How the Kazakhs Fled to Freedom

Decimated by Chinese Reds and the Hazards of a Hostile Land, Nomads of the Steppes Trekked 3,000 Miles to Kashmir

By Milton J. Clark

With Illustrations from Photographs by the Author

In storied Srinagar, cradled in the Vale of Kashmir, I spent a year among refugee Kazakhs, colorful tribesmen whose forebears have roamed the steppes of central Asia for 2,000 years.

My wiry, high-spirited hosts were the remnants of hordes of saddle-bred nomads who had fled the Communist regime which Red China had imposed on their native Province of Sinkiang.

My wife and I became the good friends of a handful of tribal families, the homeless survivors of an overland journey that had been at once a triumph and a disaster: 4,000 families had set out from Sinkiang on their epic escape march; a pitiful 350 individuals reached Kashmir.

Haven in Kashmir

In a fortresslike caravansary beside the Jhelum River, Kashmir authorities had generously provided quarters for the immigrants until their fate should be decided.

The trials and tragedy of their flight behind them, the Kazakhs were not downhearted. They welcomed us warmly and with open-handed hospitality, and in time we became their confidants. I was, I believe, the first American to learn their lore in the people's own tongue.

From Srinagar, in summertime, the tribesmen fled the city dust and heat. Mounted on borrowed Kashmir horses, they were off (and I with them) to enjoy the relaxation of a summer pasturage in the mountains.

"It is like our pastures in the Tien Shan," said Kazakh chieftain Qali Beg (page 629). A sweep of one weathered hand took in the meadow with its crystal stream, the fir-clad mountain spurs, riven precipices, and, far above, the jagged, snow-streaked summits.

What a relief to the Kazakhs was this holiday encampment! Here, in a landscape and round of activities familiar to them, they came to life with laughter, games, and jests. Forgotten, momentarily, were the dark months and weary miles so recently endured.

Picture me, if you will, at the summer pasturage, sitting in Qali Beg's felt tent. On a day of lashing rain he has invited a fellow leader, Sultan Sherif, and a few tribal deputies to while away the time in reminiscence.

Around the central fire, from which not all the smoke finds exit through the smoke hole overhead, lounges a group of young Kazakh men. They wear their high-topped bonnets, lined and fringed with fur and covered with patterned blue, red, or lavender silk.

Legs thrust from beneath long wool coats display soft, gleaming black leather boots. Sitting cross-legged or reclining on the red carpets, the young heroes joke as they gnaw a joint or swallow dripping handfuls of rice.

The women bring us tea in porcelain bowls and ladle out buttermilk. (Here in Kashmir fermented mares' milk, the mildly intoxicating, universal beverage of the steppe, is hard to come by.) Before me, as the guest, they place a sheepshead on a wooden tray. After thanking Allah for his bounty, the chief cuts off the choicest bits of meat and piles them on the mound of rice in front of me.

Kazakhs a Widespread Group

Who are these people? And what political storm set in motion the wave of crisis that dislodged them from their native land?

Today the major domain of the Kazakhs, who blend Turkic stock with a mixture of Mongolian, is the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. There several million of them occupy a vast territory stretching from China to the Caspian Sea.

Kazakh pastoral nomads also comprise, at present, about 10 percent of the population of Sinkiang, China's westernmost Province (map, page 625). In 1949 semiarid Sinkiang, two and a half times the size of Texas with only half as many people, came under the political dominance of China's Communist regime. Large groups of Kazakhs, their liberties in jeopardy, chose to emigrate, if necessary, from their dearly loved land rather than submit to Communist control.

I was unaware of the troubles that beset the Sinkiang Kazakhs until late in 1951. While studying at Harvard that fall, I read a news item about the appearance in Kashmir of Kazakhs who were reported to have fled the new Communist rule in western China.

I recognized in the account two opportunities: first, to visit and study these little-known Moslem people as subject matter for my doctoral dissertation in social relations; second, to hear the survivors' own story of their fabulous migration.

Just four months after the last of the refugees arrived in Srinagar, capital of Kashmir, I was sitting on a bright Khotan rug in the quarters of Qali Beg, exchanging gestures of friendliness (few words yet) with that Kazakh chieftain.*

Months of Bitter Decision

Now, in the summer camp above Srinagar, Sultan Sherif was talking as a downpour pelted the felt tent.

"Almost in the beginning—it was early in the Year of the Tiger—our leaders Janim Khan and Osman Batir called us to a great council at Barkol in the eastern Tien Shan," he said, scooping up a gob of butter which he solicitously plopped into my newly filled bowl of hot tea. "The Communists were holding the reins of government in tight check. Our chiefs and leading men had to choose which way to turn."

During the fall and winter of 1949-50 the Kazakhs had dealt with the Communists, asking guarantees of religious freedom, preservation of tribal customs, and liberty to travel at will within Sinkiang. But the new regime let it be known that *it* would set the terms of Kazakh "cooperation."

Many of the Kazakhs made long journeys to reach the Barkol council. Then a winter storm killed much livestock; the sheep, which were lambing, could not be moved to shelter. It was the kind of time of which the Kazakhs say, "Ice is our bed and snow our blanket."

By March of 1950 the panorama at the rallying place must have been cause for pride and even reassurance. Kazakhs by the thousands populated the broad valley, still white with snow. Tents were strewn for miles across the landscape, the sons' placed around those of the fathers.

Within sight of Sultan Sherif's tent door were assembled at least 15,000 people, 60,000 fat-tailed sheep, 12,000 horses, 7,000 head of cattle, and more than 1,000 camels.

On March 28 in that Year of the Tiger a congress of 1,000 Kazakh leaders and family heads cast their vote to leave "the golden cradle of their birth" and make for the southern passes that led toward India.

A week later the council set up an autonomous Kazakh government, naming Janim Khan governor and Osman Batir commander in chief of the fighting men. Neither leader

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A Kazakh Twangs a Plaintive Tune . . .

Strumming a guitarlike *dombra*, he sings high yodeling-type songs not unlike cowboy ballads.

* See "The Idyllic Vale of Kashmir," by Volkmar Wentzel, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, April, 1948.

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. . . Man and Horse Alone in a Vale Call to Mind the Life of an American Cowboy

Both Kazakh herdsman and cowboy wear leather pants, high-heeled boots, and high-crowned hats. A Turkic and Mongolian blend, Kazakhs claim descent from the hordes of Genghis Khan.

survived long to exercise his new authority.

At Barkol the threat of tribal destruction hung, like the Damoclean sword, over every tent, every horseman, every mother, every infant heir. Yet the Kazakhs clung stubbornly to the customs and ritual of daily life. The herders' work, the elders' prayers, the children's play—all went on as usual.

In mid-April the Communists swept down in a surprise attack on the Barkol encampment. Brief warning by outpost sentries scarcely gave women and children time to strike tents and head for the hills, driving flocks and herds before them.

Puppet troops in quilted drab poured into the valley in trucks, armored vehicles, and on horseback, heavily armed and plentifully supplied with ammunition.

For the spirited Kazakhs, used to unequal odds, even such formidable armament held

no new terrors. Shouting battle cries and riding at full gallop, the warriors struck hard in righteous anger. "One shot, one dead enemy," states the Kazakh standard of marksmanship. But against an enemy equipped with modern arms, there could be no hope of victory. Kazakh fighting men died by the hundreds.

"Janibeg!" called out the chiefs at last, using one of the war cries that are old-time heroes' names. "Break off battle and flee!" Southward streamed the shocked, enraged, depleted company of tribesmen.

Sultan Sherif told me that 12,600 of the more than 15,000 of his people assembled at Barkol were killed, captured, or dispersed. Many fled to the hills, where some groups still may be precariously hiding out.

At the head of one of these groups Janim Khan, the new Kazakh governor, rode off—to disaster. In a skirmish with Chinese Communist attackers in the Pei Shan (North Mountains) he was taken captive. Promptly hauled off to Urumchi, he was executed in February, 1951. Two months later the life of Osman Batir, the Kazakhs' second in command, was to be snuffed out in the same manner and for the same "offense."

Colt Stomach Used as Poultice

From this encounter only seven escaped, including two of Janim Khan's sons, Mezhit and Delil Khan. In the fighting Delil Khan was wounded and became separated from the others. At last Mezhit and the renowned warrior Nurgojai Batir found him in the mountains.

"My brother was badly hurt," Mezhit told me, "so Nurgojai Batir killed a colt and removed its stomach. This he wrapped around Delil Khan's wounds, for a colt's stomach is very fat and absorbs bad blood. To give us new strength, we all ate the flesh of the colt, which is the greatest delicacy to a Kazakh."

The survivors managed to rejoin the main body of organized refugees. Under the leadership of Osman Batir, Sultan Sherif, and Delil Khan, this group pushed southwest through Singsingsia and crossed out of Sinkiang into Kansu Province near Khara Nor.

They passed the sacred Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, 12 miles from the thick-walled city of Tunhwang. There 500 caves honeycomb a cliff for more than a mile, sheltering scores of sculptures and thousands of delicately frescoed figures.*

South of Tunhwang the refugees from Barkol split up: Osman Batir and the riddled family groups that remained with him chose to hole up in the mountains near Khanambal.

"Here we shall wait, hoping that some of those who have become separated will find their way to us," he said.

Sultan Sherif and Delil Khan urged their high chief to keep moving south with them to the foothills of the Kunlun, whence flight into Tibet was feasible in an emergency. But Osman Batir declined. It was the last time his fellow chiefs saw him.

Flocks Slowed Escape Trek

Mile after mile the tribesmen plodded on, across steppes both green and sere, over stony mountain passes, through desolate valleys. Slowed to the speed of their flocks and herds, they could not outrun their pursuers. Small Communist bands attacked them at intervals. Only superb horsemanship and sharpshooting saved even the dwindled remnants of the tribes.

Sometimes, in a protected, grassy spot, the procession would halt for several days to restore strength and the will to go on. The routine of life then differed little from what the steppes have seen enacted generation after generation.

Women and girls off-loaded the pack animals, Bactrian camels and small, sturdy horses. On a dry piece of land not far from water the felt tents, or yurts, would go up (page 632).

The Kazakh yurt is perfectly adapted to the steppes. It sheds the heaviest rain and turns aside the bitterest gale, is cool in summer and cozy in cold weather, and insulates its occupants from outside temperatures that may vary 50° in a day.

Curtains partition the tent inside, allowing privacy. A chief, such as Qali Beg, reclines at night on a layered bed, a felt undermat overlaid with a bearskin and two wool-stuffed quilts covered with patterned cotton. A large pillow supports his head.

Moslem custom normally restricts Kazakh patriarchs to a maximum of four wives; however, men of lower station usually can afford only one. Qali Beg had three wives, while his deputy had but two. Sultan Sherif also seemed content with two. Children, of course,

* See "The Caves of the Thousand Buddhas," by Franc and Jean Shor, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, March, 1951.

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Fleeing Communist Rule in Sinkiang, Kazakhs Trekked 3,000 Miles to Kashmir

When the Communists seized their home pastures in Chinese Turkistan, 15,000 Kazakhs left for sanctuary in Kashmir. On the epic 2-year march, only 350 survived Red attack and hardships. One meaning of the word "Kazakh" is "one who has left his people." The refugees left behind some 400,000 of their tribesmen in Sinkiang and several million in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

were born during the 2-year escape march of the Kazakhs (page 633).

So, despite suffering and dejection, the little nation, shriveling in battle, enlarged by birth, made its way south. With summer came blowing sand, intense heat, and a terrifying water shortage.

They pressed on to Makhai, then west to Ghaz Kul and Timurlik. The chiefs sought out the tents of Hussain Taiji, a Kazakh leader who had lived there with his people for many years. They knew he would replace from his still-intact flocks as many of their lost animals as he could.

Meanwhile, to Timurlik had come another group of fleeing Kazakhs, perhaps 50 families, under Qali Beg, the chief who became my special friend. Pasturing among the mountains near Urumchi (Tihwa), Sinkiang's capital, these Kazakhs had heard of the disaster at Barkol. Leaders at once marshaled their families and got them under way southward through the Tien Shan. Their objective also was a rendezvous with Hussain Taiji's people.

Running the gantlet of enemy attack and natural obstacles, Qali Beg's skeleton "horde" endured even harsher trials than had the easterly tribes under Sultan Sherif and Delil Khan. My notes record reminiscences of Hamza, Qali Beg's deputy, about their anxious crossing of the exposed Lop Nor desert, eastern reach of the dreaded Takla Makan.

"Lacking maps, we followed a river to the salt Lop Nor," Hamza said. "Hillocks we passed were strewn with bones of men and animals. Many among us thought the same fate awaited us, but I spoke what I believed: that death would be the destiny of our oppressors, not the Kazakhs. 'Let us follow our future,' I said, 'and trust in Allah.'

Water Holes Avoided as Traps

"Crossing the wintry desert," Hamza went on, "we huddled among our livestock as black sandstorms and snow squalls swept over us. We had to avoid known water holes, for the Communists would use them as lures, drawing us into ambush. Smaller water holes were frozen over. We broke the ice loose and carried it with us for melting as we needed it.

"Some became separated, lost their way, and couldn't even find ice. The need to keep moving made them sweat, even in the cold. First they drank the milk from their animals. Some slaughtered their cattle and sheep and quaffed the blood. Still many perished.

"At last, after seven days, we met Hussain Taiji's people. Our men and women danced and hugged one another and exchanged presents to celebrate their survival."

While at Timurlik, Qali Beg and the other newly arrived chiefs gratefully accepted from Hussain Taiji whatever horses, camels, sheep, and cattle he could spare. Qali Beg, however, was unwilling to take all these replacement animals as gifts. For a few of Hussain Taiji's good horses and camels he insisted on trading some of his remaining sheep.

Kazakh horse trading follows a prescribed ritual. Hussain Taiji and Qali Beg inspected the animals up for exchange, then agreed on a middleman. This entrepreneur sat down between the principals, holding the left hand of one and the right hand of the other hidden within their long, loose coat sleeves.

By bending and gripping certain fingers, Qali Beg stated his offer, which the middleman repeated to Hussain Taiji in the same manner. The seller, in his turn, likewise made known his approval or amendment of the terms. And so the bargaining went on, the three men expressionless, preoccupied.

The Kazakhs say this silent, cryptic method of barter avoids friction and obviates the usual exaggerated praise of animals offered in trade.

Horse trading over, Qali Beg and Hussain Taiji took their prayer rugs and, facing Mecca, joined the older men in afternoon prayer. The young men, meanwhile, readied their brass-embossed saddles for riding and sport.

In a few moments one group on horseback was playing a wild game in which they fought for possession of a sheepskin, charging back and forth as they tussled. Off to one side youngsters played "crack the whip," in which a boy wearing a wolflike headdress tried to catch the last child on the line.

By the time a Kazakh boy is six or seven he is playing hide and seek, blindman's buff, or a hand-slapping game called "Is the khan well?" He shoots mice with a bow and arrow. By this age too the youngster (boy or girl) has learned to ride horseback, secure in a small-size saddle.

The refugees under Sultan Sherif and Delil Khan moved on for the winter of 1950-51 to Taijinar Nor. Qali Beg and his people remained near Timurlik.

"Summer is like Heaven, and winter is like Hell," says a Kazakh proverb. When the devastating *jut*, or winter storm, sheathes natural forage with an unbreakable crust of snow and ice, great numbers of livestock perish.

At one time during the winter at Taijinar Nor such an ice coating forced the tribesmen to slaughter many sheep from their already reduced flocks. Suddenly meat was overabundant. Hungry horsemen ate two to four pounds every day for a week. Family heads went from tent to tent jovially dispensing handfuls of fat.

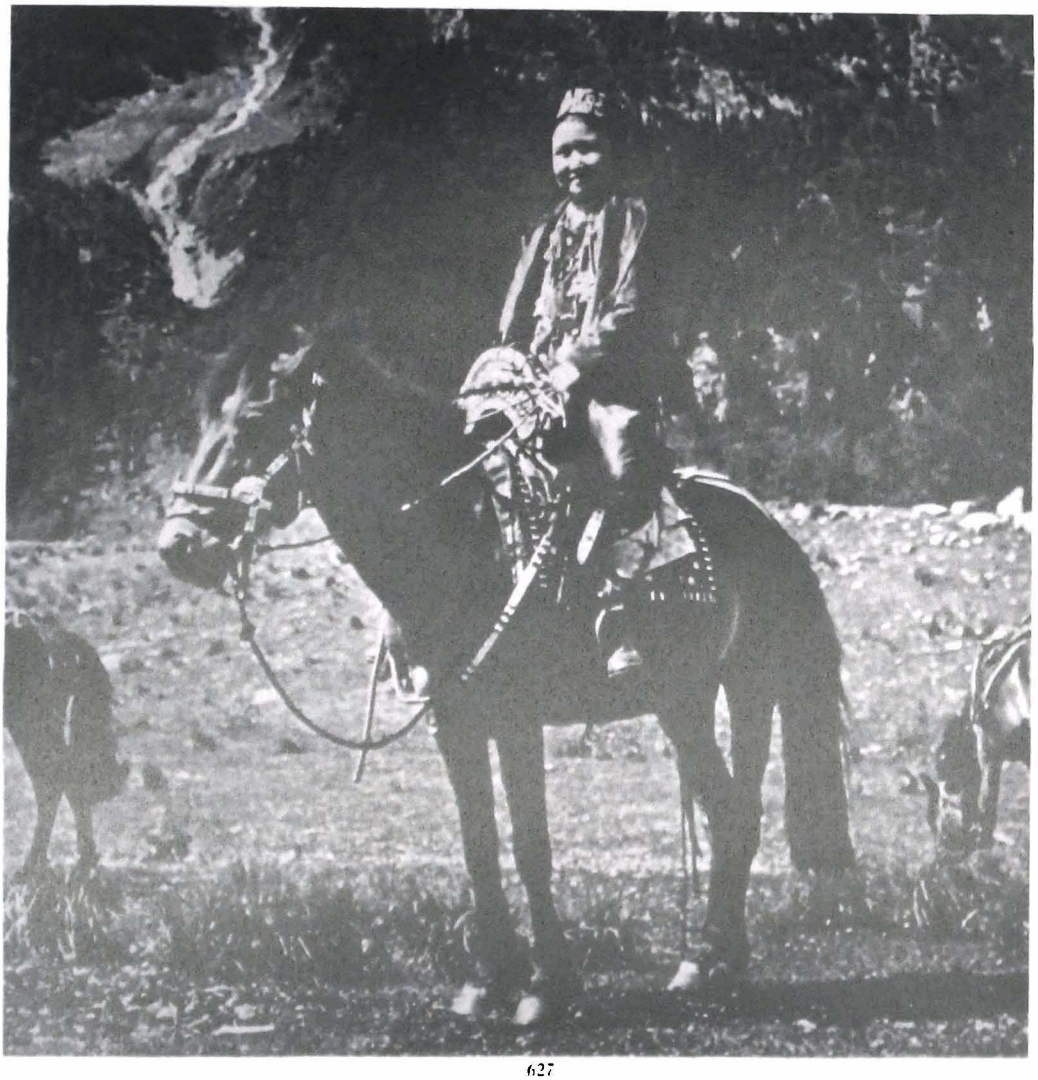
Famine Follows Feast

Thin times followed again all too soon, when the people had to fast resignedly on tea and dried curds, with perhaps an occasional bowl of powdered millet.

Feast or famine, gorge or starve—such always has been the lot of a Kazakh. Alternating good and bad times color his whole attitude toward life, instilling a psychological dualism in which high spirits and low follow each other in almost rhythmic succession.

To lessen the frequency of famine, the Kazakhs in Sinkiang practiced agriculture on a limited scale. But they remained predominantly herdsmen, moving about in seasonal migration with their grazing herds.

Winter quarters usually lay in a sheltered valley or a forested area at the foot of the mountains. As the snows thawed with spring, the Kazakhs rode up to spring pasturage in



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Already a Veteran of Years in the Saddle, a Kazakh Maiden Rides with Skill and Ease

Like all tribal youngsters, this young girl began training for horseback riding as a toddler clinging to backs of sheep. At three she straddled cows, secure in a small wooden saddle. At five she was ready for horses.

alpine meadows and from there moved on gradually to summer pastures.

In August or September family groups herded together their livestock. After shearing the sheep, preparing dried-milk products, and selecting the animals to be killed for smoked meat, they returned by easy stages to winter quarters. There, giving up their tents, they lived in log cabins close to their corrals.

While frozen in at Taijinar Nor the Kazakhs took advantage of idle hours by striving to foresee what eventual fate awaited them.

Although they are Moslems, the Kazakhs still cling instinctively to superstitious practice and belief. During that nerve-racking winter of 1950-51 they often sought a "reader," who burned the shoulder blade of a sheep and forecast coming events from the heat cracks in the bone.

The tools of divination include hard pellets of sheep's dung. Men lay them out in nine piles in three parallel rows to learn through the "crystal ball" of second sight what visitors to expect, what events lie ahead along the trail, who has delayed their messengers, and

so forth. These forecasts usually are made with a shrewd foreknowledge that ensures their accuracy!

The crowning act of Kazakh superstitious life, the exorcising of evil spirits by a shaman, is partly surreptitious. Devout Moslems among the tribesmen deride these "dark" goings on. Moslem religious leaders deplore them. But they still express an almost obsessive aspect of the people's spiritual-imaginative life.

In Kashmir one of the most popular Kazakh heroes was Nurgojai Batir. I found him a cheerful, even jocular, man, even-tempered and well-balanced, the life of the party and friend of all. He was also a relentless warrior in battle, with a fox's cunning and a lion's strength.

Yet Nurgojai Batir was a highly revered shaman. "Was" until a few months before I met him, when he gave up the role, largely, I suspected, for fear of ridicule by the city Moslems of Kashmir.

Calling the Wolf Jinni

But once, in a remarkable performance at the summer pasturage above Srinagar, I watched Nurgojai Batir re-enact the freeing of a young boy from the evil jinni of illness that possessed him. (The Kazakhs are most reluctant to reveal the actual ritual to an outsider.)

The patient was laid on a felt mat near a log fire surrounded by his family and interested spectators. Nurgojai Batir rode up on a horse, strumming on a *dombra* (page 622). After two or three circuits of the assemblage he jumped down from his mount, flung aside his dombra, and began to invoke the blue-wolf jinni, one of his other-worldly "correspondents," which inhabits the sick:

> I'm calling, calling, calling blue wolf.
> When I call, come!
> Great mountain come to the bottom
> of little mountain,
> Put your tongue in and out,
> Move your two eyes all about.

Dombra players kept up a syncopated tempo specially reserved for this ceremonial, increasing in intensity with the mounting excitement of Nurgojai's mood. When the jinni's presence was acknowledged, two assistants sprang up and wound a rope several times around Nurgojai's belt line. They thrust a stick inside the loops, twisting them until Nurgojai's waist was constricted to half its usual circumference.

By then, Nurgojai seemed in a kind of hypnotic trance. After an interlude of prancing about and shaking his head he stretched out his arms. Two men hung on each arm, and he whirled them round, mumbling incoherently as he bargained with the evil spirit.

Dancing now in a frenzy, the shaman picked up an ax, struck at his patient with it, narrowly missing with the blows. Then he turned the blade flat to his own body and beat violently on his chest. Dropping the ax, he snatched coals from the fire and popped them into his mouth. He licked a red-hot iron; his eyes rolled and his shoulders twitched. All these actions were intended to imitate those of the invisible jinni.

The audience meanwhile chanted the battle cry, "Shaqabai, Shaqabai, Shaqabai!" in time with the shaman's dance. (Shaqabai was Nurgojai's hero ancestor.)

Now the shaman filled his mouth with water from a kettle. Seizing a hot frying pan, he blew the liquid across its bottom. The water went up in a puff of steam, symbolizing the banishment of the jinni from the boy's body. Then the spirit doctor collapsed.

I learned that after the shaman has driven out an evil jinni in an actual ritual, he falls into a long, deep sleep. Friends rub his head and massage his stiff body. After the ceremony he must drink a quart of oil rendered from sheep's fat; otherwise, they believe, he may bleed dangerously from the bowels, because of the strain of the ceremony.

Certain Ages and Days Unlucky

The superstitions of generations still color everyday life. The Kazakh divides his life span into periods of 12 years, each year bearing the name of an animal. He considers the ages 25 and 37 especially hazardous and unlucky. If a man gets past both these landmarks, he gives away his clothes, so that he may face the future in fresh raiment.

In every family one day each week is unlucky; the man of the household would never think of suggesting a move on such a day.

At the first sound of thunder in spring women go out and beat around the edges of the family tent with wooden spoons to seal it against the evil spirits muttering in the sky.

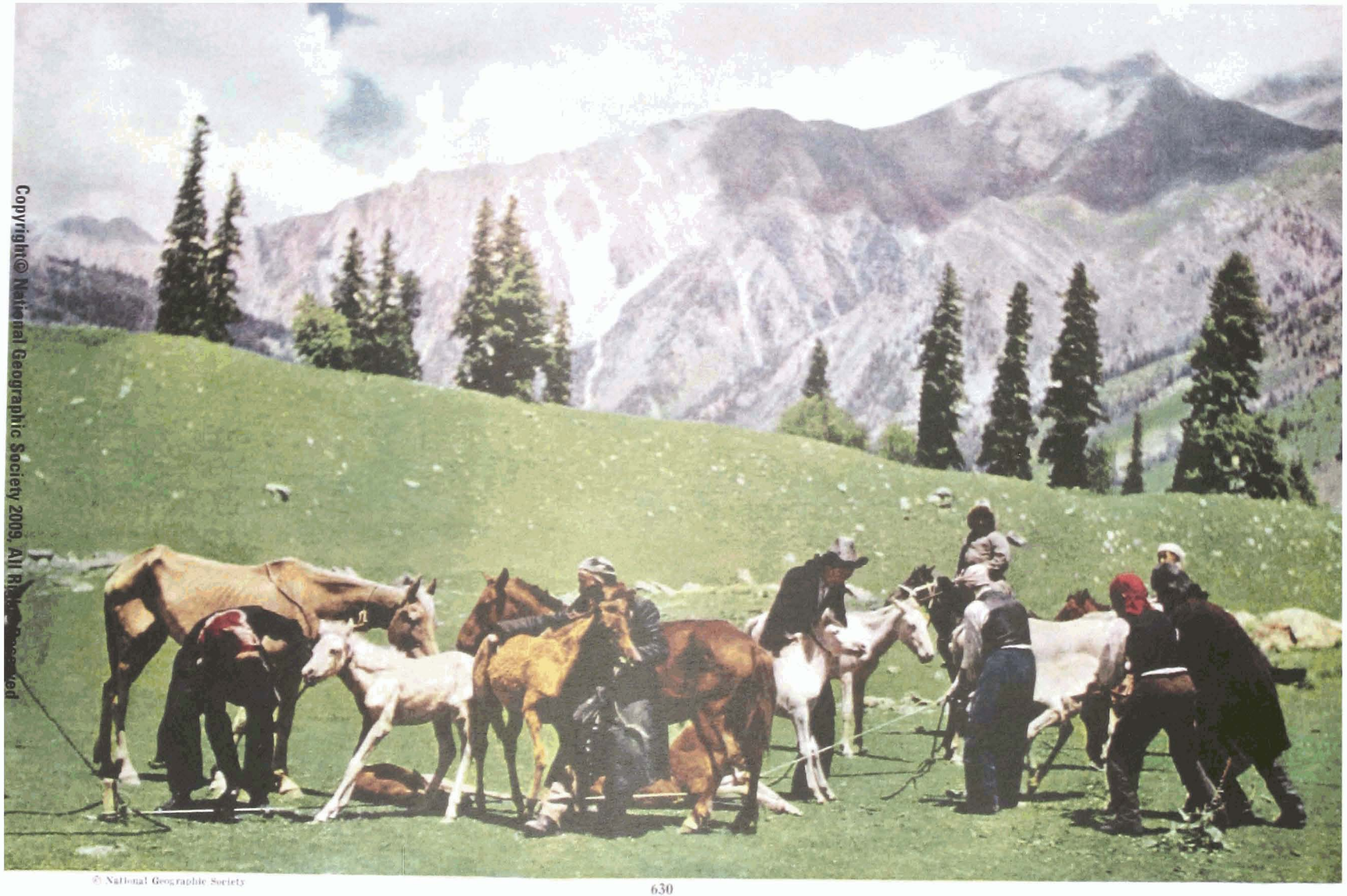
Early in the Year of the Hare (1951) the Communists swept down on Qali Beg near Timurlik. Routed by modern arms, he and his people fled for their lives into Tibet.

(Continued on page 637)

Anseo Color by Milton J. Clark

Robed in Magnificent Snow Leopard, a Kazakh Chief Proudly Rides into Exile

Deadly sharpshooter and superb horseman, Qali Beg led one of the three Kazakh bands escaping from Sinkiang to Kashmir. Crowned with fox and booted in soft leather, he sits on velvet atop a silver- and gold-embossed saddle.



Mare-milking Time: Kazakhs Tether Colts near Their Mothers

The saddle-bred Kazakh sees his horse as a nearly human friend, priceless servant, and money in the bank. With it he buys his bride, pays his debts, transports his family, makes his living as a herdsman, and fights his enemies. As endearment, the nomad calls his baby "colt-ling." Dancing, he imitates the movements of a horse (page 634). In epic poetry he lauds the animal's good sense.

The flesh of the colt is the Kazakh's supreme delicacy. Kumiss, the fermented milk of the mare, is his favorite drink (page 644).

These tribesmen know that it helps for two to milk a mare: a colt to begin the flow, a man to fill the bucket. Here they rope down frisky youngsters alongside milking mares.

White horses such as these are highly prized. In sealing treaties, Kazakhs dip their hands in the blood of a white horse and swear by it.

Anscochrome by Milton J. Clark

Setting Up a Domed Tent, Nomads Start Housekeeping Minutes After a Halt in the Trek

The circular yurt answers the Kazakhs' need for a house that packs on horse or camelback and moves with the family. Its light willow frame can be taken apart easily. Walls and roof roll up compactly. Made of felt three-fourths of an inch thick, the tent shuts out the heaviest rain and bitterest gale and insulates against temperatures that may vary 50 degrees in a day. Woven bands lace this structure, which housewives helped to make.

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Kodachrome by Milton J. Clark

All the World Over, Baby Captures the Center of the Stage with Cries at Dinnertime

This youngster spends his first year in a willow cradle, snuggled under blankets and Turkistan rugs. Mother breast-feeds him until he develops a full set of baby teeth. Already he wears a leather pouch containing a prayer from the Koran to protect him from the evil eye. Later, like his sisters', his clothes will jingle with silver coins and buttons. Deer's teeth talismans will ensure him the grace of a deer.

The Referee Waves His Flag; Wrestlers Lock Heads in Combat

Officials of Kashmir quartered the refugee Kazakhs in Srinagar, but with the coming of summer many fled the restrictions of the city for the freedom of a *jailao* (summer pasturage) in the mountains near by. Camped in yurts, these warriors, their wives, and children turn with zest to a *toi* (celebration). Wrestlers began their match on horseback. Here pulled to the ground, they continue the struggle. Referee waves flag until one man wins.

→Here young Jaksi Qan, accompanied on the *dombra*, shyly moves into a characteristic tribal dance, the *Kara Jorga*, or Black Ambler. Sliding her feet in shuffling steps, she interprets the movements of a fine horse ambling along the mountain trail or treading the rich grass of the plains. As the dance mounts to a climax, the audience claps and sings in rhythm.

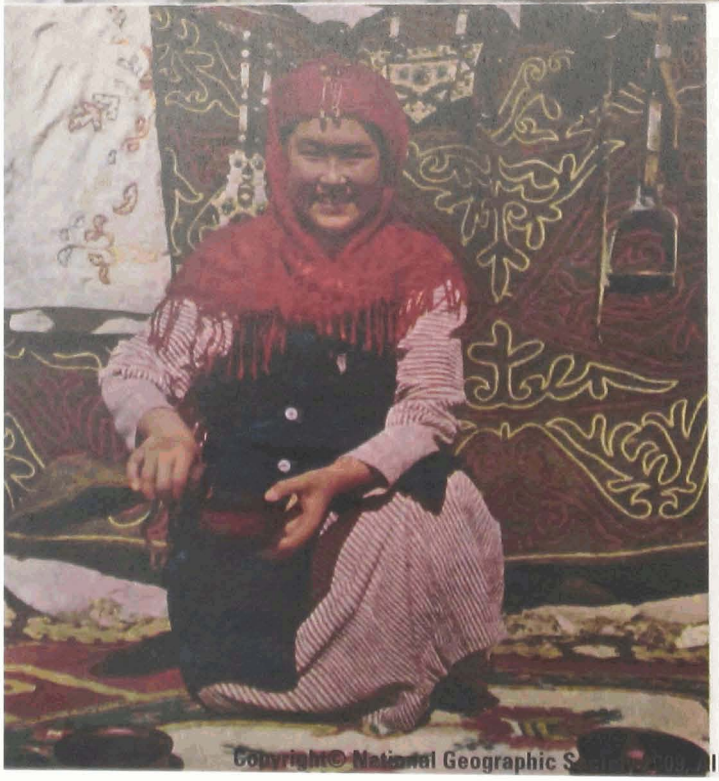
Female Troubadours Sing of Heroes and Life on the Steppes

Unlike many women of Moslem faith and settled habit, Kazakh wives and maidens hold a prominent place in the community. They assume heavy responsibilities—tending the children, matting felt, weaving wool, cooking and serving the food, milking sheep, washing garments, fetching water, and collecting and drying the camel dung that is the primary fuel of the nearly treeless steppes.

In battles with Communist troops women fought side by side with husbands and brothers, some giving their lives.

Welcomed at group celebrations, Kazakh women show skill in playing the dombra and singing native melodies. These three resemble the ladies of medieval Europe with their nunlike headdresses of white cotton. The design of the embroidered dickey, worn with brilliant silks and printed cottons, once identified the tribe to which a woman belonged. Taste dictates the choice today.

© Kodachrome (top) and Ansco Color by Milton J. Clark



↑ Kazakh Chiefs Give a Party, Enforce Hospitality by Law

A friendly stranger nearly always finds welcome within a Kazakh yurt. If rebuffed, he can demand and receive a horse or a colt in restitution. In best tribal tradition, Sultan Sherif (center) invited the author and his wife to share his commodious yurt during their visit to the summer camp. At night silken curtains partitioned the guests' fur and felt pallets from their host's.

The young hostess, capped in the embroidered pillbox of a maiden, sits by to ladle buttermilk from the large bowl. Chunks of fried bread serve as appetizers.

←This Kazakh bride, pouring fermented mare's milk from a coltskin flask, wears the red *sali* (shawl) until the birth of her first child. Then she dons and wears for the rest of her life the white headdress and embroidered dickey of the matron (page 635).

It was February when a mounted messenger brought to the Kazakhs at Taijinar Nor the word that Osman Batir had been captured and that the Communists had routed Qali Beg. Quickly the chiefs broke camp and led their people over the rugged Kunlun passes, then turned westward across Tibet. With the help of Allah they might reach Kashmir.

Even beyond the stormy Kunlun grass for the flocks and herds was hard to find. The animals grew thin, and many perished. Fortunately game—"by the hundreds and thousands," the chiefs told me—was there for the shooting. The men killed antelope, deer, and ibex; what was not eaten was smoked or frozen. Dung of the wild animals provided fuel in a land devoid of firewood.

Horses Taught to Eat Meat

The "manna in the wilderness," however, was the small, dun-colored horse known to the tribesmen as *qulan*. The Kazakhs hunted it from horseback, killing scores for the flavorsome, nourishing meat.

One of the young leaders, Mezhit, told me the men roped surplus horse meat to their saddles on breaking camp in the morning. One day, as he rode along the trail, Mezhit noticed his mount turning its head frequently, obviously drawn by the odor of the meat. Knowing the hunger of his steed, whose fleshless ribs daily rubbed the calves of its rider's legs, Mezhit dismounted and held out to it some of the meat. When the horse tossed its mane in refusal, Mezhit forced the meat into its mouth.

"So I taught my horse to eat this food," Mezhit said. "When I told my brother this, we tried it on the other horses and the camels, and we made them eat it for the great strength it gave them."

Mountain illness, the bleeding death called *is*, was a special scourge during this part of the heroic trek. It killed or incapacitated the physically depleted Kazakhs by the dozen, especially while they were crossing the mountain passes into Tibet.

First symptoms of the disease often were a bad headache, dizziness, and nausea. In many cases treatment was in vain; futile even were the shaman's efforts to exorcise the evil spirits believed to be causing the sickness.

Drastic treatment was sometimes followed by recovery. One victim told me of beseeching a shaman to free him from the misery of this illness. The shaman took a sharp knife, placed it against a vein in the man's temple, and flicked it to slit the blood vessel. He let the blood, very thick and black, fill three cups. Then he applied some herbs and a bandage. In two days the patient was well again.

After 10 days' travel the Kazakhs' outriders caught sight of a straggling band of men and animals quartering into their trail from the north. It was Qali Beg and the remnants of his group! Joyful was the reunion, calling for singing, wrestling, and dancing.

For safety, the united groups presently split again. Delil Khan and his people joined forces with Qali Beg, but Hussain Taiji and Sultan Sherif remained together, heading the other section.

Qali Beg told me his people suffered seven armed attacks during the ensuing crossing of Tibet, a portion of the trek that cost his families alone 42 killed in action, 22 dead of mountain sickness, and nine missing. Between the Tien Shan and the Kashmir border they lost in addition 3,000 sheep, 200 cattle, 73 horses, and 145 camels.

Relief from Migration Hardships

Births, deaths—weddings, too—provided intimate landmarks on the bitter trek out of Sinkiang. Sad or glad, these events gave relief from the ruthless, never-ending struggle for survival.

A Kazakh marriage may be contracted for before the promised boy and girl can even walk. This practice tends to stratify the classes; seldom will a chief marry his son to any but the daughter of a chief.

Unlike Western society, where a wedding's heaviest costs are borne by the bride's parents, Kazakh custom dictates that the father of the groom must pay a "bride price" to the bride's father. This dowry-in-reverse may relieve him, in the case of a rich man, of a sizable part of his property.

Horses are Kazakh gold. Nevertheless, even in the case of a subleader, the bride price may include as many as 40 horses. Therefore a man is glad to have pretty daughters as well as handsome sons, for what he pays out when his sons get married will probably come back to him in the bride's price for his daughters.

If a brother and a sister of one family group marry a sister and brother of another, no one has to exchange anything but smiles, though the families symbolically transfer a camel

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Girls in Tandem Haul Water to Camp

Kazakh custom decrees these 14-year-olds ready for marriage. Boys wait until 15 years of age.

or a horse, each owner promptly leading his ritually proffered animal back home.

If a promised son or daughter dies before the wedding, Kazakh law requires that the relatives of the deceased provide a substitute from their own kinship group. (There must be no blood ties between bride and groom closer than seven ancestors back.)

When a wedding was celebrated during the migration, much of the traditional ritual and adornment had to be dispensed with. But the bride was bedecked in whatever finery remained. As tradition demanded, the women threw pieces of bread at the groom, who placed in his tall hat the owl feathers symbolic of good luck.

A mullah married the young people in a simplified ceremony, reading prayers from the Koran. Filling a bowl with water, he placed in it some silver trinkets, blew over the bowl, and passed it to bride and groom, who drank from it in turn, an action symbolizing completion of the wedding. Relatives from both families then drank from the bowl.

A customary fixture of wedding entertainment is a singing contest opposing a pair of women and two men.

"My hero, you are strong and tall," sings a woman.

"You, sweetling, are loveliest of them all," replies a man.

"Your feet and ears are bigger than your wit," the second woman mocks.

"Your eyes are twisted and your nose is split," adds the other man.

So, switching nimbly from flattery to ridicule, the battle of nasal yodeling continues until one contestant fails to invent a rhyming rejoinder and the competition breaks up in laughter.

Wrestling matches, games of tag, horse races, and dancing to the twanging dombras round out the wedding festivities (page 634).

During the flight from Sinkiang the defending warriors were not the only heroes.

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Kazakh Women Sun and Air Their Bedding by Taking the Roof Off the House

Latticework walls fold like an accordion. Leather thongs strap together four sections to make the frame 20 feet in diameter, girdled by woven bands. Roof "rafters" peg into a ceiling hoop, through which smoke escapes.

One day in the summer encampment above Srinagar, while we sat cross-legged in conversation, some of the young women were kneeling at the fringe of the group raptly engrossed in the men's talk. Suddenly Milya, Qali Beg's newest wife, turned to him saying, "Erim (my husband), do you remember the day the enemy came to the encampment when the men were away?"

A Woman's Deed of Valor

Qali Beg's eyes lighted up and, at his urging, Milya told the tale, flushed with pleasure as all eyes sought her out.

"My husband and his men were off fighting the enemy," she began, as her companions replenished the empty tea bowls. "Suddenly we saw troops galloping toward our camp. The women snatched up their young children and ran for their horses.

"I was last in the stirrups, and my horse balked, badly frightened. A Communist bullet grazed the animal's leg, and he bolted forward.

"I saw a child crying in front of a tent," Milya went on, helping break the round loaves of unleavened bread and spreading the chunks before us. "Slowing my horse, I leaned from the saddle and picked up the child, with the enemy close behind. Four bullets pierced my clothes, and I was much afraid. Luckily my horse was swift, and I lost my pursuers in the mountains.

"Soon I met Suleiman, a young man from our tribe who was herding sheep. I told him what had happened, and together we raced back to the camp by a short cut. We knew the enemy would return to loot the tents. We found two machine guns and lay in wait.

"As we expected, they rode up unsuspecting. We could see their startled looks when Suleiman commenced firing. I loaded one machine gun while Suleiman fired the other.

"We held off the foe for five hours, until my husband and his men returned and drove away the enemy. My husband told me I was very brave and that I had saved the camp. *Oi!* I shall never forget that day!"

Even by forced marches the cruel 700-mile trek across Tibet consumed three months. To reduce the chance of attack, the ragged columns bypassed settlements that might harbor spies.

As for the Tibetans, they let the Kazakhs cross their land unopposed. The emigrants, in fact, hired willing shepherds as guides. Tibet at that time was in the throes of "adjusting" to the new Chinese Communist regime that was seizing their country, too.

There were streams to cross, and many Kazakhs cannot swim. Men and women rode the rivers tandem on the horses, infants in their mothers' arms. Young shepherds plunged into icy water and were swept across, clinging to the necks of two sheep.

Hope Appears on the Horizon

At last, in the distance, rose the jagged, ice-draped Karakoram Range. To the weary pilgrims, by then nearly drained of hope, the mountains must have seemed a mirage.

Near Rudok, the last Tibetan village short of Kashmir, the Kazakhs pitched camp and courteously invited the headman of the town to a meager "banquet." They gave their Tibetan guest a rifle; he reciprocated with salt, flour, and brick tea, showed the way to the border, and wished them well.

Crossing into Kashmir near Pangong Tso, the weary refugees surrendered to the frontier guards and gratefully let their feet fall on the soil of sanctuary.

Miraculous it was that any had won through; yet, for the successful few, personal tragedy leached almost all joy from the achievement. There was none who had not left behind—dead, captured, or a hunted runaway—husband, wife, child, or dearest friend.

The ensuing months in Kashmir inevitably brought Kazakh affairs to a new crisis, though not, like that they had just survived, one of life and death. With Kashmir's mountain pastures already held by local sheepherders, there seemed no promise that they would be able to continue in their traditional way of life.

Civilization's conveniences and restrictions in a sizable city like Srinagar imposed a hardship of adjustment on the Kazakh. After all, on his native steppes a tribesman might easily have lived and died without ever sitting in a chair or riding in a bus and with scant knowledge of electric lights, faucets, and telephones.

The Republic of Turkey came to the rescue, matching the generous hospitality of Kashmir and India—hospitality that the Kazakhs never can forget. Turkey offered to resettle the fugitives on the Anatolian Plateau, a region whose steppes closely resemble those of Sinkiang. The Turks, furthermore, speak much the same language as the Kazakhs and share a common ancestry and history.

In November and December of 1952 about 200 Kazakhs left Kashmir in two groups and made the long journey by land and sea to Turkey. Eighty-five more joined them later. All have successfully put down new roots in their adopted land.

Qali Beg and about 60 others chose to remain in Kashmir for another 18 months. In June, 1954, they, too, left for Turkey.

Our year in Kashmir ebbed away. My wife and I packed to leave. Kazakh friends begged us to remain, but when we explained that the land of our own people called us back, it was a motivation whose power they knew all too well.

The chiefs—young Mezhit, stolid Sultan Sherif, lively Qali Beg—invited us to farewell feasts, all on the same day! They were full banquets, and etiquette compelled us to eat what each host offered as if with hearty appetite.

Parting Makes Hosts Wistful

We ended up in Qali Beg's room on the second floor of the Srinagar caravansary. The setting was long since familiar: fire glowing in the corner, bright rugs and mats on the floor, coiled whips, belts, and hats hung on the walls. We did our best with rice pilau, mutton soup, fried bread chunks, and a kind of triangular dumpling filled with chopped mutton and vegetables. And there was tea, cup after cup after cup.

Other chiefs and their wives joined the party. My wife gave the women costume jewelry. Sultan Sherif's wife took off a cluster of silver coins and presented them to her. One of Qali Beg's wives pulled a silver ring from her finger and placed it on her hand.

Usually stoic, our Kazakh friends broke down in tears. But I recalled, as we shook hands and left them, the proud defiance of Qali Beg in scorn of those who now arrogantly bestrode his native pastures: "He who tastes a spoon of Kazakh blood will burn his tongue for 40 years."

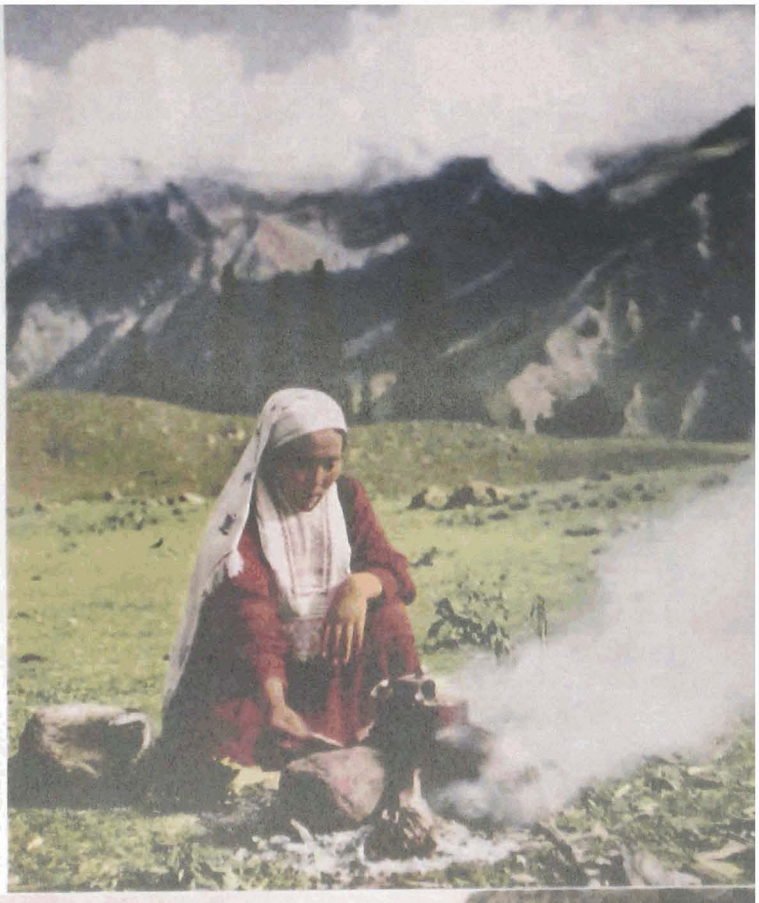
A Singing Kettle on a Stove of Stones Calls Teatime

To withstand jolting hauls on horseback, cooking and eating utensils come in unbreakables such as iron, tin, wood, and skin. Kazakh taste for tea keeps this pot on the fire most of the day.

On the steppes, tribesmen use rocklike bricks of black tea, breaking off each day's supply with hammer or stones. The drink is usually brewed with milk and laced with butter and salt.

Though the outdoor kitchen lacks modern work savers, a Kazakh housewife rarely has to tackle a meal alone. According to Moslem custom, her husband is permitted four wives. Only the wealthiest can afford the limit, but some have two spouses and usually a mother or sister sharing yurt and work.

These women prepare a wedding feast of cabbage, carrots, potatoes, mutton, and soup.



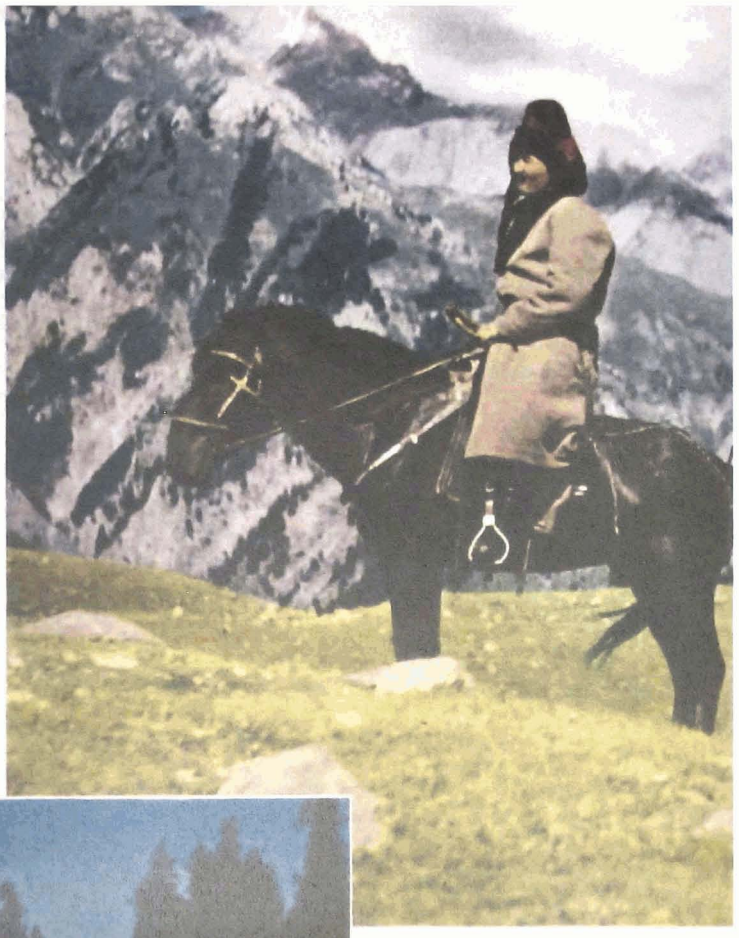
Warriors Ride → into the Mountains for a Day of Sport

On the march from Sinkiang the tribesmen faced incredible odds: continuing Chinese Communist attack, desperate food and water shortages, mysterious illness, and untracked mountain and desert wilderness. Yet they heroically fought through to freedom.

These men, mounted on Kashmir gift horses, ride amid peaks and alpine meadows reminiscent of the Tien Shan (Celestial Mountains).

On the steppe Kazakh horses live in family herds. Each stallion protects from wolves and other dangers a harem of about nine mares and some 30 offspring.

The last rider appears to have scooped up a pint-size passenger. Loving children dearly, even the fiercest fighters find time to play with and fondle their youngsters.



Summer Encampment → Makes a Picnic of Every Meal

Kazakhs normally eat with fingers out of a community dish. Plates and silverware at this dinner were provided for the author and his wife in deference to Western custom. Tribesmen brought the prized porcelain cups from China. This family cleans hands after eating. Fried bread is left over.

The head of the household wears a high-topped bonnet, fringed with fur and covered with patterned silk. A tassel of owl feathers, symbol of good luck, waves from the crown. Believed sacred, owls are captured alive, stripped of the downy feathers under the tail, and released.

←A mountain stream serves as sink in the Kazakh "kitchen." These women draw clear, fresh water for their teapots.

Ansco Color by Milton J. Clark

Ansco Color by Milton J. Clark

↑ Women Embroider Hangings for Yurts

Needlewomen draw inspiration for their stylized designs from Nature—flowers, leaves, sheep horns. Girls wear their wealth: silver coins jingle as they walk. Bonnets worn by the men hang on the yurt.

↓ Men Draw Mare's Milk for Kumiss

Slightly alcoholic, the beverage tastes like sour wine. Fermented in coltskin, it is preserved in flasks made of the same leather. Kazakh women perform most household tasks; men usually milk the mares.