up this valley was of interest in its own right for three reasons: fossils, Tibetan refugees, and several nearly deserted villages. Cronk has been making geological notes all along, but it is the discovery of several fine fossil shells at scattered spots, and of a rich site near the village of Tarengaon, that has given him the greatest scientific satisfaction so far. No paleontologist himself, he looks to future identification of these finds to provide some sort of basis for accurate dating of the incredibly torn and twisted local strata. At several points we passed, and one evening we camped beside, one of the sprawling yak-hair tents called yurts that are home to the nomadic Tibetans. These men each own sizable flocks of sheep and yaks, and many would normally migrate south into Nepal with the winter season. This year, however, due to pressure from the "People's Liberation Army," they are not planning to return again to Tibet. Charming, self-sufficient, they do not fit one's mental picture of refugees, but such in fact they are. Finally, it seems evident to us that this whole area north of the main Dhaulagiri Himal is slowly getting drier. This is the only reasonable explanation for the two almost dead villages that we passed, with terraced fields bare and houses crumbling. The rain shadow effect of the southern monster peaks makes this a dry area anyway, with irrigation necessary for any cultivation at all, but irrigation must have a source, and for these people it had apparently withered away. The lack of

All photos in this section except Plate 24 by John Noxon

PLATE 20

MEMBER OF THE LAMA'S ENTOURAGE ON LAPTSE SHARMA.

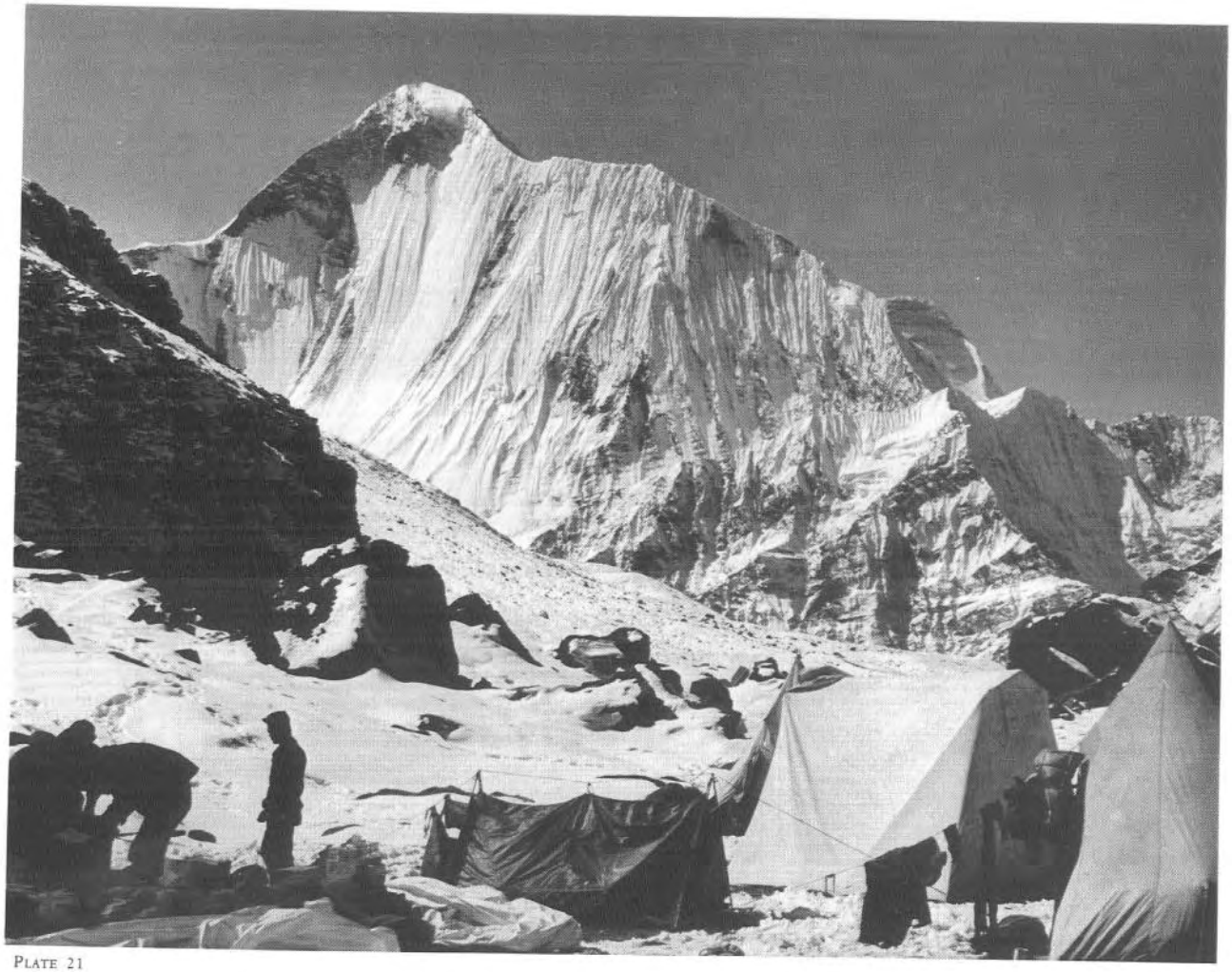

PLATE 21

DHAULAGIRI II from Mukut Base Camp.

PLATE 22

HANGDE from summit of Tongu Peak.

PLATE 23

CRONK SURVEYING FROM PEAK NORTH OF TEKOCHEN PASS. Dhaulagiri I to right.

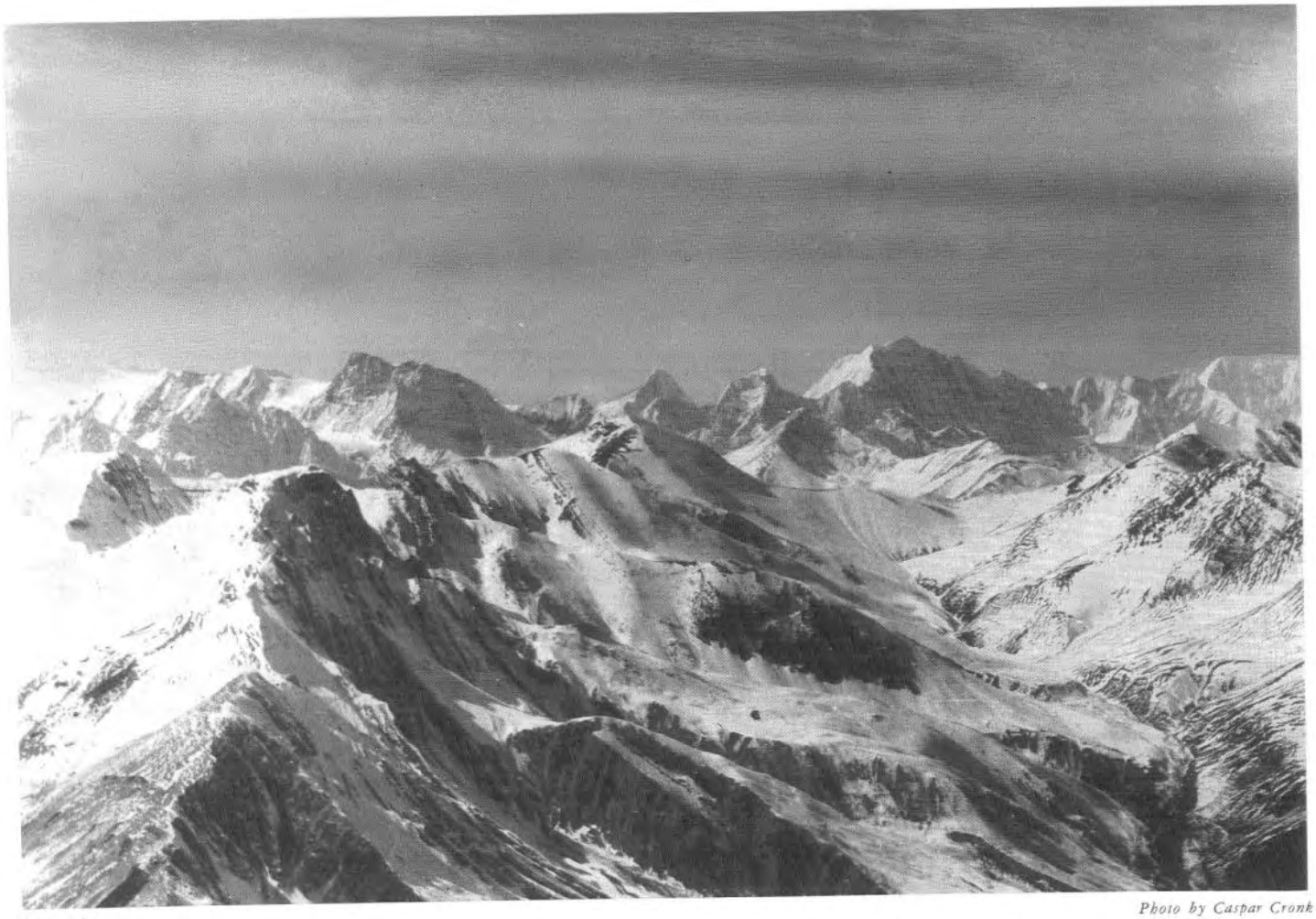

Photo by Caspar Cronk

PLATE 24

TELEPHOTO OF KANJIROBA HIMAL PEAKS from ridge near Shilong La. Tekochen Peak in center foreground.

PLATE 25

THE LAMA AT LAPTSE SHARMA.

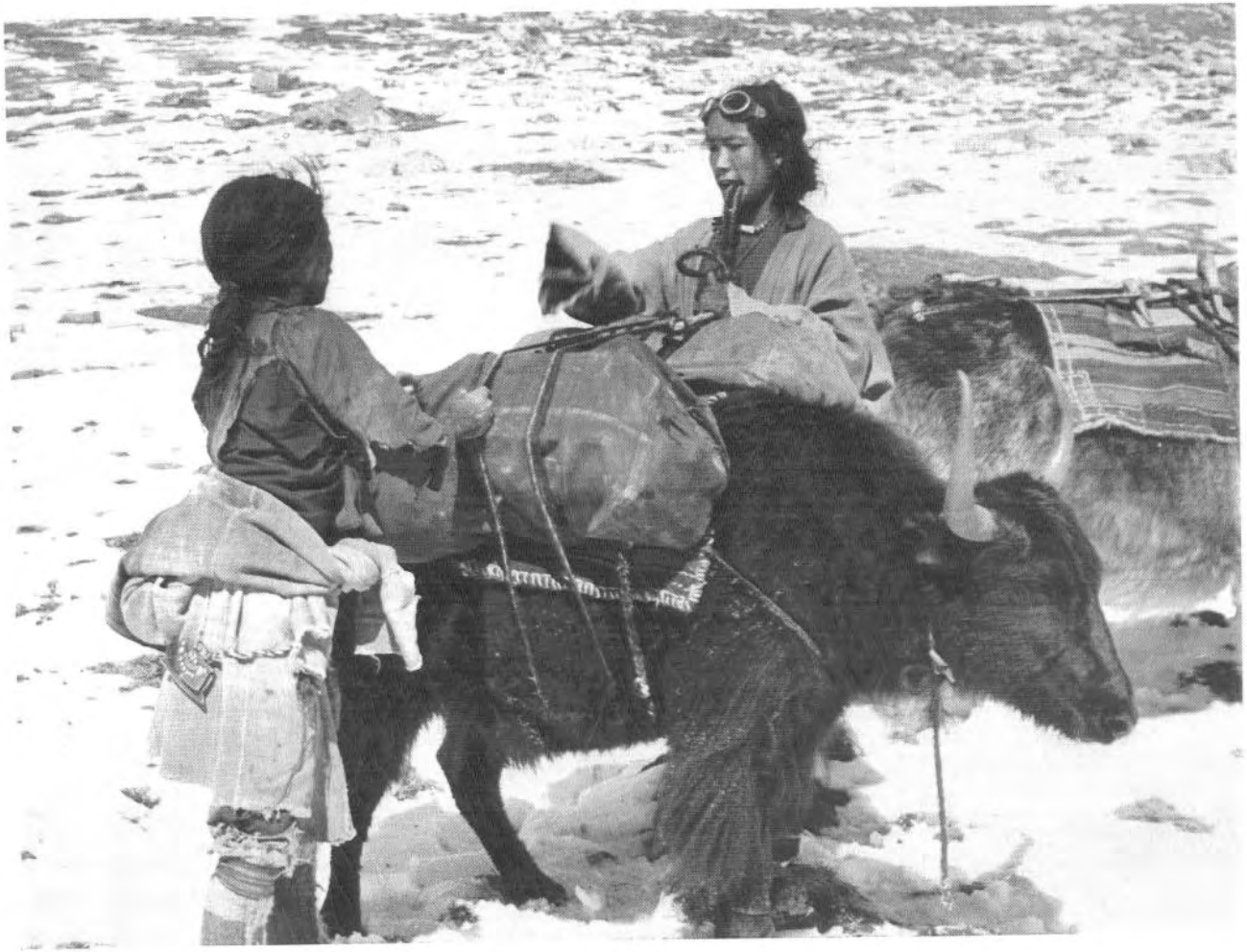

PLATE 26

LOADING A YAK AT MUKUT BASE CAMP.

PLATE 27

A LOCAL YOUNG MAN ON THE BARBUNG KHOLA ROAD.

local precipitation is also shown by the complete absence of any glaciers at all in the vicinity of our present camp. The one glacier we encountered in the Mukut Himal seemed essentially dead. This, coupled with the superb weather we are enjoying, explains the remarkable statement that in nearly one month's living close to high peaks we have not seen or heard a single avalanche of any description.

Further down this side valley leading to the Tekochen La, we have established a second Base Camp for a period of ten days or so. Prompted by the slowness of yak travel, the state of our pocketbooks, and the necessity of returning over at least three high passes before winter sets in, we were forced to the conclusion that to attempt to reach the heart of the Kanjiroba Himal is not practical. Mitigating this disappointment to a considerable extent was the superb view into this new country which we had yesterday when we climbed to the pass itself, and thence to the summit of a small neighboring peak, "Tekochen Peak." On the northwestern horizon, and clearly at least a week's travel away, stands a significant group of peaks, rising to more than 22,000 feet in several places. If the Survey of India figures are correct, the highest of this Kanjiroba group is just over 7000 meters (7043), a number that we will not be able to check with any accuracy, but which places this as the highest point in the 200 mile stretch from the Dhaulagiri Himal to Api on the far western border. Other, smaller, unidentified mountain groups rise sharply against the clear Tibetan sky further north, while in the south the scene is dominated by the vast bulk of the Dhaulagiri Himal, only 15 miles away. Further east, Annapurna can be seen over the heads of the Mukut Himal. Altogether, the top of "Tekochen Peak" is an amazingly good spot for a survey station, since getting there involves only a bit of rock scrambling. The next few days will be spent occupying this and two other stations, and doing some more sightseeing along ridges in the immediate vicinity.

Manik Tuladhar is up here with us to feel what it is like to sleep in a "high camp." He is off by himself in a little, lightweight Swedish tent, and the nights are getting colder now (5°F.); he has not yet made up his mind whether he is enjoying the experience.

November 18, Muktinath

There is a pervading sense of peace about this shrine, sacred to both Buddhists and Hindus, set 3000 feet above the Kali Gandaki river against a mountain wall, facing Dhaulagiri. Though pilgrims from all over India and Tibet visit this spot by the thousands each year, it is now the off season, and the rest house, the temples, the lush but tiny grove of handsome,

spring-fed poplar trees, are virtually deserted except for local holy men. This is a diversion from our route, but basically we are relaxed because we are on the homeward trek and all of the major obstacles, the passes that could be blocked by snow, the uncertainties of finding yak transport, are now behind.

None of the several peaks and peaklets that were climbed two weeks ago, back in the Tekochen La area, really required the use of a rope, though one was used on one occasion. Because of the local climate no glacier or ice problems were encountered at all. For the most part it was a question of myself running off with a Sherpa and doing some enjoyable ridge hopping (under the guise of "exploration"), while John and Casey were engrossed in triangulation. Fred, unfortunately, was being bothered again by a leg infection and remained below after an initial trip to "Tekochen Peak." With Ang Dawa on November 3, I traversed a long ridge to the south across three minor summits to a small snow peak (18,300 feet) with the local name of Ama Tsumen. On the following day, Phurkipa and I spent many hours reaching the top of an unnamed 18,800-foot rocky peak north of the pass, in the process crossing or circumventing an enormous number of gendarmes. The strata here were tilted absolutely vertically and had weathered unevenly, turning about 1000 feet of ridge into a series of transverse knife blades several feet thick and ten to twenty feet apart.

With the theodolite work completed, we all returned to the Base Camp and conveniently sat out a one-day storm, waiting for yaks to appear from below. They eventually did, just as the crisp blue skies came sweeping across from the south driving the clouds to nothingness. The usual hours were spent haggling, and then we found ourselves enroute directly back across the Mukut Himal via an easy pass not even suggested on the existing map. This pass, the Shulong La, rises to about 17,500 feet and is approached by a long series of gentle traverses around subsidiary ridges. Above it stands another of the small rocky peaks that abound in this area, which looked to Cronk like another good survey point. When he, Ang Norbu and I got up on the ridge, however, we were made aware again of a major reason why major summits are not generally attempted in November. Although the sky was devoid of cloud, the great swirls of snow kicked up by the strong and gusty wind, combined with relatively low temperatures, made for conditions in which simply standing still was very uncomfortable and operating a theodolite was out of the question. We climbed as far as a lower summit at 18,900 feet from which both the Thije La and the Tekochen La were visible, shot a quick round of pictures, and left that spot without further ado to rejoin the others across the pass.

Two days later, after descending a long valley in an unexpected southeasterly direction, we had the good fortune to be visited by a ragged, colorful group of lamas, just out of Tibet and on their way as pilgrims to visit the Dalai Lama in exile in India. Early on a morning bright with frost, and with the thermometer just a few degrees above zero F., they packed up their nearby camp and came strolling over to stare at us as we at them; some two dozen people of all ages and sexes. Soon lama begging-songs were being immortalized on tape and Polaroid film, etc., etc., and we had made fast friends.

On we went over the Thije La, the last high pass, where a few more angles were recorded and a few more botanical specimens were grubbed from the snow. Then down the many thousand feet to human habitation once again on the Kali Gandaki side. As a final brief excursion for geographical interest, Fred, John and I walked up the upper Keha Lungpa to look at the lower end of the "Hidden Valley" discovered by the French in 1950. After walking half the day up a spectacular trail over which even the local men will not take loaded yaks, we of course simply repeated Prof. Kawakita's finding of last year. This is that the Hidden Valley ends in a magnificent but completely impassable gorge, with cliffs several hundred feet high falling sheer to the torrent's edge. No way through here, so we were content to return, pack for the journey to Tukuche, and curse anew at the yak men for taking advantage of their monopoly situation by noticeably underworking their animals. We sent them on ahead a few days later with Ang Dawa while we diverted our steps to Muktinath out of the wind and dust of the valley. To escape the retinue (now 17 yaks and 5 Sherpas) even briefly and to relax in privacy is always a pleasure.

November 30, In the air between Pokhara and Kathmandu

All the giants of west-central Nepal (Dhaulagiri, Annapurna, Manaslu, Himalchuli) are floating by the window as we cover a two-week walk in forty minutes. Shortly, we will land back in the 20th century in that confusion of temples and Western tourists that is Kathmandu. The last week of travel in uniformly good weather from Tukuche to Pokhara was for the most part through country new to us, and was a scenic joy all the way. A glimpse, like the hint of a yeti legend, of langur monkeys flitting through the woods at 9000 feet against the background of the great south wall of Dhaulagiri; the twin spires of Machapuchare, tearing the clouds 19,000 feet above the deep, green V of the Modi Khola; these are the sort of memories that do not fade.

More than this, as we look back on the expedition we are deeply satisfied. Somehow the fact that the four or five ascents made were all of minor mountaineering importance does not seem to us of prime significance. To have lived for a few months the elemental mountain life in close contact with the rugged people who know nothing else; to have added our small increment to formal geographical knowledge of one of the most spectacular regions on the globe; to have experienced and met, both singly and collectively, the spiritual and physical challenge of a climb to even moderate Himalayan heights; these are the rewards we have been seeking. That we have found them north of Dhaulagiri this year has been our great good fortune.

Summary of Statistics

AREA: Mukut Himal and Kanjiroba Himal of west-central Nepal.

First Ascents:

Mukut Himal—"Tongu Peak," ca. 20,500 feet, October 18, 1959 (Dunn, Noxon, Humphreys).

Eastern Kanjiroba Himal—"Tekochen Peak," ca. 18,300 feet, October 31, 1959 (Dunn, Noxon, Humphreys).

Ama Tsumen, ca. 18,300 feet, November 3, 1959 (Humphreys, Ang Dawa).

Peak north of Tekochen La, ca. 18,800 feet, November 4, 1959 (Humphreys, Phurkipa).

Attempted Ascent:

Mukut Himal—Hangde, 21,600 feet, October 21, 1959 (Dunn, Noxon, Cronk)—to 21,400 feet.

PERSONNEL: Caspar Cronk, Frederick L. Dunn, M.D., John S. Humphreys, John F. Noxon.