

reached the summit without supplementary oxygen. They had climbed to the southern side of the vast summit snowfield in knee-deep snow. Suddenly Everest and Lhotse appeared through a rift in the dense fog. On September 21, Ohkura, K. Takahashi, Kato, Ohtani and Sherpas Nima Dorje and Ang Dawa reached the top. (They were accompanied by Frenchman Thierry Renard, who apparently was not authorized to make the climb—*Editor*.) Takahashi descended in ten minutes from the summit some 2600 vertical meters to Base Camp by paraglider. It took him five tries to take off. This is the record for the highest take-off. This is all the more remarkable when you consider that he had to run some distance on the flat mountain top to be able to take off. On September 22, Kobayashi, Sherpas Lhakpa Tenzing, Ang Phurba and Mingma Tenzing and I gained the summit. We withdrew from Base Camp on September 26 and were in Lhasa on the 29th.

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Menlungtse Attempt. Our team was composed of Norwegians Odd Eliassen, Bjørn Myrer-Lund, Torgeir Fosse and Helge Ringdal and Britons Jim Fotheringham and me. Getting to Base Camp was an adventure. We had originally planned on five days to reach there from the Nepalese-Tibetan frontier at Kodari, but it took us over a fortnight. We made a difficult trip by lorry over the 17,500-foot Lalung Leh pass to Tingri. There our liaison officer, Wang Ja Ren, told us that the pass that led back south was still blocked by snow but that he had ordered yaks to carry our gear over it. Life was further complicated by altitude sickness which afflicted for the time being three of the Norwegians. We finally made it to the northern foot of the Nangpa La. We swung to the right from the route over the Nangpa La, climbed a steep ridge and crossed a 17,500-foot pass and, despite reluctance on the part of the yak drivers, descended to Chang Bu Jian, the district headquarters. After much bargaining, we got yaks and porters to continue in the narrow valley with its lush green vegetation in contrast with the dry Tibetan plateau. We set out on March 22, walking down an incredibly beautiful gorge. An hour's walk took us to the confluence with the Menlung valley. We climbed steeply up the valley and on March 25 found a perfect site for our Base Camp at 13,400 feet, ten days behind schedule. On our first reconnaissance on March 27, we looked at the north side of the mountain, walking up a long moraine towering above the glacier, but there was no hope from that side. The following day we set out to explore the southern aspect. The four ridges dropping from the high ramparts all appeared difficult and steep, but the route that gave the greatest chance was more of a buttress than a ridge. Three days later, on April 2, we were at 17,200 feet at the foot of the buttress, although the approach had been frightening. We decided to use fixed rope to make it safer for the descent and to give us a higher jumping-off point for our alpine-style push for the summit. We ran out some rope-lengths before dropping down to Advance Base in the valley. The following day we returned with tents and food, but we still had rope to fix. On

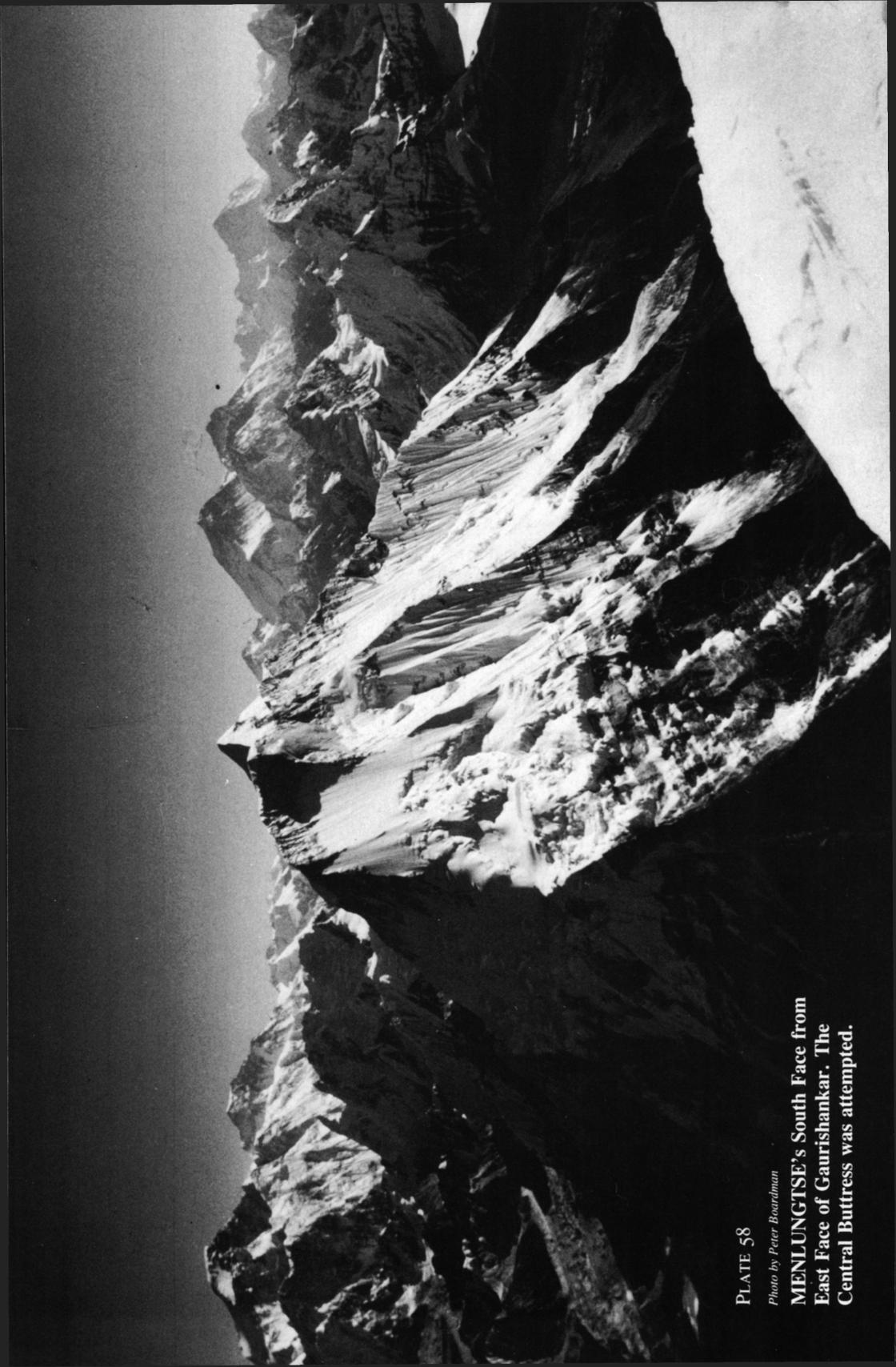


PLATE 58

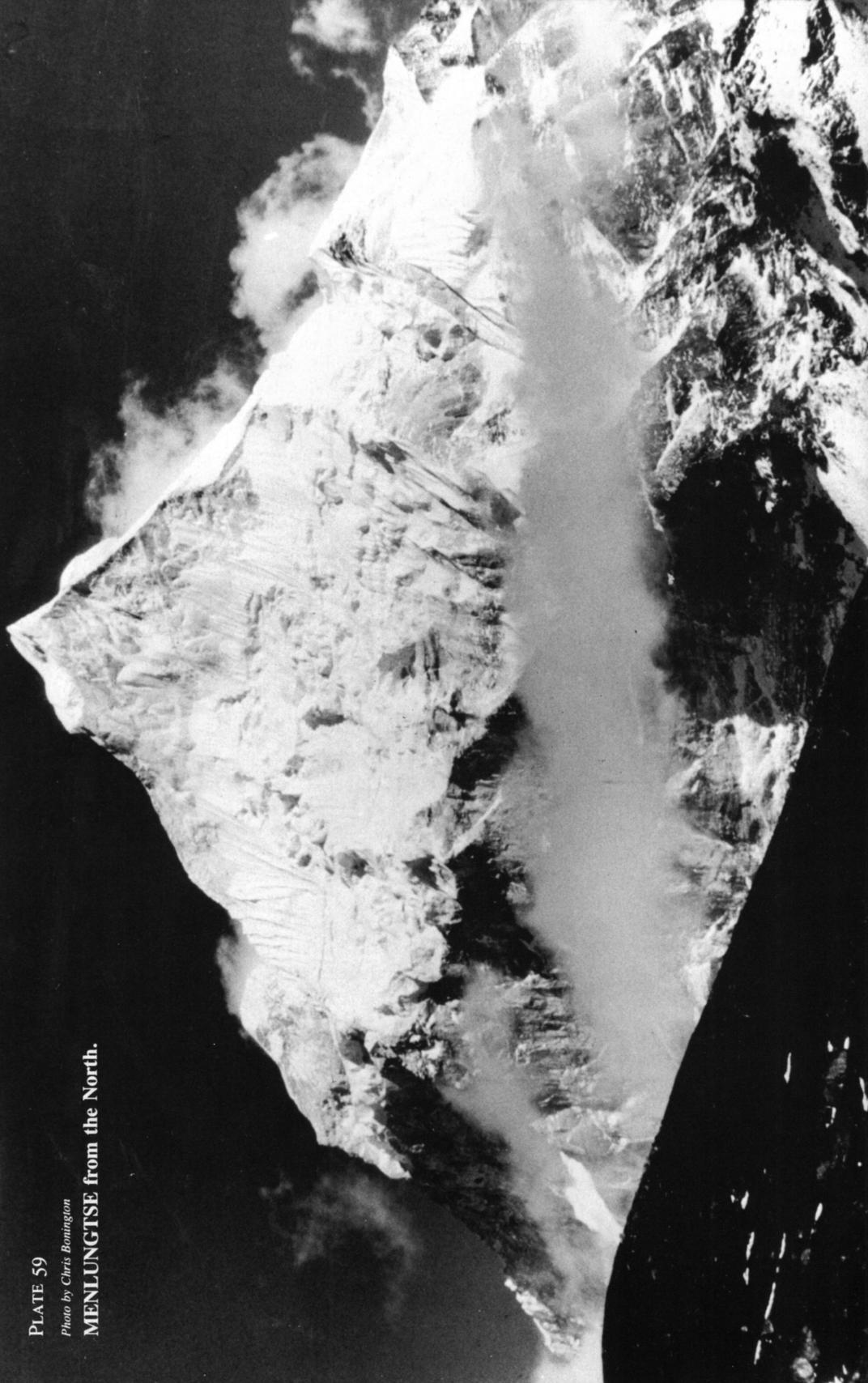
Photo by Peter Boardman

**MENLUNG TSE's South Face from
East Face of Gaurishankar. The
Central Buttress was attempted.**

PLATE 59

Photo by Chris Bonington

MENLUNGTSE from the North.



April 5, we put the rest of the rope in place. This took us to the rocky crest of the buttress but what had looked like solid rock from a distance turned out to be a terrifying pile of shattered blocks. There was the constant threat of dislodging one of the huge rocks, which all weighed several tons. Eventually the difficulties eased and the rock was marginally more sound. We climbed another four or five rope-lengths until we had used up our fixed line and our four climbing ropes before dropping back to our camp at the foot of the ridge. Now it was time for our alpine-style summit attempt. Heavily laden with six days of food and gear, by late afternoon we had reached the top of the fixed ropes and picked up our climbing ropes. Odd Eliassen and Bjørn Myrer-Lund camped a few meters above us shouted down that the way ahead looked clear. The following day we made faster progress, but at three P.M. clouds swirled in. Jim and I were digging into the crest of the steep, narrow snow ridge when I was aware of a high-pitched buzz. Jim collapsed onto his knees. "I've been struck," he muttered. It was lightning. There was nothing we could do and we had to camp there. The next morning the wind was as fierce as ever. Bjørn and Odd's tent had been torn to shreds. We had to retreat. This was no easy matter. We were nine rope-lengths above the top of the fixed ropes. I began to fall as I clipped badly into the abseil rope, but I just managed to grab the rope, which tore my hands, and I held on. It was late afternoon when we reached the camp at the foot of the ridge. Without discussion, we stripped the site and carried everything down to the valley, 3000 feet below. We hadn't really examined the southeast ridge, which led straight to the summit. Four of us walked below the southeast ridge and realised it would be even more difficult and time-consuming than the buttress. We decided to try our original route, fixing the remainder of our rope so that we could have a higher jumping-off point. We returned to the fray on April 16, spent two days reascending the difficult section and leaving a line of fixed rope behind us. At the end of the second day we were hit by another thunderstorm and retreated all the way to Base Camp. The next morning the weather seemed to improve and we rushed straight back, going from Base at 13,400 feet to Camp I at 17,200 feet in a single day and on the following one, April 22, climbed the fixed ropes to the previous high point of 20,000 feet. We had plenty of food and fuel and felt well set for a push to the summit. That evening it began to snow and blow. The next afternoon Odd and Bjørn decided to go down. Jim and I sat out one more night, hoping for an improvement. It started snowing ten minutes after they left and by dark the wind had built up into a crescendo of terrifying force. The following morning, shaken and exhausted, we fled as the weather deteriorated even more.

CHRISTIAN BONINGTON

Labuche Kang Reconnaissance, 1986. From September 1 to October 5, 1986, a joint Chinese-Japanese expedition made a reconnaissance of Labuche Kang (7367 meters, 24,170 feet). The peak lies between Cho Oyu and Shisha Pangma. The Chinese were Cheng Tian Lian, leader, and Lee Wang, and the