

Broad Peak Central from China

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DURING A THIRD SUMMIT ATTEMPT frustrated by bad weather, five of us were trapped for four days at Camp III at 7350 meters. Out of food and fuel, we had no choice. We plowed our way down technically difficult terrain to Advance Base. Jordi Magrinyà and I in particular were in bad physical shape. Jordi kept on down to Base Camp.

Four of us remained at Advance Base at 4400 meters. The atmosphere there was worse than pessimistic, but there flickered a spark of hope. No one uttered a word about the mountain. We had already said it all: the different possibilities, how much time was left, fear that a new attempt would fail. This was our last chance—if the weather would cooperate. Reflexion, concentration, rationalization. Everyone was locked in his thoughts, even forgetting to eat.

Three days before the camels were scheduled to arrive to take us out, the weather cleared. At Base Camp, Jordi would have to persuade the camel drivers not to leave and abandon us. It was August 1. We agreed to climb the upper part of the North Gasherbrum Glacier early in the afternoon when the sun no longer baked the east face. This was a zone of cavernous crevasses; we had already had some rude surprises despite always going roped.

On the steep face leading to Camp I, just before the rock section, Enric Dalmau was jumaring ahead of me. I heard a thud and violent cursing. What had happened? A grapefruit-sized rock had struck him full on the leg. Luckily nothing was broken. We treated the swelling and the pain in Camp I at 5700 meters, while taking a hot drink and a bite to eat. Soon we continued on to Camp II.

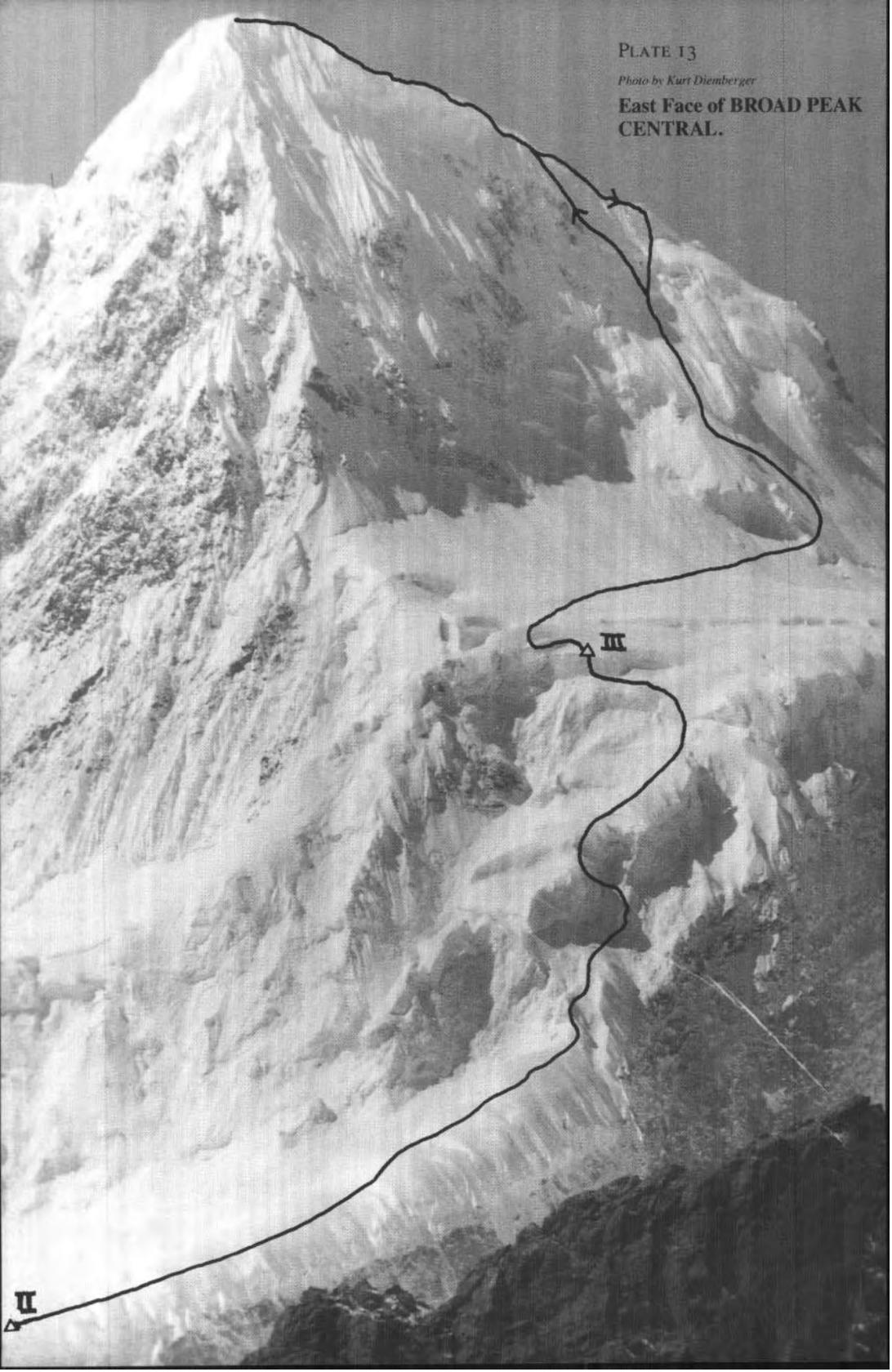
At one in the morning, we got to Camp II at 6350 meters, eight hours after leaving Advance Base. I had looked forward to sinking into my sleeping bag, which I had left open in the tent to dry. What a disappointment! The ice which had formed on the inside of the tent had melted in the recent sunny weather. The resulting swimming pool had frozen in my bag. Alberto Soncini lent me his half sack and a jacket. I shivered for the rest of the night sandwiched between him and Lluís Ráfols.

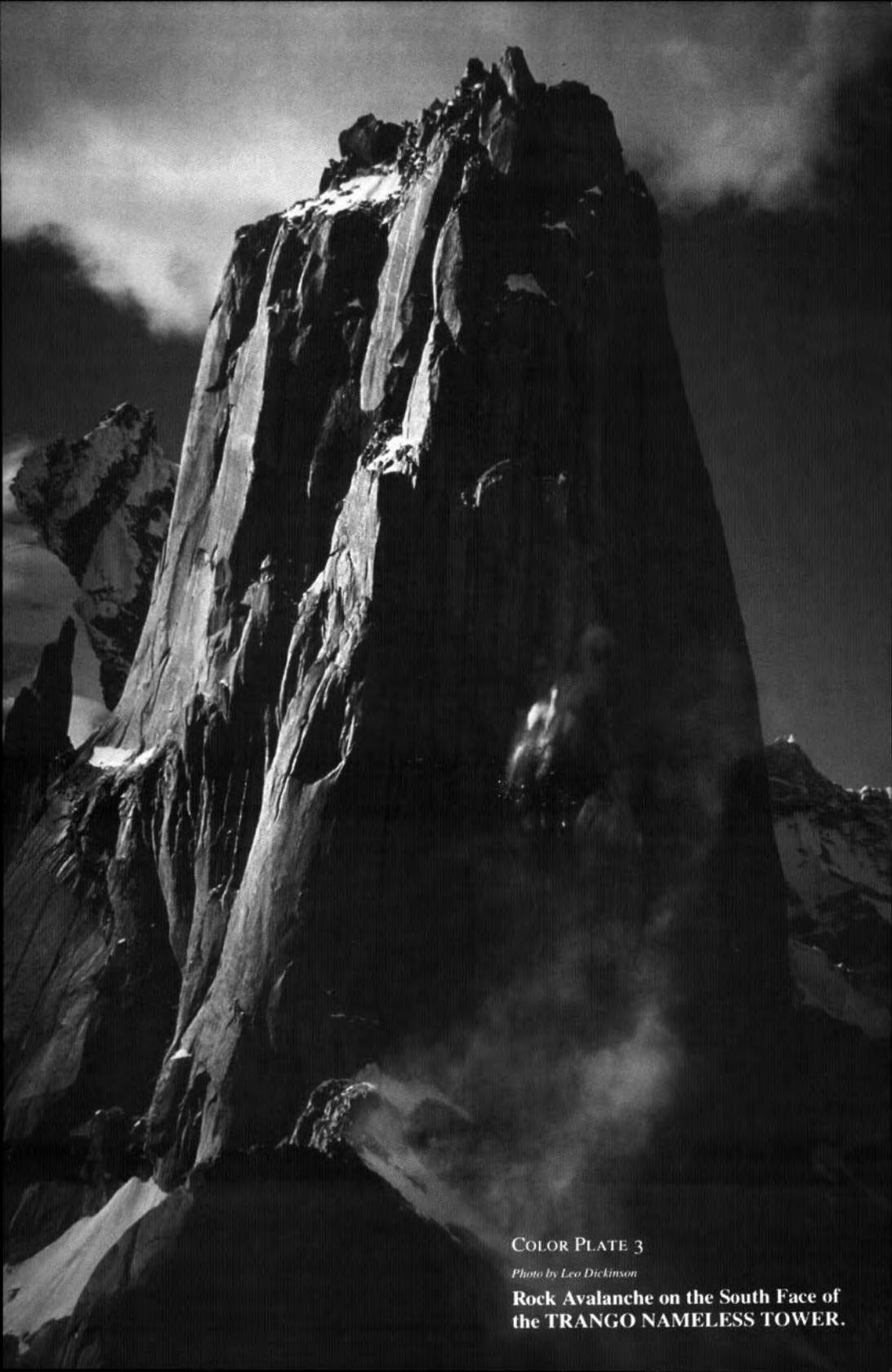
On August 2, the weather continued to be fine. We first had to climb those fatiguing 1000 meters to Camp III at 7350 meters. The route through and over the séracs was complicated and technically difficult. On previous tries, we had

PLATE 13

Photo by Kurt Diemberger

**East Face of BROAD PEAK
CENTRAL.**





COLOR PLATE 3

Photo by Leo Dickinson

**Rock Avalanche on the South Face of
the TRANGO NAMELESS TOWER.**

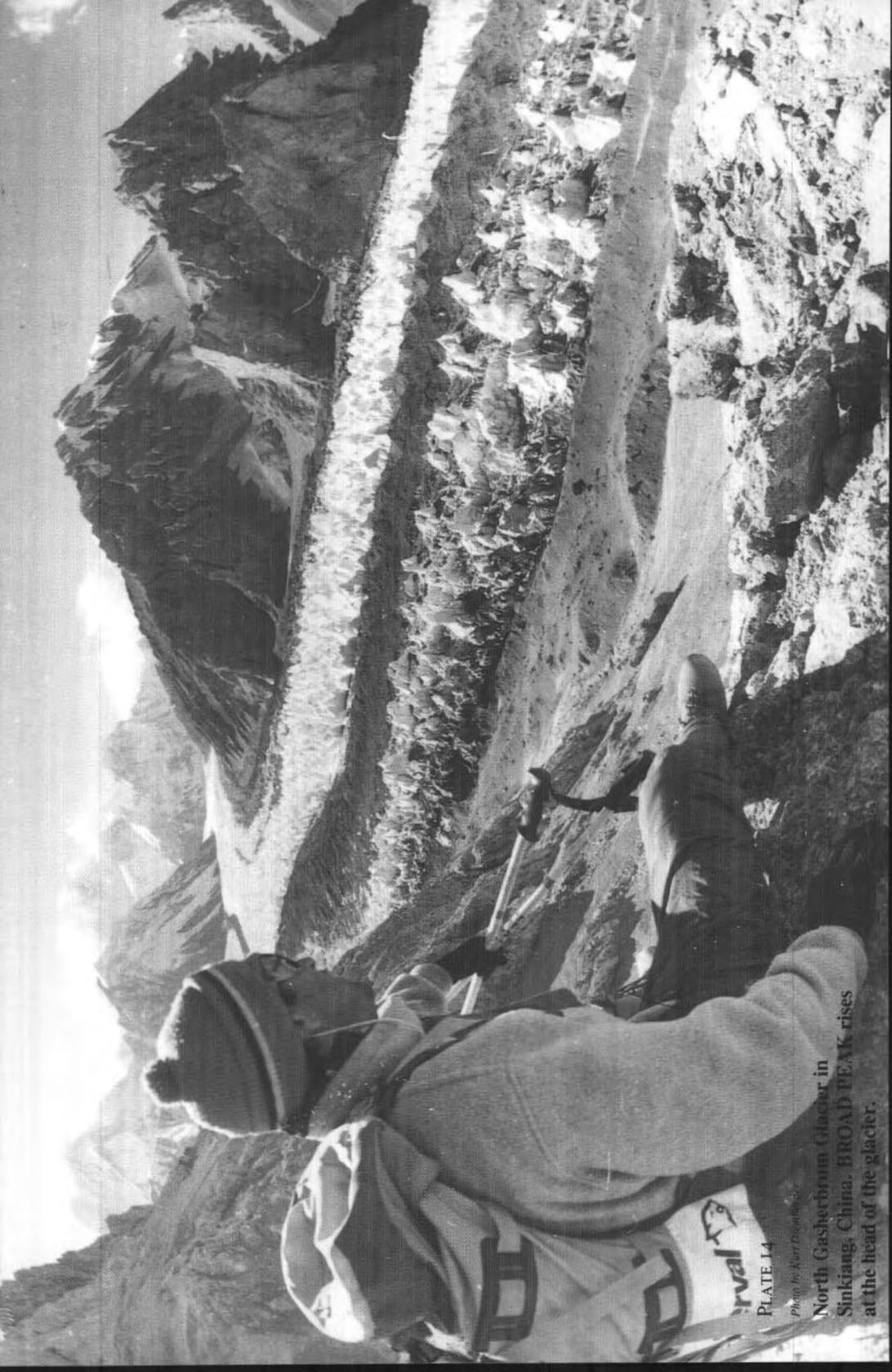


PLATE 14

Photo by Kerr Doughty

North Gasherbrum Glacier in
Sinkiang, China. BROAD PEAK rises
at the head of the glacier.

left rope fixed on the hardest and steepest places, which included spots of 70° ice. On the first two attempts, we had not pushed through to the plateau but had placed "Camp II½" short of where we wanted our highest camp. On the third attempt, we finally had moved to Camp III, a safer place some 150 meters higher, on the plateau above the séracs, which gave us the most difficult climbing on the mountain, but all food and fuel there had been used up.

Above Camp II½, we reached the ridge crest and out of the fog emerged a wide crevasse full of chaotic blocks of ice. Dominating the crevasse was a 30-meter-high, vertical ice wall which looked at first glance unclimbable. Lluís immediately attacked it, while Enric belayed and I filmed. Alberto reconnoitered in vain for other possibilities up the 90° wall. Lluís continued up the ice on artificial aid, no mean feat at 7300 meters. Finally the ice cliff was split by an ice chimney, which gave access to Camp III at 7350 meters. The campsite was buried under more than a meter of snow. While searching for the camp, one of the tents was ripped to pieces by crampons. Luckily, we had brought a replacement. We did not get the camp set up again until late that night. The next morning, we were incapable of an early start.

Lluís preferred resting by exploring the plateau. The other three of us found ourselves around midday at the base of the final wall with a burning sun that was frying us. However, long wisps of clouds began to appear in the sky up at about 11,000 meters, no guarantee of continuing good weather. We halted, drank something and discussed plans. Alberto and Enric opted for going for the summit that same day. I agreed, although we had not foreseen this possibility. We realized that it would mean an unprotected bivouac, completely without gear. Broad Peak was offering us a terribly hard opportunity but we wanted to take advantage of it. I called Lluís by walkie-talkie who immediately proposed to cross the "plateau" and join us. Our tracks let him catch up to us before we got to the final difficulties. He joined us just before dark.

We were now on Broad Peak Central's uppermost northeast face, which was furrowed by several 65° to 70° couloirs. We four, now reunited and roped, sought the most direct and safest way to the summit. As night fell, we climbed in the light of our headlamps. The batteries of mine had given out the night before, but the others still worked for a while. Then the cold got to Alberto's and Enric's. We kept on by the light of Lluís'. That too finally gave out and we continued in black obscurity. We placed and removed ice screws by feel and climbed by instinct.

It was two o'clock in the morning. At 8000 meters, we had just surmounted the last ice pitch and sensed that we had emerged on a wide and gently angled ridge that almost seemed like a plateau. We didn't have to think twice to grub a small platform out of the ice. At first the wind caressed our faces, but soon our bodies were shivering till our bones rattled. From time to time, they called us from Base Camp on the walkie-talkie. The hours stretched out to eternity.

When morning finally came, we took stock. We were on the edge of a plateau that rose gently to the summit a few meters higher. We looked at our watches. It was seven o'clock Beijing time, but only four A.M. in Pakistan. The first rays of

COLOR PLATE 4

Photo by Kurt Dremlberger

The East Face of BROAD PEAK.



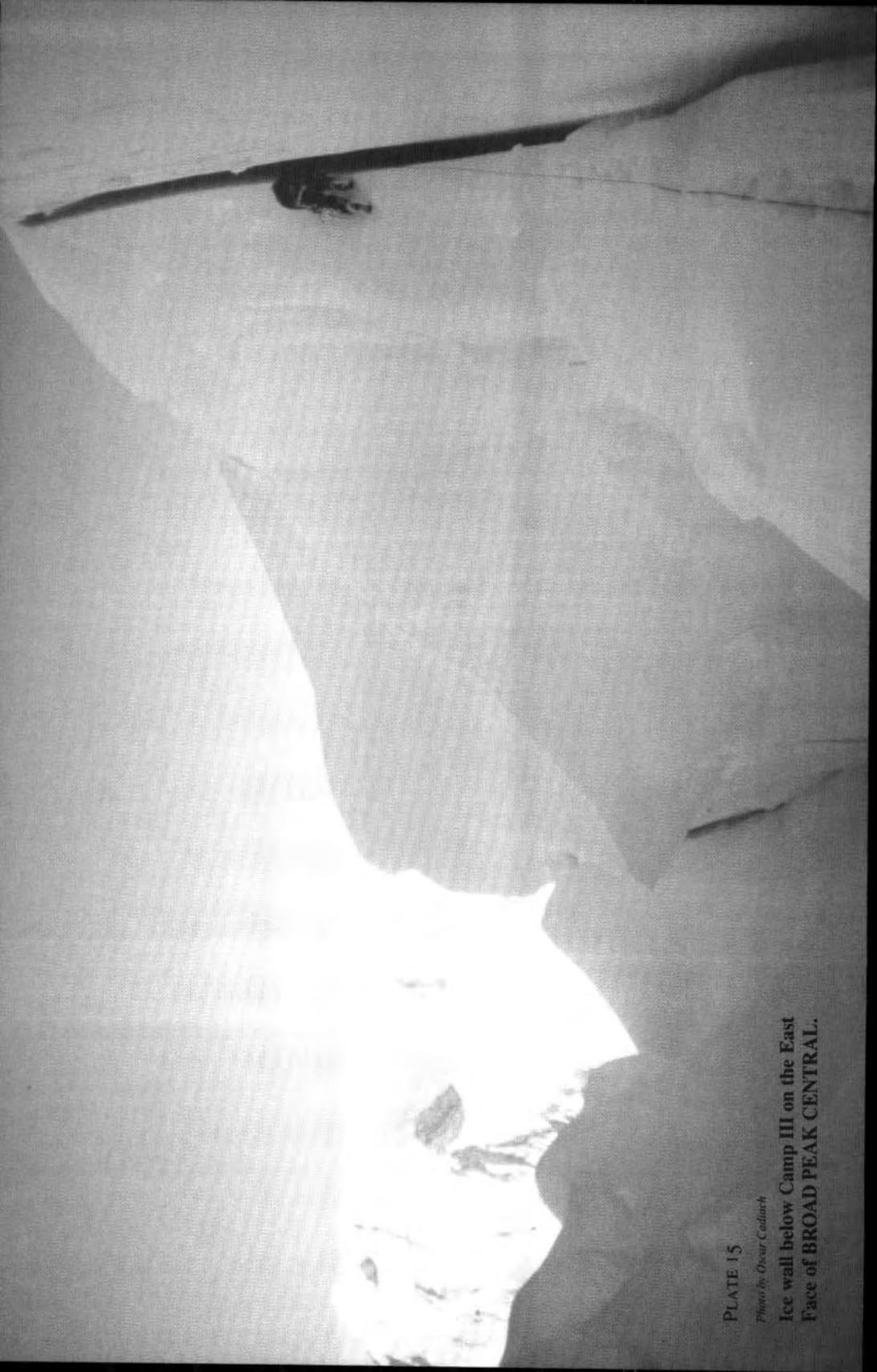


PLATE 15

Photo by Oscar Cadiz

Ice wall below Camp III on the East
Face of BROAD PEAK CENTRAL.

the sun tentatively shone on our backs, but they gave no warmth. The wind left us stiff and rigid. Like zombies, we got to our feet, plowed through by the cold, and began the first and the last steps upwards. Slowly, at the end of a few minutes, we stepped onto the summit. We felt nothing special, or rather, yes, we felt the cold! K2 behind us; the main summit of Broad Peak ahead of us. There we could make out tracks, yesterday's perhaps. The Gasherbrums. We were looking at them with our own eyes . . . and from our summit! Finally! It was incredible. Before calling on the radio, I huddled to protect myself from the wind and to catch my breath. Down there, our companions were jubilant; up here an embrace meant it all!

We were neither hungry nor thirsty. Everything in our packs was frozen. So as not to get out of practice, we had bivouacked nearly on the summit. We knew it was dangerous to take off our gloves for photos, but finally we did it . . . one, two, three . . . Let's get going. The clouds will catch up with us. They already cover the Baltoro Glacier, Concordia, the Godwin Austen Glacier. They threaten to envelop everything and quickly.

We didn't start the descent on the ascent route, not wanting to rappel down where we had climbed. We lost altitude, heading for the north peak. Soon we felt recovered from that -30°C bivouac without sleeping bags, stove or drink.

We slabbed around a gendarme and came back onto the face, but not before we had seen yellow tents at the Pakistani K2 Base Camp, perhaps belonging to the Russians or Mexicans. It came to our minds that we should cross the Sella Pass to visit them and offer them some of our food in exchange for caviar, titanium ice screws or a bottle of tequila. We knew we couldn't, since the camels were awaiting us and the camel drivers had issued an ultimatum: they would wait only until seven A.M. on August 6.

We halted in a hollow, sun-lit and windless, to eat a bite. We took off face-masks and mittens. We tried to call Base Camp on the walkie-talkie, but the batteries had gone dead. The sky clouded over and it began to snow. Nonetheless, we found a passage at 7800 meters that led us to our tracks of yesterday. To get there, Lluís and I set up a 25-meter rappel on a sérac. Since the anchor hardly seemed secure, I set in another one. I got set to descend. Uaaahhh! The ice screws popped out and I fell head over heels onto some snow blocks that kept me from plunging over the edge. I shouted up to my companions that they had better fix the anchor.

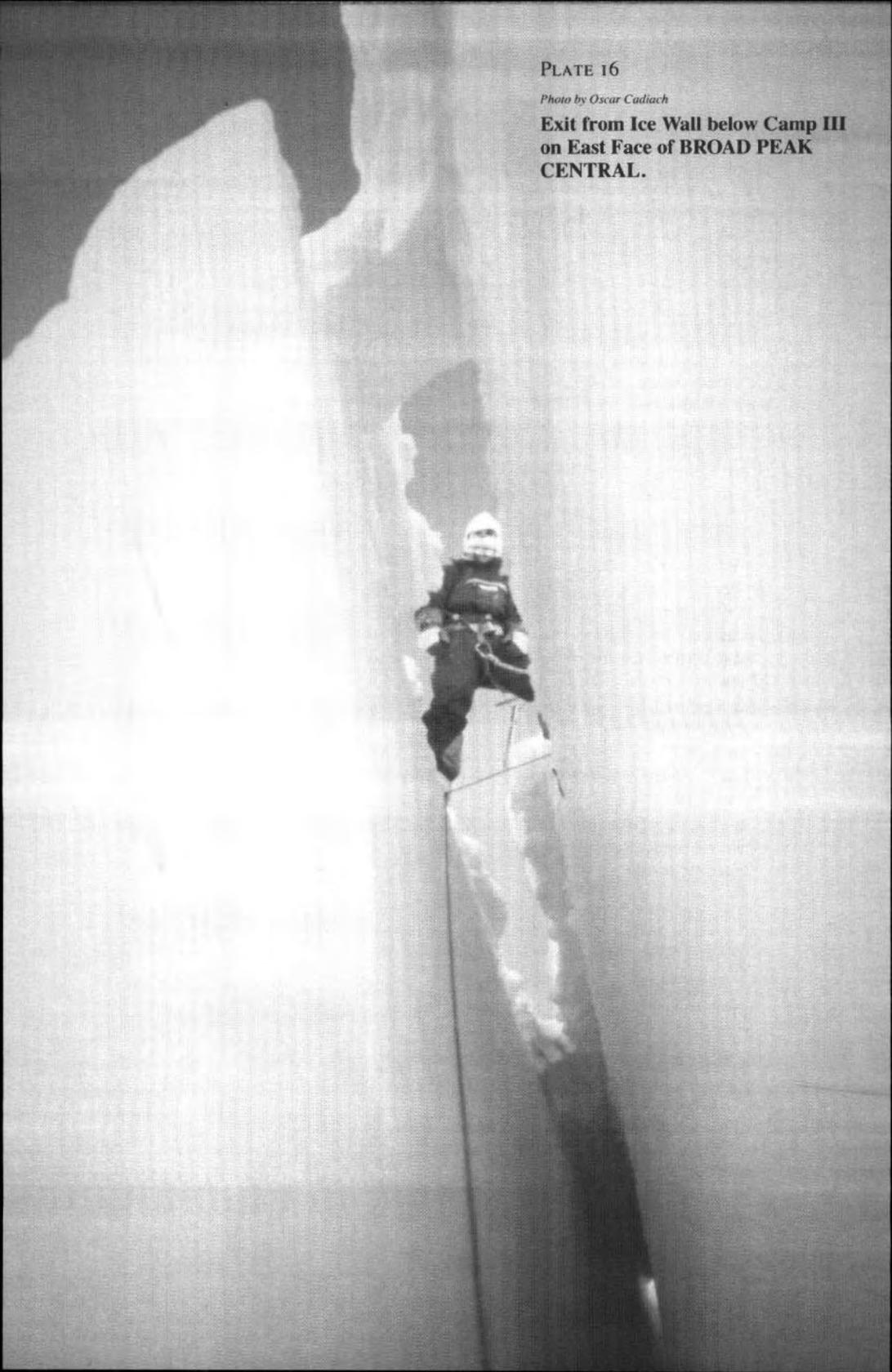
Despite our exhaustion and the bad weather, we descended to the "plateau," where we met the Sherpas. We picked up Camp III and got to Camp II just before dark.

Finally, the four of us could rest in a tent, drink and shelter ourselves in down bags. The next morning, one of our companions discovered a hornets' nest in his feet, deep frostbite. But we had to keep on down. By afternoon, we were at Advance Base. With 20-kilo packs, the walk down the glacier to Base Camp was torture, but we made it in the moonlight by five in the morning. We embraced Jordi Magriñà, Kurt Diemberger, Jesús Elena and radio-operator Joan

PLATE 16

Photo by Oscar Cadiach

**Exit from Ice Wall below Camp III
on East Face of BROAD PEAK
CENTRAL.**



Gelabert, as well as our interpreter Zhang and our liaison officer Thong La, who had arrived with the camel caravan.

As a prize, the camel drivers had brought a water melon from Kashgar. But as a punishment, they made us continue on for eight hours to Durbin Jungle, where the Chinese helpers provided us with a sumptuous banquet.

We finally began to get the idea that Broad Peak was giving us a beautiful memory, a dream that had taken faith and will-power to make into reality.

Chronology:

June 6, 1992. Departure from Islamabad, Pakistan for Khunjerab Pass and Kashgar.

June 9. Arrival in Kashgar.

June 11. Arrival at Quqia and the Mazar Pass, where the camel caravan started.

June 16. Crossed the Aghil Pass (4800 meters).

June 17. Base Camp established on the side of the North Gasherbrum Glacier at 4350 meters, higher than in 1991.

June 28. Advance Base established at 4850 meters.

July 7. Camp I established at 5750 meters.

July 10. Camp II established at 6300 meters.

July 11. First summit attempt stopped at Camp II by bad weather.

July 14. Second summit attempt halted at Camp II½ (7200 meters) by bad weather.

July 19 to 27. Third summit attempt in which the route to the Camp III at 7350 meters was worked out. Stopped by lack of food and bad weather.

August 1 to 5. Climb to the summit.

August 5 to 11. Return with camel caravan to Mazar Pass.

[See also the report of the 1991 reconnaissance in *AAJ, 1992*, pages 268 to 270.]

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Karakoram, Xinjiang, China.

NEW ROUTE: Broad Peak, c. 8016 meters, 26,300 feet. Third ascent via a new route from the North Gasherbrum Glacier via East Face and then Northeast Face. Summit reached on August 4, 1992 (Cadiach, Dalmau, Ráfols, Soncini).

PERSONNEL: Jordi Magrinyà, leader, Oscar Cadiach, Enric Dalmau, Jesús Elena, Lluís Ráfols, Joan Gelabert, radio operator, *Spanish*; Alberto Soncini, *Italian*; Kurt Diemberger, *Austrian*, who carried on considerable geographical exploration in the region; Tenzing, Nawang and Mingma, *Sherpas*.