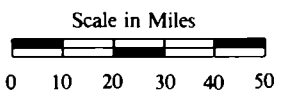
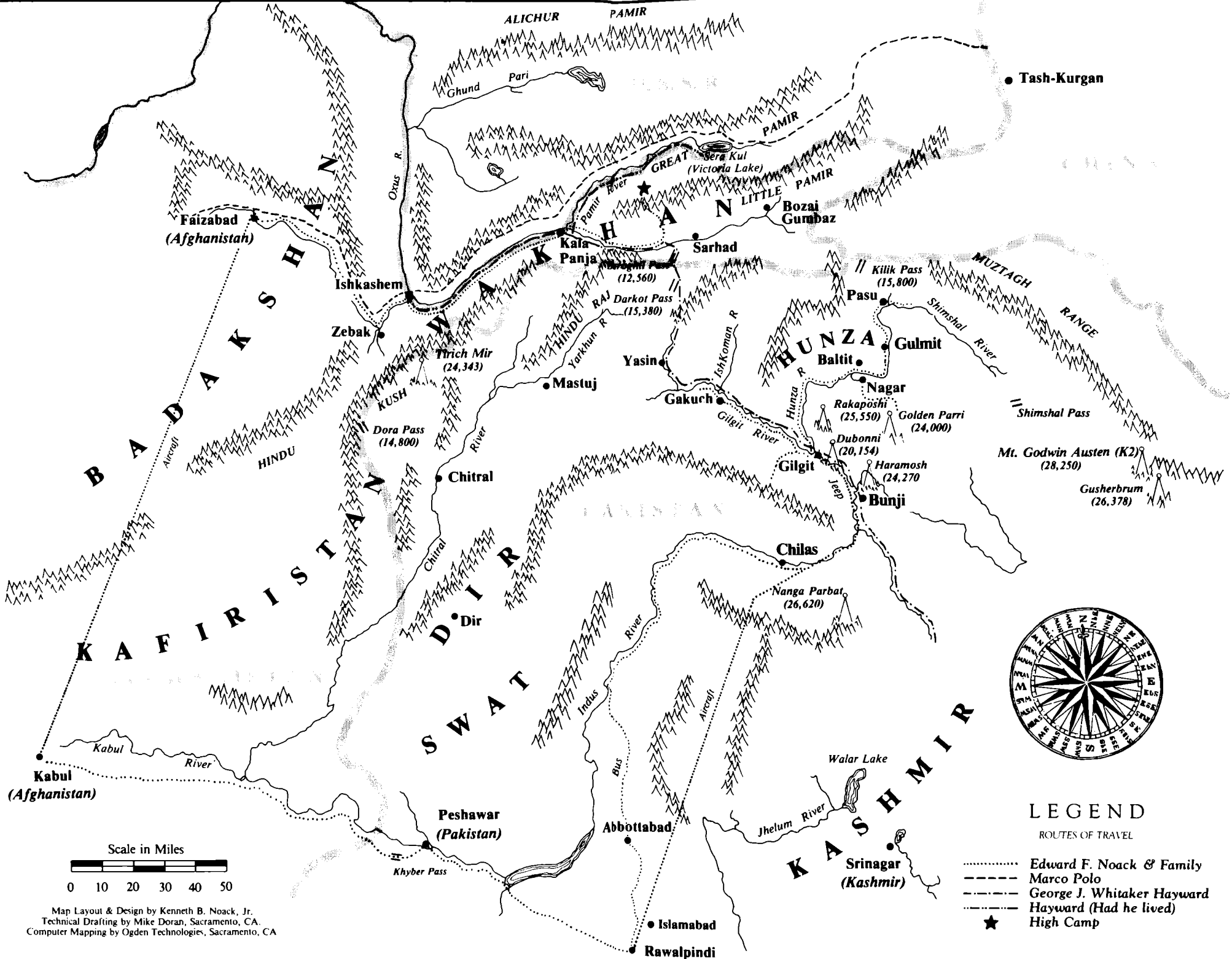
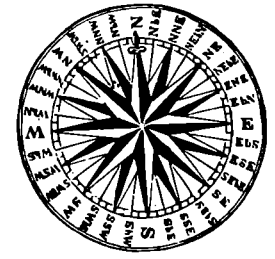
A photograph of a person in a high-altitude mountain landscape. The person is carrying a large, tall bundle of golden-brown hay or straw on their back. They are wearing a dark jacket and dark pants. The background features a large, snow-capped mountain peak under a clear blue sky. The foreground is a grassy slope with some dry vegetation.

**AMIDST
ICE &
NOMADS
IN HIGH
ASIA**

by Edward F. Noack



Map Layout & Design by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.
 Technical Drafting by Mike Doran, Sacramento, CA.
 Computer Mapping by Ogden Technologies, Sacramento, CA



LEGEND

- ROUTES OF TRAVEL
- Edward F. Noack & Family
 - Marco Polo
 - . - . - . George J. Whitaker Hayward
 - Hayward (Had he lived)
 - ★ High Camp

*Enjoy!
Ken Noack
9-19-89*

Amidst Ice and Nomads in High Asia

by

EDWARD F. NOACK

*Mary Drew's grand mother
introduced me to these folks*

KENNETH B. NOACK
CHAIRMAN

NOACK AND DEAN
INSURANCE AGENTS AND BROKERS
401 WATT AVENUE

(916) 488-3100
P.O. BOX 255188
SACRAMENTO, CA 95805



NATIONAL LITERARY GUILD, INC.
210 N. Pass Avenue, Suite 204
Burbank, California 91505
(818) 845-2687

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Helen, who accompanied me on sixteen different treks into restricted areas of Central Asia. She ate the native food, rode her trusty yak, helped with the camp chores, and when serious problems or danger arose her cheerful and sage advice was always welcome.

*Better to strive and climb
And never reach the goal
Than to drift along with time,
an aimless, worthless soul.*

*Ay, better to climb and fail,
Or to sow and reap though the yield be small
Than to throw away day after day,
And never to strive at all.*

Anon.

Personal.

From:- Mr. Habibul Rehman Khan T.P.K.

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN



RESIDENT IN GILGIT AND BALTISTAN

(MINISTRY OF HOME & KASHMIR AFFAIRS)

KASHMIR AFFAIRS DIVISION

No.

Telegrams :- RESIDENT

Phone : No.1-Office.

Gilgit the 17th October 1968.

My dear friend Edward Noack ,

I feel grateful for the keen interest that you have shown in our socio-economic problems, during your three extended visits of Gilgit Agency beginning from 1960. Your recent visit into the almost unknown glacial fastness of Barpu, Sumiyar, Bar, and Miar in Nagar State, in the company of your two sons shows the adventurous spirit of the family. As far as I am aware you are the first Americans ever to visit, this frozen wilderness excepting the Conway expedition of 1897 (British) and a small swiss party many years ago, who were the first foreigners to visit this remarkable area. You have seen what great efforts the Government of Pakistan is making to develop these extensively mountaineous areas which have remained backward and neglected till independence in 1947. It is true we have reached that stage when small and simple ~~of~~ sewing machines, and knatting machines, small ploughs, thrashing machines will be of great help to improve the living condition of the people. For the education of people 16 millimeter projectors are also necessary. These facilities we can receive only through our Government of Pakistan and not direct from any foreign agency.

With all the best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Habibul Rehman Khan
(HABIBUR REHMAN KHAN) T.P.K.

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AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As I look back to the eighteen different adventures which took us to restricted parts of Innermost Asia, I want to report that there was no race to reach the summits of lofty mountains nor piton or rope scaling of vertical rock faces. That was not our objective nor our priority—trekking over colossal glacial flows and rugged wilderness terrain amidst many of the world's loftiest peaks and magnificent scenery was reward enough.

Equally rewarding was the close association with the inhabitants of the remote areas—tribal rulers, land barons, farmers, bearers, nomads and children. We thank all those who served us willingly and faithfully during the long hours of day and night while we were in their company. I wish to express our appreciation for the many kindnesses and help given us by native residents of the areas involved in our travels.

There were still others and I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the following individuals for their untiring efforts in making it possible for us to visit and explore forbidden areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

They are: the late Mr. Habibur Rehman Khan, T. Pk., resident Political Agent in Gilgit and Baltistan; the late H.H. Major General Mir Mohamed Jamal Khan, H. PK. and Rani, Ruler of Hunza State, Pakistan; H.H. Brigadier Shaukat Ali, H. Pk. H.Q.A. C.B.E., Mir of Nagar State, Pakistan; Wing Commander M. Shah Khan—Pakistan Army; the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India; Mr. G. Sarwar Nashir, President, Spinzar Cotton Company and Hotels formerly of Kunduz, Afghanistan; H.M. Zahir Shah, former king of Afghanistan; K.S. Bajpai, Political Officer—Sikkim and N.E. Frontier of India; Mr. Lakhan L. Mahrotra, former Consul General of India, now Consul General to the U.S.S.R. Moscow; Asad Malik, son of the Governor of West Pakistan; Dr. Dwight L. Wilbur M.D. who has taken a keen interest in my magazine articles and slide programs, persuading me to offer this manuscript to a publisher; Nicholas G. Thacher, former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and Jean Louise Thacher, his wife. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them and express my gratitude for all of their assistance given me to meet with foreign diplomats in Asia; Kenneth B. Noack, Jr., my grandson, who has accompanied me on one of my glacial adventures in the mountain regions of Nagar State, Pakistan and who has also trekked in the Hindu Raj Range of the Chitral region of Pakistan. He has been of great assistance to me in assuming the details involved in the publishing of this book; my wife, Helen, who has accompanied me on most of the treks. When the going became dangerous, she resolutely mounted her trusty yak and left the problems to his bovine good judgement. Her good judgement was often used on me in a crisis.

—Edward F. Noack

ACKNOWLEDGMENT II

I have always been intrigued by the wealth of knowledge and geographical expertise which Grandpa has accumulated and committed to memory over a period of forty years through primarily first-hand experience travelling in and reading about a part of the world of which still very little is known...except by him.

Over the years I have developed a frustration listening to his travel tales and viewing the numerous photographs he has brought back with him...none of it has been recorded for anyone to enjoy! This book is only a start, I hope, toward the fulfillment of a personal dream which is to have and to share, forever, part of a twentieth century pioneer and scholar—my grandfather.

I am indebted to many people for their personal support, input, feedback, efforts and patience toward the successful publication of this book. I would especially like to acknowledge the following individuals: John Sabo, Jackie Hayden and all of the staff at Magnicolor Laboratories of Sacramento, California for their personal attention to photographic excellence in the processing of our film from excursions abroad; Bette Todd, Michael Scheer and their staff of the National Literary Guild, Burbank, California; Chuck Colburn and Ed Hotchkiss of C&M Graphic Services, Burbank, California; and Sheri Masser of Type&Graphics, Burbank, California for each of their personal interest and ambition to assure all aspects of the book were accomplished to our satisfaction; Grandpa, for his faith and belief in my ability to pursue this project on his behalf; and finally and most especially, my mother and father—my very best friends—for the wonderful supporting parents they are toward everything my sister, Karen, my brother, Charlie, and I, venture into...

—Kannes

How It All Happened

A journey to high Asia is inspiring enough—writing about it is something else since it brings into focus those treasured memories of adventures, some almost forgotten but stirring enough to inspire me to record many of the events and scenes encountered in a little-known, yet magnificent wilderness.

The intention of this narrative is to describe the impressions of a determined adventurer wandering about in remote and little-known parts of innermost Asia, inspired with a specific goal to be accomplished. The famed British explorer Lieutenant George W. Hayward, Gold Medallist of the Royal Geographical Society of London, a fearless adventurer, gave me the incentive to follow in some of his footsteps through almost unknown areas on the "Roof of the World" and moreover, in the phantom footsteps of his specter. For Hayward met a most tragic and untimely death at the hand of a treacherous and brutal ruler as he stood at the threshold of a most important assignment—to explore the unknown Pamir Steppe.

After examining and surveying numerous Karakoram Ice-fields north of the Himalayan Range, making his way into Sinkiang, Chinese Turkestan and being held under guard by suspicious Chinese authorities in Yarkand and Kashgar as one of the first foreigners to invade this remote westernmost province of China, Hayward failed to obtain permission to proceed onward to the Pamir Steppe. This stroke of ill fortune, for the moment, turned out to be a blessing, for, on his return to seek another but more hazardous route through that remote British-India outpost of Gilgit, he was afforded the opportunity to examine and map unexplored glaciers and little-known ancient caravan routes of the lofty Karakorams.

Retracing his track through formidable and dangerous territory, he entered India's Northwest Frontier Province and proceeded on to Gilgit in the western Karakoram where he had been warned of traveling in the domain of the treacherous rulers of Yasin and Chitral. But he was determined to run the risks of a journey through those perilous parts in order to obtain access to explore the Pamir Steppe—his priority assignment of the Royal Geographical Society of London.

Following in Hayward's track for nearly two hundred miles brought us to grips with some of the most spectacular glacial flows of the Karakorams and onto the "Roof of the World," those snow and icebound heights shown on the map of Central Asia as Pamir, from which radiate the highest and mightiest mountains on the face of the earth. This is a land of snow and ice. Man, if present at all, is either a transient adventurer or a nomad tending his livestock in summer pastures. He does not dwell for long in the muztagh.

1 The Beginning of an Expedition

An epitaph inscribed on a modest gravestone in faraway Gilgit Cemetery had been haunting me for eight long years. It lay neglected in that lonely graveyard, isolated in the Northwest Frontier of India (now Pakistan), for over a century. It is the last resting place of a fearless adventurer. I stood there in late autumn, 1960, while on an assignment to remote Gilgit Agency. It read:

ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF
G.W. HAYWARD
GOLD MEDALLIST OF
THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON
WHO WAS CRUELLY MURDERED
AT DARKUT
JULY 18, 1870
ON HIS JOURNEY TO EXPLORE THE PAMIR STEPPE

THIS MONUMENT IS ERECTED TO
A GALLANT OFFICER AND ACCOMPLISHED TRAVELLER
BY HIS HIGHNESS
THE MAHARAJAH OF KASHMIR
AT THE INSISTENCE OF
THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON



*Hayward's Gravestone.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

It was hard to resist the lure of the Pamir Steppe and the icebound heights of Karakoram. A few years later, and twelve thousand miles distant, my thoughts were drifting back to poor Hayward and my first impressions of the icy Karakorams in the years 1959 and 1960, when my wife and I wandered about through Hunza and into the Pasu Mountains of Little Ghujal in Upper Kanjut Valley. It was there that we first discovered the ice mass of the Pasu and the mighty Batura.

For hours in his highness, the Mir of Hunza's hunting lodge at the quaint little village of Gulmit, around the fireside we had listened to tales about an unexplored glacial fastness of rare

splendor in little-known Nagar State. The tales were told by natives whose ancestors had brought back accounts of the ice world of Hispar and Barpu, remarkable realms of Central Asian terrain that still stood irresistible and defiant. Those native storytellers added fuel to the flame of adventure that hovered in my mind. No further allurements were needed.

As I pondered over the prospect of a modest expedition into that legendary land, I dreamed of the glamour of the Orient that would soon unfold before my eyes. But to reach the goal would require endless effort attempting to convince officials in command of those restricted and sensitive frontier areas of a satisfactory reason for proceeding beyond Gilgit village.

I thought first of my old friends, their highnesses, the Mirs of Hunza and Nagar and his excellency, Brigadier Habibur Rahman Khan, Resident (Governor) of Gilgit and Baltistan. Much correspondence ensued and time passed from weeks to months, then to years when, at long last, welcome news came stating that permission had been granted to enter those glacial areas of Nagar State and other parts of Gilgit Agency where Hayward had traveled.

While packing my bags in preparation for departure, my thoughts drifted to the Orient. I imagined that I could hear the camel bells of caravans, detect the spicy odors of the Asian open bazaar, and see the evening glow of sunset on the distant snowy peaks and spires of Hispar. All the charm of Asia seemed to unfold before me as I prepared to depart.

I broke away from those close friends who had often warned of the horrible dangers of Himalayan trails. They cautioned about Asian bandits and dangerous fevers. Others predicted my demise in a glacier crevasse. At the airport where they had gathered to wish me farewell, I reminded them about the perils they would encounter driving back to their homes. Then I boarded my aircraft for Copenhagen, the first lap of an east-bound air journey that would land me five days later in Rawalpindi, almost halfway around the globe.

2 **Airline Strike Lands Aircraft in Afghanistan**

I was awakened at an early hour by the ringing of the telephone in my room at Kabul Hotel where I arrived the night before. "Hello, is this Mr. Noack, our passenger for Flight #607 to Rawalpindi? This is Pakistan International Airlines office calling

to inform you that our flight has been cancelled." I answered. "Cancelled? For what reason?" My caller replied, "A strike of our pilots over the entire system, the first in our history." "Then how am I to keep my rendezvous in Rawalpindi today with his highness, the Mir of Hunza?" I asked. "Besides, my sons are scheduled to arrive on your Pakistan Airlines via Hong Kong and Karachi." He replied, "No problem. We are prepared to transport you and three other passengers to your destination in our Volkswagen microbus. Be ready at ten o'clock with your luggage; we will pick you up at your hotel." Weary as I was after the long, tiresome flight from California to Kabul, Afghanistan by way of Copenhagen and Teheran, I arose and had breakfast.

Three hours later we were winding our way by microbus down the Kabul River defile, through the Hindu Kush Mountains and out onto the plains of Jelalabad. Occasionally we passed camel caravans heavily loaded with oriental rugs, felt numdas and dried fruits. Shaggy, two-humped Bactrian camels—ships of the Asian Steppe—were driven by native Pathan nomads toward the Khyber Pass and the lucrative bazaars of Peshawar and Rawalpindi. The countryside resounded with the toll of the camels' bells, the leader wearing a huge bronze one that rang out a dull clang to the rhythm of the animal's gait. It was nearly sundown when we reached the Afghan check station near Landi Kotal, followed by customs at the Pakistan border. Khyber Pass was crossed at dusk as nomadic tribesmen were in the process of pitching their tents before settling down for the night. Light from their blazing campfires silhouetted them, and their camels and livestock against the dark background of approaching nightfall. Spicy odors of supper being prepared permeated the air as we hastened toward our destination.

It was nightfall when our microbus passed through the ancient stone ramparts of Peshawar in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province and drew up to the familiar old Dean's Hotel where the airline put me up for the night, with a promise of seeing me through to Rawalpindi next morning.

Somehow, during the night, the strike was locally settled. I traveled the rest of the way by air in a World War II DC-3 aircraft, arriving exactly twenty hours late by the clock in the airline office at Chaklala Airport in Rawalpindi. I remarked to an attendant, "This must be the shortest strike in history." She replied, "Our business is a speedy one; we cannot afford to lose time."

The interruption had come on the last lap of the air journey. I was halfway around the globe in Rawalpindi, the starting point of an adventure had taken more than two years to negotiate. As I inquired as to the arrival of my sons, the door of Pakistan Airlines office opened and in they walked with Nazim Khan, a nephew of his highness, the Mir of Hunza, who was sent to greet



A Bactrian Camel train entering Kunduz in northern Afghanistan with cargo from the plains of Bokhara. The lead camel is burdened with a huge bell hanging from its neck which rings out a resounding clang to the rhythm of each right foot step. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

us on arrival and accompany us on to Gilgit. What a coincidence — there we stood, 12,000 miles from our starting point, each traveling in opposite directions by different schedules, and arriving with minimum delay in spite of unreliable air connections and a strike. Greeting them, we stepped into his highness' Mercedes automobile and were whisked off to Flashman's Hotel, my friendly domicile of years past.

3 **An Ambush on the Indus**

Nazim inquired, "When do you wish to leave for Gilgit? Mir Sahib is expecting you this week in Hunza." I asked, "Is the jeep ready for our drive over the Indus Gorge Road to Gilgit as planned?" Nazim answered with dismay. "You haven't heard about the tragic experience of the three Pakistani officers in their jeep at an isolated bend on the Indus Road only yesterday?" he asked. "They were ambushed by tribesmen of the lower Indus and two were shot and killed. Mir Sahib was contacted by telegraph through Gilgit. He and Rajah Habib—ur Rahman Khan, Political Agent (Governor) of Gilgit and Baltistan, vigorously protested our going by jeep through that treacherous area." This unfortunate incident climaxed a long-sought and planned two-day journey through the spectacular lower Indus Gorge en route to Gilgit. Had there been no airline strike, I pondered, might we have been in that vicinity at the time of the ambush? Accordingly, we made reservations for a flight out to Gilgit on the following morning.

I was anxious to contact Colonel Shah Khan, my hunting companion in the autumn of 1960 in the Pasu Mountains of Hunza. Being a native of Hunza State and a grandson of Mohamed Nazim Khan, a former Mir of Hunza, he would have the answers to numerous questions on my mind relative to the little known glacial wilderness we were bound for in the Karakorams of Nagar. Nazim announced that he would arrive shortly and in time to have dinner with us.

When Shah Khan arrived that evening, I knew that we were in good hands. He and Nazim informed us that Mir Sahib had arranged for a jeep to transport ourselves and our bags over the spectacular and treacherous Hunza trail. Equipment and supplies needed in Nagar awaited our arrival at Baltit. Five bearers and a cook had been selected by his highness, the Mir of Nagar, for our trek into the icebound heights of Karakoram. The annoy-

ing details of a modest expedition having been arranged, we were free to indulge in more productive activities with our local friends.

4 Indus Gorge Air Transportation Improved

The following morning at Chaklala Airport, a sturdy Fokker prop-jet aircraft was warming up for the scheduled flight out to Gilgit. I remarked, "What an improvement over the old-fashioned freight carrying DC-3 Dakotas we had become accustomed to on our earlier flights to Gilgit." The air route up Kagan Gorge, close by lofty Nanga Parbat Mountain and to the Indus and Gilgit is known to be one of the most spectacular as well as hazardous flights imaginable. "The new higher-flying and faster airplanes will take many of the thrills out of our flight," I complained. We were highly impressed as we soared over the newly-planned city of Islamabad, just north of Rawalpindi, splendid in its layout and architecture. The vision of the capable people of Pakistan is reflected in that monumental undertaking, planned exclusively for the Central Government of the country as its new capital.

A few moments later, our sturdy aircraft approached Kagan Valley with its towering snow-crowned ridges rising above us, and lush, terraced valleys spread out below. As we approached Babusar Pass and cleared it by several hundred feet, icebound Nanga Parbat, 26,658 feet in height, confronted us to the east. This western buttress of the Great Himalaya, with its glaciers glistening in the early morning sunlight, was a monstrous sight to behold. One could not help but remember the terrifying experience encountered by the several expeditions on the ice of its Diamir face, starting with the small and humble expedition of the Mummery, Hastings, Collie party in 1895 during which Mummery perished, and climaxing with the successful and remarkable last stage, solo effort of the Austrian climber, Herman Buhl on July 3, 1953, who reached the summit and returned to tell the tale.

We gazed at Nanga Parbat's icy western face, not five miles distant, where thirty-seven human bodies lie, frozen in its depths for posterity, the end result of that fervent desire of men to reach the top.

Approaching the Indus Gorge as we flanked the northwest face of the mountain, an almost sheer drop of 23,500 feet from summit to river came into view, a dramatic spectacle of ice and



The northeast face of Nanga Parbat from its ice bound summit at 26,658 feet to its 3000-foot base at the River Indus, one of the greatest single verticle rises on earth— 23,000 feet.
Photo by Edward F. Noack

stone. Then, a left bank of the aircraft and the gorge of the Gilgit River was beneath us with still sufficient altitude to view Rakaposhi's 25,500 foot summit away to the north. The purplish glow of the Karakorams loomed up directly ahead. As we settled down for the final approach of the Gilgit landing strip, two sharp ice-capped fangs pierced the blue of the northeastern sky. These were the peaks of Haramosh and Duboni, glittering brilliantly in the sunlight. The fields and foliage of Gilgit were already adorned in brilliant autumn coloring. Lofty ramparts rose above Kargah Gorge and the mountains of Punial State formed a backdrop in the distance. Quaint and exotic Gilgit Valley, with its ancient village and bazaar, lay before us.

5 Old Friends and Familiar Sights

"Salaam Alaikum" (May peace be with you), I addressed my old friend Humayun Beg, as I alighted from the plane. The prominent Beg family of Hunza's Wazirs (advisors) were his ancestors. A radiant feeling of warm friendship came over me as I found myself surrounded by a group of Gilgit's officials. Ken and Bill were promptly introduced into the circle of Gilgit Agency Officialdom. Then we were led to a waiting jeep for transport to the Residency of our esteemed friend and host, the distinguished Rajah Habibur Rahman Khan, Resident (Governor) of Gilgit and Baltistan.

Winding our way along poplar-lined lanes toward Gilgit's famous old bazaar center, we detected the customary spicy odors of most oriental villages; those which emanate from a combination of smoke from the hookah pipe, camel dung cooking fires mixed in with the fumes from spice shops, and the scent of wandering camels and donkeys. Even in the darkness of night, at the end of a day's stage, a traveler is alerted as he approaches a village by those familiar fumes drifting out, sometimes from a mile away.

The strangely delightful familiar lanes and bazaars of Gilgit had changed but little since I last saw them eight years previously. But the colorful wares hanging from shop walls and piled high on the ground of many of the open-front stalls seemed to have increased in volume and variety. An avenue of newly-built bazaar stalls came to my attention as a corner was turned near the end of the main lane before we started up a winding

road toward the Residency. It was apparent now that sleepy old Gilgit had taken on an expansion spree after many years of dormancy.

Electric wires from a newly-built, tiny hydroelectric plant were seen attached to poles along the lanes; electricity, an unheard of luxury during past visits to this remote outpost, attested to the awakening of the sleepy old community of alert citizens to modern improvement and higher living standards. I wondered if Gilgit was losing its former charm as one of the few remaining bazaar centers on the old historic caravan trail from Sinkiang, China to the Punjab and on through the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan and western markets. For centuries past Gilgit had been an important trade center on the ancient trail. It is said that the village is due to regain that status before long, with the new jeep road in the process of construction by the Chinese and Pakistanis to replace the old camel trail that connects Gilgit with Kashgar in China. Sentiments probably should not interfere with progress in this fast-moving era, even in these remote and primitive parts.

The remainder of the way was lined with familiar buildings, orchards and fields. We presented our credentials at the Compound Guardhouse and drew up to the famous old Gilgit Residency. As I stepped down from the jeep and glanced up at the long row of Ibex and Marco Polo sheep trophies hanging on the veranda wall, fond memories were reflected before me. Then Rajah Habibur Rahman Khan stepped forward to greet me and to meet Ken and Bill in warm Asian fashion. A sensation of sincere friendship came over me—our separation of several years had only served to strengthen our relations. Mirza and Rahmantelle, our faithful servants of years past, appeared with smiling faces. They carried our bags and gear into a spacious and attractive room, only to return presently with the conventional tea and English biscuits. The following hour provided time for much-needed relaxation.



Street scene in Rajah Bazaar Rawalpindi on a busy shopping day.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.



The Gilgit post office in the northwest frontier of Pakistan.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.

6 Gilgit and its Residency House of British Fame



The meeting of a Chinese delegation with Pakistan in Gilgit. His Highness, the late Mir of Hunza, posing second from left. Photo by unknown

The annals of Ptolemy and records left by the Buddhist pilgrims, Fa Hien, A.D. 400 and Hsuan Tsang, A.D. 631, describe Gilgit Valley as flourishing when these religious historians visited the area known to them as the mountains of Bolor. Hsuan Tsang's journal states: "Perilous are the trails and dark the gorges. Here there are ledges hanging in mid-air; flying bridges across the abyss; paths cut by hand with the chisel." Yet, in this remote fastness, they discovered great convents and ancient carved Buddhas on cliff sides.

From what we encountered in our travels in Gilgit, Hunza and far-off Nagar, the descriptions of the ancient pilgrims could very well apply today. Frightening roads, trails and bridges were encountered. Buddha's image, carved in stone, appears at the north portal to Kargah Nullah (gorge) not far from Gilgit Village. We stood at its foot where, recently, an ancient settlement has been discovered; it would be interesting to know what some enterprising archeologist might uncover. Already, pottery and clay coins have come to light. Gilgit has for nearly a century been the center of operations from which observations and control over the northern frontier and the tribal states are most effectively maintained. Its central position with relation to the Northwest Frontier Province where three great Empires meet, and its location with respect to the Indus Valley States and the ancient Asian trade routes, makes it the obvious point of vantage over that important frontier area. Russia's rapid expansionist activities in Central Asia, with Cossacks on the Pamirs up to the nearby Turkestan-Indian Frontier, was just cause for alarm and concern to the British as long ago as the year 1888.

Because the mountain fastness harbored primitive and lawless tribal peoples who lived in terror of each other, the Gilgit Agency and garrison was established. Conflict between independent tribes still persists. So situated, Gilgit was in a strategic position to watch events on the nearby Soviet and Chinese Frontiers and at the same time control the tribes of Hunza and

Nagar in the north, as well as the States of the Gilgit watershed and the Indus Valley.

In the year 1878, Major John Biddulph was the first British officer to be assigned to the Gilgit Agency. After several withdrawals and reappointments, the Agency was re-established permanently with Colonel Algernon Durand as British Political Agent in the year 1889. A garrison of Kashmir Imperial Service troops was, thereafter, kept at Gilgit fortress and deployed strategically within the frontier states under command of British officers. Today, Gilgit Scouts of the Pakistan Army serve as frontier sentinels.

Before the year 1891, Hunza and Nagar had been rival states with frequent feudal wars, caravan raids, and slave trading, which provided diversion and booty for the natives. Since the establishment of the Gilgit Agency and enforcement of Pax Britannica after Colonel Durand's famous and successful British India conquest over the two States in 1891, their rivalry has ceased and friendship has taken its place.

The fair complexioned Aryan blooded natives of Hunza and Nagar as well as those natives of the other northern States of Gilgit Agency contrast strongly in both appearance and language with those farther to the south in the Indus Valley. As ably reasoned by the renowned archeologist and ethnologist, Sir Aurel Stein, the Hunza-Nagar natives belong to the Indo-Scythian or Yeshkun tribes who were pushed out of Kansu, China and eastern Turkestan, then across the Oxus River into Bactria (Balkh), now northern Afghanistan, long before the beginning of the Christian era. Later, many of them migrated over the Hindu Kush passes into the fertile valleys of the Northwest Frontier Province of India (now Pakistan), including the States of Gilgit Agency. Those aboriginal natives of eastern Central Asia likely were driven into those more remote and inaccessible valleys which provided a safer haven and fertility of soil

If the foregoing took place, then the more inaccessible parts of that great mountain fastness should harbor the descendants of the original race in its greatest purity. That is what is actually found in Hunza and Nagar, and to a lesser extent in some of the other northern States. The natives of Yasin and Punyal belong to the same stock as those of Hunza-Nagar. They speak the little-known and unwritten dialect, Burishaski. Their religion is Mohammedanism but of different sects, Hunza belonging to the Ismailis and Nagar, the Shiahhs.

Upon reaching the northern Gilgit States for the first time, a visitor is surprised to find so many of the natives fair complexioned, blue-eyed and appearing much like the people of the west. Many of them, if dressed in western clothing, would pass unnoticed on the streets of European or North American cities. Only their language would give them away.



An Afghan farmer and his young son taking a moment's rest while plowing his field. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



*Habibur Rehman Khan, political agent, Gilgit/Baltistan.
Photo by Eduard F. Noack*

7 **Discovering the Place where Heaven and Earth Meet**



*My grandson, Kannes, crossing a native-built bridge in the Upper Yarkhun Valley in the Mastuj region of the N.W. Frontier of Pakistan.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*

We felt highly honored to be accommodated in the Gilgit Residency House. Major Biddulph, during Lord Lytton's Vice Royalty, was the first British officer to be appointed to Gilgit and to live in the Residency. A long line of Political Agents followed, including the famous names Lockhart, Robertson, Young-husband, Gordan and Durand, and others whose careers turn the Residency into a British Hall of Fame. It exists to the present time under the capable direction of our gracious host, Rajah Habibur Rahman Khan, Political Officer (Governor) of Gilgit and Baltistan.

Following a brief rest and a walk through the autumn emblazoned compound grounds, dinner was announced. Over an abundant array of Asian dishes, conversation drifted to the topic of sports in the Gilgit mountains, a pastime indulged in by many of the officers on tour of duty in Gilgit. After presenting him with a fine fly-casting rod and reel, I reminded Mr. Habib of the fine trout fishing we had enjoyed in the Kaghah River near Gilgit several years ago. He quickly intervened, "I have in mind a two-day jeep trip in Punyal with some fishing in the upper Gilgit and Ishkomen Rivers." Needless to say, I was delighted, not only by the fine fishing prospect, but because we would be traveling in the footsteps of the explorer Hayward, on his final attempt to reach the Pamir Steppe. We retired early that night with instructions to be ready for an early breakfast and departure at seven o'clock.

Morning broke clear and frosty. A three-hour jeep drive along the right bank of Gilgit River brought us to Singal in Punyal State, sandwiched between Gilgit Valley, Hunza, Darel and Yasin. Punyal is eloquently described by its capable ruler, Rajah Jan Alam, as the land "where earth and heaven meet." Dignified and friendly, he helps make it so. I was surprised at his command of the English language. We chatted for an hour over a midday meal of delicious Kashgar melons, mutton, rice and vegetable pilau, chappattys, honey, cakes and dried apricots at his residence in Singal. He advised us, "Today I want you to fish our streams and catch a few one and two-pounders, all European browns. But if you will come in the spring, I will show you where the big ones take the fly; up to ten-pounders." I thought of Izaak Walton and the fish tales he might have related had he been present to listen to a few of ours.

That afternoon and the following morning, the upper Gilgit and Ishkomen Rivers provided splendid trout fishing and the kind hospitality of the Punyal natives. But the size was limited to two pounds, just as Rajah Jan Alam promised. My interest in trout fishing diminished as I gazed out to the north and sighted the huge glacial flows toward Darkut in Yasin where Hayward met his untimely fate. We had been traveling in his footsteps, but to venture beyond toward the nearby sensitive Afghan frontier would have been a hazardous decision. Access to the Pamir Steppe had been denied me by the highest Pakistan authorities. It was now doubtful that this Darband (closed door) could be opened to permit me to carry out my longing to visit the Pamir where Hayward was commissioned to explore. For now, the ice world of Karakoram was our objective.

Our return to Gilgit after nightfall of the second day was heralded by an urgent message from the Major Domo at Gilgit Hunza House: "Be ready to leave for Baltit in the morning. A Hunza jeep will pick you up at seven-thirty."



The Old Kashgar-Gilgit Caravan Trail by Jeep

A loud "Salaam" echoed through the hallway and into my room at an early hour the morning of our departure. Then, with smiling faces, our bearers Mirza and Rahmantelle entered, turned on the lights and announced, "Breakfast ready now." Our jeep would soon arrive, Inshallah (God willing); Mr. and Mrs. Habib were up for a hearty breakfast with us; then a warm farewell to our gracious hosts and we were on our way. The heavily loaded jeep rolled down the winding road past rows of cornstalks and the brightly-colored foliage of apricot and apple orchards. We were slowed by a flock of goats being driven in the road by a small boy. Our driver gave them a blast of the horn, and they scrambled away across a field.

Presenting our credentials to an official guard, we drove over the Gilgit suspension bridge, a one-way affair with an up-and-down weaving motion. Four miles beyond, near the mouth of the Hunza River, the road turns sharply to the north to disclose an unobstructed view of distant icy peaks and spires of the Great Karakorams. The sky was brilliantly clear with only a few billowy white clouds sailing by. Some of those heights included the 20,000 to 25,000 footers of the Rakaposhi group, a formidable

pattern on the distant horizon. It was amongst those towering frozen giants we were bound for.

Early morning activities were apparent as we wound our way out of Gilgit Valley. Native farmers were loaded with produce from the garden to be bartered at the Bazaar in Gilgit. But as we entered the watershed of the lower Hunza River, we saw scarcely a sign of vegetation or human activity until we reached the little oasis of Nomal, eighteen miles away. Neatly placed small farmsteads, irrigated by numerous native built channels carrying crystal clear water from a tributary of the Hunza River, disclosed the existence of a small rural community.

Native women in their intricately designed and handcrafted varicolored gowns and needlepoint caps were already at work in the millet and buckwheat fields, separating grain from chaff when we called for a brief halt to have a better view. Several timid women covered their pretty faces and scurried away to their mud and wattle homes. We had no intention of bringing forth our cameras, however; I had learned a lesson earlier—they are camera-shy. One elderly woman sat knitting a pair of wool socks by her winnowing tray, apparently waiting for the breeze to swell so that she might continue her grain separating chore. These were industrious people who wasted no time.

The male folk, gathered at a roadside shelter in their long wool chogas colorfully decorated with floral designs, appeared to have the latest village gossip well in hand. Children playing games ran back and forth on top of narrow rock walls. Others tended small flocks of fat-tailed sheep and goats. The tinkle of the animals' bells enhanced the tranquil scene. Strangely enough, not once did we hear a child cry during our visits to Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar. This phenomenon could have more significance than the legend about the longevity of these natives.

I looked back over the desolate sand and boulder strewn alluvial fans through which the lower Hunza River has cut its sinuous way and saw Nanga Parbat (26,620 feet) snowbound, glistening in the morning sunlight. This monarch of the Indus stood out in majestic grandeur. Its incredible 23,000 feet sheer north face from summit to the waters of the Indus was only partially visible from our commanding position.

Leaving the little dell of Nomal, we drew closer to another massif of the Parbat class, Rakaposhi, 25,500 feet above the sea. Though not far ahead of us, it was for the moment hidden away beyond the vast canyon walls of the Hunza River. We were now close by that western limit of the Great Karakoram Range in what is known to Central Asian explorers as the Mustagh (or ice) mountains. Within the boundaries of the little State of Hunza there are more summits over 20,000 feet than there are in the Alps over 10,000 feet.

While temporarily relaxing as we drove over a smooth and safe stretch of road, I was suddenly awakened by a deep sounding voice calling out, "La Illaha il Allah," as the sun rose above the

eastern canyon wall. A native wayfarer knelt on his prayer rug alongside the path reciting his morning devotions.

A halt was made in a wooded glen surrounded by forest-covered mountains that towered above us. Here we drew up to the small village of Chault and the winter residence of his highness, Shaukat Ali, Mir of Nagar State. The old crumbling forts of Chault and Chaprot, located here, had seen stormy days prior to the turn of this century when the natives of Hunza and Nagar fought Kashmir's garrison which had been stationed to protect the frontier of that state. Here the caravan road forks. One branch of the north or Hunza side of the river is supported mostly on ledges and galleries of wooden poles cut out of the face of cliffs by native artisans. The other branch crosses the River just below the Mir's Residence and proceeds along the south bank of the Hunza River to the Nagar villages in that state. Before reaching the forks, we stopped to make inquiry as to the onward road condition. Our Hunza driver questioned the village headman. I sat still and watched their expressions since I hoped the answer would be in favor of taking the southern branch—only too well did I remember the frightening experience of past visits on the parris (precipices) of the Hunza Road. The village elder answered, "You must proceed over the Hunza jeep trail since the Nilt Road on Nagar side is closed. There has been a boulder slide at a dangerous parri." That was a demand; furthermore, no alternate route was available. I had experienced the alarm of jeeping over Hunza trails several times before; I had undergone the terrifying sensation of riding a yak for miles over a two-foot-wide trail carved out of sheer rock cliffs 2,000 feet straight up above the river in northern Hunza. But all of that was past and forgotten—except during an occasional horrendous nightmare. Now it was a matter of taking the risk or founder in our adventure amongst the Karakoram Glaciers.

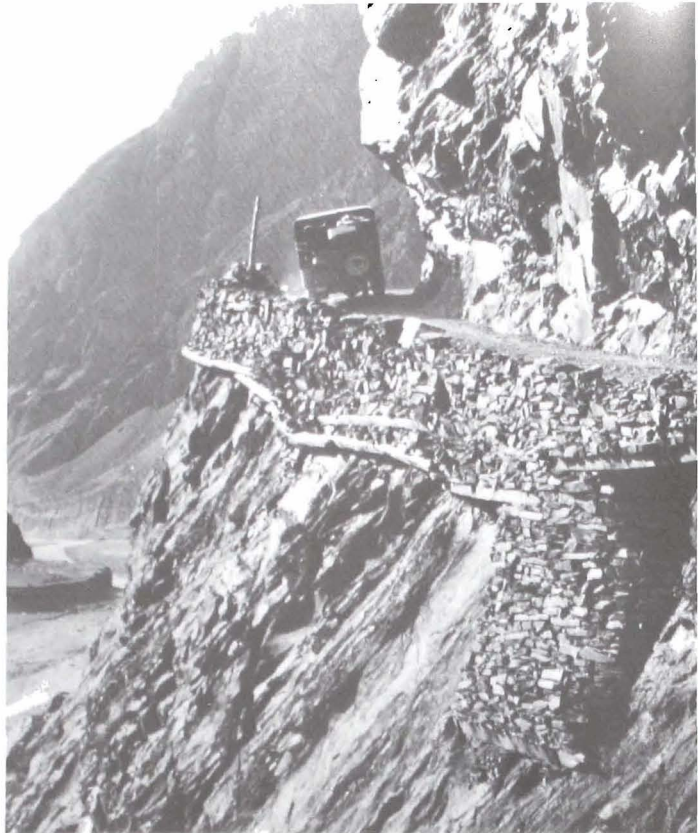
We drove along the right bank of the Hunza River and reached the crumbling ruins of the old Maiun fort without dismay. What was left of the famous Nilt fort across the river on the Nagar side stood out dimly on its prominence. Those two famous old Hunza-Nagar defense relics were the scenes of the brilliant and successful British campaign of 1891, when Colonel Algernon Durand, Commander-in-Chief of a small army of Gurkhas and Dogras of the Kashmir Body Guard Regiment, stormed the Nilt fort and adjacent sangars that were manned by the combined forces of Hunza and Nagar. That British-India triumph promptly put an end to widespread treacherous caravan and village plundering, slave trade and threats aimed at the British by those semi-civilized Asiatic robber chieftains. It is surprising how quickly and completely the natives of those two isolated states were converted into reliable and productive allies of the British-India Empire after their overwhelming defeat. The frontier boundaries are long since stabilized; tribal warfare and wandering brigands remain only in the memories of a few elders.

Calling for a halt, we got out of our jeep to survey a precarious situation. We were appalled to discover our jeep perched up on a narrow timber and stone gallery built out over an abyss of alarming perpendicularity.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

A still greater breathtaking experience awaited us. Our jeep driver called it the flying bridge. I discovered it to be a cantilever bridge over a stream flowing far below. I decided to walk across with Helen, my wife, while the driver followed with our baggage-burdened jeep.

Photo by Edward F. Noack



An Unexpected Roadside Welcome

Rakaposhi's massive glacial-riven buttresses extended downward to the river's bank far below us. But most of its 25,500 foot bulk was obscured by a cloud bank that enveloped the eastern sky. A halt was in order for a better view of that incredible apparition; then the sky cleared, exposing a spectacle of the highest order, one never to be forgotten by those fortunate few who have seen its unbelievable splendor. The six-foot-wide stony roadway that meandered out ahead suddenly became an overhanging gallery, half rock shelf, half wooden framework, perched up on protruding crags and projecting above a seemingly bottomless chasm—a startling situation, indeed. Walking ahead for a better view of our plight, we were appalled to find our jeep resting quietly but precariously over a deep abyss. The Hunza River was not less than fifteen hundred feet below us. It was

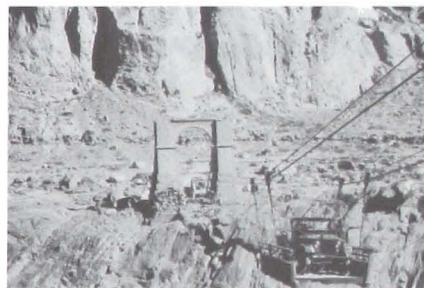
frightening to contemplate that several more miles of that hazardous road awaited us before we would reach our brief stopover in Baltit. We pointed out the risk to our native driver, who replied, "We reach Baltit most safe, two hour, inshallah (God willing)." I answered, "Inshallah or no inshallah, maybe I walk to Baltit." From that point onward, a considerably reduced rate of speed became the order of the day.

Alarming moments occurred frequently until, at last, near Aliabad the trail zigzagged downward onto flat ground at the western extremity of Baltit Valley. With a sigh of relief, we emerged safely on a smooth, safe track that led to Baltit and Karimabad. A friendly cheer came from the distance ahead as we drove up to a waiting jeep beside the trail. "Hello, hello," said a familiar voice. Out stepped Prince Ayash, brother of Hunza's ruler, his highness, Mohamed Jamal Khan. He welcomed me with the warm embrace of old friendship. "We have been expecting your arrival earlier," he exclaimed. Ken and Bill alighted from the jeep and were rightly introduced. "Come with me," directed Prince Ayash as he led me to his jeep. "We shall lead the way."

It was a disappointment to me that we were to continue on to Baltit in the comfort of that modern device, when only eight years previously we had taken to horseback over a narrow trail at that very point. Perhaps I should be more tolerant of the modern methods of transportation, since they do provide effortless movement over Hunza's difficult terrain.

Nearing Baltit in Hunza State we were appalled at the site of a cable tramway crossing the Hunza River flowing swiftly one hundred feet or so below. What proved to be even more frightening, my wife and I crossed in a separate tiny skip over a single small cable while the jeep and driver crossed on the tram!

Photo by Edward F. Noack



10 The Isolated Karakorams

As we drove onward, there came a weird but pleasant sound of unfamiliar tribal music in the distance. We soon caught up with a ten-piece native band that marched slowly ahead, leading us toward the old fortress-castle that sat astride a promontory ahead. The two jeeps came to a sudden halt at the Hunza palace courtyard gate. A number of officials awaited our arrival. Among them, I spotted some of my old friends in their decorated chogas and typical Hunza caps. A round of greetings was interrupted by the opening of huge courtyard gates, exposing to view at close range a scene of rare and dignified richness. Remote as we were, nearly five hundred miles from the nearest center of modern culture, we found an imposing palace structure of hand chipped stone, the artistic work of patient native labor. What few



Baltit officials await our arrival at the Palace gate.

Photo by Edward F. Noack

materials and furnishings were not handwrought of local product had been brought in either on the backs of natives or animals led over narrow trails along crumbling canyon walls. Spacious terraced gardens studded with fruit trees lay at the base of lofty and icy heights that reached skyward. The autumnal radiance of the scene was well nigh visionary in color and scope.

Led onward by the Hunza band, Prince Ayash and our escorts, we entered the courtyard on foot and proceeded ahead to the palace steps where awaited our noble host, His Royal Highness, Major General Mohamed Jamal Khan, Mir of Hunza State. Emotions ran high for the three of us as a welcoming ceremony followed. We climbed the palace steps and entered the luxurious sunroom. Well-placed windows afforded an expansive view halfway around the compass. Our view of Karakoram was astounding.

As we were seating ourselves, Her Highness, the attractive Rani of Hunza and three of her lovely daughters entered to welcome us. Tea and a large assortment of exotic and delicious refreshments provided stimulant for a spirited conversation. We distributed our traditional gifts amongst the Royal Family. Then Mirsahib ordered a large decanter of Hunza wine that had been made by the natives of every village from the abundant crops of several varieties of grapes grown throughout Hunza. They all say that it keeps them warm and contented throughout the long and cold winter season.

The Karakoram Glaciers of Nagar being our prime objective, we were impatient to learn more about the organizational details of our modest expedition into the frozen wilderness of Nagar State. Sensing my impatience, His Highness spoke up with assurance, "All arrangements have been completed with permission granted for you to enter restricted areas near the frontier. But you must remain here with us for, say, three days to rest and enjoy yourselves before proceeding into Nagar. I will communicate with His Highness, Shaukat Ali today, and he will be glad to know that you have arrived. He will have your bearers and cook ready. We have your storm tent, equipment, and food supplies in order. Sultan Ali will go as your liaison official." Needless to say, we were elated over that cheerful news.

While we were keen to make an early start for the wilderness of Nagar, we were, nevertheless, pleased since there is always something of interest to keep one occupied in the environs of Baltit. We were interrupted by a stately uniformed bearer announcing dinner, a welcome signal for healthy appetites that had been building up within us since early morning.

Entering the imposing walnut paneled dining room with fine Yarkand carpets underfoot, we were totally overcome. A luxurious adornment of Russian chinaware, silver and a large assort-



The opening of the huge courtyard gate exposed to view at close range a scene of rare and dignified richness of the Palace where awaited our noble host,

His Royal Highness, Major General Mohamed Jamal Khan,

Mir of Hunza State, accompanied by His Rani (wife) and three of his daughters. Needless to say, emotions ran high for us as the welcoming ceremonies followed. My wife, Helen, and I are seated to the right.

Photo by Edward F. Noack

Hunza Palace's ornate living room. Photo by Edward F. Noack



ment of both oriental and occidental foods awaiting our eager appetites. As I took my place alongside His Highness, I exclaimed, "Surely the Mongol Chieftain, Kublai Khan, could not have offered more to his Venetian guest, Marco Polo, at his royal court seven centuries ago. It is our pleasure and good fortune to be your humble guests." Although Her Highness, the Rani, is conversant only in Hunza's native language, Burishaski, as well as Persian and Urdu, I found no difficulty in holding conversation with her. His Highness speaks several languages including English, and he is most attentive to his wife during conversation, translating simultaneously with remarkable ease. Conversation offered no problem. In the spacious living room, tea and more delicacies followed dinner. Conversation drifted to local and Asian politics. I questioned His Highness on the camel caravans we had seen in Baltit and along the Sinkiang-Gilgit trail when we visited Hunza in 1959 and the Pasu Mountains in 1960. He answered, "Trade with China has been stopped since 1960, but recently, as you know, Pakistan and China have settled the Sino-Pakistan boundary dispute favorably. In addition, a barter-trade agreement has been reached which will provide for exchange of goods between China and Pakistan over the old Gilgit-Kashgar Caravan Route passing through Hunza. Mr. Habib will go from Gilgit to Kashgar next month with a delegation to complete the agreement." "When do you expect the

The two humped central Asian Bactrian camel, known to the natives as "the ships of the desert," are found throughout the Karakoram although the yak and pony are more frequently used for transport. The 600-year-old fortress overlooks Hunza's Baltit Valley in the background.

Photo by Edward F. Noack



caravans to start operating again?" I asked. His Highness answered, "You are aware that Pakistan Army Engineers are building a new jeep road from Gilgit to the Chinese border through Hunza. This road will connect with the Chinese jeep road from Kashgar, through the Pamirs to the Hunza frontier. When the two roads are completed, trade will commence. I am not sure when that day will come, but it is not far off. The Chinese road crews have, in fact, crossed the frontier and are pressing on toward Baltit."

As I walked over to my quarters that night, I was plainly disturbed by the thought that sleepy and peaceful old Hunza, lying remote and isolated within the massive Great Karakoram Range, was awakening to the march of time. I pondered, "Will a modern way of life add to its already happy existence? Would an active trade route with distant lands and strange peoples improve their simple and adequate economy?" Hunza will, eventually, be linked by a good jeep road not only to Pakistan, but to China as well. The benefits to come might well be of major importance to both lands.

11 **A Feudal Fortress Resounds its Stormy Past**

After an early breakfast, Ken and Bill were eager to start off for nearby Ultar Glacier high above the old Hunza Citadel. Having already been there, I was content to bide my time visiting old friends and landmarks in Baltit. On the way to the old fortress I noticed a gathering of native women. Their handsome gowns and exquisite needlepoint caps unmistakably identified them as Hunza residents. They were busily engaged in the operation of some kind of appliance, and as I drew closer, I discovered it to be a hand-operated sewing machine of an early vintage. Each woman had a piece of cloth or a garment in hand awaiting a turn at the machine. It became apparent that my presence was objected to, so I moved away next to an elderly gentleman who stood nearby. I inquired of him through my bearer as to the use of the machine by so many women. He answered, "We are fortunate to have one of these machines; many of our villagers are not so well equipped and the women must stitch by hand." It occurred to me that there remained much to be done in the way of foreign aid to make life more interesting, if not easier, for those patient natives.

The 500-year-old fortress-castle of the Hunza Thums and Mirs stands astride a dominating knoll above the village near the mouth of Ultar Nullah (chasm). It commands an unobstructed view of great expanse on three sides. On the fourth, an unapproachable cliff and inaccessible mountain ramparts provide for an impregnable site for the mountain redoubt of a feudal chieftain. And feudal chieftains they were in bygone days—the autocratic rulers of Hunza State.

But the glory of the site is the view of lush, terraced, autumn-colored orchards backed by towering ice-clad peaks and spires around the compass, from the 25,000 foot heights of Boiohagurdoanas Sar (mountain of the flying horses) and the Bulbuli Mutin steeple immediately behind the fortress, to the grand array of Hispar's frozen giants and the majestic Rakaposhi Range of Nagar State.

The old fortress in its dominating position hovers over a quaint group of mud and stone dwellings housing over one-half of Baltit's population. In times of peril during tribal raids of the past century, residing close to the impregnable walls of the old bastion had distinct advantages. Its reputed capacity to hold and house fifteen hundred souls made it a safe haven for the natives who would hasten to it for protection at the toll of the great warning bell atop the fortress cupola. The same bell sounds its toll today, but not as a warning of impending danger. Its former use has been silenced by the peaceful relations that have existed between the frontier rival states for nearly eighty years.

Minor neighborly warfare between the natives of Hunza and Nagar was frequent in the nineteenth century. But when confronted with a common foe the two sides always joined forces, hand in hand, and fought as a single unit in an effort to save their independence.

Upon entering the massive main doorway of heavy wooden planks set in a six-foot-thick stone and timbered wall, and passing through numerous other openings within, one must bend over repeatedly in order to avoid serious head injuries. The reason for this unusual construction was to slow the enemy as they attempted to gain access to the fortress interior during feudal wars. Steeply pitched ladders provided access to upper stories and galleries until, finally, the roof would be reached. At the roof's western extremity is a large room, ornate with oriental carvings and ibex horns. This room was the living quarters of former Mirs and Thums. A portrait of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, hangs on a wall. On another wall hangs one of His Highness, Mir Ghazan Khan.

If the walls of that room could only speak and reveal the story of the fortress as it unfolded during five long centuries! A listener might be privy to some of the infamous plans of the tyrant ruler Mir Safdar Ali Khan and his brigands, who organized raids on camel caravans that carried goods in trade



*Building materials in Hunza are hand-wrought since the nearest city is several hundred miles in distance.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

from Yarkand to India over the Pamirs and the Karakoram Pass. Another wall might reflect Safdar Ali's barbaric schemes of patricide and fratricide to enable him to ascend to the Hunza throne. His hatred and distrust for the British can be compared to that of the mouse for the cat. It was from that room that he sent his warning to Colonel Durand in the year 1890. He threatened that if Hunza were troubled by the British, he would personally see that Durand's head was severed from his body and delivered on a platter to the Vice Royalty in India. The effect of civilization and law and order on this tyrant was but a thin veneer in his remote environment.

Not merely a conspirator of plunder and slave trade, Safdar Ali contrived in the year 1888 to dally with Russia's Captain Grombchevsky. With a bodyguard of Cossacks, Grombchevsky sallied forth over the frozen Pamirs, across the British-India Frontier into Hunza and Baltit for the express purpose of laying groundwork, with the aid of Safdar Ali, to gain a foothold for the Soviets in their expansionist designs south of the Hindu Kush. But Colonel Durand soon thereafter changed Mir Safdar Ali's mind by storming his forts at Nilt and Miaun, capturing them and later entering Baltit and Nagar in December 1891 for complete victory.

The ruffian ruler and his retinue of servants were forced to flee for their lives into China's Sinkiang by a brilliant British-India military campaign led by Colonel Durand. It must have been somewhat embarrassing for Safdar Ali and his followers to be forced to flee his impregnable mountain redoubt, carrying with him not only his treasurers, but the wife of the Hunza Wazir as well. He was forced to cross the formidable Pamir Steppe into Chinese territory at a rate of speed somewhat unbecoming to a ruler who always took great pride in claiming decendency from so formidable a warrior as Alexander the Great.

While Mir Safdar Ali was undoubtedly a tyrant whose treachery, plundering, and arrogance toward the British caused Colonel Durand to depose him, the natives of Hunza and Nagar cannot be judged too severely for carrying out the infamous acts he and other despots commanded. They had followed orders upon penalties of punishment and even death.

It was within that Baltit castle where I stood that the dignified and capable Mohamed Nazim Khan, grandfather of His Highness, the present Mir, thereafter with the influence of British-India became the Mir of Hunza State and its ruler for the following forty-seven years until his death on July 23, 1938. An autocratic ruler, as were his ancestors, he was capable and benevolent. He was also cherished by his subjects. His reign and the concomitant enforcement of Pax Britannica brought an end to tribal warfare, caravan plunder and slave trade. Soviet expansion stopped at the Pamirs. Tribal jealousies ceased to exist. This marked the beginning of a new era in the Northwest

*A portrait of Mohamed Nazim Khan, former Mir of Hunza.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



Frontier States of Hunza and Nagar. Progress and law and order followed. The calm remains to this day. His Royal Highness, Mirsahib Mohamed Jamal Khan now rules with a benevolence and ability rarely found in an autocratic state.

I was about to descend the ladder steps from the old fortress roof when my eyes were directed to the brilliant pink glow of the magnificent Golden Parri at sundown. Its base was our goal in Nagar State. Towering more than 23,000 feet, its snowbound summit stood radiant, etched against the evening sky.

I had hoped and prayed for Mirsahib Shaukat Ali's consent permitting us to reach that majestic landmark in the very heart of the Great Karakorams. From my vantage point I was surrounded by icy peaks and spires that pierced the blue sky to over 25,000 feet above the sea. Only the distant Golden Parri fascinated me. For after all, it was the breeding ground of the icy flows of remote Sumaiyar Bar and Miar Glaciers, among the most imposing and unexplored frozen tributaries of the Hispar complex. As I left the old fortress, I pondered over the excitement to come next day upon our arrival in Nagar Village and later in our faraway camps in the wilderness of the frozen Karakorams.



*The famous Golden Parri rising to 24,000 feet above the source of the Sumtiyar Bar glacier.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

12 A Marital Ceremony Alerts Us

Bill and Ken had already returned from Ultar Glacier when I arrived at our quarters. We were weary from our eventful day, and expected to enjoy a spell of relaxation before supper. But unfortunately, that was not to be our lot. Weird strains of Asian music filtering up through the tree covered terraces from far below alerted us to a tamasha (festivity) of apparent importance at a nearby village.

And so it proved to be, after we had fairly flown downhill over terrace after steep terrace and across one swift water course after another until directed by the wailing of trumpets, the whine of string instruments and the beat of drums. We eventually arrived near the village of Ganesh (golden). There before our eager eyes we spotted the brilliantly-colored gowns of a group of women who darted away from us down a rock-walled lane and into a spacious courtyard surrounded by a number of stone dwellings.

Sure enough, this was the site of a wedding party nearing the end of the first part of a two-day ceremonial feast. We were met at



*Blood relatives of His Royal Highness, Mir of Hunza. His lovely Rani (wife) stands the fourth from the right.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

the huge entrance gate by a group of village elders. They cordially invited us to join them in the festive occasion. But the women folk covered their faces and scurried away to rooftops or more remote spots in the courtyard. Besides the bride and groom and their families, there were probably close to one hundred guests all attired in their finest garments of native homespun fabrics. The menfolk seemed delighted that we three foreigners were witness to their festivities, but most of the women seemed far from pleased. As we understood through our bearer-interpreter, the program for the day had been devoted to various activities including a spirited dance contest. This colorful event was underway as we entered, with dancers swinging to the wail and rhythm of the village six-piece orchestra. Singles, pairs and groups competed before a cheering audience who ate heartily from a variety of snacks, delicious fruits, and nuts spread out on tables before us. They insisted that we join in on the food and fun before leaving for our quarters. We witnessed a number of events and sampled a variety of refreshments. As dusk approached, we prepared to depart, but not before being informed of the program to follow later in the evening. A great feast was scheduled to take place after nightfall. The revel would last through the midnight hour until dawn, and would be interrupted at intervals by toasts and speeches by some of the elders. Wedding gifts from family and friends would be offered. We were told that the traditional apricot tree, fully grown and on a small plot of ground, would be the choice gift from the groom's parents. Goats, fowl and foodstuffs were also on the list of gifts.

*The sound of strange tribal music taunted our ears as we rested at Karimabad, Hunza. Curiosity led us to investigate its origin in the nearby village of Ganesh. There we found a wedding in full swing.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



The following day (for the benefit of those weary souls who had been awake all night) would be devoted to less vigorous activity and a more sober ritual. All of this was to be climaxed by a serious parting ceremony prior to the honeymoon in which the bride's mother, by custom, would play the important role of attendant and chaperone by accompanying the newlyweds for the span of their honeymoon holiday. The description of this unusual custom nearly inspired us to bring forth some suggestive questions as to the reasons for and the expediency of mother-in-law intrusions into such intimate adventure as the honeymoon. We held our tongues and begged to be excused. We cordially bowed out of the courtyard and wound our way steeply upward some twelve hundred feet, to arrive at Karimabad in time to prepare for supper with Mirsahib and family.

13 A Stately Feast Preceding Our Departure for the Nagar Glaciers

Supper was announced by the palace bearers at seven-thirty. As we passed through the extensive corridor from living room to family dining room, our attention was drawn to a pair of Marco Polo Sheep trophies that adorned the wall. Family heirlooms, firearms, archery artifacts and portraits of ancestors decorated others. We noted that the elaborate appointments of the midday dinner hour were cast aside; we were to dine in traditional Asian family style in the palace supper room before a roaring chimney fire. We sat on the floor, which was covered wall-to-wall with fine oriental Khotan and Yarkand carpets of soft color and intricate design. We stretched our legs under a huge twelve-inch-high table spread with fine linens, silver and china. Platters and bowls were heaped high with delicious oriental and native Hunza foods. The table was round, so we sat where we wished. There is, of course, no place of preference at a round table, and this helped break the conventional seating formality so unnecessary to a group of hungry guests.

A variety of tempting wild game and exotic oriental foods spread before our eyes whetted our appetites. Chutneys, spices and native condiments were available to enhance flavor. We discovered that a dish's flavor was not totally entrusted to the taste buds of the palace cook in the stone kitchen building. That privilege was brought to the table for each individual taste. All the delicate spicy ingredients were there. We simply sampled each one, mixed them according to taste on our plates, and gently dipped each morsel into a concoction of our own creation.. It was a novel experience, at least for us.

Out in the little stone kitchen away from the palace building, we had often watched the cooks practice the fine art of oriental cooking on the huge wood-burning stone and clay stove. A big fire for the largest pots, medium fire for smaller ones, and red-hot coals for the smallest pots and for roasting kabobs. We watched the cooks at critical moments, as they made decisions over the frying, boiling, broiling and baking foods. When the proper moment arrived, the foods were removed from the fire and garnished with the variety of spicy seasonings. Of course, the cooks were careful to allow for the final flavor to be made at

The Mir of Hunza's private bakery in Karimabad, Hunza. A variety of breads and the staple—chapattis—are being baked for dinner, to be served while still warm.
Photo by Edward F. Noack





*His Highness Mohamed Jamal Khan (left), and my good friend Shah Khan with his son and hunting dog, Rusty, all enjoying an excellent early morning duck shoot near Pasu, Little Ghujal.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

the table by each individual according to his fancy. Watching those master cooks deeply occupied in their culinary art, at the same time inhaling the savory fumes emanating therefrom, built up within us appetites capable of consuming all the exotic delicacies laid before us.

Prince Ghazanfar, Mirsahib's eldest son and heir to the Hunza royal title, provided us with appropriate musical selections on his guitar at intervals during supper while all engaged in informal conversation and enjoyed the delicious foods. I was astonished by the prince's knowledge of the latest popular music from the west. He played one of Elvis Presley's songs and even knew some of the strains from Ricky Nelson.

We arose gorged from the festive supper. Before retiring, His Highness Mirsahib led us into his trophy room to inspect a plentiful supply of staple foodstuffs that had been laid out for our expedition. He left the room momentarily and returned with two fat, freshly shot, wild geese and a tub of Yak butter to add to our larder. These were the foods, among others, that would really sustain us in the chill of Nagar's icy wilderness. After a careful inventory of supplies and camp equipment, and at a later hour than planned, we retired with the prospect of adventure in mind until sleep finally took over.

14 A Strange Illusion at Hispar Crossing

Morning broke with a cloudless sky. A frosty landscape surrounded us. We arose at an early hour and breakfasted while our jeep was taking on the precious cargo for our survival. Sultan Ali arrived and boarded while we bade our devoted and gracious royal hosts a warm farewell. Mirsahib wished us success and a safe return to Karimabad later. Then we wound our way along a narrow trail steeply downward toward Ganesh



The members of our glacier expedition, back row—left to right—our five load bearers and Hor Ali, our capable cook, who fed us well, even during snow squalls, stands at the upper left. Front row—right to left—our leader, liaison official, and interpreter, Sultan Ali from Hunza State dressed in his wool choga, my two sons, Bill and Ken, respectively, and the author. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

Crossing the Hispar River between Karimabad, Hunza and Nagar can be a harrowing experience. The foot planks are unevenly spaced. One must be alert and tightly hold the continually swaying hand cables stepping accurately onto the foot planks to make a successful crossing.
Photo by Edward F. Noack



(golden) Village and the Hunza River cable bridge. No foreigner nor resident is permitted to pass beyond the north portal of that bridge without official permission from both Mirs of Hunza and Nagar. That formality was settled well in advance of our arrival. As we rambled up to the lonely guardhouse, we were duly summoned across into Nagar State by the Hunza guard. The treacherous winding trail gave us the same gasping thrills as experienced on the Hunza Road, but the really hazardous stretch was behind us in less than an hour.

We came to an abrupt halt at trail's end some two hundred feet above a suspicious-looking rope bridge that spanned the swiftly flowing Hispar River. This was to be where mechanical transport ended and trekking began, a trek that was to last for the remaining days of our adventure. Soon we were greeted by shouts from four of our Nagar bearers who raced uphill to our assistance. They quickly bound and roped our equipment into equal loads, lifting them onto their backs; then they were off down the steep embankment towards the crossing. Two hand and two foot ropes formed the suspension. As I inspected more carefully, I noticed that four-inch-wide wooden slats, unevenly spaced at about 16-inch centers, formed the steps. These were fastened rather haphazardly to the lower ropes, which in turn were secured to the hand ropes above. The whole structure looked safe enough if only one could hold on tightly while



En route from Karimabad, Hunza to the Mir of Hunza's hunting lodge in Gulmit, Little Ghujal. Two weeks of excellent duck, goose, chikkor, and Ibex hunting was enjoyed. The author and his wife mounted behind the large black yak in the foreground. Other constituents include members of the Royal family of Hunza and their servants and bearers. Photo by bearer

planning with sufficient accuracy to step exactly on the center of an unevenly-spaced plank each time. Also to be accounted for, I noticed, was a swaying, somewhat bouncing rhythm caused by the bearers as they crossed. As I stood on the bank studying the contraption in preparation to taking off, I carefully watched as one of the loaded native bearers ran across without hesitation. That gave me a sense of security that I would have no problem in reaching the far bank. Inshallah (God willing). I soon lost that sense of security when I spotted one of the slats move somewhat out of place as I prepared to cross. I thought of swimming the turbulent Hispar, but then I noticed Ken and Bill crossing with no apparent concern. I followed with no further fear until I reached midstream and made the mistake of looking down between the slats into fast-moving water. The next thing I noticed, the bridge and I were moving upstream at an alarming rate of speed while the water was standing still. I tried my best to rationalize this strange illusion. Then I looked up away from the water and made it over without further confusion. It was a relief to stand on good old terra firma again.

15 **A Chained Ibex Stands Guard at Palace Gate**

Our route took us three miles almost straight up on foot over a narrow path within the walls of Hispar Nullah (chasm), then into a steady climb through lush terraced apricot, apple and mixed almond orchards. We finally broke out of dense cover into the Nagar polo field. Between two parallel rows of tall century-old poplar trees, there appeared in the distance a walled courtyard and the palace residence of His Highness, Brigadier Shaukat Ali, ruler of Nagar State. Our bearers came to a halt and dropped their heavy loads on the veranda of the stone guest quarters near the end of the polo field. Our sleeping bags were spread out on charpoys (beds) before an open fireplace already lighted for our comfort. Tea and sweet biscuits were soon brought up to help revive us while kettles of hot water were prepared for a refreshing clean-up. Our arrival was then announced to His Highness.

Approaching the palace compound gate, we were encountered by Mirsahib's pet ibex standing proudly on guard. He was a burly fellow with a good forty-inch set of horns. I attempted to be friendly and gave him a pat on the head, but he would have none of it, as evidenced by his hostile reaction. Thereafter, I preferred to keep my distance.

Our noble host came forward to greet us and stepped up onto the veranda. "Welcome to Nagar," he said. "I am pleased that you arrived safely." I replied, "It is a pleasure and a privilege to be here." It had been nearly eight years since I had visited His Highness at his winter residence at Chault. I had never set foot in Nagar Village before. Entering an imposing hallway after introducing my sons, I was fascinated by the fine collection of antique firearms and archery artifacts that decorated the spacious walls. I assumed that these were relics of early racial warfare in the Northwest Frontier states. An ancient musket attracted my attention because of its huge dimensions—at least eight feet from muzzle to butt—a formidable weapon. Its owner must have been a fearsome creature.

As we approached the huge living room, four well-mounted Kashmir stag trophies stared straight at us from the far wall as though we had startled them by our appearance. A number of priceless antique swords, knives and daggers, all family heirlooms, were attractively arranged on the walls. An especially fine photo enlargement of His Highness' grandfather, the distinguished Sikander Khan, hung prominently on an end wall along with photos of other dignitaries. Well-arranged red velvet-upholstered chairs and divans placed around the room's perimeter over a huge oriental carpet gave warmth and a stately appearance to this regal dwelling in lonely Nagar Kingdom.



My son, Bill, seated in the spacious living room of Nagar Palace. Four well-mounted Kashmir stag trophies stared at us from the far wall as though we had startled them by our approach.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

16 Remote Nagar State Resists the March of Time

Isolated Nagar State can easily be located on the map of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province. It lies south of the Hunza River in the heart of the Great Karakoram Icefields, well secluded from the Hunza Road and the ancient Gilgit-Kashgar caravan trail north of the river in Hunza State. Looking away in the opposite direction, inaccessible icebound mountain ramparts and perpetually frozen valleys form a protective barrier on three sides. It appears unlikely that Nagar's peaceful solitude will ever be invaded.

Strolling through the many terraced vales of Nagar, we came upon one of those spectacles that gives this tiny principality its individuality of landscape. Crumbling and terrifying precipices, horrifying to the unaccustomed eye, were adorned with picturesque stone and mud dwellings that perched frighteningly close to the abyss of verticle canyon walls and the confining

glaciers below. It was a staggering picture to behold. Merely to wander through the gardens of some of those homesteads requires courage and a command of one's faculties; beware, anyone afflicted with vertigo.

Nagar settlement itself is located on the westerly part of the crest of a monstrous ancient moraine, the terminus of the Hispar-Hopar glacial complex. The Hispar River emerges from this black icy conglomerate to join the Hunza River below the village of Baltit. It is surprising that mature and accustomed natives survive a lifetime, to say nothing of the little children who play their games precariously close to the brim of seemingly bottomless canyons.

Stone, mud, and wattle walls surround every homestead. The sides next to the path have stall-like recesses every hundred yards or so which make a convenient latrine for the weary wayfarer. Sanitary inspectors are unknown in these inaccessible parts.

In the sprawling valley of five quaint little villages along the Hopar glacier and moraine, one is charmed by the impressive combination of neatly placed, terraced orchards, and fields of shimmering golden millet and autumn-colored fruit trees and shrubbery. All is surrounded by canyon walls reaching up to ice-clad peaks and crags that tower through drifting clouds to pierce



Drying fruits and grains on the roofs of dwellings in the Nagar Valley. The square roof top holes act as chimney vents for the interior kitchen fires. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

a blue sky above. As if to complete an already amazing scene, a huge frozen river of pure white pinnacled ice grinds its course ever so slowly to destruction in a terminal moraine of geologic chaos. Add to this unusual scene contented natives spreading their newly harvested walnuts and grains on sunny rooftops to dry; others loaded down with huge baskets of pumpkins and apples to be stored for winter use while the others wander along rock-walled lanes in a carefree and jovial spirit. That makes up a picture of village life in Nagar State. Their economy is almost entirely dependent upon farming and the raising of livestock.

At Rattullo village, I inquired of an old-timer handling a winnowing tray, "What kind of grain are you separating?" He answered, "That is buckwheat, one of our most important foods. I have only just started harvesting a field that must yield enough to last until next autumn for my family." He told me he was drying his apricots, walnuts and other crops to supplement the staple grains, but that soon he must gather up his flock of goats from the almost barren mountainside so that they might feed upon the orchard leaves now beginning to drop to the ground.

17 **Mir Shaukat Ali Reveals an Exciting Plan**

At the dinner table that night we relaxed while conversation centered on an early morning start for our objective, the glacial wilderness of the Karakoram. His Highness spoke up, "We have strong and capable bearers ready for you. We have prepared a supply of fresh vegetables, apples, dried apricots, mutton and rice. I have a suggestion to make for your adventurous trek—you will remember the account of the famous Conway British expedition to my country in the year 1892. They visited the Barpu and were the first foreigners to see that most beautiful part of my whole domain. Excepting a small Swiss party to later visit the Barpu glaciers, Conway's was the only one. You will be the first Westerners to discover the upper Barpu complex of glaciers if you are successful in reaching the Phar Phari yak herders' stone hut. Besides, you must go on up past Sumaiyar Bar and Miar glaciers to Girgandil at the foot of Golden Parri. I wish you success. No foreigners have, as yet, penetrated that far."

That was enough to whet our aspirations to become glacier explorers. His Highness seemed well pleased with our enthusiasm. Moreover, it ended my concern. It provided the authority I had anxiously awaited to penetrate the Nagar ice-

fields right up to the remote Golden Parri, well into the Hispar complex. His Highness then volunteered to provide six bearers and one of his best cooks, Hor Ali, who had been as far as the lower Sumaiyar Bar. We felt ourselves fortunate to have reliable men and a leader familiar with the route. We would trek the entire distance.

It was reassuring to know that Hor Ali had been selected to be our guide and leader as well as cook. He had visited most of the area on our itinerary. I did not approve of an alternate guide who was originally selected because he impressed me as a man of contemplation rather than of action. We had no time for pondering or meditation.

18 Ancient Trade Routes and Predatory Natives

That afternoon His Highness invited us for a short walk in the direction of our objective. It gave us an opportunity to view some of the mountain giants of the Choga Lungma Group that formed a backdrop above the upper Barpu glacier far away to the southeast. Conversation drifted to the nearby Hispar— that enormous ice flow lying in the very heart of Karakoram's lofty heights. In centuries past there were two well-known routes from Nagar to Baltistan. One wound over the hazardous Hispar Glacier and pass, down the Biafo to Askole and on to Skardu. The other route traversed the shorter but even more hazardous Nushik La (pass) to Arandu and Skardu. Before the year 1890, caravan plunder and raids upon villages in Baltistan were commonplace. The marauders were the natives of Hunza and Nagar; the victims, those of the Baltistan villages and the traders of China's Sinkiang and India's bazaars. Those perilous routes were apparently of little concern to the fearless natives whose raiding activities were partially prompted by an insufficiency of food. In a land composed largely of stone and ice, little wonder that there was not enough arable soil to go around.

A Nagar legend with undoubtedly a valid background describes a famous raid led by Wazir Hollo and several hundred natives from the villages, who crossed the Hispar glacier and pass and followed the Biafo to descend upon Skardu. Hollo and his tired and hungry men arrived near Askole after their incredible ordeal, but were routed and forced back by Balti natives who had been alerted to the pending raid. Fatigued and defeated by its misfortune, Hollo's party was ill-prepared for

return over the dangerous frozen route. The legend contends that all but Hollo and a few of his followers perished during a snow storm in the frozen wastes of the great Hispar Glacier. It is a dismal story but then, the snowy Hispar is a dismal, icy waste.

The natives of quaint little Nagar State have come a long way since the plundering days of the last century. As in Hunza, they live peacefully with strong family ties, a sense of responsibility and a commitment to long hours of hard work.

19 **Autocrat Rules Kingdom on Foot**

"How do you manage to keep in touch with your people in the many small villages of your mountainous state?" I asked His Highness. "Many of them come to Nagar Village to report to me," he answered, "but I manage to visit every village and family in my domain each year. I must see, personally, that my people are provided for and that justice is carried out in case of arguments over land and water rights. Then there are other civil cases which require time and deliberation. When you return from your expedition, I will have left for my winter residence in Chault. I will walk the thirty-five miles in six or seven days, stopping at every village en route to attend to State Affairs. I must settle problems arising amongst my subjects and try to keep both sides happy. That is one of my important duties."

Supper time provided for final decisions and the shrewd advice of Mirsahib as to our adventurous penetration of the Karakoram. He ordered one of his bearers to bring before us a huge tray of edibles. One glance convinced me that we would not perish from hunger even if we lost our way. Besides a hind quarter of mutton, there were fresh vegetables and plenty of dried apricots, onions and apples. With the addition of supplies brought over from Hunza, we had foodstuffs sufficient for several weeks. There was no concern now that we might run short of provisions, a comfortable disclosure that put us at rest for a good night's sleep. Our quarters in the palace compound guest house had most of the comforts we could reasonably ask for. As we entered from the large veranda, a glowing fireplace reflected welcome heat. Our goosedown sleeping bags were spread out on felt numdas (rugs) atop charpoys (beds). Before retiring, I walked out onto the veranda. I stood in the starlight darkness with the sprawling village of Nagar before me. There was not the faintest sound to be heard—only profound silence. The familiar voice of a child, bark of dog, weird strains of tribal

music, even the murmur of prayer, were totally absent. Gilgit, even Baltit, have their typical native sounds breaking into the late evening stillness. But as I stood watching the few household torches that glimmered in the black of night, I experienced a strange stillness unknown to me in distant Asian villages.

The chill of the frosty night soon sent me indoors to the warmth of a blazing chimney fire. I lay in bed that night listening to the utter silence around me, the harbinger of sound sleep to follow.

20 **At Last We Depart for Karakoram's Icefields**

The snowy, white profile of our distant landmark, the magnificent Golden Parri, stood out in sharp contrast against an azure-blue morning sky. As we arose at break of day on the morning of our departure, our loaded bearers were dispatched one by one down the polo field away to the southeast. Beyond stood the Hopar group of five tiny villages, surrounded by farmlands through which we were soon to pass. We followed in single file, accompanied for a spell by Mirsahib Shaukat Ali. He insisted on overseeing every detail of our adventure to ensure comfort and success. We were trekking on a well-maintained path that wound its way through terraced fields of buckwheat and golden millet, gently sloping toward the almost hidden snout of the huge moraine-covered Hopar Glacier. Industrious Nagar farmers, both men and women, were toiling away, threshing out grains of millet on prepared circular earth pads with stout willow whips. Winnowing—separating the grain from chaff—would come later with the arrival of a breezy day. The key to those bumper crops, I concluded, was water; and water they possess in abundance. They have no need for costly dams and reservoirs. Their water supply is frozen in huge amounts in every canyon, cleft and mountainside, awaiting the warm summer sun to release this treasure for every need.

Geology leaves no doubt as to the belief that the string of villages, where most of Nagar's natives reside, lies astride an ancient marginal moraine of the Hispar glacier, laid down in a prehistoric era resulting in rich level farmland.

We marveled at the engineering skill of Nagar farmers in preparing steep and rugged hillsides for crops. Terraced fields are held in place permanently by hand-laid stone walls, miles of them, each bay leveled with the most primitive of instruments.

But there they lay, tried and true, accepting the life-sustaining water from their equally complex systems of canals leading up to the snout of a glacier. When thirty thousand people live in a land that is composed predominantly of stone and ice, they must come up with a solution to their problems in order to survive. And this they have done with remarkable skill. The bumper crops we witnessed attest to the genius of Hunza and Nagar's untiring natives.

As we passed through Hakalshal village, a generous housewife dressed in a colorful, pretty gown came out to the path and offered us heaping handfuls of walnuts. I gladly accepted and returned with a rupee note. She politely declined. When I persisted, her husband came up and motioned a firm "No." It appears that these generous people take pride in offering a gift with no thought of a reward. She wanted us to enjoy her offering without payment. One of our bearers stopped to pick up a sack of buckwheat flour for our already bulging larder. The last of the quaint little farm settlements, Holshal, some six miles to the east of Nagar Village, was reached well before noon. Drawing closer to our spectacular icebound Karakoram objective, we were fascinated by the commanding scenery that surrounded us. The dramatic Hunza spires, rising steeply to over 25,000 feet, revealed their needle-like summits above billowy clouds far behind us.

The natives of rural Nagar reside in huts of stone and mud without windows and usually one doorway for entrance and exit. A hole in the roof allows for escape of smoke from the cooking and heating fires placed in the center of the living room. Five months of the year, temperatures at night often drop to zero and below. Only the ruling family, their servants, and a few village Lambardars leave for the more moderate climate of Chault some thirty-five miles away and nearly two thousand feet lower in elevation. The rest of Nagar's population hibernates within the thick stone walls of their dwellings, emerging only if necessary.

21 **Lonely Barpu, Abode of Ice**

As we climbed up onto a vantage point before descending a narrow trail around an escarpment leading to the Hopar Glacier, we were struck by an icy mass off to the south. Sultan Ali ably translated as I questioned Hor Ali, our leader, "What do you call that mountain?" "Bualtar Chish (mountain), sahib," he replied.

I had hoped for the answer to be the Crown of Dirran, the designation given by Conway in the year 1892 when he and his comrades looked straight up the Bualtar Glacier and felt compelled to name the peaks they saw. The Crown of Dirran, the two Burchi Peaks and the Emerald Pass are the names he confidently ascribed to those astonishing ice-clad massifs.

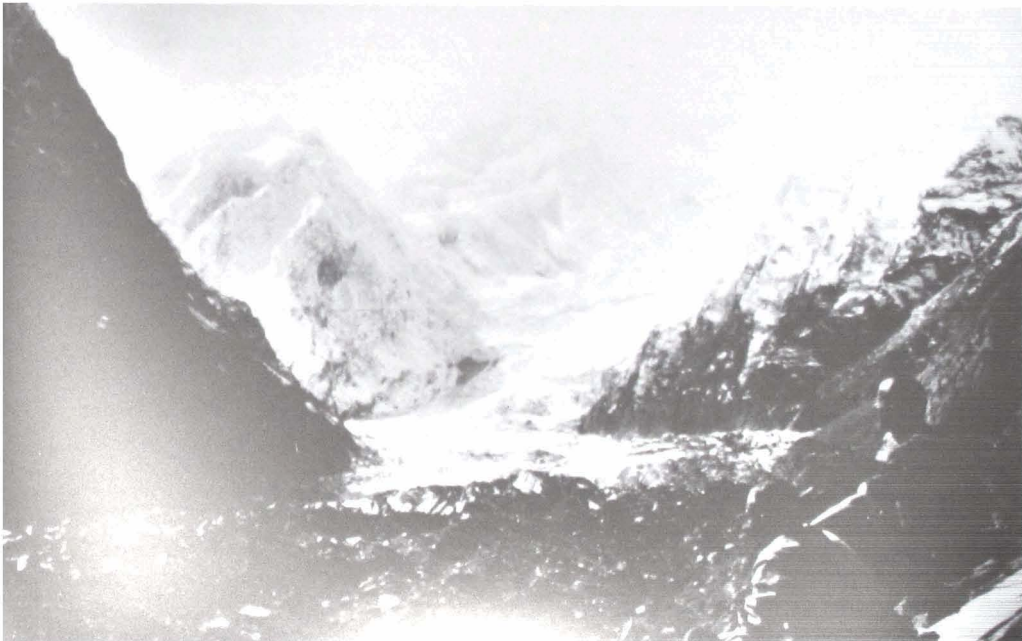
Bualtar Valley's glacier and icy heights lured us into its magic realm. We were not immune to the fascinating attraction that lay immediately before us. So into its icy field we penetrated for nearly five miles over a narrow and frightening path. At the foot of the great icefalls and seracs we halted abruptly for want of alpine equipment. Though we had none, we were not defeated. We sat in the shelter of a rocky cove for a full hour and reveled in the glory of a frozen world, solid monuments of ice and stone silhouetted against a deep blue sky.

Retracing our steps toward the village of Holshal, following the course of the Bualtar, we marveled at the flow of pure white pinnacled ice that moved ever so slowly in its tortuous course to unite with the massive Barpu not far ahead. We had now seen first-hand the startling ice-age geology of the Hispar-Bualtar-Barpu complex.

"What do you call that pretty cultivation across the Bualtar?" I asked. "Sahib, we call that Shaltar and that is Shaltar Chish (mountain) above." A native family had found an isolated

Bualtar Valley, its glacier and icy heights drew us into its realm like a magnet. We penetrated over a narrow and frightening path for nearly five miles. At the foot of great ice falls and seracs we were stopped for need of alpine equipment, but we were not defeated. For an hour we sat in the shelter of a rock cove and reveled in the glory of still another ice world.

Photo by Edward F. Noack



clearing above the glacier and had settled in that lonely dell to eke out a living on a tiny plot of fertile soil.

Soon our enthusiasm dwindled as we departed the last vestige of native settlements and started a steep descent to the huge Hopar icefield over a steeply pitched narrow trail carved out of an escarpment face. It took me back several years to a similarly frightening experience on the crumbling canyon walls of the Hunza River in Little Ghujal en route to the Pasu Mountains. I recalled the advice given by the sure-footed bearers: "Look ahead, never down" and "Keep your mind off menacing danger." To really enjoy this sort of diversion over a Nagar trail, I decided, takes courage, composure and nerves of steel. Reaching the heavily crevassed black ice field of the Hopar without event, we wound our way in the footsteps of faithful old Hor Ali and Sultan Ali through seracs and around crevasse after crevasse of unknown depth. We arrived at our noontime tiffin (luncheon) site where the thoughtful bearers had carried sufficient thornbrush for a small fire. We could see and scent the smoke as we approached over the ice. A blazing fire cheered and warmed us as we were handed cups of hot tea and sweet biscuits. Dried apricots and walnuts provided ample nourishment and the energy necessary to carry us through the afternoon stage to the Barpu-Giram campsite.

All told, it required one-and-one-half hours to cross the tortuous ice flow. Speculating on the thickness of the ice at midpoint, we agreed on approximately six hundred feet after examining the pitch of the adjacent canyon walls. The distance across was not less than one-and-one-half miles. The view was now obstructed in the direction of our objective by the canyon walls of Rash Ridge on the east on Hispar side and a mighty rampart opposite. We had been guided most of the morning by sight of the Golden Parri in the distant background; it had served as our beacon ever since we left faraway Hunza Valley. I had great respect for Hor Ali's ability to lead us onward to our objective in the heart of the Karakoram wilderness, which we were rapidly approaching. Still, there was need for orientation through landmarks rather than by compass or the memory of bearers in this almost unexplored maze of frozen rivers and towering mountain heights. Walking ahead with Sultan Ali, I began to sense the need for a halt and a check of our bearings. The bearers had gone on ahead to follow the right bank of the Barpu. "Hor Ali," I asked, "what name do you have for that high ridge over there on our left?" "That is Rash Ridge," he replied. "Hispar Village and glacier are directly across and a little farther on." My orientation agreed with his, and I went on with further questioning. "Alright, what is the name for the high mountain we see over there?" Hor Ali, his face prematurely wisened and furrowed, looked straight at me and answered. "Bualtar Chish (mountain), as I told you before we crossed the Barpu."

"Good news," I replied, "then our Golden Parri must be directly ahead."

"Yes, and the glacier we are to follow until tomorrow night we call the Barpu," answered Hor Ali. After all that, I fell silent, satisfied that we were on the right track. We had been trekking alongside the Barpu for over an hour without being aware of it. A pressure ridge that had been created by the tremendous thrust of expanding ice from the massive glacier had tilted up the landscape along the Barpu's bank to obstruct our view. Over the ages, the enormous force of expanding ice had formed an escarpment along the right bank of the flow some fifty to sixty feet in height. As we climbed up onto it and glanced over the brim there was no further question about our location. The immediate view presented a wilderness, and an icy one, as far as the eye could see up and down the glacier. As we scurried on for an even better view, not only our Golden Parri landmark but a whole family of closeby towering alps and crags stood out in startling splendor against a deep blue sky. A scattering of billowy white clouds floated by to enhance the effect. As we rested on a rock slab, an occasional deep-pitched sound of grinding ice upon stone could be heard coming from depths within the glacier. Nearly twenty miles of advancing ice, a mile wide, five hundred feet in thickness, slowly ground its tortuous way to final destination in the great snout of the Bualtar.

My son, Bill, viewing a wilderness of ice as far as the eye can see. The mighty Barpu Glacier extended for another twenty miles to its source.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



The icebound Golden Parri, in all its majesty, looked down upon our humble group from its greatly superior height, as if to remind us that its lonely summit still remained invincible. We had journeyed halfway around the globe to view the great glaciers of Karakoram—now we stood amidst some of the grandest, if not the largest. I could now understand Mirsahib Shaukat Ali's remarks when he pointed in this direction and explained the abundant frozen water supply awaiting only the heat of summer to release it for his farmlands.

Hastening onward, we dropped down from the ridge onto a long, narrow meadowland. Patches of autumn-colored willow and scarlet rose thickets began to appear in profusion against the hillsides at the base of Rash Ridge. The local Bik copse, common in this part of the Karakoram, made its radiant appearance in abundance. Frigid night temperatures typical of early autumn had turned most of the foliage to a brilliant red and golden color. In spite of the frosty nights, there remained a scattering of some hardy alpine flowers in protected glens along the glacier banks. Among these were the Alpine gentian and a variety of ranunculus. The scene presented a contrast of radiant colors against a backdrop of snowy heights and crisp blue sky. Taking time to glance at our maps, we saw that we were now entering the almost unexplored glacial complex of lonely Upper Barpu. The Sumaiyar Bar and Miar icy tongues, still a few miles distant, would not be disclosed to our view until this stage of our pilgrimage was completed. The Bar and Miar were our final objectives. The mighty Hispar, over forty miles in length, lay adjacent to Rash Ridge, whose southwest base we were following.

22 **An Unexpected Alarm**

In our excitement, we had gone well beyond Barpu Giram, the double stage set for the day's goal. It was evident that our bearers, each carrying sixty-pound loads, were long overdue for nourishment and rest. And so it proved to be for all of us. But soon they arrived with loads on their backs and smiles on their faces—they had stopped for a spell at an old stone hovel alongside the trail. Camp for a bleak and frosty night was pitched in a small wooded dell near a spring of crystal cold water. Mirsahib had correctly assured us of Hor Ali's ability as a cook. Pots over glowing coals were soon giving off a spicy aroma of

curry and the promise of a tasty, well-seasoned pilau of rice, mutton, onions and carrots that would calm our ravenous appetites.

I left the comfortable tent which gave us shelter from the approaching evening chill and noticed that all our bearers but Hor Ali had disappeared. This, of course, presented an alarming situation; especially since, apparently, the men had not eaten their supper. Bearers, in these parts have rarely been known to desert their sahibs and certainly not before receiving their wages. We tried to discover a valid reason for our plight. It could be serious. Bearers invariably remain contented when they can billet in a shelter, no matter how crude. We were isolated and far away from the nearest hamlet. Our snug storm tent was large enough to sleep only five of us, leaving five of the bearers out in the cold with the prospect of a snow squall at any time. Remembering the highs and lows of a native bearer's temperament, and knowing that his mood rapidly deteriorates when he is forced to penetrate isolated ground, we should have been alerted and more watchful of their movements. But here we were, with all of our equipment and only Sultan Ali and faithful old Hor Ali accounted for. Our predicament was serious enough to cause some concern. Hor Ali had been watching our distressed expressions and he finally came forth with a reassuring solution to our dilemma. The bearers, he explained, had merely backtracked to the yak herder's hut we had passed earlier at Barpu Giram. There the bearers could prepare their supper and sleep under cover. They had been instructed to be on hand for an early breakfast before we struck camp and began the next stage of our trek.

The cheerful news provided a timely remedy for our concern, and an assurance that brought on sound sleep later in the evening. The five of us fitted comfortably into the nine by twelve foot tent. The heat from our well-exercised bodies and that from several burning candles generated the few degrees of warmth needed to provide a cheerful setting for dinner.

Early next morning there was no trace of our bearers as far down the glacier as we could see. Bill decided to investigate; he started off in the direction of the yak herder's hut. A half hour later I became concerned. All sorts of unhappy visions came to mind. Even Hor Ali seemed to be disturbed by the bearers' delay in arriving. This aggravated the situation still more. But as we sat down for breakfast, I heard a dim cry in the far distance. A little later it came again. It proved to be Bill, reassuring us of his return and moreover, the arrival of our indolent bearers. Every one of them emerged through a wild rose thicket a kilometer down the glade. Though late, they seemed to be in excellent spirits. I was immensely relieved His Highness had vouched for the bearers' faithful performance and so it had proved to be.

23 We Enter a Frozen Paradise

Camp was struck later than expected. According to Mirsahib, a ten mile trek over fairly good terrain would put us at the Phar Phari abandoned yak herder's hut above the confluence of the Sumaiyar Bar and Miar Glaciers. He assured us that the spot would be a preferred location for our base camp, the hut providing shelter for the bearers and the site affording access to the areas selected for exploration.

High spirits now prevailed amongst all of our little band. The happy bearers were probably contemplating the several days of rest and feasting that lay ahead. We looked forward to a more active program exploring some of the dramatic attractions of this untrodden cleft at the earth's surface.

The snow gathering heights at the source of the Bualtar Glacier. Avalanches slide down over the steep rocky slopes to feed the glacier for the ten miles to its terminal at the junction of the Barpu-Hopar complex. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



A long, narrow spread of vegetation covered the marginal moraine of the upper Barpu we had been following, and continued onward as far as we could see along the right bank of the ice flow. Apparently, at some remote age in the past, the ice had extended in a solid mass over the moraine area, up to the base of Rash Ridge, a distance averaging about four hundred feet in width. Climate and glacial recession in the next geologic stage reduced the thickness of the ice, bringing to light a relatively uniform land surface now covered with a luxuriant growth of copse and stunted trees. Along this ancient moraine, our path at times was obstructed by pressure ridges or tilted landscape, the apparent result of a later invasion of advancing ice, a reversal of the glacial recession.

Proceeding onward ahead of the bearers, we ascended a ledge where we could observe the extreme upper end of the Barpu. Ken pointed out the junction of Sumaiyar Bar and Miar glaciers coming up directly ahead of us. The nearby Choga Lungma group of mountain giants were enshrouded in heavy cumulus clouds which drifted and occasionally exposed stupendous icy massifs framed against a cloudless blue sky. The scale of the scene before us was immense. Words were inadequate to describe the display of mysterious terrain that lay ahead. At last we were nearing our goal.

Hor Ali had gone on ahead with the bearers, leaving us to continue our observations and follow in his footsteps. A wisp of smoke rising in the distance alerted us to his tiffin (lunch) fire. Presently we arrived with appetites equal to the ample variety of viands that awaited us.

I surveyed our surroundings at the luncheon site. We had reached one of Conway's important 1892 camps from which he and his party took to the Miar glacier and followed it up through treacherous seracs and ice falls for a distance of about four miles. There, they were forced to abandon further exploration of the glacier's unknown upper reaches because of the chaotic condition of the ice. J.H. Roudebush, one of Conway's five companions, slid into a dangerous crevasse—his life was fortunately saved by two of his bearers who pulled him out with long wool shawls they had tied together.

All of Conway's landmarks—from Nagar Village across the Hopar black ice to its upper reaches where we stood—were all quite familiar: we had accurately followed in his footsteps. Paipering Maidan was the name given to this important campsite, *maidan* meaning grassland. Here they had camped for several days during July, 1892. Forest rose, willow, and the Karakoram Bik trees grew in abundance, as he had described. The junction of the two great ice flows, the Sumaiyar Bar and the Miar, was directly in front of the maidan exactly as Conway described, with the snowy flanks of Awkbassa Ridge dividing the two glaciers and rising majestically to nearly nineteen thousand feet.

With the help of our maps and Conway's records, we were able to orient our position with precision in the far-off wilderness of Karakoram.

24 **We Become Glaciologists**

Conway's 1892 expedition journal contains many interesting observations on the Nagar and Baltistan glaciers. He noted a gap in the ice flow of the Barpu just above where it normally abuts into the flank of the Bualtar, a short distance upstream from our crossing of the Hopar. That situation would indicate a period of recession in the Nagar complex of glaciation during Conway's time, about ninety years ago. He further observed that if there should be any additional shrinkage of the ice at that point, the Barpu would be in retreat up its own valley. Our observation revealed no gap at all at that location, but instead, continuous fissured and pinnacled ice joining right up to the flank of the Bualtar. The latter eventually winds up in a jumble of black ice up against the Hopar. This bit of intelligence from Conway's records, coupled with our own observations, gave clear evidence of a twentieth century advancing stage in the long-term cycle. Our deduction was later confirmed by his Highness, Mir of Nagar.

It became apparent when we first viewed the Nagar glaciers that, like most of those of the Karakoram, they were much more crevassed and fissured than those of the Swiss Alps or the mountains of Greenland. Conway remarked that even in the relatively level stretches of the Barpu, its surface was heavily fissured, as though the frozen mass had been churned up from beneath by some gigantic force of nature. Often we heard angry rumblings and sharp rifle-like reports from within as fracturing ice moved slowly on its tortuous way. Like Conway, we were impressed by the rarity of the usual *roche moutonnes* (sheep-shaped rocks worn round by glacial abrasion) throughout the whole Nagar complex of glaciers. A casual survey of the geologic formation of the Barpu canyon walls above the ice flow revealed a tendency toward jagged, vertical stratification of the rock. If this formation is eyeballed down to the glacier's bed, it becomes evident that the colossal thrust of ice moving over a hampered surface of up-ended strata must cause monstrous uplifting forces, resulting in a contorted and broken surface. We concluded that eventually, in geologic time, those stony ridges might be broken off and polished to permit a smoother course and, ultimately, a smoother appearance to the surface.

In our excitement to extend our view up the glacier we climbed astride a ridge where we could make observations about the fundamentals of glacier formation and existence. Ahead we observed great rising clouds of powdery snow crystals that resembled a pall of white smoke above the steep rocky slopes. The crystals filled the air as avalanche after avalanche skimmed downward over the stony canyon walls from far above. Those heights are lofty snow-gathering grounds that feed the great Barpu white dragon below. The dragon's head and upper extremities receive nourishment from the abundant snowfall concentration within the immense cirque of towering peaks. Finally, as the mass of snow congeals, enormous pressure builds up to form a jumble of seracs and ice falls, and a steady movement along the gradient. The movement continues slowly downward for over twenty miles along the Barpu, to final destruction at the glacier's terminal moraine. At the lower level, summer temperatures convert the ice into a flowing stream of water which ultimately joins the main Hispar River.

The very existence of a glacier is dependent upon the available supply of snowfall that is concentrated in its course, and upon prevailing sub-freezing temperatures during most of the year. The size of a glacier varies with the level of snowfall as governed by wet to dry cycles. The end result is a glacier that advances or recedes. What we observed in the Nagar glaciers was apparently the beginning of an advancing stage in the long-term cycle.

The rate of movement of the Barpu caused much speculation amongst our party members. Many guesses were made. But we were not satisfied with guesses, so measurements were taken near one of our camps. The result established a movement of a little over one-and-one-half feet in a twenty-four-hour period as an average at our location. At that rate of flow, we estimated, the ice opposite our camp would reach the Hopar group of villages in about the year 2066. We walked the distance in a little over two days.

25 **Base Camp and Our Objective at Last**

While the intrepid Lieutenant Hayward's exploration of the eastern Karakoram and Sinkiang won him the Founder's Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society of London, the credit for the discovery and inspection of many of the Nagar and Baltistan glaciers must certainly go to Sir Martin Conway. After conquering the Miar or Shallihuru ice flow through its treacherous

seracs and yawning crevasses, he and his party returned to Paipering Maidan and directly crossed Rash Ridge to Hispar Village. From there they mounted a major exploration of the vast ice fields of Hispar and its tributaries. Conway left the Sumaiyar Bar glacial area untrodden, and so it has remained to this day, except for an occasional native yak herder seeking an unruly stray animal. An hour's rest prepared our little party for the trackless jaunt to Phar Phari campsite. High spirits reigned. The landscape had burst into flaming crimson and gold while the bleak, icy Sumaiyar and the snowy heights above seemed whiter than ever as we rambled onward in the heart of Karakoram. The glaring sunlight provided comforting warmth even though we had shed our bulky goose-down jackets for the first time since leaving Hunza.

Bearer dons his six-foot yak hide shoes. He wraps them on every morning and hangs them up at night. One size fits all. We marveled at the safety and protection afforded by this ingenious footgear even on the smoothest icy surface or rocky cliffside. Photo by Edward F. Noack

Phar Phari, a yak herder's sod hut, was reached at mid-afternoon, in time to set up our base camp tent in the midst of a brilliant thicket of forest rose and Bik and close by a crystal clear spring. If Phar Phari afforded a desirable campsite for us, it was a luxurious hostelry for the bearers. For there stood the ruins of an old yak herder's stone and mud hut—the essential ingredient for bearer delight and tranquility in camp.

Preference was given to the kitchen location to keep Hor Ali happy. It was placed up against a large boulder in a corner as protection against the usual morning draft. Our snug storm tent was pitched amongst willows and shrubbery near the stone hut.



Important items of survival came next as we unpacked rice, flour, packaged dinners, a hind quarter of mutton, vegetables and the two wild geese that H.H. the Mir of Hunza had given us as we departed. And hidden away in our duffle bag, unknown to us, were two bottles of French brandy which he had thoughtfully cached away to warm our weary bodies and cheer our spirits after a rugged day of climbing about in sub-freezing weather. We usually carried a small flask of Mirsahib's very best brandy for use in case of emergencies. And somehow, an emergency always seemed to arise that called for a small nip or two before the day was over.

The muffled sound of foreign tongue and laughter coming from the stone hut aroused our curiosity. I became keen to learn what the bearers were up to now. Like most Nagar dwellings, the hut's open doorway was less than four feet in height, making it necessary to bend over to gain access. There was a single room with a circle of large stones centered for use as a fireplace for cooking and for warmth. Our bearers had piled plenty of brush, wood, yak dung and some small logs at the entrance for fuel and were enjoying the comforts of home around a small fire. Around the perimeter of the crude shelter, the earth floor was covered with a thick layer of brush to form the sleeping quarters and mattress. Slabs of slate laid over wooden poles and covered with a thick layer of sod formed the roof. This was sufficient to keep out rain and snow. Two men could probably erect the shelter in as many days. In the Karakorams, a native yak herder or wayfarer would find such a shelter perfectly suited to his requirements for a temporary home. Mirsahib Shaukat Ali had carefully planned our exploration with comforts in mind for both ourselves and our bearers. At least we were relieved of the concern about our bearers taking flight to more hospitable quarters.

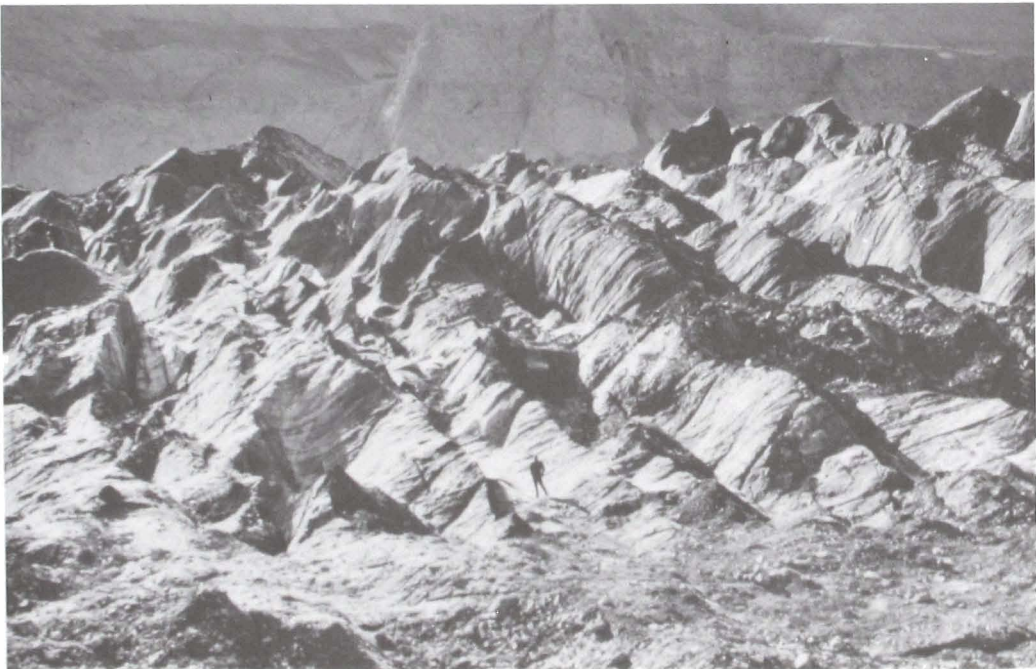
26 **The Majesty of the Golden Parri**

As I stepped toward the hut's doorway to leave, my eye caught the glimmer of the sun's rays cast upon a distant ice-capped crag. Anxious to scan the skies, I left hastily to find, to my excitement, that the cloud bank that had earlier covered the massif of Choga Lungma had broken, exposing to view our guiding beacon, the magnificent Golden Parri, whose frozen image had directed our course faithfully all the way to its very threshold. Not only the Golden Parri, but most of its icy

neighboring companions stood out as though to greet us, their imposing buttresses extending downward, enclosing our peaceful little camp in a vast frozen basin on upper Sumaiyar Bar ice field. I stood in the approaching evening twilight as the last glowing shafts of sunlight diminished over the highest peaks and spires one by one, until a cold, gray pall of dusk sent me scurrying for the tent and what little warmth it could provide. I enthusiastically reminded Ken and Bill that we had three full days ahead in which to explore our mysterious little domain. We felt like we owned this untrodden cleft of the earth's surface, for the duration of our stay, at least.

Dining on the floor of our cozy shelter by candlelight became a welcome evening pastime. Mirsahib Jamal had thoughtfully included an old Khotan rug in our duffel which served both as table cloth and comfortable wall-to-wall carpeting. With an outside temperature hovering around twenty degrees at suppertime, the six candle flames gave us cheer and modest warmth as we dined and gazed out through tent flaps at the slickering tongues of our campfire. Faithful old Hor Ali brought bowls of hot leek soup and the customary rice, meat and vegetable pilau; only this time the dish had been improved with liberal slices of wild goose breasts, fresh Nagar carrots, onions, staple wheat chappattys, yak butter and tea. The native bearers, out in their stone hovel around a roaring brush fire, seemed contented with

*The heavily crevassed ice
field of the lower Barpu
Glacier just before its
confluence with the Hobar.
Author standing in the
foreground.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



their usual diet of hot chappattys, plenty of yak butter and strong brisk tea. They seemed to thrive on it.

I was awakened next morning at the dismal hour of five by a loud report like a gunshot that was followed by deep, rumbling sounds. Sultan Ali, who slept in the tent with us, assured me that we were not being attacked, but that the Sumaiyar Bar glacier was sounding off its routine salvo as ice fractured under enormous strain and split to form a crevasse. Rather than go back to sleep, I began planning the day's activity in the warmth of my sleeping bag with the help of Ken and Bill. While camp was to remain at Phar Phari, it was decided that one of us would press onward up the glacier's right bank to a point near the base of the Golden Parri. Because I had no intention of crossing the heavily crevassed ice flow unroped and alone, and not being equipped for dangerous rock climbing, I chose Girgindil as my destination. Discussion at breakfast disclosed a variety of goals for a day of humble exploration. I held to my plans and my sons to theirs, so it appeared that between the three of us considerable ground would be covered.

Until now, our trek—through the Nagar villages, up into the Bualtar defile, across the Hopar ice field, up along the Barpu glacier to the Sumaiyar branch—had required no great effort. Now we faced a more dynamic prospect. I knew that as we pressed ahead, unconquered ice-clad heights rising above 23,000 feet in elevation would confront us. Two ice axes were the extent of our alpine climbing equipment. I decided that we were not the men to match those mountains. After all, we had come to set foot where no westerner had stood before—not to pit our skill and desire against overwhelming odds by attempting to climb unvanquished frozen peaks.

I left camp as the morning sun rose over Choga Lungma's sky-piercing peaks and wound my way through brilliant autumn-tinted shrubbery along the bank of unexplored upper Sumaiyar Bar glacier. It was not long before I found myself in the midst of a great cirque of steep stony walls rising up to huge ice-falls that descended in steps from the precipice of the Golden Parri. The scene presented a picture of frozen chaos—a silent cataract in an isolated sanctuary of the Karakoram. Girgindil, another blank on the map, was discovered in Artic-like isolation at the very portal of the Choga Lungma group. But alas, I had reached the end of my trek for, just a few hundred yards beyond me, I saw a great cloud of snow crystals skimming rapidly down a steep slope to the surface of Sumaiyar Bar. Glancing directly up the slope high above me, I noticed a series of rifts in the snowfields, tell-tale warning of an avalanche crisis. Apparently I had reached the fertile snow-gathering course of the Sumaiyar Bar-Barpu glacial complex. Any attempt to advance farther would be extremely hazardous. The old snow was still firm under the newly fallen mantle, so no problem existed to slow my pace.

To enhance the scene (as though it were not *already* astonish-

ing) was a thicket of forest rose that grew on a sheltered knoll. It glowed in brilliant crimson with an abundance of little vermillion, apple-like fruits hanging as Christmas ornaments from the branches against a white icy background. I stood gazing into that awe-inspiring scene of startling radiance until the last flicker of sunset sent me on my lonely way. En route to camp, I walked out onto the ice to gain a better view up the glacier to its source. Staring into that frozen fastness, lonely and silent in the gathering dusk, I felt like a humble intruder in a strange world. The oncoming darkness would soon blot out the landscape and make my return to camp especially perilous. Leaving the ice, I scrambled up onto a sandy bar, buttoned my goose-down jacket and hastened campward.

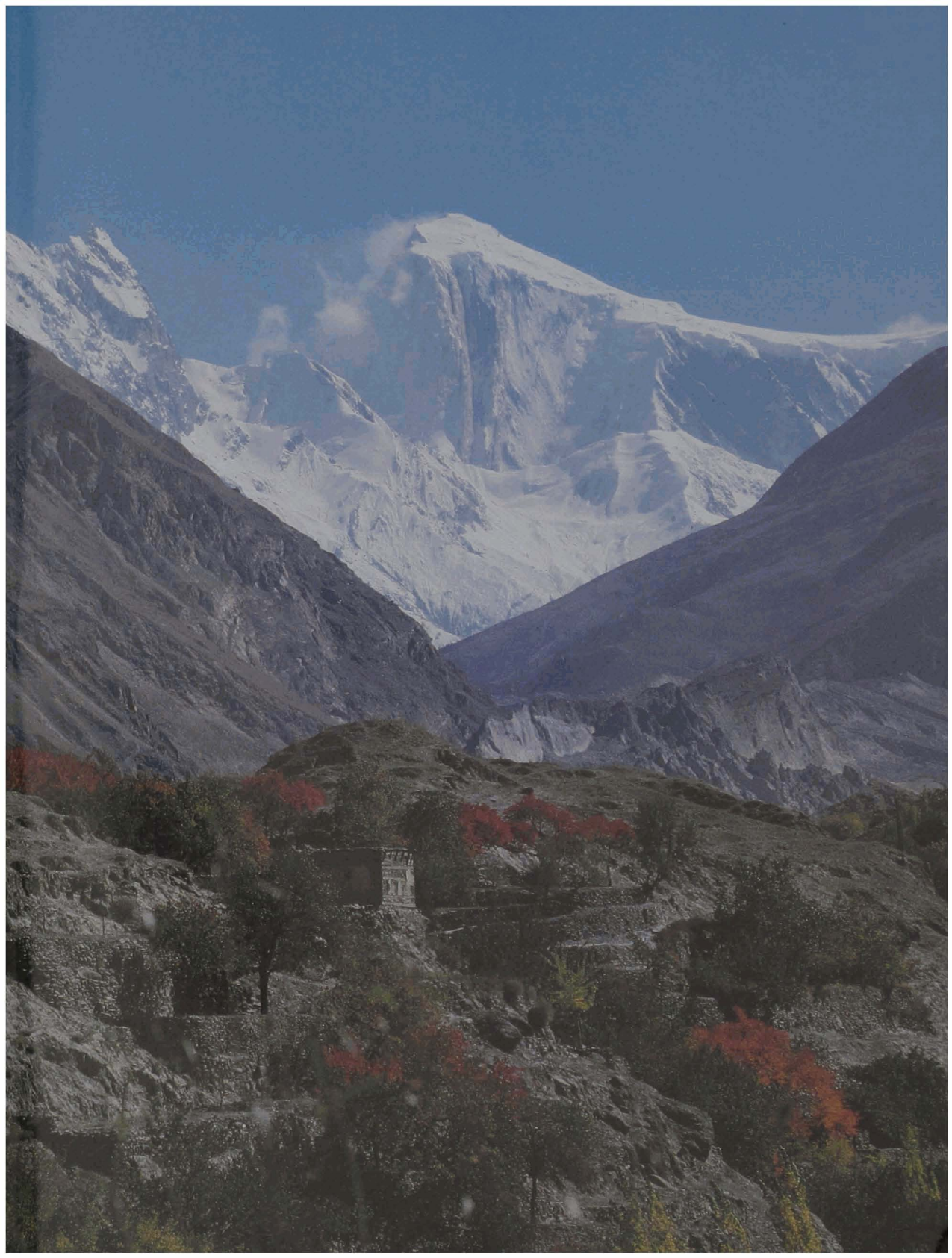
A silent full moon rose amongst the pinnacles and steeple-like spires to dominate the eastern sky. Our campsite took on an unearthly aspect as the moon cast long shadows over it and the surrounding landscape.

27 **Strange Faces Invade Our Camp**

As I approached campsite less than two hours later I was surprised to find two strangers standing with Ken and Bill, silhouetted against white ice at the glacier's edge. The strangers peered through binoculars at the opposite bank of Awkbassa Ridge. In the near-darkness both appeared to be natives of Nagar. One carried a rifle. My first thought was that Mirsahib had sent his shikari (hunter) and another bearer to report on our progress and to assist us. Or they might be hunters from one of the villages far away seeking game for food. We brought a rifle ourselves with the prospect of procuring some wild game for our larder.

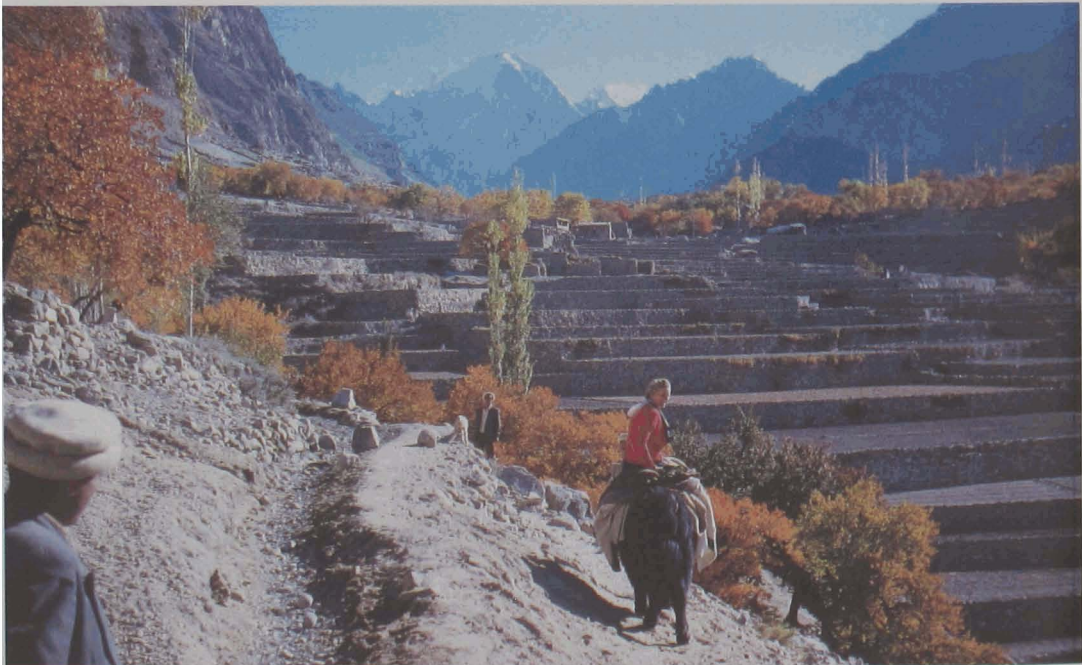
Ken and Bill had returned from their trek and were apparently much interested in the strangers. As I approached, the visitors handed me the binoculars and pointed to a prominence on Awkbassa Ridge about a mile away. Sure enough, on that spot stood four wary Ibex browsing for their evening meal. The strangers claimed eight, but in the near-darkness I could account for only four. The newcomers were a hardy and interesting pair. They apparently had been in the area before, and they invited us to accompany them in the morning across the treacherous crevasse-riven glacier to rugged Awkbassa Ridge. Having secured a Karakoram Ibex in the Pasu Mountains of Hunza some years ago, I declined the offer, preferring to use

The Golden Parri, a Karakoram gem, stood out in bold relief against a clear blue sky on the morning of our departure for the wilderness of ice. Chinese Buddhist Pilgrims, in the seventh Century A.D., on their westward adventure to India, described the ice bound spires of the Karakoram mountain complex as "reaching midway between heaven and earth." Photo by Edward F. Noack





Part of our caravan climbing out of the austere Hunza River gorge en route to our destination at Gulmit and Pasu, Little Ghujal. Photo by Edward F. Noack



Looking up through autumn colored foliage toward the Shimshal mountains with stone reinforced terraces in the foreground. My wife, Helen, on her trusty yak in foreground. Photo by Edward F. Noack

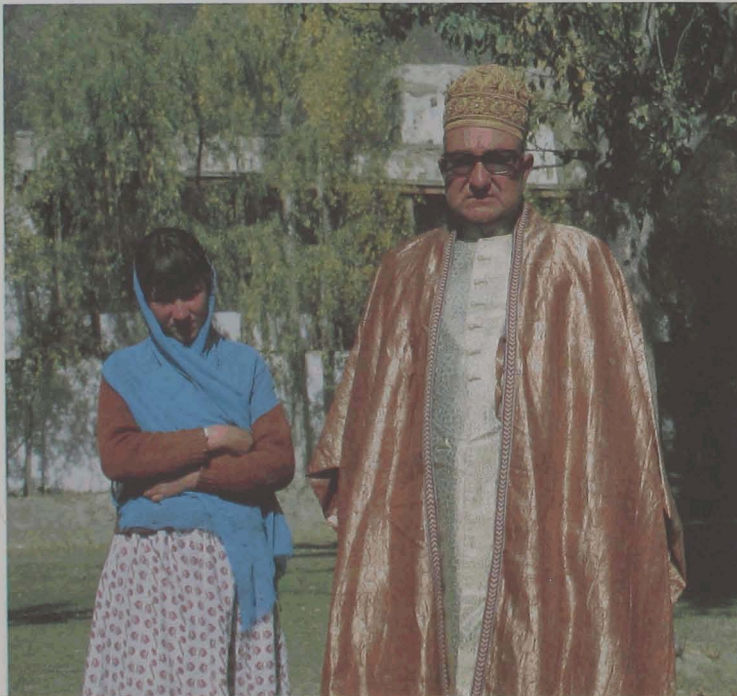


The six hundred year old Hunza citadel rising above the Ultar Gulch at the base of the 25,000-foot pinnacles of Bolohagurdoanas Sar (the mountain of the flying horses). Photo by Kenneth B. Noack





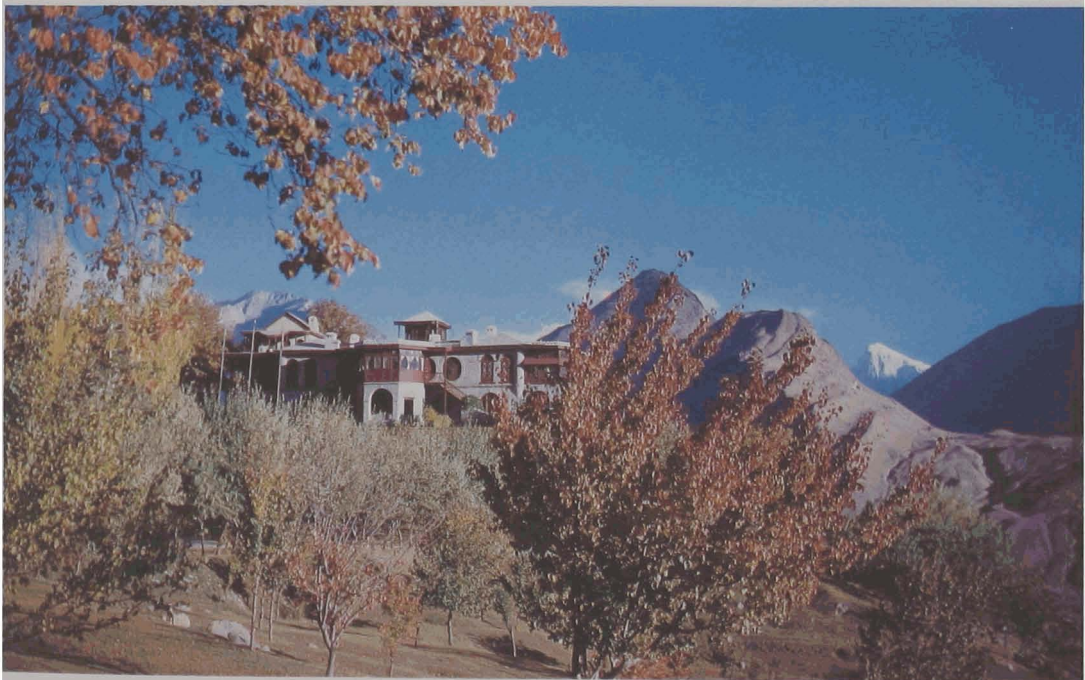
*The palace compound of Nagar State with the Hunza Karakorams in the far distance.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



His highness Shaukat Ali, Mir of Nagar State, proudly displays his grandfather's priceless choga. It was hand-made of the finest silk and pure gold thread making it a warm but somewhat burdensome garment weighing approximately 20 lbs. Photo by Edward F. Noack



Sumiyar Bar Glacier with Choga Lungma mountains in the background; autumn-colored Karakoram Bik is abundant along the glacier margins. Photo by Edward F. Noack



The Karimabad Palace of His Highness, the Mir of Hunza which overlooks the Baltit Valley, the snowy summit of the Golden Parri is in the distance. Photo by Edward F. Noack



Winnowing on a windy day in the Wakhan. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



A variety of spices and nuts on display in a Pakistan bazaar for the shoppers' inspection and choice. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.



A tempting display of dried fruits, nuts and grains in Raja Bazaar, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.

Contented Hunza village natives spread out their harvested crops to dry in the warm autumn sun, on the roof tops of their homes. The economy of these tribal states is almost entirely that of farming and animal husbandry. Photo by Edward F. Noack



The junction of the Sumatrayar Bar and Miar glaciers forming the Barpu with Awkbassa Ridge in the distance at the confluence. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.

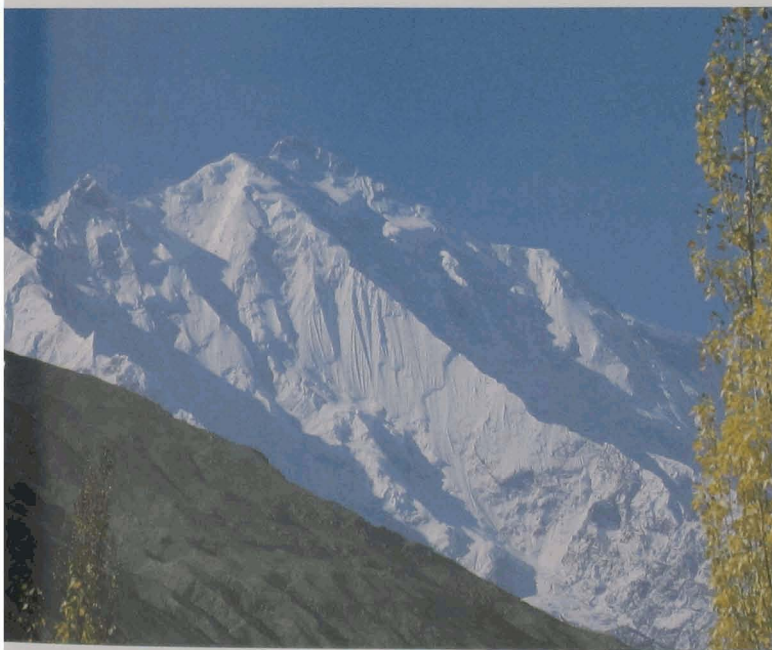


An idolater, Kisar, from Baltistan, had a fairy wife named Bobuligus but he was in love with a Balti woman, Langi Bonglu. One day a fairy told him that Langi Bonglu was living with another man. Kisar was so enraged that he turned his fairy wife into a hen which he placed on top of a Balti mountain and left the country. The mountain is still called Boublit Moutn to this day. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.





*Sheep pasturing on the lush slopes above terraced vegetable gardens along the Bualtar Glacier.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



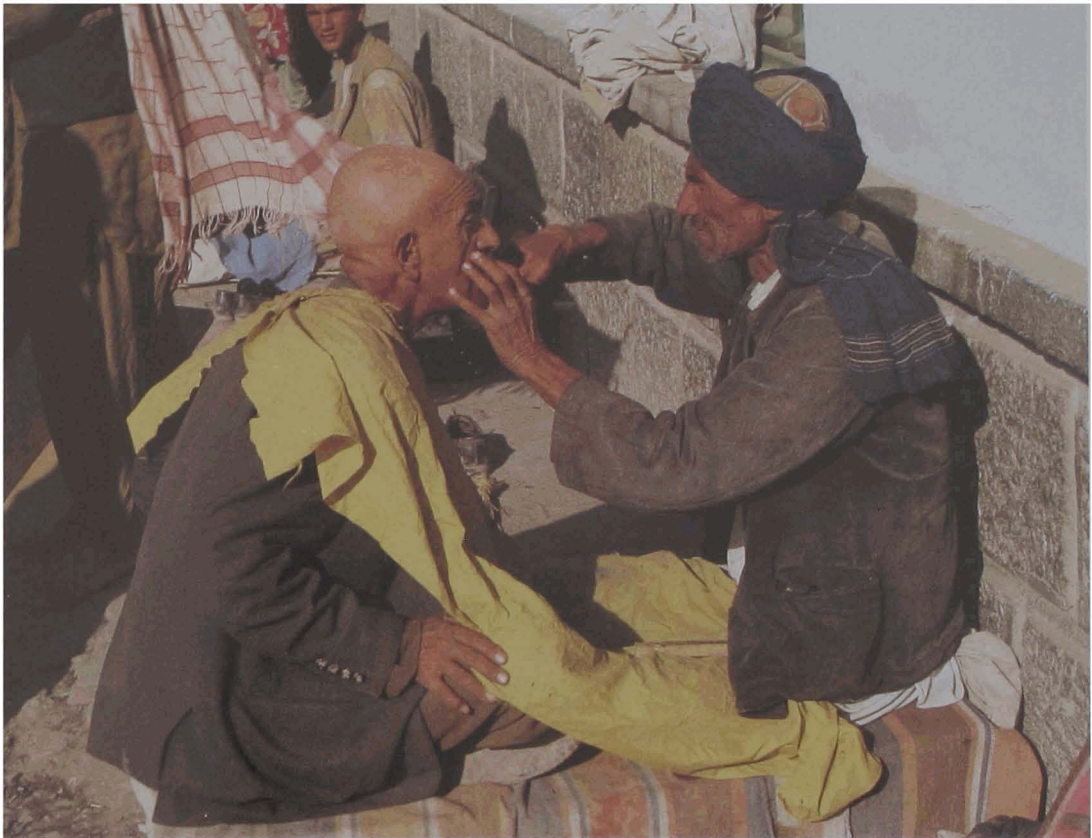
*Rakaposhi, in all its frozen glory,
reaching to 25,550 feet, dominates
the Baltit Valley of Hunza.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



Our jeeps came to a halt just short of an outer stone wall where awaited a number of Hunza's officials and old friends in their decorated chogas and wool caps. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



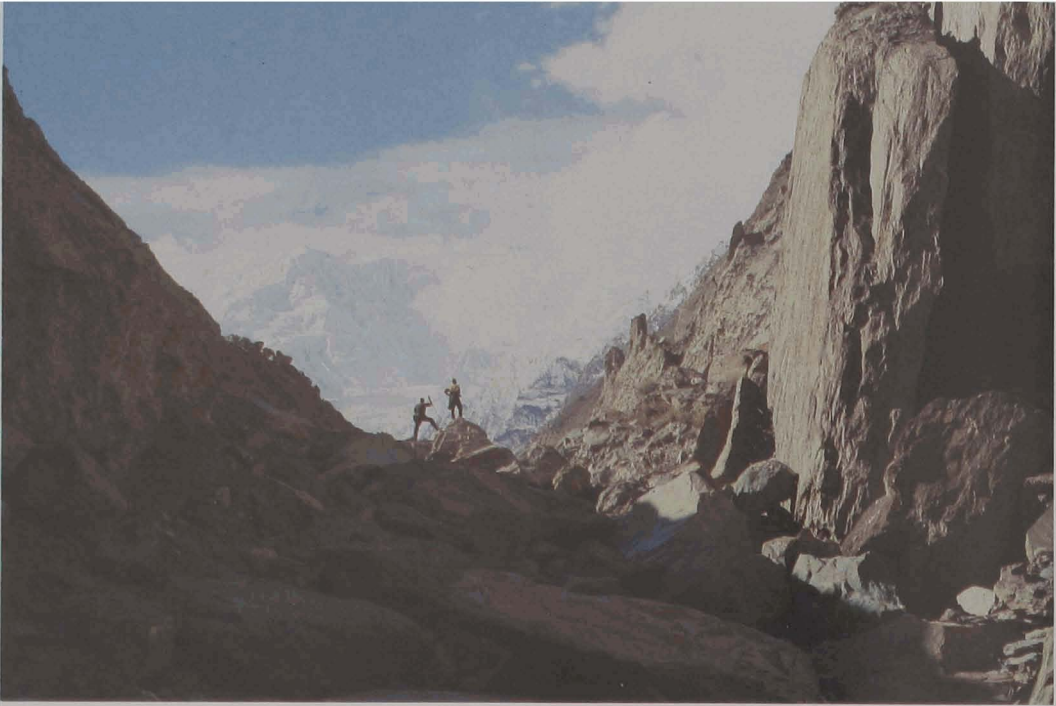
A wedding party leaving Faizabad for the groom's home in the wilds of the Hindu Kush mountains. It is customary for the bride to remain fully veiled throughout the ceremony. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



The village blacksmith is equipped with the crude instruments necessary for primitive dental care which consist primarily of extractions. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



At long last, in quest for a typical Aryan example of mankind, we discovered, among the few inhabitants of the village Baba Tarji, a handsome maiden with the fairest of complexion, blue eyes and light blonde hair, all typical of the Aryan race. She was born and raised in the wilds of Wakhan, far from the nearest large village. It is likely she will never leave the wilderness of her present homeland. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



*Our first glimpse of the vast ice world of Nagar State through a stony defile of the Great Karakoram Range
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



*My grandson, Kannes, trekking
in the Hindu Raj.
Photo by Charles T. Noack*



Looking up the Miar or Shallihuru Glacier with the Sumtyar Bar glacier bearing down from the left. The famous Conway British Expedition of 1892 camped for several days here at Papering Maiden before crossing Rash Ridge to explore the great Hispar Glacier. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



Helen and I en route from Karimabad to Pasu on our trusty yaks, a two-day trek. Pasu Pinnacles in the distance. Photo by bearer



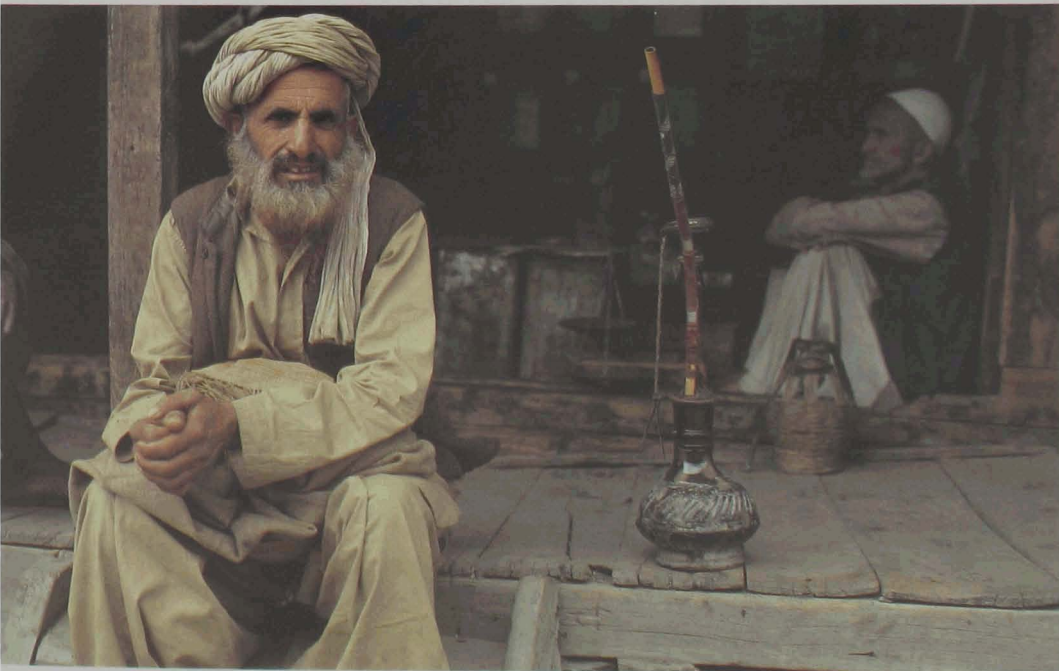
Rakaposhi Mountain, 25,500 ft., from the Hunza Palace gardens. Photo by Edward F. Noack



Hunza's citadel is imposingly situated on a dominating knoll commanding an unobstructed view of great expanse on three sides. Inaccessible mountain ramparts provide for an impregnable site for the redoubt of an autocratic chieftain. Photo by Edward F. Noack



Terraced crops of potatoes, onions, rice, wheat, and corn flourish in the village of Nagar with the Karakoram gem, the Golden Parri in the background. The Hispar glacier terminates approximately 3 miles up the left gorge of the photo. Photo by Edward F. Noack



A follower of Islam and his Hindoo friend indulging in the diversion of the hookah pipe. Photo by Edward F. Noack



The Pasu Pinnacles (15,900 feet) near the terminal moraine of the Pasu Glacier. Trail of Shimshal Village takes off across the Hunza River. Photo by Edward F. Noack



After a full day's hunting the wary Ibex in the heights of Gilgits' mountains, a late afternoon rest in front of a blazing fire is a welcome respite for author and his valued friend, Shah Khan. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

the precious time left to us exploring the hillside leading up to Rash Ridge.

That night after another hearty dinner by candlelight in our shelter-tent, we got out the maps and laid plans on splitting up again into separate parties. Bill and Sultan Ali to climb in Conway's 1892 track up the steep canyon side to the top of Rash Ridge where a commanding view toward the great Hispar Glacier could be had; Ken, the nimrod and bearer to cross the formidable Sumaiyar Bar glacier and the icy flanks of Awkbassa Ridge directly across from campsite to pursue the wily Karakoram Ibex.

Morning broke with powdery snowflakes drifting between the tent flaps onto my face. Ken and his bearers were well under way across the treacherous ice while Bill and Sultan Ali were still in sight through a thin veil of snowflakes, climbing steeply upward for a position astride Rash Ridge. After a late breakfast, I wandered out to discover a game trail which I followed for several hundred yards through willows and forest rose trees that displayed their autumn brilliance in the warm morning sunlight. The snow squall had temporarily abated; the west wind ceased to blow and a covey of Ram-chikkor (snow partridge) sounded their whistling call as if to welcome the first real balmy day since we left Gilgit.

I at last reached a height on Rash slope where a luxuriant growth of Juniper trees endured the rigors of Arctic-like winters. Ibex spoor was particularly noticeable in these thickets, indicating their preference for a bedding ground in cover and one that offered a commanding view of the surroundings. But, nary an Ibex did I see. The scene that stretched out before me, half-way around the compass, was one of amazing contrasts. The range rising beyond Hunza displayed its icy peaks and towers above a cloud bank in a northwesterly sky, one summit soaring above 25,000 feet and several others exposing their icebound peaks well over the 23,000 foot elevation. The western sky was dominated by Rakaposhi in all its ghostly white majesty, 25,550 feet of icy glaciers and stone, framed by drifting cloud banks, supreme and defiant. Around the compass from Rakaposhi to the Choga Lungma Group, massive ramparts rose to well over 20,000 feet in height until, completing the half-circle scene, the incredible image of the Golden Parri prevailed.

From my vantage point on the crest of Rash Ridge, I beheld a grand view of distant icy peaks and spires, some in the 25,000 feet class, towering skyward amongst an aristocracy of lesser, nameless crags. My path crossed a grassy declivity studded with the few flowers that managed to bloom at the edge of snowbanks left from the last storm. I was able to identify some of them to be of the gentian family, almost identical with those I know so well near my cabin in the Sierras of northern California.

In the valleys below, the snowy white ribbons of Sumaiyar Bar, Miar and Barpu glacial flows were grinding their tortuous

courses to final destruction in the Hopar ice field near the Nagar villages. The distant terraced fields of Nagar were clearly visible through my telephoto lens, contrasting sharply with the bleak towering heights immediately behind.

In the opposite direction and concealed beyond Rash Ridge lay the monstrous Hispar Glacier and its complex of snowy sentinels including Disteghil Sar, its frozen image proudly claiming supremacy over all others in western Karakoram at an elevation of 25,868 feet above the sea. But I was deprived of that stupendous scene by a rapidly developing snow squall that began to blot out the ridge above me. The abrupt change in weather sent me hurrying for shelter. A splendid group of noble pinnacles loomed up ahead of me, having an ecclesiastical appearance—stately and dignified in their isolated domain.

28

Ken Relates His Perilous Crossing of Sumaiyar Bar Glacier and the Icefalls of Awkbassa

Wearied bearers resting after trekking through rugged country in the Wakhan Corridor.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



Carrying fuel for our nightly camps en route to base camp above the junction of the Sumiyar-Miar glacier forks. Wood is a precious commodity in this desolate region.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

My first reaction to the thought of crossing a pinnacled glacier laced with alarming pocket crevasses was one of zero enthusiasm. A daylight examination of those ice flows is bewildering in beauty but devastating in terms of plotting a navigable course from one side to the other. When our native nimrod, after several hours gazing across the ice through my binoculars, spotted a herd of eight Karakoram ibex the day before, I could see I was doomed if I wanted to join him in a trek to the area.

A previous expedition dating back to 1892 records the advantages of glacial navigation over long stretches of smooth ice and moraines of gravel. Elaborate equipment including ropes, ice axes, crampons and emergency gear made up the minimum outfit. It will come as no surprise to the reader that the author was nothing short of terrified at the gesture of the Burishaski-speaking shikari (hunter) who, at four o'clock in the morning, motioned through our tent flaps that we were to leave in fifteen minutes, cross the crevassed glacier and commence a stalk in newly fallen snow in twenty-degree weather. Our stalk was to ascend three thousand feet to the 15,000-foot level on Awkbassa Ridge where the ibex herd grazed the evening before. I did not know that it was snowing at that moment, and that a modest blizzard was threatening. The one-mile glacier crossing was to be accomplished in near total darkness with one small flashlight and without ropes, axes and crampons. Somehow, it worked. Two gun bearers, the shikari and I stepped gingerly

from one ice ridge and pinnacle to another, around and over crevasses of unknown depth, until at last one of the bearers shouted, "Shabas" (well done), and we stepped onto good old terra firma again, only to contemplate a similar crossing later in the day.

The trek took our small party on hands and knees over an evasive, snowy path around ice falls to a rocky spur that rose above 14,000 feet. From there, we used binoculars to inspect the splendid ibex herd feeding through the snow on low shrub. Even at long range it was evident that there were trophy heads among the group. But our approach to within range was hampered by lack of sufficient cover to obscure our movements. It was eleven o'clock, about the time that these wary animals habitually bed down for a midday siesta, as do, I learned, nimrods and bearers. I joined them as they negotiated a one-thousand-foot drop through a sheer snow-covered nullah (chasm) to an old, abandoned goat herder's stone shelter. A fire was quickly ignited to permit us to regain composure and thaw out.

Dried apricots, hot chappattys and strong tea brought smiles to our faces and cheer amongst us, yet I could not understand a single word of their banter. Despite the annoying language barrier, it was surprising how well we communicated with facial expression and sign language. As mid-afternoon arrived I was on my hands and knees again, following to a vantage point where our shikari hoped the ibex would be moving out to browse before bedding down for the night. Well hidden from view, we hastened around the contour of a treacherous fifty-degree ice slope, matching our footsteps with the ibex herd's hoofprints. We were not far behind. Soon the animals appeared, negotiating a rocky shoulder where our nimrod hoped we would score a successful shot. The ibex were nicely silhouetted against an orange-tinted evening sunset at about 15,000 feet, but were still over four hundred yards distant and slowly moving away. A sharp cliff ahead abruptly ended our stalk. It was fire now or abort. Bracing our firearms with due care, we let go five rounds without a hit. It may be hard to believe, but in a way I was glad. My comrades were not—they wanted meat for camp and I cannot blame them. The ibex herd proved to be smarter than we. The animals were handsomely rewarded with an unmarred escape. More power to them—perhaps we learned something, too.

At camp we heard shots ring out in the distance. Speculation ran high and consensus of opinion amongst us favored a successful hunt. And so it later turned out to be—but in favor of the ibex herd. As twilight fell upon our little camp and the sharp chill of nightfall gripped us, we heard faint clicks of an ice ax chipping out footholds in the glacial ice. Then came shouts followed by the faint murmur of voices as the hunters approached. A few minutes later, four weary souls left the ice and sauntered up to the campfire to receive cups of hot tea as a prelude to a feast being prepared over glowing coals.

Our glacial adventure eventually came to an end and the day for departure arrived. Camp was struck and when our bearers were loaded and on their way, I gave a final glance back toward those towering frosty heights that had beacons our way. I pondered the history of that vast stretch of terra incognita that lay frozen, unbroken and silent, for over three hundred miles, from the source of the Yarkand River to the steppes of the Pamir. The forbidding landscape had watched over Hayward's intrepid exploration of Karakoram's inaccessible wilderness and the untimely tragedy caused by the hand of a ruthless tribal ruler at Darkut, as Hayward was on the threshold of completing the dangerous assignment given him by the Royal Geographical Society of London.

29 **The Pamir Steppe**

I have already described my interest in those little-known parts of the Karakorams that had been touched by Lieutenant Hayward's perilous explorations. I could not resist a venture-some temptation to continue to tread the path he had chosen through Badakshan and Wakhan along the renowned River Oxus and finally onto the Pamir Steppe, his priority assignment as designated by the Royal Geographical Society of London had he lived. To tread that sinuous path in the shadow of Hayward's unhappy phantom was a heady challenge. I resolved to surmount any obstacles in my way.

To reach the Wakhan Corridor and Pamir Steppe over Hayward's proposed route required further effort and time to convince the officials in command of the restricted and sensitive frontier areas in the Northwest Frontier Province of India (now Pakistan) that we had a satisfactory reason for crossing into Afghanistan from that quarter. A long and protracted effort failed, even as our enthusiasm and determination rose.

Access through Soviet Turkestan, while expedient, I ruled out as politically impossible. As a final resort, I resolutely diverted my efforts to an approach through Afghan territory. Groundwork was laid during a visit to Kabul through local Afghan friends and officials. Correspondence followed, reams of it, and time passed slowly until at last, and through a stroke of good fortune brought about by one of my local Afghan friends, welcome news came that permission had been officially granted to enter the areas involved, including the Great Pamir. Officialdom had closed the door to us from the Pakistan Northwest Frontier but we would manage to climb in through an opening in the west.

30 **Arrival in Afghanistan— Source of the River Oxus**



An Afghan street vendor displaying his freshly baked chapattis for sale in Fatzabad, Afghanistan.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

Strange fumes and the tinkle of camel bells, signs of the orient, permeated the air around us when we arrived in Kabul. The resonant call of a Musselman in a nearby Mosque announced Ramadan (autumn fast) as we drove out the broad promenade in a lorry. Our impatient driver narrowly missed running down a shaggy Bactrian camel as we drew up to Spinzar Hotel in the town square, where we registered for a brief stay before departing for the wilds of Pamir.

At long last we had reached that glamorous city of Kabul of ancient Aryana, home of the Afghans and Land of the Rising Sun. Afghanistan was invaded by Alexander the Great in the year 330 B.C. and that conquest marked one of the most important events in the country's history. For the first time, protracted contact with western culture and peoples of western civilization was possible. Greek philosophy and art were introduced and a new era of great political and cultural significance was created. Aryana became known as the Greco-Bactrian Empire. We were in the middle of great history. For three full days we enjoyed shopping, dinners and meetings with Afghan officials and friends. Our schedule stretched from dawn to midnight. Much-needed sleep after our tiresome airlift half-way around the globe was obviously neglected. But it was relaxing to mingle with our good friends and officials who had been so helpful in making it possible for us to enter and travel through those restricted and sensitive parts so essential to our interests.

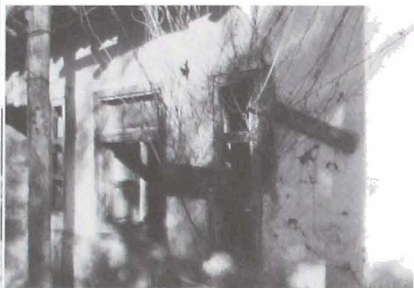
A porter came to our room to announce that a Board of Directors' meeting of Spinzar Cotton Company was in session at our hotel. A gracious friend from an earlier visit to Kabul, Mr. Sarwar Nashir, presided. Apparently he had learned of our arrival and had arranged for our presence during that important session. Presenting our cards to an attendant at the Directors' chamber door, we were led into a spacious room where five of the officers were seated at a huge mahogany table. All rose. Mr. Nashir—who occupied the Chairman's place at the head of the table—was a dignified figure who towered above the others. He greeted us with a warm handshake and a smiling face. He was a

striking individual, tall and handsome—the cotton king of Afghanistan. Moreover, he held the distinguished title of Leader of the tribal Uzbegs, thousands of whom were employed on his vast cotton empire. Evidently, the Directors were involved in important discussions; nevertheless, we were seated among them and served with tea and cakes. Nashir spoke his native Uzbeq tongue as well as Persian and German, but very little English. However, there was really no problem—his linguist sat beside him and removed any linguistic difficulties.

Nashir was keenly interested in our plans, of which he had been fully informed by Afghan officials since he had played an important part in our negotiations. He offered any further assistance we might need, then reached into his pocket for two of his personal cards on which he penned notes in Arabic characters—instructions to his innkeepers in his home city, the ancient Kunduz and in Taloqan, to extend to us as his guests whatever lodgings and special attention we required on our stopovers en route to Faizabad, Badakshan. Time arrived for departing. We felt most fortunate to have as a friend in that far quarter of the world as distinguished and generous a host.

At four o'clock a telephone call informed us that we were invited to a cocktail party at the residence of His Excellency, the Honorable Mr. Ashok Mehta, Ambassador of India, and his charming wife, whom I had known on former visits to Afghanistan. The embassy automobile called for us at six o'clock and whisked us out to the Residency. Two Afghan footmen in uniform stood at the courtyard doorway to receive us. The entrance hallway with its rare oriental Bukhara carpets underfoot and ancient firearms and artifacts decorating the walls brought back memories of a past visit in 1968. A retinue of uniformed house servants led us into a spacious living room past numerous antiques, well chosen and appropriate for that dignified residence. Priceless ivory-inlaid Afghan muskets commanded our attention as we passed, but our eyes were diverted toward charming Mrs. Mehta, who stood to greet us in her exquisite embroidered gown.

Cocktails were promptly served and as our hostess was about to propose a toast on the event of our departure for the Pamirs, the Honorable Mr. Mehta entered to join the ceremony. Servants brought up hot hors d'oeuvres followed by a continuous procession of delicacies over the next two hours. Conversation centered on plans for our early departure and travel schedule, destined to put us in our faraway Pamir camps in eight days. Instead of the occasion being merely a customary cocktail hour, we indulged in not only drinks (mostly gin and tonic) but a most deliciously exotic hot and cold snacks. The fare seemed customary for some important state occasion, but hardly for us humble adventurers en route to an almost unknown wilderness on the "roof of the world" in Turkestan. Eventually a toast was proposed by the ambassador, giving notice that in the same



The complex wiring job at the Faizabad telegraph office gets the message through... occasionally.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

room upon our successful return, there would be another party given in our honor with guests from the countryside interested in adventurous travel. After which, we respectfully thanked our gracious hosts and departed in the embassy automobile for our hotel and much-needed rest in preparation for our early morning departure.

31 **Into the Wilds of Badakshan to Intersect Marco Polo's Trail**

We awoke early. At six o'clock three bearers came to pick up our duffel bags and equipment for delivery by government lorry to Kabul airport for our flight to Faizabad, Badakshan. This was the first leg of our long journey ahead. Our breakfast at Spinzar Hotel would be our last in the modern style until our return some five weeks later. At the airport, we observed the formalities of weighing in our baggage and paying excess weight charges. Pir Mohamed, our liaison official, pointed out the Canadian Otter, a very capable aircraft for rugged flying, take-offs and landings, which we boarded for the next lap of our journey.

The sturdy little aircraft climbed without falter to a pass in the towering Hindu Kush Range and prepared for a landing and short stopover in the cotton growing community of Kunduz. An hour later we were safely down on the Faizabad strip, a primitive, simply graded landing field. But the rugged Otter was designed for just such terrain, and with a landing speed of about forty-five miles per hour, we came to a halt in a remarkably short distance.

Two four-wheel-drive pickup trucks awaiting us were quickly loaded with bags and supplies; then we were off for the ancient city of Faizabad, capital and residence of the governor of Badakshan. The city bordered Soviet Turkestan to the north. We had gone but a short distance when I called to the driver to come to a halt. A group of Afghans, colorfully attired and mounted on horseback, was advancing rapidly toward us. It turned out to be a wedding party. We learned that, by custom, the attendants led the parade while the nuptials brought up the rear. It made for a pastoral picture as the mounted group moved swiftly over lush meadowland as ramparts of the Hindu Kush Range rose in the near distance.

Twenty minutes later we entered the main bazaar of the exotic community of Faizabad on the banks of the Koksha River, a tributary of the Oxus. We were now close to the trail that the renowned Marco Polo, his father Nicolo and Uncle Maffio had



Faizabad, Badakshan on the river Koksha, a tributary of the Oxus.

Photo by Edward F. Noack

followed on their famous journey to Cathay and the court of Kublai Khan. We would follow in their footsteps for the next two hundred miles and scan the remarkable sights that Marco Polo had recorded in his journal. Of Badakshan, Marco makes this statement, "The province is inhabited by people who worship Mohamet and they have a peculiar language. It forms a very great kingdom and the Royalty is hereditary. Those of royal blood are descended from King Alexander and the daughter, Roxana, of King Darius of the vast empire of Persia." We found that the vast majority of the population of Afghanistan still worships Mohamed. They are, nearly to the man, devotees of Islam, about equally divided between the Shia and the Sunni faiths.

The Islamic religion began to spread throughout Afghanistan in the seventh century A.D. and has persisted ever since. It brought not only faith in Mohamed, but a cultured civilization devoted to science, philosophy, and the arts. Interestingly, great rock carvings of Buddha, stupas and other artifacts unearthed in burial grounds within Afghan territory are constant reminders of a pre-Islamic era of Buddhism. And among the natives of the south, there are legends of the elusive Prester John, the fantastic Christian Potentate and conqueror of India and Africa and Lord of the Tartars and all the land between. His presence hovers like a phantom from the farthest shores of India to the Tower of Babel and Abyssinia. He appeared upon the scene as both priest and king in the twelfth century and has remained in the minds of men ever since. Marco Polo devotes much space in his journals to the life of Prester John and the Nestorian Christians whom Polo encountered along his trade route from Bagdad to Peking.



Afghan natives of the Wakhan Corridor possess the features of the Aryan race.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

The legend of the Alexander pedigree to the Kings of Badakshan also applies to the chiefs of many of the tribal states of Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier Province of India (now Pakistan). Alexander and his Macedonian followers found tribes of Aryan blood in Bactria when they arrived there in 328 B.C. It was in northern Afghanistan that we entered the realm of that great Mongol, Jenghis Khan, who by the time of his death, A.D. 1227, had achieved his astonishing military triumphs from the Yellow River to the Danube and had brought victory to the Mongols over that vast area. It was evident, too, that we were either on or near one of the principal branches of an ancient and famous Asian overland trade route, a fork of the Silk Road—or what is left of it after a couple of thousand years of intermittent traffic (camel and donkey) from the Orient to the Occident and vice versa.

As we pulled up in a cloud of dust to an open-front clothing stand of the main bazaar, we spotted some very fine chapons, which are long robes worn by all Afghans and tribesmen in this part of Central Asia. Ken bargained three dollars for one of them, a colorful, striped kind, and finally won. He handed over 250

afghanis for a fine robe with a quilted lining for cold weather. These open-stall shops, extending for a good mile through the town, cannot be effectively described; one must be on the scene to fully appreciate the vivid picture of the strange wares, and to inhale the pungent and savory fumes from the outdoor restaurants, the acrid smoke from camel dung fires and the hookah pipe. All of these are mixed in of course with the odors of passing Bactrian camels, bullocks and donkeys. You soon remember to refrain from snapping pictures of muslim women as they haggle with the street butchers over a shoulder of mutton: the ladies will cover their faces and warn you to point your camera away. But it is always permissible to snap a picture of the shoemaker at his cobbler's bench as he cuts a perfectly good pair of shoes from a discarded rubber tire.

Passing along those ancient bazaar lanes, one hears the cluck-cluck of a caged chikkor (partridge) in the bird market. I saw one of these fine game birds in a willow cage, offered for fifty Afghanis, or about sixty-five cents. That is not all, for there was a variety of songsters from robin size to the large talking magpie. If you are inclined to falconry, perhaps you could come up with 400 afghanis for a trained eagle or falcon guaranteed (vebal) to perch on your shielded forearm while hunting, until given orders to take off after a flock of partridges. What's more, he will bring one back to you in his talons. Marco Polo mentions the Saker and Lanner falcons being widely used for hunting when he visited

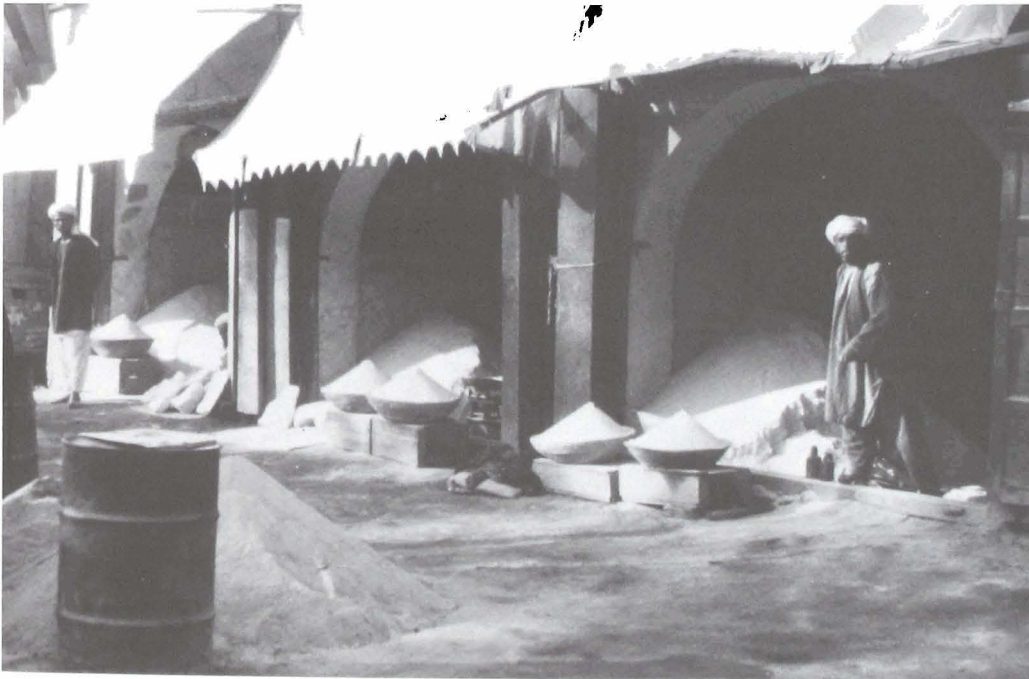


A Kunduz cobbler at his bench cutting out a pair of boots from a discarded rubber tire.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

The Salt vendor in a Fatzabad bazaar. Just as in the days of Marco Polo, the spice, salt, plays an important role in the preservation of meats and the consumability of other foods due to the lack of adequate refrigeration facilities.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



Badakshan. We were probably witnessing many of the same scenes he beheld more than seven hundred years earlier. One must mingle with the natives to understand the rare and unusual sights. It is rewarding to observe the customs of the people with whom you rub elbows as you pass along the quaint bazaar lanes. We found the men tolerant, friendly and sometimes humorous, but most of the women passed by quickly with barely a glance our way; some in purdah with faces covered, although many had long since discarded the veil. We bought a few Kashgar melons along the lane and found them delicious. Besides offering a cool and adequate way to quench one's thirst, the melons are safer than a drink from even a crystal clear stream, most of which are contaminated with dysentery bacteria. The danger is especially great in sparsely settled areas where sanitation is unknown.

Such is the life in that little-known but important center of Badakshan, where the inhabitants live in peaceful independence, making their own progress and place in history, oblivious to the political stress and afflictions of the western world.

32 Along the Banks of the Rivers Koksha and Warduj Through Badakshan

Our destination for the day being some seventy-five miles beyond, we reluctantly left the main bazaar and drove along a lane of tall poplars that shaded a row of primitive mud-brick and wattle dwellings. At the end of the lane stood the walls of the customary caravanseri that provided a resting place for native

*Our lunch being prepared in the bazaar near Faizabad.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



traders and their camels. A tea house and lodgings were a typical part of the establishment, offering meals and shelter for the night. We stopped for a cup of hot tea and a bowl of rice, and mingled with stately Afghan land-owners from the farmlands of Badakshan. Caravan bashis and camel drivers from lands afar were also present, all attired in the colorful native dress of their homelands. In a corner of the walled caravanseri stood a native storyteller who enthusiastically described Buzkashi—a game played on horseback similar to Polo with a beheaded goat instead of a ball. In a resounding voice before an eager audience of native Afghans, he told of the great game of the horsemen and the beheaded goat, a game as fierce as the battle between the bull and the bear. The tale came from the far-off steppes of Central Asia and has reached the cities of Afghanistan for the amusement of the people and the delight of the mounted horsemen.

We learned that Buzkashi would soon be coming to Faizabad with the usual influx of natives from the countryside and even the distant hamlets of the Hindu Kush. But it was our lot to be far away in the Pamir on that auspicious occasion.

It was nearly high noon when we finished our samovar of tea and bade our newly acquired acquaintances farewell before departing for the wilds of Badakshan and Wakhan. We drove out into a wide open valley between the towering heights of the Hindu Kush and Badakshan Ranges. Our driver proved to be quite careful, although at times he was determined to speed up as we approached a village, regardless of the condition of the trail. Natives of remote parts of Afghanistan are hearty, sociable fellows who prefer companionship with friends in the small settlements to the loneliness of the wilderness. Our driver was simply eager to greet his comrades.

Our route took us through miles of grain and clover fields, and through orchards of apricots and apples. Groves of walnuts and almonds covered the hillsides at the foot of the Hindu Kush Mountains. Wide, open valleys were planted with cotton and melons, indicating large estates and wealthy landlords. Occasionally we would stop to greet tall, stalwart, Afghan country gentlemen who rode lively Badakshi ponies. These men were well-dressed native citizens with long, colorful chapons draped over their shoulders and extending down to their ankles. Probably the owners of many thousands of acres. Afghanistan is a Sovereign Constitutional Monarchy. A prime minister who is elected by members of a Parliament and the approval of the king, presides over the cabinet. Afghanistan extends to all subjects the right to participate in government. A native citizen may own his own farm, bazaar stall, or other business. He also has the right to work for a landlord. He feels certain his country will never voluntarily submit to any other form of government and he appears to be well satisfied with his lot.

Grain harvest was in full swing as we passed through valley after valley nestled between towering mountain ranges. Farmers



This native of Western Tibet not far from the Pakistan frontier needs the care of a competent dentist if not a seamstress to provide him with the suitable clothing for the rugged climate in which he lives.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.



A native farmer of the Wakhan displays a sound set of teeth. He wears a typical rolled wool hat which is frequently found near the Pakistan Frontier.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



*Threshing the grain from the chaff with bullocks in preparation for the first windy day of winnowing (separating grain by wind power). A plentiful number of sheafs of grain in the background are to be stored on the roofs of dwellings for animal feed and to act as insulation against the bitter winters.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



*A breezy day is essential to winnowing of grain in the highlands of Badakshan.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

were harvesting what appeared to be a bumper crop of wheat. The reaping process as we know it is non-existent in those parts since no mechanical device to make farming more efficient and less laborious has reached the wilds of Badakshan. And perhaps it is just as well, as the province is sparsely populated and the land owners, by combined effort of every family in a district, can easily handle the task. First the grain is cut by hand with a sickle; then it is placed in shocks to dry. When ready, the shocks are removed to flat, circular pads of smooth ground and laid uniformly about a foot thick. Five to ten donkeys are harnessed abreast and driven in circular merry-go-round fashion over the grain, thereby tramping out the kernels of grain and breaking up the chaff. Then, come a windy day, two or three men to a pad lift the chaff and grain into the air with homemade willow pitchforks, permitting the wind to carry off the chaff while the grain falls directly on the pad below. When all is winnowed, the grain lies in a pile at the center of the pad, and a great heap of straw rests about twenty feet away. The straw is gathered up to be used as winter feed for the farmer's livestock. Further winnowing of the grain makes it ready for a nearby water-driven mill, where it is ground on a revolving millstone into flour. Watching the process brought back memories of the tales told by my grandparents of the same primitive methods once used in Ohio.

Long shadows of the surrounding mountains creeping over the landscape reminded us that dusk was rapidly approaching



Grain is gravitly fed from a hand-woven basket into a center hole of the raptdly spinning water-powered millstone which revolves against a fixed stone base grinding the grain into a good grade for flour.
 Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

and that darkness would soon envelop us. Since we were now several miles from the next village, and since the weather appeared to favor us, we decided to set up camp in a likely dell alongside the road. A grove of walnut trees on a hillside near the Koksha River offered shelter from wind while a large boulder provided confinement for the camp and cooking fires. While dinner was being prepared we spread out our sleeping bags on a thick bed of straw that had been left from grain winnowing. Apparently we were bedding down on a native farmer's land. Hot dried soup, canned ham, baked potatoes, tea and sweet biscuits made for a hearty dinner around a warm campfire on this, our first night in the foothills of the towering Hindu Kush Mountains. As we crawled into our goose-down bags at sundown, the highest peaks in the distance gathered shrouds of billowy white clouds while the sougning of the breeze through the surrounding woods seemed to forecast the onset of a change in weather.

Long before dawn we were awakened by a few raindrops on our faces and, strangely enough, by straw that was being scattered about by two farmers with pitchforks who had arrived to move it into a stack for protection from the oncoming rainstorm. There appeared to be nothing to do but get up and move our beds to a drier spot. In the dark of night, we dressed and moved to shelter under a large spreading walnut tree. We laid our beds on a canvas sheet, part of which we pulled over us for protection. But sound sleep was not our fortune: after a short catnap, the rain worsened to the extent that we got up, had a quick breakfast by the light of the campfire and moved on toward the next village and night stop on the Warduj branch of the Koksha River.

Formidable canyon walls of varicolored stone impressed us as we approached the great rampart of the Hindu Kush which forms the boundary between Afghan Wakhan and the Northwest

Frontier of Pakistan. The icy summit of that magnificent massif, Terich Mir, rises to 25,000 feet. Partially hidden behind a cloud bank, it held us in suspense as we awaited the skies to clear so that we could actually view its summit.

We saw many of the celebrated Badakshi horses roaming over the landscape. Marco Polo states in his journal, "Of the people of this land, they are excellent archers, given much to the chase. Falconry, too, is much practiced by the rich, birds and beasts being in abundance. Excellent horses are produced, remarkable for their speed. Alexander's Bucephalus stood at the head of this strain, all of which had a particular mark on the forehead. This breed was entirely in the hands of an uncle of the King's; and in consequence of refusing to let the king have any of them, the latter put him to death. The widow, then, in despite, destroyed the breed and it is now extinct." To this day the Badakshi ponies are sought for the games of polo and buzkashi throughout the lands of Central Asia.

Game was in evidence along our trail, particularly the partridge-like chikkor. From the occasional wayside native we learned that the sport of falconry was still indulged today by a few. I cannot attest that the fine horses we saw along our trail were direct blood descendants of Alexander's Bucephalus, but they had the stature of fine breeding. Some of the ponies we rode later had those qualities.

That morning we started out with suspicious cloud banks over our heads but as usual, as the sun rose and its heat bore down on us to cheer our spirits, the skies soon cleared and we spread out our damp clothes and bags to dry as lunch was prepared at roadside. Later, as we continued our sinuous course, the valley of the Warduj began to narrow and our trail to worsen until finally we entered a stony gorge with a turbulent, crystal clear stream that presently joined the waters of the Warduj, then the Koksha, and eventually reached the River Oxus. Our bearers told us that there were large brown trout to be caught but we decided to wait until next day's arrival at the head of that same stream, where good fly fishing was reported.

Long rows of poplars and willows alongside our lane foretold the presence of a settlement ahead. It was not long before we approached a hardy-looking fellow in a long Afghan chapon tending a small flock of goats. A swirl of smoke and the outline of stone huts on the horizon assured us of shelter for the night stopover at the village of Payz. One of our bearers had gone on ahead to announce our arrival and as soon as we pulled up to the center of the village we were met by the Aksakal (literally, white-beard or village headman). Arrangements had been made for our shelter and several of the villagers had started up tinder fires for heating our quarters and for cooking the evening meal. Spicy odors permeated the air around us and whetted our appetites for a hearty dinner of rice and mutton pilau with a variety of vegetables mixed in. The staple *nan* or unleavened bread would

be baked over an open fire. Our room was of ample size to house ourselves and our bearers, but what cheered us most were the colorful felt carpets with interesting geometric designs spread out over the floor, and two fine oriental rugs on which to place our sleeping bags. Such exotic refinements are found in most of the more well-to-do native dwellings and are handwoven locally. Afghanistan, particularly its northern provinces, has been a center for fine oriental carpet weaving for many generations. The Khanate of Bokhara, home of the renowned antique Bokhara carpets, joins Afghanistan on the north; however, since the Soviet invasion in the mid-nineteenth century, most of the weavers have migrated to the Afghan area south of the Oxus near the ancient city of Balkh where they carry on their remarkable trade. A typical Afghan family of weavers maintains a room in their mud-brick dwelling where a great wooden loom is erected to weave the magnificent oriental carpets. The children are taught to tie the geordian and sinah knots, and to operate the shuttle.

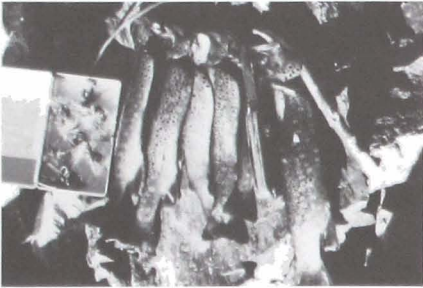
In an atmosphere of cheerfulness and relaxation after dinner, we reclined on our bags to enjoy welcome rest after the long day's ride over rough terrain. In Badakshan at that time of year the onset of evening brings frigid temperatures and a thick coat of ice on exposed water puddles. The wise villager seeks haven by his fireside within the thick stone walls of his home. The typical Afghan heating stove, a welcome contraption in our room, consists of a circular, upright firebox of metal over which extends a water tank with a spigot for drawing hot water. Not only does the stove—which is fired with tinder or yak dung fuel—heat the room but it boils the water in the tank for bathing and for tea. Heavy wires attached to timbers in the stone walls are for the drying of clothing. Withall, the Afghan stove is a skillfully designed and highly efficient invention.

Our dinner was prepared over three separate fires on the earthen floor against a stone wall at the far end of the room—one fire for the rice pot, one for the vegetables, and another for roasting kabob and heating the pan for preparing nan (native bread). It is surprising how comfortable and restful those crude huts can be after the chill of nightfall descends upon the wilderness of Badakshan.

Despite the few days we had been in Afghanistan, we were beginning to discover the characteristics of the different native tribal peoples. Aryan blood seems to predominate as it has in most of Central Asia as far back as history records. Many of the villagers had blond hair. Some had blue eyes, but the most interesting feature noticeable in many was the long horselike face with deep-set eyes and long aquiline noses. Those, we were told, were the native mountain Tadjiks who had dwelled in Badakshan and Wakhan and particularly in the Pamir Steppe since the beginning of time. We shall see more of those interesting people as we enter the Wakhan Corridor and later in

the Pamirs. We soon learned to distinguish between the Tadjik and the Uzbek, who make up the majority of the population, sparse as it is. The Tadjik composes the majority of the population of the Wakhan.

33 Time Out for Trout Fishing to Conserve Our Meat Supply



*A few of the Brown trout we caught in a small stream in Badakshan.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*

Fly fishing in the Zebak River was the first order of the day since we needed meat for the pot. So on that bright morning we headed out toward the southeast, gazing at the great towering bulwark of the Hindu Kush confronting us. We bade our several hosts a warm farewell as they assembled at the village portal in their finest robes to see us off. It reminded me of some ancient parting scene out of an oriental book of fables. Except for our presence in the picture, it probably wasn't much different from that viewed by our intrepid predecessor, Marco Polo, when he passed this way seven hundred years ago.

As we progressed on our way toward Zebak, we came upon the crossroads that had been traversed by ancient peoples from the west en route to Cathay, and by traders destined for the markets of India. The trail began to deteriorate as we progressed and became a mere path in the wide canyon that separated the mountains of Badakshan from the mighty Hindu Kush. At last we came to a halt beside a swiftly flowing crystal clear stream—the Zebak River, our stopover for a fishing spell. Tall, autumn-colored poplars and willows that lined the river's bank shimmered in the bright sunlight. Through their branches several good-sized brown trout were spotted rising to the surface for insects. Rods and reels were quickly assembled and flies tied on leaders in preparation for an hour's diversion. The Zebak's waters were icy cold but we waded in and started casting for the fighting spotted browns. We were rewarded with a strike for nearly every cast. Many got away but within the hour we had landed plenty for dinner. We had enjoyed exceptional sport in strange waters.

Marco, at this point in his journey to the court of Kublai Khan in Cathay, made the following statements about the ancestors of the fighting trout we caught and about the therapeutic properties of the atmosphere in the Zebak highlands: "In those brooks are found trout and other fish of the dainty kinds; and the air in those regions is so pure and residence there so healthful, that when the men who dwell below in towns and in the valleys and plains find themselves attacked by any kind of fever or other ailments that may hap, they lose no time in going

to the hills; and after abiding there two or three days, they quite recover their health through the excellence of that air." And Marco said he had proved this by experience; for when in those parts he had been ill for about a year, but as soon as he was advised to visit that mountain, he did so and got well at once. The area that Marco speaks of is probably about fifty miles north of our fishing spot at Zebak, at the cool plateau of Shewa which contains the mysterious Lake Shewa. According to Afghan authorities, no westerner has ever been on those glorious tablelands. Marco's observations were in evidence as we passed many a stalwart, healthy-looking native along our trail. We certainly had no complaint over the fishing properties of those brooks with their many "dainty kinds."

34 On To the River Oxus and the Forbidden Wakhan

Lieutenant George Hayward, my unknowing benefactor, cautiously laid his plans to cross the difficult Darkut Pass and proceed onward over the Baroghil to Wakhan and Badakshan before attacking his assigned objective, the Pamir Steppe. Had he not been cruelly murdered at Darkut as he reached the very

A hazardous crossing of a stream flowing into the nearby Oxus River. Our bearer warned us to have not over one horse and three men on the bridge at a time. One look at the contraption led me to believe it would be safer to wade the horses and ourselves across.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



threshold of his eventful exploration, he would most certainly have passed through the Wakhan Corridor and Zebak en route to Badakshan and retraced part of his path in order to reach the Pamir Steppe. We, therefore, from Zebak onward, would be following not only Marco Polo's path, but the purposeful footsteps of Hayward as he resolved to be one of the first explorers of Pamir, "the roof of the world."

The crossing of a low pass brought us into the broad valley of the renowned River Oxus which together with the Jaxartes or Syr Daria and their tributaries drains the western watershed of the Soviet and Afghan Great Pamir Steppe. Tall, golden-tinted poplars appearing on the horizon revealed the presence of a remote settlement near the banks of that historic river. Presently we drove into Ishkashim, a village that lies at the west portal of a sensitive and forbidden zone known as the Wakhan Corridor, a buffer separating Soviet and Afghan territories. A pleasant and colorful flower garden surrounded the compound of the Aksakal (Governor) of this remote and important Afghan frontier post and garrison. Directly opposite the river not more than a quarter mile away was a similar Russian fortress.

We alighted and soon found ourselves surrounded and rubbing elbows with the Tadjik townsmen of the colorful and picturesque little village. A small, open-stall bazaar was the center of attraction, displaying dried fruits, nuts and a variety of fresh vegetables. We obtained a generous supply for our pantry. The bazaar even boasted a bird market, quite in evidence by the chirping of songsters and the screeching of some larger varieties confined in willow cages. It was market day and the bazaar hummed with conversation of local tribesmen who had assembled for the important weekly event, showing off their handsome striped chapons while spreading the latest village gossip. We joined in with them; one asked, through our linguist, if we were from Faizabad or Kunduz (apparently he had never been that far away). When told that we were from America, he shook his turbaned head in the sort of bewilderment usually manifested by Afghan villagers when confronted with a geographical location beyond their homeland.

We were abruptly interrupted by the approach of a tall, stately gentleman attired in a beautifully embroidered wool chapon and cap. He had come to inspect our official permits to enter the Wakhan Corridor and proceed onward to the Great Pamir. We were impressed by the apparent importance of the gentleman as we were informed that he held the title of Aksakal or Governor of the Province of Ishkashim and commander of the small Afghan garrison on the Soviet Frontier. Our liaison officer arranged for us to photograph him, his small son, and a group of tribesmen who stood nearby. This operation seemed to amuse them and they were as willing to please as we were eager to photograph. We posed them in groups of Tadjiks and Uzbeks after questioning them as to their ethnological classification. I mused that had we

brought a Polaroid camera, we could have created a sensation amongst our newly acquired friends.

Departing Ishkashim's pleasant flower gardens and shady tree-lined lanes, we drew up to the left bank of the historic Oxus where it flowed swiftly around what is termed the Great Bend. It is through this point that the turbulent waters are directed northward to join the Shakhdara and Surkh-ab, two important tributaries of the Oxus. We were then on the frontier that forms the common boundary of Soviet and Afghan Turkestan. A Russian garrison stood out in bold relief only a few hundred yards distant across the river. In Ishkashim we were informed that we would be watched by Soviet sentinels as we passed along the frontier all the way to Qala Panja, some eighty miles to the east. According to our driver, we were being watched through high-powered binoculars by observers in their hideouts on the Soviet side.

Marco Polo at this point records in his journal the following observations about the surroundings and its inhabitants: "They are excellent archers and much given to the chase; indeed most of them are dependent for clothing on the skins of beasts, for stuffs are very dear amongst them. The great ladies, however, are arrayed in stuffs and I will tell you the style of their dress. They all wear drawers made of cotton cloth and into the making of these some will put sixty, eighty or even a hundred ells of stuff. This they do to make themselves look large in the hips, for the men of those parts think that to be a great beauty in a woman." We failed to notice this attraction in any of the women of Badakshan nor Wakhan, so apparently the fashion no longer prevails. Perhaps the menfolk now prefer to gaze upon a slimmer, less hippy figure. I have seen women in this style of pantaloons, filled up with Marco's so-called "stuffs," far away in the Khyber, which indicates that the custom may still persist.

According to Marco's recordings, and verified by several of our native bearers, we were now not far from the location of the ruby mines in which those valuable gems known as Balas rubies are mined. By all accounts they are the finest in the world. In Marco's time, the mining of the rubies was controlled by the king; they were produced only for his account. No one dared dig for them on pain of forfeiture of life. It is reported that the gems are still mined, but no one seemed to know if the stones eventually reach a marketplace. Not far to the south of Zebak the valuable semi-precious gemstone lapis-lazuli is mined, some of it finding a market in the bazaars of Kunduz, Mazari-i Sharif and Kabul.

We were now jeeping along over a stony path well inside the confines of the Wakhan Corridor. Massive canyon walls of stone rose skyward on both sides of the river. To the south towered the glacier riven crags of the Hindu Kush, while across to the north, huge buttresses supporting 20,000 foot heights formed the south boundary of Pamir, our destination in Afghan Turkestan.

The Wakhan Corridor extends for more than a hundred miles eastward and terminates at the Chinese frontier at the westernmost boundary of Sinkiang. The history of Wakhan's boundary between Afghanistan and Soviet Russia dates back to the year 1872 and the famous Granville-Gortschakoff agreement, which delineates the common frontier. It was agreed that the boundary would follow the course of the Ab-i Panja (Oxus) from Sarikul (Victoria Lake) in the Pamirs near our farthest destination, all the way to the junction of the Oxus and Koksha Rivers north of Kunduz. In 1895, a convention between the British and the Soviets was held in the inhospitable Pamirs. It settled the boundary dispute in the Pamirs except for that part on the eastern front abutting Chinese Turkestan. This area has never been officially settled.

35 **Our Movements Closely Watched by Soviet Cossacks**

Stone pylons placed at regular intervals along the river's course drew our attention and made us aware of the strip of no man's land that was marked by these monuments. No Afghan nor foreigner is permitted to pass beyond this border. The same restriction exists on the Soviet side of the river. Fierce skirmishes and bloodshed occurred at frequent intervals along this frontier before the corridor separated the hostile natives.

Across the river we spotted armed cossacks in a tower watching our movement through field glasses. A Russian jeep kept abreast of us for several miles. Pir Mohamed speculated that they had seen us snapping a picture some distance back and were on the alert to observe what we were up to. Care was taken to keep our photographic equipment out of sight.

Mountain Tadjiks and a few Uzbegs are the two ethnic divisions of races native to the Wakhan Corridor. They commonly reside on both sides of the Oxus. However, a number of Kirghis dwell in the Pamir Steppe in the eastern extremity of the corridor. Since the time of the demarcation nearly one hundred years ago, the strip of no man's land along the river has kept the separate ethnic groups apart, never to mingle with their kin—and able to see each other only occasionally across the distance of the stream.

36 **We Enter an Important Wakhan Hamlet**

Toward evening there appeared on the horizon all the marks of a settlement—tall poplar trees, smoke from cooking fires and the sound of belled animals. At dusk the huts of the village of Khandut came into view. Barking dogs greeted us as we drove up to the compound of the village headman. Two rows of stone, flat-roofed dwellings about a quarter mile in length formed the little livestock and farming center of Khandut in the Wakhan Corridor. The inhabitants, known as Wakhis, appeared to be of mountain Tadjik background. The Hindu Kush Range rose in the southern sky with several peaks of the 24,000-foot class standing out in brilliant sunlight high above the gray dusk of oncoming evening. Every ravine discharging its icy stream onto the broad valley floor and into the River Oxus was a tongue of pure white ice that carved its way slowly down the mountainside—at last becoming a milky stream at a lower altitude.

The temperature was falling rapidly as we arrived. An icy breeze sent us scurrying for shelter and the warmth of a fire that had already been prepared for our arrival in one of the stone buildings near the center of the community. Passing through a low, five-foot doorway brought us into a wide hallway. Along the outer wall three glowing fires burned brightly. Iron stewpots that hung from the beams above two of them contained part of our dinner—a pilau of rice, mutton and vegetables. The aroma sharpened our appetites for what turned out to be a splendid hot supper. One of the village natives sat squatting near the third fire patting out chappattys (flat bread) and roasting them on a sheet of fiery hot iron.

With Pir Mohamed acting as our linguist, we learned that the isolated little settlement is a trading center for natives and nomads of the upper Wakhan Corridor during the winter season. When the river Ab-i-Panja (Oxus) freezes over, it becomes a frozen highway for Bactrian camel trains and nomads along with their flocks of sheep and goats. I was curious as to the reason for using the icy surface of the river for travel rather than the ancient trail across "the roof of the world," a branch of the famous Silk Road from China to the West across the Pamir Steppe. Our host, the village headman, explained that the

A rare photo of the famous Kirghese tribal chief, Rahman Kul, the Khan of the Kirghese tribal nomads of the Pamir residing in Gilgit, Pakistan since the invasion of the Soviet army into Afghanistan. Several hundred of his tribe with their herds of yak and goat have followed him. We spent an hour chatting with him through our interpreter and good friend, Shah Khan, as to his future plans—he alluded to Alaska and is understood to be living in Turkey now.
 Photo by Kenneth B. Noack, Jr.



icebound river, while fraught with danger, was a much safer and more direct route. He spoke up with alacrity, "Twice each winter Khandut becomes the center of much excitement for a few days—we make tamasha (festival) and our good friend Rahman Kul comes from Bozai-Gombaz to trade." Rahman Kul, a Kirghis tribal chief from the little Pamir close to the Chinese Sinkiang frontier nearly one hundred miles away, comes over the frozen Ab-i-Pannja (Oxus River) with his Bactrian camel train and flocks. Tea, sugar, grains, cloth and salt are the items he needs. He will trade mutton and hides. We were told that the bargaining will last several days.

We arose early next morning while our cook was preparing breakfast at the far end of our quarters, over glowing coals left from last night's roaring fires. As I gazed northeast across the river toward Soviet Turkestan, 23,000-foot Karl Marx peak caught the first rays of sunlight. It was an amazing spectacle.

Our objective for that day was Qala Panja, the end of the road as far as vehicles could go and the point of transfer of bags and supplies to the backs of horses. While my attention was directed to the brilliant array of lofty ice-coated peaks and glacial flows ahead as we drove out of Khandut, there seemed to be some concern amongst the bearers as to the possibility of fording one of the streams that flowed from a large glacier of the Hindu Kush a short distance ahead. As the sun rises and beats down on the icy glacial tongues, melting increases, and by midday the depth of water becomes too great for safe crossing, even with a four-wheel-drive vehicle such as ours.

Arriving at the crossing we found the icy water turbulent and rising rapidly. But our driver did not seem concerned. He shifted into four-wheel-drive and plunged into the stream, the water coming up nearly to the floorboard. Providence was on our side

for all three of our vehicles made it through without mishap. For the next several miles there was either no road at all or only a miserable track leading ahead through the Wakhan toward Qala Panja.

37 **An Ancient Fortress Remains Intact at a Strategic Frontier**

We were now well beyond the bustle of civilization. Even the humble settlement of Khandut lay several miles behind. We met no camel caravans, carts, shepherds with their flocks—nothing but the occasional native of Wakhan afoot, the birdlife in the heavy copse along the river, a marmot, or the infrequent track of some larger beast.

A most picturesque stone Mazar (tomb of a Musselman) stood beside our path at the foot of a steep escarpment. We stopped briefly to pay our respects at the ancient shrine and observed a Muslim devotee who kneeled with head to the ground over his small prayer rug, facing Mecca, performing his morning orisons. The worn threshold at the entrance to the shrine gave evidence of the many pious devotees of Islam who had lingered therein. The low profile of Qala Panja Fortress at last came into view in the distance as we rose to an elevation of nearly ten thousand feet. Again, a grove of brilliant autumn-colored foliage revealed the presence of primitive dwellings and farmsteads in this isolated narrow corridor of Afghan's Northeast Frontier. The southwestern buttress of the Great Pamir stood out supremely in the near distance between the two principal sources of the River Oxus. It was a magnificent, immense spectacle. This was our first glimpse of the lonely heights that Hayward was destined to explore had he lived. Our coveted goal lay beyond them.

Entering the confines of the settlement of Qala Panja, we passed a stone wall surrounding the compound of an important Wakhan native whose political status entitled him to the sprawling dwelling that stood behind the wall. A little farther on stood the ancient citadel and garrison headquarters. Situated close by was a comfortable wood dwelling, the remote lodge of his majesty, the King of Afghanistan. The lodge was reserved for the king's shelter and comfort during his occasional visits to Wakhan. The ancient fortress with its six-foot-thick stone and mud walls provides shelter and protection for the Afghan frontier guards. The outer walls are built with loop holes and turrets for observation and, if necessary, for the firing of guns. I was told that the loopholes were used in ages past by archers.



A native Afghan maid tends her cows in a lush spot along a stream as she passes a small ancient mosque.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



Afghan bearers carrying fuel for kitchen fires within the five-foot-thick walls of this ancient fortress of Qala Panja on the south bank of the Oxus River. The north bank of the Oxus is in Soviet territory. Marco Polo was reported to have stopped over here en route to Cathay, China.

Photo by Edward F. Noack

The massive fortress and its surroundings reminded me of a scene from the Arabian Nights.

Qala Panja provided safe haven for the native residents and acted as a barrier to intruders treading on the Oxus Valley trail from China's Sinkiang Province to the West. The citadel continues to serve this purpose. Reflecting over days long past, I stood gazing at the surroundings and imagined I could see the warning fires lit on the fortress tower, and hear the muted sound of drums behind the walls calling the sentries to arms as the invaders drew near. Then would come the blare of trumpets as the warriors sallied forth to meet the enemy. That scene has long since disappeared, but the fortress still remains to remind the occasional wayfarer of a turbulent past. My careful observation of construction details of the ancient fortress revealed that the greatest number of loopholes were placed on the walls facing land. An attacking enemy would have to approach over land since the Oxus River flows close by the opposite side. Its presence would be a formidable barrier.

The commander of the fortress stepped forth to greet us and announce that he was having a late lunch prepared for us over the kitchen fires within. Several ponies were being readied for the loads they were to carry during the next two days on our trail to Sargaz and Baba Tanji some twenty miles away. These villages were the last habitation we would encounter in the Wakhan Corridor before taking off for the Great Pamir over Sargas Pass.

Directly across the river from Qala Panja, the Soviets occupied a fortress which appeared to be of more recent construction. We had noticed several Soviet settlements since leaving Ishkashim, some with sentry-occupied towers.

A short distance upstream from Qala Panja, two of the principal sources of the River Oxus or Amu Daria join in a jungle of camelthorn, willow and other kinds of copse. The Pamir River branch has its source in Lake Victoria (Sirikol) seventy miles to the northeast while the Wakhan branch rises in the glaciers of the Little Pamir to the east of Great Pamir. Captain Wood, a British explorer, set out to discover the source of the Oxus in 1838. He was the first Englishman to travel through the Wakhan Corridor to Qala Panja at the confluence of the two principal sources. In mid-winter, he decided that the Pamir fork was larger. He followed that branch until finally arriving at his goal. There he made the following statement: "After quitting the surface of the river, we traveled about an hour along its right bank and then ascended a low hill which apparently bounded the valley to the eastward; on surmounting this, at five o'clock in the afternoon of the 19th of February, 1838, we stood, to use a native expression, upon the Bam-i-Duniah or Roof of the World, while before us lay stretched a noble but frozen sheet of water from whose western end issued the infant River of the Oxus—its elevation, measured by the temperature of boiling water, is 15,600 feet above sea level. This, then, is the position of the

sources of this celebrated river, which, after a course of upwards of a thousand miles in a direction generally northwest, falls into the southern end of the sea of Aral." But Captain Wood was mistaken in his assumption that the Pamir branch was the principal source of the Oxus. After further exploration, the Wakhan or Ab-i-Panja fork was rightfully identified as the true source. Our course for the next two days would follow along the Oxus left bank.

Several hours had passed since our breakfast. We were anxious to mount our ponies and be on our way when several of our bearers appeared with trays of welcome food—rice, mutton and vegetable pilaf, fruit and stacks of chappattys. We dined on the open veranda of his majesty's bungalow overlooking the Caravanserai. The residence and compound of the village headman and the fortress surrounded us. The steep canyon walls across the river in Soviet Turkestan obstructed our view of the glaciated heights we were destined to see upon our arrival in the Great Pamir.

The site of Qala Panja marks a geographical point of uncertainty among historians as to Marco Polo's route across the Pamirs. According to his journal, we had followed in his footsteps for the last two hundred miles. But at this point, historians seem to be confused as to which branch of the Oxus Marco followed. Colonel Henry Yule, renowned authority on Polo's travels, wrote, "There is nothing, absolutely to decide whether Marco's route from Wakhan passed by Wood's Lake (Lake Victoria) or by the more southerly branch of the Oxus in Pamir Kul." Either of these routes would have eventually put Marco at Tashqurgan in Sarikol, located eighty miles to the east of where we stood. So, regardless of which route Marco Polo used, we would be no more than a few miles off his original course. Sir Aurel Stein, the celebrated British archeologist who spent nearly forty years of his life in explorations in Central Asia, seems to favor Marco Polo following the Pamir River branch to Lake Victoria. It is on that watershed that one of our camps in the Great Pamir would be.

Penetrating deeper into the Wakhan, we were astonished at the immense scale of the canyon walls and the towering icy heights of the Hindu Kush and Pamirs. The few agrarian inhabitants, mostly of Tadjik background, dwell in a land of harsh splendor. Existence in the hostile environment of Wakhan centers around abundant water, a few plots of fertile soil for crops, vast areas of grazing lands. A native's life is one of toil and struggle.

The village Beg or headman came to bid us a warm farewell and wish us success on our Pamir adventure. But he could not converse with us nor we with him since he spoke only his native Persian tongue and a few words of Ottoman Turkish. But through our native linguist bearer, I asked him about the ruins of an ancient stone building I had discovered nearby. He

explained that the building had been erected in ancient days as a watch-tower to warn the surrounding residents of approaching unfriendly tribes pressing down from the east. A sentry was probably on watch day and night to alert the populace of pending danger. As I chatted with that robust native official I had no inkling that I would find him lying prostrate on his charpoy only three weeks later, burning with fever and several days distant from medical assistance. We discovered on our return through Qala Panja he was delirious and breathing heavily. When his bearer asked me for help, I told my linguist to inform the man that I was not a medical doctor. Still, I could see that the official had a high fever and probable infection. I handed my bearer twelve tetracycline capsules, the strongest medicine in my kit, with instructions as to their use. I hoped and prayed that it would be the proper medicine. Next morning (and six tetracycline capsules later) we were glowingly told that the official's temperature was almost normal and that recovery was apparently on the way. I told his bearers to keep him in bed for at least three days and have him use all the remaining tetracycline pills. Then I was besieged by the natives for more of the "magic pills." Needless to say, my supply of tetracycline was nearly exhausted. As I handed the capsules to the fortress commander, I was careful to insist that the magic medicine be used only in alarming emergencies.

38

Jeep Road Gives Way to Rugged Horse and Camel Trail

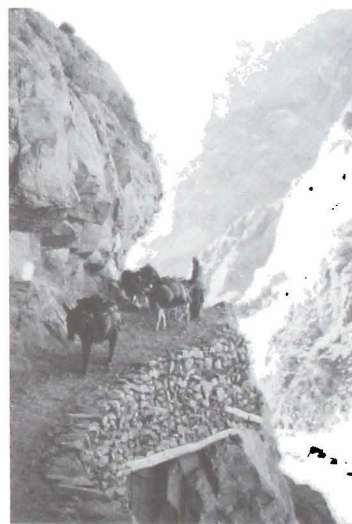
We mounted our ponies not far from the garrison compound at the very end of the jeep road. We were up against a steep bluff that seemed to defy footing even for a horse. After waiting for all twelve Badakshi ponies to be loaded with our bags and supplies, a native guide who had joined our bearers led us around a bluff to a steep trail that ascended over alternate patches of grass and shale to a well-used animal track. This track wound along the canyon wall ahead for miles. Suddenly we came to a switchback that dropped off steeply toward the river where the trail disappeared around a precipice. We found to our dismay that a gallery had been constructed on the cliffside with pegs, timber props and knee braces. It had been topped with poles and brush, and overlaid with shale. It clung to the canyon side above the river in a most precarious fashion. This structure provided the support for our trail. I dismounted and walked on ahead until I reached a gravel bar on the river. Looking back, I was startled to see that the gallery had been secured with not only props and



Our still cantilevered trail along the Oxus River between Gala Panja and Baba Tanja. Two more days of hazardous travel to our destination before embarking upon the Great Pamir. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

braces, but with wooden pegs that had been driven into crevices in the rock wall. That night I lay awake and pondered the possibility of termites existing in the Wakhan. If they did, I wondered how long it would take them to devour the pegs which were apparently the sole support of the structure above us.

After all members of our party had survived the ordeal and were accounted for, I turned in the opposite direction and saw the distant outline of several small stone buildings surrounded by brilliantly-colored autumn foliage. It appeared to be a farmstead of a Wakhi family. Dark gray clouds streaked across an angry sky. I was sure I felt a snowflake mixed with the light rain that fell against my cheek. It seemed to be the harbinger of a snowstorm that would settle upon us before nightfall. Pir Mohamed had galloped on ahead toward the village to arrange supper, shelter, and horsefeed for our livestock. A snow squall had set in, so we pulled our storm gear over our goose-down jackets. The only cheerful sight before us was an occasional glimpse of shimmering autumn foliage through a thin veil of snowflakes. At dusk, we arrived at a small farming and livestock settlement consisting of several sprawling stone and mud huts that huddled together in the center of a well-terraced talus slope. The settlement was at the base of a glacial nullah (chasm) of the Hindu Kush Range. It was heartening to arrive at that pretty little compound of three or four friendly families and accept their



We finally reach a safer track in the Gorge of the Hunza River near Chault.

Photo by Edward F. Noack

warm hospitality. A large pot of hot tea was brought to us on the trail by a village elder. We welcomed the dry shelter and the warmth from the villagers' kitchen fires. Not only were we comfortably accommodated in dry and warm quarters, but our exhausted ponies were led under cover with the natives' livestock and fed a sizable ration of newly-harvested wheat straw.

The common Wakhan farm compound in these remote parts has a stone-walled enclosure adjacent to the dwelling for confining livestock after nightfall as protection against predators, principally wolves. But during frigid winter nights the livestock is driven into covered stalls built against the dwelling walls. With the poorer families, the living room is shared during bleak nights by humans and animals alike. While I never slept in the same room as the family livestock, I was awakened before dawn one morning by the crowing of a rooster that had perched on a beam. His call was followed by the cackling of hens who flew from their roosts above me to reach a straw pile on the ground. There they scratched around for their breakfast.

To pass away the time while awaiting our supper, we huddled close to the blazing coals of the cooking fires. Conversation amongst the bearers reached a lively pitch. It was quite important that our nightly stops provide companionship and rest for our bearers so that their thoughts would not dwell on their distant homes and kinfolk. The daily toil required to put ourselves and supplies safely in the Pamirs had to be rewarded with not only meager wages, but by some form of recreation. Mingling with the few Wakhan natives and chatting until late hours of the night seemed to keep the bearers in high spirits.

As moderate snowfall settled in for the night, we were thankful that adequate shelter and warm food had been reached before darkness forced us to pitch the tents at trailside. The savory fumes of mutton strips being roasted on skewers over red-hot coals permeated the air and reminded us that we had not eaten for nearly seven hours. The customary rice and vegetable pilaf and hot chappattys were brought up along with tempting strips of mutton. It was a most adequate supper for hungry, tired wayfarers.

Morning broke clear and cold with the ground covered with a few inches of powdery snow. It was a relief to find that our horses were packed and ready for the day's double stage all the way to Sargaz and Baba Tanji, where we would lay over for two days before beginning our upward climb to Sargaz Pass and our destination in the Great Pamir. It is surprising to see how quickly two bearers with a piece of rope and a square hitch can pack a cumbersome load on a horse. As we left the little farm settlement, a great icefall at the terminal of the Hindu Kush glacier presented an Arctic-like scene. Across the river, the stony north wall of the canyon rose seven thousand feet to the southern rim of the Great Pamir, reminding us that three days

hence we would be riding our yaks amongst those icebound peaks on the way to our encampment.

The Wakhan branch of the Oxus flows unhurriedly like a colossal snake over a stony bed nearly a mile wide in places, sometimes separating into as many as four different streams as the valley widens. Along the banks and on land between the water courses, there is jungle of camelthorn, tamarisk, and salix. Clusters of vermillion-colored berries covered the branches of the copse as we passed. The golden yellow of willow added brilliant color above the deep blue water of the Oxus. Our bearers told us that foxes, rabbits, wild boars, and even an occasional leopard abound in the jungle. Sometimes, during the bleak winter months, the Asian snow leopard and Siberian wolf invade the farming areas from heights above to prey on the livestock. Those Wakhis who raise cattle, sheep and goats keep large mastiff-like dogs to guard their domestic livestock day and night. Several coveys of chikkors (partridges) were flushed from the copse near the river bank as we rode along but it was not until we reached an elevation of around 16,000 feet that we found the Ram Chikkor (Himalayan Snow Cock), a giant partridge that can sometimes weigh eight pounds. Ours provided a delectable meal for a half dozen hungry wayfarers.

Occasionally we passed the ruins of ancient stone structures that had probably served as watch towers at a strategic vantage point on this historic ancient trail.

Our Afghan Wakhi bearers informed us that there was a more direct way to approach our yurt camp in the Pamir by crossing the river several miles west of where we first mounted our ponies. The route follows the nomad trail along the left bank of the Pamir River for a short distance before striking up a side valley eastward into the heights of Pamir. The route would have saved a full day travel. But we were told that the sentries on the Russian frontier objected to the presence of foreigners, even though the trail is entirely on Afghan soil. As remote as the area is from civilization, the Soviet-Afghan frontier along the Oxus and its headwater tributaries is vigilantly guarded by sentries on both sides of the river. As we rounded a projecting bend in the river which had been obstructing our view, we saw the telltale huts and terraces of another small settlement three or four miles ahead. The bearers had been in high spirits for some time; that alone should have told us that we were approaching friendly Wakhis. We were nearing our immediate objective and two-day stopover, the isolated community of Sargaz and Baba Tanji—the home and headquarters of the community headman, Ali Gohar Sheikh, who would be our native guide into the little-known wilds of Great Pamir. An hour later we dismounted and led our ponies down a stony defile. The milky waters of the turbulent Ab-i-Panja (Oxus) rushed by with unusual ferocity. A primitive but skillfully designed cantilever bridge spanned the stream to provide access to the tiny plantation of Sargaz. We



*One of our yaks loaded with willow fire wood from the banks of the Pamir River several thousand feet below one of our camps. Dried yak dung is the only limited source of fuel in the Pamirs.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

heard from the natives who built the timber structure that it is the only one spanning the river for over a hundred miles. But it is capable of bearing the weight of two or three horses. We crossed the shaky structure on foot, single file, the ponies following behind.

39 Arrival at Sargaz to Prepare for Pamir Ascent



A native Wakhan farmer ready for his day's labor of pitching hay. His homemade pitchfork is made from the branch of a willow tree.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

Sargaz is a picturesque little community of neatly terraced farmsteads lying astride a large talus delta which had been formed over the centuries by a substantial glacier-fed stream. Some thirty or forty families scattered along the Ab-i-Panja between Sargaz and Baba Tanji make up the population of Wakhis in this almost unknown and extremely isolated region. Their livelihood depends upon the outcome of whatever crops they can wrest from the little productive soil that is available. A few of the pastoral families join the nomadic tribes of the Pamirs each spring to tend their flocks on the rich pastures until heavy snows and arctic-like temperatures drive them homeward again in the autumn.

Back on our ponies, we wound our way up over terrace after terrace of golden-colored grain, ripe and ready for harvest. Our ears caught a grinding sound coming from within a small stone hut. Closer inspection revealed the village miller busily engaged in the operation of two millstones, grinding the day's accumulation of the wheat harvest into flour. The crude little mill was operated by a stream of water directed against paddles fitted into the lower end of a shaft which, in turn, rotated a homemade millstone upon a second stationery stone. The grain was fed through a small hole in the upper unit. Though antiquated, the contraption produced a fine grade of flour not unlike the sort we purchase at the supermarket.

Several villagers met us with warm greetings, apparently having been informed of our imminent arrival. We were welcomed to the home of Ali Gohar Sheikh, who had left for the Pamir camp to prepare for our arrival. As the Aksakal (headman) of the community, Ali Gohar enjoyed a dwelling that is a spacious and imposing structure for these parts, with high stone walls enclosing a compound of living quarters, stables for ponies and yaks, and corrals to confine them. Beyond his local duties, he holds an important official appointment as warden over the vast and lonely area of Great Pamir. We felt fortunate to have obtained the services of this competent leader to guide us

in the frozen wilds of Pamir. Additionally, we learned that our linguist and head bearer from Sargaz onward would be a highly respected Afghan guide, well acquainted with the isolated mountain fastnesses of Hindu Kush and Pamir. From what we could gather from our bearers, we would rest for two days at Sargaz and Baba Tanji while our supplies and animal transport were made ready for the steep upward climb of seven thousand feet to Sargaz Pass and the Great Pamir. Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir were expecting us at a herder's yurt camp five miles beyond the pass.

The kingdom of Afghanistan has laid aside all of the Great Pamir that is within its boundaries as a refuge for the remaining herds of *Ovis Poli* (Marco Polo Wild Sheep) and ibex. The former is reputed to be the rarest and most prized of all big game trophies. At the discretion of His Majesty, the King of Afghanistan, and by special permission from the government, a limited number of permits are occasionally granted to cull the herds of the older animals and improve the stock. After several years of effort on my part and that of my official friends, Afghan officials notified me that they would permit us to travel through the Wakhan Corridor and onto the Pamir to hunt and secure one fully matured Marco Polo wild sheep. The official date set for arrival in Kabul was nearly two years after that notification was received.

Entering Ali Gohar's dwelling, we were led into a spacious stone-walled vestibule and passageway which appeared to be used for storage and from which several other rooms opened. One of these seemed to be a master bedroom, but we later found it to be the quarters reserved for passing natives on their toilsome travels over the Wakhan trail. Clean and comfortable, the room was assigned to us for the duration of our stay in Sargaz. The usual colorful felt rugs and a fine quality oriental carpet added cheerfulness as coverings upon the clay floors and sleeping decks. Regardless of the primitive construction of these Wakhi dwellings and the rudeness of the furnishings, one can always find something to cheer the spirits and gladden the heart.

Re-entering the passageway and glancing through a doorway, we discovered a huge family room with massive stone walls and heavy adzed timbers to support the roof and hold heavy iron cauldrons. As we entered, it was apparent that our dinner was being prepared by several womenfolk. The ladies were busily engaged in tending the victuals being cooked over several beds of glowing coals of dried yak dung. Smoke escaped through an opening in the roof directly above the cooking area, while light entered through the same opening. The room was bright and near-smokeless. The time of day could be determined by shadows cast on the floor during fair weather. Marks were scratched on the planks to indicate the hours of the day. In addition, the seasons were indicated by similar shadow de-

marcations on a post. Carved notches helped keep track of both time and season, a sort of sundial device. This system takes the place of the clock and the calendar, rare luxuries in these faraway parts, and unknown items even in the bazaar of Ishkashim.

We lived with these Mountain Tadjik natives in their mud and stone huts, existed as they did, ate their food, and became their staunch friends. If our linguist bearer was away, we got along with them with motioning with our hands and through facial expression. At times it was a hopeless struggle; sometimes we received a smile when it should have been a scowl, and vice versa. But they seemed to thoroughly enjoy us as we did them. When we departed for the Pamirs, they followed in our yak tracks well beyond the limits of their compound, waving until we were all out of sight.

It was comforting to know that our native hosts throughout the Wakhan corridor were eager to accommodate us by providing the very best food and lodgings available in their bleak domain. This attribute seems to have impressed the Polos in their travels throughout this and other parts of Turkestan. Their journals record the following at the Province of Camul near the Great Desert of Lop: "The people are all idolators. They live by the fruits of the earth which they have in plenty and dispose of to travelers. And it is the truth that if a foreigner comes to the house of one of these people to lodge, the host is delighted and desires his wife to put herself entirely at the guest's disposal whilst he himself gets out of the way and comes back no more until the stranger shall have departed. The husband has no shame in the matter but considers it an honor."

Among the variety of supplies that had been stacked in the vestibule ready to be loaded onto our yaks, one item that caught my eye was several cartons of Army C-rations, included for our lunches while we explored and hunted in the Pamirs. I thought that I had seen the last of C-rations when I served in the Army during World War I. But after fifty-seven years they caught up with me again. I always found the several varieties of canned C-rations to taste alike—there seemed to be little difference between canned corned beef and chicken.

A small lad, the son of a Sargaz farmer, came hobbling up to us as we were sunning ourselves on the veranda. He seemed quite timid and even somewhat fearful as he wordlessly pointed to a filthy bandage around the calf of his swollen leg. Upon removing the bandage and laying bare a severe and painful-looking wound, he looked up at me, pleading with his eyes that something be done about it. As I examined the badly infected wound, our linguist explained that the boy had injured the leg on a sharp stick of wood several days before and that nothing more than the crude bandage had been applied. Infection had set in and formed a pocket in the flesh the size of a large cherry. It was filled with pus. The infection seemed to be spreading since

the surrounding parts were badly inflamed. Still, there was no evidence of fever. The nearest medical clinic administered by a pharmacist was at least four days away. Several villagers had gathered around to watch the magic cure to be performed by strange foreign sahibs. The veranda began to take on the appearance of a field hospital. It was imperative that the ugly-looking wound be cleaned out without delay, so Ken and I disinfected the cavity with a cotton swab and alcohol from my medical kit. Then the wound was packed with antibiotic jelly and bandaged with sterile pads of gauze. The boy was handed a supply of the jelly with pads and gauze, and told to instruct his parents to keep the wound clean with bandages and repack it every day. Aspirin and penicillin tablets were also given to him, along with instructions for their use. Though he left with a gratifying smile, the outcome of his condition could not be predicted. He was fine when we returned two weeks later, but he would carry a deep scar for life.

A spectacular scene unfolded before us to the southeast just before sundown. We gazed over terraces of newly harvested golden grain sloping toward the fast-flowing waters of the upper Oxus to the 23,000-foot icebound summit of Baba Tanji (grandfather mountain), a sentinel that later became our guiding landmark on our return to Sargaz. The mountain glowed in the approaching sunset. Across the river on the rocky canyon side a narrow trail winds eastward to the Chinese Sinkiang Frontier some seventy miles away. The trail is an historical trade route that even now accommodates camels and donkeys carrying the commodities of the Orient and Occident to their respective markets. Its use has dwindled to infrequent travel required by those natives residing within the Wakhan Corridor and the wandering nomads of the Pamir Steppe.

Of even greater historical importance is the nearby junction of an ancient trail that was crossed by the famous Chinese General Kao Hsien-chih in 747 A.D. His remarkable expedition crossed the Pamir within view of where I stood, leading a fully equipped military force of 10,000 that ousted the Tibetans from the upper Oxus basin and from India's Northwest Frontier Province.

As I wandered along the bank of the river I came upon an elderly matron with deeply furrowed facial wrinkles, telltale evidence of advanced age and an arduous existence. But the twinkle in her deep-set eyes betrayed her keen curiosity as she gazed upon one of the few foreigners she had ever seen. I asked my native bearer, who spoke her tongue, to inquire as to the woman's birth date. I was startled as well as amused by her answer. "I was too young to remember," she said. Then I instructed the bearer to ask the woman her age. "I can ride a yak," she replied. "I sometimes help in the harvest. I tend my small flock of goats." I smiled as I reflected her prompt answers; they were direct, intelligent and typical of her individual estimate of age. As I had observed in other remote parts of

Afghanistan and the Northwest Province of Pakistan, almost none of the elders had any record or memory of their age. Later, on our return to Sargaz, I suggested to Ali Gohar that records of age be kept by cutting one notch each year on a timber for each member of the family.

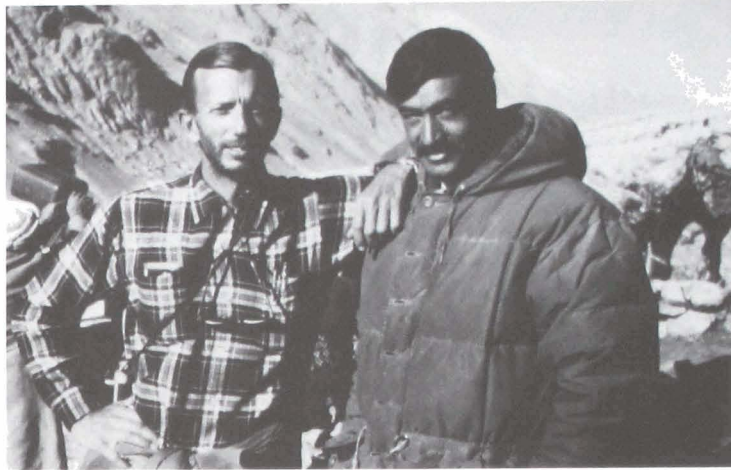
At a splendid dinner served in our warm quarters by lamplight, we learned that hot springs not far from Sargaz emitted not only heat and vapors, but sufficient warm water for a hot bath. Villagers had constructed a stone bath house around the spring and pool to contain ample hot water for community bathing. However, I understood that it was used more as a spa for restoration of bodily health and vigor than as a place of cleanliness. Nevertheless, it was decided that since our last bath had been five days earlier, we were due to test both the bathing and therapeutic properties of the spring. It would be our last chance for at least two weeks since the streams of the Pamir are either frozen solid or too frigid for bathing during the winter season.

Our brief stopover in Sargaz, while too short for more than a cursory survey of the surroundings and inhabitants, revealed the village to be an interesting mix of religion (Islam prevails), domestic culture, racial characteristics and language. Sir Aurel Stein, the distinguished ethnologist who spent most of his life exploring Central Asia, claims the Oxus basin and the Pamir valleys are the center of the origin of the Aryan race. In a land so far removed from the western world and yet so near the frontier of China, it was surprising to find many Wakhis who had typically western European characteristics—light complexions, some with blue eyes and blonde hair, fine facial features. A few had the handsome appearance of a Flemish country gentleman.

Painstaking construction of crude but well-planned and cold-resistant mud and stone dwellings with reinforcing timber poles gave proof of the resourcefulness and patience of these hardy people. To survive under the rigors of sub-zero winters and to successfully raise sufficient crops to nourish themselves at 10,000 feet altitude requires not only robust bodies but a high order of intelligence.

When I returned to Ali Gohar's veranda, my attention was unexpectedly directed toward moving objects that approached from far up on the canyon side. The natives at work in the fields apparently had discovered this bit of excitement, for they were chatting away as though some important visitors were about to arrive. As the objects drew closer, the profiles of men on the backs of yaks could be made out through our binoculars. But it was not until one of our bearers came up to us that we learned the identity of the visitors. As we had hoped, it was our Afghan leader Teheri and a number of bearers returning from the Pamir where they had prepared camp for our arrival upon the Bam-i-Duniah (roof of the world). Our spirits rose at the sight of our yaks and men winding their way down the steep mountainside

*Ken with one of our guides, Teheri, upon his return from one of our Pamir camps.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



in numbers sufficient to bear our supplies and equipment to our destination.

Teheri dismounted his shaggy yak and shook our hands with warm formality. He was a tall, handsome, well-spoken Afghan native with typical Aryan features. He addressed us in skillful English. He inspired confidence instantly. His eyes, however, required treatment for snow-blindness. The best we could do was to supply him with a spare pair of dark snow glasses and bathe his eyes with warm water and boric acid. By sundown he showed signs of recovery. He was able to look after the animals and the moving of supplies to a convenient location for early morning loading onto the yaks and to care for the numerous details associated with our transport.

Teheri proved to be an encyclopedia of knowledge about the Wakhan. We kept him occupied in conversation about the area's geography and inhabitants, and about the antiquarian ruins we had passed along the Oxus. Authentic history of Central Asia and particularly Afghanistan goes back to the era of Alexander The Great. Many of the past rulers of the region pronounced themselves descendants of Iskander (Alexander). Many of the present rulers of the States of the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram Mountains cling to the same conviction.

Teheri, Sifat Mir and Ali Gohar, our expedition leaders, left the main Pamir encampment intending to meet us at Sargaz upon our arrival. En route they stopped at a nomad's camp in one of the Pamir valleys where they spent the night. There were reports amongst the natives that a band of the rare Marco Polo Sheep had been seen high up on the snowbound ridge not far from their camp. Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir decided to investigate the rumor instead of returning to Sargaz to meet us. But Teheri, several bearers, and six yaks were sent on to guide us onto the Great Pamir.

A check of the weather before we retired revealed increasing cloudiness and only a few scattered stars shining through to give some hope of fair weather for our start the next day. From our sleeping bags, we were amused watching our cooks have supper around red hot coals of the kitchen fire and listening to their spirited conversation, not a word of which we understood. Most probably their talk centered on our forthcoming adventure in the Pamir. Even the barnyard chickens roosting above our beds on a rafter cackled with zest as though they expected to accompany us. And they likely will, I reflected, since I knew that one of our bearers would tend the livestock on our journey.

40 **We Depart for Bam-i-Dunya (Roof of the World)**

Before daybreak I was awakened from a deep sleep by the unusual sound of grunting yaks and the tramping of hooves as our beasts of burden were herded to the dwelling's entrance for loading. Soon the voices of bearers shouting strange commands aroused us sufficiently to leave our warm sleeping bags and dress to join in the commotion. We would shortly be on our way to much loftier and more remote parts.

In less than two hours (including time for a warm and hearty breakfast of eggs scrambled with onion, curds, chappattys and tea), we mounted our grunting yaks and rode out of Ali Gohar's compound, through the little settlement, past waving children in their colorful homespun garments, and onto a broad cobblestone wash that had been formed by a small tributary of the Ab-i-Panja. A rough trail carved out of shale zigzagged steeply upward directly ahead to a promontory overlooking a vast stretch of the river valley. It was there I noticed that Ken was on foot far ahead, climbing up and over a steeply inclined escarpment. It was comforting to realize that travel in this kind of terrain is far safer on foot or on the backs of sure-footed yaks than on horseback.

After joining Ken on level ground, we beheld a most spectacular view of the glittering Ab-i-Panja (Oxus) snaking its way along the canyon floor two thousand feet below. The river was enroute to other branches of the mighty Oxus before debouching far ahead onto the plains of Afghanistan and Bukhara. It would ultimately empty into the inland sea of Aral 1400 miles away.

I was apprehensive about the weather. Conditions were beginning to worsen and obstruct our splendid view of the mighty

ramparts of the Hindu Kush directly opposite across the Oxus canyon. A noticeable drop in temperature as we rose in altitude signaled the possibility of snowfall. We gradually penetrated the clouds that gathered around us. Traces of snow from a recent storm began to appear on the ground as we ascended the mountainside. My mind began to drift toward the remarkable geographical area we were rapidly approaching. We were trodding on soil in the very heart of innermost Asia, and before sundown we would climb onto the incredible heights known as the "roof of the world," home of the nomad and the rare and renowned Marco Polo sheep. As I plodded along that bleak mountainside on my trusty yak, I found it hard to believe that after nearly ten years of determined effort, hopes, and frustrations, we were now approaching the goal that had been forcibly denied for a long time by officials in command of the sensitive frontiers involved. Little did I dream only a year earlier that I would soon be following in Marco Polo's footsteps.

We had reached an elevation of slightly over 14,000 feet according to our aneroid. A crystal clear stream cascading down the canyon side had guided us. The stream eventually flowed out onto the terraces of Sargaz hamlet in the form of numerous irrigation courses and millstreams for domestic use before joining the waters of the Ab-i-Panja. Several small frozen lakes and swamps surrounded by grassy meadows and patches of rosethorn enhanced the landscape as we climbed steeply up toward 17,000 foot Sargaz Pass amongst the majestic pinnacles and ice fields of Pamir. Many flowering plants, long since wilted and past their blooming season, appeared in sheltered places. Teheri remarked that the mountainsides were radiant with a profusion of varicolored wildflowers in summer. I noted and identified the Kashmir Blue Gentian, although the specimen I saw had been dried and withered by frost and wind. It was almost identical to the gentian of the California Sierras. The immediate surroundings were spectacular in their enormity—huge overhanging cliffs rose sharply above the stream we were following and tongues of fossil ice left over from the last ice age were beginning to make their appearance in the nullahs (chasms) as we climbed higher.

Presently, dark clouds gathered and snowflakes enveloped the canyon side. Everything was lost to view and I found myself traveling alone. I had been following on foot for some time, leading my yak, while the rest of the party outdistanced me. All was silent except for the hushing crunch of freshly fallen snow beneath my heavy boots. I imagined that I heard the tinkle of bells in the distance. But our yaks did not wear bells. Then the faint sound of calling voices seemed to come from somewhere behind me. Yet our little caravan was far ahead. I got the weird feeling that a mysterious band of Asian robbers was trying to lure me away from my comrades; fortunately, I retained sufficient composure to dismiss such a bizarre assumption.

Nevertheless, mysterious sounds and voices, muted by the heavy screen of snowflakes, persisted and haunted me as I hastened onward toward my companions. Soon the snowfall abated and the angry clouds lifted until far above, on a field of pure white snow and ice. I made out the forms of nine yaks and as many men plodding steeply upward toward a notch in the barrier ridge defining the southern boundary of Great Pamir. My yak bearer had long since gone ahead with his companions, so I trudged along as fast as I could, leading my grunting bovine mount while keeping a sharp eye on those ahead.

It was not long before I caught up with the others and found that they had been anxious as to my whereabouts. I told them I had stopped to don my fur-lined gloves and goosedown storm coat when arctic-like chill overtook me. I was careful to avoid any reference to the spirits that had bewitched me. The incident still lingered in my mind; I recalled the tales of natives in hamlets where I had stopped for the night relating similar experiences of travelers in the deserts and mountains of Central Asia. There was a legend of a lone traveler in the wilds of Kara Kum who heard voices calling his name. He became bewildered, followed the voices and was lured deeper into the desert only to expire from hunger and thirst. Seven hundred years ago, as Marco Polo traveled along the edge of the desert Lop in Sinkiang, he recorded this account in his famous journal: "Beasts there are none; for there is nought for them to eat. But there is a marvelous thing related to this desert, which is that when travelers are on the move by night, and one of them chances to lag behind or fall asleep or the like, when he tries to gain his company again, he will hear spirits talking and will suppose them to be his comrades. Sometimes the spirits will call him by name; and thus shall a traveler oftimes be led astray so that he never finds his party. And in this way, many have perished. (Sometimes the stray travelers will hear it as it were the tramp and hum of a great cavalcade of people away from the real line of road, and taking this to be their company, they will follow the sound; and when day breaks they find that a cheat has been put on them and that they are in an ill plight.) Even in the daytime one hears those spirits talking. And sometimes you shall hear the sound of a variety of musical instruments, and still more commonly, the sound of drums. (Hence in making this journey 'tis customary for travelers to keep close together. All the animals too have bells at their necks so that they cannot easily get astray. And at sleeping time a signal is put up to show the direction of the next march.) So thus it is that the Desert is crossed."

Safely back with my companions, I decided that I had been the victim of that sort of apparition where evil spirits beset the lonely traveler making his way in the wilds of the land. After the brief respite the snow began again. I pulled on my parka and fur mittens and was prepared to oppose the icy blasts that would be encountered at the 17,000-foot pass and beyond in Pamir.

I had lost track of Ken during my lonely climb up the canyon-side and now that I had joined our party, he was still not in sight. I was concerned as to his whereabouts and hoped he had not been a victim of the phantom spirits that had lured and bedeviled me. The faint track of nomads and their livestock had guided us toward our destination but snowfall had blotted out the last vestige of a path. It was questionable whether Ken could find his way to the pass. Presently, one of the lead bearers excitedly signaled for us to join him on the promontory. There we caught a glimpse of Ken through a thin veil of snowflakes, climbing on foot only a few hundred yards above. He was moving slowly in the direction of a gap in the massive, icebound sawtooth ridge—Sargaz Pass, at last the culmination of the climb to Great Pamir.



*Sargaz Pass, 17,000 feet.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*

41 **We Reach 17,000 Feet Altitude at Sargaz Pass**

A stiff climb over the ice brought us up with Ken. Astonishingly, we found him as determined as ever to reach the pass on his own feet—an incredible achievement that brought praise from every one of us. His pace had slowed considerably, a perfectly normal result of climbing 7,000 feet to an elevation of nearly 17,000 feet, a distance of about fourteen miles, all in a little over nine hours.

Traveling astride the broad back of a bulky yak has its shortcomings, requiring one to dismount often to limber up his legs, warm his body, and silence the unceasing grunt of the heavily burdened animal. But, after each spell of steep climbing on foot and pulling my slow-gaited yak by a rope attached to a ring in his nose, I was glad to remount in spite of the discomforts built into the clumsy beast.

Cloud-enshrouded Sargaz Pass, though it had been in view for nearly an hour, proved to be an elusive object on the skyline which attracted us beyond the limit of our patience. The obstacles encountered and vanquished were now behind us and at last we rode onto the deceptive notch in the snowbound rampart. The Great Pamir lay beyond. We lingered there for a time and tried to absorb the stupendous landscape that stretched before us. Magnificent iceclad peaks and spires rose skyward between drifting clouds above the flat, snow-laden valley floor of the Great Pamir. For a moment, the sun broke through the heavy cloud cover in the west. Light seemed to creep

up the mountainside, reminding us that sundown was near. Suddenly the crest of an icy pinnacle to the northeast turned faintly crimson and we watched as the distant massif revealed its evening splendor.

42 **Our First Contact with Pamir Nomads**

Since it was nearly five miles to our night shelter and a few snowflakes had begun to appear, we remounted our yaks and trudged onward at a faster pace over a downhill grade to the valley floor. Teheri had nearly recovered from his snowblindness so he rode ahead to alert Ali Gohar and our camp cook of our arrival, leaving the bearers to steer us safely on to camp. My yak's cloven hooves crunched into the powdery snow and gave me a feeling of security on the steep and icy terrain of that bleak and inhospitable environment. Descending rapidly to an elevation of 15,000 feet, it was now possible to make good progress along the level valley floor. The animal's usually slow pace quickened for some unknown reason. Our bearers appeared to be aroused by some unseen activity in the distance. As we skirted projecting rocky spurs I saw smoke in the distance, rising above two large felt yurts (Asiatic tents). Tadjik nomads gathered up their flocks of goats and yaks from snowladen grasslands before nightfall. The fierce barking of huge wolf-like dogs, the tinkle of bells, and the harshly guttural sound of a herder's voice prodding an unruly yak into the corral for nightly protection from his predator, the wolf, gave assurance that we were at last entering the domain of a nomadic tribe. And, what seemed most important at the moment, warm shelter and food.

As we drew up to the yurts, two important-looking native Afghans approached us with a welcome handshake and salaam while a bearer brought up mugs of hot tea. Ali Gohar's wisened facial expression and expressive, sparkling eyes inspired confidence on first sight. A native of the Wakhan, sensitively aware of his formidable and primitive surroundings, Ali Gohar possessed the very qualities that we could hope for as our caravan bashi (leader) during our adventure on the Pamir. Sifat Mir, an Afghan native of the Hindu Kush, was a handsome chap possessing fine facial features and a good command of English as well as the local native dialects. Good fortune had placed us in the care of two capable leaders.

Two large felt yurts belonging to the local nomads and three storm tents were pitched in a well-protected site sheltered on

three sides by rocky cliffs. Circular stone walls three feet high surrounded corrals to confine the nomads' livestock after night-fall. Several wolf-like dogs lurked slyly toward us, drawing the attention of Sifat Mir who came up to warn of the danger of these trained animals. They watch the livestock day and night, protecting them from the ravages of wolf packs. They are trained to keep strangers away from the yurts except when the visitors are accompanied by one of the nomads.

The womenfolk appeared to play an important part in the daily toil of the camp by gathering up the flocks at sundown, carrying large vessels of water from nearby icy streams and caring for their small children. Approaching us from the snow-laden valley floor were four men driving a number of yaks to be corraled for the night, some of which Sifat Mir had procured for transport to our base camp deeper into the Pamir.

As I glanced out onto the vast frozen steppe toward distant snowy summits, a shaft of light from the setting sun streaked over the valley and onto the peaks, creating a splendid scene of rose pink—one suitable for the artist's brush. The warm glow of color over the snowy summits quickly paled and one by one the distant peaks took on the cold grey pallor of twilight as the specter of night approached. The biting chill sent us scurrying for the fireside and the warmth of the yurt to reflect on the events of the day and to enjoy the substantial supper being roasted over red hot coals for us. Presently, the loud barking of dogs alerted us to conversation outside. A native herdsman, powdered with snow and a coating of hoarfrost on his beard, appeared through the yurtflaps with our host at his side. There was much excitement when Sifat Mir arrived to inform us that he had spotted a herd of several Marco Polo wild sheep about three miles distant, bedding down in a sheltered dell for the night. This, of course, was stirring news since one of our objectives was to come to grips with a herd of these rare and noble animals and to secure photos and, hopefully, a mature specimen for a trophy as well as a plentiful supply of meat for our larder. As we crawled into our snug goosedown sleeping bags, heavy snowfall set in to add gloom to a bitterly cold night. Sifat Mir ordered breakfast to be ready at four o'clock in the morning to permit an early start for the heights where the sheep had been discovered. But we were too weary to concern ourselves at the time.

At the dismal hour of four o'clock in the morning, the barking of dogs and grunting of yaks broke into our sound sleep—then the tent flaps opened, letting in snowflakes that chilled our faces and hastened our decision to arise and don our several layers of clothing. After a generous hot breakfast of egg and onion omelet and oatmeal porridge, we mounted our yaks and departed for strange parts known to harbor those few wild sheep reported by the local herdsman.

The snowstorn soon abated and small clusters of bright stars

appeared. The highest icebound peaks in the distance caught the first dim rays of the sun, casting a faint pinkish glow upon them that gradually spread to the lower ranges and finally out onto the vast snow-laden valley floor. We plodded along on our shaggy yaks until Ali Gohar unexpectedly ordered a halt. He dismounted to examine tracks in the snow and set up a spotting scope to scan the mountainside in the direction of the spoor. We were now on Marco Polo sheep ground, and the tracks were fresh on newly-fallen snow. They pointed steeply upward into soaring heights which we climbed for more than an hour. Though we followed closely, the animals' instinctive alertness and unbelievable agility enabled them to outdistance us and conceal themselves. Their natural skills were beyond belief. Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir sat astride their yaks looking out into the distance from the brow of a hill. They seemed restless and uncertain as to the next move. Their slightest gesture would have to alert us since we could not see beyond the brow or understand their chatter. But upon catching up with them, we were doomed to disappointment—we were told that a band of five Marco Polo sheep were spotted far in the distance crossing a high ridge to disappear into the wilderness beyond. Not being prepared for a long and arduous stalk, we were willing to agree that round one had to go to the wary sheep and their native habitat. It was decided to abandon the stalk and return to camp.

Three Tajik nomads processing yak hair into blanket size squares for covering yurt dwelling living quarters. First the yak wool is spread out uniformly about two inches thick, then rich hot yak milk is sprinkled over the wool and into the fibers. When thoroughly dried the felt blankets are roped down over the exterior roof and sides of the yurt to make it wind- and water-proof.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



"Salaam alaikum—may peace be with you," spoke a lone herdsman astride his hairy yak as he stopped to greet us. "Wa alaikum salaam," I responded as I tried to shake his hand. He had come from the direction of the yurt camp; I pondered over his lonely quest in such formidable terrain. I found later that he had been sent out from camp to hunt down two stray yaks that failed to turn up the night before.

Reaching the yurt camp at midday, our attention was centered on several nomadic women who toiled over what appeared to be a pile of animal hair. Closer observation disclosed a crude manufacturing process involving four elderly kneeling women who used a long wooden roller to press and roll a thick layer of yak hair across a smooth stone surface. Another woman stood with a large vessel of hot goat's milk, pouring the proper amount onto the matted hair as a binder while it was being rolled into a mass. The hair and milk would eventually adhere and cement the fibers together into large, blanket-sized sheets of one-inch thick felt of stormproof quality. When ready, it is laid out in the sun to dry. The ingenious process produces covering material for the yurts and comfortable ground cover. It is surprising to observe how comfortable and warm a yurt can be with the help of a small yak dung fire in its center and the felt doorway cover pulled shut. There is an opening at the center peak of the roof to provide an outlet for smoke but even this can be closed in stormy weather. Small children and even babes play on the wall-to-wall felt carpet nearly naked while outside temperatures hover near zero. The yurt's skillfully designed framework is held rigidly together by a wide, artistically decorated woven band stretched tightly around its exterior. Decorated felt numdas (small rugs) are piled four or five thick around the perimeter to provide additional warmth and comfort as bed mattresses. Occasionally, one finds a fine antique Bukhara rug thrown over one of the beds in the yurt of a well-to-do nomadic family. Even the walls might be covered with fascinating woven fabrics. Handwrought copper kitchen utensils may hang from the ceiling framework around the hearth. An opening in the felt carpet and a circle of stones at the center of the floor provides a safe place for the yak dung fire.

Although the life of a Pamir nomad is admittedly austere, he is able to devise comforts that make it possible for him to live with reasonable contentment in such hostile surroundings. I was offered a bowl of freshly-made yogurt by one of the women who seemed to sense my liking for the dish. It proved to be quite tasty though slightly more acid than our western variety. The chunks of goatsmilk cheese we carried in our pockets for a snack were quite rich in flavor. But even more tempting was the sight and savory odor of a haunch of mutton hanging from a wire over a bed of red-hot coals, sizzling away temptingly. I drew the line at sampling the native Central Asian intoxicating beverage, kumiss, originally made by the Tartars and still brewed by the

nomads of the Steppes from fermented mare's or camel's milk. Because it was somewhat embarrassing to reject a sip of their favorite liquor, I gave in and accepted from my host a large mug of the potent, orthodox liquor of the Asian steppes. Its taste, from the small draft that I swallowed, was like a mixture of warm champagne and beer. Although the large majority of Pamir tribes are Muslims, they regard their ties to Islam rather loosely and, on occasion, they partake in the merriment offered by a few drafts of the potent kumiss.

Outside the yurt, activity in the compound was running at a fast pace: the womenfolk were rounding up the ewes for evening milking while the men and dogs kept busy separating the yaks from the rest of the livestock. All of the animals were being herded in groups into enclosures for protection from marauding wolves after nightfall. Children were pouring a plentiful supply of milk from goats and yaks into large containers for later churning into butter, cheese, and yogurt. These foods, added to the staple nan (unleavened bread), grain, mutton and a few onions, make up by far the principal components of the native diet. The flesh of sheep, goats and yak is roasted over coals of yak dung or whatever copse or root is available. While the diet seems to produce alert and sturdy children and lean, muscular elders, its limited variety would soon become monotonous. We learned that many of the children are stillborn and that dogs give birth to pups only about once every three years. Whether this phenomenon is the result of diet or the high altitude, I shall not attempt to determine.

Sifat Mir came to disclose plans for transport of equipment, supplies and ourselves to base camp some fifteen miles deeper into the Great Pamir. We would have to arise early in order to arrive at our destination by mid-afternoon. Twelve yaks and nine bearers— including two cooks— will be required for the trek and to put camp in order. Sifat Mir, head-bashi (leader) and linguist— Ali Gohar, shikari (hunter) and Resident of the Sargaz, River Panja area, and the Great Pamir where his authority reaches to the far corners of this isolated domain. They are well acquainted with the isolated wilderness into which we shall spend our remaining days in Pamir. Ali Gohar holds the Afghan Government title of Warden of the Great Pamir.

"Khab Rufta ust (The wind has gone to sleep)," remarked Ali Gohar as the biting west wind abated. "Inshallah (God willing)," I added, hoping that the weather would improve by morning. The prospect of entering what Ali Gorhar calls the home of the Great Ovis Poli wild sheep was exciting enough, yet we would be approaching close to the trail of Marco Polo again— the trail that we had left behind as we departed Qala Panja. More than seven hundred years ago Marco wrote in his daily notations, "There are numbers of wild beasts of all sorts in this region. And when you leave this little country and ride three days northeast, always among mountains, you get to such a height, one that 'tis said to

be the highest place in the world! And when you have got to this height, you find a great lake between two mountains, and out of it a fine river running through a plain clothed with the finest pasture in the world; insomuch as a lean beast there will fatten to your heart's content within ten days. There are great numbers of all kinds of wild beast; among others, wild sheep of great size, whose horns are good six palms in length. From these horns the shepherds make great bowls to eat from, and they use the horns also to enclose folds for their cattle at night." Messrs. Marco was told that the wolves were numerous and killed many wild sheep. Hence quantities of their horns and bones were found and these were made into great heaps by the wayside in order to guide travelers when snow was on the ground. This plain is called Pamir. The great lake between two mountains was named Lake Victoria by the British explorer Lieutenant John Wood, who on the afternoon of February 19, 1838, stood on its frozen surface believing that he had discovered the true source of the River Oxus. Later it was found that the Ab-i-Panja was the real source of that famous river. Before departing those frozen heights of "Bam-i-Duniah" or "Roof of the World" as he named it, he decided to withdraw the name Victoria and retain the name of "Sir-i-kol," the appellation given to it by our guides. That name endures to this day.

43 **We Depart the Nomad's Yurts for a Wilderness Beyond**

On a splendid but frigid morning we awoke to find the vessel of water frozen solid in our storm tent. But soon, Sifat Mir had one of our bearers bring a large vessel of steaming hot water from the yurt for our morning sponge. We could always tolerate the sharp cold of morning with our thermal underwear and several layers of wool clothing topped by goosedown coats and fur-lined mittens. When the sun shone brightly, its warm rays provided comfort. But when a dark cloud passed over or the shadows of late afternoon deprived us of that welcome heat, we got off our yaks and walked.

Bidding our nomadic friends a warm goodbye, we steered our yaks to the dim trail that led through the snowy valley floor beside a frozen stream. We plodded along in the center of that vast expanse between snowy heights that reached to over 20,000 feet. Our humble caravan was dwarfed. Lake Victoria (Sir-i-kol) lay thirty miles northeast. Polo's trail across the "Pamier" is 5,000 feet lower and less than six miles to the northwest.

One by one, in single file astride our grunting yaks and with our loaded bearers on foot, we left the nomads' grazing ground. A bearer who trailed close behind tended a half dozen goats and sheep that would follow us to new pastures and an eventual destiny on the mutton and rice platter of our dinner table.

A prominent landmark rose majestically in front of us to an unknown height, but not less than 21,000 feet. This impressive crag with a remarkable hanging glacier clinging to its north face would be our guiding sentinel to the base camp site some twelve miles further on. My attention was suddenly directed to a scene of commotion around a group of nearby yurts. I thought we had left the last trace of civilization behind. I stopped for a better look when two herders came forward. I assumed their intention was to greet me. It was somewhat disturbing to note that the two nomads were dressed in the skins of animals. What little tailoring there was barely held the skins together around the men's bodies. Their long fur robes that resembled the Afghan chapon draped over their shoulders and extended to their ankles. Their shoes were merely leather strips wound around the feet and ankles and tied with a thong. A cap made of the hide of a fox or a wolf sported earflaps similar to a trapper's headgear. They appeared to have just stepped out of a cave dweller's abode. Still, as I sat astride my yak and regarded them, they seemed to be intelligent. Modern civilization, though, was either unknown to them or of such a thin veneer that their likeness to cave dwellers was probably not too remote. While I sat watching their expressions, they appeared to be startled at being suddenly confronted with strangers—faces and apparel of a sort they had probably never seen before. I would have liked to have greeted them with a warm handshake, but learned afterward that it was better I had not. I left them with a wave of my hand and a goodbye. They looked more bewildered than before.

Seven hundred years ago Marco Polo said of the nomads, "Indeed, most of them are dependent for clothing on the skins of beasts for stuffs are very dear amongst them." Stuffs (fabrics) are *still* dear amongst them. After I caught up with him, Sifat Mir told me that many of the nomads react to foreigners in the manner of animals. Living in solitude throughout their lives and seldom confronted with strangers, they become alarmed when they suddenly stand face-to-face with queer-looking people. Little wonder! He disapproved of my wanting to be friendly by shaking hands and felt that making a move toward them might bring forth some of their primitive traits. I was glad that I kept my distance.

As we proceeded onward toward our destination, the valley gradually opened up into a great broad expanse of snowy grassland. There was grass aplenty as far as the eye could see: "A plain clothed with the finest pasture in the world," is how Marco Polo described it. Mile after mile we jogged along over crusty snow which sounded like crunching glass under our yaks' hooves.

Despite our longing to reach the base camp and begin our pursuit of the Great Marco Polo wild sheep, we were thoroughly contented with our carefree life, our newly-acquired companions, and even the domestic animals which carry and sustain us. Besides, the landscape became more immense and impressive as we penetrated deeper into the Pamir.

At last we reached the forks of two streams draining into the nearby Pamir River. In the distance, rising above the steppe, we saw enormous sky-piercing heights laced with glacial flows and ice fields. The sun's warm rays kept my left side comfortable while my right side suffered from the biting cold. I donned my fur parka and forgot the bleak wintry blasts. Ali Gohar changed his course and headed our little procession toward our camp at the foot of the ice mountains. The last vestige of civilization lay far behind—even the nomads' camp with its flocks and domestic activities were well beyond our reach. We had arrived at the heart of that lonely steppe of Central Asia the Polos called the "Roof of the World"—that unknown wilderness of ice and snow that had been chosen by the Royal Geographical Society of London for exploration by the intrepid Hayward. I asked my bearer, "How far to camp?" He answered, "Yes, far." Then I asked, "How many kilometers?" He answered, "Yes, kilometers." No further questions were asked.

Before crossing the stream, I dismounted my yak to stretch my legs. When I attempted remounting my formerly gentle beast attacked me head-on. I grabbed his massive horns and held on for dear life with all my strength as the 1,200-pound beast carried me above his grizzly head. Luckily, my bearer heard my cries and came running to grab the rope attached to a ring in the yak's nose. That stopped the animal's vicious attack and enabled me to escape without injury. Luckily I survived the ordeal without being gored. Needless to say, I changed yaks on the spot and never rode my adversary again.

44 **Headquarters Camp is Reached in the Wilds of Great Pamir**

A two-hour march up a narrowing, grassy trough brought us to within sight of our encampment. It was nicely nestled in a circular basin and surrounded on three sides by towering pinnacles rising to heights well in the 20,000-foot range. As we drew closer to the setting, three bearers who had gone on ahead came forward to greet us and help with the loads. Two antiquated stone huts stood in the foreground, while a short distance away stood a large felt yurt and two storm tents that

would provide warm shelter against the bitter cold nights so common to the Pamir valleys.

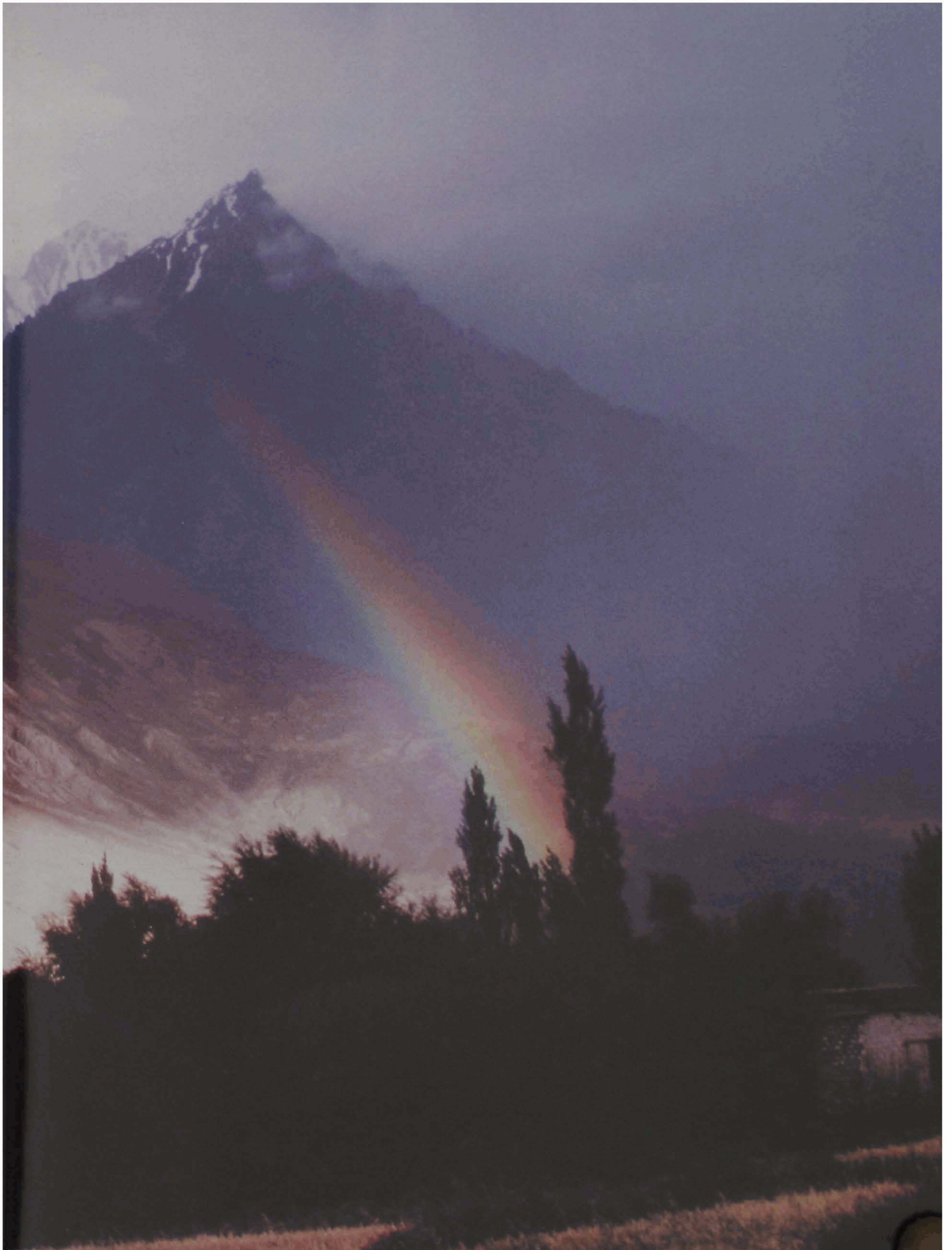
There was much chatter and excitement amongst the bearers, not a word of which we understood. But before we could inspect our quarters in the cozy yurt, they hastily led us off to a spotting scope mounted on a small tripod and focused sharply on a group of three Marco Polo rams that lay about one thousand yards away among some rocky crags. And that was not all, for in plain view through the scope, less than a half mile away on the opposite side of the valley, several females and a single ram were feeding with the assurance that safety is directly proportionate to the distance between nimrod and quarry. Both groups were well out of range for telephoto photography or rifle shot. It was hard to believe that all this good fortune should prevail on our arrival in camp. At last we had come to grips with the rarest and most stately of big game. But I refused to allow myself to become overly confident upon this piece of luck. While peering through the scope at those magnificent animals, Ali Gohar shrugged his shoulders and announced that they were not of the stature we were after for our cameras or for trophy and pantry. We were therefore relieved of the thought of an arduous stalk to bring them within range. But we had had the rare privilege of viewing our first Marco Polo wild sheep.

The savory aroma of hot bread ended our search for wild sheep and sent us scurrying to the kitchen fires glowing cheerfully alongside one of the stone huts. While our cook prepared dinner over two of the fires, one of our bearers, Aslam, patted out chappattys between his hands and tossed them onto the red-hot griddle where they cooked to tantalizing taste in a matter of seconds. With a lump of fresh yak butter and a couple of hot chappattys, our hunger was suppressed until suppertime.

Ali Gohar told us that the average life of this great sheep is about fifteen years, after which they fall victim to predators during the deep snows of winter. We were fully aware of the keen sense of smell and alertness of the Poli and his ability to outwit even the most nimble hunter. I knew that the days ahead should bring us to grips with many of these noble animals. We resolved to keep our cameras ready for pictures and a rifle in hand in case a fully mature ram appeared within range. Sifat Mir told us that it will require all the skill we can muster for an outstanding photo or a chance to secure a fine trophy.

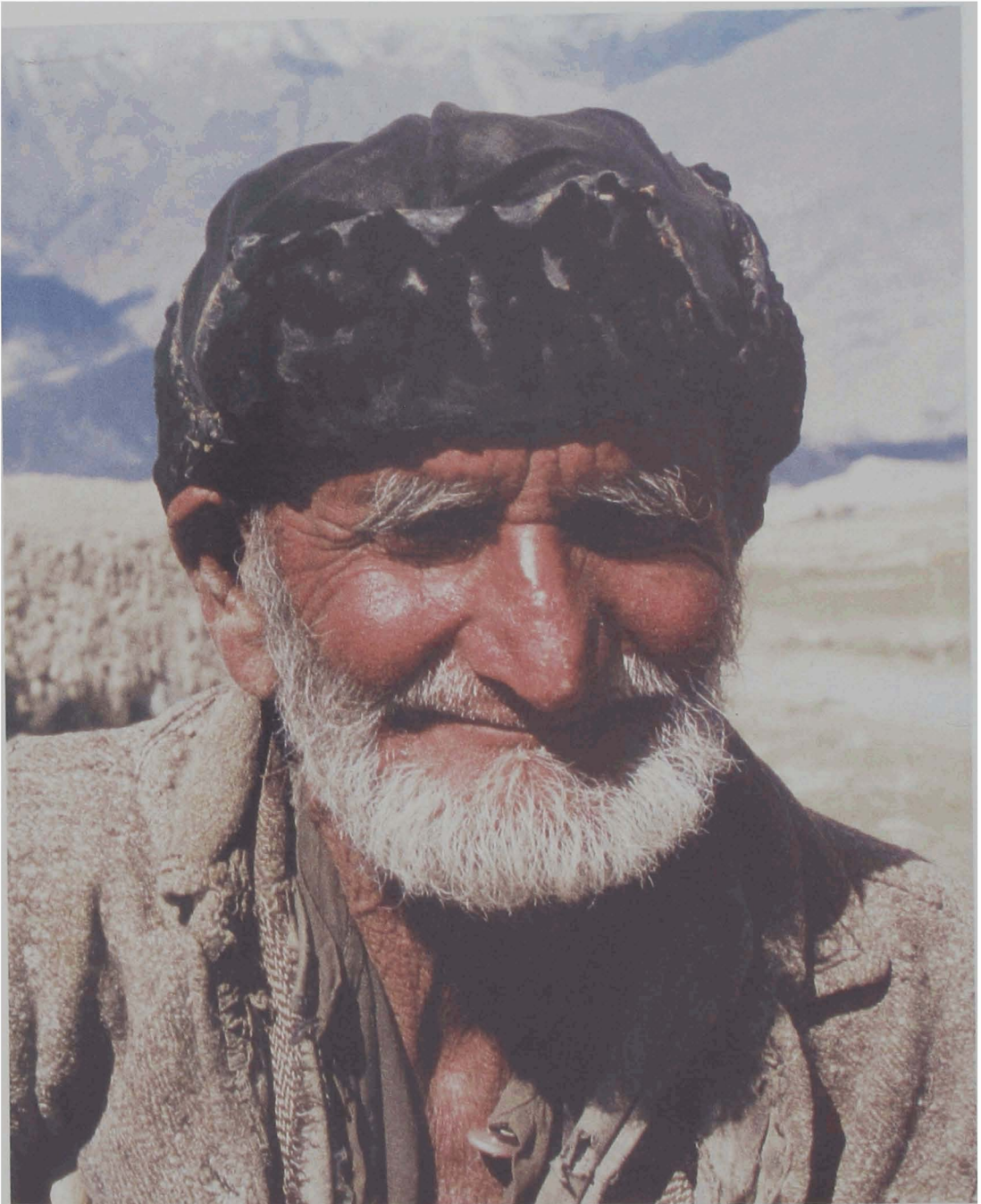
It was our renowned medieval traveler who first brought the story of this monstrous wild sheep of the Pamir to the attention of the western world. For this he was ridiculed, just as he was for the many astonishing but valid tales he told of the wonders of Central Asia and Cathay. But eventually, after later explorers had proven the existence of the great wild sheep of Pamir, the scientific name *Ovis Poli* was accepted by naturalists in honor of Marco Polo.

Long shadows of late afternoon began to envelop our little

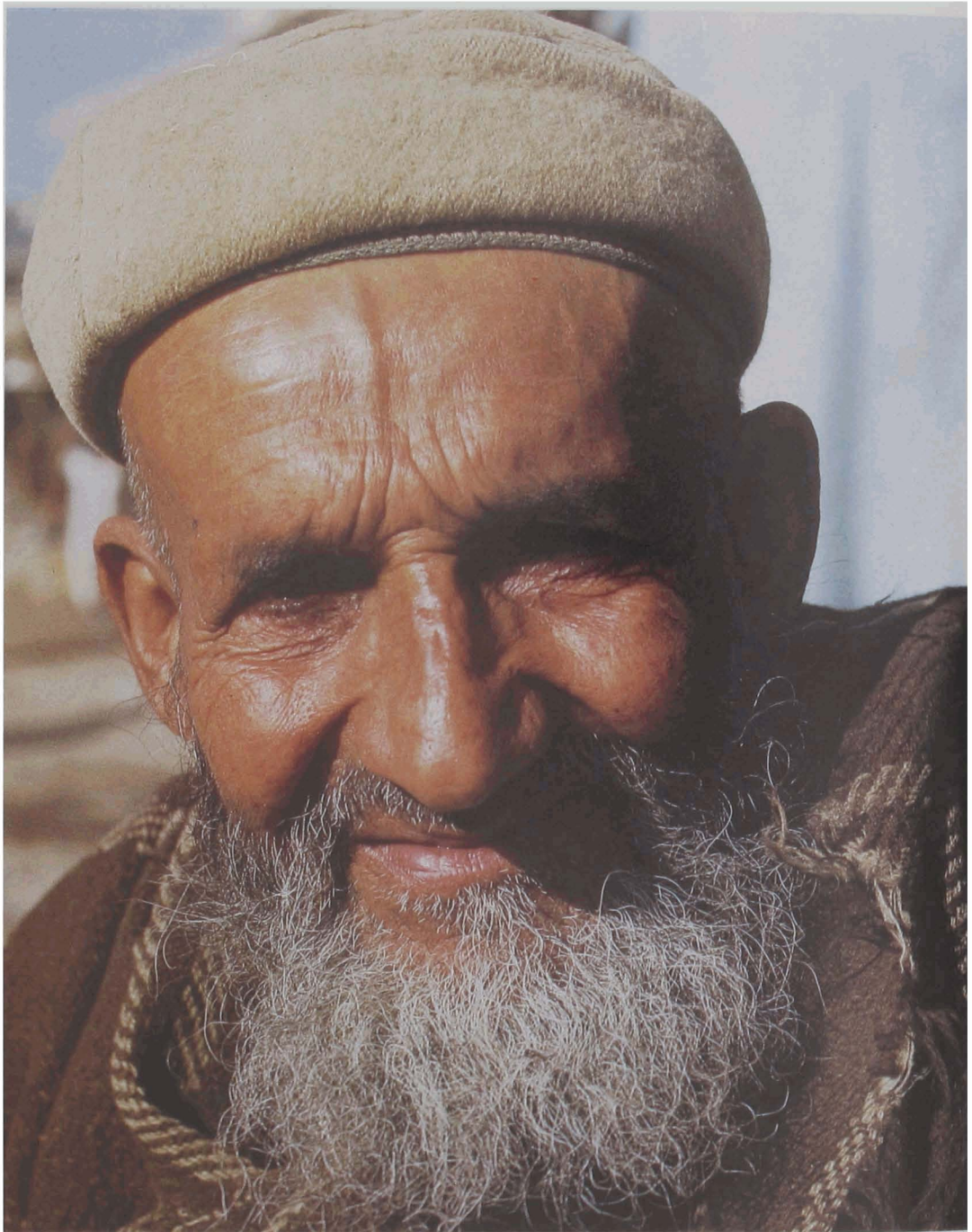




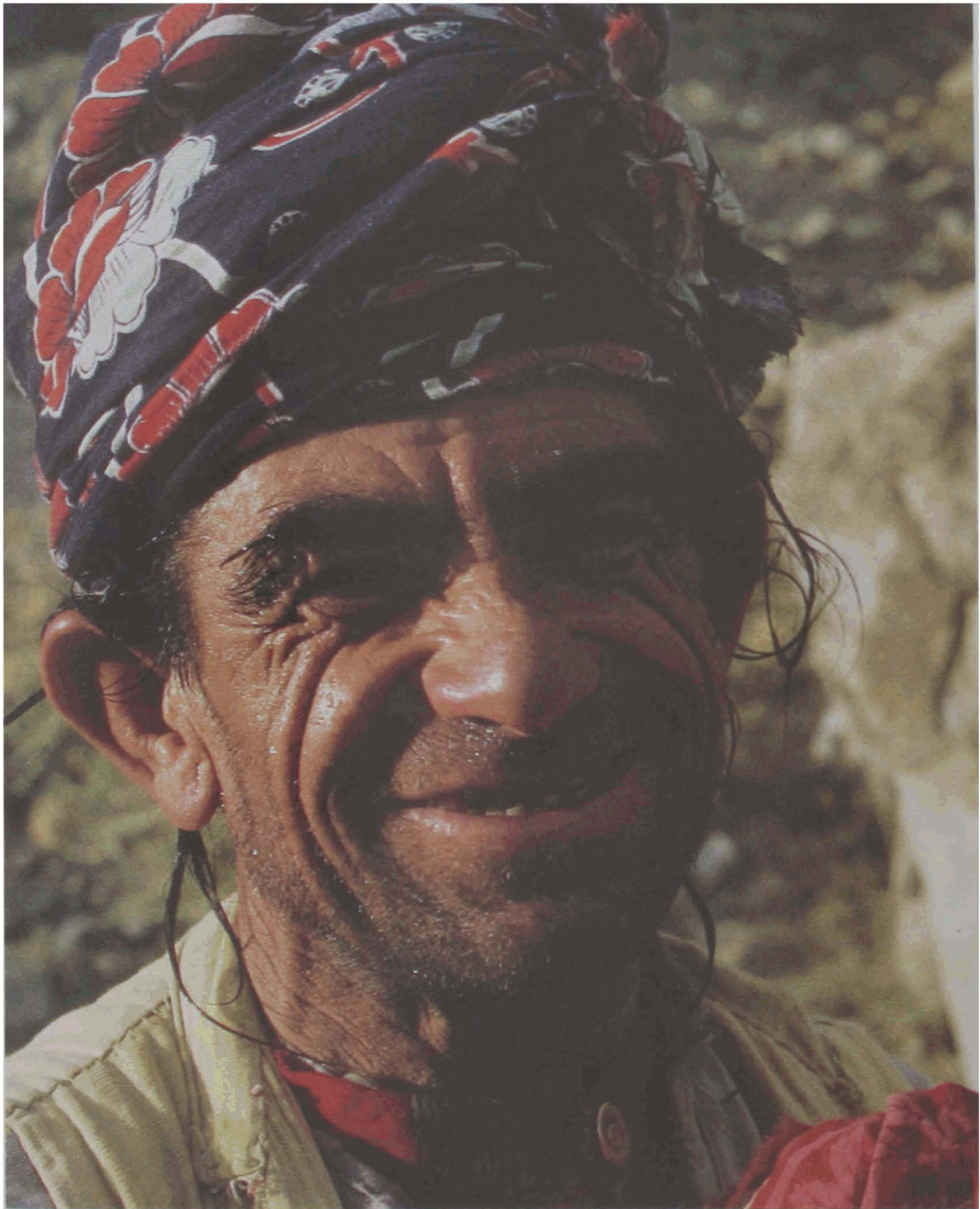
An elderly native Wakhan matron. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



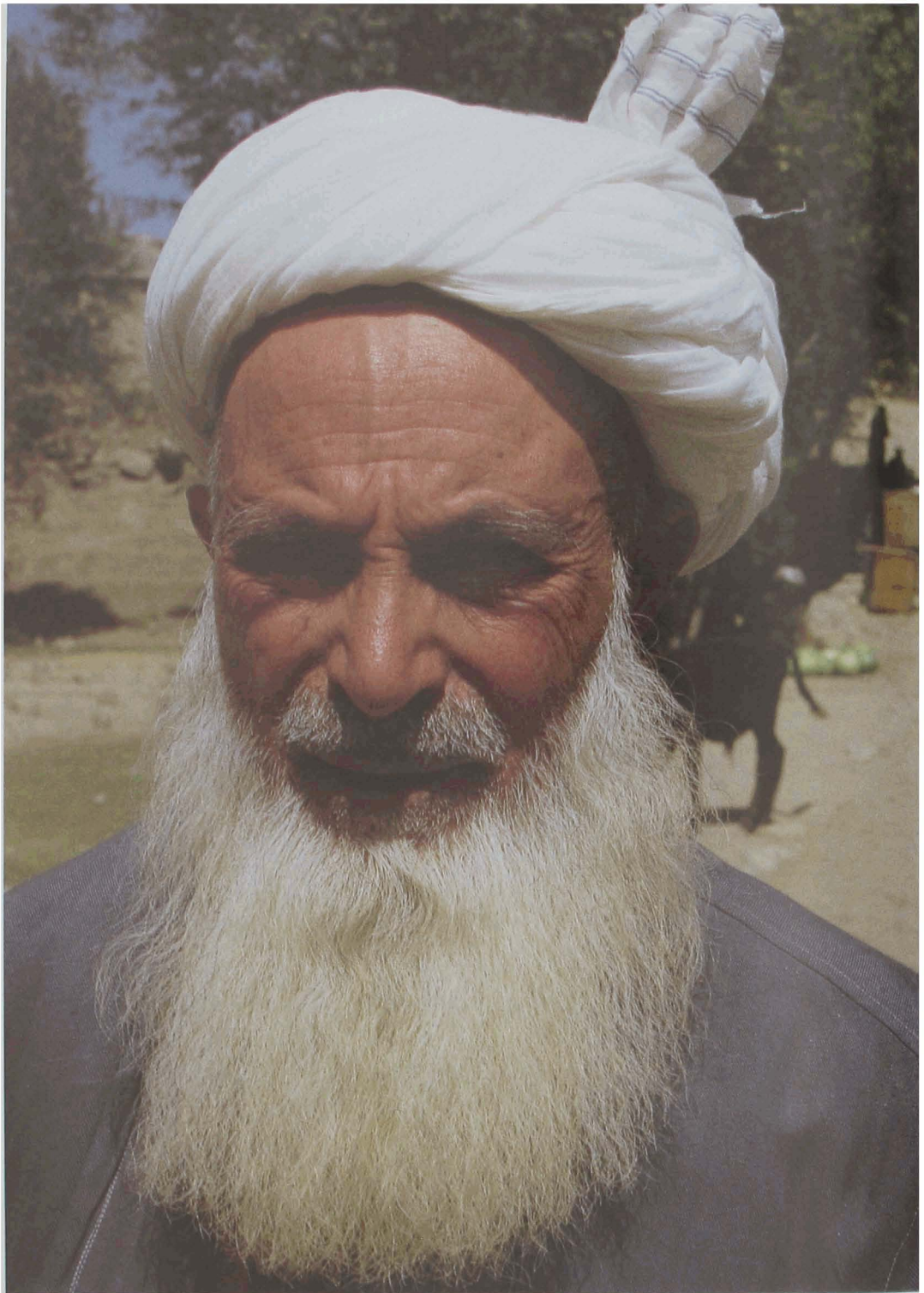
A native Wakhan gentleman. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



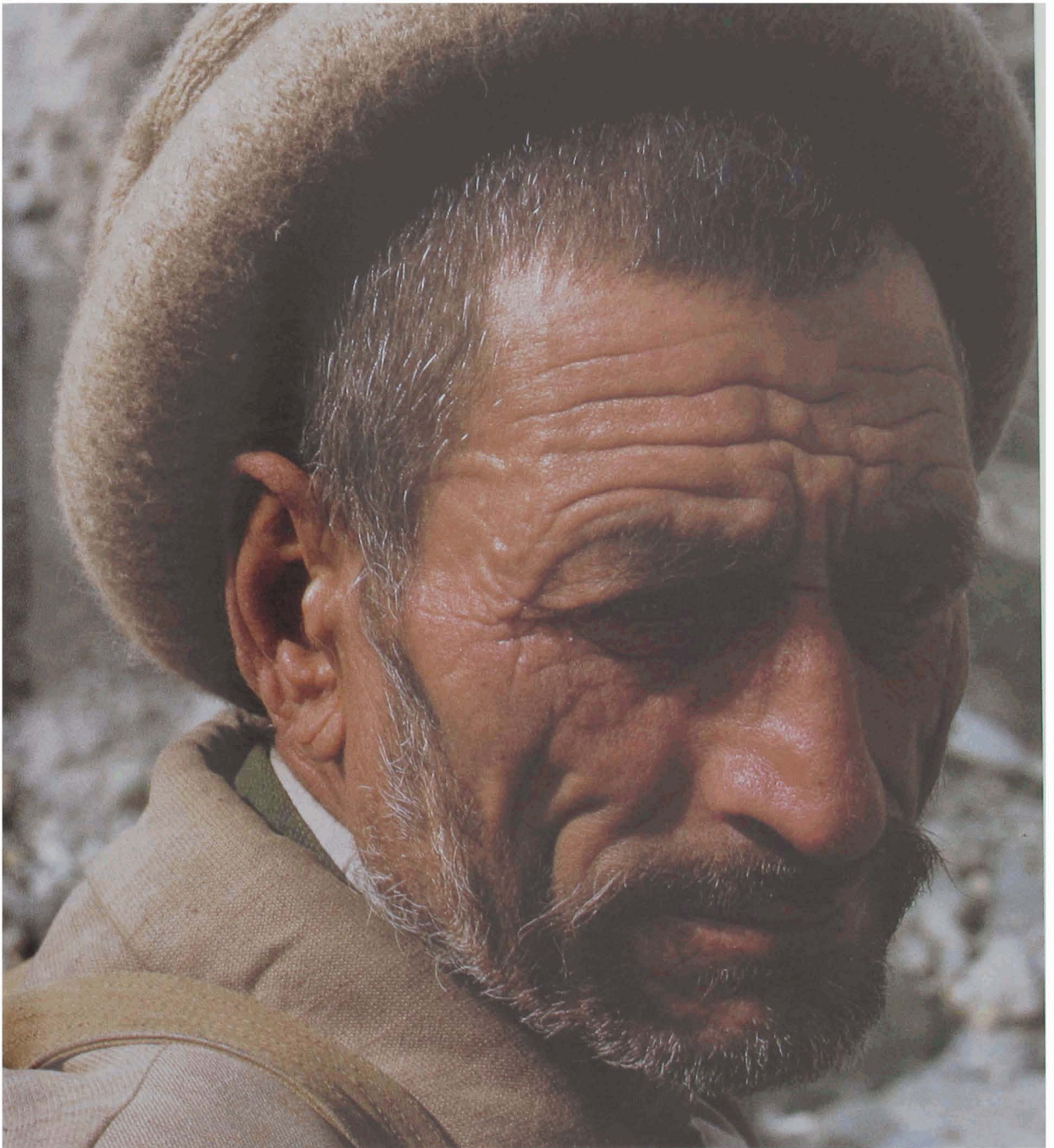
His long aquiline nose and headgear betray this Afghan as a product of the Aryan race.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



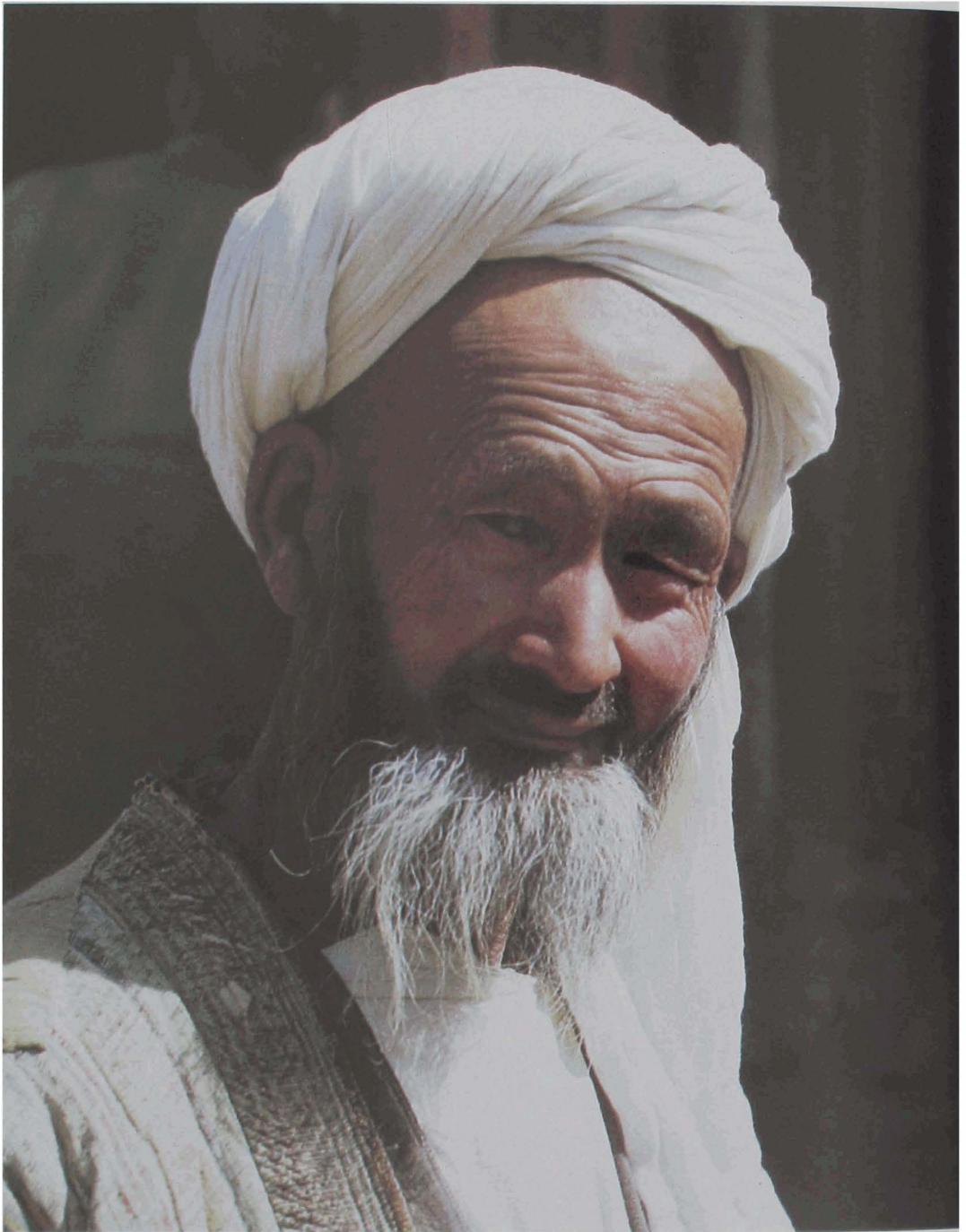
After his daily hot bath in a Wakhan village natural hot spring, an Afghan farmer dries in the sun with a bandana handkerchief for a towel. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



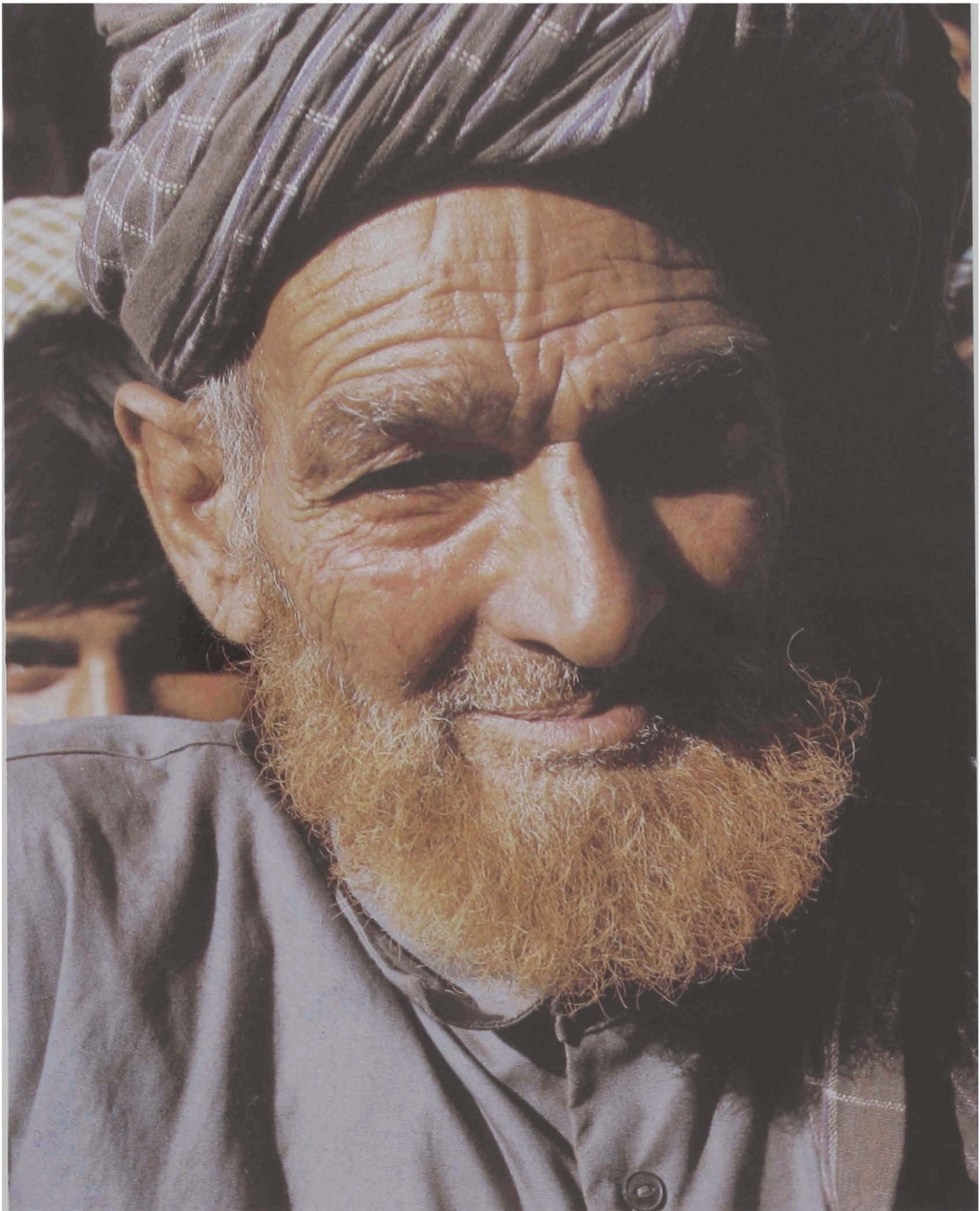
A Wakhan farmer displays his well-groomed white beard, the product of about one year's growth. It is apparent he has taken tender care of it daily. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



Hor Ali, our faithful cook, who fed us well under trying conditions. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



A Kirghese gentleman from the Pamir on the streets of Faizabad, Badakshan. His features are more refined than those of the nomadic Kirghese tribes tending their flocks in the Pamirs. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



A vendor of Kabul's Rajah Bazaar displays a well kept beard which is not naturally a dual colored appendage. The regular use of the well known dye, henna, produce the color effect. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



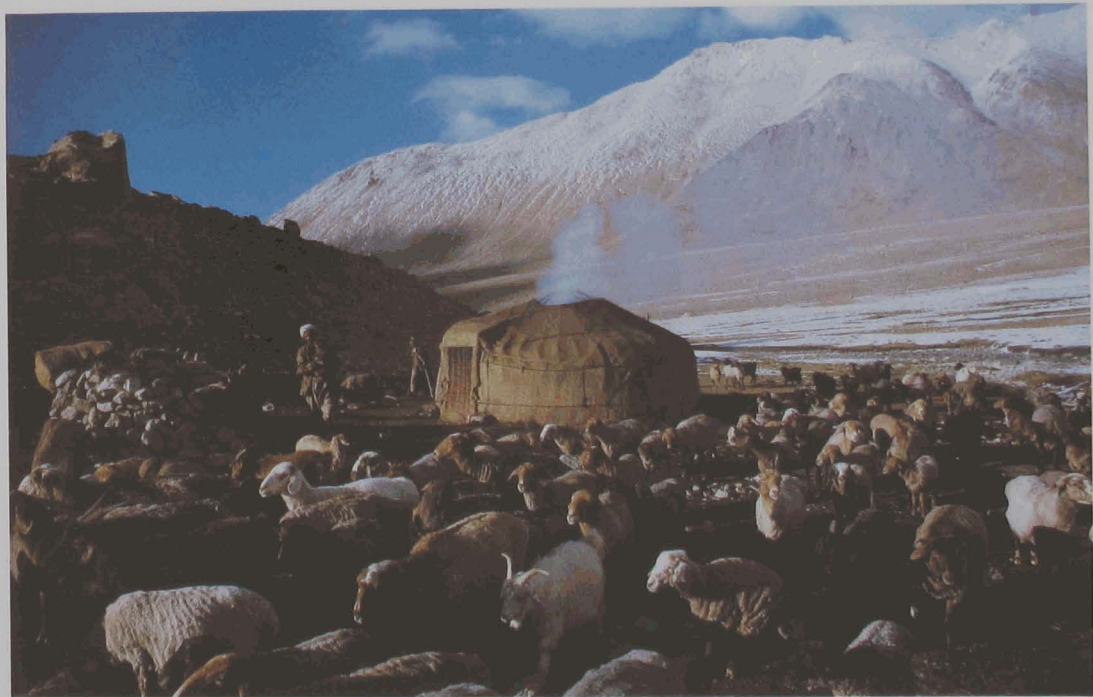
*Women and their children in front of their stone dwelling at Baba Tanji in the Wakhan Corridor.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



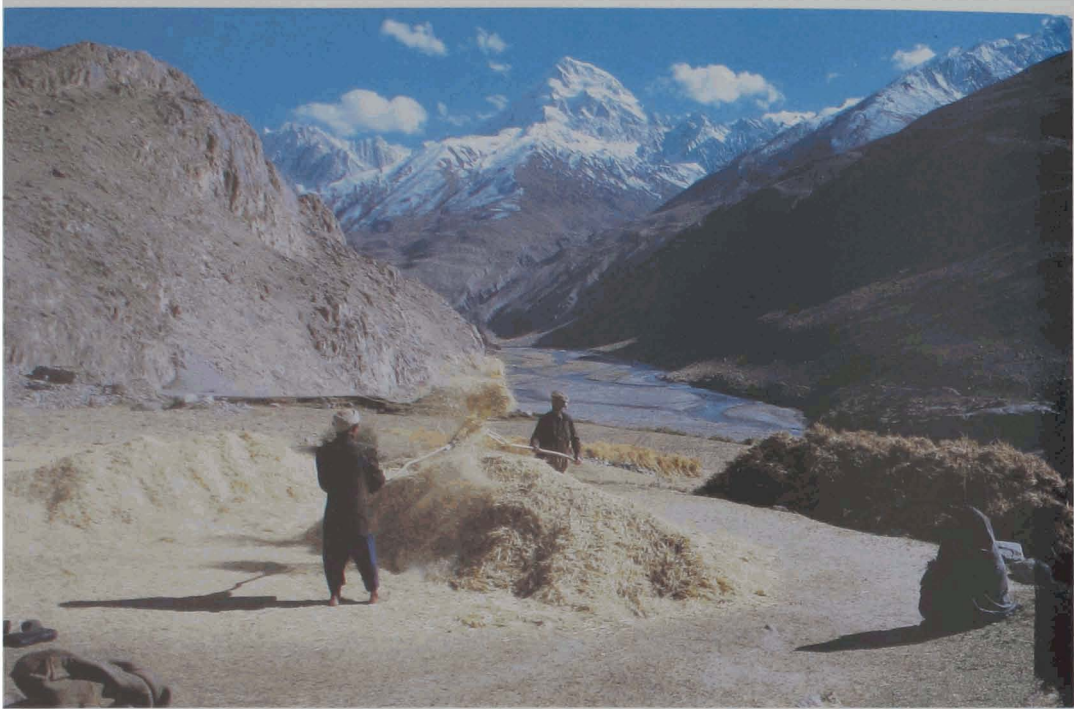
*Kirghese and Tajik natives in a typical gathering on the streets of Kabul, Afghanistan.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



*The framework of our yurt being assembled for our occupancy. Covering with yak hair felt squares to make it wind and snow proof, completes its erection.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



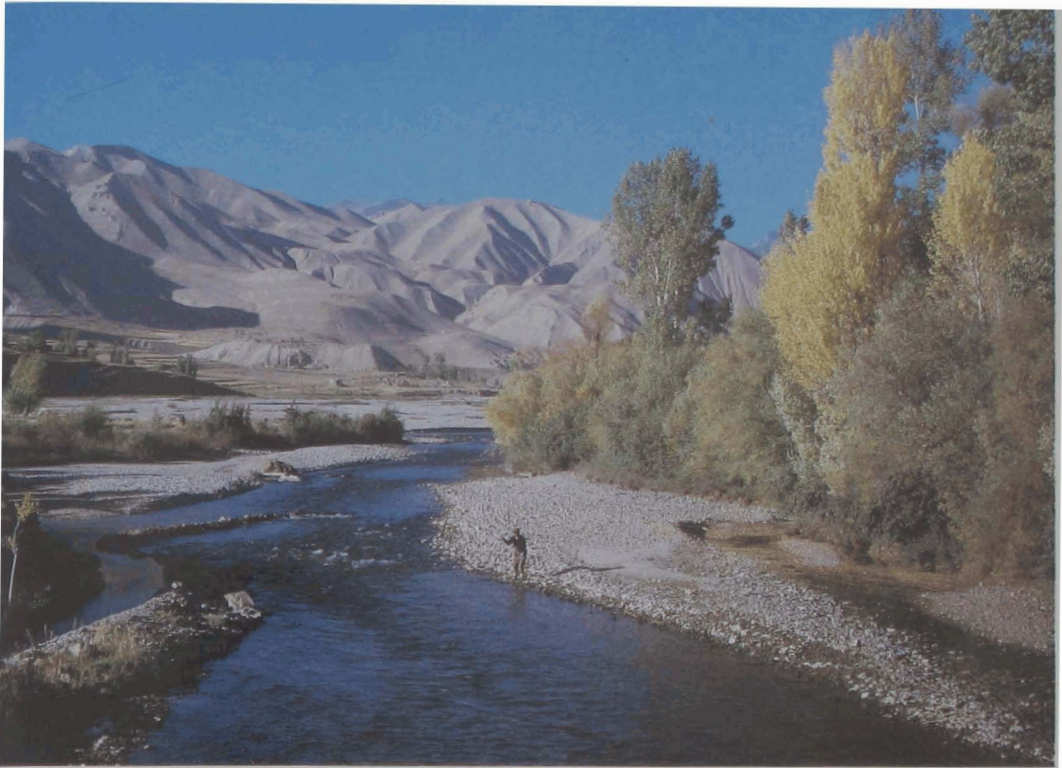
*Our finished yurt at 16,500 feet with smoke rising with a warm cooking fire to provide warmth and the comforts of home. We found children playing almost naked inside with outside temperatures near zero.
Photo by Edward F. Noack*



*A breezy autumn day in the Wakhan rarely passes without the chore of winnowing grain.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



My son, Ken, amusing native Afghan children of the Wakhan. Photo by bearer



*The author rainbow trout fishing in a tributary of the Oxus River near Zebak in Afghan Wakhan.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



*My son, Ken, gazing across the River Oxus at 23,000 foot Baba Tanji and its icy
glaciers. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



A typical Pamir landscape. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



Returning to our camp after a full day's hunt up to about 18,000 feet in the Great Pamir not far from Lake Victoria or Lake Sir-i-Kol. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



Urging a yak to cross a rocky frozen stream near our campsite in the Great Pamir. Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

campsite. I was reminded of approaching sunset by the rapid drop in temperature even as I sat close to the glowing fireside and indulged in piping hot chappattys and yak butter. The attraction of our cozy felt yurt—a wisp of smoke rising above the vent from a warm fire within—lured me to make my first inspection of what would be our quarters for the duration of our days in Great Pamir. Warm comfort welcomed me as I stepped into the twenty-four-foot diameter yurt and onto a thick wall-to-wall felt carpet with colorful geometric patterns woven into the fabric. Our sleeping bags were arranged around the perimeter. Sifat Mir's and Ken's on folding cots brought up from Sargaz on the backs of yaks, and mine placed on top of a jumbo-sized air mattress. For frigid night temperatures, I found the ground much warmer than a raised platform or cot. What comforted me most was a native-made stove assembled in the center of the floor with a teapot sizzling on top. Piles of numdas (felt rugs) lined the wicker-framed circular wall, and our bags and trappings added to the furnishings. Cameras, clothing and personal effects were conveniently placed near our beds. We returned to the outdoor kitchen to absorb some of the radiant heat from the fires kindled up to cook our supper. Three huge copper pots over as many glowing fires held rice, vegetables (mostly onions), and roasting strips of goat's meat (kabobs). Our meat ration had trailed along and kept us company all the way from the nomads' camp. But every time one of the goats or sheep was slaughtered, it seemed like a criminal act against an innocent traveling companion.

Ali Gohar told us that we were now in the natural abode of the *Ovis Poli* and the Siberian ibex. It is prime feeding ground—an area of isolation and rarefied air in which the animals thrive. Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir informed us that our next day's trail would lead us onto snow and icebound heights far above any we had already encountered. We had survived the rigors of cold and thin air of high altitude up to now without falter. Climbing higher would be a new experience and a risk we had to take in order to come to grips with the rare and dignified denizens of Pamir.

Evening darkness soon enveloped our little compound—the flickering light of our kitchen fires cast long shadows as our bearers Aslam and Islam carried great platters of hot foods into the yurt. "Tonight we have dastarkhan (feast)," Ali Gohar announced. As we entered our warm yurt, we cast our goose-down coats aside. Our table was lighted by candle and lamp. We helped ourselves to rice, mutton, and onion pilaf, baked nan (wheat and barley bread) spread with wild honey, tea and sweet biscuits. Soon our hunger vanished. Ali Gohar informed us that we must arise at the early hour of three-thirty come morning. So bedtime after a long and active day arrived at 7:00 p.m. Aslam waved his hand again and again over the bright candle flame trying to extinguish it. "Why doesn't he blow it out?" I wondered.

I had noticed this practice in the native settlements in the Wakhan Corridor: it is a lingering remnant of Zoroaster's doctrine dating back to before the sixth century B.C. Zoroastrianism, the faith of the so-called fire worshipers, flourished throughout Persia in that remote era. Acolytes do not blow out a flame for fear of polluting fire with their breath. This and other superstitions connected with fire dates back to pre-Christian times.

At last the steep climb to Pamir was over—our snug quarters sheltered us from a bleak and snowy night. So we snuggled down on heavy felt numdas in our goosedown bags. The breeze and powdery snow found a tiny chink and invaded our yurt, but red-hot coals in our little stove cheered us as we drifted off to a sound sleep.

While everyone in camp was in deep slumber, great commotion arose in the compound at a little past eleven o'clock. Cries and shouting came from within the stone hut a few yards away. Sifat Mir, who slept in the yurt with us, grabbed his rifle and ran outside in the darkness calling Balu-Balu (bear) as though he knew exactly what was taking place. And he did, for there was a large brown bear in camp about to break into our provisions hut and gobble our food to his heart's content. He was crawling through an opening directly above two of our bearers who had been on the floor fast asleep. They were so terror-stricken that they bolted out of the hut into the frigid night. I arose from my warm bed and with bare feet ran to the yurt flap to gaze out into the darkness to witness the disturbance, but an icy blast greeted me. As the turmoil quieted down, I scurried back to bed. Sifat Mir returned after firing one shot in the darkness, and reported that the bear had been seen trying to enter the hut through a small opening, but was frightened away by the bearers before he was able to find and devour any of our food. Bears are supposed to live off the land, but when they scent man's food and garbage they are inclined to ignore their normal diet and raid man's pantry and garbage pit.

Three-thirty arrived all too soon after the bear incident broke into our sleep. But it was time to arise and don the five layers of clothing required to insulate myself against the sharp Arctic-like cold of early morning. Aslam and Islam entered the yurt with a torch and lighted a heating fire and lantern, and later brought up a substantial hot breakfast of oatmeal, tinned fruit, ham and onion omelet and nan.

45 **Our First Encounter with Wild Marco Polo Sheep**

Our shaggy yaks, saddled and waiting outside, gave a few grunts to alert us to the sharp cold. We donned heavy coats and fur mittens before starting out to explore the frozen heights of Pamir. Moonlight enabled us to discern the jagged profile of towering mountain heights rising aloft on both sides of the broad valley we were to follow. As dawn cast its light pink reflection on the highest snowy spires, the surrounding landscape came to life in a most imposing array of brilliant pastel coloring—changing in splendor against its snowbound surface as daylight progressed.

My yak grew tired of his usual grunting after a while and began to grind his jumbo-sized teeth—the sound resembled the sawing of wood. A guide rope attached to a metal ring inserted through his nose cartilage enabled my bearer to tug him along, yet the determined beast continued along much as he pleased. “Gulja, gulja,” cried Ali Gohar, pulling up for a dead stop astride a ridge. He pointed down to the snow, and we saw the gulja (*Ovis Poli*) tracks. And a good many freshly-made ones, too, taking off toward a small lake nearby. This bit of excitement called for a brief halt and an inspection of the surroundings through binoculars. Ali Gohar set up the spotting scope with its forty-power magnification for a more precise inspection, and found that there were probably seven or eight sheep in the group. They apparently stopped at the lake for water, then took off abruptly to the top of a ridge where they disappeared over a pass. For the moment they were too far away to plan a stalk.

I was surprised to find the pretty little lake entirely free of ice although the air temperature stood at several degrees below the freezing point. Sifat Mir explained that several of the lakes nearby were fed by hot springs and would remain ice-free until late in October. The reflection of a majestic pyramid-like peak in the lake’s indigo blue water presented a magnificent picture as the early morning sun’s rays cast a golden streak across the water’s glassy surface. I was disappointed that we could not tarry longer.

Stalking the *Ovis Poli* was the objective of the day and we had hopes of coming to grips with trophy-sized males within camera

range. Upon reaching an elevation of somewhat over 16,000 feet, we again came to an unexpected halt on a rocky eminence. Ali Gohar dismounted and signaled for all of us to do the same. Then he crawled on hands and knees to an eminence that offered a commanding position overlooking a large snowbound basin amongst towering heights on three sides. I knew he had spotted game since he was setting up the powerful spotting scope and the yak bearers were hastily heading the beasts under cover of a large boulder. Upon reaching Ali Gohar, we found him intently gazing in the direction of a little grassy bare spot surrounded by snow. With unaided eyes, I was unable to detect anything but boulders and shadows in the glare of the sunlight. But Ali Gohar's wisened expression as he stared into the scope and then at me gave all that I wanted to know—he motioned for me to come have a look. Sure enough, I could see seven rams browsing in the shadow between the boulders where I had failed to spot them with unaided eyes. They blended into the landscape almost perfectly. After I observed the grand sight for fully ten minutes, two of the larger rams lay down and rested their massive horns on the ground, relieving their muscular necks and shoulders of the heavy burden. As we found out later, the bare horns and skull often weigh over forty pounds. We were told that these rams would go over fifty inches around a single horn. Yet, at the impossible range of over seven hundred yards, even

*A rare photo of twelve Marco Polo sheep (Ovis Poli) taken from six hundred yards.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



our telephoto lenses could not produce the detail we required. Nor would a rifle shot be in order at such a range. The wind, what little there was, favored us since we were on the downward side. An examination of the terrain for a possible stalk to closer range revealed a spur intervening between us and our quarry. This would conceal us until we reach another vantage point not over four hundred yards away. All of us crawled on hands and knees to keep well out of sight and finally reached a spot to peer through a crevice. One of the bearers pointed excitedly to the seven rams as they retreated over the skyline a half mile yonder. When I stood up for a better view of the unfortunate situation, I saw eight more wild sheep following some distance behind the others. Where those eight came from we would never know. Likely, they were hidden away in a nearby nullah and became alarmed at the sight of the others on the move.

We felt that our approach had been flawless: the gentle breeze was in our favor, we had tried to keep well-concealed, and there had been no sound capable of reaching the sheep's keen hearing. I decided that they must possess some form of intuition that gives them warning when danger threatens. My profound surprise can be better imagined than explained when two more rams unexpectedly appeared as though out of the blue sky, then disappeared into a deep ravine. They did not reappear. The usual expression on Ali Gohar's face changed to one of bewilderment. I could then understand why it is claimed the Marco Polo wild sheep is the most difficult of all big game to stalk.

Signaling for the yaks to be brought over to us, we mounted and started off in the same easterly direction leading into a nullah supporting a grand glacial flow. Its origin seemed to be amongst a group of majestic, icy crags perhaps ten miles ahead of us. It terminated nearby in a jumble of ice falls, seracs, and stony moraine. As I admired the incredible height of some of the towering summits confronting us, I recalled that when the Pilgrims, Hsuang Tsang and his Chinese followers first sighted those awe-inspiring summits of Pamir during their pious wanderings en route from their homeland in China to India in the year 642 A.D., they wrote in their journals, "These heights of Bolor (Pamir and surrounding area) lie midway between earth and Heaven." With the explorers' knowledge of the Buddhist faith and the reputed whereabouts of Heaven, their description was probably accurate enough for all practical purposes at the time.

Two spectacular glacial flows came into view with their stony terminal moraines joining a short distance from where we stood. After we reached the junction of the two frozen valleys, Ali Gohar — thoroughly familiar with every nullah, gulch and cranny in this wilderness, and keenly aware of the habits of its wildlife — chose to explore the valley on our left. We would tramp its gravelly moraine and glacier if necessary. We had barely entered the lower reaches of this promising area when Sifar Mir dropped

to the ground and motioned for us to dismount and do the same. Crouching behind a boulder, we waited for the big spotting scope to be set up. We knew that another herd of Guljas had been discovered. But we saw not a one, so perfectly did they blend into the surroundings. Still, Ali Gohar had them in the field of the scope and declared that there were two very large rams of trophy size in the herd.

Glancing through the scope, I could hardly believe what I saw. There were nine Poliss within the field of view and two or more of them carried massive, wide-spreading horns. The others appeared to be either sickle heads (young rams) or mahdines (females). They had sought shelter amongst scattered boulders in the moraine and had bedded down in a sunny spot well out of the snow. Gazing eagerly through the glass I mused, "This is the golden opportunity of a lifetime of dreams and plans. At last I might come to grips with the great wild sheep of Pamir." Yet, with over seven hundred yards between the quarry and me, how could I shorten that hopeless range to assure exceptional color transparencies? If I could conquer the problem, there would be ample meat for the stew pot and a grand trophy besides. The problem, obviously, was to devise a skillful stalk.

We were so well hidden and the wind was so much in our favor that it was safe to talk the situation over without the least fear of our quarry being disturbed. Both Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir knew the ground well and agreed that a stalk to within range, either for telephotography or rifle, would be both difficult and time-consuming. With my eyes fixed on those magnificent rams I was ready and willing to accept the challenge. I scanned the rugged topography and saw only one possible route that would shield me from view. If the wind did not change its course, I could with difficulty reach a vantage point well above the sheep and not over three hundred yards distant from them. But I was told that it would take no less than three hours to negotiate the sinuous uphill climb necessary to accomplish the task. Besides, it was likely the sheep would move out to their feeding grounds within the next two hours. Furthermore, if the stalk was successful, there would be so little time left before darkness that it would be impossible to travel the difficult, frozen valley and reach camp by nightfall. Having brought no sleeping bags, and with the prospect of finding no fuel for a campfire to keep from freezing in the frigid night temperature at 17,000 feet elevation, I had no alternative but to abandon all hope of approaching those stately denizens of Pamir. Anyway, it was gratifying to have had the unexpected opportunity of watching them for a protracted spell in their well-protected hideaway. We left with our hopes dashed while those wily guljas remained as undisturbed and contented as when we arrived. While it was disappointing to mount our yaks and turn our heads toward camp, it was, nevertheless, encouraging to know that the sheep had not been alarmed.

Unless routed away by predators, they would likely remain in the same quarter for another day's attempt.

Our track back to camp got underway at a faster pace than usual—both bearers and yaks were eager to return to the comforts of our isolated little encampment. The bearers seemed delighted with our decision to abandon the idea of a protracted stalk. In summer, the *jilga* (valley) in which we were confined is carpeted with an abundance of wildflowers of various colors. Icy tongues of glaciers extend from the heights above to the valley floor, a scene resplendent in brilliance and massive ice-riven spires. But now winter reigned, and we plodded along over icy shale and crusted snow to the rhythm of our mounts' grunting and grinding of teeth. The yaks, hardy and accomplished beasts of burden, dug their cloven hooves into the icy surface without ever making a misstep. So sensitive is their instinctive reasoning that they would stop and paw the deep, newly-fallen snow whenever they approached a crevasse. As I rode along, I could feel and count the heavy beats of my mount's giant-sized heart. But he never seemed to tire, even under the heaviest strain.

The Karakoram natives describe him well enough: "The yak is a strange ruminant—something like a grand piano, standing four-square on his short sturdy legs. A kind of jack-of-all-trades: he can carry a pack or pull a cart; one can eat its flesh and drink its milk out of its own horn, each one holding a full pint; its dung

En route to the Great Pamir through the snow near Sargas Pass. Author riding lead yak.

Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



serves as a convenient fuel for the cooking fire and from its tail you have an excellent fly-swat. Where would you find a more useful animal?"

Conversation dwindled as we sauntered along, but the monotonous sound of yaks' hooves breaking through crusted snow kept us alert in spite of the weariness that threatened to overtake us after such an eventful day. Sifat Mir suddenly cried out, "Balu, balu." Fifty yards ahead a big brown bear dashed out from behind a boulder and headed for cover in a nearby gulch. Ali Gohar reached for his rifle but before he was able to extract it from the scabbard the bear had gotten out of range. Ali Gohar squeezed off two fast shots to no avail. The bear managed to reach safe haven, out of sight, and it was too late to plan a stalk. When the excitement dwindled I wondered why Ali Gohar would want to slay an innocent bear. The animal apparently was living off the land and was probably not the same critter that had raided our larder. His hide would not be prime for another month and would not have made much of a trophy rug. And I am sure we would have rebelled at bear stew when there was plenty of mutton on hand for dinner.

Soon a westerly breeze came out of the calm, bringing with it the spicy fragrance of our dinner cooking over the open fires at camp. We knew that camp was not far away and that our first warm meal since early breakfast awaited. A billow of blue smoke appeared in the near distance. Then we saw the flames of fire and finally our felt yurt, and then the whole compound opened up before our eyes. Aslam and Islam came running out to greet us but they soon discovered by the expressions on our faces that we had not had a totally successful day. Nevertheless, they cheered us with good news—they had been watching a large number of Poli rams on the heights northwest of camp as we approached. Dusk was upon us so it was impossible to estimate the animals' size even with binoculars. I scanned the mountain-side and could hardly believe the large number of rams and ewes that stood on the hillside, defiantly looking down on our motley group, quiet and unconcerned about our problems, but instinctively aware of our presence in their native habitat. Little did they suspect that sooner or later our cameras would catch some of them posing unaware. Or that I hoped to see one of their mature, trophy-sized brothers through the sights of my rifle one day. Inshallah (God willing).

We warmed our weary bodies around the cooking fires and relieved our hunger with hot chappattys and Yak butter. Ali Gohar heartened us by announcing that, since the fall rutting season was at hand, the big rams were lying not far away from the herds. We drew our camp stools in front of a blazing wood fire and close by a big stack of freshly-baked native bread as Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir set forth a plan for tomorrow's strategy. While many promising haunts of the wild sheep were discussed,

there was strong preference shown for the icy mountainside west of our campsite.

Long, ghostlike shadows of the sawtoothed ridge to the west soon descended upon us in our comfortable resting place as the sun set behind Karl Marx Peak, a prominent landmark of Soviet Turkestan. It was only minutes later than I noticed a layer of ice forming over my cup of tea. It was not long before we abandoned the cheerfulness of the open-space fireside for the comforts of our yurts, the standard home of all nomadic families residing on the bleak Pamir Steppe.

A lively crackling fire in the tiny metal stove had already warmed the yurt and soon a savory feast of rice, mutton and vegetable pilaf arrived from the kitchen fire on a large platter. And that was not all—for our untiring cook had taken the time to grill sheep's liver and kidneys over red-hot coals. Hot biscuits and wild bees' honey topped off a capital supper. Silence fell over our lonely compound at an early hour. We bedded down before seven o'clock with visions of monster rams and the strange untrodden landscape that we would feast our eyes upon come morning.

The grunting of our yaks broke into the silence of a frostbound dawn as we mounted and left camp in total darkness. The yaks' cloven hooves shattered the surface ice of a small stream, causing more clamor and alarm than we wished. We knew that *Ovis Poli* were not far off. And we knew that our quarry's sensitive ears were capable of picking up such warning signals at incredible distances. But onward and upward we climbed, nudging our bovine mounts along to keep them from nibbling grass from beneath the snow. We were headed for a belt of rimrock some fifteen hundred feet above camp. Our total altitude would be nearly seventeen thousand feet; we were, by this time thoroughly acclimatized and hardened to withstand the rarified climate. Before we left Pamir we would probably go much higher.

Through the semi-darkness of early dawn, I could barely see someone ahead dismounting. It was Ali Gohar, who motioned for the rest of us to dismount and hand our yaks to the bearers. We had reached the rimrock. The spotting scope was being set up behind a crevice in the ridge. At the crack of dawn Ali Gohar motioned for me to have a look. His smiling face kindled our enthusiasm for game. I scanned a sizable flat basin through the scope and caught the fleeting movement of at least twenty *Polis* retreating in the near distance. The group included no less than five good-sized rams. Others out of range had been alerted and were moving away from their feeding grounds to disappear into a distant ravine. Our approach to this promising maidan (pasture) was made with the breeze in our favor and without any alarming sound reaching the sheeps' ears. Still, something alerted them of impending danger before we reached the

rimrock. What it was, we'll never know, unless it was the sound of fracturing ice as our yaks had broken through the frozen stream at camp over a mile away.

We seemed to be favored by good fortune in discovering so many Polis in the brief time we had been in their homeland. In high spirits, we remounted our yaks and rode north out across the basin to a steeply ascending slope. This maneuver would hopefully put us in a commanding position astraddle a knoll overlooking the escape route of the Polis. Through snow a foot deep we struggled steeply upwards, at last reaching a crest we estimated at near 17,000 feet. It was a difficult ascent for our stocky kashgows (yaks), over icy shale and big snow-laden boulders. But the beasts are amazing in their ability to negotiate risky terrain. They hug the ground on their short, stocky legs—slow but sure—with a grunt for every step.

Near the crest we cautiously crept to shelter between large boulders, avoiding being seen on the skyline. But we found no game in sight after scanning every nook and cranny on the mountainside where all those Polis had made their great getaway. The day was bright and sunny, so we decided to remain on this comfortable vantage ground and examine the immensity of the landscape around us. The towering, ice-bound heights, nameless and forbidding, rose in every direction around the compass.

High above the valley floor, the shrill cry of a large bird drew my attention. He came stroking by quite close, then set his broad sweeping wings in a sharp dive before coming to a fluttering halt inches above the ground. In a moment the bird's violently beating wings carried it upwards to soar into the breeze with some unfortunate creature in its sharp talons—probably a marmot that had been sunning himself outside his den, unaware that sharp claws were speeding toward him from far above. I watched this drama of "survival of the fittest" through my binoculars and identified the bird as probably a falcon or small eagle.

I examined the vast panorama of the Great Pamir through my binoculars and followed the precise route of the famous explorer Lieutenant John Wood, who in the winter of 1838 set out to discover the source of the River Oxus. I could follow the course of the Pamir River from near its junction with the Oxus to Lake Victoria—some thirty miles away, as the crow flies. Wood had followed in the footsteps of the Polis just as we had for over two hundred miles to Qala Panja. It was through this historic valley of the Pamir River, I reasoned, that the intrepid Hayward was destined to follow the same route as Polo and Wood, had he lived. We know from Hayward's records that he intended to cross the Darkut and Baroghil passes on the Hindu Kush Range and make his way into Badakshan before attempting his assignment to explore the Pamir Steppe. Upon his return to Qala Panja, he

would have had the choice of two historic routes leading onto the Pamir. I rationalized that he would have been advised by the local tribesmen at the Fort of Qala Panja to follow the Pamir River route.

46 **Frederick Drew's Account of Hayward's Last Days**

Hayward lies in a modest grave in peaceful Gilgit cemetery. I wondered how he would have responded if only he could have witnessed the alpine scene before me. An accurate account of Hayward's last days is described by Frederick Drew, formerly of the Maharaja of Kashmir's service, in his book *The Northern Barrier of India*, 1877. It was Drew who recovered Hayward's body and brought it to Gilgit for burial. His account reads, "In the beginning of the year 1870, Lieut. George W. Hayward came to Gilgit. He had been sent out by the Royal Geographical Society of London with the object of exploring the Pamir Steppe. In prosecution of this object he had gone to Yarkand and Kashgar, from which places he had, in the previous year, returned to the Punjab, unsuccessful as to his main end, not having been allowed to approach the Pamir from the side of Yarkand, but with a store of information about eastern Turkestan and the Karakorams. With an enthusiasm for his purpose that was characteristic of him, he determined to run the risks of a journey through Yasin and Badakshan to the place which was his goal. Though warned by many of the danger of putting himself in the power of such people as the Yasin and Chitral rulers—I myself introduced him to men who knew their ways, and declared them to be utterly devoid of faith—he started on the journey.

"The first thought that there would be difficulty in entering the Yasin country was that the chief would refuse admission to Hayward, but it did not turn out so. It chanced that an agent of Mir Wali's had on some pretext come to Gilgit and was there on Hayward's arrival: by his hands he sent a letter and presents, and in due time an answer came from Mir Wali to the effect that he would be glad to see him. So he went, was hospitably received, and was taken about to some of the valleys for sport. This was in the winter when snow was on the ground: there was no prospect, for three months or more, of the road to Badakshan being open. Hayward, though on good terms with the ruler, did not think it wise to wear out his welcome by staying all that time, but determined to return to the Punjab and make a fresh start in the early summer. It was almost a necessity that in return for such

attentions he should give his host, who was well-known as an avaricious man, almost all that he had that was suitable for presents. He promised, besides, that which Mir Wali expected to be of more value. He engaged to represent to the Governor-General what Mir Wali had persuaded him to consider his rightful claim to Gilgit.

"It was evident that Mir Wali had no right to claim Gilgit as one of his possessions based on the frail grounds, that some four generations back, a distant relation of his wrested it from someone. But little of this did Hayward know. He adopted the views of Mir Wali, and promised his aid in getting them brought before the British Government. He did, in fact, bring them before the Governor-General; nothing was done about it; nothing could have been done about it.

"Hayward returned to Yasin in July, 1870, and at once it was clear that the former cordial terms would not prevail. Mir Wali was annoyed at his having effected nothing for him; was vexed to see the now large mass of baggage, containing untold wealth in the very things he would like to have (for they had been provided as gifts for the people beyond Yasin), going out of his grasp, and was vexed at Hayward's not agreeing to the route through central Chitral that he was desired to take; lastly, he was enraged at an encounter of words that took place between guest and host. For one used to having his own way within his own little country, all this was sure to be more than annoying. For Mir Wali, a man who thought little of taking life, it was enough to decide him to murder his guest and take possession of his baggage.

"Hayward had started from Yasin, and had made three short marches on the road to Badakshan, had reached a place called Darkut, when he was overtaken by fifty or sixty men sent by Mir Wali. These, however, gave no signs of enmity: the leader said he had been sent to see the camp safe across the pass. But the next morning they took Hayward in his sleep, bound his hands, led him a mile to a pine forest, and killed him by a blow from a sword. His five servants, Kashmiris and Pathans, met with the same fate.

"Three months afterwards I recovered Hayward's body, sending a messenger with presents and promises from Gilgit, where I lay. We buried him in a garden not far from Gilgit Fort."

So concludes Frederick Drew's account of the death of George Hayward as described in his book *The Northern Barrier of India*, published in London in 1877. My wandering reflections were brought to a sudden end by great excitement erupting around me. Off to the south, in a tremendous snow-covered cirque, a large herd of ibex made its appearance. First, ten male animals came into view, then several more, until in all there were more than *sixty* climbing astride a rocky ridge, in full view nearly a mile away. They suddenly picked up speed and ascended rapidly to a bluff where they came to a halt and looked back. With



the aid of our binoculars, we watched them for several minutes. They were unquestionably alarmed. But our presence could not have been the reason. Ali Gohar was certain that a wolf pack or some other large predator was on their trail—perhaps a snow leopard. This was our chance for rare pictures of ibex, alive and in their native home. But the distance, even with telephoto lens, was excessive. Ken's resourcefulness was equal to the occasion: he set up his eight-power binoculars on its small tripod and fit a 150 millimeter lens to his reflex camera. But the herd decided to move rapidly in single file into the snowy cirque. Ken focused his camera lens through the binoculars but I was fearful that he would be too late for the picture we hoped to get. The ibex slowed down and stood broadside to us against a pure white snowy background. I heard the click of the camera shutter, then another and another. That was it; I felt sure that Ken's skillful contrivance for long distance photography would yield precious results. While our earlier efforts to photograph the wily Poli sheep had failed, our spirits rose with this bit of success. Several of the sheep were fine, big fellows with massive upswept horns. With the aid of eight-power binoculars, we estimated that the horns measured well over forty-five inches. All told, there were sixty-five ibex (*Capra Siberica*) in the herd. The predator, whatever it might have been, failed to appear on the scene. He probably gave up in disgust after failing to find an idler or weakling among the herd.

Mounting our yaks, we steered in the direction of camp with the firm determination to try another stalk on the mountainside to the north where rams had already been sighted, and where they would likely reappear at afternoon feeding time. As we descended a steeply-pitched ridge, we were approached by five yaks that carried great bulky loads. As we met on the valley floor, we found them to be driven by our bearers. The group was returning from an overnight trek to the Pamir River with loads of firewood cut the day before in the willow thickets and copse

A group of fifty ibex alarmed crossing a snowfield, possibly escaping their predator, the Siberian wolf, the arch enemy of both the Ovis Poli and the ibex (20,000 feet)
 Photo by Kenneth B. Noack

along the river banks. Yak dung is the favorite fuel in the nomad yurt camps where it abounds, but there was hardly enough at our camp to supply the needs of several fires burning almost constantly.

With the thermometer registering near the freezing point in the shade, we lounged comfortably in the sunlight in front of the outdoor kitchen fires. A hearty lunch sizzled away in the iron cooking pots. Through habit, the crafty wild sheep of Pamir rise from their beds in the icebound heights above and range downward to lush grassy benches in late afternoon, and graze during the night. Before mid-afternoon I spotted four polis approaching a sheltered dell high above camp and within less than an hour's climb. All were rams and one big fellow was trophy size. What little breeze there was blew in our favor, so when the Polis settled down to steady feeding, Ali Gohar and I mounted the yaks under cover below the brow of the hill and climbed slowly and as silently as possible to a critical point, where we dismounted and proceeded on foot. Just as we had observed before leaving camp, it was possible to continue the stalk to within close range without exposing ourselves to view. The only remaining problem confronting us was how to negotiate a silent final approach over loose shale. The stone has a tendency to rattle underfoot, and that alone could reach our quarry's sensitive ears and result in complete collapse of all our efforts. But Ali Gohar and I were alone. We climbed slowly and methodically—always seeking firm ground or secure stones for a footing—avoiding the least sound. We felt certain that we had, at last, accomplished our goal. We arrived at a predetermined destination and cautiously looked over the brow of the dell where our rams had been grazing. They had vanished as though by magic—they were nowhere to be seen on the mountainside. Disappointed and confused, we stood shaken on the spot where four stately Poli rams had grazed only minutes before. Ali Gohar and I remained silent. There was no clue as to what caused the alert and disappearance. I looked to Ali Gohar for encouragement but I understood not a word that he spoke. Yet, from the sage expression on his furrowed face and the waving of his arms, I gathered that he thought the animals were not far away, continuing their late afternoon repast in better pastures.

We took up their tracks in the large patches of snow that remained and had little trouble following their trail and escape route in a westerly direction to another grassy bench. Concealing ourselves behind a huge boulder, we got our binoculars and scanned the mountainside. A quarter of a mile ahead amongst boulders and drifted snow we detected movement. A dark cloud blotted out the late afternoon sunlight and it was difficult to make out the sort of animal and the number in the group. But we were confident that they were Polis. The sun reappeared briefly before setting behind the lofty Wakhan Mountains in the far distance. It cast its last rays directly upon our elusive quarry:

there were our evasive four elegant rams and six others, all with their heads down, feeding contentedly at the foot of a steep escarpment. Despite the sudden drop in temperature, we buttoned up our parkas and feasted our eager eyes upon those noble animals. They fed without the slightest perception that they were centered in the field of view through high-powered binoculars. Little did they know that we observed their every movement. We even watched one big fellow nudge his opponent away from a particularly savory morsel he had saved for himself. We were so absorbed in watching the scene before us that little thought was given to planning a stalk to put us in range for telephotography or securing a huge, old monster as a trophy to grace my fireside at home. To our irritation, it was far too late in the day to think about another stalk, but the location was firmly fixed in our minds for an early morning inspection. Hopefully, those magnificent rams would remain for their breakfast.

The long shadows of evening were beginning to envelop us. Bitter cold was setting in for the night as we turned toward the tethering site of the yaks. An hour later we rode into our little compound and hastened alongside the blazing kitchen fires to be handed mugs of hot tea and heavily buttered chappattys. I was prepared to give a detailed account of our attempt to stalk the four elusive Poli rams but learned that the whole camp had been watching our every movement through binoculars. The entire scene had been within their field of view, as camp was not more than a mile and a half away. The four big rams we had tried our best to outwit raised their heavily burdened heads in alarm soon after we dismounted to make our final approach on foot. They rambled along the sloping mountainside to join several of their comrades feeding away contentedly on a small spot of luxuriant grass. Our hurried departure for camp at sundown brought no alarm amongst them. But we found that our bearers had been watching an even larger herd coming out from the icy heights above to graze along with the sheep we had stalked. This bit of intelligence helped to remove at least part of the disappointment we had experienced and prompted a spirited discussion of plans for the morrow as we consumed sticks of buttered nan and a hearty dinner served in the warmth of our felt yurt.

47 **Our Operations Move Deeper Into the Great Pamir**

In spite of the linguistic barrier existing between Ali Gohar and me, we got along commendably even when Sifat Mir was not

*A bleak day in the snowbound heights above Qala Panja.
Photo by Kenneth B. Noack*



along to translate. But I would have liked to discuss many interesting topics with him concerning his stamping grounds — the Great Pamir and Wakhan. Ali Gohar was self-educated and spent a toilsome life in an isolated wilderness where his very existence depended upon what he could wrest from the land. He had a keen mind and a remarkable knowledge of the local tribes and nomadic migrants. He knew their language and customs and helped them when problems arose. He had great respect for law and order, primitive though it had to be in that remote corner of Central Asia.

Before retiring, we got out our maps and scanned the areas already covered. With Ali Gohar's help, we marked the nullahs where large herds of Polis were known to congregate. All of these locations were within three hours yakback from camp. It was heartening to find so many hideaways within so short a distance from our headquarters — there was no likelihood of running out of prime hunting ground. Fourteen different valleys with streams fed by vast glaciers discharge their flows into Pamir River. Each one of these valleys is a hideaway for Marco Polo sheep and ibex. We had already covered no more than a fraction of the area of just one of these valleys and had counted over sixty wild sheep. Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir reminded us that we had only begun our pursuit for those wary beasts. And as yet, we had not explored the most promising ground. I snatched a few winks of sleep during the conversation and soon retired to the comfort of my sleeping bag. I drifted off to sound slumber with dreams of Marco Polo and his account of "wild sheep of giant size, whose horns are good six palms in length."

The constellation of Orion stood out boldly against a clear black sky as I stepped out of the yurt at four the next morning. I reflected over the discovery in the Pamir, halfway around the

globe from my home, of those familiar stars. Orion, the big dipper, and others were cheerful to gaze upon when all else around me remained so strange. They seemed like heavenly friends. Clear skies promised fine weather to explore spectacular ground deeper in the Pamir Steppe. We steered our grunting kashgows in the direction of last evening's hunt. We sallied forth in bright moonlight. All was still as a graveyard. The first rays of dawn struggled with the light of the moon for supremacy. It was barely light enough to make our way up the mountainside, but our yaks plodded along as though they were equipped with radar.

Soon we reached our planned vantage ground. Daylight made its appearance with a pinkish glow over the great snowy peaks while all else below remained dim. Keeping well hidden, Ali Gohar set up the spotting scope and with what daylight there was, quickly spotted seven rams about six hundred yards distant, their heads down and feeding in our direction. Finding cover for our mounts and ourselves, we prepared for action as the sheep approached within range. We were patient as Ali Gohar signaled the animals' leisurely progress in our direction. In our eagerness, we exposed our heads just enough to glance over the stony barrier behind which we were concealed. This was enough to cause an about-face in the sheeps' grazing direction: they slowly disappeared around a spur a quarter mile away. Disappointed and annoyed over our misjudgement, we remounted and followed Ali Gohar, who apparently hoped to overtake them. We climbed steeply over loose shale for another hour until we reached a dawan (mountain pass) overlooking a vast expanse. We stood on ground well over 17,000 feet in altitude and reveled in the stupendous landscape before us.

While the Marco Polo sheep out-manuevered us and disappeared into some sheltered hideaway, we had reached the very heart of their domain. The deep snow disclosed freshly-made footprints of large animals moving over the higher snowbound ridges into less hostile ground below. As the spotting scope was set up, but I was engrossed in scrutinizing the scene before me (the Pamir River was not far below), I examined my topographical map and had no trouble following the river's course all the way from Qala Panja Fortress to Victoria Lake, a distance of about sixty miles. This is the route followed by the distinguished Venetian travelers on their way to the court of Kublai Khan seven hundred years ago. It was within this valley of Pamir that they had their first opportunity to find "great numbers of all kinds of wild beasts; among others, wild sheep of incredible size."

Had Hayward lived to cross the Hindu Kush into Badakshan as he had planned, he would have had the choice of reaching Pamir Steppe by one of two ancient trade routes—the Pamir River chosen by the Polos, or the Ab-i-Panja branch over which

we traveled. Either way, he would have visited this magnificent *jilga* (valley).

The bearers had spread out a tempting lunch in the shelter of a rocky outcrop—battered *chappattys*, strips of roasted mutton and several cans of various Army C-rations. Sifat Mir noted a snowy pass leading into an adjacent *jilga* (valley) that revealed a freshly made game trail. As we examined likely spots with our binoculars, I picked up the head and shoulders of a *Poli ewe* approaching beyond the skyline about a quarter mile away. Then others appeared and followed cautiously in single file. All told, it was the largest herd yet: forty ewes and five small rams crossed the pass and slowly came directly toward the outcrop that screened our stand. Our spirits rose as the sheep approached—one thousand yards, eight hundred, seven hundred. But as we adjusted our cameras for pictures, the animals caught our scent and abruptly stopped in their tracks. We could only hope and pray that larger rams were trailing and would soon appear over the horizon. Alerted but apparently not frightened, the sheep turned their heads, changed course, and ambled away over the snow. They were soon out of sight. Another disappointment, but it had been a capital opportunity to observe those magnificent animals. At five hundred yards range and with the aid of binoculars, it was possible to examine the anatomy of this strange animal. The *Poli* is larger than the red deer of Scotland, stands as high as a small horse or large donkey, has a thick coat of hair similar to the *reindoor*, and is entirely devoid of wool. Only their massive horns mark them as relatives of the more familiar varieties of sheep.

Both Sifat Mir and Ali Gohar seemed encouraged and brightened our spirits by predicting that mature rams were not far afield because many females were in the vicinity. Ali Gohar gazed intently through the scope into the depths of a ravine several hundred yards away. He waved his hand and said that the ravine was a promising shelter and hideout for old rams during rutting season. With that season impending and with some forty attractive females gallivanting leisurely nearby, surely there would be a few elderly and eligible males on hand. Leaving the yaks and bearers trailing well behind, we started off over the snow, bound for a bluff less than a quarter mile away. Our two veteran *shikari* (hunters) led the way with Ken and I following closely. It took all the skill we could muster—we even got down on hands and knees to avoid exposure above the crestline. I trailed several yards behind the others. When the group came to a dead stop Ken motioned for me to come along quickly. I got there just in time to catch sight of three good-sized rams not one hundred yards away as they took off and disappeared into a rocky defile. I had no time to reach for my camera or bring my rifle up for a snapshot. How long they had been bedded down or standing there we would never know. But it was long enough to give us the most dramatic view of the great sheep of Pamir that

we had had to date. We fixed our eyes upon the most likely spot for them to reappear. When they returned, it was at a distance well out of range for the cameras or a running rifle shot. Ali Gohar estimated that the horns would go somewhat under fifty inches, a fair-sized trophy.

Our approach to the ram's hideaway had been a matter of chance. We happened to have been lucky enough to stumble onto the right place at the right time. We had had no idea that the rams were lingering so close to our luncheon site. While the Ovis Poli is said to be widespread throughout the Pamir, we found that the animals are real isolationists, confining themselves to the solitude of lofty crags, glacial flows, and lush glens where they find abundant grass for subsistence. Unless disturbed, they seem to bed down during the day and start moving about near sundown and during the night—crossing political boundaries at will, where it would be unsafe if not impossible for us to follow. Perseverance and long hours afield seemed to be the keys to success in our quest to come to grips with these crafty beasts.

On our return to camp late that afternoon, I came across a number of old, bleached Poli horns and bones strewn about beside our path—mute evidence of a tragic demise for several of these noble animals. They had most likely been the victims of wolves. Ali Gohar explained that when winter approaches and the rigors of cold creep over the frozen heights of Pamir, the great herds of wild sheep descend into more tolerable elevations. The stealthy wolves sense this migration and follow the sheep over deep snow to their sheltered retreat. Displaying remarkable cunning, the wolves advance to encircle and drive the sheep into deep snowdrifts, thereby restricting their movement and confining them. When the cordon is finally drawn around the Polis and all chance of escape is closed, the wolves start howling to panic the sheep into attempting escape through deep drifts where they become easy prey. The aged members of the flock are destined to feel the wolves' sharp teeth. Only the younger animals have a chance of escape.

48

Ken Secures Rare Photos of Ovis Poli in Retreat

The following three days were exciting and disappointing. We were outwitted in every attempt to stalk and approach within range of the fifty or sixty sheep we encountered daily. But the adventure at last had its rewards when Ken managed to set up his telephoto-binocular contrivance five hundred yards from a

herd of twelve rams. We discovered them bedded down amongst huge boulders: so skillfully had they concealed themselves that one became visible only when our carelessness made him wary and caused him to raise his massive horns above a boulder. Up they came, little by little, until I could fix my binoculars on the full monstrous head. I could hardly believe my eyes. Then all of a sudden up came three more—then still more—until twelve rams, four big fellows in the lead, sallied forth across a bare snow patch into a steep nullah. They disappeared, but Ken had been ready for the occasion: three clicks from his camera assured me that he had succeeded.

Six hard-earned but fascinating days taught us that the great sheep of Pamir are craftier than we. Even with the skill of our native guides, the animals outmaneuvered us. Yet Ali Gohar was confident of other more successful encounters. He and Sifat Mir held a durbar (pow-wow) by the fireside while Ken and I gorged on hot buttered chappattys and chunks of yak cheese. After a time, Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir arrived at what seemed to be a sound *modus operandi*. Fair weather had ruled since our arrival in camp. Much snow had melted on many of the sunny slopes, exposing patches of browse and lush fodder to attract game. The strategy for the next day's shikar (sport) would put us at heights above any we had reached thus far. Ali Gohar contended that many of the larger rams would remain well up onto the glaciers in spite of the Arctic-like cold. He kept us in high spirits as he carried on with his plan of approach.

At sundown, great cloudbanks dispersed. The leaden sky cleared and a full moon rose above the distant snowy range to shine like a new silver dollar. Silence fell over our little compound as the gloom of dusk descended upon us. The muted howl of a distant lone wolf broke the calm. I was drifting off to sleep at the early hour of seven.

The harsh grunting of yaks and the popping of our kitchen fires roused me the next morning. I decided to doze until the bearers came to light the lamps and announce breakfast, but the smell of roasting mutton came drifting through the yurt flaps and inspired me to arise for a hearty breakfast.

As I rode my monstrous yak out of the compound in total darkness, the profound silence of the Pamir Valley was interrupted by the annoying grinding of my mount's teeth. His huge tongue hung from his mouth as he shuffled along. His breathing still sounded like the sawing of wood. Occasionally he would bite into the snow to quench his thirst, which gave me temporary relief from his litany of weird noises. Soon our way was brightened by cheerful moonlight that rose between distant sawtooth rims. Our bearers looked like ghosts as they stumbled over the crusted snow in their long chogas and chapons (robes). There were eight of us, including the bearers who pulled the yaks. But despite the pulling, my yak's leisurely gait remained

constant, as though he had been equipped with a mechanical speed governor.

Ali Gohar guided us through a lush, partially snow-covered valley, then above two frozen lakes and upward over stony slopes into a grand boulder-strewn basin. A spectacular glacier dominated the scene in the near distance. A whirr-whirr sound and a whistling came suddenly from the mountainside above. As we looked up, a half-dozen ram chikkors (Himalayan snow cocks) sailed past and alighted beneath a nearby cliff. Belonging to the partridge family, these fine birds sometimes weigh up to eight pounds; they are native to the higher mountain ranges of Central Asia.

Small, lush grassy plots began to appear between the boulders and crags where the sun's rays hastened the melting of snow. According to Sifat Mir, we were approaching a favored haunt of big Poli rams. As rutting season approaches, these lusty old fellows seek isolation until Arctic-like chill sets in to seal off high Pamir for the winter. The rams then sally forth with females and sickle heads (young males) for the more temperate rutting grounds where battle-royal begins for possession of their harems.

The recent severe storm and generally bleak weather had already driven a few younger animals to lower altitudes but it was still too early for the hardy to abandon their favorite hide-away. Numerous fresh tracks appeared in the snow as we climbed, revealing recent movement of several Polis during the night. We hastened to the nearest cover to conceal ourselves and scan the countryside for their whereabouts. Ali Gohar gazed intently into a depression ahead. He signaled for us to dismount and seek cover behind nearby boulders as he set up the spotting scope. Crawling on my hands and knees to his side, I watched him turn the glass slowly on its axis. He stopped and fixed the scope in the direction of a small, boulder-strewn basin at the foot of a glacier. His grin gave assurance that game was in sight. I looked through the scope and was amazed to see six Poli rams of monstrous size — by far the largest we had seen. They stood with their heads down, nudging the snow in search of grass. Two of them possessed outward spiraling horns that made them appear top-heavy. As I excitedly stared, I recalled Marco Polo's observation as the first foreigner to view the great wild sheep of Pamir — "whose horns are good six palms in length."

49

At Last We Outmaneuver Monstrous Poli Rams

Our concealed stand and the favorable direction of the wind gave assurance that we could plan our approach without alarming the rams. This was a priceless opportunity—one we had long dreamed of. We had to get closer. Sifat Mir discovered safe access to some large boulders to gain a hundred yards. We decided that the Polis would not be disturbed by this maneuver, so we started out kneeling and finally went on hands and knees. Bearers and yaks remained behind with instructions to watch our signals. The four of us reached our vantage point and gazed intently at the six magnificent rams, who were unaware of our presence as they munched away at frozen tufts of grass. We were still nearly six hundred yards away and would have preferred it be half that distance for our cameras. Ken and Ali Gohar huddled to work out a stalk that would close the gap. There seemed no feasible way without exposing ourselves to view. The camera and lenses were adjusted and made ready for fast action should our quarry become alarmed. Through the spotting scope, I noted that four of the rams had bedded down in the sun. All were of mature age. Three possessed horns of incredible size. They were unaware of our presence in their remote hideaway. We continued to enjoy the rare privilege of watching every movement they made. Ali Gohar pointed out the grandest and most elderly of the group and estimated the ram's age at thirteen years—about the limit of the Poli's longevity. His massive horns measured more than fifty-five inches, a remarkable trophy he estimated.

It was safe to assume that Ken had been successful in producing splendid photos of this remarkable group of Polis. I wondered about securing the venerable old ram for a trophy. As I gazed at the splendid scene through the high-powered scope, I noted that the old monarch had bedded down while a younger one had taken over as sentinel. Like the wary ibex, the wild sheep is keenly alert to the approach or scent of predator or man. His survival depends upon this instinct. While every one of the six rams appeared to possess horns over fifty inches, my interest was focused on the wise old resting veteran.

I lingered over the decision that faced me—I considered the

hundreds of wild sheep we had seen in a week's exploration of only a fraction of the Pamir Steppe. Then I pictured a scene of terror as a wolf pack closes in on the helpless old monarch, cornered in deep snowdrifts while his younger companions flee to safety. The urge to possess so magnificent a trophy rose as precious time ebbed away. Heedless of the extreme range, I reached for my rifle and fired two shots. Upon the first, the old ram rose to his feet and led the others to a standstill on an icy embankment. Upon the second, he faltered and dropped back to a trailing position, then disappeared into a deep ravine.

Sifat Mir had honed his skills over years of grim existence stalking game on hostile ground in Pamir. Signaling for the yaks to be brought up, he followed the fresh tracks through deep snow. Impatient to retrieve my prize, I followed on foot, expecting to discover the old ram lying prostrate in the snow. But Ali Gohar knew better—he had been reared in the Wakhan. His livelihood was steeped in the lore of the land and he was intimately familiar with the great herds of wild game that roamed his homeland. He advised me that of all the animals roving the Pamir, the great wild sheep is noted for his incredible ability to climb after a mortal wound. Ali Gohar pointed upward toward icy spires and peaks, some reaching 21,000 feet. I could not believe we would wind up on one of them. But the four of us struggled onward and steadily upward as Ali Gohar promised that the ram lay close by. I looked back into the valley and saw that our yaks and bearers had reached the ravine where we started our climb. They awaited further signals to follow our tracks when we reached our quarry. "Come, look," called Ali Gohar, pointing his finger at a large track in the snow. It was the footprint of a prowling wolf, grim evidence of predators not far away.

50 **Our Quest Ends at 19,000 Feet**

Marco Polo sheep possess remarkable stamina, and it was not until we had reached the thin air at 19,000 feet that we came upon the old ram. He lay on a promontory, his loyal companions standing nearby as if guarding their veteran leader. Upon sighting us, they scrambled up over deep snow and jagged rocks to a pass on the skyline a thousand feet above us. Soon they had disappeared. But my hard-earned prize had reached his final destination. Ken climbed up on the knoll and dragged the ram down a steep, icy slope to a basin where I awaited. I admired the old patriarch as Ali Gohar got out his tape to measure up. I



At 19,000 feet in the Great Pamir of Afghan Turkestan after many days' effort given by every one of us, we succeeded in securing a fine 55-inch specimen of Marco Polo ram with a 40-inch spread of horns weighing 200 kilograms. Ali Gohar estimated his age at over thirteen years—nearly the maximum life of this species before becoming the victim of the Siberian wolf.
Photo by bearer

guessed fifty-four inches around the curve of the massive outswept horn—the tape found forty-inch spread at the tips and sixteen inches around the base. The ram's body size rivaled that of a large donkey. According to our shikaris, his weight would go slightly under two hundred kilograms (a little over 400 pounds).

I relaxed from the excitement and tension of the past days—it was comforting to know that success had come in the midst of strange lands, strange peoples and strange animals. A shrill whistle brought bearers and yaks up the steep mountainside while we set about preparing the bulky carcass for transportation back to camp. Our faithful bearers arrived looking exhausted, followed by four grunting yaks reluctantly climbing through snowdrifts three feet deep, unaware of the burden they would carry back to camp. The bearers spread a saddle blanket over the snow in the shelter of a rocky outcrop for our noontime tiffin. Chappattys, yak cheese, tinned fruit and tasteless K-rations rekindled our weary muscles and warmed our bodies for the chore to come.

While the bearers loaded the carcass onto the backs of two yaks, Ali Gohar made a careful examination of the sheep's horns and accurately estimated the age by counting the well-defined growth rings on each horn. We decided that the ram was thirteen years old. Since fourteen to fifteen years is considered to be the limit of the species longevity before becoming the

victim of predators, it was reassuring to know that ours had been nearing the terminal point in his life and was spared a tragic fate. By tape the accurate measurement of each horn around the curve was found to be 55 inches.

I brought up the rear of our little pack train as we headed back to camp. I had time to admire those massive horns, roped in an upright position on the back of the leading yak. At times, the horns presented a strange illusion, for it looked as though they rested on the yak's head. They appeared far too massive, even for a one-half-ton yak.

As we descended slowly from our perch at 19,000 feet, the distant scene across the Great Pamir onto the Wakhan Mountains became awesome. It seemed that the higher we went, the higher these peaks in the distance appeared. Karl Marx sentinel stood guard in Soviet territory with his crown rising nearly 23,000 feet above the sea—a silent vanguard forever watchful of the vast wilderness he commands.

Billowy white clouds swelled in the western sky like the sails of ships at sea. As I watched them streak across the blue sky, I caught a glimpse of two specks moving toward us. Down they came with set wings, streaking directly toward a small frozen pond—most likely to settle down for the night. But they were in for a grand surprise, for when they flapped their wings for a final soft landing, they struck the ice and skidded away in amazement. As we passed, I saw that they were ruddy shelldrakes, ducks common to Central Asia and North Africa. In late summer and early autumn myriad varieties of wildfowl abound in the lakes of Pamir and Kashmir. Winter migration to warmer feeding grounds begins when the first hard freeze sets in. Our two lonely shelldrakes had probably been forced to land after a long and difficult flight in the thin air across Pamir. We were told that many of them die or become badly injured as they struggle to wing their way up and over the highest passes.

51 **Camp Bristles with Excitement**

Our leading yaks, burdened with ponderous loads, moved along at a snail's pace. At every step their cloven hooves broke through hard, crusted snow with a sound like shattering glass. We neared camp as the shadows of soaring crags on the skyline began to envelop us. We shivered and buttoned up our greatcoats and prepared for the austerity of sundown.

Entering the bounds of our compound, the cries of shahbas (well done) came to our ears on the breeze. The bearers came running out to shake our hands and congratulate us with broad

smiles and animated conversation, not a word of which I understood. I replied with a lusty *mubarak* (good luck). And I believe they agreed with me that luck plays an important role in securing an outstanding Poli ram.

When the hilarity of our bearers quieted down and calm was restored, our little encampment returned to its normal state. As I drew close to the cheerful kitchen fires to relax, I glanced up toward the nearby Poli grazing grounds—sure enough, five of the stately rams stood looking down on our strange and noisy enclave, unconcerned about the trials and tribulations of our civilized life and the political frontiers over which we dare not tread. We drew closer to the red-hot embers of the fireside. Biting cold penetrated our heavy clothing, running shivers up our spines while the fireside heat roasted our faces and chests. At last we were lured to the luxury of the felt-covered yurt to bid defiance against wind and weather.

52 **Fumes of Sheep's Liver and Onions Drift into Our Yurt**

The heavy door of the yurt was thrust open by our cook who came to spread the table cloth and announce that tonight there would be *dastarkhan* (festive celebration). As we relaxed in anticipation, two bearers entered burdened with our feast: barbecued Marco Polo sheep's liver and onions roasted over glowing coals, leek soup, tinned corn and a variety of unfamiliar dishes prepared for this festive occasion. Ken brought out a bottle of Russian vodka he had bought in Leningrad en route to Afghanistan. We offered a toast to our two untiring native guides who had organized our expedition into the Great Pamir, and whose outstanding guidance had brought us to grips with more than three hundred wild sheep and nearly as many Turkestan ibex. Their efforts eventually led to the six magnificent rams and success.

Then Sifat Mir and Ali Gohar offered a toast to us as two adventurous Americans who came to explore the realms of the River Oxus and Pamir Steppe, its inhabitants and nomadic tribes. At last, the bottle of *Stolichnaya* vodka became so depleted that we had to forego additional toasts and get along with our tempting *dastarkhan* while it was still warm from the glowing coals.

A large mug of hot tea flavored with Wakhan honey warmed our weary bodies and prepared us for bed. Knowing that there would be no three-thirty alarm to disturb our sound sleep come morning, we retired at the late hour of eight. But when three-

thirty arrived, I was fully awake from habit; I needed time to adjust to the luxury of lying in bed till sunup. At last I drifted off to sound sleep again, only to be awakened three hours later by the cooks rattling pans and preparing breakfast.

The next two days provided respite from the vigorous schedule we had become accustomed to—yet every one of us kept occupied with the chores of breaking camp, dismantling the yurt, and the meticulous detail of preparing the sheep's head and hide for mounting. At last our cozy little shelter had to be dismantled and made ready for transport to Sargaz. Five bearers loosened the binding ropes and peeled off felt and blanket-sized squares, exposing the intricate framework. The process looked like the skinning of some giant, prehistoric quadraped. The skeletal remains presented a grotesque-looking specter. The unknown architect who had designed the felt yurt in the time before Genghis Khan deserved a Mongolian Legion of Honor.

53 **Last Days Amongst the Nomadic Tribes**

It was a dismal day when we mounted our yaks and turned our backs to isolated wilderness encampment where we had lingered in contentment. As we rode in single file through the compound, our little manor sank back into its natural calm, not to be disturbed again until some wandering nomad chanced to pass by. As I glanced back over the formidable landscape that had beckoned me, I felt a sense of gratification knowing that we had barely disturbed the numberless bands of those great Marco Polo sheep and ibex, whose abode from time immemorial has been confined to the Pamir wilderness.

Only the two isolated stone huts remained in peaceful solitude. Soon they would be buried beneath drifts of heavy snow. The nomad herder's encampment was reached in late afternoon, in time to mingle again with those stalwart mountain Tadjiks and learn more about their domestic life. Two little Tadjik maids, dressed in sheepskins and riding double on the back of an unruly yak, were prodding several stray yaks homeward with the aid of willow whips. Trained wolf-like dogs snapped viciously at the stubborn beasts to bring them back into line. Before entering the herdsman's compound, I noted womenfolk and small children busily driving flocks of goats and sheep off the mountain slope and open valley floor to nightly protection within rock-walled corrals.

I dismounted my yak in front of the yurt. The owner shook my

hand warmly and invited me in to share a bowl of well-ripened yogurt poured into dried apricots. I was glad to have another opportunity to inspect the interior of his yurt. I had with me several pieces of costume jewelry I had brought from home as gifts. Several women and children gleamed as I displayed my bait, which I had brought in hopes of inducing the womenfolk to permit me to photograph them.

The women were quite choosy in their selection and one of them handed back all but one of the five pieces offered her. The children were not so fastidious—they reached up for beads and trinkets even before the prizes were offered.

Before leaving, I was offered a potent draft of kumiss which I sipped with caution and later disposed of without being discovered. Sifat Mir told me that kumiss has a reputation as a tonic, a cure for fever, and as a retardant for aging. It renews vigor and virility and possesses powers too numerous to mention. I decided to forego its magic potency.

One of the women, in her colorful native robe, sat near the fireside kneading nan (bread) dough in a wooden trough in preparation for the evening meal. As usual, a large shank of meat (probably yak) hung from a wire above glowing coals. It gave off a savory aroma and whetted my appetite for supper. Flickering firelight disclosed the yurt's furnishings: a crimson, geometrically designed felt carpet caught my eye. Two dark-eyed Tadjik women tended the coals and patted out circular chappattys to roast on a huge iron griddle. The tinkle of bells sounded outside as yaks and goats bedded down for the night in the bleak stone-walled corral.

I left the warmth of the yurt pondering over those hardy natives inside. They and their ancestors had camped on the Pamir Steppe for countless seasons and turned their herds out on the rich grass until snow and icy cold drove them back to their winter quarters some seven thousand feet lower in elevation. There they remained until the sun cast its shadow on the notch in a wooded post and heralded the return of still another spring season. Once again the natives would feel the urge to climb the heights above.

54 **Homeward Bound**

During the three days we lingered at the nomad's camp we did not hear an infant cry or a single harsh word from a child. They played happily despite the bitter cold and utter isolation—we

handed them toy balloons which they divided fairly amongst themselves.

Twenty-seven yaks, their shaggy, foot-long winter coats reaching nearly to the ground, were brought in from the snowy heights for our return journey to the banks of the Oxus. Leftover supplies, equipment, the yurt and its furnishings, and the Marco Polo sheep trophy awaited loading onto the backs of the animals for the long and tiresome stage to Ali Gohar's compound.

The loading operation next morning demanded all the skill and brawn our bearers could muster. Sifat Mir stood on a wooden box and directed packing operations—calling out orders to the bearers with a willow stick in hand, pointing and rotating signals like a concert master waving his wand before the orchestra. Then, when the last load was roped in place, we were strewn one by one and in single file along the dim trail for nearly a mile. An early morning haze blanketed the 16,000-foot valley as we approached the steep incline leading to the pass. Climbing up through the mist and emerging above we were cheered by a bright blue sky and the warmth of sunlight. In looking back toward the Great Pamir, it appeared as though we were gazing out to sea—the frosty peaks resembled great icebergs emerging over water. It was a remarkable apparition, a scene of Arctic-like splendor I shall never forget. The sun's bright rays soon melted the vaporlike pall and fully revealed the peaks and spires and landscape below.

In the opposite direction across the River Oxus, the majesty of the Hindu Kush Mountains reached its most imposing grandeur as far as the eye could see. Mighty glaciers, ice falls, and snow fields laced the entire range. As we descended steeply from the 17,000-foot pass, we faced the staggering pyramid of Baba Tanji, soaring skyward and dwarfing all others within view. Clothed in the spotless garb of eternal snow and ice, it presented a scene of dazzling white against an azure blue sky. This scene, too, would be etched in my memory forever.

Our attention was abruptly diverted by the appearance of a band of about twenty ibex feeding unalarmed on a bare, grassy spot some four hundred yards off. Their tracks disclosed that they had crossed a great snowfield from high above to find this sunny spot where the warmth had exposed tasty vegetation. Several were big fellows who carried great upswept horns of trophy dimensions. But I had no interest in securing another trophy; I was content with the success already achieved. To view the ibex and observe their movements was rewarding enough.

Toward sundown and after a drop of nearly seven thousand feet, we reached the tiny village and rode up to Ali Gohar's lonely compound. We were greeted once more by the local elders with the familiar "shabahs" (well done), and warm compliments on our successful two-week expedition. One of the natives, a particularly imposing gentleman, stood out among the group that waited to greet us. He wore a long, formal chapon of

excellent quality and tailoring. I was informed later that he was the village Aksakal (head man) of a nearby settlement. He came forward to greet me warmly. I tried to look impressive as I sat there on my shaggy gray mount, but finally realized that a yak hardly lends dignity to such a setting. Through my linguist, we chatted briefly about his homeland and mine. I left for my quarters with a feeling that I had learned more from him than he learned from me.

Our primary objective to explore the Wakhan Corridor and to trace Hayward's planned access into the Pamir Steppe was now behind us. We had lived amongst the Wakhis, the mountain Tadjiks and Uzbeks, all of Aryan origin. We had come face-to-face with a few Mongol-featured Kirghis nomads, members of a widely scattered race belonging to the parent stock of Ottoman Turks.

A small settlement on the left bank of the Oxus some four miles distant was our goal for the following day. Sifat Mir had selected Baba Tanji as the most exemplary of the small villages of the upper Wakhan. One of the families residing there had features remarkably typical of the original inhabitants of Wakhan. Our curiosity was aroused and we went to sleep with visions of blue-eyed children with blond tresses and fair complexions.

Morning broke with biting cold that chilled us to the bone. There was a frozen stillness all around. A white veil of hoarfrost coated the valley of the Oxus. But when the icy mountain heights above caught the first rays of sunlight, they glowed like fiery towers.

Breakfast over, we changed to horseback, much to the relief of our weary legs after two weeks astride the broad backs of yaks. Long before reaching Baba Tanji, we heard the laughter of children at play. From Kabul we had brought several bolts of colorful cotton cloth for distribution as gifts to the local native children who patiently awaited our arrival. We watched as they assembled into a single file formation under the direction of the village elder. Upon arrival, we were gladdened by the sight of so *many* children, perhaps forty in all, standing at attention in their modest homespun frocks, to greet and welcome us to their lonely homeland. Brightly-colored carpets of oriental design were spread out on the ground for our comfort in the center of their little hamlet. We seated ourselves and listened to a number of their folk songs.

Surrounding the area of activity were the children's homes, built in bygone times from mud and stone and wattle. Each had a simple doorway for entrance and illumination. An opening in the roof vented the acrid smoke from their camel and yak dung fires. The entire population seemed to have turned out for the occasion; many had traveled from cultivated plots along the nearby river.

My visions of blue-eyed children with fair tresses and com-

plexions came true with my discovery of a handsome adolescent girl and her younger brother. I had sought this prototype of typical Aryan stock throughout Badakshan and the Wakhan Corridor. Now, in this remote and lonely quarter of Wakhan, success had been achieved. The girl had blond hair, bright blue eyes and very fair skin. She stood taller than the rest of the children of her age. The boy's features were quite the same, but were not as refined as his sister's. Nor was he as tall as she. I had no problem snapping many close-up pictures of the girl and her playmates, but I needed several pieces of costume jewelry and a number of Afghani notes to lure the elder women into close range of my camera.

Settling down on the carpets, we were served hot tea and dried fruits as Ali Gohar and Sifat Mir cut several bolts of the colorful cotton cloth into three-yard pieces to be distributed among the children. Each one received nine yards; it was inspiring to watch the happy expressions on their faces as they rambled off to their dwellings. There was no question about the parent stock of these Wakhan natives. They are mountain Tadjiks, an Aryan race of Central Asia widely scattered throughout northern Afghanistan.

Before departing, I climbed up onto a ruined stone wall of an ancient watch tower in order to obtain a better view of the stupendous landscape surrounding the Ab-i-Panja source of the Oxus. I fixed my eyes on a remarkable geographical point perhaps sixty miles distant where water gushes from melting glaciers and trickles westward to mingle with others to form the Ab-i-Panja and, ultimately, the Oxus. Swelling in volume, the river meanders 1,400 miles through Wakhan to the plains of northern Afghanistan and Bukhara before ending in the Sea of Aral. From this same geographical point on the great Asiatic Divide, gushing underground springs turn their courses eastward to merge with others before flowing out onto the great Takla Makin Desert (wilderness of death). They eventually dry up in the faraway depression of Lop in Sinkiang, the westernmost province of China. Still other springs emerge there and flow southward through the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan into the Huna and Gilgit rivers. They later converge with the mighty Indus on its long journey through the Punjab and Sind deserts to the Arabian sea, and, finally, the Indian Ocean.

I tarried for a spell with my eyes fixed on this remarkable promontory on the southern rim of the "Roof of the World" where three great Empires meet and where historic rivers rise and flow in opposite directions. Only one finds its meandering way to the sea. Just a few yards from the crumbling stone wall upon which I rested was the dim camel trail leading to China, the ancient Cathay. Marco Polo's footprints had long since vanished, but I pondered over the great Venetian's last statement. As he lay on his deathbed, a group of his most intimate friends pleaded with him for the peace of his soul to retract some of the incredible statements he had recorded in his journals—

descriptions of his fantastic and almost unbelievable travels. But as Marco Polo sank back on his pillow, his only reply was, "I have not told the half of what I saw." He was buried in the church of San Lorenzo.

Were it possible for me to report to my benefactor, Lieutenant George W. Hayward—fearless explorer of Central Asia's frozen wilderness more than one hundred years ago—I would have to acknowledge that although I followed for many miles in his footsteps and in the route he would have followed had he lived, I did not view the half of what he saw, or what he would have seen.

Hayward had already earned the Royal Geographical Society's highest award, the Founder's Gold Medal, before cruel fate terminated his brilliant career.

I admired the intrepid Hayward for his daring explorations in the Himalayas and Hindu Kush mountains of Central Asia. Reading about them fascinated me as much as the *Tales of the Arabian Knights*.

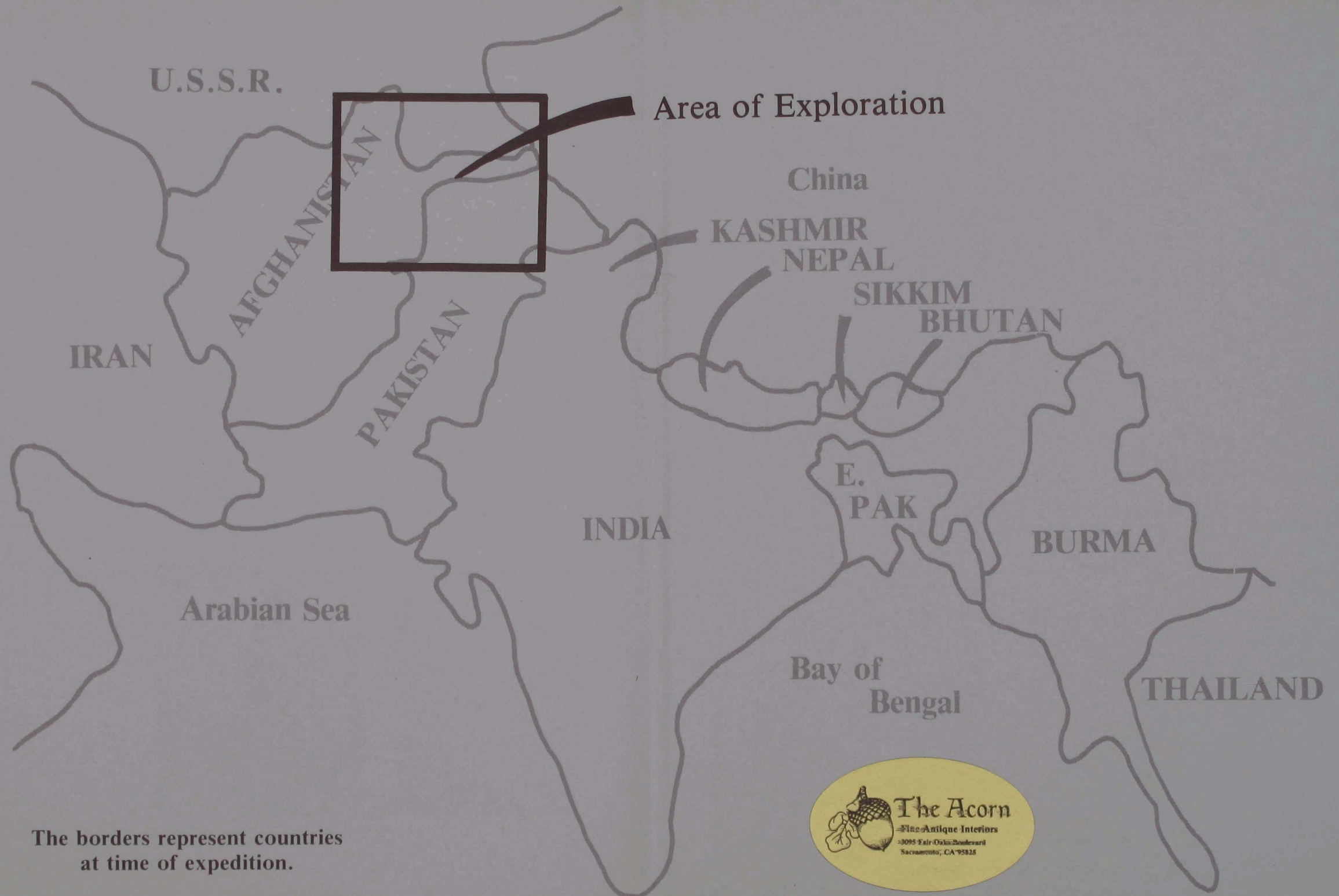
I would like to have followed in more of Hayward's routes in the terra incognita of Hindu Kush. However, at the time I was in the vicinity, I was advised against entering the troubled and dangerous areas involved. There may be, however, an opportunity for me to visit an even more incredible path of Hayward's in Chinese Turkestan before my trekking days come to a close, inshallah.

As Hayward lies in his lonely grave in faraway Gilgit cemetery, I ponder over his cruel fate that prevented his exploration of Pamir Steppe—if only his phantom could have seen through my eyes while I explored his assignment given in the Pamirs by the Royal Geographical Society of London.

THE END



Photo by Kenneth B. Noack



U.S.S.R.

Area of Exploration

China

KASHMIR
NEPAL

SIKKIM
BHUTAN

IRAN

AFGHANISTAN

PAKISTAN

INDIA

E.
PAK

BURMA

Arabian Sea

Bay of
Bengal

THAILAND

The borders represent countries
at time of expedition.





*Mid Nineteenth Century glacial explorer and mountaineer of the Himalayas, George J.W. Hayward.
Photo courtesy of the Royal Geographical Society of London*