

Heavy clouds had hung over the mountains that day and hidden from view the great ice-clad peaks between the Sel-dara and Tanimaz headwaters which I had seen from the other side on my way south from the Alai. The next day brought heavy rain with fresh snow on the mountains, and obliged me to halt at Sitargh village. The pass named after it was to take us across into Khingab, the head portion of the large hill tract known as Wakhia-bala. The local headmen were apprehensive of risks in attempting the pass under such conditions, but were intelligent enough to accept from me a written statement that they were not to be held responsible if anything went wrong. Fortunately the sky cleared in time to permit us to start for the pass long before day-break.

The ascent was steep but at first easy, lying over slopes clothed with alpine vegetation. Then the climb led over large snow-covered moraines past a steep glacier, until after seven hours from the start the narrow ridge forming the pass was reached at an elevation of about 14,600 feet. The view from the pass was limited to the head of the large glacier over and past which the descent leads. But when we had made our way over the glacier for about a mile and a half, zigzagging between many long crevasses, a magnificent panorama opened over the huge ice-stream and side glaciers of great size which join in from the range to the south (Fig. 141). It was not until after a total march of some ten miles from the pass, over trying slopes of lateral moraines, that the snout, some 150 feet high, of the united ice-stream was reached. Three miles lower down we were glad to gain a camping-place for the night on a small grassy plateau.

On October 4 an easy march brought us to Pashmghar,