

Flights: Three direct from Europe per week (British Airways or Air Malawi).

Department of Tourism, Box 30366, Lilongwe, Malawi.

Van der Post, L. 1952. *Venture to the Interior*. A rather dramatized account of a visit to Mulanje (in the wet season!) and to the Nyika Plateau in N Malawi.

¹ (Available in Malawi and overseas from: Times Bookshop Ltd, P/Bag 39, Blantyre, Malawi. Cost: Malawi, K8.50; and, by airmail, UK, K15; Europe, K17.50; USA, K19. 1K (Kwacha) = approx 1 US Dollar.)

Jannu

Alan Rouse

In the post monsoon season of 1978 4 British climbers climbed Jannu in Alpine style reaching the summit on the 5th day of their climb on 21 October. This is the story of their ascent.

On the 12th day of October a weary foursome descend the Yalung glacier heavily laden with equipment brought down from an attempt on the E Ridge of Jannu. The route proved to be too long and difficult for us despite the 6 days of effort put into the attempt, during which we gained 1200m. Our chosen objective was clearly out of the question.

The next day we spend at Base Camp sorting our equipment and deciding what we should do. It is clear that our only chance of climbing Jannu is to make the long slog round to the Yamatari glacier and try the much easier French route. We select and pack our gear accordingly, deciding to leave the next day. It will take 3 long days to reach the foot of the route and say a week on the route itself. We pack 10 days' food and ignore the walk back. We intend to climb as 2 ropes of 2 so we take one 45m 9mm rope per pair and a small selection of pitons, nuts and ice-pegs. Brian suggests taking a tent but the idea is vetoed as everyone begins to realize just how much weight we will be carrying anyway. I insist on taking one snow-stake, while Brian and Roger decide to carry some meta fuel for cooking. We only have 6 gas cylinders left and they think in advance of the great high altitude thirst.

On the morning of the 14th we leave our Base Camp and descend the Yalung glacier to Ramshey at the foot of the Lapsong La. Our Sirdar, Padam, helps us by carrying our ropes and technical climbing gear but we still have heavy loads. A family of yak herders is resident at Ramshey so we buy some meat off them and cook it over a wood fire. It is a beautiful evening but rather cold and with a heavy dew. We stay up until late talking and eating meat, luxuriating in the smell of vegetation and the denser air of lower altitudes. Padam will return to Base Camp tomorrow morning and 2 of the yak herders will help us carry over the Lapsong La.

The next morning a fire is lit at the first signs of the dawn and we are ready to leave before the sun appears from behind Rathong. The early start is necessary because our 2 yak herder friends must return to their family the same day. We give the 2 of them, the old man and his son, 25Kg apiece which reduces our loads to around 20Kg. They walk quite fast and we soon reach the top of the Lapsong La 1000–1200m above Ramshey. We offer them a few sweets and they give us small



33 Jannu, with E peak on the right (This and next photo: A. Rouse)

cubes of very hard dried cheese, carefully removed from the piece of string on which they are kept like beads on a necklace. The top of the pass is littered with cairns most of which are tall and slender, only 15cm wide yet several m high. In the distance Makalu and Everest are clearly visible. The W facing slopes dropping down to the Yamatari glacier and eventually Ghunsa are still well frozen so we proceed first and kick big steps for the two porters. Shortly after midday we arrive at the grass covered moraines by the side of the Yamatari glacier, having dropped 1200–1500m from the top of the Lapsong La.

Having established ourselves under some boulders we toy with the idea of taking a rest day so as to conserve our strength for the route, but we soon decide that it would be better to press on in order to take advantage of the excellent weather conditions that are prevailing. So on the 16th we set off along the boulder-strewn glacier, well refreshed from a long night's sleep. It takes 7 hrs to reach the point at which we should leave the Yamatari glacier and start our climb. By 7 o'clock we are all established at the last point we will see any greenery for quite a few days and we drink as much liquid as possible as there is a small stream nearby. We are now at an altitude of around 4800m so we have some 2900m to go.

Rab Carrington and myself form one rope while Roger Baxter Jones and Brian Hall form another. Although each pair has essentially independent equipment we have agreed that we all go up or we all go down. This is partly dictated anyway by our weight-saving measure of only taking one rope per pair. Nobody or no pair is the leader as we are all equally qualified to be on this climb.

The first day of our climb we aim to reach the French Camp 3, a very long way but without any significant technical difficulty. We stumble across boulders in the pre-dawn grey and then scramble up to the hanging glacier, where we put on crampons for a short ice-wall leading on to the main part of the glacier. Despite the

relatively low altitude the snow is very powdery and quite hard work. At about 11 o'clock we stop for tea on a sunny rock island. The afternoon passes laboriously in deep snow and by 4 o'clock we decide to call it a day, still some distance below the site of the French Camp 3. During the day we passed 30m of fixed rope remaining from the French ascent. This rope, stretched along a short rock step, and a small piece of rope hanging from a serac on the ice-ridge are the only traces we are to see of the French ascent. The bivouac site is comfortable and spacious, perched on the top of a rocky ridge separating two glaciers.

After a good night's sleep we eat a leisurely breakfast and then Roger and Brian lead off into a short ice-fall. The idea is that each pair leads on alternate days giving the other pair a relatively easy day. A short ice-pitch up a serac wall bypasses the crevassed region that had provided the French with some problems and leads to a plateau where the French Camp 3 had been. Above us looms the Tête du Buttoir, an unpleasant looking object festooned with cornices, seracs and snow mushrooms. There are two possibilities for gaining the 600m separating us from the top of this giant snowy gendarme. Straight ahead lies the couloir used by the French attempt in 1959. This is mixed rock and ice at perhaps 55 to 60 degrees and looks inviting apart from a crowded group of seracs lurking over its top. A ridge coming into the Tête du Buttoir from the left looks easier and safer although sections of it are out of sight. We plump for the ridge as the French had done on the successful attempt in 1962.

Putting on our technical climbing gear we were now ready to get to grips with some interesting climbing. The slopes leading to the ridge offer little difficulty and we climb together up the curiously fluted face lying at an angle of 50 to 55 degrees. The ridge proves narrow and precarious with very steep sides. We proceed with caution, taking ice-axe belays in the hopelessly soft snow and hoping that the whole thing will stay in place. To avoid overhanging mushrooms we engineer several pitches on the right flank, where the ice is as full of holes as a Gruyère cheese and each of the holes is filled with powder snow. Sometimes progress is made with arms buried to the hilt although occasionally front pointing techniques are necessary. Roger takes a 5m fall on a short vertical wall of snow but Brian manages to hold him and they set off in a different direction. This particular *mauvais pas* was to give us some trouble on the descent as well. Another steep wall of snow almost proves impassable but eventually succumbs at a rate of a metre every 15mins. A great gash in the snow marks our progress. The ridge now peters out into a hideous mass of gigantic ice-blocks. It is like a glacial ice-fall coming down the crest of a narrow and exposed ridge: quite unlike anything we have encountered before. Fortunately the actual climbing proves easier than it looks and after a few more hours we reach a suitable bivouac site.

While clearing a flat area on which to sleep Rab uncovers a big hole and it becomes apparent that we are on top of some ice-blocks wedged between two serac walls. Meanwhile Brian has gone exploring to find a suitable route for the next day. Suddenly he disappears from view as a snow-bridge collapses. He is left hanging in space over a great drop and Roger can only just hold him. Rab quickly belays Roger and I belay Rab while Brian tries to get back up. Eventually we all settle down for the night none the worse.

We are now at 6400m and we all seem to be going well, although Brian's ill-fated reconnaissance has revealed that all the possible exits from our present position will be pretty tricky. The next morning with Rab and I in the lead we climb



34 Janu

2 precarious pitches of very steep snow and ice climbing. The second pitch involves crawling along a small horizontal slot and then somehow pulling out on to a snow-slope above in a fearfully exposed position. The complete lack of belays and irreversible nature of the climbing adds to the nagging doubts about just how we can get down again.

A tedious slope of powder snow brings us to the top of the Tête du Buttoir from where a pleasantly airy ridge leads over the Tête du Dentelle. Roger, our authority on the French ascent, as he is the only one who has read the book, informs us that we must traverse round on the left side to reach a gully which will lead us to the top of the 120m high obstacle. The traverse involves crossing a very steep slope of wind-slab across which we proceed very gingerly, taking extra large steps to avoid creating a fracture line. Rab tries to climb the steep fluted face but retreats in disgust because of the appalling snow and then I try with the same result. Meanwhile Brian and Roger have arrived and we start to discuss just what kind of situation we seem to be heading for. The retreat from here would be very difficult even in good weather and yet we are climbing into further difficulty. We mentally prepare the descent and most of it seems feasible. Roger has been investigating possibilities around the corner and eventually shouts back that he has reached a groove which leads up for some distance and seems feasible. We all follow to find a groove that actually has some ice in its bed from time to time and we indulge in the luxury of a running belay from an ice screw. The groove leads to a platform only 9m from the summit of the Tête du Dentelle. Roger carries on over an exposed snow-bulge to reach easy ground. Another piece of irreversible climbing perhaps? We ask Roger his opinion on the matter and he reckons that it should be OK and also that the way ahead looks easy. We feel very committed as the 4 of us finally stand on the top of the Tête du Dentelle.

Now we are on the vast plateau of the throne and a biting wind quickly forces us into our sleeping bags for the night. We use blocks of wind slab to erect walls around us but they provide scant protection against the constant gusts of spindrift. This is our 3rd bivouac on the route and it is only a few hundred m higher than the previous one, the bulk of the day's climbing having been horizontal. Under the conditions Rab and I give up the struggle to make tea or cook and we sleep badly through the night. The other two persevere and manage to make a little tea.

By the next morning the winds have dropped a little but it is very cold as we set out for the 4th day's climbing. The day passes uneventfully as we slog steadily upwards on easy ground gradually getting closer to the summit head. We take turns in breaking the trail and finally reach the bergschrund close to where the French Camp 5 had been. The bergschrund promises a comfortable bivouac so we stop there for the night.

We are now at 7000m with 700m still to go. Between us and the summit the French erected a Camp 6 and only just made it from the camp to the summit in a day. We decide that despite the distance involved we must try for the summit the next day as another bivouac higher on the mountain in the intense cold and strong winds would be inviting disaster. To further this aim we decide to take only necessary climbing gear, some sweets and a headtorch thus obviating the need for a rucksack. In order to get an early start we start making tea at midnight. By 3.30am we are ready to leave and Rab goes into the lead out of the bergschrund and on to the ice-slopes above. The cold is more intense than any of us have experienced before and a strong wind produces icy currents of spindrift. A good moon aids our

progress, although we all look forward to dawn which will hopefully see a relief from the almost insufferable cold.

Dawn arrives after 10 or so pitches, but brings little comfort as the wind gets increasingly stronger. We all put the maximum effort into progressing as quickly as possible to try and reach the summit before midday—a deadline if we are to descend safely. Rab is in the lead and going well as we pass the site of the French Camp 6. The climbing is of a technical standard of perhaps Alpine TD, but is straightforward as for once we encounter good snow conditions. We enter a gully which is pouring spindrift out in all directions, stinging the face and making speech almost impossible. After a total of about 20 pitches we emerge on to the summit ridge which proves easy though of course tiring. A further 8 pitches bring us to the summit. Thirty m away there is another summit perhaps higher than ours, but we decline to investigate. It is now 11.30am on 21 October and we all take a turn standing on the summit before setting off down again.

By 4pm we regain our bivouac site. All day we have been worried about frostbite and we are relieved when toes and fingers warm up in the sleeping bags. Although the weather is perfect the strong winds persist and we spend a restless night.

The next morning we do not get up until after dawn and then we stroll back down the throne to reach the Tête du Dentelle. Reversing the last pitch on to the Tête du Dentelle proves easier than expected as our steps have now frozen and are still visible. It still proves nerve-racking with the complete absence of belays. After a few more hours we arrive at the Tête du Buttoir. The thought of climbing down the 2 difficult pitches after the 3rd bivouac site is too difficult to contemplate so we opt to search for a different line. With Rab belaying I go to the edge of the convex dome that we are on only to find that the rotten snow becomes steeper and steeper and then out of reach below turns into vertical serac ice. If only we could reach some ice—then we could rappel from an ice-screw. The second spot I try yields the same results as before but I have more luck the 3rd time. A pinnacle of snow and ice has split away from the serac wall and I manage to get down on to it. We manage to rig up a rather precarious rappel by using the pinnacle as a bollard. After a little exploring and one more rappel we regain our line of ascent and continue down.

The short steep snow-wall which had cost us so much effort on the way up looked an unlikely thing to climb down so we sacrificed our snow-stake as a rappel anchor. A while later we came to the *mauvais pas* on the ice-ridge. I cut a poor snow-bollard and rappelled with a top rope but when Rab started to rappel the bollard gave way as we had foreseen it might. Rab fell 6m but fortunately I was on the other side of the ridge and was able to check his fall relatively easily. Eventually we became too tired to continue and as it was already dark we bivouaced, for the 6th time, at an altitude of around 6100m.

The next day we made it down to the Yamatari side of the Lapsong La. Everyone was feeling hungry by now as we had effectively run out of food the previous evening. The following day over the Lapsong La proved very wearing as the lack of food really began to tell. We did not make it down to Ramshey that day but bivouaced in a snow-storm near the top of the pass. In the morning we dropped below the snow-line again and were relieved to see that the yak herders were still in residence at Ramshey. They provided us with some cheese and Tibetan tea which fortified us for the final 7 hour walk back to Base Camp.

So we managed to climb Jannu in Alpine style with 4 bivouacs on the ascent and 2 on the descent, yet somehow it was not as satisfactory as we had hoped. Although

we had been brought to our limit it was in a way unfamiliar to us. The grinding effort and great commitment without the reward of magnificent technical pitches such as one may encounter on the Grandes Jorasses in winter. Certainly there had been hard climbing but it had not been of the enjoyable type. Hard work is the best description of Himalayan climbing that I can think of. Nevertheless I expect we will all be back again pushing our own personal frontiers of experience. There definitely is something there and memory will dull the pain.

International Alpine Camp, Pamirs 1978

Marek Brniak

Foreign visitors to the mountains of Pamir, members of International Alpine Camp organized by the USSR Mountaineering Federation, were admitted to the area of Revolution Peak for the first time in 1978. Apart from the areas of Peaks Lenin (7132m) and Communism (7495m) already well known to the climbers of the W, this is the only part of the SW Pamirs foreign climbing parties are allowed to enter.

The Alpine Camps have been organized in these areas on a permanent and regular basis. It is suspected that other new regions will become accessible as time goes on. The USSR Mountaineering Federation makes a business of it with the camps resembling package holidays. Such a regular trip lasts 35 days, 30 of which are spent in the mountains while the remaining 5 days are allowed for travelling and a sightseeing tour of Moscow. Aeroflot planes take the visitors within a few hours from the capital to the camp sites. The participants are required to bring their own personal climbing and bivouac equipment, in accordance with the goals to be attempted, but the base camp tents are supplied by the organizers. Also full board and lodging are provided throughout the whole trip with 3 regular meals a day to be enjoyed in dining-rooms arranged under canvas at the base camps or an equivalent in the form of standard packs of the climbers' choice. The base camp staff include some interpreters with a sufficient command of foreign languages thus making available information on routes and climbing conditions. Also medical attention can be obtained on the spot if necessary but the Federation do not wish to accept any responsibility for accidents or any injuries suffered by the climbers who are expected to insure for the period of their stay in the Soviet Union with their own insurance agencies. The total cost of such a trip amounts to about US\$1000, payable to the Federation who will be happy to supply application forms on request. Despite the fact that the price does not include travelling expenses to and from the Soviet Union this does not seem to be overmuch, for it gives the participants practical chances to set foot on the summits of 2 or even 3 seven-thousanders, to reach some virgin peaks or to make first or numbered ascents of all grades of difficulty including many problems of the highest standard available.

The 1978 Camp's new Base Camp was erected in Jazgulem Dara valley that leads to the foot of Revolution Peak from the S. The massif of the Peak is the culmination of the Jazgulemskyi Chain stretching for almost 200km from the Ab-i-Panja River on the Afghan border in the W to the head of the Tanymas River in the E. For most of its length the chain runs from SW to NE. It is characterized by a real wealth of