

KOLAHOI.

W. A. W. RUSSELL.

KOLAHOI, at the top of the West Liddar Valley, is undoubtedly one of the finest peaks of Kashmir. Its vast pyramidal summit, commanding the neighbouring tops, rises sharply out of an immense plateau of surrounding glacier, while the lower reaches are protected by steep, heavily crevassed glaciers. It has been ascended a number of times by way of the long east ridge. The usual method of tackling it is from the valley of the West Liddar itself. Two camps are established, one at the glacier snout and the other at about 15,000 feet on the glacial plateau. The east ridge presents about 2,000 feet of rock work before reaching the summit at 17,799 feet.

After a good four weeks of climbing, around Sonmarg and Nilani in the Sindh Valley, we moved over the Zoji La into Ladakh. Using Dras as base we established a camp at 16,000 feet on the little-explored Jarakhesh Glacier. Defeated on the north ridge of the 19,600-foot peak which commands the glacier, through vertical ice at about 1,500 feet from the top, we retreated to the Sindh Valley and then crossed the Yam Har Pass (13,500 feet) into the West Liddar Valley, at the pleasant wooded alp at Lidderwatt. Continuing up the Liddar we were forced to camp at 11,000 feet, about a mile from the glacier snout. Our original intention had been to camp at the small lochan of Dud Nag, some 1,500 feet higher, overlooking the North Glacier. As usual, our troublesome pony wallahs and coolies had staged a minor mutiny, refusing to go any farther. We strongly suspected that this had been inspired by our old ruffian of a headman, Mohammed Butt, whose longing for comfortable camps was now well known to us. The mountain was a grand sight. The North Glacier was hidden from us by the steep sides of the valley but,

towering above the ridge, the mountain stood out as a perfect pyramid.

Leaving our mutineers to pitch the camp, we struck up the valley and took stock of our position from the top of the glacier snout. The north face rose vertically from the glacier, presenting a sheer exposure of over 4,000 feet. The angle of the east ridge looked quite reasonable. We decided to approach it by the extreme west branch of the glacier and to tackle the whole thing in one day. If this failed, there would be no alternative but to bivouac high up on the glacier in a second two-day effort. Returning to camp we were greeted by Mohammed Butt, who atoned for his past sins with a four-course dinner, fit to be served in any first-class London restaurant! This idea of a comfortable camp was not too bad after all. If successful, to-morrow would present us with over 6,700 feet of climbing on ice and rock. Luckily, we had acclimatised ourselves to the altitude on previous ascents. The process had been most unpleasant and mountain sickness and glacier lassitude were still fresh in our memories. On two occasions we had been brought to a halt by our limbs refusing to go any farther. This seems very strange, since Everest climbers have reached a height of 28,000 feet unaided. The whole process is gradual and simply cannot be rushed. After a comfortable night we were rudely awakened by our bearer, Ramzana, at 5 A.M. It was still dark but Kolahoi stood silhouetted against the sky. The top looked very far off.

Setting out at 6 A.M. we moved up the side of the glacier until we were eventually forced to traverse the steep sides of Hiurbagwah, in order to avoid a steep section of the glacier. At this stage we remained unroped since the crevasses were not covered by snow and the angle was easy. Instead of following the west branch right round we struck up a side shoot. At this point we roped up. I led, followed by Ramzana, with Fleming in the rear. A bit of step-cutting was necessary and some crevasses on a steep section were crossed by delicate snow bridges. This route brought us out on the less steep section forming the beginnings of the glacial plateau at about 13,400 feet. A long steady slog

up the now snow-covered glacier took us close to the foot of the east ridge. The ridge seemed very long and the bergschrund looked singularly unpleasant. We decided to cut out the ridge, follow the glacier higher up, and try to force a route on the south face. Ramzana began to tire and drag on the rope and the sun beat down on us, quickly skinning nose and hands. Luckily our faces were protected by a good month's growth of beard. At 16,000 feet we struck up a shallow ice-filled corrie on the south face. Going now was extremely slow. The slope up to the rock forming the south face was a thinly covered ice-slope and this was criss-crossed by a number of gaping crevasses. Belays were unprocurable and we were exceedingly glad to reach the good, firm rock. The bergschrund itself proved easily surmountable.

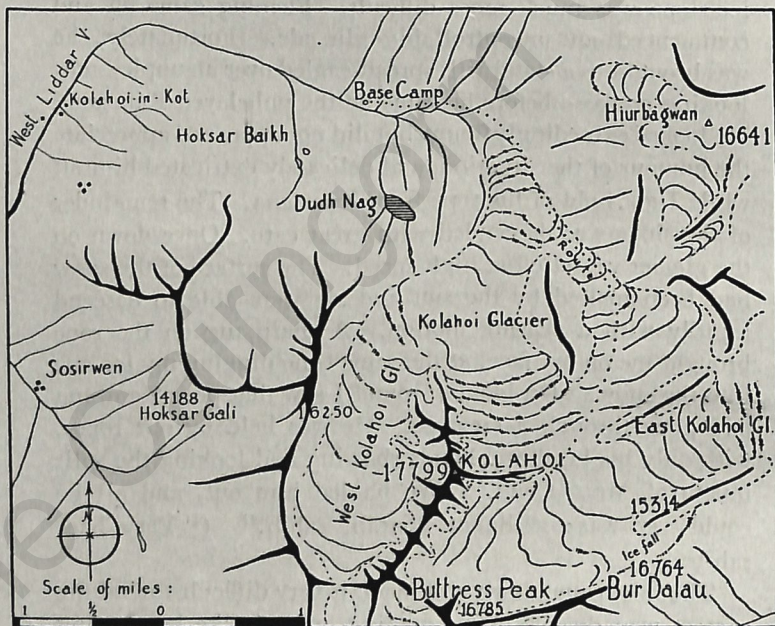
We sat down on a scree-covered shelf. It was now midday and we were at about 16,500 feet. Before us stretched a good 1,300 feet of steep rock. The top section appeared almost vertical but was almost completely devoid of snow. Our thoughts, however, were at this point mainly occupied with our immediate comforts. Fleming managed to eat a hearty lunch, but I could only nibble at a small piece of bully and a few biscuits. So scorching was the sun that we endeavoured to make little hutches of stones in which to hide our faces from the glare. Morale was low! Ramzana was quite *hors de combat*, and Fleming and I were feeling much the worse for wear. Fifteen minutes' rest considerably improved our condition, and when we started again we were reasonably fit. Ramzana was left behind and we were to collect him on the way down. The first section, although quite steep, was fully supplied with holds, and in most places we managed to move together on the rope. Following the course of a shallow couloir we were brought to the foot of the steep section. Luckily, this section was well broken up and, although almost vertical, proved of a moderate to difficult standard. This section, we thought, would bring us out high up on the east ridge, but we were uncertain how much of the ridge still lay before us. On reaching the ridge we were overjoyed to see the unmistakable, snow-capped summit only 50 feet above. Unfortunately the clouds were

now swirling around us and the view was most disappointing. Through the mist we looked down the gross exposure of the north face on to Dud Nag, and below in the valley we could see the position of our camp site. Nanga Parbat and the Karakorums were both completely obscured by thick banks of cloud. We had witnessed excellent views of these fine mountains while climbing on the Jarakhesh peaks.

It was now 2.30 P.M. and, as it grew dark before 8 P.M., we decided to waste no time on the descent. The first part proved to be without undue difficulty, and we were again roped up with Ramzana at 4.30 P.M. The descent of the ice-slope was much more difficult. Fleming came off and commenced an uncontrollable glissade. Fortunately, he was brought to a standstill, spread-eagled over an unpleasant-looking crevasse before he came on the unbelayed Ramzana. He looked exceedingly funny, but did not appear to appreciate the humour of the situation, and delicately extricated himself while I got hold of his rope from Ramzana. The remainder of the slope was descended with great care. Once down on the glacier we set off at high speed. The surface of the snow had been melted by the sun and we were able to descend rapidly with a skating motion. A sharp tug on the rope brought me on my face, at the same time digging my ice-axe into the snow. On looking round I saw that poor Ramzana had gone through a crevasse. He was held by our ropes, with only his head and hands showing and looking the split image of Mr "Chad." We hauled him out, and all he could say was: "Bahut kharab, sahib." ("Very bad, sahib.")

The mist came down and made it very difficult to find the correct way down. After making one mistake by starting down the wrong side shoot, we eventually came out of the mist on the lower glacier, which we descended by our old route. Darkness overtook us on the lower section, and the final part resulted in many spills and much cursing. One hundred yards from our camp we were met by our coolies, led by Mohammed Butt, who were making a great show as a search party. As it had been dark now for some considerable time they had obviously no intention of proceeding farther. They

surrounded us, making a great fuss of undoing our boots and puttees, washing our feet, and bringing us mugs of steaming tea. After a first-class dinner we wasted no time in getting to sleep. The climb had taken fifteen hours of constant ascent and descent. We were well pleased with our day's effort. We had made a second route, which, as our ascent in one day proved, was much quicker than by the east ridge. During the day we had enjoyed every conceivable type of mountaineering of an interesting, if not technically difficult, character. It came as a fine finish to an excellent holiday.



ASCENT OF KOLAHOI

(Kolahoi was first climbed by Kenneth Mason and Dr Ernest Neve on June 28, 1912, by the east ridge, the route now usually taken. Lieut. Russell was apparently not aware, at the time of writing, that the first ascent of the south face was made by Hunt and Brotherhood in July 1935 (*Himalayan Journal*, Vol. VIII, p. 108). For account of first ascent see *Alpine Journal*, Vol. XXVI, p. 407.—ED.)