

1955

This is Afghanistan

Royal Afghan Embassy, London

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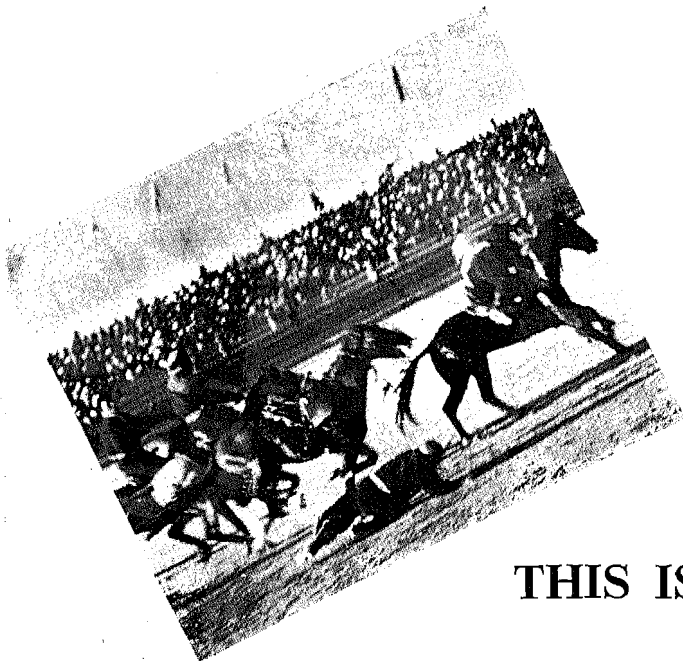
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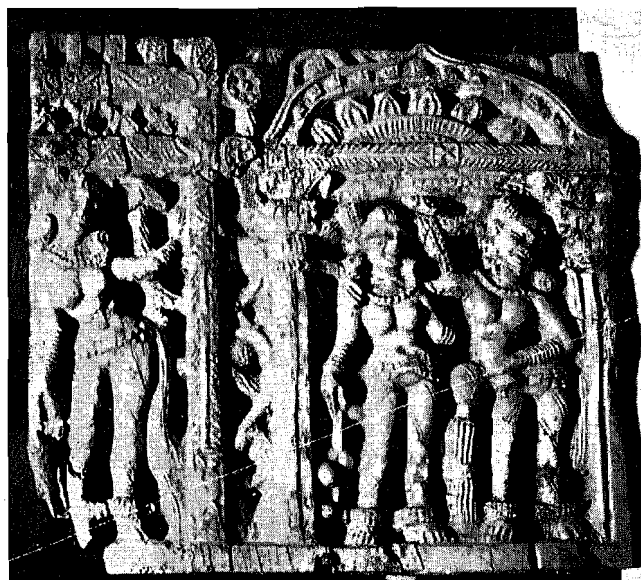
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THIS IS AFGHANISTAN



True and Untrue

Afghanistan is no more a remote part of the world—thanks to modern means of transport.

It is true that few people know enough about Afghanistan. It is also true that still fewer have visited the country; but is entirely untrue that your trip would not be worthwhile from various points of view.

Geology

With its unique location in the heart of Asia, Afghanistan is straddled by one of the highest mountain ranges in the world—the Hindukush. This range actually cuts the country in half, is a great impediment for communications between various places and interferes with the climate. Yet it is majestic, memorable and glorious. And it is nature's great water supply.

History

Historically, the country is one of the richest in the world. You can see the ruins of ancient Bactria near Mazar, statues of Buddha and thousands of painted caves in Bamiyan, and remains of the Kushanid civilisation in Bagram.

Fruits

Exotic fruits, among them sixty kinds of grapes grown in Herat, are another main attraction. Afghan melons, especially those grown in the north, are the best in the world.

Handicrafts

Products of Afghan handicrafts are cheap to buy and last for ages. They range from beautiful red carpets, silk fabrics, knives and sheepskin coats to

karakul pelts. A gift of one of these ~~would make your family or friends happy for ever!~~

People

Most important of all are the people. You can see in the streets of Kabul tall, sturdy Pakhtuns walking proudly about in their costumes. The clever Tajiks, the small, hard-working Hazaras, the Uzbeks and the Turkomans are familiar sights moving around in their various pursuits. They have become mixed a great deal through inter-marriages, but some of these ethnic groups have still preserved their characteristic features.

All these people with their different features, costumes, dialects and sometimes languages are Afghans. Their attachment to Islam and their love for freedom have cemented their unity in such a way that the odd mixture works quite smoothly.

An honourable Afghan is a hospitable person. Therefore it is the easiest thing in the world to go to an Afghan home, have a cup of tea, enjoy the Afghan meals and make friends. Almost all Afghans believe that money is a means and not an end in itself. So they do not save enough and do not worry about their rainy days. Cripples and homeless people are looked after by the local municipalities. The aged are cared for by their sons or daughters. Further, life is so peaceful and carefree that they have not even come to think of it.

How to Get There

The best way to travel to Afghanistan is by car. Roads are increasingly improved and a network of all-weather

highways connecting various towns is partly completed—tarred, etc. Travellers can also fly to Kabul, the capital, from Teheran, Delhi and Moscow. The Ariana Afghan Airlines have regular services between Kabul and other main towns at very reasonable rates. A seat in an Afghan bus is also easily obtainable; and being a stranger you would be treated like a guest of honour by all passengers.

Preparations

One of the most typical trips to Afghanistan is to start from the Persian border and finish at the Khyber Pass.

Supposing that you have obtained your tourist visa from any Afghan Consulate in Europe or *en route*, your international health certificate indicates that you have been inoculated against typhoid, cholera and smallpox, and you have enough money to last you till the end of your journey, you then cross the border from Yusufabad to Islam Kala. Afghan customs officials are not difficult. In fact every foreigner is treated with due courtesy by all, officials or otherwise.

Money Problems

There is no restriction on the amount of foreign currency taken into Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Bank has a special rate of exchange for tourists and all branches of this bank and other banks in Kabul cash Travellers' Cheques. American dollars are generally preferred to other currency. Afghan money can be obtained either at Yusufabad or Islam Kala. In case of emergency, officials are always helpful.

The country's monetary unit is called an Afghani, which consists of 100 pools.

There are banknotes for 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000 Afghanis. The rate of exchange between Afghanis and dollars is fluctuating most of the time, but it is somewhere between 40 and 50 Afghanis to the dollar.

What to Take Along

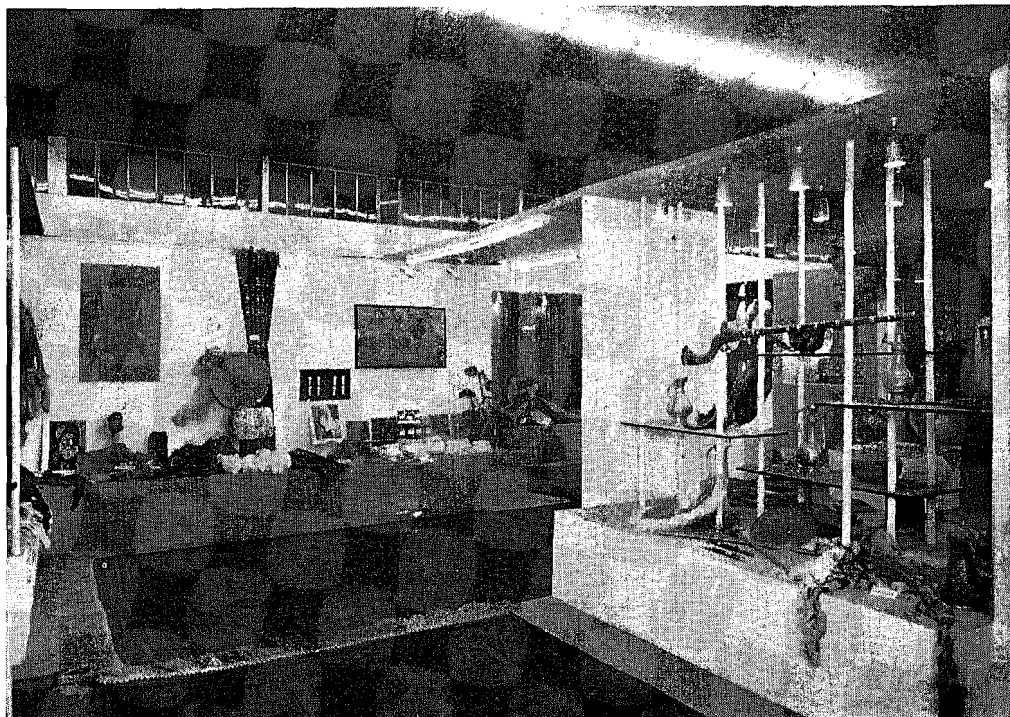
You should have enough petrol (it costs roughly five shillings per gallon) to take you from Islam Kala to Herat. Also, a supply of water and a permanent stock of some spare parts come in handy. Most tourists take along a supply of canned foods, fruit and milk, some antibiotics, and shotguns for shooting partridges and ducks. Others prefer peaceful camping along the way and relaxing in the evenings while listening to the cherished transistor radios connecting them with home.

Photography

There is actually nothing worth seeing between Islam Kala and Herat—a distance of 120 kilometres. You should keep both your ordinary and cine cameras still. Herat will give you plenty of opportunity to click and zoom them. A reliable stock of colour film for both cameras would save you a lot of bother, while black and white films are easily obtainable in all main towns.

Herat

For a down-to-earth tourist arriving in Herat after a long drive there is nothing more welcome than the Park Hotel. This is a pleasant building with spacious lounges, comfortable furniture and beautiful carpets. The cost of a single room and meals here, as well as in other towns, do not exceed three pounds. Most single rooms have private bathrooms, but in



Afghan handicrafts on display at Frankfurt, West Germany.

ANTIQUES

cold weather the management should be asked to arrange the heating.

Language Snags

A workable knowledge of Afghan Persian is always useful, but most tourists can get away with a few words they have carefully written and memorised beforehand. Some people take with them teach-yourself books of Persian in their own language. The difference between Afghan and Iranian Persian is slight in writing but sometimes striking in pronunciation. So you certainly want to be understood when you utter a few words to the waiter

or the taxi driver.

Food

A typically good Afghan meal to order is "chalau," which is white rice served with one or more kinds of vegetables. Vegetables vary according to the season, as do the fruits. "Nan," the unique Afghan bread which is sometimes home-baked, and resembles pancakes, is a delicious whole-wheat nourishment. It is automatically brought to the table with a jug of water. "Palau" is more delicious than "chalau," but it is prepared with fried ground onions and therefore does



Samples of vegetables grown in Afghanistan.

not suit most Western stomachs. There are varieties of "palau" and "chalaui" for a gourmet to sort out and appreciate. Most tourists, however, find kebabs and "bolani" very tasty. The Afghan kebabs are different from those served in the West. The ordinary kebab, called "teka," consists of pieces of lamb and fat grilled on skewers and served hot. They usually serve with it slices of onion in vinegar or tomato and onion sliced and mixed in a bowl. Always beware of Afghan enthusiasm for red peppers or chillies. Most of them like hot meals in both senses of the word, and think that they do the guest a favour by putting more pepper, fresh or ground, in the meal.

Other kinds of kebab are "chapli," which is almost a version of hamburgers only having more ingredients. "Dashi" is something like European roast lamb but is more delicious and tender, while "degi" consists of pieces of lamb with slices of onion fried in a saucepan. The more complicated type, the "abreshom" is only served in homes, as it is more costly.

"Bolani" is a kind of pancake stuffed with special Afghan leeks, salt and pepper. Some people call it Afghan ravioli, but unfortunately it is not generally served in hotels and restaurants. You should either order it or buy it from some street vendor. It is generally cooked

in margarine, so it is quite safe. The best way of eating "bolani" is either with Afghan tea or with yoghurt. Most Afghans drink green tea, and the first cup is much too sweet for foreigners. The remaining cups, usually several, are drunk without sugar. Afghan yoghurt is usually more sour than its European version.

As dairy farming has not been developed in the country, milk has to be specially ordered in the hotels or carried along in tins. Restaurants in the streets generally serve tea without milk, but milk tea which is called "mix," is also obtainable.

Monuments

Refreshed after the night's rest and a warm bath, you should ask for a taxi or gadi, a horse-drawn carriage, and start your sightseeing tour from the Park Hotel, as you can waste a lot of time by driving your own car from one place to another. Most cities have no maps as yet and you do not have a clue about the location of tourist attractions.

The first thing to see in Herat is the Grand Mosque, which was built in the 13th century and has been reconstructed several times. In recent years vast repairs have been made to it under the patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed Zahir Shah. The Grand Mosque has gorgeous panelling of glazed tiles, precious pieces of mosaic and beautiful Arabic inscriptions. It is indeed a great monument giving the visitor a thrilling impression and an idea about the style of architecture and decoration of the time.

The other monuments to see are the "musallas"—a series of minarets built

around a religious school where Jami, the great poet and scholar of Herat, used to teach hundreds of his pupils. There is not much left of the school building but the remains of the minarets with their fading tiles and mosaics bear witness to the artistic designs of Herat's craftsmen.

Other places of interest in Herat are the tomb of Queen Gowharshad, wife of King Shah Rukh (1405-1447) and the mausoleum of Ansari at Gazergah, both renowned for their literary accomplishments.

Scenic Places

The two most scenic places in Herat are Takhté Safar and Shaidaye, the former overlooking the city with the vast green plain of Herat, and the latter is a big park with beautiful flowers and rows of cypress trees. In fact, cypress trees grow so well here that they are most typical of the city, and line the streets of Herat. It is a good idea to have morning tea in one and afternoon tea in the other of these two beauty spots.

Wealthy Heratis

Although Herat does not have a speciality as far as the gourmet is concerned, yet it is special in other ways. Herat produces more men of letters than other provinces and the people are more well-off. The new city has rows of beautiful houses with vast gardens full of flowers. Some houses even have tens of acres divided into patches for growing flowers, fruits and vegetables. The best kind of grapes in Herat are called "lal" and are white in colour. Pistachio is another product of Herat and mostly exported.

Buy

Things to buy in Herat include "kurk," a thick woollen material for making coats. This is usually light brown or beige in colour with white stripes. The best thing to buy for ladies is a very fine hand-woven silk fabric called "kanawez." This is a gorgeous cloth with marvellous shades varying according to the degree of light they are exposed to. Also silk handkerchiefs with chic or stripy designs are good buys for decorative purposes.

Leaving Herat

From Herat you should proceed to Shindand, 130 kilometres to the south, and have a good rest there. Tourists usually order their lunch at the small but pleasant local hotel by telephone from Herat. Your petrol stock and water should also be replenished here as there is a distance of 140 kilometres to cover in order to reach Farah.

Farah

Farah is the seat of the local province of the same name and has nothing praiseworthy about it as several upheavals reduced its buildings into rubble.

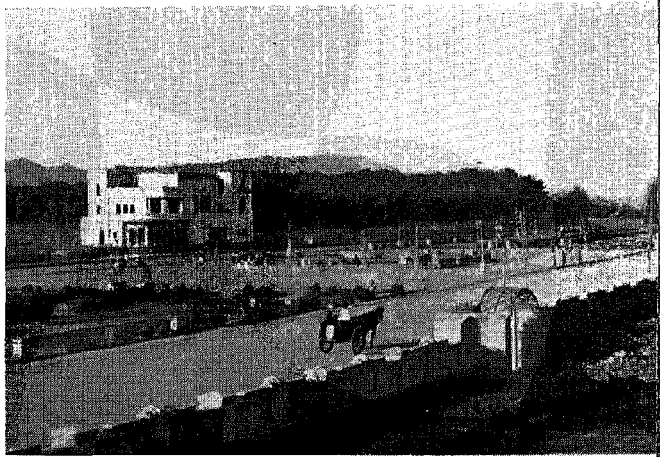
It is also extremely hot and if you happen to be there in summer, you should seldom venture out from the shady hotel. Only a glance at the famous Baghé Pul in the late afternoon is sufficient to give you an idea that most parts of this area were green and prosperous in the old days.

Dilaram

Another halting place would be Dilaram, 132 kilometres south-east of Farah. Lunch or dinner should again be ordered by telephone from Farah. The River Khash, the desolate plain and wide



The Grand Mosque of Herat which is more than 700 years old.



The Nadir Pakhtun Park in Herat.

majestic horizon furnish an enjoyable view from the hotel overlooking the whole area.

Grishk

After crossing 122 kilometres of mostly deserts, you come to Grishk, a real oasis consisting of a little thriving town and irrigation works. You should stay here for a couple of days in order to see the Helmand and Arghandab Valleys where vast irrigation and power schemes are under way.

There is a lovely café near the dam in Grishk, which you should see before leaving for Lashkargah. Also, if you are a keen fisherman, you should try your luck either at the Boghra Canal or at the mighty Helmand river.

Lashkargah

Lashkargah is the seat of both Helmand and Arghandab Valley Development Schemes, with a modern hotel and several administrative and residential buildings for the employees. The new mosque recently built there is also worth seeing.

Here it is up to you to decide whether you should see the irrigation schemes at Nadé Ali, Darwishan, Marja, Shamalan, etc., or visit the historical places at Kala Bist and Lashkari Bazaar.

Kala Bist

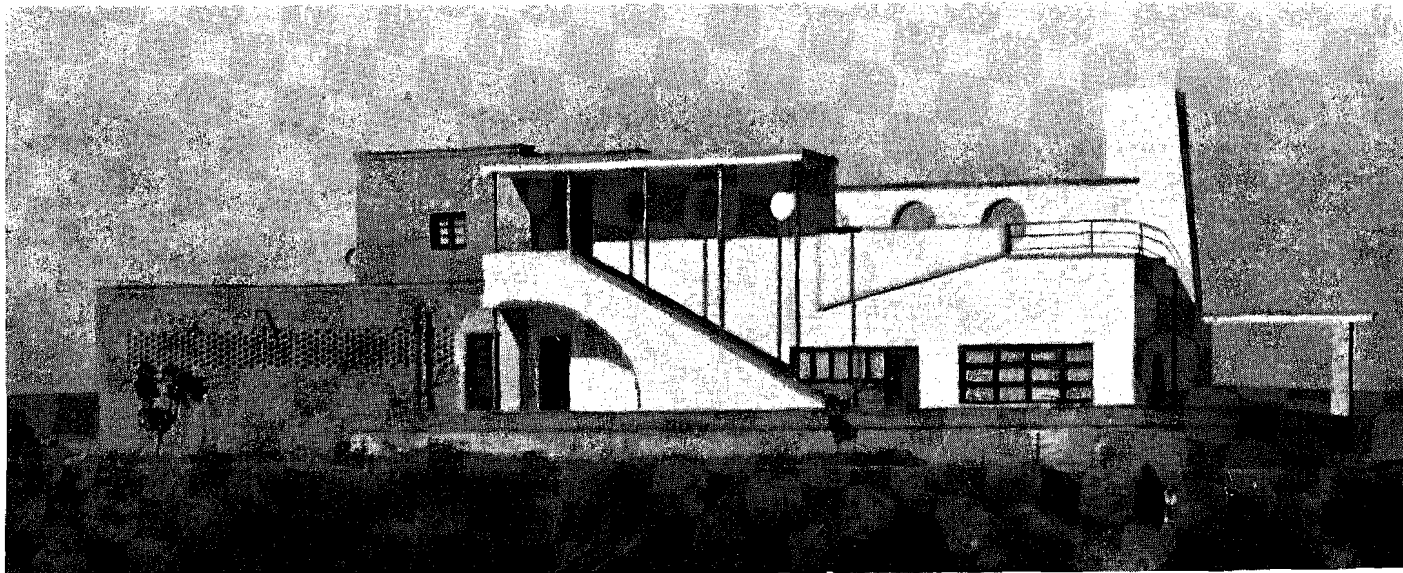
Kala Bist was the winter capital of the Ghaznavid Emperor, Sultan Mahmoud (998-1030) whose patronage of arts and learning is well known. It is said that once he had about 400 poets at his court.

The Boghra Canal Café.

The ruins at Kala Bist have crumbled to form a small hill, but in one part of the citadel a few rooms have remained in good condition.

Below the hill, there was a kind of amphitheatre, with an arch on one side. The great Sultan, and later his son and successor, Masoud, used to celebrate the festival of Sadda here with their generals, poets, historians, painters, scribes and courtiers. The Sadda was a festival of songs and wine at which eminent poets used to read their poems, mostly in praise of the Sultan's conquests, and were given lavish prizes in cash or kind. Another feature of the festival was large bonfires.

The arch has been repaired in recent years, with its design and tile-work beautifully preserved.



Lashkargah was the military cantonment of the Sultan's well-organised army and consisted of several barracks. Lashkari Bazaar was the shopping centre of the town; both places having been richly decorated with glazed tiles and miniature paintings done by the best artists of the time. The Kabul Museum has allotted separate chambers to the finds from here.

Farming settlements

The Helmand and Arghandab Valleys comprise hundreds of acres reclaimed in recent years, three dams for irrigation and power, vast experimental and animal husbandry farms. Farming settlements have been organised to absorb the landless peasants from other parts of the country and also attract the nomads to a settled mode of life.

The Authority which supervises the progress of both schemes in these valleys, has opened a number of schools, runs several hospitals and clinics, and has introduced modern sanitation and way of life to local inhabitants. It also grants credits and lends seeds to the settlers in order to help them in overcoming farming difficulties, among them the problem of salinity.

Kandahar

Kandahar lies 122 kilometres to the south-west of Grishk and is a very important commercial centre of the country.

The Kandahar Hotel is almost always full and advance booking is necessary either from Europe or Teheran. The climate here is not as hot as in Farah, but is quite warm. Most people close their shops in the late afternoon and take a stroll in the straight streets of the new



The Arch of Bist in Grishk Province has been restored in recent years.

city. Here, as well as elsewhere in the province, the tourist can take good photographs of the tall, brown, smiling Kandaharis in their traditional costumes.

The old town built by Ahmed Shah Durrani (1747-1773) has been straddled by new streets, but parts of the walls, the Khirka, and Ahmed Shah's tomb are still intact.

Monuments

The Khirka is a sacred shrine where Mohammed's shirt has been preserved.

It was brought here by Ahmed Shah from Bokhara, which he had conquered, and the shrine is visited by hundreds of people, mostly women. The tomb of Ahmed Shah is a magnificent building with many excellent decorations and inscriptions inside. His helmet and coat of arms are kept here to remind the visitor of his chivalry. Another monument of note in Kandahar is the Chel Zina, which has 40 steps and a niche, and was carved in a mountain near the city

by the order of Emperor Baber (1526-1530), and gives a wonderful view of the town and part of the valley below.

The mausoleum of Mir Wais Hotaki (1709-1715) lies at Kokaran outside Kandahar. He was founder of the Hotakid dynasty which overthrew the Iranian rule and established the Afghan Kingdom at Kandahar. In fact, it was he, and later Ahmed Shah, who gave so much prominence to Kandahar that it became the capital of Afghanistan up to the middle of the 18th century.

Scenic Places

Places of scenic beauty in Kandahar are the Sardeh Park and the Baba Wali Café, the former providing a cool spot in the heat of summer and the latter overlooking the town and around. Sardeh Park, especially, is a must for tourists, because it lies at the bank of the Arghandab river and is full of different trees and flowers. Fishing is also excellent here and the restaurant run by the local municipality is quite well furnished and comfortable.

Gay Kandaharis

Kandaharis are more adventurous than Heratis. They enjoy strolling in the streets in the afternoon, going to picnics on Friday, which is the Moslem Sabbath, and some of them go all the way to Grishk for hunting and duck shooting.

Gadis and bicycles are highly decorated here and everybody takes pride in being clean and attractive. Most men, except the government employees and students, grow beards, some of them beautiful and jet black.

Afghanistan's Orchard

Kandahar, with the Arghandab Valley lying near it, is the orchard of Afghanistan. The best grapes, apricots, pomegranates and figs are grown here, and mostly exported abroad. The best raisins the country produces are called Shindokhani, which are greener and longer than the ordinary sultanas. The local dried apricots, "shakar para" sugar flakes, are mostly exported to India. The Kandahari pomegranates are both sweet and sour in taste and cannot be matched by other varieties.

Special Food

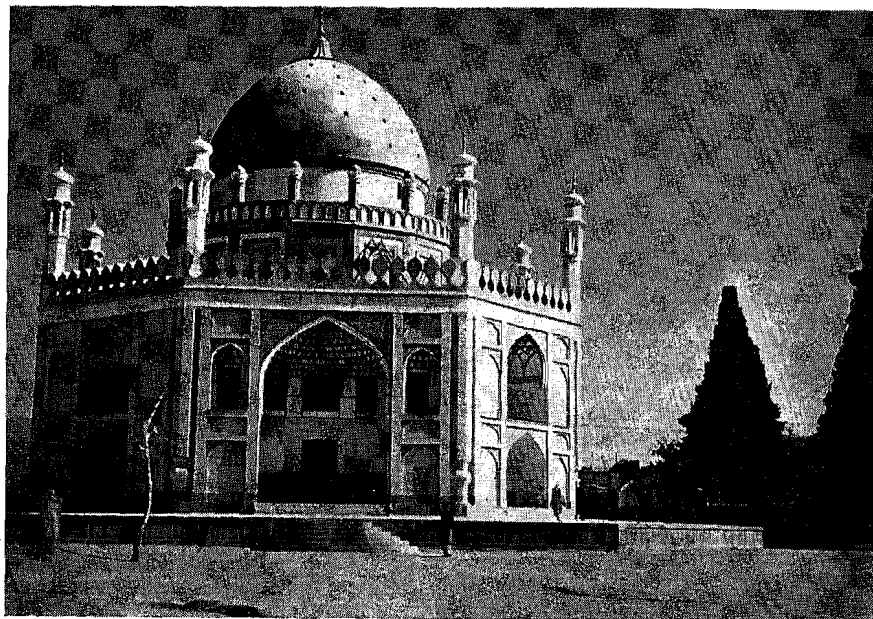
A speciality of Kandahari food is a dish called "firni." It is a kind of rice

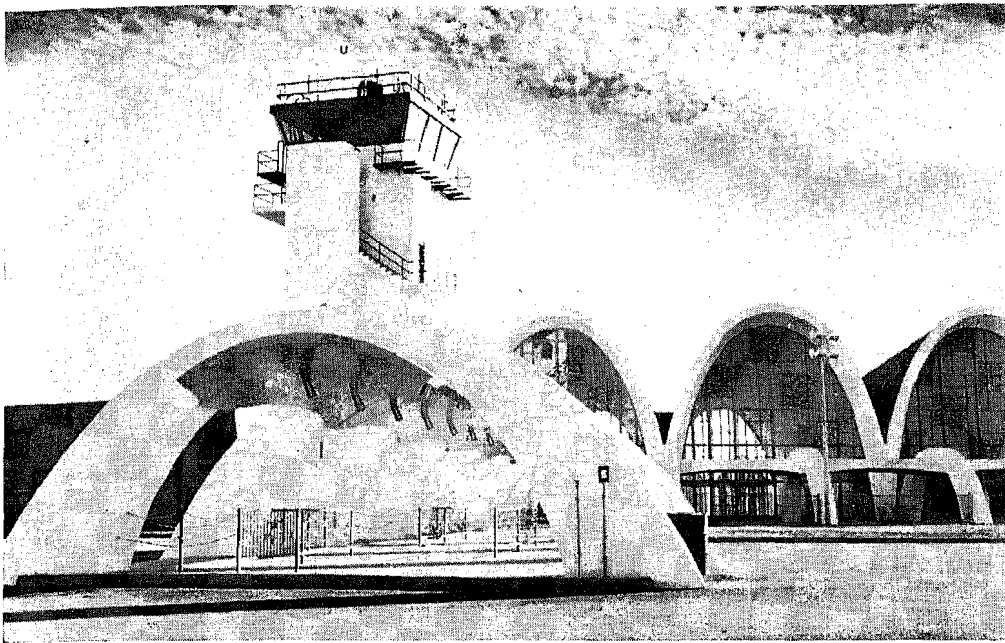
pudding served with ground pistachio, and very delicious in taste. Lamb in Kandahar is very tender but has a lot more fat than elsewhere. Restaurants serve all kinds of Afghan meals. The typical soup is "shorwa," which is famous, but is rather greasy for foreigners. Kebabs are also good here, but not always the best.

Buys

Things to buy here include special kinds of sandals for summer. They are open at the toes and heels, and are beautifully embroidered. Also, other pieces of lovely embroidery, such as tablecloths, scarves, dresses, etc., are available in the bazaars. Prices are quite reason-

The Mausoleum of Ahmed Shah Durrani at Kandahar.





The terminal building of the Kandahar International Airport constructed with United States assistance. The building was so designed to preserve some characteristics of the Afghan architectural style.

able, considering the quality of the unique Kandahari art.

Afghan ladies usually buy their face powder in Kandahar. It is called "sfeda" and is very useful in avoiding wrinkles on the face. Old ladies prepare it in their special ovens by their traditional methods, and it is a good buy.

Airport

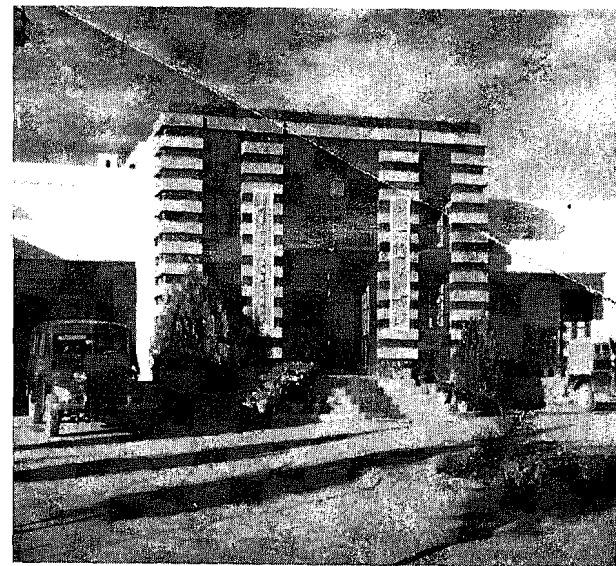
In recent years, an international airport has been planned in Kandahar, the construction work of which will soon be completed. Equipped with all sorts of facilities such as restaurants, hotels, a hospital, post office, repair shops, filling stations, etc., the airport will be some-

thing unique in the whole region.

As it will shorten the flying time between East and West by one hour, Kandahar will become the halting place for the main jet airliners which connect the Orient with the Occident.

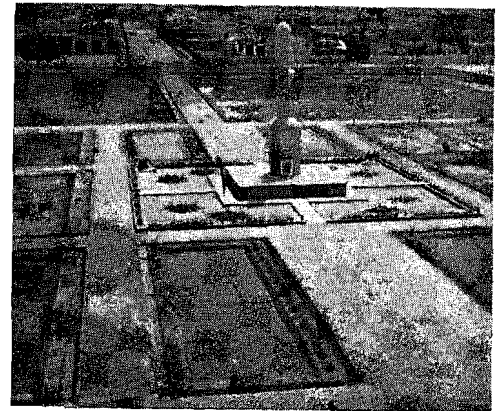
Facilities

Near the new town of Kandahar lies Manzel Bagh, a vast compound where the Helmand and Arghandab Valleys Authority have their installations to repair cars, tractors, bulldozers, etc. Pleasant chalets have been built here to house some of the American engineers of the Authority with their families. The restaurant here is also open for tourists



The Kandahar Hotel is always crowded and needs expansion.

The Martyrs Monument in Kandahar.



but the rates are the same as in the United States. There is also a swimming pool in the compound which can be used in the heat of summer.

Industries

Among the industries are the Watan Wool Factory, producing the best woollens in the whole region, the Pashtun Company, producing sweets and ice, and the Fruit Preserving & Canning Factory.

Three days' stay in Kandahar is advisable in order to see the people and places and enjoy the view of the scenic spots bursting with flowers.

Leaving Kandahar

On leaving Kandahar, one should make sure that the car is in good running condition as there are no adequate repair stations until you reach Kabul. Also, your stock of petrol, food and fruit should be replenished. The most suitable time to start the journey in summer is early in the morning, as the intense heat later in the day is apt to overheat motor tyres on certain patches of the road.

Kalat

Kalat or Kalaté Ghilzai is 138 kilometres to the north-east of Kandahar, and has an old citadel on top of a hill and a small hotel.

Kalat is famous for three things: the world-famous Afghan hound, almonds and "kossay."

The tall, shaggy, good-looking Afghan hound is a native of Kalat, and is used for fox hunting. It is known throughout Afghanistan as "tazi."

Unfortunately, there are no kennels in Kalat, but it is just possible to find an Afghan hound owner who is willing to part with his pet for hard cash.

The almond produced in Kalat is of the hard-shelled type, but it has two advantages: it is produced in abundance, and is exported by all means of transport. Therefore it is cheaper, but still tastes the same as the more expensive types.

Kossay is the name given to the unique voluminous cloaks which are worn by men in winter. They are made of white felt with long flat sleeves and are generally embroidered in purple silk. The sleeves are only for decoration and have particularly beautiful patterns worked around studded pieces of mirror.

In order to buy a good kossay, one has to consult one or two experts, but the quality of felt and the type of embroidery usually do not escape unnoticed by a Western traveller. And it makes a

wonderful collector's item to decorate a lounge, or can be worn to keep out the cold in mid-winter.

Fighting Tigers

The Kalitis have a unique use for kossays. They use them as shields. When food is scarce in winter, hungry tigers and wolves come down the plain prowling after sheep. A Kalati will generally meet the tiger with a club and pound it, and meet the wolves with his bare hands, strangling them. But the indispensable kossay is used to catch the claws of the ferocious raiders.

Mukur

After Kalat comes Mukur, 117 kilometres to the north-east of Kalat, and the main halting place for buses running between Kabul and Kandahar.

A caravan of Kochis on the move leaving the cold plains for warm pastures.



Tawkhana

Mukuris are tall, strong and handsome people and like Kalitis, they have their own peculiar central heating system, as the area is cold most of the time.

This system is known as "tawkhana," and involves a very cheap way of directing smoke through a labyrinth of underground channels. Bushes are either collected in summer or bought cheaply and stored for a rainy day. When the intense cold weather sets in some of the bushes are fed to a furnace which leads to the channels. The smoke travels under the floors of the house, and is stored there for 24 hours. Thus the Mukuris are not bothered by the Siberian winter around them once they are inside a tawkhana, which literally means "heat house."

Buys

What has made Mukur renowned throughout the country is not its tawkhana but its beautiful rugs known as "gelam."

Woven mostly by women, these rugs are made of the best wool produced locally. The dyeing is also carried out locally, and the price of the finished article is far below that of a medium carpet. And it is a sheer delight to have in a sitting room with its traditional fast colours of orange, red, green and purple, so matching with modern Western furniture.

Hotel

The little hotel in Mukur, like that in Kalat, cannot cope with the increasing number of visitors, but there is always a way out.

People who travel in winter and have to halt at Mukur because of heavy snows

or breakdowns go to the tea-shops where they eat and sleep cheaply. Only a few visitors use the hotel and occupy the rooms which are obviously more comfortable, and enjoy privacy.

Tourists generally replenish their petrol stock from here, and shop for all manner of things from cigarettes to dried fruits. They also make telephone calls to Kabul to book accommodation and so on if they have not already done so.

Abé Istada

There are 111 kilometres between Mukur and Ghazni. En route to Ghazni, if you turn off to the right for a few kilometres you will come to one of the most striking bird sanctuaries in Afghanistan. This place is called "Abé Istada," which means "the Standing Water." The lake is big and the water is extremely saline, with islands here and there which are ideal for nesting. Almost all kinds of migratory and other birds of the temperate zone are seen here.

Zoology students from Kabul University visit the place every year to observe the birds, while casual tourists pass by it without knowing of its existence because of its out-of-the-way location.

Karez

The area between Mukur and Ghazni is well populated and quite fertile, but water is scarce throughout the region after Kandahar. The underground irrigation ditches known as "karez" serve as the life arteries of the scattered farm-houses. The principal crop is wheat, and plums are the main fruit. Especially the plums grown in Ghazni and the suburbs are the best in the country and mostly exported to the Indian sub-continent.



A typical Pakhtun boy.

Ghazni

Ghazni was the seat of the vast empire founded by Mahmoud (998-1030) and was flourishing between the early 10th and mid-12th centuries.

Mahmoud built beautiful mosques, palaces and cantonments and decorated the city with *objets d'art* which his victorious army had brought back from

various countries. He commissioned Ferdousi to compose "Shahnameh," the Book of Kings, which is an immortal epic of Persian literature. He also changed the *lingua franca* from Arabic to Persian and his court historian, Baihaki, recorded almost all of his military and cultural achievements.

The World Burner

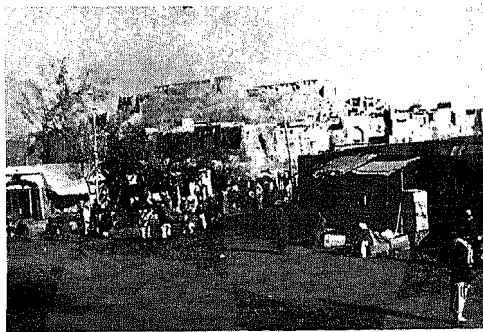
Unfortunately for Afghanistan, Alauddin, a ruler from the rival Ghurid Dynasty, raided the city and burned it to the ground in order to avenge the murder of his brother. His name has been smeared thereafter, and is referred to as "Jehansoz," which means the World Burner. For Ghazni was a world of arts and learning only rivalled then by Baghdad.

The Citadel

The Ghazni citadel, now headquarters of the local garrison, dominates the whole of the little town and its suburbs.

Down below the bazaars are narrow and always crowded. Most of the townspeople have a strain of Mongolian in their features, while those from rural areas, especially the Suleimankhels, are tall and most handsome. The citizens of Ghazni still live in the old city surrounded by walls which are broad enough to accommodate an entire house built upon them.

The new town lies near the petrol station before one reaches the bazaar. It is a planned residential area with buildings designed to meet modern requirements. But it still takes time to persuade the old conservative people to move from the city built by the Great Mahmoud to live in a place planned by ordinary men.



A section of old Ghazni with the citadel in the background.

Monuments

Nothing is more historical in Ghazni than the mausoleum of Mahmoud himself. Known as "Rowza," the mausoleum lies in an orchard filled with the famous plum trees. It is altogether a pleasant place, and if you care to make an arrangement with the keeper, you can see the historical finds preserved in the small museum in the compound.

Other items of historical interest are the two pillars, which are the only tangible relics of Ghazni's past glory, and the mausoleum of Sanai, the great poet of the Ghaznavid era. Recently the Italian archaeological mission has been able to unearth a few important finds at Tapeh Sardar.

Scenic Beauties

Ghazni, like Herat, is full of the tombs of famous saints who led a pious life in their time and tried to guide the people on the path of truth.

One of these was Khwaja Bulghar, who was buried at the foot of a hill overlooking the Ghazni plain.

The local municipality has built a café

here, and it is more than worthwhile to spend an afternoon at Khwaja Bulghar in order to enjoy the cool fresh air of the plain in summer.

Travellers who are keen on fishing usually go to Bandé Sultan, a few kilometres from the town, to catch catfish at the dam.

Hotel

The Ghadni Hotel, like other small hotels, is run by the local municipality. It is situated on a small elevation near the main road and is very suitable for shopping and sightseeing.

Foods

The best food Ghazni can offer the tourist is kebab in the bazaar. As the land is extremely fertile and there is plenty of pasture land, the Ghazni lamb enjoys a nation-wide reputation for being tender and juicy. The yoghurt is also good, while the vegetables, especially radishes, spring onions and local leeks "gandana," are the best in the country.

Buy

The best buys in Ghazni are "postins," "postinchas" and men's socks and gloves.

The postin is a long fur coat, shaggy and heavy, with lamb fur inside and yellowish suede out. It is generally embroidered with yellow silk on the lapels and sleeves. Men of the older generations, especially those living in the rural areas, still use postins in winter. Although cumbersome, they are actually like a hothouse. If you have one, you will not need any form of heating, even in Scandinavia.

Blankets of the same fur are known as "jafari," and can be made to order.

Postincha is actually the best buy here

as it is shorter than the postin and therefore lighter. Also it is less expensive while more attractive.

A postincha is usually sleeveless and reaches the hip. The fur inside is of a finer quality, and the embroidery more lavish and neatly patterned. The suede is mostly of yellow colour, but recently dark blue, beige and other shades have also been introduced. The best postincha can be purchased in Ghazni for £2.

Men's socks are generally knitted in Jaghori and other areas and brought for sale in Ghazni. They are made of strong home-spun wool and have different colours such as black, white, beige, purple and yellow. You can buy these socks and also good quality woollen gloves for as little as 2s. 6d. a pair.

The Ghazni plum, fresh or dried, has to be tasted to be believed. It makes every dish, more especially meat dishes, very delicious and exotic.

Between Ghazni and Kabul

There is a distance of 149 kilometres between Ghazni and Kabul. The road, unlike some stretches between Kandahar and Ghazni, passes through some beautiful valleys.

The main halting places on the way are Shikhabad and Arghandeh, the former being more favourably situated. The two valleys of Wardag and Maidan are very rich in natural beauty; crystal-clear streams full of fish, rows of poplar trees, cool, fresh air and handsome tall Pakhtuns inhabiting the villages.

Off the main road turning to the left, one can go to Sarchasma and Jalrez, which are even more attractive.

Chak, a valley in Wardag, is famous

for its beauty, its hydro-electric plant, which feeds Kabul, and the easy fishing one can do near the dam. There is a hotel overlooking the man-made lake and this is frequented by employees of the Afghan Electric Company in summer.

The people of Maidan and Wardag are excellent "attan" dancers and participate in displays arranged during the independence celebrations in Kabul.

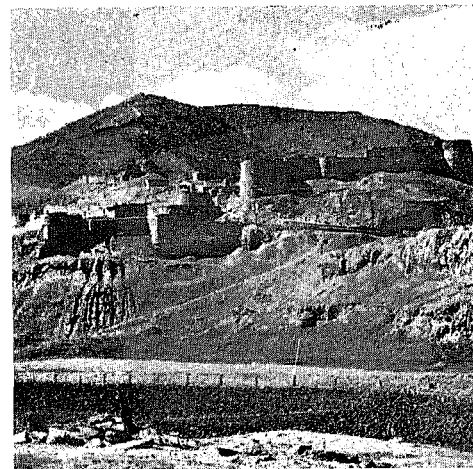
Kabul at Last!

Kabul, the capital of the Kingdom of Afghanistan, is an ancient city whose history goes back to the fifth century B.C.

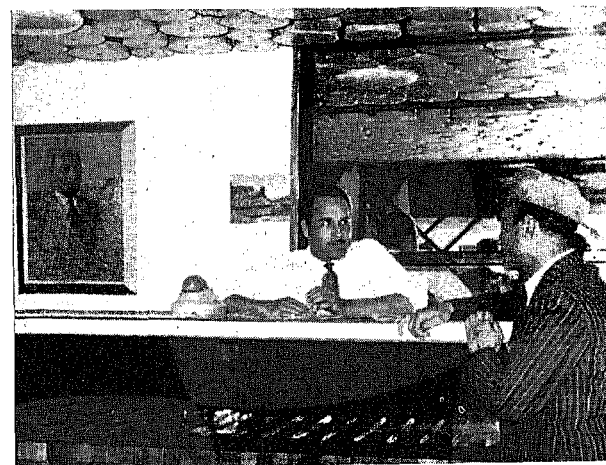
The city is named after the river which passes through it and divides its two main sectors. In full spate from winter to summer, it was called Kobha "full of water" by the early Aryans when they first caught sight of it during their migration.

The ancient city lies south of the river and is dominated by the citadel, with its back to a mountain. It is composed of mud houses, a few covered bazaars and narrow alleys, some of which have already been demolished to leave their place to modern constructions.

Despite its antiquated living quarters and old-fashioned shops, this part of the town, which is locally known as "the City," has retained most of its hold on the nation's business. A great number of wholesalers, brokers and big businessmen have their offices or shops in places called "sarais." These sarais are rectangular compounds with shops at ground level and offices on the first floors on all sides. New sarais built on the other side of the river have, however, changed this emphasis to a certain extent. The most



A view of the historic citadel of Balahissar.



Part of the Ariana booking office on the ground floor of Hotel Kabul.

important shopping centre here is Maiwand Street, with almost all kinds of merchandise on sale.

The other side of the river, which includes the new town, Sharé Now, has a

different character. It has straight, wide streets, banks, cinemas, theatres, schools and colleges and a number of hospitals. Also the "Arg" or the compound encompassing the Gulkhana Palace and other royal buildings; all foreign embassies and trading firms are located here.

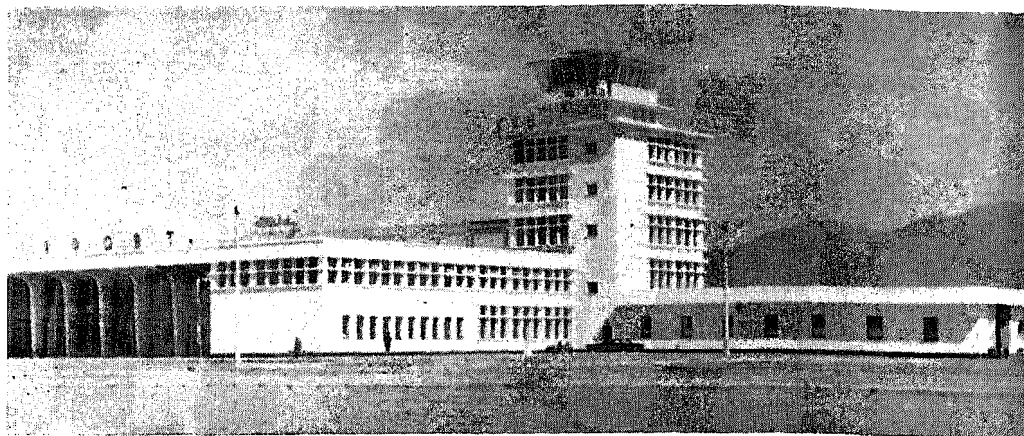
Monuments

No monument in Kabul is of greater importance than Arg, which is surrounded by marble walls, in the Arg Gardens. Built by Amir Abdur Rahman, it has been subjected to several reconstructions. In fact, the present King, His Majesty Mohammed Zahir Shah, has renovated most of it and has built the Gulkhana Palace towards the north of Arg, and also the Royal Guards Buildings to the south, flanking the fashionable Pakhtunistan Avenue.

Ever since it was first built, the Arg has been used by the Kings of Afghanistan as the royal residence and has always the Royal Secretariat, the bodyguards, the treasury vaults and the royal library.

To the east side of Arg lies the Delkusha Palace, built by Amir Habibullah, which is still used as the royal office where foreign envoys present their letters of credence and Afghan officials and others are granted audiences by His Majesty.

Kabul of the Buddhist period is of immense interest to archaeologists and those taken with matters relating to the antiquities. It lies 12 kilometres to the south-east of the present Kabul, the site being referred to as Chakari. As one goes to Bini Hisar, one has to walk three kilometres to reach Chakari. In the Kabul of the Buddhist period there are



The terminal building of the Kabul airport completed with the help of the Soviet Union. The building has facilities for 300 passengers.

indications of several stupas belonging to the second and third centuries A.D. Well preserved, these stupas are nearer to present-day Kabul. On the ridges of the mountain there stands a 20-metre high monument of the Kushan period, formerly decorated with Chakari, meaning a wheel—a sacred symbol of Buddhism. To the south-west of the stupas there is another monument known as Surkh Munar, which is in the form of a minaret.

The Midday Gun

One of the distinguishing features of Kabul from other cities in Afghanistan is the gun which is fired from the top of a hill every midday. It does not disturb the Afghans, who have been accustomed to it, but it is quite startling for tourists and outsiders.

A part of everyday life in Kabul, the midday gun serves two purposes: to announce the midday, which is lunch hour

for office and factory workers, and to help the public to synchronise their watches.

During Ramadan, when the people do not eat in the day-time, the gun goes off at dusk and dawn, respectively to announce the end and the beginning of the fasting period in 24 hours.

On special occasions such as Ids and so on, the gun goes off more than once in a specified time and in succession.

Surrounding Walls

To the south-east of Kabul lies a green elevation known as the "Emerald Hill," joined on either side by remnants of old walls surrounding the city. This hill was the site of Kabul Citadel, "Bala Hisar," serving as a stronghold as well as the royal residence from pre-Islamic periods until 1879, when the second British invasion was launched. The royal residence was inside the stronghold, while the latter was surrounded by living quarters which were fortified and almost

intact until the first half of the nineteenth century. On the outskirts of the citadel stands the Military Academy, built in recent years.

Beyond the citadel and in the mountain there lies the public cemetery where Tamim, a companion of the Prophet, was martyred in pre-Islamic days and was buried. Close to Tamim's mausoleum there is a rippling stream known as Khizr, and both places attract the citizens of Kabul in the early spring.

The Kabul walls, built on the ridges of Sher Darwaza and Asmayee mountains, were erected in the fifth century A.D., in the reign of the Ephthalite kings, who wanted to surround the city with defensive fortifications. Fortunately enough, the greater part of these walls are still standing, showing the long history of Kabul.

New Constructions

Ghazi Mohammed Jan Khan Street, which connects two parts of the town, has greatly enhanced the beauty of Kabul, as it is planned to be flanked on either side by modern shops and offices with almost every amenity. Such buildings, some of which are already finished and others in the process of being completed, include the Kabul Municipality building, the Commercial Bank, the Spinzar building, etc.

The tallest construction in present-day Kabul is the Central Silo building, which is nine storeys high. The reason why tall buildings are not generally constructed is, presumably, the frequency of earth tremors, which prove quite startling to foreigners but does not bother the Kabulis. In some cases houses are rocked like boats in the English Channel, but they

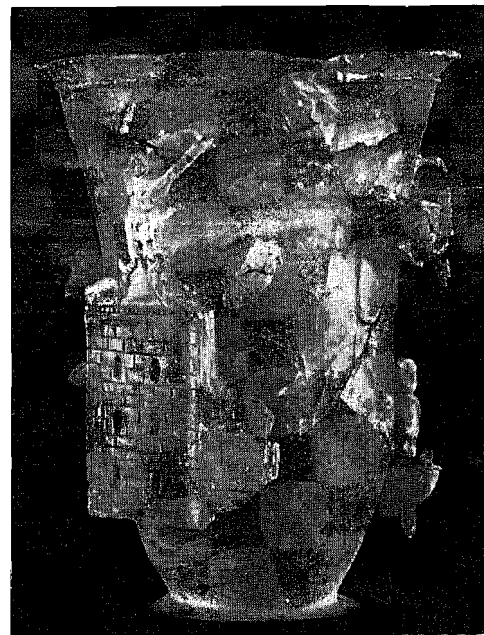


Statue of a sitting Buddha discovered at Hadda, Nangarhar Province.

seem to have adjusted themselves to such caresses of Mother Nature. The tremors are usually over in a matter of seconds and the hustle and bustle of the town is hardly disturbed.

Kabul Museum

The famed Kabul Museum lies 10 kilometres to the south-west of Kabul in the lovely Chardehi valley. It has sections for numismatics, ethnology and ethnography. Its showcases encompass a wealth of relics ranging from gold and silver coins of the ancient Greek rulers of Afghanistan to the rare manuscripts both in Pakhtu and



Replica of the Alexandria Lighthouse dating back to the 1st century A.D. unearthed at Bagram.

Persian, and some beautiful miniatures representing Herat school of painting.

Finds from Bamyān, Bagram, Fundukistan, Lashkargah and Surkh Kotal have separate rooms as they are so numerous that arranging a selection of them to be displayed in one room is not feasible. Now the finds from Ghazni are to be added to these treasures.

The museum is planning to print a guide book in various Western languages and also some postcards for the benefit of tourists in general and historians in particular.

Hotels

Hotel Kabul is a first class hotel—the

best in Afghanistan. The charge is approximately £2 per night with breakfast, and the restaurant downstairs serves lunch and dinner. It is ideally situated within easy walking distance of the Kabul Cinema, the Ministry of Press and Information and the two main banks.

The other hotels recommended to tourists are the Spinzar, the Ariana and the Maiwand, which are cheaper and quite pleasant, but not in the centre of the town.

Food

Varieties of meals are served in the restaurants for lunch and dinner. A foreigner staying at a hotel is advised to avail himself of the self-service restaurant near the Kabul Hotel. This is the Khyber Restaurant, which is Kabul's first and foremost catering organisation, setting a precedent for the local businessmen who previously thought that such a venture could not pay. Both tourists and Afghans can see and buy almost all kinds of conventional Western meals and the cost is quite reasonable. Also, in cleanliness and comfort it rates as high as a first class restaurant anywhere in the world.

Halfway to Paghman, there is another beautiful restaurant, the Spozhmay, which gives the tourist ample visual experience as to the inside of a typical Afghan home. The Afghan rugs, the pieces of furniture, etc., are extremely tasteful, while the location of the restaurant on the bank of an artificial lake is excellent.

Buys

Kabul is so rich in Afghan merchandise that the tourist is often bewildered about what to choose. Varieties of karakul pelts in black, grey, brown, beige and white for coats and hats, and all so cheap;



Dining Room at the Kabul Hotel.

carpets of different sizes and prices, so beautifully woven and finished; jewellery, including lapis lazuli, for which the country is so famous, postinchas, socks and gloves, beautiful Kandahari fabrics for making jackets, all kinds of packed dried fruits and nuts, especially "jalghoza," which presumably does not grow anywhere else; a wealth of ancient coins in gold and silversmiths' shops; shawls and costumes so colourful and exotic, shoes and hats, pieces of embroidery with unique designs representing different parts of the country, and so on. An endless assortment.

The Afghan customs do not charge visitors for one of each product and it is

easy to have a karakul coat made to order in one week or so and take it home.

Afghan goldsmiths and tailors are good at their jobs; so one can order a ring made of lapis lazuli in a specified design, or have a suit made to measure.

Tourist Organisation

The Afghan Tourist Organisation, locally known as "Garzendoy," looks after tourists before and after their arrival in the country.

All potential tourists, especially writers and scholars, should get in touch with this organisation before their arrival in order to make all the necessary arrangements for their visits. Those who arrive in Kabul without prior arrangements, con-

tact this office to let them know about their arrival and if they need accommodation.

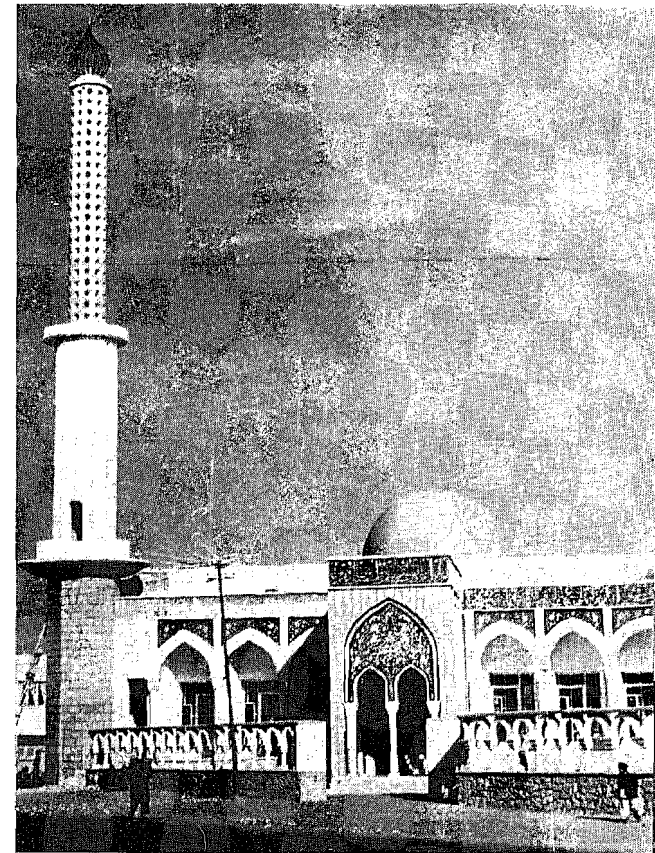
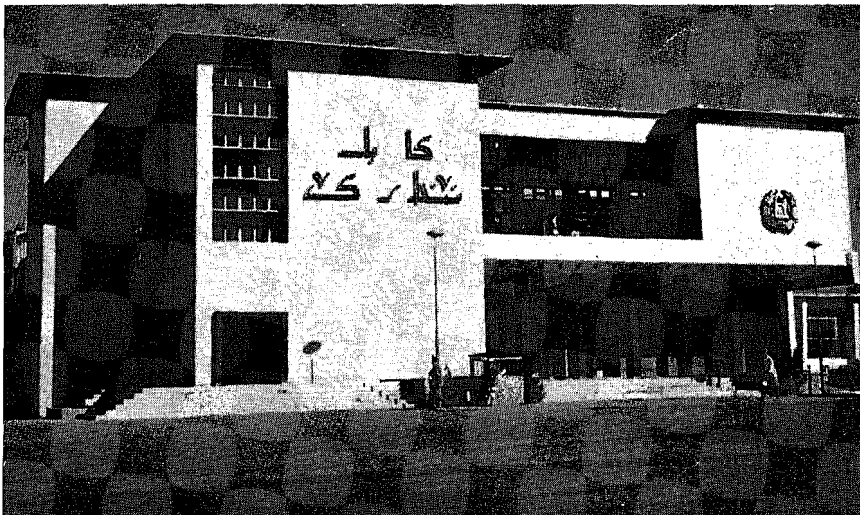
All foreigners are required to register with the police, and the Tourist Organisation helps them in this connection, as well as in other respects. They have cars, buses, camping equipment, etc., for hire, and guides who speak foreign languages in order to provide them with facilities and interpret for them in shops and offices.

The Tourist Organisation is so suitably situated in Pakhtunistan Square that tourists can walk in a matter of minutes to the Afghanistan Bank to get local currency, to the Ministry of Press and Information to obtain information about the country and to the Telephone and Cable Office to get in touch with their homes.

Scenic Places

Lying on the western outskirts of Sher Darwaza mountain, the Babur Gardens are famous in the south-western suburbs of Kabul. They are only two kilometres away. Terraced as they are, the second part of the gardens serves as a royal cemetery, where the progenitor of the Moghal kings, Zahiruddin Mohammed Hakim Mirza, has been buried. On the third terrace stands a small mosque built of marble in the reign of Shah Jahan, being under repair at the moment. With a pleasant swimming pool and a café, the Babur Gardens prove to be a public attraction all through the summer. Another factor which has recently added to their popularity is the municipal attention towards laying out gardens. In other words, the Kabul municipality make some elaborate arrangements on the first

The Kabul Nindarai Theatre at Chaman, Kabul.



The Sher Pur Mosque at Sharé Now.

day of every new year at the Babur Gardens to observe the ceremonies of the "Spring Fair."

Two kilometres to the south of Babur Gardens lies the Chelsotoon Palace, a handsome building situated on a hill and surrounded by its own park, and enjoying the view of the pretty Chardehi valley.

Nine kilometres from the city lies the Taj Beg Palace, built high up on a hill,

also overlooking the Chardehi valley.

In the eastern suburbs of Kabul is the Maranjan hill—an historical place where some indications of the past have recently been unearthed. On the southern extremity of this hill lies the marble mausoleum of the late King Nadir Shah, father of the present King of Afghanistan. This imposing monument overlooks the city of Kabul.

Khwaja Safa is a tiny summer resort south of Kabul on the outskirts of the Sher Darwaza mountains. It has only one small building and a pigeon house, and is surrounded by juda trees. It is well worth seeing in spring time when the trees are in flower.

Paghman

Paghman is a summer resort which lies 27 kilometres to the west of Kabul on the outskirts of high mountains. It enjoys wonderful weather and beautiful scenery. The cool air, the picturesque beauty and the rippling springs make Paghman a public attraction in summer time. The public garden in the centre of Paghman is surrounded by a number of private houses and villas to let. Up on the ridge of the mountain there is a natural lake which attracts mountaineers every summer to enjoy the snow-peaked ranges here and there.

Eight kilometres to the south of Paghman lies another valley known as Begtoot, at the entrance of which stands a small building erected in the style fashionable in the reign of Abdur Rahman. Referred to as Sohayl, the building overlooks Paghman and Kabul from a dominating location. Before one

reaches Paghman, one sees another magnificent park and a summer palace which His Majesty the King gave away to the public.

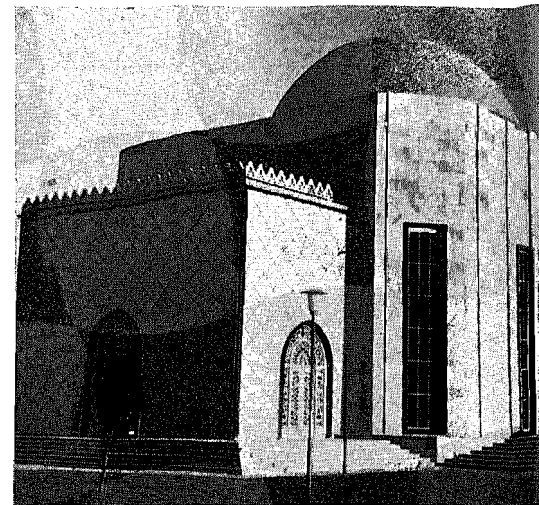
Fifteen kilometres to the south-west of Kabul there is a cool, pleasant place called Rishkhoar, in the centre of which there is a park in which stands an imposing building erected by His Royal Highness Sardar Shah Mahmood Khan. The park is terraced and shady, and planted with flowers, and has been provided with a swimming pool which is open to the public.

Whilst hiking in this park is generally allowed, foreigners are required to obtain special permission to use the swimming pool.

As one passes Rishkhoar, one reaches the Lalundar gorge, through which the Kabul river passes with foam and fury, especially in the spring.

Twelve kilometres to the east of Kabul lies a big park and playing grounds known as Bagrami. The park is beautified by a tributary of the Logar river which passes through the centre. Distinguished visitors and guests coming to Kabul via Jalalabad are received at this park. At the Bagrami Ground an annual contest of "Buzkashi" takes place on September 21st. Several teams of excellent horsemen from many provinces take part in the game, which celebrates the King's birthday.

The sport is a "must" for every visitor as it demands superb horsemanship and great courage, providing an exciting spectacle of more than a hundred riders struggling to obtain a calf, the object of the whole game.



The Mausoleum of the late King Nadir Shah



A corner of Tapah Park at Paghman.

Istalif

Fifty kilometres to the north of Kabul lies the beautiful valley of Istalif, which, like Paghman, is the summer resort for

the citizens of Kabul.

Set against the background of the majestic Hindukush, the town of Istalif is famous for its pottery. Most homes in the surrounding areas and some in Kabul possess one or more pieces such as bowls, ashtrays, vases, flower pots, etc., made of clay and glazed in turquoise.

The public park in Istalif, known as Takht, is an excellent cool spot in hot summers and it is always crowded by people coming to picnic here from Kabul.

Like Paghman, its special fruit is the cherry, but it is called "shaloo" here. The cherries produced in both places are actually different from the Western variety as they are a bit smaller, crimson in colour, and far more tender and delicious.

Leaving Kabul

On leaving Kabul for the northern parts of the country, one passes by the Baghé Bala Palace which was built by King Abdur Rahman on top of a hill and surrounded by vineyards.

Past the hill, one sees Badam Bagh, the Almond Orchard, to the left, sprawling all the way from the main road to the skirt of another hill.

After a few kilometres one passes through the Khair Khana Pass and down the slope overlooking the green valleys of Kohdaman.

There are so many beautiful valleys to the left of the main road that an ordinary tourist cannot see them all during the short time he has allotted to the whole country. The more important of them, after Shakar Dara and Istalif, are Gul Dara, Farza, Sinjid Dara and Tope Dara. The last valley has, besides its natural

beauty, indications of Buddhist stupas and a tower.

Legend has it that some sort of cable connected Tope Dara with Bagram in the old days, presumably during the Kushanid period, and both centres of Buddhist culture and religion signalled messages to each other by pulling on this cable.

Mir Bachakote (Sarai Khoja)

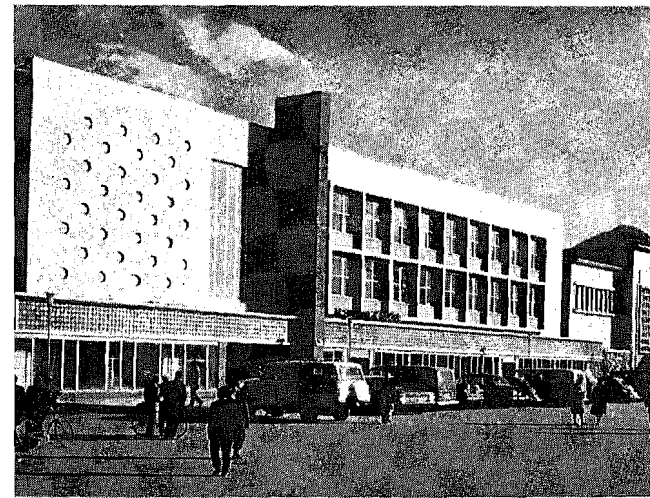
Mir Bachakote, the centre of Kohdaman, lies 32 kilometres to the north of Kabul. The new small town has been well planned and has something of everything, while the old bazaar is still famous for its rice dishes.

A halting place for commuters between Kabul and Charikar, Mir Bachakote has always been important for travellers as well as transport. There is a lovely karez near the old bazaar where travellers quench their thirst. There are all kinds of fruits to be bought from the shops and street vendors, and also some small workshops to repair minor mechanical faults on vehicles, and a filling station.

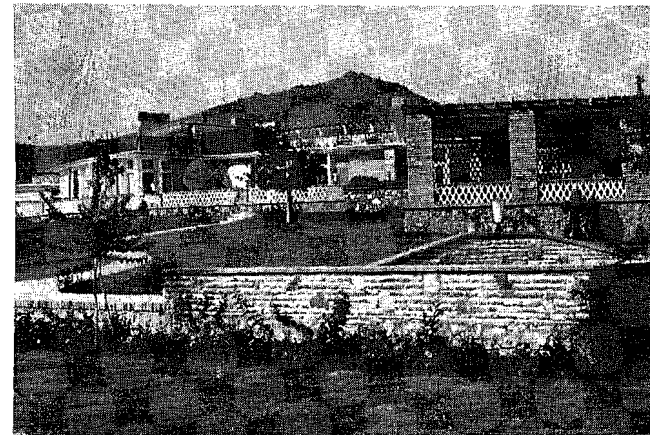
Surrounded by vineyards, each usually containing a tower, Mir Bachakote is rich and prosperous, because its products such as fresh grapes, peaches and raisins are transported to Peshawar by lorries overnight.

Crate manufacturing is always busy in summer when the grapes begin to ripen, and grape merchants pitch their camps in the vineyards to supervise the packing of fresh grapes into the crates.

In the winter, travellers buy "kan-gina," a container which looks like a flying saucer and is filled with grapes. Made of clay, it preserves the grapes right



The Khyber Restaurant at Pakhtunistan Square which has set a good example of the self-service system and catering capabilities in Kabul.



The Spozhmay Café on the banks of the man-made Kargha lake half way between Kabul and Paghman.

through to the end of winter, but it is a bit heavy and tricky to carry.

The round wooden boxes of grapes

lined with cotton are preferable, but more expensive.

Charikar

There are 32 kilometres between Mir Bachakote and Charikar, the centre of Parwan Province. The road is as good as when it starts from Kabul, and is flanked on either side by mulberry trees, a special tree of Kohistan.

The town of Charikar has been built on the slopes of a mountain dominating one of the most beautiful valleys in the whole world—Kohistan. Overlooking Charikar and the whole green world is Takia which is quite an attraction in early spring when thousands of juda trees are abloom, painting the skirts of the mountain a deep purple.

There is a café at Takia and many camping sites for picnickers and casual travellers. Many people go there on Fridays to enjoy the blue sky above, the purple juda trees, and the green valley below.

Buys

Charikar is renowned for its cutlery. There are many shops selling all kinds of knives, especially the pocket ones. The bull horn handles are so superbly shaped and polished that they become quite transparent, and sometimes reflect handsome colours. The manufacturer usually places his name underneath the handle in order to advertise his craft.

Food

Charikar's speciality in food is "falooda," which is a mixture of special spongy flakes, cream, snow, sugar and rose water. This makes a delicious cooling drink, as well as a nourishing food.

Bagram

Ten miles to the south-east of Charikar is Bagram, the capital of the Kushanid empire.

Overlooking the green valley of Kohistan with Panjsher and Ghorband rivers straddling it, Bagram has yielded part of its riches to the Kabul Museum in the form of ivory carvings, statues, coins, vases, etc. It was destroyed by Cyrus, but was quite prosperous by the time Alexander launched his conquest of Afghanistan.

Bagram is also famous for its melons, known as "sarda," and water melons, which are sent to Kabul and also exported.

Opian

A few kilometres to the north-west of Charikar lies Opian, the site of one of the Alexandrias in this part of the country.

Opian is still an important place, with many prosperous traders and a holy shrine which is frequented by patients suffering from rabies. According to the people who go there, the patient touches the chain attached to the shrine and gets rid of the disease.

Jabulseraj

Jabulseraj or the ancient Parwan, lies to the north of Charikar and is becoming increasingly industrialised.

It was here that the first hydro-electric power-house was built in the reign of King Habibullah. It was here also that the late King built a second "Arg"; and in later years a textile mill and cement plant were opened.

A beautiful valley with Shotul river crossing through it, Jabulseraj is becoming more important because it is situated

almost at the entrance of Salang Pass, which will shorten the distance between Kabul and the northern provinces by 200 kilometres.

The local hotel is run by the Textile Company.

The only shortcoming of Jabalsuraj, and for that matter of all Kohistan, is its strong wind which blows throughout the three months of summer.

Gulbahar

Gulbahar, which means "Spring Flower," is a real beauty spot almost at one end of Kohistan Valley, with Panjsher and Shotul rivers running through it. People from Kabul and other parts not too distant spend their Fridays here in the cool public park listening to music or frying fish for lunch.

The greatest textile mill in the country has been built on an elevation opposite the park. It produces beautiful cotton fabrics and attractive blankets. The Textile Company runs a small hotel, maintains recreation facilities for its employees, and a swimming pool, as swimming in the swift river which is full of boulders is rather treacherous.

Rigé Rawan

Opposite Charikar and on the other side of the valley lies Rigé Rawan, the "Moving Sand," which is a picnic ground for the people living beyond the river Panjsher.

A huge mass of soft yellow sand has been evenly spread on the slope of a mountain dominating an area ideally suited for horse races. People visit this place during spring fairs to do some shopping, watch the races and sometimes climb the sands.

It is, however, the young and the more sporting types who attempt to climb the moving sand because it is very high and the sand gives way under one's feet. The footprints leave big hollows in the sand, and there are so many of them every day. But the next morning it is so smooth that one thinks that it has been mechanically levelled. That is why the local people call it the moving sand.

Perhaps the scientific explanation for this is that the wind blowing from one side of the mountain is deflected in such a way that it spreads the sand evenly every day.

There is a shrine down below which is believed locally to belong to one of the sons of Caliph Ali. The shrine, built deep under the ground, is believed to lead to a subterranean tunnel ending in Ghazni. According to legends, two cats with identifying rings were left there to find their way out, and they were found at another shrine belonging to Bahlol in Ghazni.

Another legend about Rigé Rawan is that when Hindus and Sikhs come to pay their homage, a loud noise of beating drums is heard by everyone, despite the fact that it is a Moslem shrine. And the place is frequently visited by these minorities.

People

The people of Kohdaman and Kohistan are almost half Pakhtuns and the rest are Tajiks, and some of Turkish origin. There are sizable Hindu and Sikh communities in Mir Bachakote, Charikar, Jabulseraj, and also in other less known places. They are generally shop keepers and smart businessmen.

Considering Afghan standards, both Kohdaman and Kohistan are overpopulated and there is always annual migration, especially from Charikar to the northern parts of the country.

Leaving Charikar

On leaving Charikar for the northern provinces (Kataghan, Mazar, Badakhshan, Shibergan, Talukan and Maimana) one should bear in mind that parts of the road are under construction. Also petrol and repair stations are not available in each place. There is only one petrol station in Bolola and a station and hotel at Doab. From the beginning of Ghorband up to the Shibar Pass, the road passes through a valley which is many times reduced to the size of a narrow gorge with a swift stream running through it.

Fabulous Bamyán

There is a distance of 181 kilometres between Charikar and Bamyán. Those who are not in a particular hurry, stop for lunch at Chardi Ghorband where one can find a number of typical restaurants and good meals.

The road winds between narrow gorges almost all along the way up to Shibar Pass (2,809 m.) which gives a newcomer a good impression of stupendous heights and the skill of Afghan drivers in negotiating the hairpin bends with their generally overloaded lorries.

There are 32 kilometres between Bolola and Bamyán, the former being a halting place for passengers from the northern parts of the country. The route to Bamyán takes a left turning from the main road, and on entering the valley one finds out the tremendous difference between the rather monotonous scenery



A view of Shakardareh, a lovely valley to the north of Kabul.



Rigé Rawan, the moving sand in Kohistan.

accompanying the traveller from the entrance of Shikari up to the Shibar Pass, and the vigorous and cheerful views witnessed in the Bamyán Valley.

With its deep valleys, mineral springs and mountain lakes, Bamyán is 2,583 metres above sea level.

The main attraction of Bamyán, apart from its natural beauty, game—trout fishing and partridge shooting—is the existence here of two gigantic statues of Buddha. Carved in alto relief on the face of the rock 400 ft. apart, the larger of the two (53 metres high) is now mutilated, both of his legs fractured and the face destroyed. The smaller statue (35 metres high) believed to be a female, but dressed in a mantle, has not been so badly damaged.

Apart from the two statues, there are more than ten thousand caves, some of them painted, a geological formation resembling a dragon, and remains of two cities of the Islamic era razed to the ground by Ghengez Khan's armies.

One hundred and eighty kilometres from Kabul via Hajigak, Bamyán was a great Buddhist centre between the first and fourth centuries, and thousands of monks lived in the caves chanting hymns from Buddhist scriptures. Besides, it was visited by pilgrims from all parts of the then Buddhist world, including China and Korea.

Hotel

The Bamyán Hotel is run by the Afghan Tourist Organisation. It was built many years ago on a dominant spot facing the great statues. More accommodation is needed for the increasing number of visitors every year.



Bamyán Valley.

Bandé Amir

Bandé Amir comprises a series of five lakes contained in rock bowls high up in a basin. The lapis colour of the water, the orange-red hue of the surrounding soil, the white tint of the cascades splashing down below and flowing on a milky white bed, the desolate but glorious view of the mountains and plains all make this place an ideal spot for tourists and holidaymakers alike.

One hundred and forty-three kilo-

metres from Bamyán, Bandé Amir's largest lake is called Zulfikar which is first to come into view.

The Afghan Tourist Organisation is planning to build a modern hotel on the banks of this lake to accommodate various visitors and holidaymakers. Meanwhile, camping is prevalent here almost throughout summer, with fishing and swimming being the main sports.

Back to Bolola

There is no petrol station in Bandé

Amir. In fact it is only the lakes and nothing else at present. Tourists are always advised to make provision for their petrol when they leave Bamyán.

Also when departing for the northern provinces, petrol stocks should be replenished for the 340 kilometres between Bolola and Doab.

Doab

Doab is actually the Grand Canyon of Afghanistan, where one can see various colours and rock formations on entering the valley and also from the hotel built there years ago.

There is some duck shooting in early spring in the shallow waters of the river, but the frogs here produce the same sound as ducks which is quite interesting and misleading too.

Doshi

There is a distance of 91 kilometres between Doab and Doshi. Therefore petrol should be replenished at Doab, while Doshi should be used as a halting place.

The Doshi town is growing rapidly, partly because of so many passengers passing through it every day, and partly because it is a junction for the main road leading to the northern provinces and the Salang road, which is still under construction.

There are many good restaurants and a few cheap hotels here, but tourists are always warned not to drink water after Bamyán and up to Badakshan because it is not quite safe. Therefore, people in almost all parts of the northern provinces drink tea, and plenty of it, as the weather is warm and perspiration helps a lot.

Doshi marks the beginning of Kataghan

Province and the end of Parwan. So one can see here different faces and varying costumes.

The predominant feature of Kataghan, and also of Mazar and Maimana, is the "chapan," a long cloak with thick cotton lining. It has long sleeves and usually no pockets. The material is mostly stripy and sometimes silken, and of very attractive colours. Kabulis use it in winter to ward off the severe cold, while in the northern provinces, it is *the* clothing. People here believe that warm clothes repel warmth. Perhaps it helps them to perspire easily and therefore cools their bodies off.

Pulé Khumri

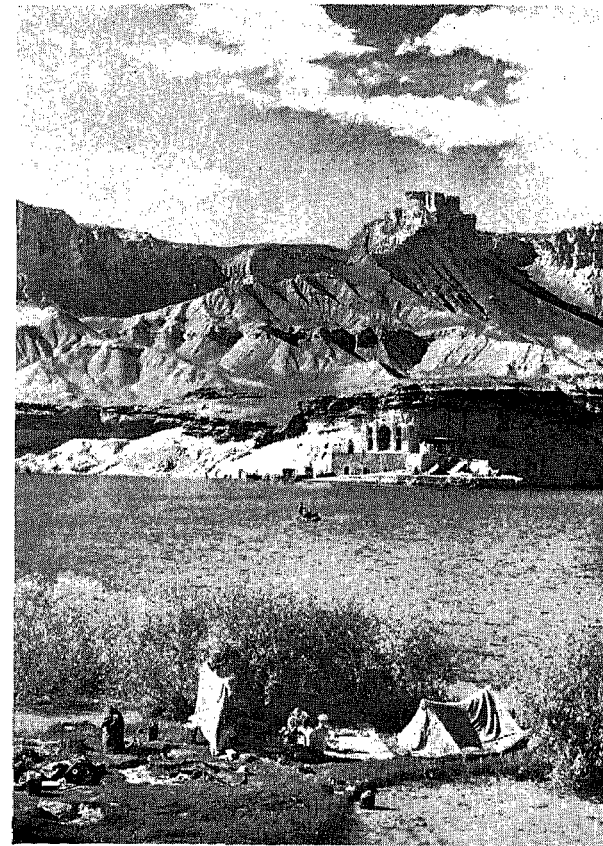
There are 48 kilometres between Doshi and Pulé Khumri, one of the most industrial towns of Kataghan.

The town is surrounded by low-lying hills with the Kunduz river flowing from one side of it.

Pulé Khumri is actually a textile town with everything geared to the mills. The Afghan Textile Company has here its second largest modern factory, run by electricity produced from a hydro-electric power plant built across the Kunduz river.

There is a well laid-out public park with a café on the bank of the river. The Company runs a hotel and restaurant for its employees as well as for tourists. Booking should be made in advance because of Pulé Khumri's location on the route to various northern provinces.

After Jabulseraj, Pulé Khumri is the second entirely electrified town one can see on travelling to the north of Kabul. Its power plant is also the oldest in this



Bandé Amir, a tourist attraction near Bamyán.

part of the country.

Except for affairs directly concerned with the Government, every other aspect of life here is affected by the Textile Company. It has built hundreds of houses and apartments for its employees and their families, it runs a modern hospital, it maintains the park, the café, the hotel (locally known as the Club) and the power plant.

There are rows of shops here selling all kinds of goods, and a cinema to show European and Indian films. In fact this is the second cinema after Charikar on one's way to the north.

There is excellent fishing in the river, sometimes big fish weighing more than five kilogrammes brought by flood waters from the Oxus river.

Duck shooting is also good here in early spring, and pheasant shooting was very good years ago in Dana Ghor.

Baghlan

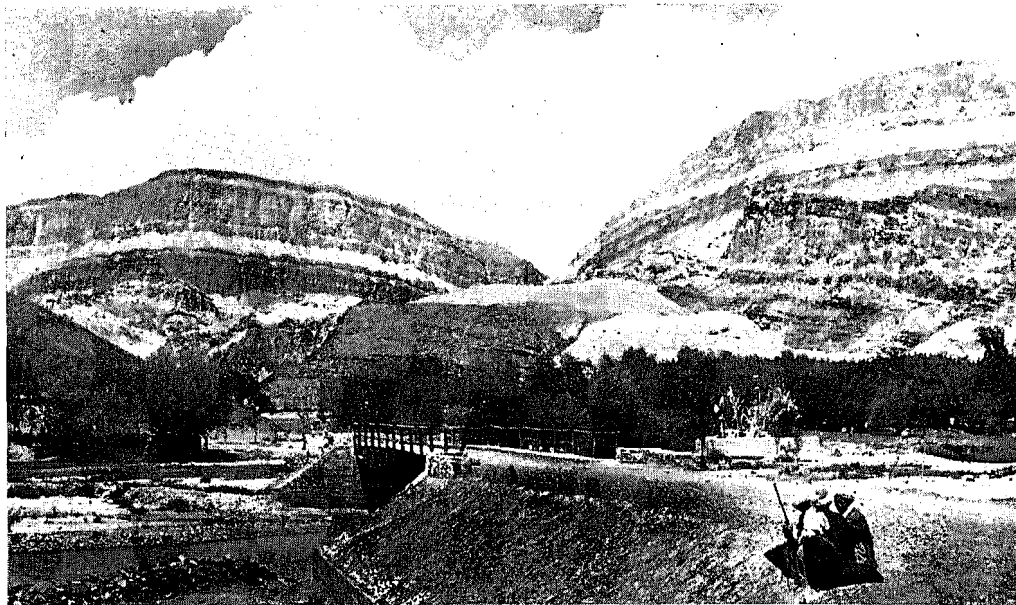
The provincial capital of Kataghan, Baghlan is 37 kilometres from Pulé Khumri. It is situated in a verdant plane, is less humid than Pulé Khumri, and also less warm in summer.

As the provincial capital of Kataghan was transferred from Khanabad to this place in a hurry and office buildings and accommodation were badly needed, a co-ordinated city planning did not materialise and therefore the town has still remained divided between the industrial sector built by the Sugar Company which has a refinery here, and the Government which has its various departments 5 kilometres away.

The industrial Baghlan is a pleasant little town with all kinds of shops, a hotel, and many bungalows.

It is actually the sugar refinery here that runs the whole town. It owns the hotel, runs an experimental farm, maintains the swimming pool, sponsors the sericulture institute, produces the electricity for the refinery and its associated bungalows built for its employees.

The Government in Baghlan has one thing to pride itself on. It is the "Sitara



Doab, like the Grand Canyon, has multi-coloured soil and rocks, but its frogs, which sing like ducks, are unique.

Café" built on a little hill dominating the whole area. It is a lovely café, well planned to suit modern requirements and decorated with inscriptions, pottery, etc., unearthed from various sites in the province.

There are petrol stations in both Pulé Khumri and Baghlan, and also good Afghan restaurants.

The only food speciality here is nan, which is round instead of oval and is made from super-sifted flour. It is much better looking than any other, and can be eaten abundantly.

The best buys in Baghlan are lengths of silk cloth.

Kunduz

After 100 kilometres one comes to Kunduz, the most industrialised town in Kataghan.

As textiles are important to Pulé Khumri and sugar to Baghlan, it is cotton which dominates the scene here. In recent years the Spinzar Company has exported thousands of tons of cotton abroad, mostly to the Soviet Union in exchange for manufactured goods.

Other industries run by the company include china, soap and margarine. The company has branches in almost all cotton-growing areas of Kataghan and Mazar, with ginning, pressing and baling

facilities.

The Spinzar Company runs a hotel here and maintains a beautiful park with an equally beautiful café.

There is a cinema and a library in Kunduz, but the most usual pastime here, as in Baghlan and Pulé Khumri, is to stroll in the park in the afternoon and have tea later in the café.

Having the richest soil in the whole country, Kunduz is suitable for all kinds of temperate zone plants and trees, but cotton and sycamore trees grow here in profusion.

Remains of ancient Kunduz are the ruins of a fort on top of a hill, but changes brought about in recent years have outshone the town's past glory.

In fact few people know much about the ancient Kunduz, while even middle-aged persons who lived there or in the vicinity remember with relish how a marshland full of reeds, infested with mosquitoes and terrorised by hungry lions was converted to such a highly industrialised town with various trades booming in it.

The Kunduz of today is the sole supplier of cotton, margarine and laundry soap to the whole nation, while the Spinzar Hotel built in a very important street in Kabul, Ahmed Jan Khan, is one of the most fashionable structures of the capital.

Askelon Melons

Kunduz is famous for its most exotic melons, and Askelon is the district which produces the best type. These have to be eaten to be believed. Some are so tender that they crack if someone passes by the

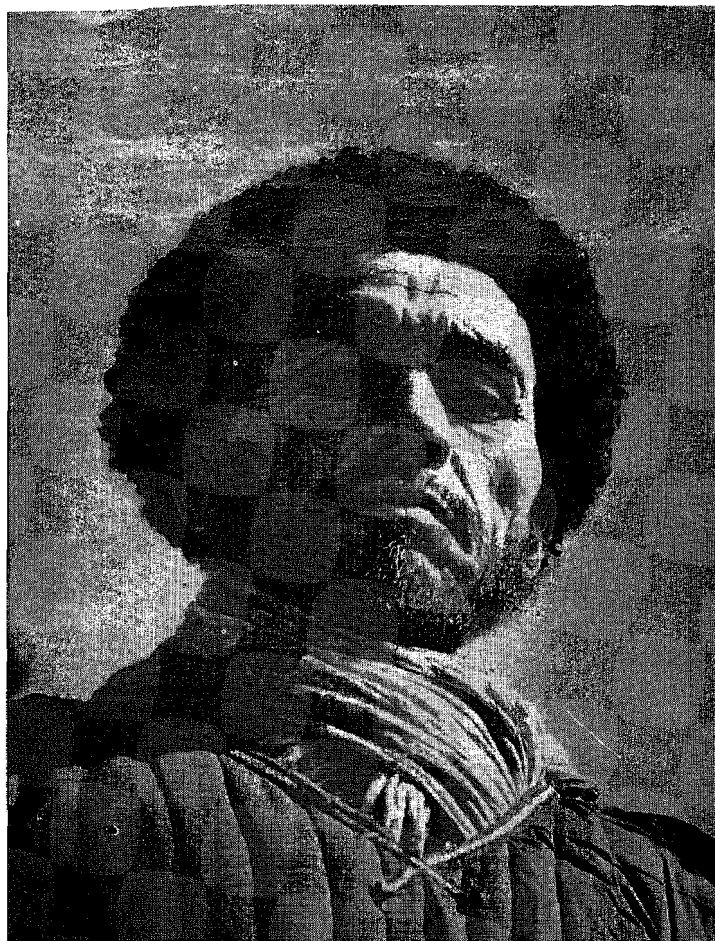
plant. Others are too sweet, and the upper crust has to be taken off before you eat them.

Khanabad

There are 27 kilometres between Kunduz and Khanabad, the largest town

in Kataghan. The town itself is situated in a basin and is warm in summer, sometimes even warmer than other parts of the province.

The local municipality runs a small hotel here, while Afghan restaurants and



A Turkoman in his costume which prepares him to meet the bleak winds blowing across the Central Asian deserts.

tea houses are plentiful in the bazaars.

The new hydro-electric power plant, built by Spinzar Company here, has given a new life to the town, especially the new sector which is planned and houses the more fashionable people.

Khanabad is more commercial and agricultural than industrial. The soil here is as good as at Kunduz, and sometimes better, especially the black soil. The main crops are rice and wheat, and most wheat produced here is grown by dry cropping.

A branch of the Kunduz river passes by Khanabad where fishing is usually good, but keen fishermen generally go to Bangi, which is not very far away, but has plenty of easy fishing to offer the not-too-adventurous types.

Talukan

After 32 kilometres the road brings you to Talukan, the seat of another province, and a pleasant little town.

Here, as in Kunduz, the Spinzar Company has a hotel, a power plant and an industrial centre.

The new town is under construction, while the old town consists of large compounds surrounded by high mud walls.

The weekly fair here is worth seeing from the point of view of the variety of goods on sale, including good horses.

Actually a horse is as important to the people of the northern provinces as a bicycle is to schoolboys in Kabul. One comes across horses everywhere, mostly red in colour, of medium height and size, but preferably fast.

Farkhar

About 60 kilometres from Talukan lies

Farkhar, one of the most pleasant valleys, with a foaming stream carrying good trout, flowing fast from the slopes.

It is an extremely pleasant spot to spend a day, especially when the summer heat and travel fatigue dictate a nice change and rest. There is no hotel, so camping is popular on the bank of the stream in the public park.

Towards Badakhshan

There are 42 kilometres between Talukan and Kalafgan, a salt mining town, with spa water which is good for the digestion.

Mashad is the halting place between Talukan and Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan province.

Badakhshan is legendary for its rubies, but at present lapis lazuli is mined at Kurano Munjan, and gold is extracted from sands brought by the Kokcha river, which is the fastest stream in the whole country. It has good water for drinking, and provides excellent fishing.

There are 160 kilometres between Mashad and Faizabad. The road generally winds along cliffs and around hairpin bends with the mountains on one side and the deep gorge pierced by the Kokcha river on the other. Driving on the road calls for extreme caution and strong brakes are needed all the time.

The population of Faizabad is comprised mainly of Tajiks, who are quite handsome. The unique features of the town are that the mountain slopes are cultivated, and the Kokcha river is ever present here.

The villages outside Faizabad, such as Baharak and Zardeh, are most beautiful, and picnickers go there to enjoy the

cherries and the lovely cool air at the banks of the almost omnipresent Kokcha.

Hotel

The Kokcha Café is the main hotel in Faizabad, while rather good meals are served in local restaurants. Two specialties are "halwa" and "parata," the first being the Afghan pudding composed of flour, sugar and butter, and the second a kind of pancake prepared in a different way and cooked in butter.

Buys

The main dress in Badakhshan is "chakman," a long cloak with equally long sleeves, made of white or beige woollen cloth produced locally. Some chakmans are decorated with purple silk round the collar and on the sleeves, but others are plain. They cost about £3, and are very warm for winter.

Back to Pulé Khumri

The tourist is advised to come back all the way to Pulé Khumri in order to go to Mazar, because the alternative route connecting Kunduz with Khulm passes through a desert. Besides, there are so many other things to be seen from Pulé Khumri to Khulm (Tashkurghan) which the tourist cannot afford to leave unvisited.

Surkh Kotal

There are 217 kilometres between Pulé Khumri and Khulm. On the way one passes through the Ghorī plain, which is most fertile, and the place for pheasant shooting. Also, it is here on the Ghorī plain that a big cement plant has been built to augment cement production in the country.

It is in Ghorī, too, that the acropolis of Surkh Kotal was built by the Kushan kings. In recent years several articles of archaeological interest, including the remains of a fire temple, have been unearthed from Surkh Kotal.

A very picturesque place en route to Khulm is Samangan (Aibak) which has a hotel, a public park and a very pleasant climate.

It has Takhté Rustam for historians and archaeologists, and Dara Zindan for the ordinary tourists to see, not far from the town itself.

Khulm

Khulm is as important for Mazar as Arghandab is for Kandahar. It is a great orchard where fig trees, pomegranates, grapes, apricots, peaches, etc., grow in profusion and are sold to the neighbouring areas. Also there is one particular type of melon known as "amiri," which should be tasted when in season.

Jehan Noma Gardens

The Jehan Noma Gardens are the seat of the local Government. They consist of a well laid-out park with a long two-storey building on one side, and a pool, flower beds and shady trees. From Jehan Noma one can see miles away in the far distance, and therefore the word meaning "World Revealer" is not very exaggerated.

Mazar

There are 58 kilometres between Khulm and Mazar, the provincial capital of the province of the same name.

Mazar is the fourth largest city in Afghanistan and prides itself for possess-

ing the mausoleum of the fourth Caliph and Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali.

The Blue Mosque, built around the tomb, is a masterpiece of Afghan architecture and tilework during the Timurid era. The turquoise blue dome of the mausoleum so much dominates the whole town that wherever one goes one can never lose sight of it.

The main streets of the town have forked from the mausoleum and a new mosque and several apartment houses have been constructed here in recent years.

The seat of the Government is Baghé Hozoor, in the heart of the town, and the hotel run by the local municipality is nearby.

Buys

Mazar is famous for good carpets, karakul pelts, "alacha," a stripy silk fabric for making chapans or skirts, long leather and suede boots, etc.

Marmul

There are some lovely valleys near Mazar; one of them, called Marmul, is very pleasant in summer due to its cool weather, spring waters, green slopes and so on, and provides a haven for Mazaris during the hot summer.

Balkh

Balkh, or the ancient Bactria, is known to historians as the Mother of Cities. It was here that Zoroaster was born and taught his religion. It was also here, or nearby, that the first Aryan settlements flourished and gradually spread to other areas.

There is nothing left from the ancient

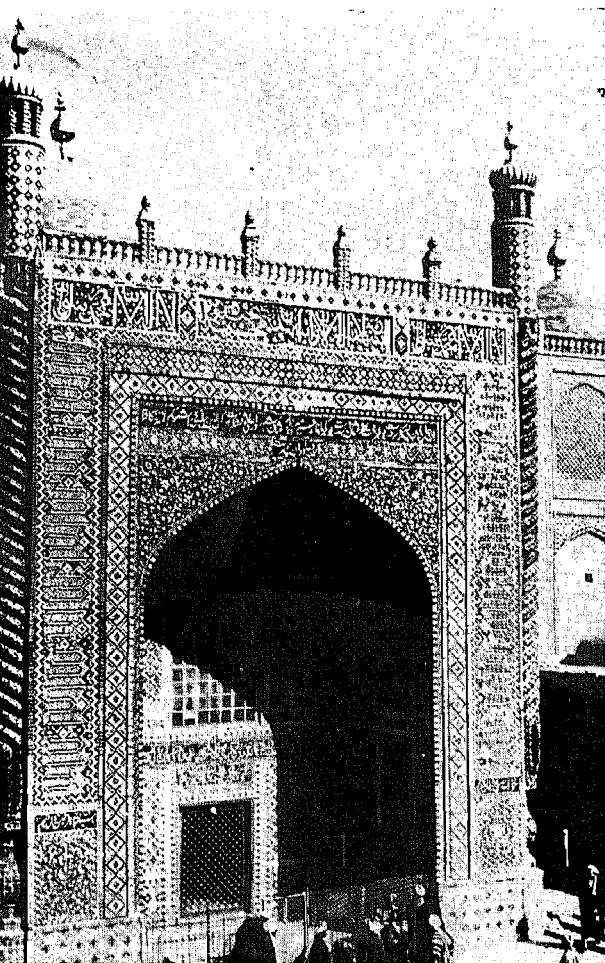


A Tajik craftsman in the process of completing a typical Afghan shoe known as "paizar."

city except indications of the Now Bahar fire temple. There are, however, some remains of the Islamic period, the best example of which is the mausoleum of Khwaja Mohammed Parsa.

Leaving Mazar

There are 124 kilometres between Mazar and Shebirghan, the provincial



Rowza, the Shrine of Hazraté Ali at Mazaré Sharif.

capital of another province of the same name.

Petrol can be obtained both in Mazar and Balkh. Tourists are advised to cover the whole distance in one lap because of the desert which the road passes through.

Also an early dawn start is most advisable for passengers as well as the vehicle in order to avoid overheating of the engine and tyres.

Shebirghan

Shebirghan is a delightful little town built in recent years, with nice straight streets, a hotel, a petrol station and a good-looking mosque.

Saré Pul

After 65 kilometres one comes to Saré Pul, a town south of Shebirghan and very picturesque, with Abé Safid river running through it.

Travellers leaving Mazar for Maimana usually have their lunch in Shebirghan and spend the night in Saré Pul.

The other route to Maimana passes through Andkhoy, but it is much longer and passes through sand dunes which cannot be kept clear all the time because of sand storms.

There are 94 kilometres between Saré Pul and Maimana, with Belcheragh as halting place.

Maimana, the capital of the province of the same name, is a booming little town with a hotel, a cinema, typical shops and lovely valleys, Zang and Shakh.

It should be the richest province, as almost the best carpets and karakuls are produced there, and except for Andkhoy area, it is arable in most places, and villages are frequently seen here and there.

A casual jeep among the many beautiful horses on the streets looks quite out of place.

Towards Herat

The road to Herat is divided into four segments: Maimana to Kaisar (96 kilometres), Kaisar to Bala Murghab (90 kilometres), Bala Murghab to Kalai Now (116 kilometres) and Kalai Now to Herat (165 kilometres).

Tourists leaving Maimana early in the morning usually have their breakfast in Kaisar and their lunch in Bala Murghab.

Kaisar is a pretty place with bazaars and good vineyards. The local tea houses serve excellent breakfast providing that the items are specified, as the local people generally order tea with bread.

Bala Murghab, on the banks of Murghab river, has a little hotel for the night's rest and meals are to be ordered in advance from Maimana.

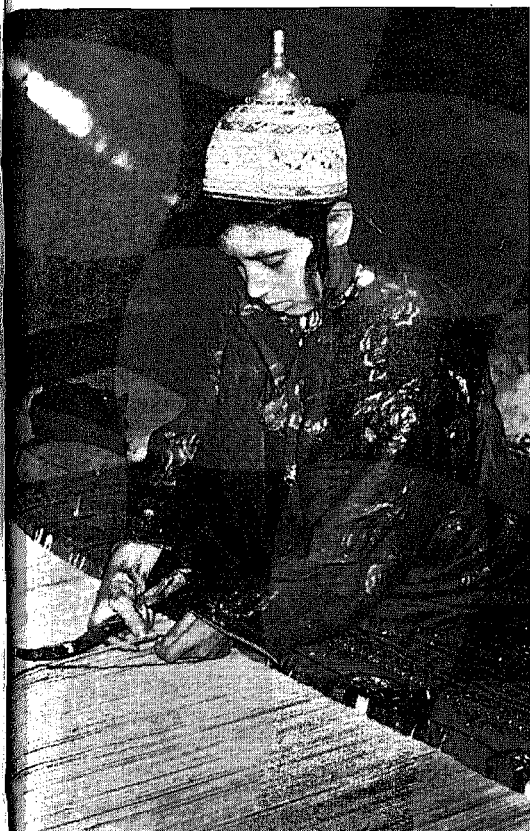
Kalai Now is the seat of the Badghisat district, the most picturesque area where grass grows taller and greener than elsewhere, and thousands of kochis graze their flocks of sheep in summer.

Very good horses can be bought here—and they are cheap, too. The hotel is good and roomy and the weather invigorating.

An early start from Kalai Now takes the tourist to Herat late in the afternoon or evening depending on the power of the vehicle negotiating the uphill stretch of the Sabzak Pass which is 3,082 metres above sea level.

The Road to Khyber Pass

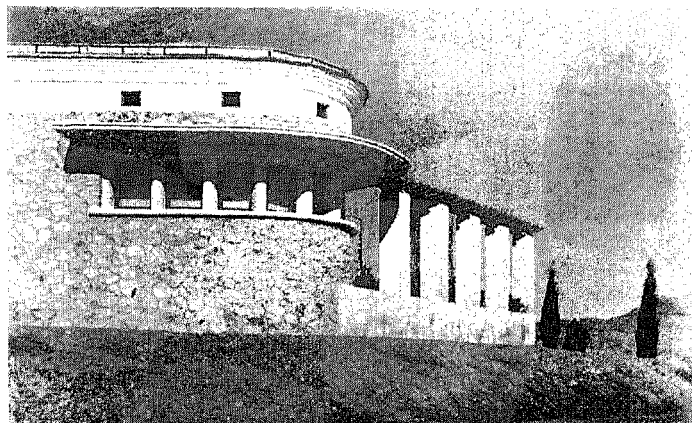
The road to Khyber Pass is divided into three sections: Kabul to Sarobi (80



A young woman from the Shakh Valley, Mimana, weaving a carpet.

kilometres), Sarobi to Jalalabad (104 kilometres) and Jalalabad to Torkham (66 kilometres).

Sarobi is a halting place for commuters between Kabul and Jalalabad, and business flourishes here more in winter as there is an influx of people leaving the snowy capital for the warm and welcoming climate of Jalalabad.



Part of the Sarobi Hotel which overlooks a man-made lake.

Most travellers have their lunch here at the local restaurants which usually serve chicken with rice. Some stay the night at the nice hotel overlooking the man-made lake of the Sarobi hydro-electric dam. The power-house, which supplies electricity to Kabul and power to Gulbahar and Jabulseraj, is not far from the dam on the road to Jalalabad.

Jalalabad

Jalalabad is the capital of Nangarhar province and the winter resort of the people of Kabul. Most of the well-to-do have their bungalows here, like the private summer villas in Paghman.

The parks worth seeing in Jalalabad are Shahi, Kowkab and Serajul Emarat.

The hotel in Jalalabad is expanding because of the popularity of the place with the general public who cannot afford to have bungalows of their own.

The restaurants in the town serve good

rice dishes as rice is the main product of Nangarhar province along with citrus fruits.

Nangarharis are good craftsmen. They make very colourful bedspreads which were originally meant for men to clad themselves with. The sandals here are better than those found in Kabul. In winter it is worth buying "gur," which is a kind of brown lump sugar mixed with walnuts.

The road from Jalalabad to Torkham passes mostly through desert, and then on leaving the Afghan customs office and check point leads to the Khyber Pass and onwards to Peshawar.

Through Central Afghanistan

The road connecting Herat with Kabul passes through some very difficult gorges and narrow passes, most of the time parallel to Hari Rud river.

Jam

After 100 kilometres, the road branches off to the right towards the Jam minaret, one of the most colossal monuments of the Ghorid Empire at Feroz Koh, built by Sultan Ghiasuddin Ghor.

The distance between Shahrak and Jam village along the new road is 60 kilometres and takes 5½ hours by Land Rover.

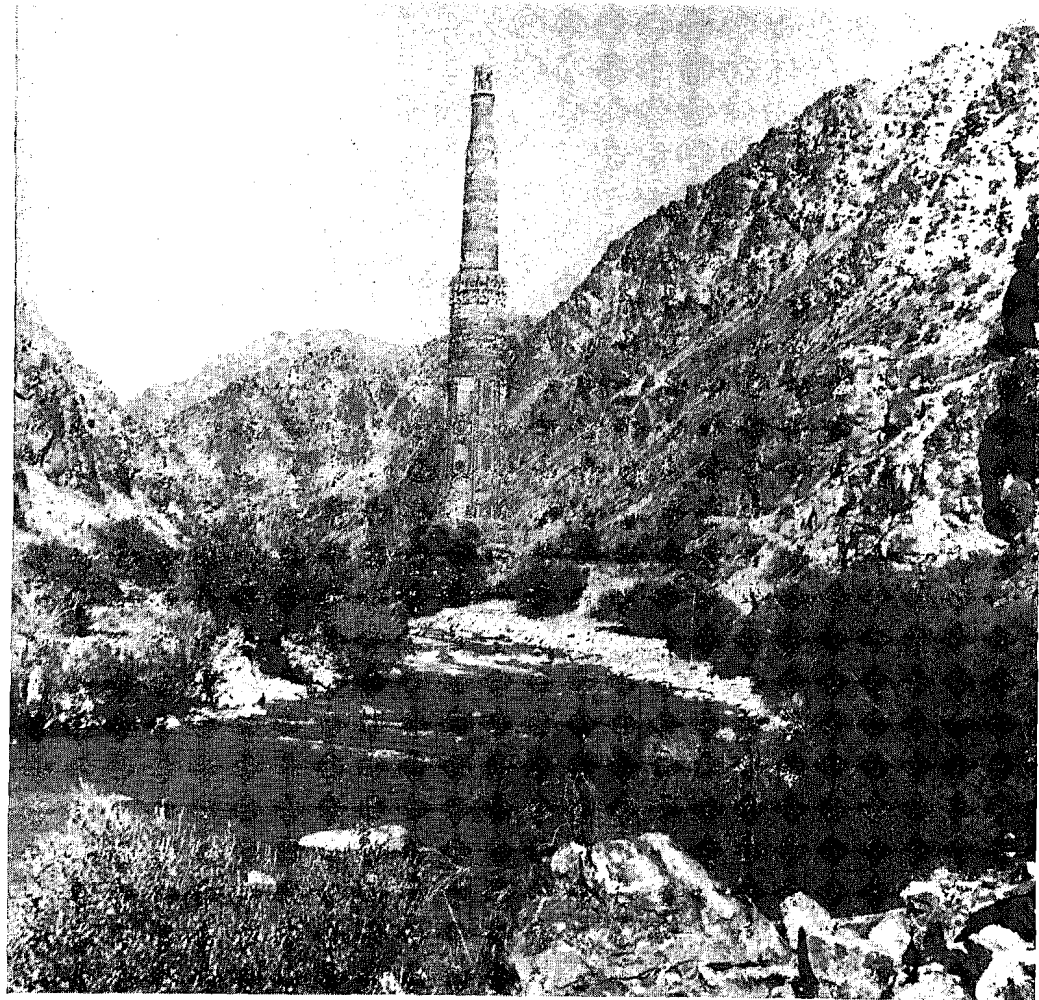
The minaret is a magnificent structure 65 metres high and nearly 800 years old.

There is no petrol station between Shahrak and Panjao, a distance of more than 300 kilometres. A large stock is needed from Herat, but there are nice picnic sites on the bank of the Hari Rud. Hotels and other facilities are also not available because of the mountainous nature of the terrain and the fact that the road is only passable by jeeps and Land Rovers during the three months of summer.

There remains 225 kilometres from Panjao to the road junction leading to Kabul. Petrol can be obtained in Panjao, but repair facilities are non-existent.

Also tourists are advised to consult the local authorities regarding the best camping site, and should not hesitate to ask for any kind of help they need in cases of emergency.

It is customary to arrange this exciting trip through the Afghan Tourist Organisation, who make arrangements in advance and telephone the would-be halting places, but group travels are preferred as the road is very long and not without its hazards.



The Jam minaret on the banks of the Hari Rud river at Feroz Koh, Ghor.

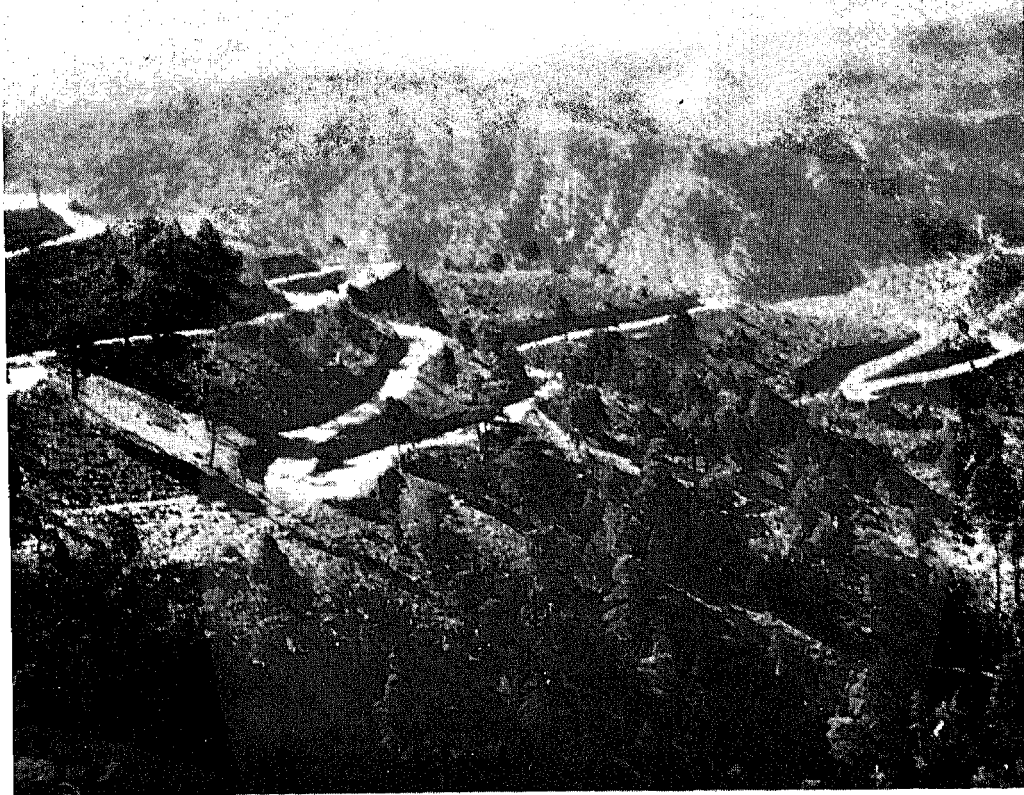
Paktya

A tour of Afghanistan is never complete without visiting Paktya and Nooristan.

Paktya is important from various

points of view: its natural beauty, its location and nearness to Kabul, and its unique and extremely handsome people.

Most of the building timber and char-



Sata Kandau in Suleiman Ranges, Paktya Province.

coal used in Kabul and other places near the capital come from Paktya.

Also "jalghoza," a special nut which is very popular among the Afghans in winter, is produced here.

Buys

There are most beautiful coats, black or brown in colour with purple silk en-

broidery on the collars and sleeves. These are called "Jaji" coats, after the name of a district with very handsome people.

Almost all the people in Paktya are fond of rifle shooting. One reason why they carry rifles is the ancient feuds, which are gradually dying out with

the spread of education.

Gardez, the provincial capital, is 122 kilometres to the south of Kabul. It is a growing town with a hotel, bazaars and a petrol station.

Nooristan

Most tourists before leaving Jalalabad pay a visit to Nooristan, the Land of Light, which is really the most beautiful place in the whole country.

After 120 kilometres from Jalalabad, one comes to Chagha Sarai, the centre of Konar district which is quite picturesque in its own right. There is a distance of 74 kilometres between Chagha Sarai and Barikote. The road winds onwards towards Kamdesh from Barikote.

It is customary to have lunch at Chagha Sarai and dinner at Barikote. Almost a day is needed to reach Kamdesh, the centre of Nooristan, not because it is so far, but due to the difficult terrain, the deep gorges with the Aba Sin river flowing swiftly underneath, and the extra time one has to take in negotiating the hairpin bends.

Almost all Nooristan is covered with pine and oak forests and there are plenty of fish in the river. The water is good for drinking and swimming as it originates from sources high up in the mountains.

Nooristanis generally look more European than the average Afghans. That was why some of the Western scholars in the 19th century thought they were descendants of Alexander's Generals.

Actually they are one of the old tribes of the country who migrated from the neighbourhood of Kandahar at the advent of the Islamic conquest of Afghanistan and chose these secluded valleys to protect their religion and customs.

Before Abdur Rahman's rule, they were able to carry on as some kind of pagans with wooden idols and many gods and goddesses. They were then converted to Islam and the name of their area, Kafiristan, was changed into Nooristan.

Although modern education has found its way to Nooristan in recent years and the people are devout Moslems now, the Nooristani dress consisting of a typical felt hat, a coat and suede booties remain the same.

The division of labour in most parts of the area is quite the reverse of the usual, i.e., the men tend the children, milk the cows, do the cooking, while the women are engaged in farming.

Nooristanis have their own language which is devoid of swearing words. Also,

there is no gambling and no stealing in their beautiful world.

The new road goes up to Kamdesh where there is no hotel yet. Arrangements for groups of tourists to visit the area are made by the Afghan Tourist Organisation.

A farmhouse made of wood in Nooristan.

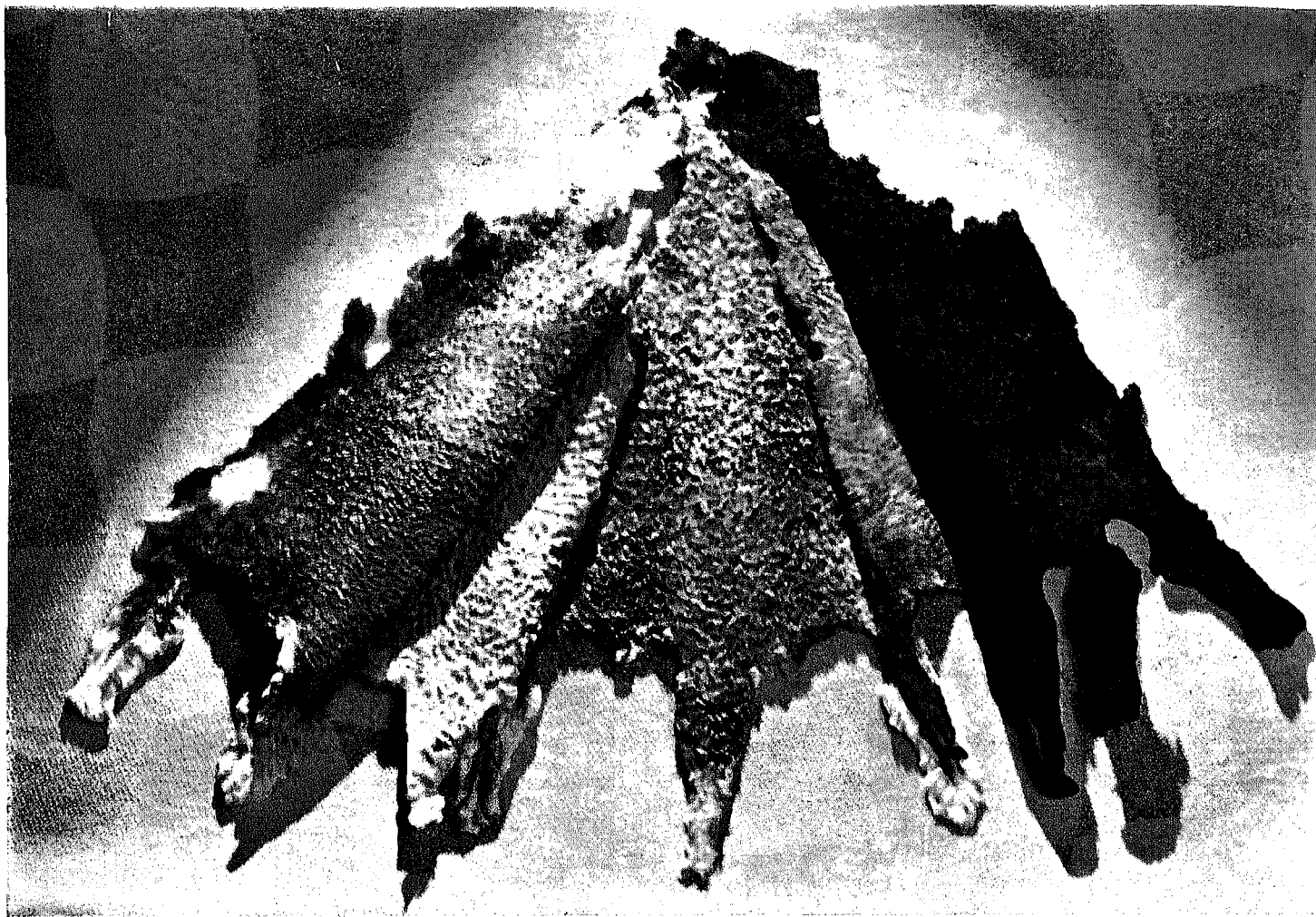


An old Nooristani archer taking aim at a target.





Views like this, from Nooristan, justify the appellation of "Switzerland in Asia," which is given to Afghanistan.



A selection of karakul skins.

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