



*A. D. M<sup>s</sup> Cormick del<sup>t</sup>*

*Cambridge Engraving C<sup>o</sup>*

*SADDLE PEAK (Karakoram range)  
from Shallihura Glacier.*

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SHKARA, JANGA, AND USHBA.

By J. G. COCKIN.

WHEN, in 1888, Woolley and Holder were obliged to return to England, I decided to stay with the guides for further climbs. Early on September 5 my friends, with Rehfeldt, the interpreter, rode away from the village of Bezingi, escorted by the chief's son, whom Rehfeldt declared to be the only honest man in Bezingi. I stood awhile watching them, but the ground soon hid them, and I turned up the valley in unwonted sentimental mood, feeling half sad at losing my companions, half Crusoe-like, 'monarch of all I surveyed,' that I had the Caucasus all to myself for climbing.

I decided to keep the tent where it had originally been pitched, close to Missess Kosh. There was no fresh water, the nearest spring, ten minutes off, failing, so that we had to use the glacier water only, and that was muddy. Then there was a long glacier walk to the foot of the climbs I wished to make; but higher up we should not have been sure of a full and constant supply of fire wood, and there was, too, no shelter for the guides, when cooking, against wind and rain. It became increasingly colder in September, and the worst fault of the camp was that Missess Tau kept off the morning sun till late.

On the 6th the guides, Almer and Roth, and myself, well laden, walked slowly four hours and a quarter up the glacier to a sleeping-place we had marked for Shkara when Holder and I, with Almer, came back from the Dych, or, as we then called it, the Shkara Pass. The valley mist that rose most afternoons followed us, black and wall-like, as far as the fork of the glacier, and in the eastern arm snow floated

thinly in the air, the one cheering event of a gloomy and unpromising day being our coming upon a plot of fresh and delicate moraine flowers where a few days before snow had covered the ground. The sleeping-place was in a ledge at the foot of the rocks ending the ridge descending from the rock peak east of Koshtantau (of the 5-verst map), which forms the highest point of Mishirgi Tau, or is perhaps to be looked on as a distinct peak.

The highest point of Shkara is supported by the great buttress shown in the photo-print 'Panorama from below Guluku,' published in the 'Alpine Journal,' vol. xiii. p. 242. From the east end of Shkara is thrown out a ridge, which curves to north-east or north, its base spreading to the Dych pass, and encloses between it and the buttress a nearly level field of névé, feeding the Bezingi glacier over a steep slope having a deeply rent ice-fall on its right side, the whole forming a lateral glacier of large size. Our object, as our route was planned by Almer, was to mount by this glacier to the crest of the ridge and follow the latter up to the top, the direct way by the buttress being out of the question, as its rocks were covered with ice.

Just as we were creeping into our sleeping-bags a horrible noise arose on the rocks, as of mixed screaming and the grinding of a cart with the break on. I thought it was birds who had smelled our provisions. Roth murmured of brigands, and Almer said it was a marder; and, as we afterwards found, in descending from Janga, tracks on the snow which the guides declared to be those of a marder, Almer was probably right. Anyway it was a good name, for a more murderous, discomposing noise could not be.

We had rooted out every stone bigger than a nut from our rock-bed, which was, in consequence, so comfortable that we overslept ourselves, and did not make a start the next morning until 4.55. However that Swiss sage Almer comforted me and vindicated himself with, 'Let me tell you, Mr. Cockin, that it is better to start fresh after a long sleep than tired after a short sleep.'

The morning was clear and cold, and as we walked sharply across the Bezingi glacier the sun's rays were shooting up above the Shkara pass, flushing with pink the top we aimed for. We took to the true left of the side glacier, as less crevassed than the right, and made good progress, Almer having occasion every now and then to chip steps, until we reached the upper icefall. The ice waves here were the highest I ever saw. After cutting up the wall

of one wave, only to find we must come down again, we found a way through, winding about in the trough of the waves until, close to the buttress, the rocks of which were sheeted with black, transparent ice, we came out on the even surface of the upper glacier.

Under a fallen block of ice, as big as a cottage, we breakfasted, 7.33 to 8. Many other blocks lay on the snow. We crossed the glacier to our left to the foot of a snow-slope leading up to the desired ridge. As far as the breakfast place the motion had kept us from feeling cold; but we were in a snow valley. The sun had not risen high enough to shine on us, and, as Roth steadily cut steps up the slope for two hours, the cold was felt very keenly. I was counting the minutes to run before we reached the warm sunshine slowly stealing down the slope, when there came a puff of wind, and we were powdered over with fine snow, some of which found its way melting down my back. It was unpleasant, but a very few minutes later (10.25) we reached the crest of the ridge and basked in the sunshine.

When I had warmed myself in the sun I looked about and found the view very fine. The nearest and grandest object was the rock mass of Koshtantau and Mishirgi Tau. The latter looked a very hard nut to crack; but early in the season the middle one of three gullies seaming its front may be filled with good snow and make an easy ladder to near the top. To the east we saw the upper part of Dychtau (5-verst map), all snow-fields on the side in sight. To the south-east in the far distance was a fine sharp peak which we could not identify. Across the Dych-su glacier Nuamquam (as we then thought was the name of the mountain properly called Koruldu) looked most imposing, its slope within our view hung with tier upon tier of glacier, like the north side of the Lyskamm, but in heavier masses. To the north-west Elbruz rose vast, resembling an immense white, tent-shaped cloud. The Saluinan-chiran peak stood nobly, making up in figure what it lacked in comparative height.

After a rest of forty-seven minutes we moved on at 11.12, leaving the sacks. Soon after clouds covered us and a cold wind blew. We came at once upon the rock bit of the climb, and found it short and, from its iced state, not over easy. Beyond this the ridge was sharp in several places of some length, Almer cutting steps a few feet below the edge on either side as suited. Both slopes of these sharp

lengths were exceedingly steep, and I was much struck with their perfect regularity and evenness, the slope on both sides rising at the same angle, and the edge, no wider than the thickness of my fore finger laid on it, being flat and not wreathed up in any fashion. Of course there must have been only a covering of snow on rock until near the edge; but how the winds could work the top part into so even and regular a state on both sides puzzled me. Between the sharp lengths the ridge was a good deal hummocked; on the level we moved at a pace as near a run as the soft, powdery snow allowed, for it was bitterly cold. Up and down the hummocks Almer cut steps. If the wind had been a little stronger I think we should have had to turn for cold. At 2.20 we came to the end of the ridge, where it joins the main mass of the mountain at the foot of the final slope.

Here we halted a few minutes, to let Almer, whose turn at leading had been mostly step-cutting, have a drink of cold tea, of all inferior liquors, the most inferior, just as hot tea is the best, when one can get it, on a climb. We had here a glimpse of the rock wall between Shkara and Koruldu.\*

The final slope was an even ascent, on which we kept near to the Bezingi edge, occasionally looking over to make sure that the snow did not overhang further on. Roth, leading, had less step-cutting than Almer had had below, and we ascended pretty fast, the cold acting as a sharp spur. At last we came to a short stretch of nearly level snow, and a few yards higher to two snow humps, cut sharp down on the Bezingi side; the further of these was the top, which we reached at 3.42. It was ill luck at so high a point to see so little; we were in the clouds. From the top a snow-field slopes down, covering the upper part of the great buttress. All about was snow, some rocks barely showing a few feet down on the Suanetian side. I asked Almer if we should look for a place to build a cairn, but he said it was too cold. The cold withered us, and after a minute's stop we had turned to find shelter from the wind,

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\* Woolley and I went up this year from the Nuamquam glacier, on the south side of the range, to a point near the lowest part of the ridge at the head of that glacier. Below us we found a branch of the Dych-su glacier, gently rising to only about 200 ft. beneath us. We did not actually descend, and the descent was too steep to see all of it, but we believe that there is here a pass that will be useful to anyone wishing to go from the Ushkul end of Suanetia to the Dych-su system of glaciers. The view is of the first order.

when the cloud lightened enough to show us the ridge falling for a long distance, but not enough to let me be sure I saw the full length of Shkara, and that we were on its highest point. Some days afterwards, however, from the point of Janga nearest to Shkara we had a cloudless view of the Bezingi ridge, and the head of the great buttress appeared the highest point of Shkara and of the whole Bezingi ridge. It will be understood that Shkara and Janga are not independent peaks, but are names of two portions of the Bezingi ridge. The two are divided by a rather deep depression, east of which Shkara, rising sharply higher than Janga, runs for about a mile to its highest point. Between the depression and the Saddle Peak will be two miles or more long, and is called the Janga; it has three points a little distinguished above the rest, of which I ascended, on September 12, the eastern point nearest to Shkara. From above the Adine pass, where it must be about 14,000 ft., the ridge runs roughly east some six miles or more to the eastern end of Shkara, something over 17,000 ft., when it falls rapidly to the Dych-su glacier. From Gestola to the east end of Shkara, some five miles, the height of the ridge above the Bezingi glacier will vary from 5,000 ft. to 7,000 ft. It is a most magnificent, wonderful wall.

I may notice in part here the view which we had from Janga on September 12, as in many respects it would be much the same as from Shkara. The most surprising thing from Janga was the seeming narrowness of the snows. Although the breadth of permanent snow, where we stood, would be twenty miles, I had a feeling that the Caucasus was a kind of snow tight rope, the cause of this being, I think, that on both sides we saw far beyond the snows. Just below us, to the south, the snows were all but entirely hid from us by their own steepness, and the eye plunged directly on green grass and vegetation, ridge upon ridge of blue hills stretching beyond, a few points probably attaining a height of 11,000 ft., so far below us and so fused by distance that their undulations seemed hardly more marked than the waves on the plain of the sea. Northward, through the gap of the Bezingi glacier, we looked beyond the snows over high bare hills and lower, detached summits far into the Steppes, where the eye seemed capable by searching of ever widening its ken. The feeling of great height and remote distance was deepened by a solitary white bird poised high above us. To the north we saw no sign of man, but to the

south Almer's quick eye caught sight of a church, and behind it some white objects, which we guessed to be the whitewashed towers of a Suanetian village. After the bare Bezingi slopes it was a great pleasure to the eye to rest on the thick foliage of the endless Suanetian woods shining in the sun. Our point of Janga was a little lower; Almer in his disappointment said 10 ft., but it was at any rate distinctly lower than another point.\* The Saddle Peak showed much more sharply marked off from the rest of the ridge than when seen from the Bezingi glacier. But the one part of the Bezingi ridge, from Shkara to above the Adine pass, that most clearly, as seen from the north side, has a separate existence, and deserves a separate name, is the beautiful cone of Gestola, which springs up so sharply as constantly to serve us as a standard of measurement; even as far away as the neck of Ushba I guessed our height by the base of Gestola.

To return to our ascent of Shkara: After about five minutes, as the cloud became no lighter, we ran down to the level place, where we were a little sheltered from the wind. While here the cloud cleared, so as to show us the top of Kosh-tantau from the upper belt of ruddy rocks, with the blue sky above, a beautiful vision from our cloud of gloom and cold. I felt like a man half starved, looking through a window at a warm fire. The cloud soon closed in thicker than ever, and we began the descent, going as hard as we could to clear the snow slope below the ridge before dark. The short rock bit with its ice gave us more trouble than in the ascent, especially a single step where one had to tuck in one's abdomen and throw the left leg round a corner. Just below this we picked up the things left in the ascent, and I was glad to have the added warmth of my 'sweater.' On the slope below the ridge it became dark, so that although I could see Almer above me I could only tell where Roth was below by the darkness seeming thicker, or, when he had turned, only by his voice. The slope was too steep to allow of carrying the lantern. Our morning steps were filled up with blown snow, and although Roth was very quick in recovering them we had a wearisome time groping and kicking for the steps before we crossed the lower of the two schrunds. It is easy to follow steps straight down in the dark, but not so when they turn; and Roth's 'The step is there,' uttered in a crescendo of virtuous surprise, made one chuckle but was

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\* M. Jukoff gives it as 42 ft. lower (*R. G. S. Pr.* Feb. 1892, p. 111).

not directing. All things come to an end, and at length we cleared the slope, and lighting the lantern tackled some biscuits and cold tea. Sitting or standing about the lower lip of the schrund, with the light showing three figures of Father Christmas, a bowl of steaming toddy to complete the picture would not have been amiss. We easily followed our morning tracks by lantern light—there was something strangely impressive in the high walls and deep troughs of the icefall by the feeble glimmer—until we came near home, when the hard snow showed no tracks. Almer and I waited in patient weariness until a shout from Roth told us he had found our ledge, and we followed. It was about a quarter to ten. Home, sweet home! It had been a hard, cold climb. How we did enjoy the hot soup! I blessed the man who first thought of self-cooking soup tins.

Going in the dark or by lantern light was one of the most disagreeable incidents of our climbs, the season being advanced. In eight out of thirteen expeditions I took part in we had more or less night work.

I thought a deal more of Shkara, considered simply as a climb, than of Janga or Ushba. Janga, once we had reached the sunshine, was a right pleasant climb, full of interest, with a fair amount of work, and crowned with a sublime view; but there was no strain about it. Ushba was turned on the successful attempt by a fall of fresh snow into an easy and reasonably safe, though fatiguing snow walk as far as the neck. Shkara was a hard strain nearly all the time between the cold and the labour. The guides had at least five, probably six, hours' step-cutting. It was the coldest climb I ever made. I was quit with both thumb ends and the right finger-ends frost-bitten. The guides were all right then, but I believe our cold day on Shkara had a good deal to do with their subsequent ailments. Curiously the cold took away at the time all sense of fatigue, though we were tired enough after.

Of the ways of reaching the crest of the Bezingi ridge I thought our way up Janga the best: it lay by the rocks to our right of the steep, narrow glacier, descending from the depression between Janga and Shkara between two lines of rocks. There were some short bits of hard rock-climbing, but these, we found, can all be turned. We crossed the mouth of a gill, the high pitch at the back of which was crowned by glacier, and ice-blocks may fall here at times. From the depression between Shkara and Janga it would be well worth trying the ascent of the former. The first part

of Shkara rises so sharply that Almer thought the direct ridge-climb would not go, and we could not see how the Suanetian slope lay; but if this point is once climbed or turned the rest of the ridge did not seem difficult. The depression seemed to indicate a pass into Suanetia, but I could not see what was the nature of the southern slope.\*

I had no trouble worth speaking of with the Bezingi natives. They are, no doubt, given to petty pilfering; but when I remember how the tent was on our expeditions left unguarded, and what value they attach to knives, nails, matches, and other things to us the commonest articles, I must give them credit for a fair amount of honesty that they did not strip us of everything. One curious and not pleasing custom they have is that when they ate my soup—and they often dropped in at meal times—they would, by way of thanks, with the most beaming of faces eructate loudly full in my direction. †

On the morning after we had been up Janga I found Roth very unwell with pains all over, especially in the chest. Towards evening he was smoking—a sure sign of recovery; but in the night Almer was taken ill worse than Roth, and hardly able to speak or move, and remained little better all next day, the 14th. On the 15th Roth was well and Almer recovering; but a wind storm began in the mountains, and its fearful cold kept us that day and the next, by day as well as by night, in our sleeping bags in the tent. The cold developed an eager appetite for fat, and I felt in training for the candles, if need were. On the morning of the 17th the wind had fallen much, and we set off with six porters for Betsho. Fierce gusts that searched one's marrow blew at intervals as long as we were on the Bezingi side of the Adine Pass, but once we were over we found all still, bright and warm. Everything on the Suanetian side seemed of a richer and pleasanter nature. The woods, clad in the most gorgeous of autumn colours, were inexpressibly pleasant to our eyes, who had for more than a month hardly seen trees except as

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\* I have since shared in three attempts on Janga from the south side—in 1890, when Almer led my friend Holder and myself, and twice in 1893, in the company of Messrs. Woolley, Newmarch, and Solly. We found this year that the pass between Shkara and Janga was too dangerous on the south side from séracs. And, indeed, ascents on the south side are much more difficult and dangerous, unless it be of Tetnuld.

† What follows was read before the Alpine Club in June 1889.

firewood. The wild crab-apples we found nearly ripe and sweet, a great treat. The two Mulakh men I engaged in place of the Bezingi porters were of a gentler and more obliging nature than the Bezingians. Food was more varied. We replenished our stock of salt; besides mutton and bread, we obtained readily eggs and cheese, and even some vodki; and never Irishman was better pleased than I with the taste of a potato.

We reached Betsho on the morning of the 19th, and found the officer in charge very civil. He assigned us in the cancellaria a good room having a fireplace with a couple of small closets opening out of it. Chairs and a table and sofa were demoralising Capuan luxuries; and, worn and jaded as we felt, we stayed in the rest of the day, sending out Kosta, a Mulakh man whom I had retained, to forage for provisions.

Next day we set out to look for a camp, and, following the path mentioned by Mr. Freshfield, came above the lower part of the glacier, descending the east slope of Ushba, and opposite to the gap between its two towers. We could see nothing for mist, but, listening for a long time, I heard no fall of stones or snow, and was satisfied that we need not fear the avalanches which Donkin in his letter to Holder had mentioned as turning his party back. We knew nothing of their unhappy fate, and when we came on a shallow trench and found bits of a Meiringen paper indicating where they had camped, we felt pleased as with a sense of companionship, and I was glad to see that the guides looked cheered and livelier. Their water supply, water from the glacier trickling down a rock, had failed, and we judged that in the more advanced and colder season we were there, we must camp lower.

On the 21st, leaving part of the baggage at Betsho, we pitched the tent on a tongue of land, across the little valley on the lower side of which were the last trees, and distant about an hour's walk from Donkin and Fox's camp.

On leaving Betsho I was amused by the people who had come to sell provisions. An old woman had brought a very sickly-looking sheep; several women and girls had brought each a single cheese; two men had each a bottle of vodki. There are no stores. Each family has its own stock of provisions, and naturally will not sell to leave itself bare; so that it's a slow business on first entering a village to collect food from cottage to cottage. Afterwards, when the people know that the traveller is willing to pay, they bring volun-

tarily what each can spare. Doubtless I had the benefit of the confidence inspired by previous climbers.

Ushba is next to the Matterhorn the most imposing-looking mountain I have seen. There is a strong suggestion of likeness between the south peak and the Matterhorn, and, though the latter is the more symmetrical, Ushba is much the greater. It will be nearly a thousand feet higher above the level of the sea; and, whilst the Matterhorn is not much over 9,000 ft. above Zermatt, Ushba towers nearly 12,000 ft. above Betsho. Its mass is double that of the Matterhorn. The upper rock part of the S. peak to be climbed will be nearly 8,000 ft., against little more than 4,000 ft. of the Matterhorn.

The two peaks of Ushba are joined some 700 ft., as near as I can guess, below their tops, by a saddle or neck of rock covered with snow, and keep at about even distance from each other on the E. side of the neck, while they fall for what took us 2 hrs. 25 min. in soft snow to ascend; then the cliffs of the north peak break off towards the N. at nearly right angles to their former line, the rocks of the south peak running down as before eastward. From the neck to where the gap ends, the slope, gradually becoming less steep, had no crevasses, but at the latter point an ice-fall begins, which keeps its original width, that of the gap, for a distance which with fairly good going we were two hours in ascending; whilst from the foot of the east cliffs of the N. peak descends for the same depth an ice-slope, towards which, where it touches the north side of the ice-fall, the latter presents a wall fringed with icicles and set in places with ice-caverns, and standing from 20 to 50 ft. above the level of the ice-slope. A long schrund runs south and north at the foot of the ice-fall and ice-slope. Below the schrund the glacier, the right side of which is always more crevassed, gradually clears the S. peak and turns towards the S.

On the 22nd we made our first attempt on Ushba, but after four hours Roth's illness obliged us to return. I found he had been unwell the day before, but had not told me, on the chance of recovering. Now he was writhing on the snow with pain, and plainly unable to proceed. Thankful that his pluck had not led him to hold out longer until we were on the ice-slope, we slowly returned to the tent, where he was made as warm and comfortable as our bare resources enabled us. His pains were in the chest and legs, accompanied with a difficulty in breathing, and as these were much

the same as those he had quickly recovered from at Bezingi, I thought that he would soon be well. On Sunday, however, though free in the chest, he was plainly in for a bout of rheumatism. This was a great disappointment, for Roth is a first-rate step-cutter, and I had seen that, in the then swept state of the mountain, reaching the neck between the two towers would require almost continuous cutting from the long schrund. On speaking to Almer he agreed to try alone with me; this I thought very spirited in him, that he was not discouraged by his companion's illness, or by the certainty of an atrocious amount of labour in step-cutting, let alone the generally imposing and formidable look of Ushba. We then arranged that Almer and I should try again next morning, and that if Roth felt no better, he should go down with Kosta, when the latter brought provisions, to Betsho, where he would be warm.

Almer and I left the tent at 3.35 on the morning of the 24th, and ascended on the left side of the glacier by easy rock and snow slopes in at first a northerly direction towards Mr. Freshfield's Gulba, then west, and after passing under a wall of rock, which looked from the stones near its base to be sometimes dangerous, came, at 7.37, to the long schrund, where we breakfasted. The glacier below the schrund was sprinkled freely with stones, large and small. The ice-slope is exposed to the fall of stones from the north peak, and also of great icicles from the cliffs of the latter. We found it all bare ice, roughened and pitted with previous meltings, every stroke of the axe cutting into real ice. It was much wasted, so that in places large sheets, polished smooth, of flat, sloping rock showed. Altogether it had a more uncomfortably exposed look and was more formidable in appearance than any ice-wall I had seen, and Almer said the same; and, no doubt, earlier in the season, before the mountain has been cleaned by frequent avalanches, it will be unsafe.

At 8.5 we crossed the schrund not too easily, and Almer cut our way slowly until, after an hour and a half, we had turned a sheet of smooth rock, and were able to approach the ice-fall. Its icicles seemed so small by comparison with the giant ones on the wall of the north peak, that we didn't fear them; but, to be still safer, I proposed going on the ice-fall at an easy place. Almer agreed that it would be safer and better going, but was afraid that we should be stopped by a schrund. Unfortunately, I had persuaded myself that this schrund could be turned by the rocks of the

south peak, and so we went upon the ice-fall, and Almer had at first easier step-cutting in hard snow, then followed ice, and last, a short bit of soft snow; but finally we found the schrund could not be turned. I knew there was no chance now for that day, but wished to reach the top of the ice-fall in order to gain a clear view of the neck. Descending the soft snow, Almer had step-cutting again to a point where we could go down to the ice-slope, which was ice, as below, except the last part, where it was lying in steep ribs with alternate channels. Here we were startled by the crash of an icicle from the north peak shivering upon the slope, as if all Regent Street windows had fallen into the street; it was not too near, but was near enough to make me appreciate Almer's remark: 'If that had struck us it would have hurt us very much.' Soon afterwards we were within a few feet of the base of the north peak, and at about 1.45 came to our left into the gap, some stones whizzing from the north peak at the same time, so high that they couldn't have struck the ice-slope until near the long schrund.

The lower part of the gap, where the slope is gentle, was soft snow, but above all was glittering ice with, just below the neck, some ribs of rock. We could go, we saw, upon the north peak from the neck, but reckoned that with the best luck we couldn't expect to reach the top before dark, and passing the night there was more than we were prepared to endure.

We contented ourselves perforce with lurching and looking about us. The view was magnificent and startling. All the great central peaks served as a white background to the forests of Suanetia, whose autumn colours were like fire in the sun.

On returning to the tent I found that Roth had gone down to Betsho. As Almer was very anxious and vaguely afraid that Roth's illness might be something worse than rheumatism, I sent him down next day to say that I would start at once for Batoum if Roth wished it and was able to travel; but that if he had nothing worse than rheumatism the best thing for him was to stay at Betsho, where he could be warm before a good fire within stone walls, whilst Almer and I tried again at Ushba. I felt bound to make the offer to start at once, for although Kosta was very kind and attentive, it was no joke for Roth to be ill amongst strangers; but I prayed heartily that he wouldn't take it. I had a hard struggle for my dinner that evening, heavy rain falling and a strong wind blowing, so that after much ado to light the fire there was worse trouble to keep it lit. In the night, waking and sitting up, my face touched something

clammy, and I found the front of the tent had fallen in, the wet having put an extra strain on the stay-rope. Going out to set things right, the rain was coming down in torrents, but its violence was re-assuring, as letting me know that snow must be falling above in such quantities that some must stick on the ice-slopes.

Next day Almer came back with the good news that Roth would stay at Betsho as the best place for him. Rain fell most of that day and up to eight of the following morning, when the sun shone out warm and welcome, and a fine day following we resolved to try again.

Almer and I left the tent at 3.8 A.M. on the 28th with small hope of success, for the sky looked anything but favourable, long filaments of cloud being drawn across it, and the only good sign was that the clouds never came low enough to quite touch the Leila range. The first step in the snow told us that we were in for a heavy grind, but encouraged us to hope for safe snow. We toiled up the lower slope of rock and snow in the direction of Gulba, and then, passing under the rock wall came upon an immense mass of avalanche snow, the upper part of the fresh snow lately fallen upon the ice-slope. We were now sure of a fine day, and took cheerfully the toil of walking on the avalanche, one moment standing on a frozen block and the next sinking up to our knees. We found the long schrund choked up by the avalanche and passed it without halt at 8.3, having breakfasted below. We were satisfied from our former experience that little was to be feared from the icicles pendent from the ice-fall, and agreed that our best way was to keep close to the latter, so that if stones or icicles fell from the north peak we should have a chance of protection under the wall of the ice-fall.\* Except a few steps just above the schrund and clearing out some of the old steps on the ribs of hard snow near the north peak there was no step-cutting, the avalanche having left plenty of snow well fastened on the ice-slope and covering up the sheets of smooth rock, and, although soft, better than below the schrund. We were encouraged by the shorter time we took to pass remembered points and reached the top of the ice-fall at 10.5, having ascended the slope in little more than

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\* Our party of this year found, in confirmation of Woolley's experience of 1889, that it is safest to ascend the slope below the north peak in a line much more to the right and running up nearly to the outermost edge of the rocks of the north peak. The ice and snow in the Caucasus change much, far more than in the Alps, and this year Ushba was very dangerous.

a third of the time we took when nearly everything was ice. We halted here forty minutes.

The following 2 hrs. and 25 mins. up to the neck were intensely fatiguing. I could have sworn in the ascent that the snow grew deeper as we ascended, but when descending the slight pain from the pressure against the knee-cap of the then frozen rim of the steps ascertained the depth to be uniform nearly all the way and up to the knees. We laboured on almost unremittingly up the increasingly steep slope, turning near the neck to our left to reach a rib of rock, and then by a few steps in the ice on the rock, or by the rock, came at last to the neck, the snow edge of which Almer broke through at 1.10, greatly to my pleasure, for there was to be a change in the kind of our labour. We were near to the south peak, and both looked at its ridge rising from the neck; then Almer said that he was not going on that, and we at once turned to our right for the north peak. The south peak ridge rose steeply straight as an arrow, and was coated over with hard snow and in places ice, the general evenness of the coating seeming to indicate that there were few breaks in the ridge. As we found it I was no more minded to try it than Almer; but we were both inclined to think that when clean of snow and ice it can be climbed.

In order to reach the north peak Almer crossed the neck to its west side, having to clear away the snow and cut steps in the under-ice. While waiting in the steps on the east side I looked over and saw Elbruz half in mist, and nearer a fine snow-peak, which I supposed to be Dongusorum. The rocks of the two peaks narrowed the view. On the east side there was a fine view of the mountains of the central group and of the valley and forest-clad slopes beyond Mestia. The woods were glowing red in the sun, and with their snow background were very beautiful, the look of peace one sometimes sees in the mountains being over all, contrasting with my sense of strain and effort. The west side of the neck was not at all a place to take views from; an ice-slope steeper than anything on the other side but the last bit, broken with jags of rock. We crawled under a jutting rock so low that, although Almer wriggled through easily, it was a tight fit for me, and would have been a fat man's misery; then came more step-cutting, and at length we reached the rocks of the north peak after having taken about an hour to clear the neck.

We ascended, keeping below the rock ridge leading up to the north peak, and had at first some delightfully easy walking, then came to a place which Almer said would go, if

no other would. We turned back to a place I had marked as yielding a way to the ridge; but Almer, climbing up a few feet, reported that there were some smooth rocks, which, as we were no longer fresh, we'd better not try. Returning to our check I found it a rock traverse with a nearly perpendicular fall below, the foothold being a narrow ledge and good, except at one point, where it failed just where the hand-hold went to next to nothing, necessitating a short leap. On the ascent we crossed without trouble. We soon came to an easy side ridge, but with rocks not very sound leading up to the main ridge at a point a few yards below the top. These few yards were snow, and the actual top was a snow cornice hanging over the western side and rising not more than a couple of feet above the highest point we dared tread on. We reached the top at 3.45. We were in mist and saw little. The south peak was altogether invisible, and all that we saw to the north was through an occasional glimpse of a snow ridge leading down, curving slightly to the north-west. All the upper part of this ridge was an easy walk; below it swelled out to a huge tower-like shape, rising from the glacier on the side we saw so steeply and so iced that it looked impossible.

We went down to the junction of the side ridge with the main one, and sitting down tired and happy cooked two Silver soup tins, and opened for Almer's special delectation our last sardine box, which he had reserved for Ushba and twice regretfully carried back unopened. We stayed till 4.22, the mist lasting all the time. Then, having put up a stone-man and deposited in it the sardine box holding my card with our two names, we began the descent.

A stone without any excuse fell with a heavy jerk on the rope between us, and held it down until Almer could descend and dislodge the stone. We came soon after to the rock traverse. As the ledge sloped slightly downwards the bad step was a little longer, and it had also to be taken with the worse leg foremost. Not quite easily I worked myself into a position where I was sure of the step, and passed over. Almer then came, more neatly, but also with care. Probably the difficulty we found here was owing more to our being used up by the steep slough of snow below than to the nature of the passage itself. We quickly came to the neck, and went as fast as we could down the soft snow in the gap, but were caught by the darkness on the ice slope. This didn't matter much, for though the snow was now freezing, it was still soft enough to take the foot with the heel driven in, and we got along famously until we came to just above the

long schrund where a dozen or so of steps had been cut in the morning. Here we turned our faces to the slope and partly by the steps, partly by anchoring with the axe and stubbing in the toes, had descended the worst bit, when, as I was vigorously kicking away, I became aware that my right boot was coming off. When on the neck I had noticed that the lace had been cut and had worked itself loose, but as I was anxious to go as low down as possible before dark, and my frost-bitten fingers made me very slow in tying anything, I neglected to fasten the lace. The boot couldn't be attended to when I had my face to the hard slope, and finally, not driving the toe in, I slipped a foot before I could stop myself, the boot dragged off and fell away into the darkness. I cursed my folly in not fastening the lace, but when Almer too began to blame himself for not noticing it was loose, I was forced to laugh at the notion of a boot that two men couldn't keep on. Then he came below me, and cutting a few steps, we came on the softer snow again, where cutting me a seat and steps for my feet, he unroped and went to look for the boot, crossing the schrund, which turned out to be a very few feet below, and lighting his lantern. At first I felt very vexed, but it came into my mind that at any rate the climb wasn't bootless, and soothed by a chuckle over this comforting pun, I patiently waited. All was very quiet, the stillness broken only by the faint crunch of Almer's boots in the snow, and now and then by the fall of some small fragment of icicle from the wall of the ice-fall, making me look sharply round lest worse should follow. Some thousands of feet below on the opposite slope a couple of fires were lit, and a torch brandished, as if some woodman had caught sight of Almer's lantern and was signalling. After a time I called Almer back, who reported that as the boot wouldn't have much way on before reaching the schrund, it had probably fallen into the big hole not filled up by the avalanche at the corner of the ice-fall. I crossed the schrund, and the good fellow then took off his leggings and fastened them round my foot. The deep foot-holes made in the soft snow of the morning enabled me to walk without slipping, and we travelled nearly as fast as if I had both boots on, until we reached the grass. Most of the stones here were as flat as I now felt myself, but a few woke me up sharply. We reached the tent at 11.20.

It will be seen from what I have said that Ushba is in the main a snow grind, fatiguing and requiring steadiness, and at times, I fancy, not free from danger; but on our successful attempt not difficult. On our second attempt the

amount of step-cutting was in excess of anything I have known in the Alps, at least five hours'; and three hours' more cutting would have been needed to reach the neck. I have been asked if there are any rock climbs in the Caucasus. Well, it is true that up to the present Mr. Mummery's way up Koshtantau is the only great rock climb yet succeeded in; but there are many other rock climbs, only they are comparatively low. It seems to me that the natural instinct is to go first for the highest or most conspicuous peaks, just as men did in the Alps, whether they are snow or rock climbs. The snow climbs in the Caucasus are greater than in the Alps; and there is plenty of call for the best ice-craft; they have, too, rock bits on some of them equal to any like lengths on the ordinary ways up any of the Zermatt peaks. The Mishirgi Tau is a rock peak, and though dwarfed by Koshtantau, must be 16,000 ft. Tiutiurgu is a rock peak of 15,000 ft. None of the rock peaks on the north side of the Bezingi glacier can be less than 14,000 ft., and there is one nearly level with Saluinanchiran. I saw many other rock peaks—easy or difficult has to be found out. Whoever climbs the south peak of Ushba will not be dissatisfied with his prize. Caucasian rocks are much more freely coated with snow and ice than in the Alps.

As to the natives, my impression is that travelling in the Caucasus is only safe because of Russian rule, but that it is safe to any man who pays his way and treats the people civilly. Petty pilfering is to be looked for from the Bezingi men. In a dispute between two parties of natives at Kala there was a show of drawing knives, and a gun, most likely empty, was aimed, but the only violence was the shying of a stone that grazed a man's shin; then the two parties cursed each other freely, and after a time retired, each side then bursting into laughter as if it had done a clever thing. I had no difficulty in obtaining provisions.

The autumn colours of the Suanetian forests are the most beautiful I ever saw, and I have been in Pennsylvania in October and November. The birch is plentiful and very beautiful, with its leaves glittering like a shower of golden sparks, and at my entry into Betsho furnished the main colour. But during the week I was camped under Ushba red became the prevailing colour, chiefly from the mountain ash and wild cherry. Single trees of red foliage were not nearly so beautiful as the birch, but the massed effect of the

red in the sunshine was wonderful, especially at sunset, and it set off the snows more strikingly.

The glen between Tcholor and Lentechi, the most beautiful combination of rock, wood and water that could be dreamed of, is in danger of being spoiled of its trees, several fire clearings having been made. Great beeches were lying still smouldering, charred and black, an ugly sight.

#### ASCENT OF ISHPÉRO ZORN.

BY THE HON. C. G. BRUCE, FIFTH GURKHAS.

**T**HE valley of Chitral proper, running north and south, lies between spurs of the Hindu Koosh. About four miles north of Chitral Fort the Yarkhun river is joined by the Lutko river, running directly down from the main range of the Hindu Koosh, the Lutko valley forming the road to the Dorah Pass, which is the main route to Badakhshan. A long and broken limestone ridge encloses the Chitral valley on the west, and it was this ridge to which Captain Younghusband and I turned our attention. The crests of this ridge lie about five miles to the west of the valley, running due north and south, and abut on the valley with innumerable spurs, running at right angles to the ridge, and descending usually at a very gentle gradient until immediately above the valley, into which they dive at a steep angle.

From the garden of the house occupied by the Chitral Mission a glimpse is caught of some ragged crags, great part of which had remained bare of snow during the whole winter

The spur, a little to the north of our house, joins the crags and forms an arête, which I had noticed when out shooting during the winter months, and which appeared to me to afford a good route to within 300 ft. of the crest; I was by no means prepared, however, to find it so good a road as it eventually turned out to be.

On April 16, after a spell of very fine weather, I determined to make an attempt to climb these crags, or, at any rate, to make such a reconnaissance as would insure success in a subsequent attempt.

Accordingly, on April 17, at 2 A.M., I left Chitral with three Gurkhas—two of them to climb, and the third to carry our boots and provisions as far as we could manage to go without them. Boots have become so precious in this