

Zanskar Anyone?

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Mountaineers usually give slide shows and narrate what they have done in the mountains - peaks they have seen, climbed, explored and the areas they have travelled. This always happens after their return. But how about a 'futuristic' slide show?

As one travels on road from Kargil to Ringdom monastery and to Pensi la, 'slide after slide' of views begin to appear. First one sees pictures of high peaks of Nun and Khun. At Panikhar, as the road turns, the valleys to the west leads to the Bobang pass, Sersank pass and Lonvilad gully (or Bot Kol pass). Dogra armies had marched through these easiest of Himalayan passes to reach Panikhar and Kargil on their way to Baltistan.

The next 'slide' turns towards the northern faces of the Great Himalayan Range as the road travels along the Suru river. North faces of Nun and Khun, the Shafat glacier and the small but impressive massif of Thungos are projected. This scenery takes you to the Ringdom Gompa, the historic monastery which literally draws the line for the start of the Buddhist areas.

The next few slides are the most important of the show. Now the road travels to Pensi la, the watershed between the Suru valley (to the west) and the Doda river flowing east. As you travel along the road, the slides change rapidly. The glacier valleys of Shafat, Dalung, Chilung, Lalung, Pensilungpa and the long Durung Drung pass to the south, each containing brilliant peaks, most of them unclimbed and un-attempted. The Chilung la leads to the Fariabad glacier at the southern foot of Nun-Khun and down to the Warwan valley, unfortunately out of bounds for the present. Until you reach Pensi la, views in each of the valleys contain challenging peaks - a veritable climber's playground if height is not the only consideration to climb peaks.

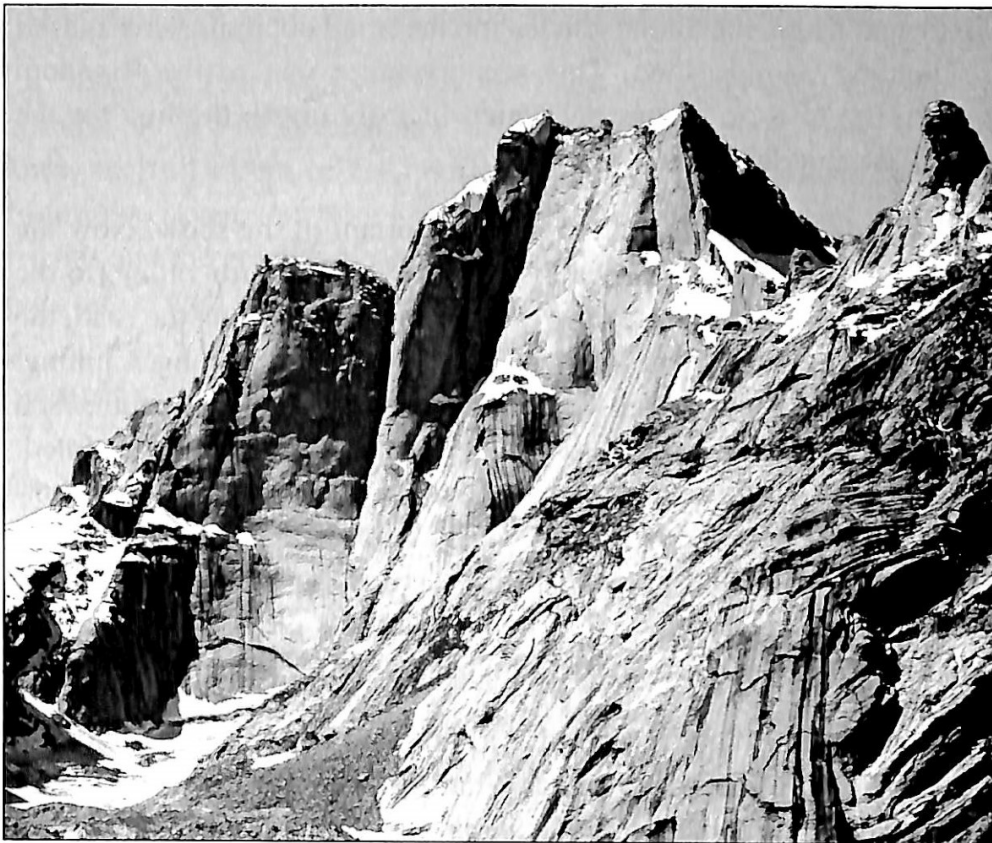
Soon you reach the high point as a picture of the long and forbidding Durung Drung glacier is projected. What a sight: a long glacier winding its way to the watershed with Kishtwar and the 6483 m high Durung Drung peak guarding the east. Several peaks of various heights and

difficulties enclose the glacier walls on both sides. Dropping from Pensi la towards Padam, the panorama changes – you see three deep valleys leading to the famous passes of Hagshu la, Umasi la and Poat la to Kishtwar.

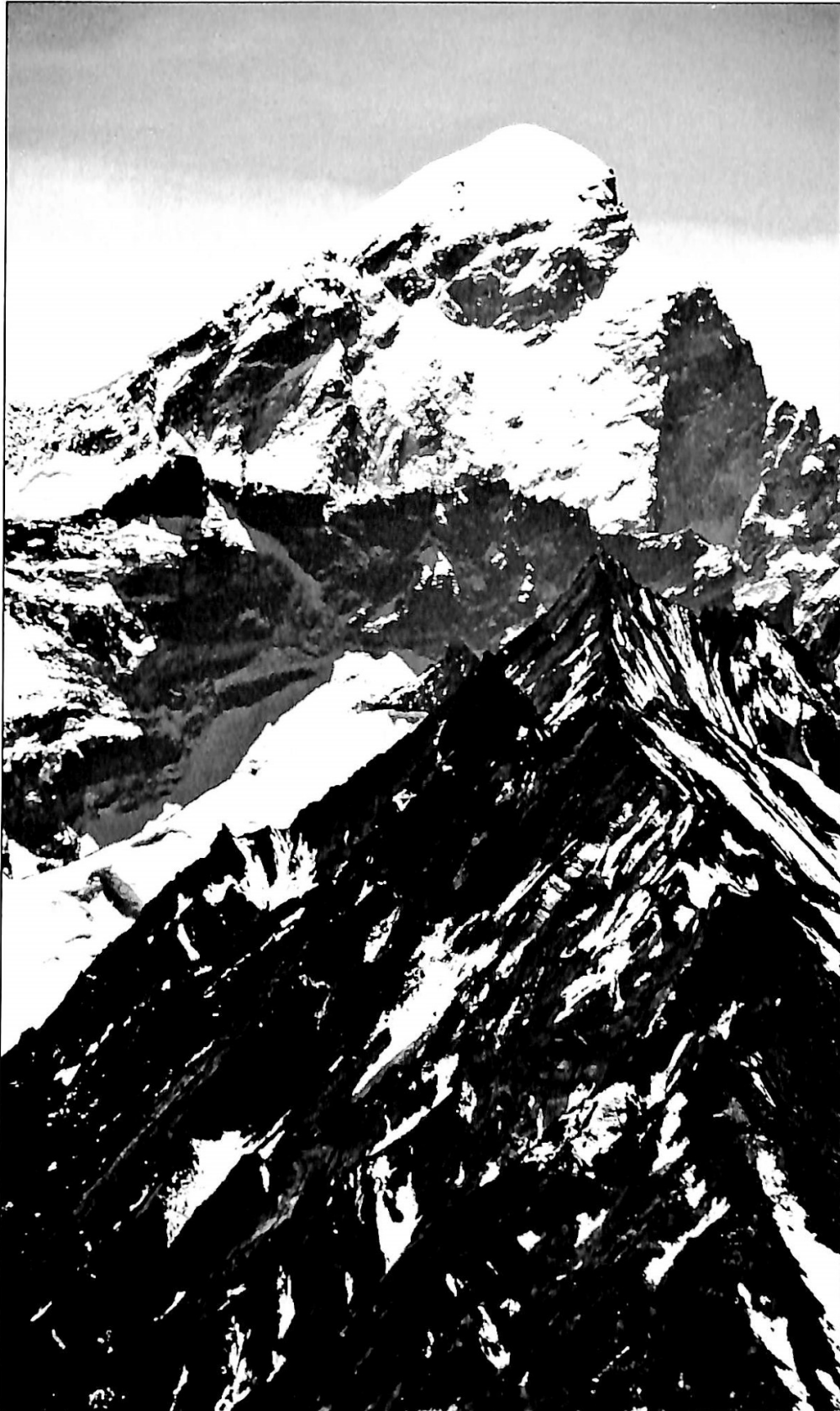
This panorama, including that of the Durung Drung glacier, can be seen without taking a single step! The road passes near the entrance of each of these valleys. One can literally change base camps by jeeps and buses. No large contingent of porters or animals is required to climb here. Sip wine at one valley, climb and move on to the next one to open another bottle!

The final visual of the slide show is a small movie clip. A climber with a laden rucksack is seen shouting in the bazaar of Leh or Kargil: ‘Zanskar, Zanskar, going alpine-style climbing, cheap and challenging, small group , no support required, open area, unclimbed peaks – small but steep, great views and great weather generally. Only two places left, Zanskar, Zanskar anyone ?’

(All photographs by the author)



42. Thungos (5805 m), southwest of Gelmothungos. (8 km before Ringdom).



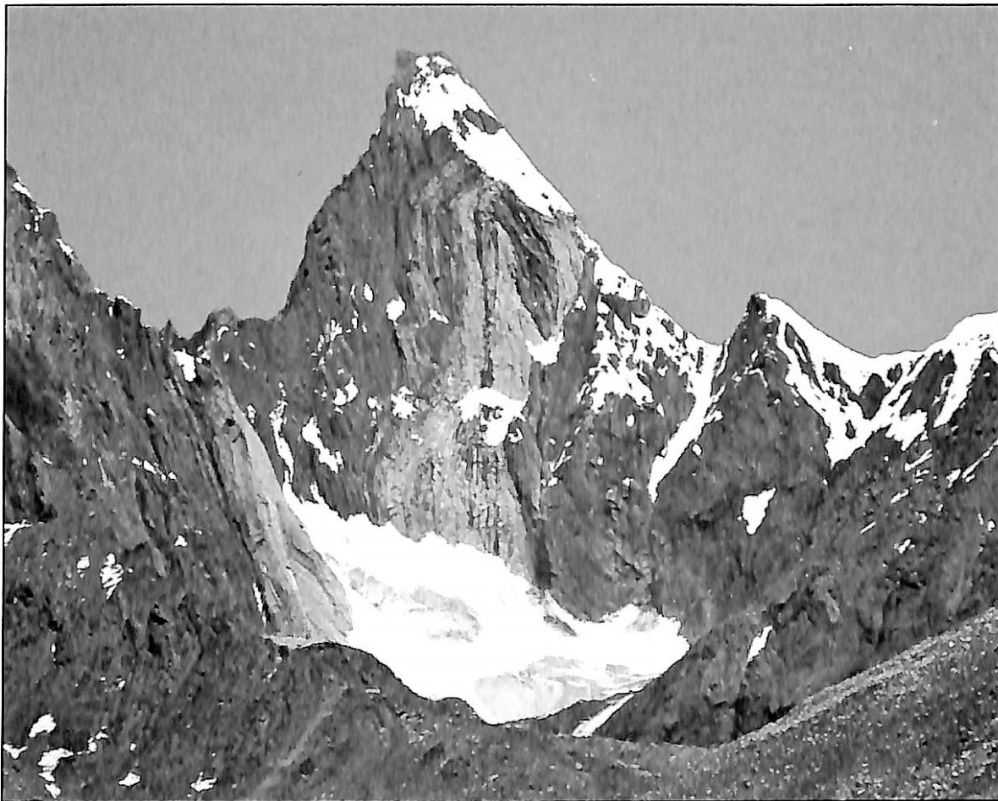
43. View from Rusi la: Khun (7135 m), north face.



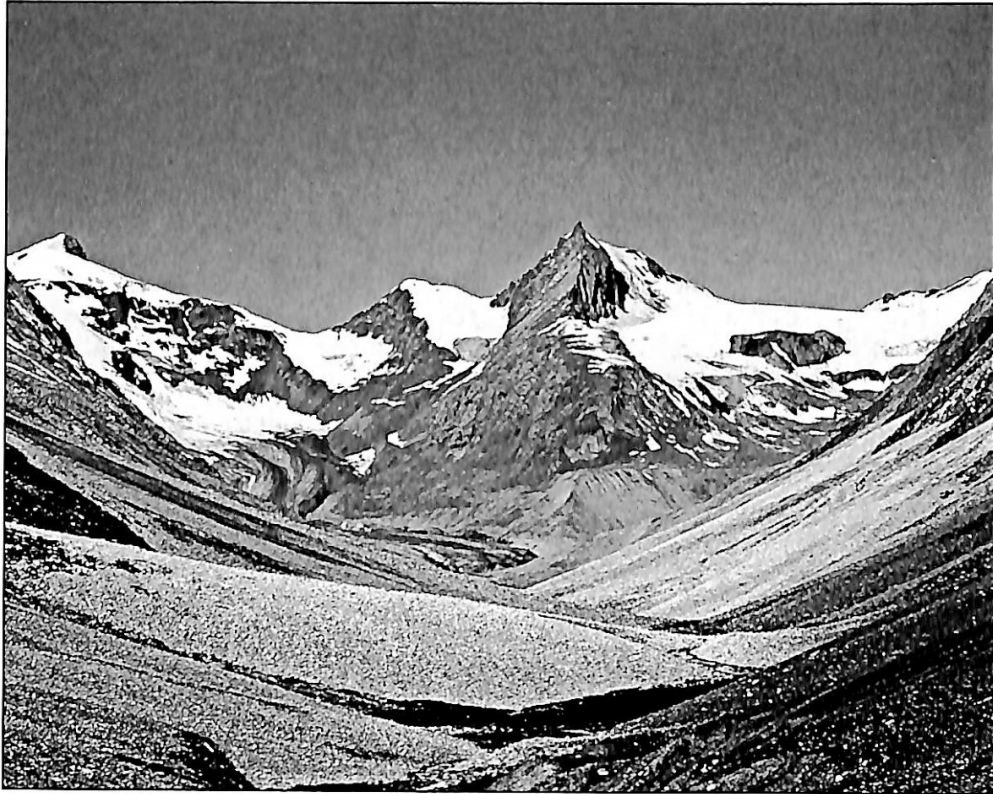
44. Nun (7135 m) above Shafat glacier (near Parkachik).



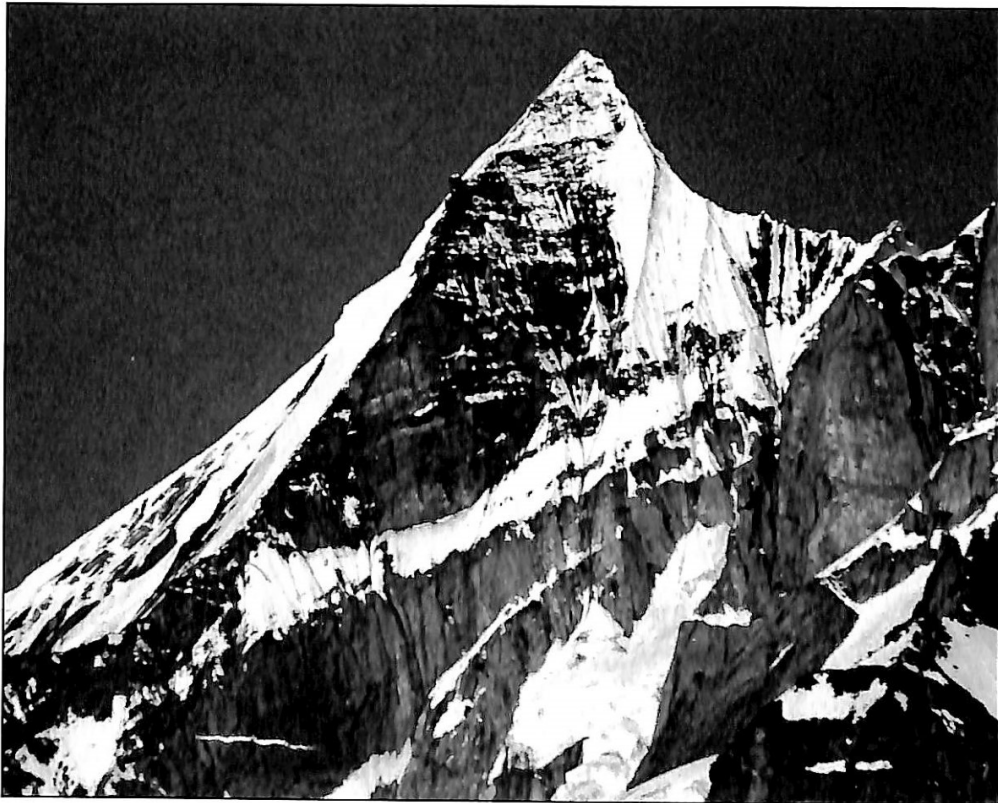
45. Peak 5894 m, Dalung valley (first valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



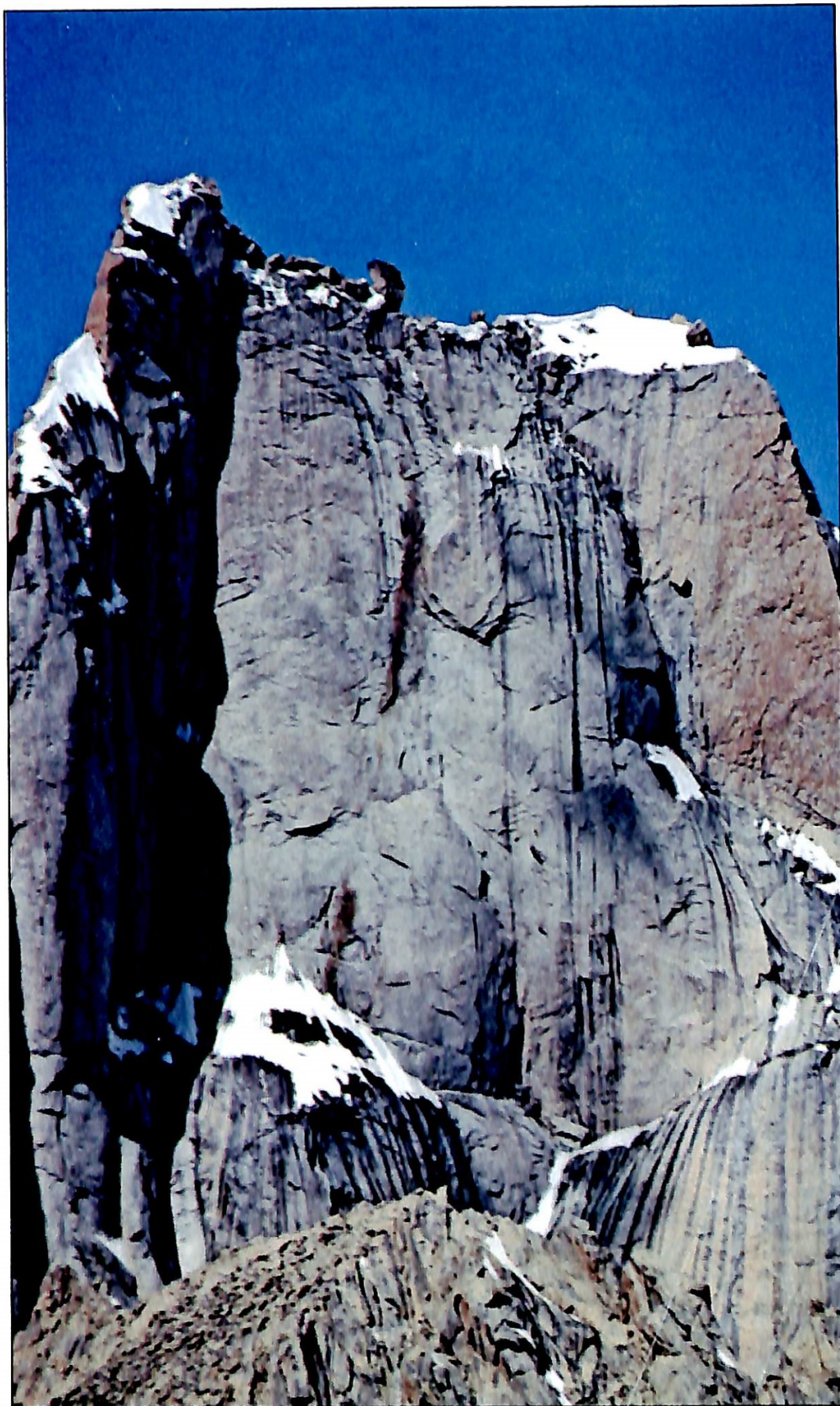
46. Peak 5926 m Shafat-Dalung glaciers divide (first valley from Ringdom to Pensi la)



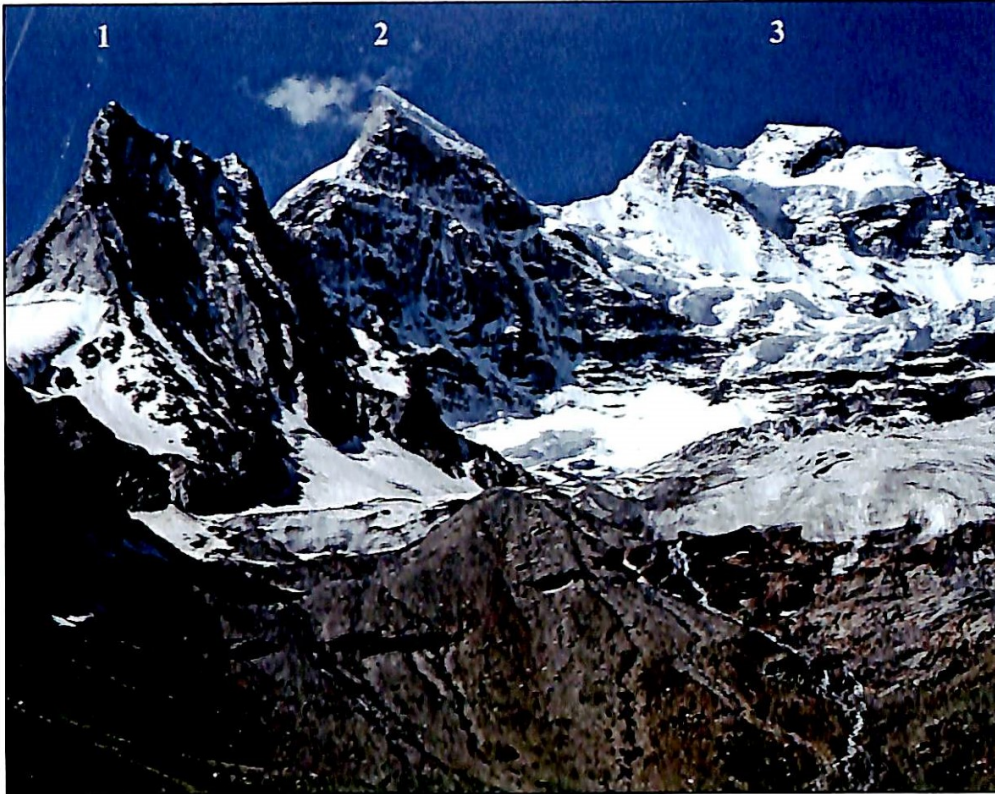
47. Chilung valley. Chilung pass is on extreme right over the snow ridge (second valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



48. Peak 6152, Lalung valley (third valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



32. Thungos (5805 m), southwest of Gelmothungos. (8 km before Ringdom).



33. En route Parkachik to Ringdom : 1 Pk. 5780 m, 2 Pk. 6495 m (Rungofarka glacier) and 3 Lingsarmo 6955 m (Lingsarmo glacier).



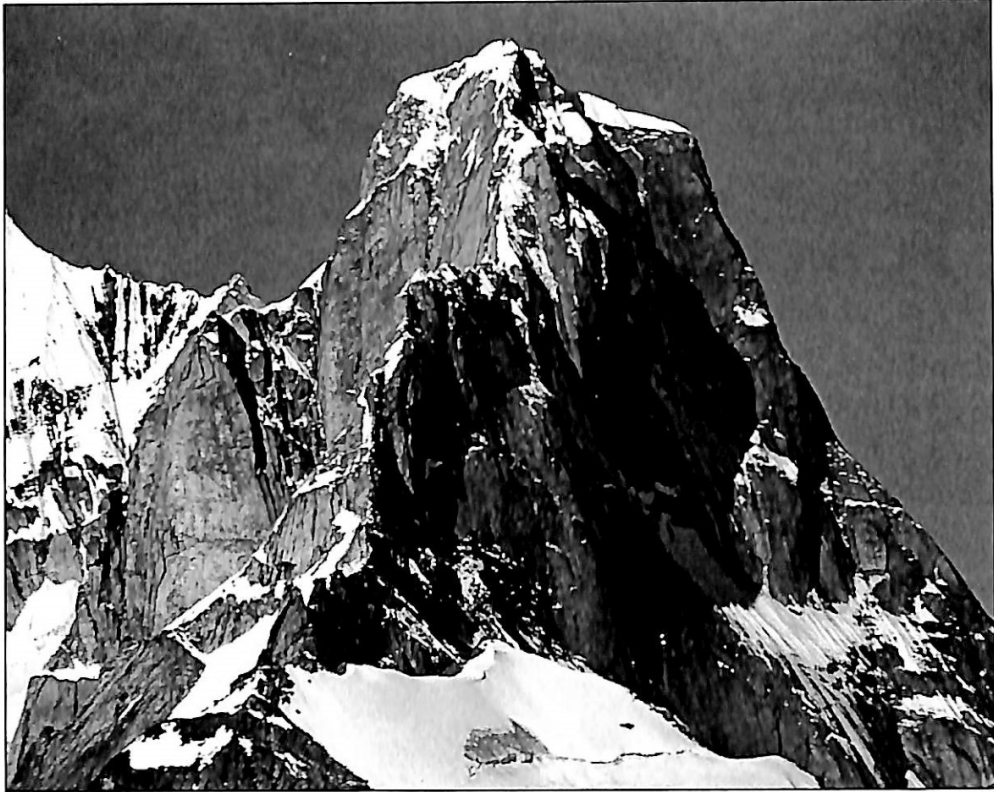
34. Peaks 6152 (left) and 5844 m, Lalung valley. (third valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



35. Peak 6243 m, Lalung valley (third valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



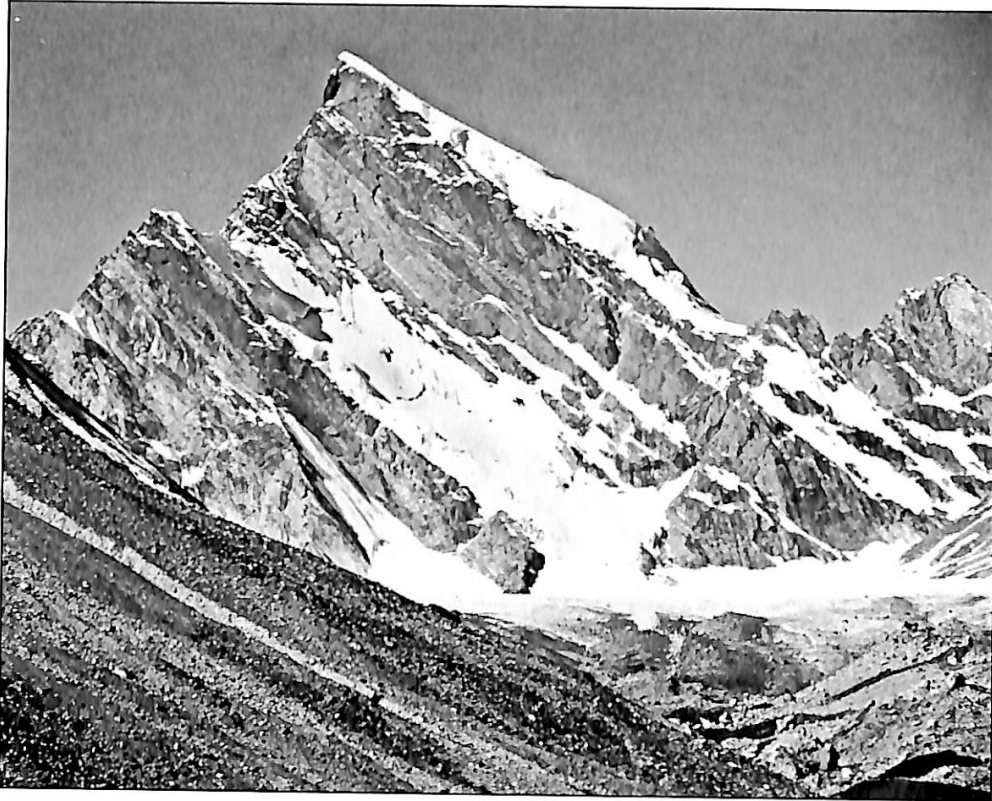
36. The Durung Drung glacier. Durung Drung peak (6485 m, left) and Peak 5835 m at head of the glacier (first valley on descent from Pensi la towards Padam).



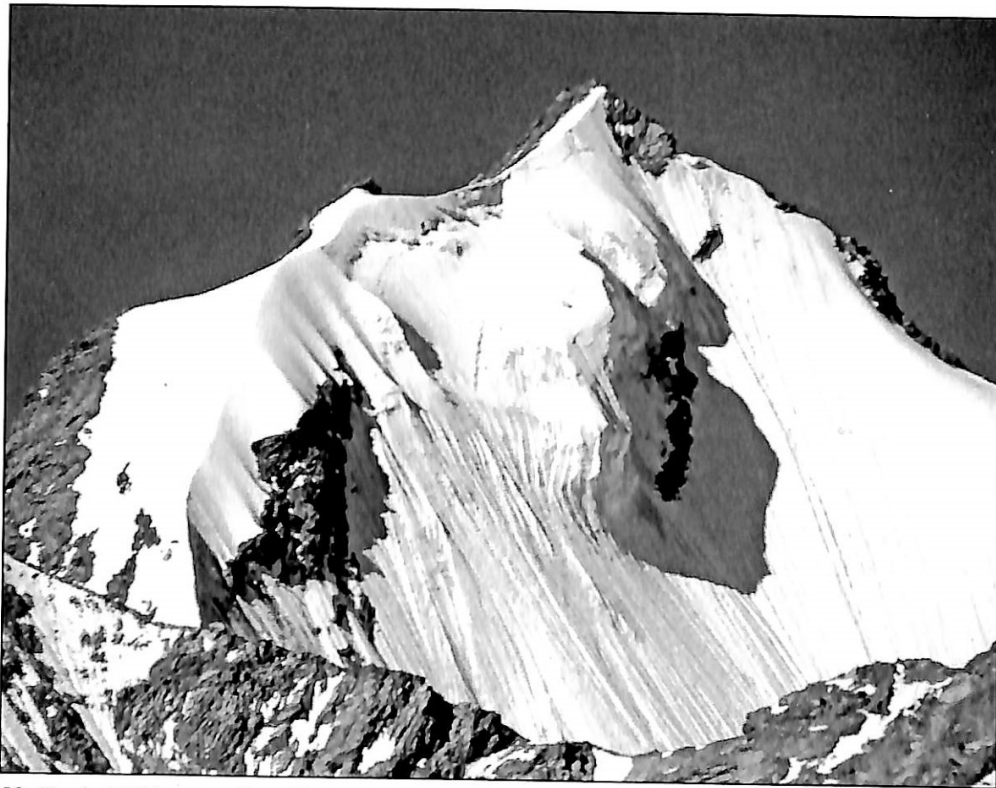
49. Peak 5844 m, Lalung valley. (third valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



50. Peak 6274 m, Lalung valley (third valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



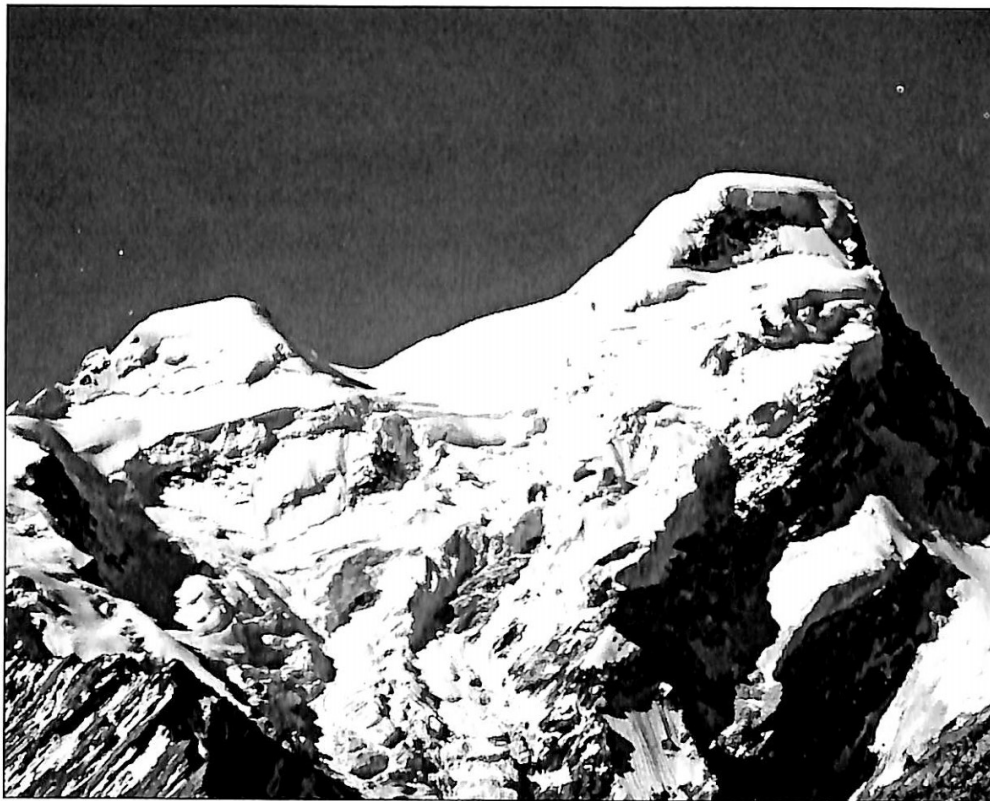
51. Peak 5854 m Pensilungpa valley (fourth and last valley from Ringdom to Pensi la).



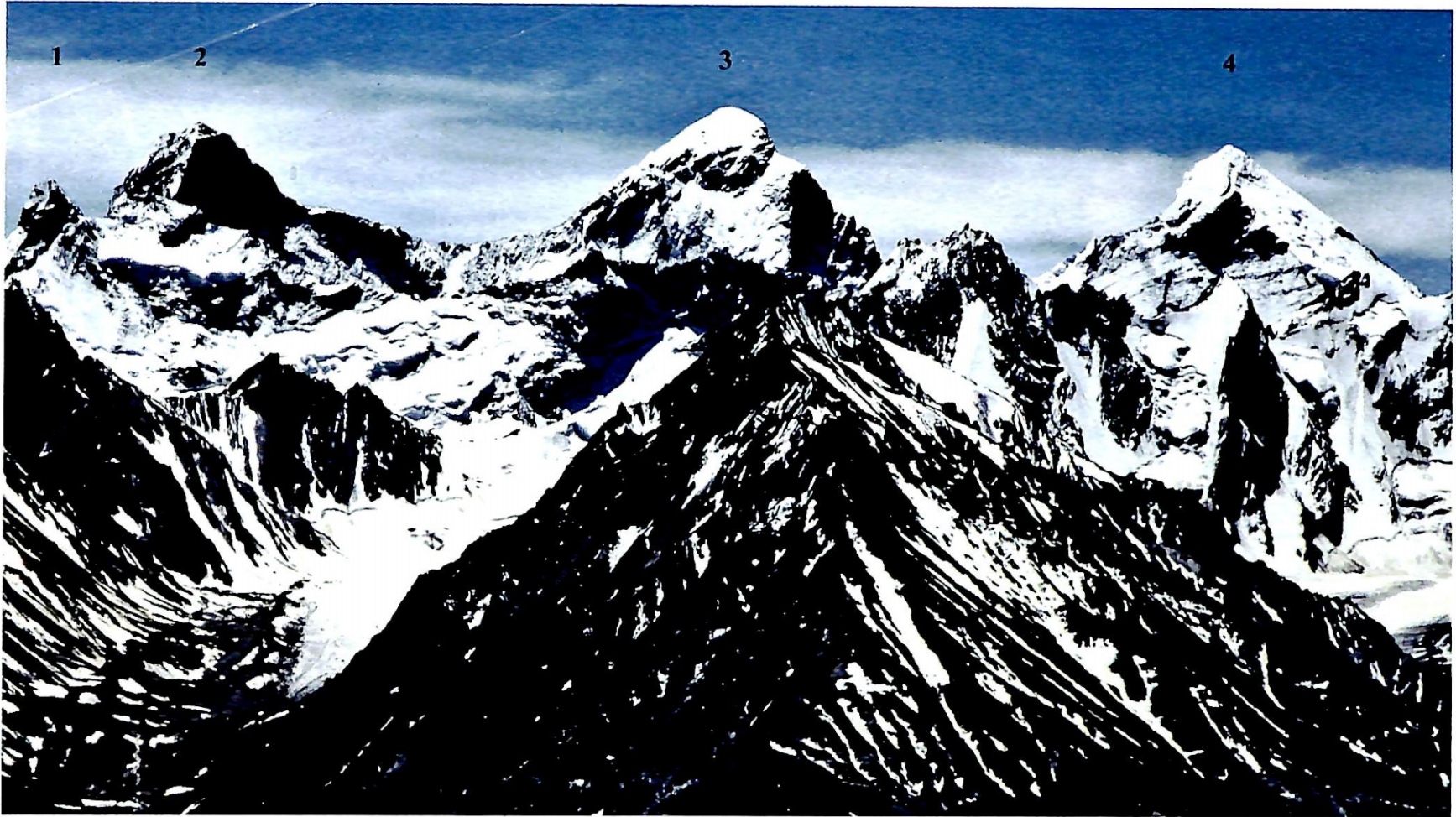
52. Peak 6197 m, on Pensilungpa -Durung Drung glacier divide. (fourth and last valley Ringdom to Pensi la).



53. Peak 5909 m, on eastern wall of Durung Drung glacier (south of Pensi la).



54. Durung Drung peak, 6485 m (first valley on descent from Pensi la towards Padam).



31. View from Rusi la: 1 Pk. 6800 m, 2 Lingsarmo (6955 m), 3 Khun (7135 m) and 4 Nun (7135 m), north faces.



THE HIMALAYAN JOURNAL



Honorary Editor
HARISH KAPADIA

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VOLUME 65
2009

Published for
THE HIMALAYAN CLUB
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
DELHI LONDON NEW YORK
2009



THE HIMALAYAN JOURNAL

Volume
65
2009

