

ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



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TRAVEL & ADVENTURE



"ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD"

by
Cap! H. Walton-Saule.

A chatty record of things seen and experiences met with among the stupendous mountains of the "Roof of the World" and in the little-known wilds of Baluchistan and the Hindu Kush. Captain Walton-Saule's photographs add greatly to the interest of his descriptions of his wanderings far from sight or sound of civilization.

I.

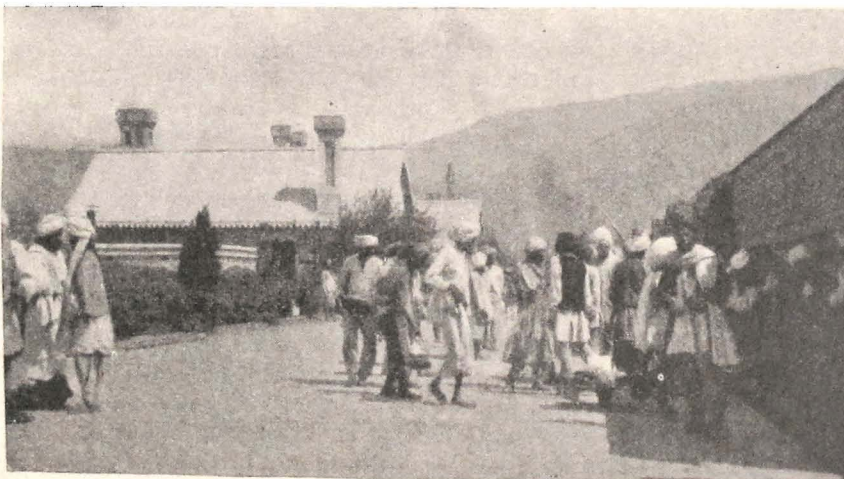


HAVE recently spent a considerable period of time travelling among the wilds of Baluchistan, visiting the "Roof of the World," and traversing the stupendous mountains of the Hindu Kush. This article sets forth the things I saw and the experiences I met with; and, seeing that the region is so inaccessible and remote from civilization, the narrative may be found of interest to the readers of THE WIDE WORLD MAGAZINE.

This photograph, which shows a railway

station in Baluchistan, forms a fitting introduction to my story, for from the moment of leaving this railway my wanderings lay among barren, trackless lands and turbulent folk whose sole knowledge of the "iron horse" is gathered from the half-believed tales of their more travelled brethren, who confidently ascribe its achievements to the devilish magic characteristic of the European, which enables him, it is reputed, to harness the lightning by means of wires to convey his messages about the land.

The Baluchis, compared to the Afghans and other Pathan tribes, are of a comparatively law-abiding turn of mind, yet their country is not far separated from the district of the most lawless tribesmen of the Indian borderland, the Mahsuds, whose creed from time immemorial has been that murder and theft form the only means of livelihood for a man of spirit, and who nobly carry out the doctrine of their race whenever opportunity occurs.



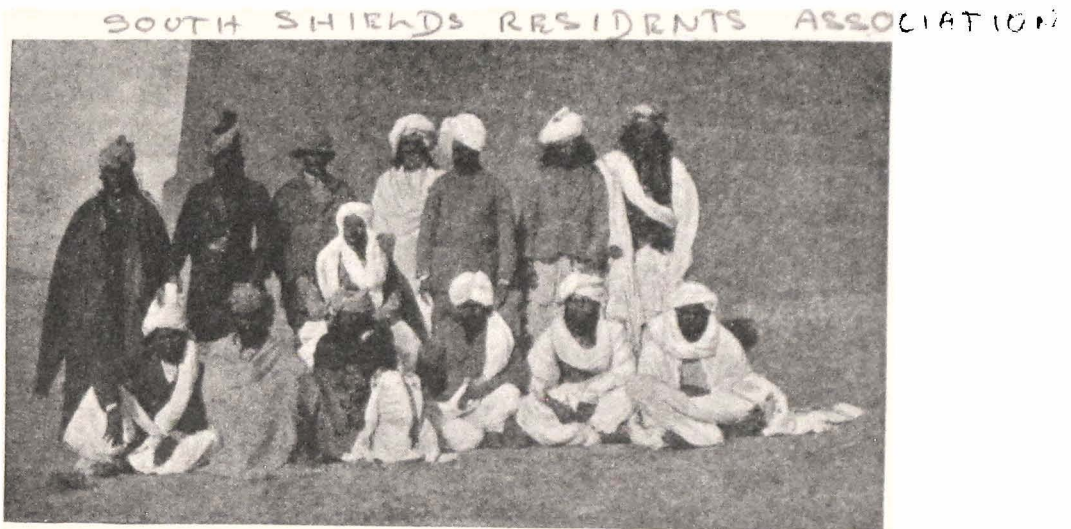
A RAILWAY STATION IN BALUCHISTAN—AFTER LEAVING HERE THE AUTHOR'S WANDERINGS LAY
From a [Photo.]
AMONG TRACKLESS LANDS AND TURBULENT FOLK.

Even among the milder Baluchis temptation to violent acquisition of wealth is a thing they cannot withstand, and it is but a few years since, and while I was in the district, that this fact was exemplified by an experience of the British officer of the native levies, who was at the time touring round his posts on the Afghan border with the usual small retinue of followers.

While passing from post to post among the foothills of the Suleiman range Major X—— invariably made it his custom that an armed escort should accompany his personal baggage and effects. On the occasion in question he had gone a short way from his tents, leaving

assembly of the Baluchi sirdars of the Ghob district, the central figure being the chief sirdar of the district. These sirdars are all landowners and men of substance, yet their features show clearly the imprint of the wild instincts of their ancestry.

The marked Semitic cast of feature and expression which is observable along the frontiers of Afghanistan leads one to the irresistible conclusion that here at least some portion of the lost tribes of Israel must have sojourned for a time: while the tribal names, Suleiman Issak (Solomon Isaac), Yussuf (Joseph), and others of a similar Hebraic origin, and many traditions handed down among them from the



From a]

A GROUP OF BALUCHI SIRDARS.

[Photo.

directions that camp was to be struck and moved a short distance through the hills. On his return he found that his servants had started off with their camels without waiting for his Border sirdars to accompany them. He had a foreboding of disaster, and galloped off at once in pursuit with the native N.C.O. and two men who formed his personal guard. Before proceeding far a single shot was fired at him as he entered a narrow pass. Sending his men to right and left, he hastened on, and round the first corner came upon the sight he had dreaded to see—his servants butchered, his camels hamstrung, and his baggage cut open and ransacked.

The thieves had had but a short two hours to collect their forces and prepare the ambush, yet only too successfully had it been carried out, and, save for a sniping shot or two at his party as they carefully reconnoitred the surrounding hills, not a trace was ever found of the perpetrators, who no doubt made good their escape across the Afghan border.

The above photograph shows a representative

mists of early times, lend corroborative evidence to the strong foundation for this belief. A marked peculiarity in the dress of the Baluchi is the extraordinarily voluminous nature of his white linen trousers, which are girdled round the waist and gathered in at the ankle, between which they hang in longitudinal folds. As many as forty yards of cotton stuff, or even more, are frequently employed in the manufacture of a pair of these wonderful leg-coverings! The Baluchi spends his life in the saddle, and few parts of the world can provide finer horsemen over rough country than Baluchistan.

The horses are small but wiry, and of the true Arab breed. Broad in the forehead and fine in the muzzle, they betray blood and intelligence in that most characteristic part of the horse—the head. Their iron limbs and lean shapeliness tell of a constitution which can stand all the hardships of the bitter winter cold and fierce summer heat of their uplands, and can keep them in condition on the scanty grass and short commons of their barren land. Few



A SACRED SPRING TO WHICH A CURIOUS LEGEND IS ATTACHED—THE SINGING OF A CERTAIN NATIVE LOVE-SONG IS SUPPOSED TO INCREASE THE FLOW OF WATER! [Photo.]

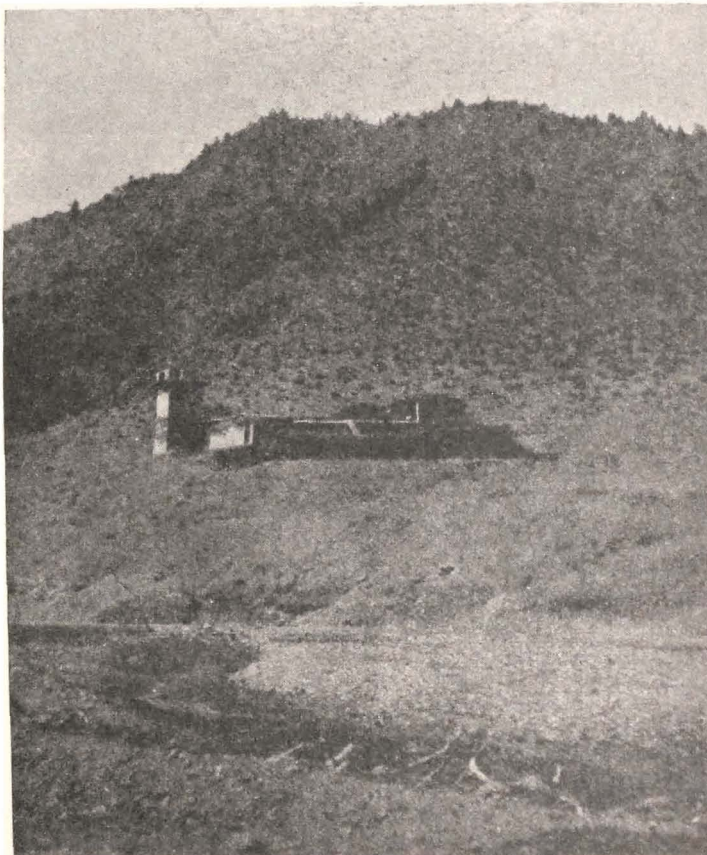
more pleasant mounts can be found than a good Baluchi pony which has been taught, as all the best of them are, to pace—a gait at which they can keep up for hours alongside a freely cantering horse.

In the above photograph some of these ponies can be seen, with their owners, gathered round a sacred spring to which attaches one of the many poetic legends of the Baluchi folk-lore. Tradition relates how a beautiful maiden of the country was transformed into a spring of water in the midst of an arid plain, and that when a particular Baluchi love-song which her friends were wont to sing to her is sung at this fountain the spring gushes forth with doubled volume.

Sad to relate, on this occasion no such effect could be observed at the close of the rather mournful melody chanted by some

dozen young Baluchis, but, as they explained, it is in answer to the song when sung by maidens that the most immediate reply is always vouchsafed.

The photograph below shows a typical Waziri walled village with its watch-tower. This particular hamlet is situated at the end of a beautifully-wooded valley, overlooking scenery which is rare in this arid country—cedar forests, grassy glades, and limpid streams—a veritable paradise in a dry and barren land where no water is, and which I found a most attractive resting-place during my wanderings in Waziristan. Here I made the acquaintance of a village elder, with whom I eventually became on more friendly terms than is usually possible with these somewhat reserved men. He had but one foot, the other having been cut off at the ankle—and, on my inquiring if



A TYPICAL WAZIRI WALLED VILLAGE, WITH ITS WATCH-TOWER. [From a Photo.]

this were the result of an accident, I was informed that he had been so from birth. His father had disgraced the family by dying peacefully in his bed instead of in the recognised and honourable way of tribal fight or family vendetta—and the baby's foot had been lopped off to expiate his shame!

The next photograph brings the more western

river-bed which forms the ford, and are standing to mark the way and assist the traveller across. The presence of numerous quicksands in almost all these frontier streams forms a further danger, even when they are not in flood.

In the lower photograph we see a vehicle which is familiar by name to all readers of Rudyard Kipling's works—the "tonga," a



CROSSING THE MOUNTAIN STREAMS IS A TRYING AND DANGEROUS BUSINESS—THE SMALLEST RIVULET MAY DEVELOP INTO A RAGING TORRENT IN A FEW MINUTES. *[Photo.]*

series to an end and shows one of the difficulties of travel in these parts, where the smallest streams may develop into dangerous raging torrents in the course of a few minutes—from the effects of a violent thunderstorm among the hills. Under such circumstances all sign of the ford is lost, and a deviation in crossing of merely a few inches may mean drowning, as

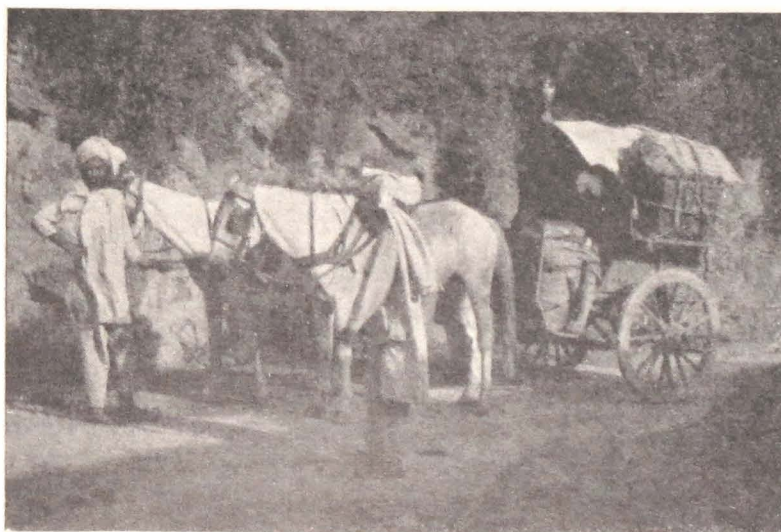
was the case with a squadron of the 9th Lancers in Afghanistan, whose tragic fate is told in the wailing verses of Kipling's song, often heard in military camps in India, "The Ford of Cabul River." In this photograph two natives have stripped and cautiously felt their way step by step along the part of the

marvel of strength in carriage construction and of easy draught up and down hilly roads.

The native drivers of these mail carts, blowing their bugles almost continuously to clear the road for their approach, will gallop at breakneck speed down the most dangerous slopes and swing on one wheel round apparently impossible corners; yet a smash is of the rarest occurrence,

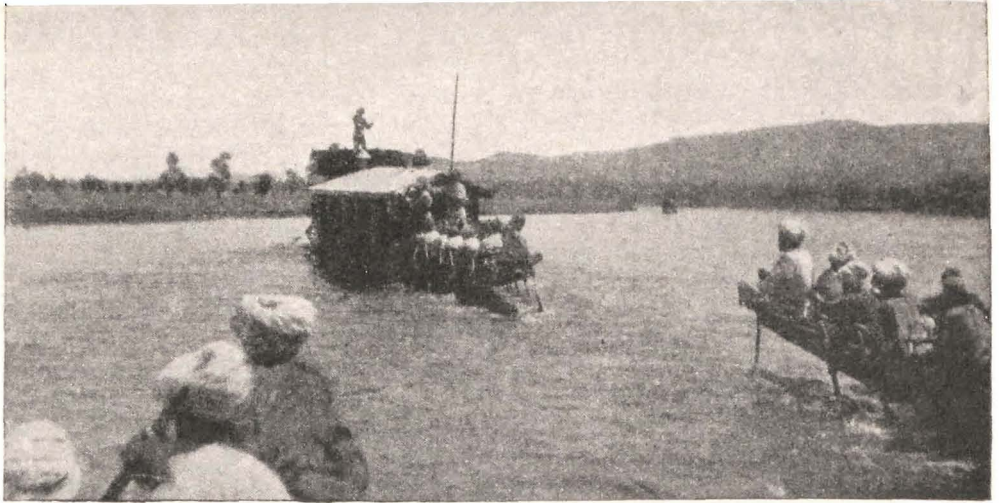
and when it happens is generally the result of the cranky temper of the sour, country-bred ponies which usually form the team.

When a smash *does* come, however, it is necessarily complete, but in the course of many years' acquaintance with this method of travelling I had but one narrow shave, and that was



HIS MAJESTY'S MAIL-CART—THE "TONGA" IS THE ONLY WHEELED VEHICLE WHICH CAN BE USED IN THE HILLS, AND A LIFE IN ONE IS AN EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER. *[From a Photo.]*

through a vicious pony deliberately pulling back to let drive into the tonga -- he had already cleared away the splash-board --- and his heels missed my head by the fraction of an inch. The immediate cause of his temper was thought by his driver to be the touch of the rein on his back, wherefore



THE MAHARAJAH OF KASHMIR'S STATE HOUSEBOAT BEING PADDLED UP THE JHELUM RIVER.
From a Photo.

Few more pleasant methods of traveling can be found than in the luxurious houseboats of Kashmir, and one stage of the journey from India to the eternal snows has to be performed in this way—up the Jhelum River and across the Wular Lake.

The annexed photograph shows a typical scene in the higher valleys and birch woods of the fair land of Kashmir, where the narrow track which eventually leads to Central Asia and the Russian railway system east of Samarkand is seen slowly ascending to the summit of the Kamir Pass, depicted in the picture next reproduced.

These smiling summer photographs



A TYPICAL SCENE IN BEAUTIFUL KASHMIR—THE NARROW TRACK IN THE FOREGROUND IS THE ROAD TO CENTRAL ASIA.
From a Photo.

he placed his assistant on the roof of the tonga to hold the near rein clear, while he drove with the off rein and whip from the inside. We concluded the stage in safety, but on a steep and devious road it was a nerve-shattering performance for the passenger.

The top photo. on this page takes us a stage farther on our approach to the Hindu Kush, and shows the Maharajah of Kashmir's state houseboat being paddled up the Jhelum River towards Srinagar.



From a

ON THE SUMMIT OF THE KAMIR PASS.

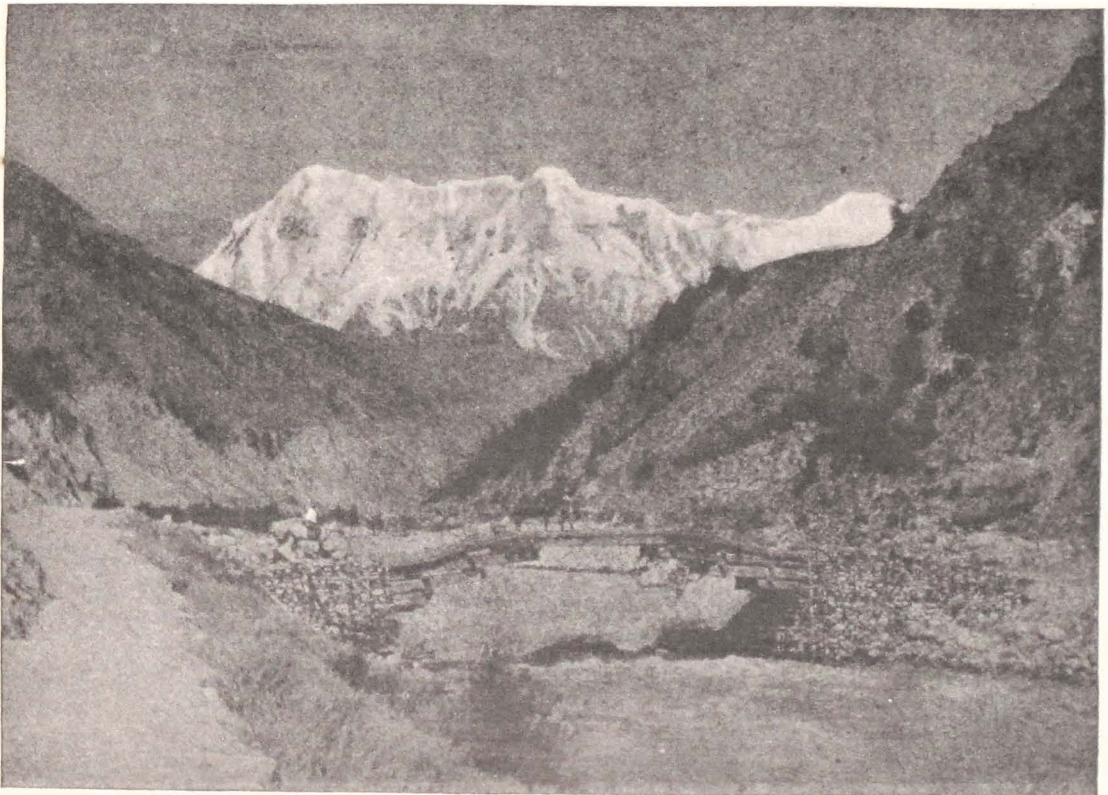
Photo.

give no indication of the dangers of crossing this and other passes when the first snows of October have warned travellers of the risk of being caught in one of the sudden blizzards, which obliterate all traces of the track and may last for days. These storms have been responsible for much suffering and loss of life to people crossing the fourteen-thousand-foot plateau which forms the summit of these dangerous passes. About half-way across the neighbouring Burzil Pass there is a refuge hut of the strongest timber perched on an Eiffel Tower-like structure some forty feet above the ground, and this gives an indication of the depth of snow which covers the surface in mid-winter, while additional proof is afforded by the enormous height and thickness of the telegraph poles and the strength of the wire which crosses this pass on its long journey to Gilgit and Chitral and beyond. Frost-bite, avalanches, and blizzards all claim their toll of victims almost daily on these passes during the winter months. Yet to those who have seen them only in summer it seems impossible that such scenes of horror can take place on them in winter, or that even in the most blinding snow-storm a reasoning being could lose his way in the short mile or two which forms the summit plateau.

Yet so it is, and in the space of seconds the

track, all sense of direction, and almost all power of thought can be lost under the fearful lash of a howling winter blizzard.

The next photograph shows a view of one of the most stupendous mountains in the world, Nanga Parbat (the Naked Mountain), which rears its vast snow-clad mass to a height of twenty-six thousand six hundred and sixty-two feet above sea-level. With the exception of Rakapushi, in the Kara Korum range, this mountain forms the most magnificent sight of any peak in this portion of the Indian Alps. From the point on the Gilgit road where this picture was taken, the sense of overpowering height which it gives the beholder cannot be conveyed by any photograph. No native of the country will approach Nanga Parbat, which is to them the abode of the most fearsome demons, who, they say, deal certain death to anyone who ventures to trespass on its sacred snows. In proof of this belief they instance the fate of the well-known Alpine climber, Mr. Mummery, who, accompanied by two Gurkhas, made an attempt on its western slopes some years ago, none of them having ever been seen again. The bridge in the foreground of this same photograph gives a good idea of the rough cantilever system used for all the bridges on this road.



NANGA PARBAT, ONE OF THE MOST STUPENDOUS MOUNTAINS IN THE WORLD—IT IS NEARLY TWENTY-SEVEN THOUSAND FEET HIGH, AND THE NATIVES BELIEVE IT TO BE INHABITED BY FEARSOME DEMONS, WHO WILL DESTROY ANYONE WHO VENTURES NEAR.

from a Photo

(To be concluded.)

Travel and Adventure on the "Roof of the World."

BY CAPTAIN H. WALTON-SAULE.

A chatty record of things seen and experiences met with among the stupendous mountains of the "Roof of the World" and in the little-known wilds of Baluchistan and the Hindu Kush. Captain Walton-Saule's photographs add greatly to the interest of his descriptions of his wanderings far from sight or sound of civilization.

II.

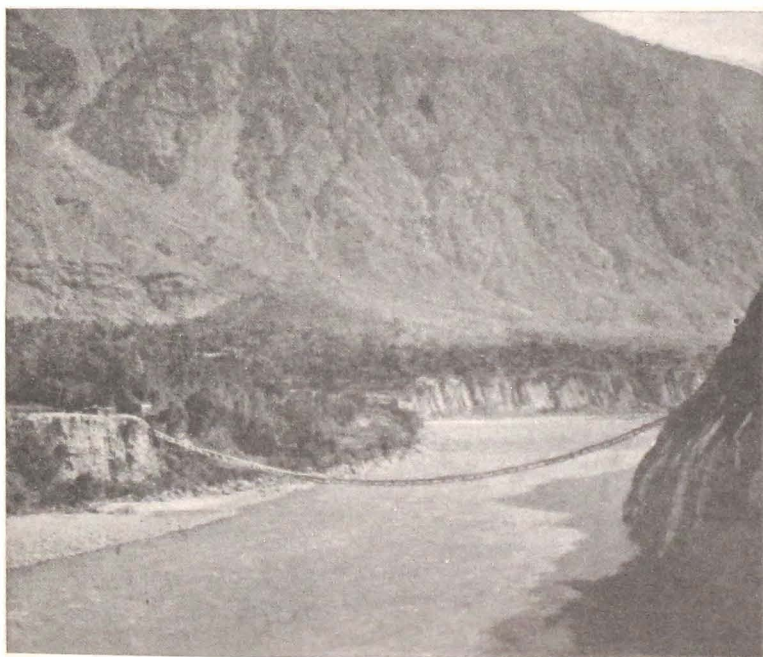


WHILE I am dealing with the subject of bridges, I should like to draw the reader's attention to the accompanying photograph. This depicts another and more primitive type of bridge, which becomes the only means of crossing rivers as the Pamir region is approached. The bridge is formed of three broad plaited bands of the strongest birch twigs, most neatly and carefully woven. The centre one sags below the other two, which are both on the same level, and the three are loosely connected by thinner transverseropes. The two upper strands act as handrails, the centre rope being the footway. The whole structure sways somewhat alarmingly in the wind, but the only difficulties in negotiating the "bridge" are at the start and finish of the transit, where the three strands are all brought on the same level over a great

circular beam before being anchored deep in the ground. This necessitates a somewhat uneasy spread-eagle attitude. To a novice, especially if inclined to giddiness, these Hindu Kush bridges present some trying features.

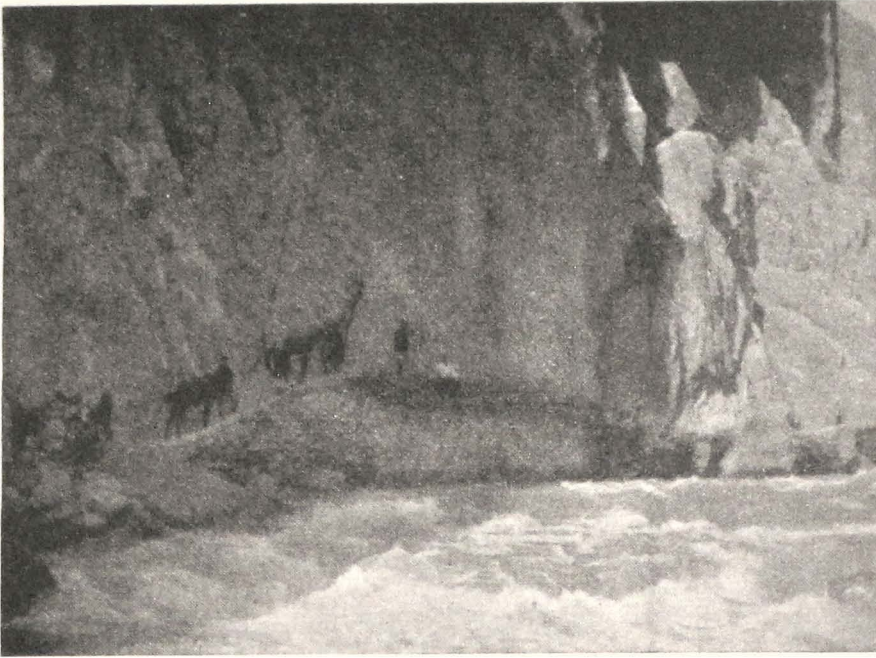
It may be opportune here to make mention of the roadway among these mountain ranges, which can best be described as a constant progression along the beds of glacier streams varied by continual ascents, often to a height of a thousand feet or more, to negotiate the crossing of some buttress of rock or to pass from one valley to the next.

On the luxurious highway which leads to Gilgit the breadth of roadway is never less than ten feet, but on the purely local tracks it more nearly approximates to as many inches, and along these ledges all traffic has to pass. The local ponies and mules, however, are particularly sagacious and know their danger, and it is rarely that an accident occurs, though the crashing of a huge boulder across the track, possibly dislodged by some animal grazing far up the mountain slope above, gives proof of the ever-present risk of being hurled at any moment into the abyss which yawns below one. Once I was nearly swept off the road by a mule, which came fast round a corner and tried to pass between my pony and the rock face. Throwing myself off my pony and half across the passing mule, I managed to cling desperately to a rock, while my unfortunate mount was jostled over the side and went rolling down the slope—which by good luck was not absolutely precipitous at this point—till brought up by a large rock, whence he was dragged back with little more damage than a broken saddle.



A PRIMITIVE BRIDGE IN THE PAMIR REGION—IT IS COMPOSED OF PLAITED BANDS OF BIRCH TWIGS. *From a* *Photo.*

A peculiar feature of local road



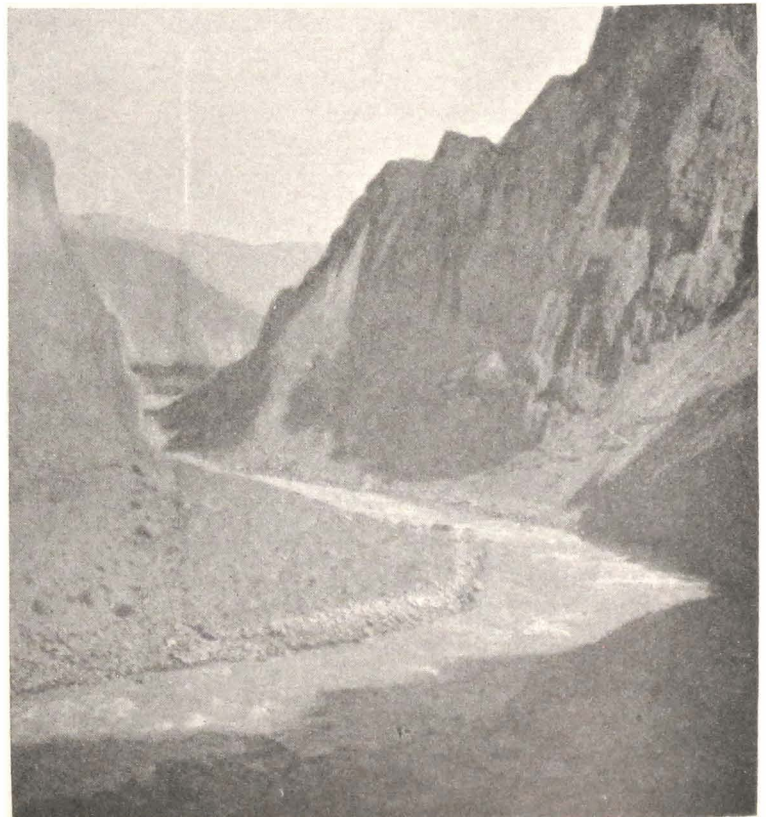
A NERVE-TRYING "ROAD"—A ROTTEN PILE MAY AT ANY MOMENT HURL A WAYFARER TO INSTANT DEATH. [Photo.]

construction is shown in the above photograph. Strong piles are driven horizontally into the rock face overhanging the stream, cross pieces are then laid on these, and a thick covering of birch faggots forms the actual roadway. When new there is nothing alarming in such places, but sometimes, instead of being fixed on piles, the roadway is merely hung from the rock by birch ropes, and the local highway board not being very careful of the condition of such portions of their "permanent way," a rotten pile or rope or a decaying faggot may at any time hurl a passenger to instant death, for these frail structures are perched at any height along a cliff face to supplement an existing ledge.

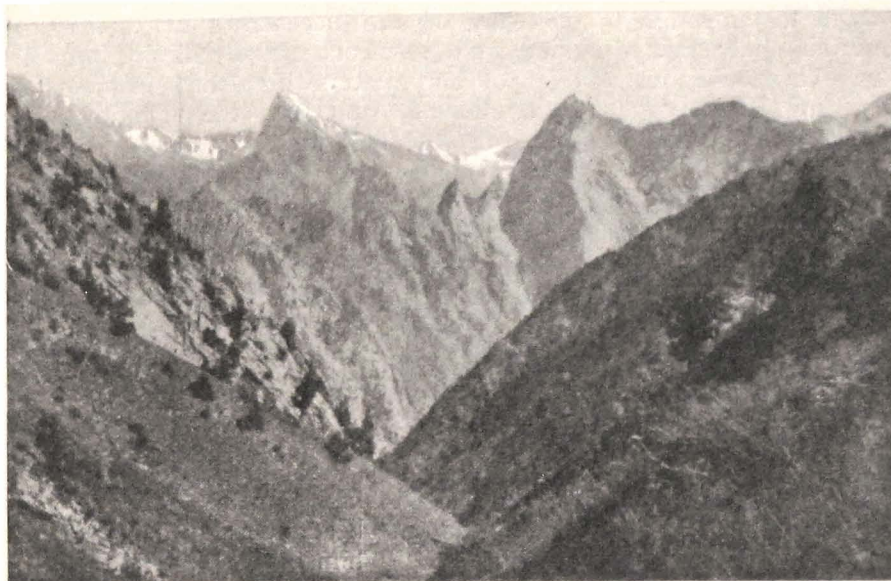
The next picture shows the scene of an historic tragedy on the Chitral road in the early stages of the outbreak of 1895. At the point marked by the small, dark patch of shadow close above the river-bank on the right edge of the picture is the cave where Lieutenants Ross and Jones took refuge when they were ambushed in this gorge, with their detachment of sixteen Sikhs. Here Lieutenant Ross was killed by a shot from the opposite cliff, and eventually Lieutenant Jones, wounded and with only fourteen

Sikhs, of whom nine were wounded, managed to fight his way back to the nearest British post at Mastuj. Many a time have I talked with the men who took part in this and other stirring incidents of that time of trial, and it is difficult to recognise in the peaceable and apparently harmless mountaineers, who are so hospitable in their offerings of the beautiful fruit which grows in all the villages, the treacherous and bloodthirsty rebels who attempted to exterminate every British soldier in the country—native as well as foreigner.

Turning for a moment to the sport of this mountain region, it is interesting to know that scattered throughout the higher portions of the Hindu Kush, and never coming far below the snow-line, are the markhor—the giant wild goat



ON THE CHITRAL ROAD—THE SCENE OF AN HISTORIC TRAGEDY. From a Photo.



[From a]

THE HAUNT OF IBEX AND MARKHOR.

[Photo.]

of Northern India; the ibex, a larger variety of the Southern European animal of the same name; and the oovial, or Indian wild sheep. Among the carnivora, the bear and the beautiful snow-leopard form the larger varieties. It is small wonder, therefore, that permission to shoot in the jealously-preserved districts is eagerly sought after by the keen sportsman, though but rarely granted.

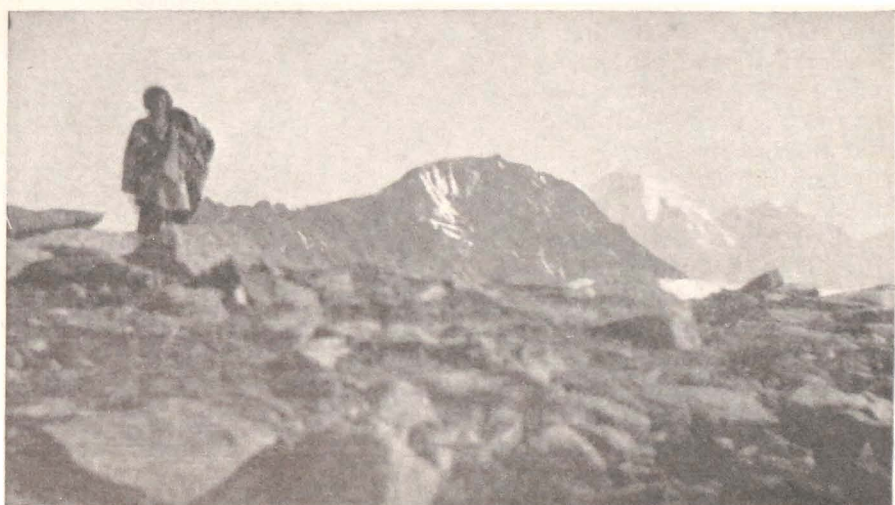
The photograph reproduced above gives an idea of some of the best markhor and ibex ground in this region, and shows that pursuing the denizens of these precipitous heights, often at an altitude of eighteen thousand feet, is no sluggard's pastime. As a matter of fact, it necessitates the possession of a clear eye and steady head, and, above all, a sound heart, for in the rarefied air of these great heights exertion is most exhausting, and I have more than once had to sit down and rest after every five or six yards of progression. Shooting here is by no means devoid of the element of danger, moreover, for even in the grassy slopes the dry herbage becomes so slippery that it is difficult to retain one's footing, and, as most of these grassy plateaus end in a drop of some thousand feet over a frightful precipice, a mere slip has more than once ended in a headlong fall to destruc-

tion. I have frequently seen the last death-throes of a markhor or ibex start the animal on a slide which has ended at the bottom of a valley to reach which a circuitous descent of perhaps miles was required to find at the end a mere shapeless pulp of bruised flesh, though the markhor's bones are so wondrously tough that it is quite exceptional to find them broken even after such a fall as has been described.

Once, and once only, did I start on a slide of this kind myself, and

that it was not "carried to its extreme and logical conclusion" the writing of this article will at once imply.

I had to cross the head of a small glacier in pursuit of some fine markhor. It was but some two hundred yards long, with a few boulders jutting out of its icy surface, and at the end of it was a sheer drop of perhaps fifteen hundred feet on to rocks. My shikaree had cut a few rough steps, in which I was following him across, when a step near the centre broke away, and in a moment I was sliding towards the precipice, vainly attempting to dig my nails and a short stick in my hand into the rough surface of the ice. One after the other such feeble holds as I obtained gave way, and my pace increased. Fortunately, however, my course led me close to a considerable rock embedded



THE MOUNTAIN IN THE BACKGROUND IS KNOWN AS "THE SEAT OF THE GODS," DOULIFLESS Owing to its curious shape. [Photo.]

in the ice, to which I managed to cling desperately. I heard the surrounding ice crack, and it felt as if the rock was working loose, but it held, and there I remained till my shikaree cut steps out and helped me back to solid ground.



From a]

A TYPICAL GROUP OF YAKS.

[Photo.

The whole thing possibly lasted twenty seconds—it seemed as many hours.

The distant snowy peak seen in the lower photo. on the previous page is the mountain which we perversely insist on calling Raka-pushi, which towers to a height of over twenty-seven thousand feet above the curious old States of Hunza and Nagar, with their mediæval castellated fortresses. The proper local name, Deo Bani, is far more poetic, and signifies "The Seat of the Gods"—no doubt an allusion to the curious shape of the mountain.

To conclude my reminiscences of life among these great mountain systems, I must make some reference to the still less-known region on the borders of the Pamirs, where we look across a narrow separating belt at our Russian rivals.

Here we are beyond the zone of horse and mule transport, and enter the land of the yak, the aboriginal ox of the "Abode of Snow." Some typical yaks are seen in the top picture. The yak is not only the saddle animal, pack-horse, and general representative of transport in these up-tilted lands, where no pair of wheels can pass, but he is also the universal provider

of many of the necessaries of life. Yak's milk and very occasionally flesh form the food of his masters, his hair provides them with clothing, and on the Pamirs he is practically the only source of fuel.

He is a somewhat fearsome hack until one gets accustomed to him, but he scuffles along over snow and rough ground at a most unsuspected pace and heaves himself over boulders which no mule could surmount. He grunts all the time, however, in the most distressing manner, fully justifying his scientific name of *Bos grunniens*, and will promptly die of heat and exhaustion if you take him even a few hundred feet below the snow-line.

The last photograph shows a cavalcade of yaks crossing the lofty Darkot Pass at an altitude

of some sixteen thousand feet. This pass consists largely of a glacier and is some five miles across. Crevasses are numerous throughout its surface, of a sufficient size and depth to be extremely dangerous. In the foreground of the photograph can be seen the tip of a birch branch, while there is another farther on. Before crossing the glacier local guides mark out the safe portions in this way, and it is never advisable to deviate many yards to either side



From a]

A YAK CAVALCADE CROSSING THE DARKOT PASS.

[Photo.

of the marked track. I have before now seen an animal disappear suddenly in a crevasse while crossing an apparently safe patch of snow, to be no more seen until, at the expiration of some centuries, he may, perhaps, some day reappear "iced in" at the nose of the glacier.

