

TWO MOUNTAINS
AND A RIVER

H. W. TILMAN



Looking west from camp on south-west spur of Rakaposhi

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Foreword

Gerda Pauler

MY LOVE FOR THE HIMALAYA AND CENTRAL ASIA goes back to the 1980s, and more than twenty journeys have led me to these regions up to now. Whenever there had been time left at the end of a trip I used to bide my time in local bookshops looking for travel accounts; preferably old ones. On one of these occasions I bought *When Men and Mountains Meet* (1946) yet though I enjoyed reading the book it never struck me to look for others written by Harold William ‘Bill’ Tilman. Today, I have to admit that this omission was a big mistake, and if I was asked to describe *Two Mountains and a River* with one word only I would say: outstanding.

However, what makes a travel account an outstanding one? It was not before the age of thirty that Tilman’s career as a mountaineer and explorer started. Together with his friend Eric Shipton they soon became the ‘great climbing duo of the interwar years’ and they attempted or climbed several mountains in Africa before moving the focus to the Himalaya. Although Tilman either led or took part in remarkable expeditions (first ascent Nanda Devi, and leading a Mount Everest Expedition where he and three others reach 8320m) *Two Mountains and a River* is virtually free of pointing out any of these achievements. This lack of flaunting himself makes Tilman the most likable person, who allows the reader to join him as an equal partner on an extraordinary journey. Whereas many climbing writers (or writing climbers) revel in self-centred, lengthy descriptions of ascents or explorations, Tilman, who probably led one of the most adventurous lives of the twentieth century, shows humbleness and understanding for people around him; even for those who make life difficult or miserable for him. Tilman—the silent man.

Language fascinates me, and more than once I stopped reading a book because I deemed an author's vocabulary or wording dull, repetitive or inadequate. Tilman's vocabulary is wide yet his language is far from being flowery, pompous or overdone. For every single detail or situation he describes he employs the right expression or tone. As a result, Tilman does not get lost in lengthy portrayals of events but takes the reader along his way at the most pleasant pace. Additionally, he shows a high level of knowledge regarding quotes that supplement his narration perfectly without seeking to attract attention by puffiness.

The most striking characteristic however, is Tilman's sense of humour in even the most demanding and challenging situations. Yet, set against the backdrop of the hardship he had to endure in both World Wars, it clearly needs more than a heavy backpack, a rifle-waving local warlord or a seemingly endless climb to throw a man like Tilman off balance. I had a couple of hearty laughs and smiled my way through 250 pages.

To use Bob Comlay's words: 'He (Tilman) left a legacy of some of the finest travel books ever written.' *Two Mountains and a River* is one of them.

Preface

IN THE OPINION OF DR JOHNSON “the adventurer upon unknown coasts and the describer of distant lands is always welcomed as a man who has laboured for others”. To one who generally has travelled to please only himself this is a reassuring thought, and in the hope that it is true I have here described some distant lands visited in 1947.

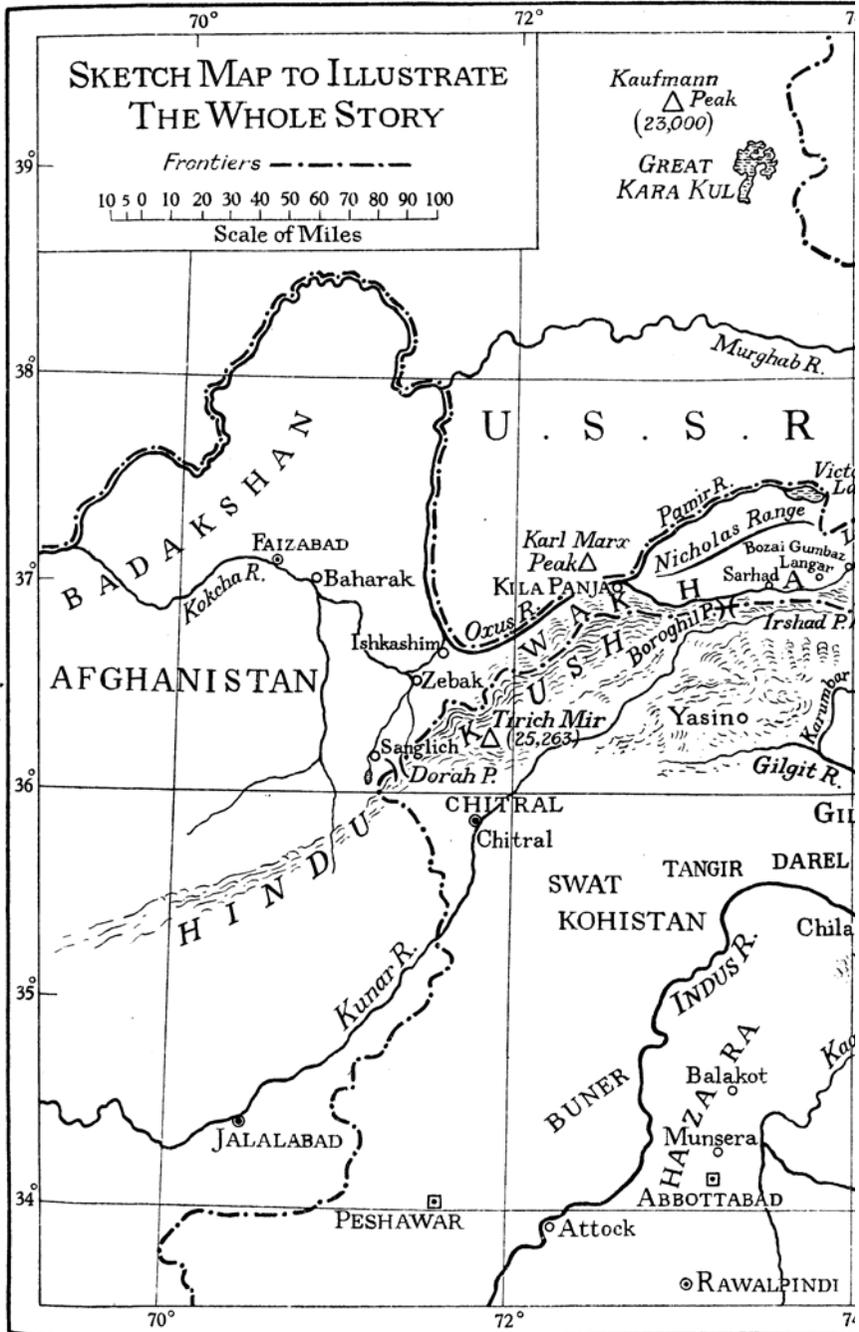
The reader will notice a remarkable difference between Robert Kappeler’s photographs (the majority of the first twenty-three plates) and those of the author, and had he been with us to watch the painstaking, methodical eagerness of the one, and the slap-dash, snap-happy carelessness of the other he would not be surprised. Nevertheless, lack of skill and care is not the sole reason for the poor results, for there was a defect in my camera. But the discovery of this, like most of the important discoveries of one’s life, was made too late.

I am once more indebted to Dr R.J. Perring for much criticism and help, and to R.T. Sneyd, Esq. for revising the proofs; also to J.M.K. Vyvyan, Esq. for the Pl. 15 photograph.

H.W.T.

Barmouth

1948



Map 1: The Whole Story



FOOD AND EQUIPMENT

THE WORST PART OF A WAR, as many of us are beginning to realise, is the end. For the majority war can be at worst an inconvenience and may even be advantageous; but just as vice and indulgence often result in disease and poverty, war has after-effects no less dreadful. And we are the less prepared to withstand the shock of these effects because while war is in progress our political prophets, amateur and professional, feel it their duty to keep up our spirits with words of present hope and, more particularly, future comfort—pie in the sky, in fact. In the late war, though careless talk, as it was called, about military matters was almost indictable, anyone was free to indulge in careless talk about the new and better world which would emerge refined, as they put it, from the crucible of war. And both those old enough to know better and those young enough to think more cheerfully availed themselves of this licence.

For many, therefore, life became even more earnest, almost a crusade; they returned from the war resolved to better not only themselves but their unfortunate fellows. Not all, however, were taken in by this talk of a new heaven and a new earth. Some had heard it before during an earlier and better war and were therefore sceptical, while others although not content were prepared to put up with the old. These, the minority, feeling that standing still was better than progress in the wrong direction, and mindful of the words of Ecclesiasticus, 'be not over busy in thy superfluous works', and who were too old, perhaps, to change or too stupid to see the need of change—these, instead of looking about for a new reel, made what pathetic haste they could to pick up the broken threads of their pre-war lives. Among these modern Bourbons, so to speak, I counted myself, and my survey of the war-shattered world in the autumn of 1945 was directed naturally to the Himalaya, to the ways and means of getting there, and to the chances of finding like-minded survivors with the same extravagant ideas. So

loud and all-prevalent was the din raised by the planners of the new world that it was hardly possible for me to avoid absorbing something of the spirit of the times, so that I did feel some slight uneasiness at attempting to do once more what I wanted to do as opposed to what the mandarins might expect me to do. But I argued as Falstaff did about stealing, it was my vocation, 'and 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation'.

Just as after the first war, when one took stock, shame mingled with satisfaction at finding oneself still alive. One felt a bit like the Ancient Mariner; so many better men, a few of them friends, were dead:

And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

But casualties were not solely responsible for the absence of like-minded companions. Though interest in mountaineering and exploration was, or seemed to be, greater than ever, I could find no one who was either brazen enough to turn his back on the promised land or who was not indispensable to a planned economy. Still, if one is bent on travel or exploration rather than on mountaineering, provided one has the strength of will or the prudence to resist the challenge of the higher peaks, it is practicable to wander in the Himalaya without other companions than Sherpas. In 1946 I would gladly have done this but there were more serious hindrances to be overcome.

In 1946 England could be compared to the married state—those who were out (most of the Services) wishing frantically to get in, while many who were in wished as much to get out and found it devilish hard. For a few months in the beginning of 1946 I fluttered about like a bird in a cage beating my head vainly against the bars of shipping offices which had no ships, stores which had no equipment, and export and currency regulations which would not yield. My reward in the end was but one short flutter to Switzerland, official negligence or short-sighted planning having temporarily left that door of the cage open.

Early in 1947, as would-be travellers will remember, there was a kind of false dawn before darkness descended again; the bonds were slightly eased while fresh knots were being tied, and the Continental traveller having been given enough rope duly hanged himself. Travel at home and abroad became easier that spring and summer, and Mr

Bevin's generous vision of a world of visa-less travel had in one or two countries been realised. Shipping firms when asked for a passage no longer laughed sardonically, but deigned to accept £10 in return for a single comfortless passage to Bombay under more or less military discipline in a 'dry' trooper; equipment of a kind could be ordered and even obtained if several months' grace was given; if it was to be taken abroad no coupons were needed, while pemmican, as I belatedly discovered, was not rationed. By 1947 great numbers of VIPs, the chief obstacle to private travel, had been redistributed or recalled, either to gratify some distant fragment of the dumb herd with their presence or to leave it to bemoan their loss, so that at length the ordinary man by cunning, luck, or impudence, stood some chance of having his wants attended to.

By 1947 my modest arrangements for a journey to one of the less well-known parts of the Karakoram were all but complete—passage booked, equipment ordered, and three Sherpa porters engaged. The Survey of India had promised to arrange for a surveyor to accompany me, for in this utilitarian age it is more than ever necessary to have some scientific or quasi-scientific purpose—to assume a virtue though you have it not. If one wants to go to the North Pole to collect cosmic dust, to the bottom of the sea for globigerina ooze, or to Patagonia to count the number of albinos, money and every facility are readily available. But an aimless wanderer is not pleasing to the mandarins. The only hitch in my arrangements was that permission to go through Kashmir had not yet been received from the authorities at Srinagar.

The porters had been engaged through our old friend and companion of many expeditions, Angharkay, who had now blossomed out as a transport agent in Darjeeling, fertilised no doubt by the numbers of Americans and British who had visited Darjeeling and Sikkim during the war. Through him ponies, porters, cooks, and anything else needful could be obtained, but unluckily neither he himself nor any porter that I knew was available this year. Many were engaged, some were absent, and, according to Angharkay's report, drink and the devil had done for the rest; for the Sherpa is not a perfect specimen of economic man—what he gets he spends, usually on drink or gambling. To this rule Angharkay is an exception, but then as his record shows he has many other qualities not usually found in Sherpas. This

year he and twenty other Sherpas were going to Sikkim and eastern Nepal with a large party, the members of which had not to disguise themselves as scientists for they were the thing itself. The flora, fauna, entomology, morphology, and geology of Sikkim having been exhaustively examined, there was left only the snow, and this they were going to measure.

In February while waiting impatiently for the expected permission from the Kashmir Durbar, I received an invitation to join two experienced Swiss mountaineers, Hans Gyr and Robert Kappeler, who were going to the Himalaya under the aegis of the 'Schweizerische Stiftung für ausseralpine Forschungen' or 'Swiss Foundation for Mountain Exploration'. This Foundation is a private affair—quite independent of the government—whose purpose is to encourage, organise, and assist the dispatch of mountaineering expeditions to any part of the world. It has financed one expedition in the past, and is in a position to finance others, but naturally prefers that such expeditions should be financially independent. It is primarily concerned with mountaineering rather than scientific exploration. An expedition under the patronage of the Foundation is expected to concede the copyright of all photographs, articles, or books which are the result of the expedition's work to the Foundation. Naturally this arrangement would do little towards meeting the expenses incurred, but the Foundation is fortunate in having wealthy backers. In 1939 it was financially responsible for a very successful expedition to the Garhwal Himalaya. This year under its auspices one expedition went to Garhwal, and ours, for which we paid, to the Gilgit region with the ambitious project of an attempt upon Rakaposhi (25,550 ft.). One criticism I have of the Foundation, and it is shared by my two Swiss companions, is that it has a weakness for publicity, especially for advance publicity. Quite apart from the ethics of mountaineering it is bad policy. It is a rash marksman who calls his shots, announces which particular coco-nut he is shying at—the wise man keeps his own counsel. So when going to the Himalaya it is foolish to broadcast one's intentions, for after the event it is not easy to describe an unsuccessful attempt on a mountain as a mere reconnaissance.

Having received this tempting invitation before my own arrangements were completely cut-and-dried I was in a quandary; whether

to accept and thereby give up my own plans or to refuse and then possibly find that I had lost both opportunities. When presented with the choice of two evils one usually finds that one gets both. To have to choose between two proffered benefits is less frequent and more difficult; one never can have both and whichever one chooses there will always be a lingering regret after the other. To have one's cake and eat it, or to ride two horses (both with equal chances) in the Derby, are well-known examples of this particular vanity of human wishes.

In this instance, though the side-issues were many, the choice was roughly between mountain exploration and mountaineering on the grand scale, between something which might be of use by enlarging in a minute degree the sum of geographical knowledge and something which would be perfectly useless to anyone including the people who did it. A choice, too, between care-free license and responsibility, for in the one there would be only myself and the Sherpas to consult and please, while in the other, as the only climber with Himalayan experience, I would be responsible for anything that might happen, good or bad. Mountaineering and mountain exploration are very much alike and in the course of an expedition the one frequently merges into the other. They might be compared to an omelette and scrambled eggs, the ingredients are precisely the same, one is perhaps a higher form of art than the other, and it frequently happens that what was meant to be an omelette turns out to be scrambled eggs and vice versa. To explore mountains one must climb and to climb an unknown mountain one must first explore. Perhaps the essential difference is that in mountain exploration strenuousness, hardship, and peril, can be increased or decreased at will, whereas in high climbing these present pains and retrospective pleasures are unavoidable. Their degree and intensity varies with the height and difficulty of the chosen mountain, but such things are then implicit in the enterprise and cannot be lessened or avoided without giving up.

Since a bird in the hand is worth two elsewhere my decision was made easier by the lack of any reply from Kashmir. Having delayed as long as politeness permitted I settled my doubts by accepting the Swiss invitation, which was no sooner done than permission arrived from Kashmir. By this time, late February, my friends had collected

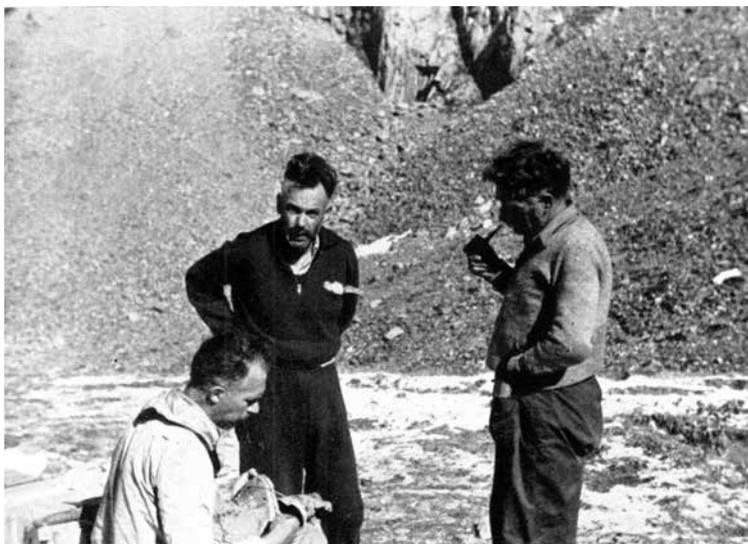
nearly all the equipment and food needed and I was asked to go to Zurich to cast an eye over it.

Without immodesty British mountaineers can, I think, claim to have had as much or more experience of high altitude climbing than any others; I was therefore surprised to find that in the most important matter of tents our experience had not been taken into account. The 'Meade' pattern tent (R.G.S. *Hints to Travellers* prefers the name 'Whymper') with a zip-fastener or a 'sleeve' door has stood the test of several Mt Everest expeditions and many others. For severe conditions of wind, cold, snow (not rain), it is hard to beat, and for simplicity, strength, lightness, is unsurpassed. But in Zurich they seemed not to have heard of it and had taken for their model a tent of French design, shaped like a coffin but of less simple construction than that article and far less easy to get into. One of the virtues of the 'Meade' pattern tent is its simplicity and its willing obedience and docility when being put up with cold hands in a high wind, whereas this Swiss tent by reason of having a fly and a sort of boudoir or ante-room at one end was unnecessarily complicated and difficult to erect or take down. The door fastenings, too, were not likely to be proof against driven snow, which will penetrate anything, even cloth if not tightly woven. For the good reason of economy the porters' tents, which are just as important as those for Europeans, had been borrowed from the Swiss army, but they were quite unsuited for our purpose. The material was thick and heavy, the poles were long, heavy, unjointed alpenstocks, while there was a door at either end secured only with buttons; one door in a tent is an unfortunate necessity, two are a disaster. Hannibal, I should say, or at any rate Napoleon, had probably used similar tents on their expeditions. For these I substituted a 'Logan' tent for the porters and took also three of my own 'Meade' tents. The 'Logan' tent I had first used with the Anglo-American Nanda Devi party from whom I had understood that it was a pattern designed and developed in Alaska, but it was not unknown in India for I read in *Hints to Travellers* that it was used by a Survey of India party in the Pamirs as early as 1913. Weighing only half as much again as the 'Meade', it holds four instead of two and is in many other ways as good.

It was impossible to quarrel with the sleeping-bags which were of real eider-down, so hard to come by now in this country, and were



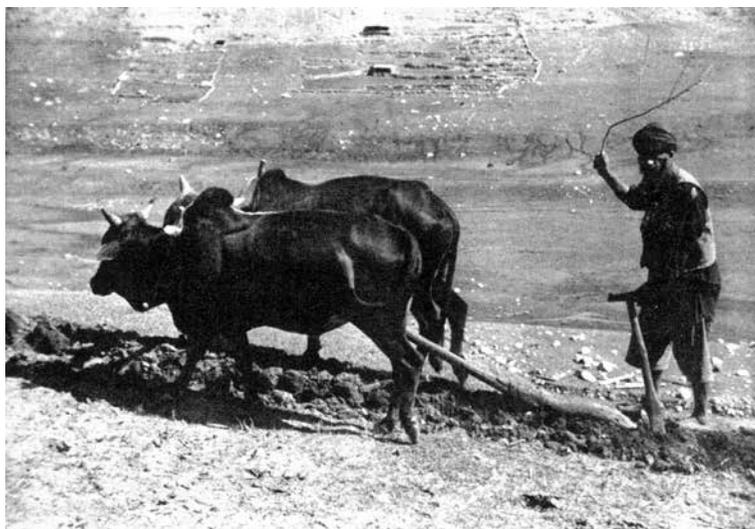
Hans Gyr, Angdawa, Angtingit, Phurba, Robert Kappeler



Campbell Secord, Gyr, Tilman



The escort in the Kagan valley



Ploughing, Kagan valley

very warm and light. The rubber mats, which are used for insulation under the sleeping-bag, were thicker, lighter, and spongier than ours. This of course, is all to the good, but as their edges had been left unsealed they had also the absorptive capacity of a sponge which was all to the bad. The other items were all good and there was little to criticize except the variety and the quantity. Nothing had been forgotten except the great doctrine of 'the Minimum', taught and practised by one or two Himalayan pundits, but at Zurich regarded hardly at all, certainly not as inspired revelation not lightly to be departed from. The doctrine of 'the Minimum' is implicit in the name and is simply the logical expansion of the precept (which, by the way, is a Spanish proverb) that 'a straw is heavy on a long journey'. As I count myself one of these pundits, this was as great a shock to me as it has been to other prophets who have found their teaching ignored. Greater men, on less provocation, might have shaken the dust of Zurich from off their feet, but on the expedition I was in that embarrassing position of guest, or at least paying guest, in which it is not easy to set about one's host's furniture, throwing an armchair or an occasional table out of the window on the slender grounds of superfluity. However, I effected some trifling reductions, guaranteed to prejudice neither our comfort nor our cumbersome-ness, and resigned myself sorrowfully to totting up the weights of the many packages—a list whose contents occupied some dozen sheets of quarto paper. It is a good working rule that an expedition that cannot organise itself on an ordinary sheet of notepaper, or, if all members are thorough-paced 'scrappers and baggers', on the back of an old envelope, is bound to suffer from the effects of too much organisation. That I had applied the axe very tentatively was evident when we reached India, when at Karachi, Abbottabad, and Gilgit, we left behind us a tell-tale line of dumps.

Crampons and skis were to be taken, though personally I have never had occasion in the Himalaya to use either. The crampons were made of some specially light alloy with ten short spikes. I suppose such things will always justify their awkward prickly presence as an insurance against the possibility of having to climb a long steep slope of very hard snow or a short piece of ice on the final bid for the summit. Anywhere below that level steps will always have to be cut to safeguard

the porters who are not likely to have had the experience necessary for the use of crampons.

The use of skis for mountaineering in the Himalaya is a debatable point. They have been used on high mountains, I believe, only on two occasions. First on Kamet (25,447 ft.) in 1931 by Mr R. L. Holdsworth (an expert skier) whose use of them is alluded to in the *Himalayan Journal* (vol. iv) as follows: 'The use of ski by Holdsworth was fully justified. As far as Meade's Col (23,500 ft.) he was able to use them throughout the whole route with the exception of the rock face between Camps 3 and 4, and by ski-ing at 23,500 ft. he must surely have created a record for high altitude ski-ing. Furthermore, on the descent he was able to take his frost-bitten feet in one day from Camp 3 to the base, whereas others similarly affected, but not so fortunate, were compelled to drag them down in two long and tiring marches.' It will be noted that this benedictory paragraph while saying 'the use of ski was fully justified', says nothing of whether the carrying of them from Ranikhet to the mountain, a journey which took twenty-seven days, was also fully justified. In Mr Smythe's account of the expedition in the *Alpine Journal*, vol. XLIII, although the unregretted absence of raquettes is mentioned, there is no reference to skis except in the bald chronological summary at the end of the article. One cannot help feeling that if Mr Smythe had been impressed by the possibilities of skis for high mountaineering he would have remarked on it.

They were used again in 1934 in the Karakoram Himalaya by André Roch, a noted Swiss mountaineer who accompanied Professor Dyhrenfürth and his international cinema-mountaineering party. In their ascent of Baltoro-Kangri, or the Golden Throne (c. 23,500 ft.), he and his two companions used skis part of the way, and of this Roch remarks: 'Thanks to skis it took us only two and a half hours to reach a point which three days previously had been reached by our companions in five hours.' In conversation Andre Roch told me that at such heights it is impossible to use any other turn than a 'kick-turn', as 'stem' turns or 'Christianias' are too exhausting. But this is of small moment for, contrary to expectation, it is in ascending not descending that skis might be of value in the Himalaya. Provided the slopes of the mountain are not too steep and that one has confidence that they will

be used and enough energy to carry such an awkward burden to the starting point, they should be taken.

In 1934 when Mr Shipton and I were in Garhwal, we did a high-level traverse from Badrinath across the watershed to Gangotri over the névé of several glaciers where we encountered snow conditions in which skis would undoubtedly have kept us somewhere near the surface instead of two or three feet below it; but then our three porters were also indispensable members of the party and more time would have been lost in teaching them how to shuffle along on skis, and of course in digging them out when they fell, than was wasted by floundering along on our feet. In the Karakoram, too, in 1937 when we were crossing the Snow Lake at the head of the Hispar and Biafo glaciers, skis would have added to our pleasure and enabled us to cover more ground; but for many weeks before that the carrying of them would most certainly have detracted from our pleasure and obliged us to cover less ground. But both these instances happened in mountain exploration, when one is necessarily accompanied by several porters, as distinct from high mountaineering. Such conditions could be met, I think, by an invention of Mr Seligman's (author of *Snow Structure and Ski Fields*) which anyone can use without previous instruction. What he calls his 'racket-ski' is about forty inches long and five broad, wider in front than behind, which helps it to rise to the surface at each step. Owing to their shortness and weight, which is only 5 lb., they can be carried easily on the back. They appear to be well worth a trial.

However, having seen some photographs of Rakaposhi I was confident that I for one, being no skier, would not be using them—not even Mr Seligman's—and I did my best to dissuade Gyr and Kappeler, who are both experts, from taking them. In this I not only failed but was persuaded in my turn to address myself seriously to the ski-ing business, for in Switzerland it is a business in every sense of the word. In that country, I imagine, a mountaineer who cannot ski is regarded with pity or with even something more derogatory. In a class apart from the votaries of the 'downhill only' school, are the ski-mountaineers who practise their difficult art not only in winter but in midsummer as well. Late in June 1946 I was the only ski-less mountaineer in the Bétémps hut where a ski club were holding a meet. From there they would climb the Lyskamm on skis, or all but the last

few hundred feet of Monte Rosa, and then whistle down to the hut in some twenty minutes.

In vain I protested the inability of old dogs to learn new tricks—to Davos of all places I had to go to be put through the mill. Before this I had worn rather than used skis for a few hours in the winter of 1945 in the Dolomites, where I had reason to envy the partisans of Forno, a small village south of Mt Marmolada, who seldom wore anything else. To see them hurtling down slopes, dodging in and out of trees, in the middle of the night, while they collected the fruits of a widely scattered 'drop', was instructive and humiliating. In fact in winter snow three or four feet deep the valuable loads scattered over a wide area by errant parachutes would not have been recovered at all but for these men on skis.

The skiers at Davos were quite different from these, though they were no less skilful. To one accustomed in the main to unspoilt mountains the intrusion of commerce so high up their slopes subdued and desecrated with funiculars and ski lifts, the cafés with blaring wireless, and the ascending herd of overdressed women and men, breathing cigarette smoke into each other's faces in the train, was very depressing. Though, in fairness, I must admit that the sight of some of this same crowd descending in what seemed to me to be one suicidal swoop was no less encouraging and exhilarating. To Gyr and Kappeler, whose minds, no doubt, were casting forward to the execution of linked 'Christianias' on the slopes of Rakaposhi, the sight of their future companion's antics must have been equally depressing. Whilst I committed all the known mistakes and a few I had thought out for myself, they would circle round with encouraging cries. To a distant observer they must have appeared like hawks striking at a heron with a broken wing. The skis were duly taken to India, but as I have explained, skis in the Himalaya are no more indispensable than skates, and by the time Gilgit was reached my companions had seen enough to reconcile them to the truth of this. We had carried them far enough.

We were all fitted with specially made boots with the new type of moulded rubber sole which is becoming popular in Switzerland; many Swiss climbers, amateur and professional, seem inclined to change from nailed soles to rubber. Our boots were very stoutly made, perhaps unduly so, for my own size nines weighed nearly 6 lb. They took

longer than usual to break in and the 'expedition' boots became one of our stock jests. I coined the aphorism that an extra pound on the feet is twenty pounds on the back, which though it may not be scientifically correct is a measure of how these boots felt to me. Nevertheless, leather is not wool and it is difficult to have warmth and strength without weight and on the whole these are the most essential qualities. A light pair of boots would be knocked to pieces in a couple of months. I think the rubber sole is very suitable for the Himalaya. With no iron in the boot the chances of cold feet and frost-bite should be lessened, while for boulder-hopping, which occupies most of one's time, they are supreme. They grip well on ice or snow, and though I thought they did not bite quite so well as nails when kicking steps in hard snow, this impression may have been a result of my own diminishing leg power. As regards their use in this country, except for the sake of hotel carpets, I should say that they are unnecessary and possibly a menace, since our rock is so often wet and greasy. One item of equipment new to me was a canvas boot cover reaching well up the ankle which, if well fitted, obviates the use of ankle puttees and keeps the boot dry even in wet snow, a benefit of the greatest value in the Himalaya where there are no drying rooms.

Formerly travel was undertaken to broaden the mind or to acquire culture, but nowadays many people go in search of food. I would not admit that this was our prime motive, but we took a keen interest in the matter as every member of an expedition should. In the exercise of this franchise there is seldom any slackness. Even the mountaineering mystics whom we sometimes read or read of, though they may not like to mention food, are certain to think of it. In 1947 the collection of enough food was, of course, impossible without the granting of special facilities, and it was consoling to find that the Swiss Government, which I had always regarded as a model of unobtrusive sense and efficiency, behaved in this matter much as any other government. Having with reluctance granted a permit for food for four men for five months, at the very last minute it occurred to some official with more perspicuity than his fellows that the loss of this amount might be detrimental to the four million odd Swiss who were not going on an expedition. Peremptory orders were therefore given that all our meat, all the butter, and half the cheese must be left behind. Fortunately our own food

officials, with far more reason to be difficult than the Swiss, played up nobly and granted an export licence for enough butter and cheese to make good the loss. I also increased the amount of pemmican ordered. So many people ask what pemmican is that I might explain that it is a Red Indian ('Cree') word for dried buffalo or caribou meat prepared so as to contain the greatest amount of nourishment in a compact form. As made by them it consisted of the lean parts of meat, dried in the sun, pounded or shredded and mixed into a paste with melted fat in the form of a cake. It appears to keep indefinitely, has a high protein and fat content, and is expensive; it is the standard Arctic sledging ration, eked out with biscuit and chocolate. It is not the same thing as 'biltong', the sun-dried meat prepared by the Boers, or 'boucanned' meat from which the word 'buccaneer' comes. In the seventeenth century the island of Hispaniola (Santo Domingo) was the home of great herds of wild cattle which the natives used to hunt. The meat was dried in the sun without salt and cured in the smoke of a green wood fire. The adventurers who used to provision at Hispaniola learnt from the natives the art of 'boucanning'.

To-day we complain of lack of variety in our food but on Rakaposhi I could have borne with less variety and more solid simplicity. Many travellers, the Swiss among them, believe in the advantages of a highly organised system of food-boxes. In a generous but futile endeavour to please all tastes a little of everything—and the quantities are of necessity small—is put up in 50 lb. boxes, one of which is supposed to feed so many men so many days. Each box is neatly stencilled, with a list of the contents and the dose to be taken pasted inside the lid; and in severe cases of organisation the date and place where any particular box will be eaten is also laid down. The amount of each item being so small, the tins, jars, cartons are the more numerous so that in a 50 lb. box there is only about 30 lb. of food. Naturally, too, the most desirable things are soon spotted, so that by the end of a week one is left with a number of rifled boxes, like so many honeycombs from which the honey has been extracted and about as interesting. Not one of us ever contemplated, much less tried, living on a box for the stipulated number of days. It was the sort of experiment I should not care to see tried—even on a rat. The compilers of such boxes are like the compilers of anthologies, assuming seemingly that no one really knows what he

likes, or that at high altitudes the mind is too sluggish to select and the body too feeble to pile the fruit of one's selection into a rucksack.

The Swiss were remarkable for their devotion to a food beverage with the sinister name of 'Ovosport'. They ate it dry, they drank it neat, and they even committed the solecism of mixing it with their tea. I always mistrust these food beverages which claim, amongst many other things, to quench thirst and satisfy hunger at the same time, for I submit that it is no more possible to do this than it is to blow and swallow at the same time. One eats soup and no one pretends he is thereby quenching his thirst; one drinks beer and no one but the brewer claims that he has therefore dined. Besides 'Ovosport' and other beverages of that type, without which health, strength, or even sleep are hardly to be expected, we had all the usual aids to comfort and well-being. In each box there were no less than twenty different species of food and over forty varieties, though since there was a whiff of the laboratory about some of them it would be more correct to speak of forty chemical combinations. As usual all failed of their effect; the Swiss had complaints ranging from boils to knee, stomach, and eye troubles; Secord, who will be introduced presently, suffered from a consumptive cough; while I had mountaineer's foot—inability at times to put one in front of the other.

Having thus equipped and provisioned the party I must shift the scene to India where our times of arrival were 'staggered' in the modern fashion. I reached Karachi by air on 1 May, the Swiss a week later, and Secord we were not to see until 6 June.