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BY





## THE ARMY TRAINING EXPEDITION TO THE KARAKORAM, 1959

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Report of a lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on Wednesday, June 15, 1960, Sir Philip Southwell, C.B.E., M.C., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: On your behalf, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome Major Streather, who will be describing an expedition to a part of Asia in which we are particularly interested. Whilst Summit conferences and talks are a little unpopular at the moment, I imagine we shall see, in the illustrated parts of the lecture at any rate, a few summits.

Major Streather joined the Indian Army in 1945 and served with the Chitral Scouts on the North-West Frontier until 1950. He remained with the Pakistan Army after partition. While serving with the Chitral Scouts in 1950, Major Streather climbed Tirich Mir with the Norwegian Expedition, that peak being 25,000 feet plus. He was a member of the American Expedition to K2 in 1953. He reached the summit of Kangchenjunga with the British Expedition in 1955; actually the expedition climbed to a few feet short of the summit, that being sacred to the gods, claimed by the natives to live there. In 1957, Major Streather led the tragic Oxford University Expedition to Haramosh, and in 1959 he led the Army Training Expedition to the Karakoram, of which we are about to hear. He is now serving with the 1st Battalion The Gloucestershire Regiment. In July, Major Streather leaves for Greenland as a member of Sir John Hunt's party which is taking boys there in connection with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

MR. CHAIRMAN, Ladies and Gentlemen,—In these surroundings I should possibly be reading a learned paper to my audience. However, not being a man of letters, I shall not attempt that and, not being a poet, I am not going to attempt to give flowery or philosophical descriptions of the Karakoram. Rather I propose to give what I hope will be a fairly light-hearted account of the Army Training Expedition to that range in the summer of 1959, illustrated with colour slides. I will reminiscence a little about a part of the world many present know much better than I do, although I have been particularly fortunate in that I have been in that area more recently than most of my audience—Pakistan, the North-West Frontier in particular, and more particularly North Kashmir, Gilgit and Baltistan.

As the Chairman has said, I served in Pakistan until the end of 1950, way up in Chitral; I returned in the summer of 1953 and went to K2, and in 1957 went back again to the Karakoram, to Haramosh in the Gilgit area. I was lucky enough to return to the area again in the summer of 1959, on the Army Mountaineering Association Training Expedition, the objects of which were somewhat different from those of most other expeditions. We were not going to try and climb to the summit of any particular peak or conquer anything. As far as I am concerned I am

convinced that that attitude, if it has not already gone, should by now have done so, and that the time has come when we can go to the mountains and enjoy them without being obsessed with the idea of climbing to the top. We wanted to give men an experience of travelling in high and barren country.

The plan was to travel light, moving about in the mountains, climbing as much as possible. It seemed that we could best do this by setting our sights reasonably low, at about 23,000 ft., climbing several peaks and visiting new areas rather than climbing one particular peak. That was the scheme with which the expedition set out. It had been my intention to go to Chitral, where, from the summit of Tirich Mir, the first mountain I climbed in 1950, I had had a wonderful view across the north of Afghanistan down across the Oxus and into Russia. Away to the north there are a number of peaks which had not been climbed until the Italians recently went there. It seemed a good area for our expedition. Unfortunately, because it was so near the Chinese-Russian border, we were not allowed to visit that particular region, and so we switched our goal to the north of Skardu, to the area at the foot of the Chogolungma Glacier, near the Hispar Wall, an area which had not been visited to any extent and which offered a good opportunity for tackling peaks between 17,000 and 23,000 ft. Several glaciers also afforded good scope for travel, and there were plenty of peaks, particularly on the southern side of the Hispar Glacier, which we hoped to climb.

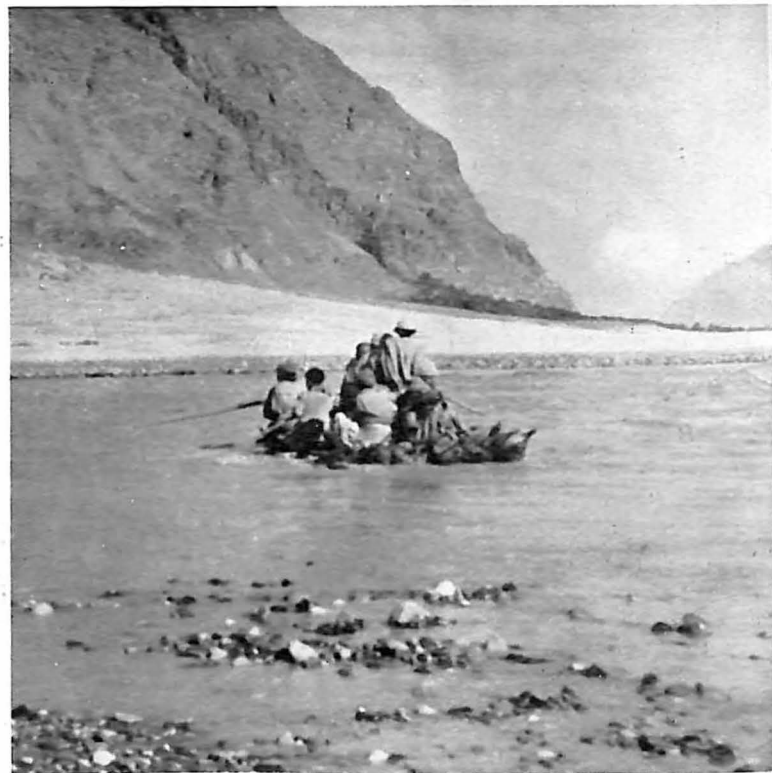
The success of our expedition depended greatly on the co-operation of Pakistan, and we were fortunate in having three Pakistani officers join us. The Pakistanis were extraordinarily kind in providing us with freighter planes in which to fly up from Karachi to Rawalpindi and on up into Skardu before we started our march to the mountains. Skardu was to be our jumping-off place, but we managed, before flying there from Rawalpindi, to get in a quick visit to Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. We were entertained in Peshawar by Major Mohd Yusuf, the Political Resident. In 1957, when our Oxford Expedition had met with an accident on Haramosh, he had been the Resident in Kashmir and had been most helpful in getting our party home again.

I met another old friend in Peshawar who had been in the South Waziristan Scouts when I was serving in Baluchistan. He insisted that we take tea with him in his Khyber village. On arrival there we found a blood feud was in progress between his and a neighbouring village, but that there was a truce that was due to run out that evening, when the battle would start again. When I asked my old friend why he had left the Scouts, he said he found it more profitable to engage in smuggling over the frontier from Afghanistan!

From Rawalpindi we were flown by the Pakistan Air Force up past Nanga Parbat and along the Indus valley to land at a small air-strip in Skardu. I remembered having been there with the Americans in 1953, the year in which the Kashmir issue was reaching one of its climaxes. We had then had a terrific reception, the whole village turning out to greet us. We had realized that there had been a certain amount of self-interest in that reception. They hoped to solicit the backing of the Ameri-



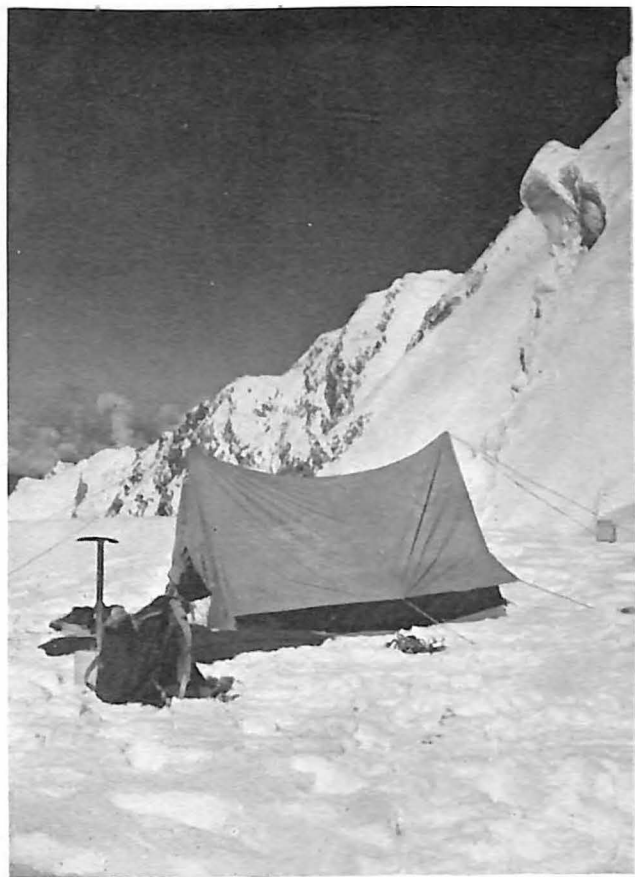
SPANTIK—LOOKING WEST UP CHOGOLUNGMA



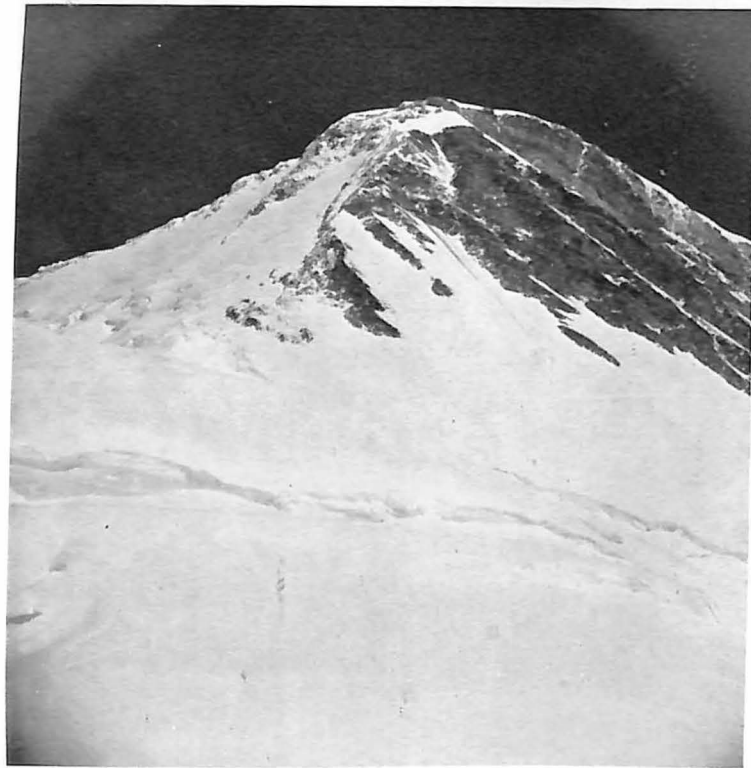
CROSSING THE RIVER SHIGAR BY GOAT-SKIN RAFT  
(ZAKH)



PORTERS ON BANKS OF INDUS AT SKARDU



CAMP AT 21,000 FT. ON MALUBITING, NEAR GILGIT



MALUBITING EAST PEAK FROM CAMP 3



'GLOSTER' PEAK 19,300 FT. HISPAR WALL

can Government in helping to solve the Kashmir problem. At that time Great Britain was not doing very much to help them. It is sad to remember that the problem still exists, and in Skardu the talk often turns to the cease-fire line.

When we reached Skardu many local people asked to be allowed to come with the expedition as porters; some had been with us on K2 six years previously; it was good to see them again and find them all as friendly as ever. We stayed in the Rest House with its wonderful view northwards across the Indus. There was the usual activity whilst we sorted out equipment and food and everything we would require during the next weeks that we would spend in the mountains. From here on, the coolies would carry 60 lb. loads each.

We moved off in two parties in order not to flood the villages with too large a group for camp sites. We crossed the Indus in the same barge as the one we used in 1953. The local people say the barge was used by one of the Generals of Alexander the Great when he came to this region, and it is still known as "Alexander's barge"! We were swept down a considerable distance as we battled madly across the Indus to land on the far bank.

Soon we had to cross to the further bank of the Shigar river, and this time we were to use one of the most primitive but safest methods of water transport to cross these torrents. We crossed on zakhs—rafts made of blown-up goat skins and bamboo branches. After each crossing the rafts were turned over while the boatmen took the skins and blew them up again.

At last we were nearly through to Arandu and could see in the distance the mountains we had come to climb. Arandu is just at the snout of the Chogolungma glacier, and is a village on the alluvial plain. Here we made our depôt camp from which we planned to split up into small parties to reconnoitre the surrounding area in order to find suitable peaks and glaciers to work on over the next few weeks. At the same time we would become acclimatized to the conditions and altitudes.

From Arandu we enlisted both old and young to act as our coolies to get us to the advance base camps. Thence we set off on the first true phase of our expedition, to climb and reconnoitre the area. We were a party of sixteen in all, including the three Pakistan Army officers, two officers from the Royal Navy, and the rest from the British Army. At this stage we split into three groups and travelled around finding peaks which we thought might be suitable for climbing. After about a week we all returned to our main camp at Arandu to discuss our future plans and to decide in which area to work. During our reconnaissance we had found that the Kerolungma glacier and the Alchori glacier to the north would be useful areas to work on. There were several tempting-looking peaks at 18,000 to 19,000 ft., about the height we were needing.

We enlisted further coolies and set out in two main groups on the second phase of the expedition, to spend the next two weeks climbing. The headman of the village was beginning to realize that he was the only person who had coolies available and tried to push the fees up from four rupees a day to nine rupees. We did nothing; we knew he would come



round. He did, and we eventually set out at the accepted rate of payment of our coolies.

Major Jenkins, Deputy Leader, led the party to the Alchori, and they saw there several likely peaks, in particular one they decided to attempt and later, after much hard work in deep snow, were able to climb. This became known as Gloucester Peak—there were three of us from the Gloucestershire Regiment on the expedition.

At the same time the second party, under myself, had moved up the Kerolungma glacier to try peaks there. We had an advanced base named Ibex Camp after the splendid herd which we had seen on the first day of our arrival. We had come over the brow of a hill and there before us, only a couple of hundred yards away, had been the most wonderful herd of ibex one could imagine. We had watched them for a long time, and it was not until we started throwing stones that they had raised their heads and galloped off up into the snow. From Ibex Camp, four of us set out to try to reach one of the passes on the Hispar wall which, as far as I know, had not been visited before. We left early in the morning when the snow was hard and the going was very good. Eventually, when we reached the col, we had a wonderful view down into the Hispar glacier, one of the longest in the Karakoram range. Away to the north was Kanjut Sar, a peak climbed by the Italian expedition that same year, and a little to the east of it is a peak you will probably read about later this year, because Wilfred Noyce is taking an Oxford expedition to climb it. Just above Ibex Camp we saw three fair-sized peaks that we thought would be worth trying. We hoped we would be able to attempt them all from one forward camp. We established this above "Yeti's Nest," as a point on the ridge became known, and parties attempted the various peaks. A peak of about 20,000 ft., which we called Sugar Loaf, was climbed by two parties. One member was a Pakistani, Captain Jawed Akhter, who had already shown that he had an aptitude for climbing; he became very keen, and he and Hardman were the first to reach the summit.

A second peak was climbed, and then the third peak, which became known as Engineers' Peak, because we had two Royal Engineer officers with us. This was possibly the most difficult climb of the three, and the route the climbers took led up steep ice cliffs along the narrow ridge to the top.

Both parties returned to Arandu, each having had about two weeks' splendid climbing. All had gained a good deal of experience and we were ready to try something bigger. By now we were a pretty competent, experienced, very fit and well acclimatized party.

We now made the final plan for the two or three remaining weeks. We decided to run two small expeditions within the main expedition and to concentrate on two fairly large peaks: Ganchen, not previously attempted, a fine-looking snow peak of 21,000 ft. a little to the west of Arandu, and Malubiting, a peak of 24,000 ft. at the head of the Chogolungma glacier. Whilst we had little hope of reaching the summit of the latter in the time we had available, we felt we might be able to carry out a worthwhile reconnaissance in the hope that this would prove a suitable goal for a future expedition.



After the usual argument over coolie rates and sorting ourselves out, we split into our two parties for our last climbs. The Ganchen party was led jointly by Thomas and Platts. They had to cross the torrential river by means of a rope bridge, and then establish their base camp at the foot of one of the approaches to Ganchen. They then tried various routes, but were forced to retire without getting very high on the mountain. I was with the second party with Major Jenkins and six others.

We had a long approach up the Chogolungma glacier which involved establishing several intermediate camps. When we were nearing the mountain, Major Jenkins and I pushed on ahead to try to get a better view of the peak. There were two main summits up which we could not see any possible routes; it all looked frightfully steep and was threatened by avalanches.

Our original plan had been to try the eastern summit of Malubiting, about 23,000 ft., to see whether there was a possible route over this and on to the main summit. From further round the mountain we obtained a clearer view of the eastern approach, and it seemed we might be able to climb up to the saddle at about 20,000 ft., leaving a 3,000 ft. ridge to the summit itself.

To cut a long story fairly short, from the climbing point of view we spent a number of days as usual, going backwards and forwards between upper and lower camps and carrying forward food, tentage and equipment needed for the final attempt, slowly building up an assault camp from which an attempt would be made on the summit. As we worked our way gradually upwards, the other peaks of the Karakoram sank down below us, in particular Spantik peak, which the Germans had climbed two years previously and the peak on which the Bullock-Workmans reached a considerable height early in the century. We were confronted by a steep snow slope leading on to a col at about 20,000 ft. Just above this we established the final camp from which it was hoped a pair would be able to reach the summit. We had from that point a wonderful view looking down the Chogolungma glacier, past the intermediate camps we had established and way on down to Arandu. Away to the east we could see over towards K<sub>2</sub> and the Mustagh Tower, a very spectacular peak which was climbed by a British and French party in 1958. From the shoulder we looked south to Nanga Parbat and to a peak I knew only too well—Haramosh, on which we had had a tragic accident in 1957.

From that high final camp we could see the route which we hoped would provide a way to the top for Jawed and Imrie, who had been selected as the summit pair. Horniblow, who was one of our doctors, and myself, helped them with the carry up to the high camp, and there we left them in rather doubtful weather. In the Karakoram one day will be perfect and the next snowing; one year August can be a wonderful month; another year it can be a terrible month. In 1959 we had had only a few storms, but I felt our luck could not last indefinitely. Four of us returned the next day to the high camp, and we were able to watch two small figures working slowly through the rocks and steadily making their way towards the summit. At about mid-day we saw an ice-axe glistening on the summit and realized that they had reached

it; it was a peak over 23,000 ft. and the highest of the peaks we managed to climb.

The weather was rapidly breaking and when, for the next few days, it started to snow in earnest, we were glad to get down and away from the high mountains. I was particularly glad that a Pakistani had been a member of the summit pair. Jawed had become a first-rate climber. He was now the first Pakistani to reach the top of a major Himalayan peak, and I am glad to hear he has been selected to join an American Expedition which this summer is to attempt the spectacular peak of Mashabrum, near K<sub>2</sub>.

The time had now come to return to base. I decided to go down direct to Gilgit, taking Chapman with me, although it meant a difficult climb via the Haramosh Pass, which I knew only too well from the Oxford University Expedition in 1957. I wanted to arrange to fix a plaque in the cemetery at Gilgit in memory of the two climbers killed on that expedition. Chapman and I left for what proved to be a very hard climb and one of the very few crossings of the pass. To our left was the north face of Haramosh. We could not find the exact route we had taken in 1957 and it was late in the evening and darkening before we reached the old site at which we had had our base camp that year. We had come down virtually from nowhere and wondered what our reception would be when the local folk saw us. It is not the sort of place at which strangers are expected to arrive. As the people knew that when I was last here I was in a pretty bad state and had to be helped down out of the valley, I wondered if they would think it was my ghost arriving! Next morning, when the shepherd boys came up to where we had spent the night, they recognized me and soon there was quite a crowd to help us down to a beautiful spot near the little lake in the Mani valley. It was wonderful to be down on green grass again after all the time we had spent in the snow and among the rocks.

After we had rested for a couple of days, the time had come to go down to the heat of the valley and to Gilgit. In doing so we had a final splendid view of the summit of Haramosh which had, the year before, been climbed by an Austrian Expedition.

Looking back on the achievements of our expedition, we had climbed six new peaks varying between 18,000 and 23,000 ft.; we had travelled a good deal on glaciers; we had visited several new passes; but far more important, we had gained a great deal of experience and had achieved more than if we had concentrated on one particular peak. I hope some of the members of the expedition will find an opportunity to return to Karakoram, either as members or as leaders of future expeditions.

From my last slide of a beautiful Himalayan sunset, you can gather at least one of the reasons why those who have once spent any time in the region wish to return to it. As Blake put it:

“Great deeds are done when men and mountains meet;  
These are not done by jostling in the street.”

The CHAIRMAN: We have listened to an interesting lecture illustrated by wonderful slides. I remind you that Major Streather is leaving in July

on an expedition to Greenland as a member of Sir John Hunt's party, going there in connection with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. I am sure there could have been no better choice than that of Major Streater to accompany such an expedition.

Sir CLARMONT SKRINE: Did Major Streater see anything of the Mir of Nagir? He must have been in his territory part of the time the expedition was in Karakoram.

Major STREATHER: We were on the southern side of that territory. I heard when in Gilgit that the Mir of Nagir and the Mir of Hunza were not particularly in favour at that time.

Sir OLAF CAROE: The area visited is most important from the international point of view, with China on the other side, north of the Karakoram. Mountaineering expeditions are frequently climbing peaks in the region. Are there any practical ways through the mountains between the Mintaka Pass in Pakistani occupation and the Karakoram Pass in Indian occupation? Did the lecturer hear any interesting points in regard to the frontier position north of the Karakoram?

Major STREATHER: The only pass I know of between the two you mention is the Mustagh Pass, over which Sir Francis Younghusband went in 1887. That pass is at about 18,000 or 19,000 ft., and I believe it to be the only pass through to the north. As far as I know, it has not been crossed for many years, and a change in the snow and ice conditions now make it extremely difficult.

Sir OLAF CAROE: Is it in Pakistani occupation?

Major STREATHER: It is

Colonel CANTLIE: What is the feeling towards the Chinese? Is it friendly, resentful or hostile?

Major STREATHER: Definitely hostile. When I was there in 1949, I think it was, a number of Chinese Nationalists were thrown over the pass and left in the snow there, and the Northern Scouts got some of them down. Many died. Some were put into the fort up the Khyber Pass for a while. Occasionally a caravan would come through. When we were in the region in 1957, caravans had recently come through from somewhere in the Yarkand area.

Sir OLAF CAROE: Where is the potential prescriptive frontier between India and Pakistan in the Karakoram area?

Major STREATHER: There is no accepted frontier as high up as that. The frontier fades out into the very high mountainous area that is not inhabited.

Sir OLAF CAROE: Is the whole of the area under Pakistan?

Major STREATHER: I should say not quite all.

Brig. SULTAN MOHAMED: As far as I know, at least the area east of Skardu is in India.

Sir OLAF CAROE: That is further south; I am talking of the old Gilgit road to the north of the main chain of the Himalaya. Ladakh is under India and Skardu under Pakistan. I rather wondered where on the Karakoram the frontier came?

Major STREATHER: Not far from the area of the Karakoram Pass, which must be in Indian occupation.

Sir OLAF CAROE: It is important; where is the frontier?

Major STREATHER: The area was inaccessible.

Sir OLAF CAROE: As far as one knows, no information has been given of Chinese aggression against the Pakistan hill posts of Northern Kashmir.

Major STREATHER: There is a Chinese post on the north side and a Pakistan post on the south side of the Mintaka and Killik Passes. I believe the Indians are looking after the Karakoram Pass.

Sir CLARMONT SKRINE: What is the daily wage for coolies now?

Major STREATHER: Rs. 4. They also want to be paid half rates for returning empty.

The CHAIRMAN: As there are no further questions, I ask you to show your appreciation of Major Streather's talk and the wonderful illustrations and at the same time wish him good fortune and enjoyment on the expedition into Greenland. (*Applause.*)



