

The magnificent
Ovis poli.

CHAPTER 15

The Rams of Shangri-La

BEYOND THE HIMALAYAS, where the massive, snow-crowned peaks of the Karakoram and Hindu Kush ranges converge, there is a narrow, green-terraced valley. This is the tiny kingdom of Hunza, sometimes called Shangri-La. Precise details of the northern extremities of this forbidden valley that merge into China are unknown. Maps are marked with the cryptic note: *Unexplored*.

Towering over a jumble of gigantic glaciers stands the stupendous mountain of Godwin Austen, sometimes called K-2. Its eternally ice-bound summit rises 28,280 feet into the heavens. Few men have looked at this awesome mountain. Fewer still have lived to tell of it. Ninety miles to the northwest is a storm-shattered pass called Chapchinal. The living men who have crossed it can be counted on the fingers of one hand. From the top of this 20,800-foot pass one can look down into China. To the south lie Hunza and Pakistan. To the west are Afghanistan and Russia. The valley going down into China is called Taghdumbash. This lofty, wind-swept country deep in the heart of Asia is known as *Bani-dunya*, the mysterious and legendary roof of the world. It is a land of spectacular beauty, of misty, hidden valleys and magnificent snowy mountains.

In this land there are at least a hundred snow-crowned summits of the Karakoram—many still unnamed—rising over 20,000 feet. Half of them exceed 22,000 feet. Nanga Parbat, "naked mountain," is a murderous 26,600-foot peak that has been the nemesis and ultimately the Valhalla of more climbers than any other peak in the world. The bodies of thirty-two men, mostly the flower of German and Austrian climbers, are entombed forever on its treacherous slopes. The grim toll began in 1895, when A. F. Mummery, one of Britain's greatest climbers, with two Gurkha companions, disappeared on the awesome heights. Other expeditions have struggled on its deadly slopes, suffered in the icy embrace of its shattered ice-falls, squandered their strength against its mighty ramparts, and were humiliated in defeat, by what came to be called the Killer Mountain.

The remote valley of Hunza is inhabited by a race of fair-skinned people whose ancestors are reputed to be descendants of Greek soldiers of Alexander the Great's army who sought sanctuary in this lost valley with their Persian wives during Alexander's mountain campaigns of 330-326 B.C. It is the abode of that mythical creature, the abominable snowman; it is the habitat of the great scimitar-horned ibex, *Capra siberica*, and the rare and elusive snow leopard. It is also the home of *Ovis poli*, the Holy Grail of trophy hunters, indisputably the most magnificent big-game trophy on the face of the earth. A big ram will stand fifty inches at the shoulder and weigh up to 450 pounds. The record horns, a pick-up head presented to Lord Roberts by the Maharaja of Kashmir about 1885, measure seventy-five inches around the curl, longer than any horn or antler of any wild animal in the world.

There is a legend that, when the hordes of Genghis Khan swept over Asia, all living things in their path fled or were annihilated. The *Ovis poli* retreated to the valley of Taghdumbash. Once each year, when the snow lies deep in the valley below, a great ram climbs to the top of Chapchinal Pass. If the sky is clear, the summit of Godwin Austen can be seen far to the south. Then—so the legend goes—the great ram returns to the flock and leads it back to feed on the dry grass uncovered by the howling winds that blow the snow into China.

Thirteen hundred years ago this country was first described by Chinese pilgrims: "It is midway between heaven and earth; the snowdrifts never cease winter or summer; the whole tract is but a dreary waste

without a trace of humankind." Marco Polo crossed this country in 1272. He described it thus: "The plain is called Pamir, and you ride across it for twelve days together—finding nothing but a desert without habitations or any green thing, so that travelers are obliged to carry with them whatever they have need of. Northeast you travel forty days over mountains and wilderness, and you find no green thing. The people are savage idolaters, clothing themselves in the skins of beasts. They are in truth an evil race. There are numbers of wild beasts—among others wild sheep of great size whose horns are a good six palms in length. From these horns shepherds make great bowls to eat from, and they use the horns also to make folds for their cattle at night."

For 566 years Marco Polo's story of the great sheep was dismissed, along with his tale of the giant bird or Roc, as another fable. But in 1838, Lieutenant Wood, a British officer traveling through the same country, brought the horns of two large sheep to England. In 1840, before the Zoological Society of London, a Mr. Blyth, who specialized in big-game animals, proposed a name for the sheep: "I here propose to dedicate the present splendid animal to the illustrious Venetian traveler of the thirteenth century, by the name of *Ovis poli*."

In the beginning, the first sportsman to visit the pamirs and shoot *Ovis poli* was the great British hunter St. George Littledale. In 1888, after much planning, he came to the heart of the Russian pamirs from the north via Samarkhand. When the fruit of his hunt—the great curling *poli* horns that measured up to 60½ inches around the curve—were displayed in England, they created a sensation. The *poli* country became the lodestone of big-game hunters. A few more hardy hunters followed Littledale's tracks, but in 1892 the entire region became permanent Russian territory, and forbidden ground to all sportsmen. To this day it is one of the most inaccessible places on the globe, physically as well as politically.

But *poli* were still plentiful in the Taghdumbash pamir, which lay just to the east of Russian territory. Here, a few venturesome hunters had opportunity to hunt *Ovis poli*. They were mostly British officers on leave or military business which took them over Kilik or Mintaka passes from Hunza into the Sinkiang province of China. But time was running out here, too. Harassed by hunters and the native Kirghiz (who were learning the use of firearms), decimated by rinderpest, pursued

Trophy Hunter in Asia

and killed by wolves and snow leopards, the *poli* retreated westward into the fastness of the Russian pamirs and virtually disappeared from the Taghdumbash.

The first Americans to collect this grand argali were Theodore, Jr., and Kermit Roosevelt who organized a scientific expedition in 1925 for the Chicago Field Museum. With strong political power and financial backing, they succeeded in obtaining permission to visit the Russian pamirs. There, after some difficulty, they managed to collect a group for the museum. In 1927, an American museum expedition headed by William Morden and James L. Clark of New York also managed to get permission to enter Russian territory, where they collected some nice specimens. No other American museum expeditions or trophy hunters had ever taken *Ovis poli*.

In the summer of 1957, my good friend Prince Abdorreza Pahlavi of Iran, who is one of the world's top trophy hunters, used his royal influence to pry open the Iron Curtain long enough to cross over into the edge of the Russian pamirs, where he collected a fine *Ovis poli*.

For me, the dream of hunting this great argali had been the mystic goal of a lifetime, a goal shared by my hunting companion, Herb Klein. For long years, we both had worked for the day when all the political obstacles would be overcome so that we could launch an expedition into central Asia. We finally found a way through.

Ayub Khan, president of Pakistan, had put his personal stamp of approval on our permits to enter the Hunza Valley. We had successfully hunted Sind ibex at Kirthar, near Karachi, and markhor in the *nullabs* above Gilgit. Now we were ready to go into *poli* country.

Unfortunately, we were faced with two serious problems. The narrow, perilous road that wound sixty-five miles up the Hunza Valley to Baltit had been washed out by a sudden flood in a dozen places. Even the old caravan trail had been breached by avalanches, and some of the fragile *rufiks* had been weakened, making travel extremely dangerous.

After long discussion we decided to attempt the journey anyway, using horses and porters for transport. Big John Coapman summed it up: "We lost a week at Karachi and another week at Rawalpindi and a few days here. It's late October now—we should be coming out of the high country instead of going into it. We've got to make every hour count."



Herb Klein and Big John Coapman with Hunzakuts at Passu, where we got the word that Red Chinese troops had invaded Ladakh. We all thought for sure that our plans would have to be canceled.

Then we received a summons from Habib Remon Khan, the Pakistani political agent for Gilgit: "I'm afraid it is out of the question for you to leave Gilgit. Not only is the trail impassable, but I have received word from Ayub Khan that the Chinese know you are here and that you intend to journey to the northern border."

"How did they find out?" Herb asked.

Habib shrugged. "The same way our people learn some of their plans—from agents. Furthermore, if we let you go, the Chinese might try to kidnap you for propaganda purposes."

"By claiming we are spies?" I asked.

"Exactly. Pakistan is getting military aid from the United States, and if they can catch armed Americans at the border, they could create an international incident."

For two hours, we pleaded our case with the adamant Habib, showing him our letters of invitation from the Mir of Hunza and the permits with Ayub Khan's signature on them. Finally, he agreed to let us attempt the trip to Baltit, the capital of Hunza.

"I can see you are determined," Habib frowned, "but I think you are foolish. Some of the trail crossings will be very dangerous."

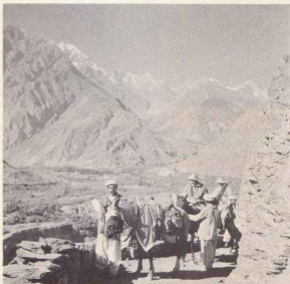
"We will be most careful, Your Excellency," Big John promised.

Habib raised his hands in resignation. "Very well, but under no circumstances are you to go within fifty miles of the border.

"Besides," he added, with a grim smile, "if you should get killed or injured on the trail, Ayub will have my head."

In the chill of early dawn, our caravan crossed the Gilgit bridge and turned east. Two hours later we came to the entrance of Hunza Valley.

Klein and Coapman on the ancient caravan trail leading up the Hunza Valley from Gilgit to Baltit. The green terraces in the background are the village of Chalt.



I stopped for a long moment as the laden horses plodded by. A wave of pent-up emotion surged in my veins as I looked at the ancient caravan trail winding into the distance. Before me lay the road to Shangri-La; to Paradise Lost; to my own Mecca if I could but reach it.

For centuries, the Hunza route has been known for its beauty and danger. Great caravans have labored over this same trail for twenty centuries, bringing the wondrous wealth of the Orient over the high passes and down into India, bringing the spices, gold, ivory, and other treasures of India that were carried back into the vast reaches of China, Turkestan, and Mongolia to the legendary cities of Yarkand, Bokara, Samarkhand, Ulan Bator, and Cathay.

Seventeen miles of travel brought us to the rest house at the village of Nomal, where we would spend the night. We were greeted by three Hunzakuts from Baltit.

"*Salaam alaikum, sahibs,*" they said courteously in Urdu, holding their hands together in Moslem fashion.

"*Wa-alaikum,*" we returned the greeting.

With Big John interpreting, we learned they had been sent by the Mir to escort us, and had been waiting at Nomal for several days. The note they carried was written in English by the Mir's own hand.

My dear sirs:

So glad that you are coming to visit us. My family and I send our greetings. I have sent three of my men and good horses for you. They will help you on the road and I have instructed the men of every village to give you every assistance. Please be very careful on the trail.

Mohammed Jamal Khan
Mir of Hunza

At noon the next day, we entered the narrow, fourteen-mile-long defile of Bong Tsilai. The trail wound through great boulders that had crashed down from the heights above. On our right raged the Hunza River, its glacier-fed waters murky-blue in color. Then the trail ascended the steep walls of the gorge. Sometimes it was three feet wide,

often less. Our caravan horses began to bump their loads against the walls, and we halted to rearrange the packs.

Several times we stopped while the Hunzakuts removed debris from the trail and made repairs. On other occasions, we dismounted and walked around the steep switchbacks and abrupt turns, wary of the sheer 3,000-foot drop-offs into the river.

Rounding a high turn, we saw the beautiful green terraces of Chalt, against a backdrop of snowy peaks. Chalt is the first village in the Mir's domain. We rode slowly down a tree-lined lane and reached the little whitewashed rest house just as the last rays of the sun slanted in and long shadows arrowed across the valley.

The Mayor of Chalt, tall and dignified, wearing the distinctive rolled hat of Hunza and a long-sleeved, ibex-wool *choga*, welcomed us amid a serenade of shrilling pipes and throbbing drums. A crowd of villagers, similarly clad, smiled pleasantly and *salaamed*.

In the morning, in the valley beyond Chalt, we passed through an enchanted vale. *Cbenar* trees, straight and tall, reached up to shade the trail. Flashes of blue from the sky filtered through. The valley turned east, and suddenly there were the towering ramparts of Rakaposhi, Goddess of the Snows. Her majestic 25,550-foot summit was backlit with a golden halo from the rising sun. She stood there, vividly outlined against the cobalt sky—proud, awesome, unconquered. Although the air was still in the deep canyon where we stood, high winds were blowing a great plume of snow from her upper crest.

For the next twenty miles along the trail, Rakaposhi dominated the sky. Our trail led across a series of sheer rock cliffs. It was supported only by *rafiks*, a shaky combination of rocks and branches built against the steep walls. We came to one place where an avalanche had smashed down from high above, wiping out a *rafik* and sending thousands of tons of shattered rock into the river 2,000 feet below. We unloaded the horses and spent two hours roping packs and ourselves across the breach. Other horses, which had been brought from the village of Maium in anticipation of our arrival, were waiting on the other side.

Beyond Maium, the trail narrowed and the switchbacks became steep again. There were numerous *rafiks*. One of them collapsed beneath one of our laden pack horses, plunging him into the depths below. None of our essential gear was on this animal; only four battered tins of food



were recovered from the load when the Hunzakuts climbed down to investigate while the *rafik* was being repaired.

As we came round a bend on the afternoon of the fourth day, we could see Baltit far ahead. The old castle gleamed white in the sun. From its foot, emerald-green terraces swept down to the Hunza River. In the center, on the point of a hill overlooking the valley, stood the Mir's palace.

Three hours later, we arrived at the palace and met the Mir. He is a short, dark man with a mustache, twinkling brown eyes, and a proud carriage as befits a man of royal blood, descendant of forty generations of Hunza kings. He stepped forward and extended his hand.

"Welcome to Hunza and Baltit," he said in perfect English. "I hope you have had a safe journey."

Besides English, which he learned at a British school in Gilgit, the Mir speaks Brushbuski (the Hunza language), Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and a dozen other dialects.

Part of our caravan moves along the trail, which in some places is 3,000 feet above the Hunza River. In the background are rugged peaks of the Karakorum.

The present palace of Mohammed Jamal Khan, Mir of Hunza. This remote valley beyond the Himalayas lives up to its name, Shangri-la, which has come to mean so much to English-speaking peoples since James Hilton's famous novel, *Lost Horizon*.



He introduced his brother, Prince Ayash, then motioned to a stairway that led to a glassed-in balcony on the second floor of the palace.

"Won't you please come in and have a drink? In the meantime, I will have your baggage taken to the guest house."

A few minutes later, he was pouring Scotch from a beautiful Victorian cut-glass decanter into matching glasses.

The palace was gorgeously furnished. The early European furniture and Persian rugs must have been worth a fortune.

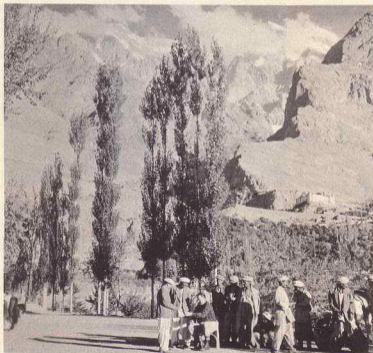
As we talked, the Mir handed us his guest register to sign. Looking back through it, I was amazed at the names I recognized. It was virtually a roster of Central Asian exploration: Lord Curzon, Sven Hedin, Sir Aurel Stein, Kermit and Theodore Roosevelt, William Morden, James L. Clark, and a host of others. Humbly we added our names.

"Your Highness," asked Herb, who had been looking through the guest register with me, "I see that only five people besides ourselves

have signed this year, and all were on the same date, May second. Who are they?"

The Mir hesitated a moment, then with genuine sorrow in his voice said, "I'm sorry to tell you this, for it was a great tragedy. They were five young mountain climbers from Germany, and all were killed in an avalanche while climbing Batura, a 25,450-foot peak which is thirty-five miles north of here."

Big John paying some of the Hunza porters at the end of a chinar tree lane near the Mir's palace. The 600-year-old castle of Hunza is perched high on the mountain shoulder at the right.



In the sitting room that evening before dinner, we were presented to the Rani, the beautiful daughter of the Mir of Nagir, an adjoining kingdom. One by one the nine royal children were brought in and introduced, beginning with Crown Prince Chazanfar Ali Khan.

As soon as formality allowed, we told the Mir about our conversation with Habib Remon Khan and his orders for us not to go beyond Baltit.

"Don't give up yet." The Mir smiled warmly. "As soon as the line is ready, I will talk to Ayub Khan myself."

He was referring to the single decrepit telephone line running through the Hunza Valley from Baltit to Misgar. It had been installed by the British army long ago.

"It is out of order much of the time due to avalanches," the Mir continued, "but we do our best to keep it operating. In the meantime, we will entertain you here."

After dinner, Herb presented the Mir with a beautifully engraved Weatherby rifle which we had brought with us. He was delighted with the gift. Over coffee, the Mir plied us with questions about the outside world. We, in turn, asked about many things we had heard about Hunza.

"In olden times, the Hunzakuts were great warriors," he told us. "Even when China was at the peak of her power, she sent envoys with tribute to the Mirs of Hunza to keep them from raiding Chinese Turkestan. But we are peaceful now," he added, eyes twinkling in amusement, "and stay out of the world's troubles."

After a many-faceted discussion that went on past midnight, the Mir escorted us to the palace guest house by the light of oil lanterns carried by servants.

"I hope you will find it to your comfort," he said, bidding us good night.

The two-story guest house was fit for a noble. There was a living room, fireplace, dining room, and upstairs bedrooms. All were carpeted with Persian rugs and decorated with Chinese paintings.

I awoke to look out on the beautiful terraced valley framed by snow-crowned peaks that vaulted into the deep blue sky. A white-clad servant bowed low as he motioned to the breakfast tray on a table.

On the green tree-shaded lawn in front of the guest house, Sultan



The Mir of Hunza on his black Arabian horse, surrounded by his court of nobles, comes up the center of the polo field at Gulmit.

Ali, the young headmaster of the Baltit school, greeted us. "I will be your guide in Baltit," he said. "His Highness has directed me to take you to the old palace this morning, and after lunch you will attend the royal court."

We rode yaks up the high slope where the 600-year-old castle stood in ancient grandeur, perched on a high shoulder of the mountain. On the way down the zigzagging trail, we stopped at the main Baltit store. During the ceremonious bargaining, Herb and I bought rolls of gorgeous Chinese printed silks, brought from Kashgar by camel caravan.

Dressed in a magnificent robe of gold brocade, belted at the waist, the Mir strode to his royal couch in the spacious courtyard below the palace. At his side hung a gold-hilted sword in an ebony-and-carved-

Trophy Hunter in Asia

ivory scabbard. His black karakul cap was plumed with egret feathers held by a gold pin, sparkling with jewels.

In a semicircle behind him stood the council of elders and a host of village chiefs, or *lambadars*. The grand vizier, an imposing elder of ninety-eight winters, stood at his side. Over the throne and hung around the courtyard walls were the horns of *Ovis poli* and ibex. The sight of them quickened my pulses.

As judge and jury, the Mir has the power of life and death over his subjects. One word from his lips settles any dispute. We saw three cases decided, one of them involving water rights, one regarding land rights, and the other a question of inheritance. Each time, the participants stated their case, often pointing accusing fingers at each other. When the Mir made his decisions, the men embraced each other, kissed the Mir's feet, and walked away arm in arm.

That afternoon, we watched a rough-and-tumble game of polo, played with passion before a partisan crowd. Later, a ceremonial *darbar* was held for us. Dressed in robes of brilliant Chinese silk, carrying long curved swords and war shields dating back more than 400 years, a group of Hunzakuts performed a fierce sword dance. Cavorting and leaping to the savage rhythm of drums and pipes, the whirling men re-created the centuries-old pageantry of Genghis Khan.

We enjoyed the unbelievable hospitality of the Mir for four days. On several occasions, we had great sport hunting chukars, which are native to the Hunza Valley.

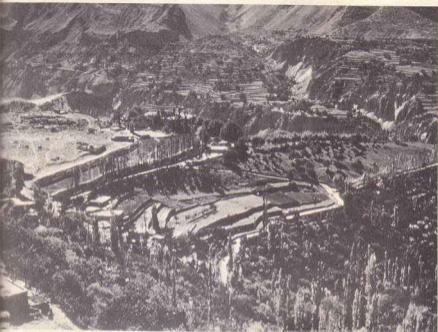
Each day, he tried to reach Ayub Khan without success.

"I want you to go with me to Gulmit for my monthly court," he said, one evening at dinner. "We can hunt ducks on Lake Barut. It is the only lake in Hunza. The birds stop there on their way south from China and Russia. From there you can proceed to Pasu, where I have arranged for you to hunt ibex."

"Will we still have a chance to go to the *Ovis poli* country, Your Highness?" Big John asked.

"I will keep trying to get Ayub Khan on the telephone. If I am successful, I will call you at Pasu."

"Your Highness," Herb said, "we are very pleased to get your invitation, but the political agent in Gilgit told us not to proceed beyond Baltit."



A view from the old castle of the gorgeous, green-terraced Hunza Valley. The new palace of Baltit is in the upper center, partially screened by trees.

The Mir smiled gently. "Have no fear, my friends. I am the King of Hunza, and these matters will be straightened out just as soon as I can get through to Ayub Khan."

We rode out of Baltit on yaks, preceding the Mir, according to his wishes. Sultan Ali explained. "You will go first, followed by Prince Ayash, then by the princes and princesses and the Rani. His Highness will come last, which is the place of honor."

Runners had gone ahead of us. The people in every village turned out en masse to greet the procession. A short distance from Baltit, we

passed the old fort of Altit, then Muhammadabad, Atabad, and finally reached Gulmit, eighteen miles distant. There was a grand reception for the Mir when he came riding through the entrance of the polo field on his black Arabian horse.

After two days of court matters, we embarked on the duck hunt. The Mir insisted that I ride his black Arabian, while he rode one of the yaks. Barut is a small lake of glacial water about half a mile long and perhaps 100 yards wide. We were equipped with the Mir's personal shotguns. Mine was a sweetly balanced, silver-embossed Purdey. As soon as the four of us were concealed in blinds, men were sent to jump ducks from the reed beds at the lower end of the lake. Soon they came whistling over. The action was fast and furious for forty-five minutes. Besides a few familiar ducks, my bag consisted mostly of the beautiful

Herb Klein and I
have lunch with
the Mir of Hunza at
Lake Barat, where
we hunted ducks.





On the way from Gulmit to Lake Barut, the Mir insisted that I ride his black Arabian horse.

exotic Asian species. Among these I recognized Mandarin ducks, Garganey teal, and Eurasian wigeon.

"It is my custom to have the birds taken down the valley and distributed to the villagers," the Mir told us. "This time of the year, the people are a little short of food. I can have sport here and not worry about shooting too many ducks."

That afternoon, we parted with the Mir and rode on to the village of Pasu, five miles beyond Barut. We forded the chalky-blue torrent of the Hunza River and climbed the high slopes, finally pitching our little tent camp beside a clear stream at 12,000 feet.

For two days, we hunted ibex, collecting fair specimens, but nothing of real trophy size. One afternoon, Herb and Big John brought in a *ramchukar*, the giant chukar that lives above 10,000 feet. The bird is almost an exact duplicate of the smaller low-country chukar, but is the size of a large pheasant, weighing five to six pounds. Prepared by our cook, it was delicious.

We returned to Pasu and moved into the rest house. Big John went to the *lambadar's* house to see if he could reach the Mir on the telephone. He was back in an hour. One look at his face told me something had gone wrong.

"I'm afraid we've had it," he said. "The Mir got a call from Remon Khan ordering us to return immediately."

"Why?" Herb asked.

"Red Chinese troops have invaded Ladakh in force, and are moving this way. They have captured about fifty miles of Indian territory. The fighting is no more than 250 miles east of here."

Trophy Hunter in Asia

"Did you find out exactly where?" I asked.

"At a place called Pangong Lake, and north of there at Changmo something or other."

"Chang Chen Mo valley," I said.

"That's it!" Big John exclaimed. "Do you know the place?"

"I hunted there a long time ago for Tibetan argali, *chiru*, and wild yak."

"The Chinese have taken the whole valley and then some."

We reached Gulmit at nine o'clock that night, tired and disconsolate.

"Please don't worry yourself," the Mir urged, pouring us a stiff jolt of Scotch. "I have gone over the political agent's head and have called Rawalpindi. Ayub Khan was expected there this evening and will call me immediately when he arrives."

Within fifteen minutes the call from Ayub Khan came in. After exchanging formalities, the Mir made a dramatic appeal on our behalf. Finally, he turned to us with a broad smile. "I have given Ayub Khan my personal guarantee for your safety, and you are now officially in my charge. If you get caught by the Chinese, Ayub will disavow your existence.

"In fact," the Mir chuckled, "he doesn't even want to know where you are for the next two weeks."

To arrive at the threshold of a life-long dream and be turned back was to plumb the depths of despair. Now, to suddenly be snatched from the brink of disaster and have the door opened again was overwhelming.

Herb raised his glass. "Here's a toast to Ayub Khan and His Highness the Mir."

Sheer happiness carried us far into the night. All the aches, pains, and fatigue were forgotten in a new wave of exhilaration.

"There are two areas where *Ovis poli* enter Hunza," the Mir told us, pointing them out on our old Indian Atlas map. "Every year or two, a few wander over from the Chinese side into the upper basin at Shimshal Pass, about thirty miles east of Pasu. The other area is up the Khunjerab Valley, ninety-five miles north of Pasu. My summer shepherds have seen them just below the border at Khunjerab and Chap-chingal passes."

It was decided that Herb and Big John would take the Shimshal route, which ascended to 14,000 feet, and I would attempt the longer

route, which would necessitate climbing to altitudes in excess of 17,000 feet.

"It might be a little tough for an old guy like me," Herb grinned. "I'll have my hands full getting up to Shimshal."

I lay awake for hours in sober thought of the ordeal ahead. *It is now October 29th. We should be back in Karachi now instead of beginning a journey into the high country. The fair weather is coming to an end. This is the beginning of winter in this land that time forgot. The snow-line on the high peaks is moving downward day after day; it is getting colder every night . . .*

October 30

With a longer distance to travel, we decide I should leave first. Speed is absolutely essential. I am leaving most of my clothes and equipment behind, taking only my rifle, twenty cartridges, sleeping bag, binoculars, one camera and a few rolls of film, an arctic parka, one change of clothes, and an extra pair of wool socks.

The Mir has given me two of his men. One is Sultan Ali, as interpreter. The other is Gulbast, one of the Mir's personal men.

As we tie the final loads on our horses, the Mir comes over and puts his arm around my shoulder. "I will be praying for your safety and success," he says, "and I must also warn you that you are going into dangerous country at this time of the year. No one has ever been there in winter. The weight of the early snows will bring down many avalanches. There are no villages in the Khunjerab Valley, and no food



Our expedition fords the Hunza River near Pasu, on the way to an ibex hunt that had been arranged for us by the Mir of Hunza. Herb is riding the white yak.

except what little you can carry with you and the game you can kill. If you are snowed in, rescue will be impossible. If you reach the border, you must exercise extreme caution. We know the Chinese send patrols up to the passes from their side. Sometimes they come several miles down into Hunza territory. Now, in view of this new war with India, they may even be planning to invade Pakistan through our northern passes. Please avoid them and be very careful."

I give him my solemn assurances, then say good-bye to Herb and Big John, not knowing for sure just when or if I will ever see them again. They will start for Shimshal by noon.

As we start to mount, I remember a few more things and get them from my duffle bags: heavy wool gloves, skinning knife, pocket altimeter and thermometer, and small medical kit.

We ride down the polo field at Gulmit, Sultan Ali leading. I turn and wave to the Mir, who is standing with Herb and Big John. They wave back.

We head up the trail at a swift canter. The Mir has provided us with horses that are fresh and in good condition. We soon reach a mass of black ice, Ghulkin glacier. It comes down a rock-splintered cleft in Batura peak, which towers 25,450 feet. *This is the peak where the five climbers were killed.* We slow down to pick our way across. This glacier moves twenty feet a day, and yesterday's trail is obliterated.

We ascend a zigzag slope and see Lake Barut below, where we hunted ducks a few days ago.

At Pasu, we stop long enough to water the horses before pushing on across a desertlike plateau, the horses now moving in a long-legged stride, eating up the miles. Across the river, to my right, is the narrow entrance to Shimshal *nullab*. Herb and Big John will stay in Pasu tonight and start up the *nullab* tomorrow.

We came to the gigantic Batura glacier, three miles across and winding at least twenty-five miles up into the heart of the Batura peaks. Dismounting, we slowly lead our horses across the crumbling moraine and over the narrow, treacherous trail leading from one ridge of ice to another. Occasionally, we hear the rumble of ice grinding against the solid granite buttresses of the mountain. Vibrations from the movement of the ice-mass give us eerie, fearful sensations. We move with great care. One slip will plunge us into the sinister crevasses to certain

destruction. It is a vast relief finally to climb out of the moraine and continue on a solid trail.

The weather changes for the worst. The light is failing. I look up to see a solid charcoal sky. It is two o'clock. A strong wind strikes us head on, and within a mile snowflakes come slanting in. We canter the horses when the trail allows, and slow them to a walk on the steep, rugged traverses. The temperature has dropped from 62° to 26° in two hours.

There is four inches of snow on the ground when we reach the rest house at the village of Khaibar. The valiant horses are finished. I unroll my sleeping bag on the wooden bunk and fall asleep, exhausted, as Gulbast builds a fire in the fireplace. They wake me up for a hot meal of mutton curry and stewed apricots.

Altitude at Khaibar, 8,800 feet. Temperature, 18°. Distance, 22 miles.

October 31

I learn that Sultan Ali has been given unlimited authority by the Mir to commandeer anything we need. Fresh horses are being saddled outside as I drink hot tea. There is a crowd of men gathered in front of the rest house, and Sultan Ali is arguing with them. When he comes in, I question him in detail. He tells me that every man in Khaibar wants to come with us.

Seven of us ride out of Khaibar, Sultan Ali in the lead, me second. The new men ride with straight-backed pride. They are splendid fellows with flashing eyes and unconcealed elation at being among the chosen few. The sky still is dark with a high overcast, but yesterday's snow is mostly melted from what warmth is still in the ground. We cross the river on a crude bridge and reach Chalapan. The news has gone ahead. More men are eager to join us. We stop for lunch at Molkhun. The arguments are repeated. We are eleven strong leaving Molkhun. The valley is more open now, and the pace is swift. The Hunzakuts are laughing and shouting at each other in good-natured exuberance. It is almost dark when we reach Sost, the last village before the Khunjerab turnoff. There is great excitement at our arrival. Sultan Ali and Gulbast are presiding over intense arguments as I go to sleep.

Altitude, 9,100 feet. Temperature, 26°. Distance, 21 miles.

November 1

A big crowd is gathered around the rest house. As we ride out, I look back to see at least fifty mounted men following us. Three yaks are being led. I protest to Sultan Ali, and he tells me most of them are accompanying us only as far as the Khunjerab turnoff. From there on, he says, we will be walking. The three yaks will carry most of our food.

We dismount at the turnoff, while the chosen men, twenty of them, divide up our supplies in small packs of about twenty-five pounds each. I learn here that the lambadar of Sost is with us as well as two of the best *shikaris* in the Hunza Valley, Aman Shah and Sheree Ali Khan. Both of them know a little about the country we are going into.

I estimate it to be sixty-five miles to the border. There is only a remnant of a trail. Sultan Ali tells me this valley is traversed only by a few of the Mir's shepherds, who bring in a few flocks of domestic sheep to graze in the summer.

Even though we are walking, the pace is swift. These Hunzakuts are magnificent. We are climbing through steep defiles and across rock-slides, constantly ascending slopes 2,000 to 3,000 feet high, then working our way back down to the Khunjerab River. Our *khud* staffs are indispensable for maintaining balance on the 50- and 60-degree slopes we must cross.

With six weeks of hunting, climbing, and walking behind me, beginning at Kirthar during our Sind ibex hunt, I am in better condition than at any time in my life. Still, I have to force myself to the absolute limits of endurance to stay with these Hunzakuts. They realize all too well the urgency of speed in these forced marches into the high country. We must get to the *Ovis poli* country and back as soon as possible. The yaks are marvelous animals. They go through difficult terrain a horse would never attempt.

We descend from a high plateau to Shachkatr, which consists of an empty stone shepherd's hut in a small level place by the river. The men cast down their loads and begin building fires out of dry willows to cook their *chapattis*. It is four o'clock. I ask Sultan Ali about the trail ahead. He says the next stone huts are seven miles farther, at a place called Wad Khun. We can continue on, he says, if I want to. I do.

He talks to the men. They pick up their loads with gleeful shouts. The gauntlet has been cast down. They have picked up the challenge. They will have something to tell about when they get home, something

to brag about for years to come. Nobody has ever gone beyond Shachkatr from Sost in one day, Sultan Ali tells me as we ascend to the plateau.

The Hunzakuts seem to be tireless. The *esprit de corps* is born that welds us into a single unit, sharing the same intensity of purpose. I look down once, as we reach the top. The unused supper fires are still burning.

At this altitude the only vegetation other than grass is the thin willows in the narrow river bottom and the scrubby *burtsa*, a small sagebrush-like plant. Around us, snowy peaks dominate the horizon, and the near landscape is a chaos of boulder-strewn slopes.

It is dark when we reach Wad Khun. In fourteen hours we have covered nineteen miles of difficult terrain. Altitude, 11,000 feet. Temperature, 32°.



The stone shepherd's hut in Khunjerab Valley, where we met our first storm and thought pretty seriously about turning back. The trail can be seen dimly in the upper center.

November 2

Last night, about ten o'clock, six of us were in one of the stone huts—Sultan Ali, Gulbast, Sheree Ali Khan, Aman Shah, the lambadar of Sost, and me. I was already in my sleeping bag, drinking a last cup of hot tea when a monstrous, raging storm struck. At first, the howling wind came from down-canyon, whipping dry snow pellets into the narrow doorway of our hut. By the dim, flickering light of a candle inside a small bottle, I watched in fascination and dread as the snow

This is the picture I took near the top of Wad Khun Pass as the white-out began to lift and the Hunzakuts were able to start their descent.



swirled in. *Is this the end of the line?* I thought. *Would we have a prayer of fighting our way back to the main trail through nineteen miles of deep snow?*

I felt a gloomy sense of foreboding as the men piled stones in the doorway and chinked crevices in the walls with smaller stones, sealing us in.

Abruptly, the wind and snow stopped. Then the wind came again, this time from the north. It rose to a shrieking crescendo, beating against the stone walls with cyclonic fury. It was after midnight before I fell into a troubled sleep.

This morning the wind has abated. When the stones are removed from the entrance, we step out into a phenomenon that mountain climbers fear, the dreaded white-out—where there are no shadows, no horizon, no grays or tones. Fortunately, the snow has been scoured away by the screaming north wind, leaving the ground bare and dark in front of us.

Aman Shah claims to know the way. With some trepidation I decide to push on. The dim trail ascends steeply. In two hours, we reach the top of a frigid pass and have to chop our way through the narrow, ice-blocked defile. We pause to rest. The white-out is getting thinner. I send the Hunzakuts ahead while I pause to relace my boots and take a picture of the serpentine line of men winding down the slope under the ragged eddies of white mist. I check the altimeter and thermometer. Altitude, 14,400 feet. Temperature, 54 degrees. I look again to make sure; 54° is correct. That explains the white-out. A mass of warm air has flooded up the valley from the country below. Merging with the cold air of the higher regions, it creates the white-out—and another problem even more dangerous—avalanches!

I catch up with the caravan, and we traverse back and forth on the perilous slope, working downward now. Crossing a steep shale slope I notice a few silver-dollar-sized stones racing silently down the slope from above. I pay little attention, but the avalanche-wise Hunzakuts react instantly.

"Go quickly, sahib," Aman Shah shouts, pointing across the slope to a buttress of rock fifty yards away.

We plunge ahead, reaching the buttress just as a slithering, churning river of snow and shale comes pouring by. This is one of the silent kind, silent until it is on top of us. None of the men is caught, but one of our three yaks, the one loaded with a good portion of our food, is swept down the precipitous chasm and buried forever.

The next avalanche is noisier. Shattered blocks of glacial ice and boulders, loosened by the warm air, come thundering down from far above. We race madly to get out of their path and the path of the main avalanche that follows.

The valley has narrowed and the stream has dwindled when we reach the bottom. We have to ford the icy waters every few hundred yards. I ride across on one of the surviving yaks, but the men pull off their skin boots and wade and walk barefoot. We must hurry out of this avalanche zone!

We reach a point of relative safety where the valley widens, and stop, exhausted. I order the two yaks unloaded, while the men gather *barista* to build fires. As tea is being brewed, we open the packs and inventory the food that is left. Not enough to continue and have any margin of safety.



Bad weather was a constant threat during our forced marches to the *Ovis poli* country. Here, one of our yaks is crossing the Khunjerab River, one of many streams we encountered.

The two graylag geese I got with a lucky shot from my .300 magnum came in very handy after much of our food had been lost in an avalanche.



The men all know we are in trouble. They squat around the little fires, conversing in low tones. They are waiting for me to make a decision. I warm my hands with the aluminum cup of hot tea and ponder the alternatives. They are few. The most intelligent course of action would be to wait here until the temperature drops below freezing—which should be within a few hours, at most—then retrace our route while the avalanches are frozen in and before this capricious high-altitude weather deals us a mortal blow. Or, I can send most of the men back with enough food to get them out while a few of us continue. But I won't suggest this because there would be a riot. I can see it in their faces. They realize the situation is serious, but none of them wants to give up. The last alternative is to continue on and start shooting game. I have seen a few ibex in the rugged cliffs along the way, and we jumped some ramchukars coming over the pass. Once, at the edge

of the stream, we saw a small flock of graylag geese. But I have no shotgun, only my .300 magnum and twenty cartridges. As a last resort, and I push the brutal thought away, we can kill the surviving yaks.

We really should turn back, but the hunger in my heart to reach *Ovis poli* country is greater than reason. Logic is overpowered by desire. What I rationalize as a calculated risk in entering this inhospitable land in the dead of winter is, in reality, a foolhardy gamble with the odds stacked heavily against us. If we become snowbound, there will be no way out.

With other lives at stake besides my own, I carefully explain the alternatives to Sultan Ali so he can interpret to the Hunzakuts. Their answer to the last alternative is a unanimous shout. The die is cast! We are going all the way! *God help us if there is a heavy snowfall.*

We load up and push on. The valley turns slowly to the east now, and my map shows we are walking parallel to the Chinese border, about five miles away. The exact notation on the map reads, "*Chinese boundary approximate.*" Beside it is the cryptic note: "*Not fully explored.*"

As we come to a small creek, Aman Shah taps me on the shoulder and points ahead. "*Bot-bot.*"

Six graylag geese are sitting in a tight group by the main stream about eighty yards ahead. Motioning the men to stop, I get behind a nearby rock-fall and stalk twenty yards closer. I center the scope on one of the geese and fire. To my surprise, another goose behind is also killed by the same bullet. The two birds won't go far, but they will help.

It was pure luck, of course, but now the Hunzakuts think I am invincible—the original two-with-one-shot Jawan sahib.

The wind strikes again, bringing lashing snow that slicks the rocks and makes the footing dangerous. We stumble on. It is late afternoon when we find shelter under the overhanging ledge of a gigantic boulder that has been spewed from the maw of a nameless glacier. A small stream comes out of a narrow valley to the northwest. We have made twenty-three stream crossings today, the Hunzakuts wading across barefoot. Some of them have gone barefoot all day with no apparent ill effects.

Just before dark I use another cartridge to shoot a *ramchakar* near camp. Eighteen rounds left. I better save them for something bigger.

Trophy Hunter in Asia

Food is rigidly rationed. The *ramchakar* and the two geese are divided. The Hunzakuts bake small *chappatis* on fire-heated stones with the dwindling supply of coarse flour that each man carries, and we share a few handfuls of dried apricots.

They huddle together under the ledge and roll up in their long-sleeved *chogas*, keeping tiny willow-and-*bartsa* fires burning around themselves.

Later, in my sleeping bag, listening to the mindless keening of the wind, the hunger pangs a dull ache, I think of the adversities we face. Hunger is annoying, but not really a serious problem as long as we have the two yaks. Without them, we'd have to abandon some of our equipment, but that would be a small price to pay for life itself. The biting, relentless cold could cause suffering, but we are well clothed and could conquer that unless the temperature drops to 30 or 40 degrees below zero—which could happen. Freezing weather will keep the avalanches locked in, however, so the overwhelming danger will be a deep snow. We might struggle through two or three feet of snow, using the yaks to break trail, but if snow falls six or eight feet deep, we have had it.

Altitude, 12,100 feet. Temperature, 12°. Distance, 15 miles.

November 3

There are six inches of snow on the ground as daylight comes. Breakfast is hot tea and dried apricots. Moisture has been soaking into the leather of my boots. Fortunately, I brought a small can of leather waterproofing which I put in my pocket last night to warm. Sultan Ali is talking to Aman Shah as I apply it to my boots near one of the fires.

He comes to me with a suggestion. "Sahib, Aman Shah says he has seen wild yaks up this side valley in a meadow near the pass. He says there are many ibex, too. We call them *sakin*. Perhaps we could go there today and hunt while the men rest."

"When were you there?" I ask Aman Shah.

"Three or four years ago, sahib."

I think about it for a few minutes, trying to evaluate the proposal. Without more food, we are now at the point of no return. I am worried about the snow, yet we are only a day and a half from *poli* country. If I can bag some game, it will give us the safety margin to continue—

otherwise, it will be a question of survival. I decide it is worth a chance.

"I will take Aman Shah and Sheree Ali Khan."

A mile up the rocky *nullab*, we spot a yak on a distant, cloud-obscured slope. We attempt a stalk, which fails when a blinding snow flurry obliterates the tracks. We continue, searching the shrouded slopes on both sides for yaks and ibex. The sullen, misty clouds roll away, revealing glacier-laden peaks towering up against the angry overcast. After another mile, the valley opens up into a meadow. Aman Shah sees something in the snow and motions to me.

Feathery snowflakes come drifting down as we kneel to examine fresh yak tracks. They can't be more than fifteen minutes old. Sheree Ali Khan points across the frozen trickle of the glacier creek. "There are two, sahib. They came down from the pass and crossed here."

"And they go back," says Aman Shah.

The signs are plain. The two yaks have milled around, then headed back up the open, meadowlike valley toward the Chinese border at the top of the pass. I raise my binoculars to look for them, but visibility is blotted out by the swirling snow. Checking my rifle, I motion the two men behind me and slowly follow the tracks, eyes straining ahead through the sifting snow. We advance less than 200 yards when I see a small, dark object on the snow. I stoop to pick it up and feel an instant surge of fear. It is an empty matchbox inscribed with Chinese characters. *Instead of wild yaks, we are tracking a Chinese patrol mounted on tame yaks!*

The two *shikaris* grasp the significance of the matchbox a few seconds after I do, and the impact is devastating. They cast fearful eyes up the valley and whisper intensely to each other. Instinctively, I check my rifle again, suddenly thankful for the snowy curtain that limits visibility.

As I look at the Chinese matchbox, I remember what Ayub Khan told me weeks ago in Karachi, and more recently the warning of the Mir. I also remember my experiences with the Tibetan brigands long ago. Capture by the Chinese will be a different thing.

Perhaps our luck has been pushed far enough. Anyway, I need time to think. The *shikaris* gather *barfisa*, and we crouch in the lee of a big boulder and build a small fire to brew tea. I want to wait long enough

for the patrol to get farther up the valley, preferably well over the border before making any move. We have trouble enough on our hands now without a confrontation with a Chinese patrol.

"What do you think?" I ask Aman Shah, who seems to have recovered his aplomb.

"Sahib," he says, putting one hand on his stomach, "we are very hungry, yes? And you wish to shoot the *sakin* with big horns, yes?"

"Yes," I agree.

"Then we must go up there," he says, pointing toward the pass.

"What about the Chinese?"

"They will follow the *jilga* on the right side of the valley, sahib. We should go high on the slope to the left."

As we begin the march, a bitter wind comes probing from the pass, turning the snowflakes to icy pellets that sting and numb our faces. Climbing the steep slope on the left side of the valley, ever watchful for the patrol, we thread our way through giant shattered boulders and carefully cross fingers of time-stained ice. Within an hour, we ascend into the gray, wind-whipped cloud mass and come to gentle rolling slopes that are free from glacial moraine. Pushing on for another half-hour, we come to a rocky ledge and pause to rest.

Abruptly, the cloud layer is whipped away, and the frozen snowflakes with it. The view is breathtaking. We are high above the pass, looking at an incredible panorama of immense glaciers and snowy peaks. My altimeter reads 16,600 feet. Suddenly, I realize we are a good half-mile inside China.

Then Aman Shah points down the long slope a mile away, to the low part of the pass. Two black dots are visible on the Hunza side. Quickly bringing my binoculars to bear, I see two Chinese soldiers, with rifles slung on their backs, mounted on yaks. Motioning the *shikaris* down, I move behind a big rock and study them with my binoculars. They are plodding along, nearing the saddle of the pass. Obviously they had stopped for shelter during the icy, driving snowstorm. Had we followed their tracks, we undoubtedly would have bumped into them.

But up here, we are safe as long as we remain hidden. Looking ahead of them, I can see that the valley leading down the Chinese side of the pass turns and comes directly under us, about 600 yards down the slope, before turning north again.

Carefully, I sweep the surrounding terrain with my binoculars, particularly the slope behind us that leads back over the ridge into Hunza. I want to make sure there are no more Chinese in the vicinity. If these two spot us, which is unlikely, and come up the smooth, barren slope after us, my scope-sighted .300 magnum will be more than a match for their rifles, which appear to be military arms equipped with open sights. I want to avoid trouble, but with Ayub Khan's tacit approval, I will shoot rather than submit to capture. We will wait until they pass and are well down in the valley, before we return to the Hunza side.

As they come on, I study them closely. They are wearing dark, quilted coats and peaked hats with flaps covering their ears. They ride hunched forward on the yaks, looking straight ahead, probably thinking only of getting back to the comfort of their outpost.

Scanning the slope below again, I see something else, a herd of six ibex, slowly heading up the slope directly toward our ledge. They have been down in the valley after dry grass and are now moving out ahead of the oncoming patrol. All six are big bucks. The leader is carrying massive, swept-back horns that are longer than any I have ever seen. I point them out to the two *shikaris*, then pull both men down behind the rocks. The wind is right—still blowing strongly from China. The ibex aren't alarmed, but are simply moving toward our ledge, stopping now and then to feed on the sparse tufts of dry grass sticking out of the snow.

Warning the *shikaris* to remain motionless, I find a slot between two boulders from which I can see both the ibex and the patrol, which is now heading directly away from us, down the valley. I wait, in a quandary, hoping the ibex will continue their slow, feeding ascent until the patrol is well down the valley. Twenty minutes go by. The patrol is now almost a mile away, and the ibex are nearing a low cut in the ledge about seventy-five yards to our left. It is a perfect setup. I will try for the big buck with one shot. The strong wind in our favor should dissipate the sound of the shot before it reaches the Chinese.

I ease the barrel of my rifle through the slot. As the big buck comes into view, he reaches down for a tuft of grass. Lifting his head to chew, he stands broadside, his great scimitar horns curving back to his rump. I center carefully on the point of his shoulder in line with his spine and pressure the trigger. He slumps down without another movement,

while the other five spring wildly in all directions, one bounding over the rocks we are hiding behind. I bring up my binoculars and scan the valley. The patrol moves blithely onward. The strong oncoming wind has muffled the shot as I hoped it would.

Posting Sheree Ali Khan to keep a sharp lookout in all directions, Aman Shah and I quickly cape the head and clean and halve the carcass. With the *shikaris* carrying the meat and me the caped head, we waste no time heading back up the slope.

Snowflakes come whirling out of China as we top the ridge and start down the long incline into Hunza. The tension is gone now. We have food, and the magnificent horns I carry are one of the finest big-game trophies I have ever collected.

Striding along through the sifting snow, the head and horns heavy on my shoulders, I mentally compose a letter:

Dear Mao:

Just a short note to let you know how much I enjoyed my recent hunt in China. I apologize for not having a hunting license for Sinkiang Province, but with the approval of Aynb Khan and a little help from a couple of your boys, the hunt was a great success. I'm pleased to inform you that I will always cherish this wonderful gift from China.

With love,

Near camp, Sheree Ali Khan spots four more ibex on a rocky eyrie. One is a fair head; more importantly, it represents more food. I rest my rifle over a snow-covered rock to shoot.

"*Nabee, sahib, nabee,*" Aman Shah whispers at my side. He points higher up. A bigger buck has come into view. I shift the rifle and shoot from 250 yards, dropping him. We walk on to camp. The *shikaris* can bring some of the men back to get the ibex. I've had enough exercise for one day.

November 4

As I awake, Sultan Ali is kneeling beside me, facing toward Mecca, reading prayers from his small Koran as he does every morning. "*Inshallah,*" he says, his face serious, "we have food and we will reach our goal."



I have my arm around Gulbast, one of the Mir of Hunza's personal men who accompanied us. Sultan Ali took this picture just as the mist was closing in near Kuksell. The ibex horns carried by the Hunzakut near the end of the line are from the animal I shot the previous day.

The temperature is up to 46 degrees this morning, and for the first time in days, the sky is clear, at least for the moment. I must skin out the ibex heads this morning so we can cache the horns here and pick them up on our way back.

Around us is a wealth of naked, unscaled peaks that sweep to the sky in jagged tiers. Dark ridges frosted with silver lines stand out sharp and brilliant below ice-crowned summits. Immaculate snowfields rise to contrast vividly against massive pinnacles of black rock. The silence is broken only by the gurgle of the stream under thick ice.

I don't think anything can stop us now. The ibex meat is rank—at least to me—but it will sustain life. The Hunzakuts eat it with relish.

We push eastward up a narrow gorge and pause to watch a cascade of sun-silvered water surging down a precipitous slope rising thousands of feet to a blue-white glacier. Through my binoculars the corrugated face of the glacier is a filigree of delicate blue crevices.

I am enthralled by the sheer grandeur of this vast and inaccessible region of the roof of the world. There always has been a burning desire inside me to climb the high mountains. Long ago, I reached an altitude of 19,050 feet in the Rupshu range, 300 miles southeast of here. *Once, just once before I die, I want to climb to 20,000 feet.*

Hunzakuts on the trail at 14,000 feet. They had a driving spirit that kept them going on forced marches up to 22 miles a day.



But even this is second to the all-consuming desire to reach my own Mecca, the home of *Ovis poli*.

The valley is rising steadily now. We continue to ford the icy stream. Sometimes the ice is strong enough to support us, but usually the yaks are sent across first to break through the ice, and the men wade.

Suddenly, I see something sticking out of the snow ahead and run to it, pulses pounding. It is an old, weatherbeaten skull and horns of an *Ovis poli* ram! The threshold of Mecca has been reached! Here is indisputable proof that *Ovis poli* have trod this ground. Until this moment I have never fully believed that we would find *poli* in this forbidden, mysterious country.

The Hunzakuts gather around me with big smiles as I kneel down and caress the horns. "Roosh!" they exclaim, using the native word for *poli* ram.

Aman Shah points up the valley in the direction we are heading. "Roosh," he says again. "Acha bai!"

A dark overcast is closing in, spitting snow, as we forge ahead through the narrowing valley. We pass deeply ribbed, barren slopes and ice-gouged ridges. Here and there are old snowbanks fifty feet high, left over from previous winters. A frigid wind is tearing at our backs. The men are tiring, and we stop often to rest. I look at my altimeter. Just over 15,000 feet. No wonder!

I can't get used to this merciless weather. It changes from hour to hour, sometimes more rapidly. I wonder how Herb and Big John are doing.

It is like an eerie twilight as we stop at two o'clock to brew tea. For

the first time I take my vitamin B-2 and folic acid tablets. They make the red blood corpuscles more receptive to oxygen at high altitudes. We may not descend below 15,000 feet for days to come.

White mist descends on us. Ragged tentacles are whipped past by the furious wind. Soon we are totally engulfed in a kind of fog. Aman Shah is leading, and we stay within arm's reach of each other in order to see the next man. I look back to see only a few ghostly figures in the swirling mist. It is four o'clock when we reach a tiny creek coming in from the left. We wait while Aman Shah disappears, then go to the sound of his shouts that he has located the stone huts of Kuksell. The creek is called Kara Jilga, black stream. About six miles up the valley are the passes of Khunjerab and Chapchingal—and the Chinese border. Kuksell will be our base camp.

Some of the men are sick and weak with dysentery. At this harsh altitude they are wide open to pneumonia and other serious ailments. One by one I give them penicillin tablets and antibiotics. They seem to have blind faith in my treatment. I can only hope the medicine will be effective. They have performed superbly. Any success I may have will be due to their driving spirit and remarkable stamina.

Our food supply again is perilously low. All of the ibex meat has been consumed. At my order, Gulbast rounds up every ounce of the coarse millet flour from each man. Hereafter, he will be in charge of our total supply.

Between them there is about fifteen pounds of flour, eighteen pounds of dried apricots, a few handfuls of walnut meat, and thirty-seven cooked *chapattis*. I add my own food to the meager pile: seven cans of peaches, two pounds of sugar, sixteen packages of dehydrated soup, four packages of sweet cookies, eight bars of candy, twenty-four bouillon cubes. There is enough tea to last, for we have been using the same leaves over and over.

The sick men are given preference. For the rest of us, rationing will continue. Everyone is cheerful in spite of the adversities. I feel good myself, probably because of the exhilaration of being on the *poli* grounds. But I will have to watch over the sick men carefully. High altitude, combined with the merciless cold, is extremely debilitating. This is no peak from which we can descend quickly to a safe altitude. We would have to travel at least thirty miles to get below 12,000 feet.

If any of the Hunzakuts becomes seriously ill, we will have to retreat immediately.

I direct Sultan Ali to have the able men gather all the *burtsa* they can find before dark. It is the only fuel at this cruel altitude. Five tiny fires are built in each hut, one in the center and one in each of the four corners. The smoke is acrid, but the warmth is welcome. They will be tended all night.

Seven o'clock. The temperature outside is 8 degrees below zero. Altitude, 15,450 feet. We made thirty-one stream crossings today.

I crawl into my sleeping bag, clothes and all, then pull my arctic parka over my head. It's warm enough, but I can't go to sleep. I keep thinking about the *poli* horns we found. It is a long way from finding a derelict set of horns to a live *Ovis poli*. I ask myself endless questions I cannot answer: *Will there be rams up in the barren meadows below the passes now, as in the summer, or have they all gone far back down into China to lower altitudes? Will there be Chinese patrols up there? Will the heavy snows hold off for a few more days? Will the mist dissipate?*

November 5

It is 4:30 A.M. and still dark. Temperature, 14 degrees below. Sultan Ali is praying as we wait for the dawn. The sick men seem to have improved with a night's sleep.

I will take Sultan Ali, the two *shikaris*, and one of the yaks. Gulbast will be left in charge of the camp. There is barely enough light to see as we enter the canyon. The mist has lifted, for I can see ghostly summits far above. We struggle up a steep incline for perhaps two miles and come to a bend in the canyon. Rounding it, I can see that the valley broadens out into rolling hills and open meadows that lead to the distant passes. Advancing toward a rocky ridge from which I will glass the wide country ahead, we cross some tracks in an area of drifted snow. I stop to examine them. Snow leopard tracks! Made by the legendary cat of the roof of the world, which is seldom seen in its natural habitat. The tracks are slightly crusted—probably made during the night.

We reach the shelter of the rocks and stop to rest. I train my binoculars toward the passes. There they are—Khunjerab to the right,

Chapchinal to the left. Quickly, I see why this is a preferred habitat of *Ovis poli*. There is a fringe of dry grass on the slopes, and the howling winds that blow over the passes in either direction keep the snow scoured away.

I search the slopes leading to Khunjerab for about ten minutes, then turn my binoculars toward the higher pass of Chapchinal. Suddenly, I freeze. Silhouetted against the dark sky on a distant crest stands a magnificent *Ovis poli* ram! His great flaring horns make a full curl, then turn down at the tips. My hands tremble and I have to lower the binoculars. I am not ashamed to say that tears of emotion run down my face. Here is a sight that few living men have been privileged to see. Here, finally, is my rendezvous with destiny. It was worth it all, every step of the ninety-five miles of forced marches through the stupendous mountain ranges that barred the way; all the hunger and hardships of the trail; the relentless toil over the terrible glacial moraines and around the sinister crevasses; the exhausting struggle through the driving snows and the bitter, howling winds of the icebound passes.

Controlling my emotion with an effort, I raise the binoculars again and feast my eyes on the distant ram. He is a good half-mile from us. My attention finally is diverted by Aman Shah, tugging at my arm.

"Sahib, sahib, the snow comes."

I turn to look just as the first wind-driven flakes hit. Within seconds, visibility is obliterated. We crawl into the lee of a great boulder and crouch there. The wind increases in velocity, and snow comes in a driving, blinding torrent. Fortunately, it lasts only a few minutes and passes on. As the air clears again, I look for the ram. He is still standing there, as if contemptuous of the storm that swept over him. His remarkable horns measure well over sixty inches. As I watch, he slowly walks down the slope toward us. Then follows a sight that transcends by far anything I have ever seen while hunting. The legend of Chapchinal comes true as over the ridge comes another great ram, then another. I stand there transfixed and count them—seemingly forever—until there are no more. Exactly *sixty-five* rams have crossed over that ridge!

The largest rams are leading, yet the last one carries horns that will go over fifty inches. They are resplendent in their prime winter coats. I continue watching until they reach an area where the snow has partly

been blown away by the wind. There they mass together and start grazing. A few lie down, while others stamp through crusted snow to get at the dry grass beneath.

Finally, my hunting instincts take over, and I begin to appraise the possibilities of making a stalk. There is a ridge below them, which is within shooting distance. To reach it, we have to cross at least 500 yards of open snowfields in plain sight of the rams. I dismiss the idea immediately and study the surrounding terrain. There is a high saddle far up the slope to the left of Chapchingal Pass. If we can reach it and cross over, we could come down behind the *poli*. I look for an alternate stalking route, but none appears feasible. We must climb to the saddle, for I am determined to take no chances of being seen by the rams. This may very well be my only chance.

Nearby, there is a shallow, ice-gouged swale. I leave Sheree Ali Khan with the yak and tell him to wait there until I send for him. Then I lead Aman Shah and Sultan Ali behind a vertical ridge where we will be hidden from the *poli*, and we start the climb.

Breathing is difficult; climbing becomes an agonizing ordeal. We stop to rest often, gasping for air. We climb a few yards at a time, breathing deeply three or four times with each step, fighting to get enough oxygen into our starving lungs. Sultan Ali, just behind me, is near the end of his endurance. I can see it in his face. He stumbles once, losing his staff, but Aman Shah catches it. Our staffs are invaluable. Their sharpened points bite into the fresh-crusted snow, providing indispensable support and balance.

The saddle is less than 300 feet above us now. It will take another half-hour or more, but we must reach it! All three of us have severe headaches. I stop a final time and share my B-2 and folic acid tablets with the others. I also take out a codeine tablet for each of us to deaden the headaches. We swallow them with a handful of snow. I feel caught in a dreamlike apathy as we resume the climb, and recognize the dangerous symptoms of high-altitude oxygen starvation. Summoning our last reserves of strength and will power, we move upward. The only favorable thing about this brutal climb is the absence of wind. The eerie silence is supernatural, punctuated only by our ragged breathing and the crunch of the crusted snow as we forge upward, step after desperate step.

Finally, there is nothing above. We collapse on the hard snow at the top of the saddle. There is a gentle slope leading down the other side. We can descend all the way and be in a perfect position for a stalk on the rams! I train my binoculars down the way we have come. The rams are tiny dark specks on the snow far below. They are still bedded down.

The temperature is 18 degrees below. I pull out my altimeter and stare at it in disbelief. It reads 20,800 feet. It is a fine Swiss high-altitude instrument calibrated to 22,000 feet. I shake it and look again. The reading is the same, 20,800 feet! *Unwittingly, I have attained one of my long-cherished goals, to climb to 20,000 feet.*

This unnamed saddle is higher than any point on the North American continent! No wonder the final stages of the climb were so agonizing.

The slopes on the other side lead far down into a great, open valley that is visible beneath pillars of swirling clouds. It can only be the Taghdumbash Pamir. We are looking into China. It is an awe-inspiring sight. Great eddies of mist break soundlessly against faraway summits of glittering ice. The fantastic panorama will always be etched in my memory.

Carefully, I scan the slopes below for Chinese patrols and select the best line of descent. We must head downward, and quickly. To stay at this altitude would be suicide. If all goes well, we can cross back into Hunza at 17,000 or 18,000 feet.

We start down into China. In forty-five minutes, we reach an outcrop above the ridge the *poli* have gone over. There are tracks and droppings in the snow. I crawl up behind the outcrop and inch forward until I can look down. The *poli* are still bedded down. The distance is about 400 yards. I see a mass of amber horns but cannot pick out individual rams. Crawling back, I join the men, and we start down again. Reaching a big rock about fifty feet below the ridge on our side, I stop to check my rifle and let my breathing settle down before making the final stalk. The slight movement of air is in our favor.

Now, I begin to wonder what is going to happen when I crawl to the top of the ridge. The rams are less than 100 yards below the crest. With that many animals present, at least one will spot me. I won't have any trouble hitting something; the problem will be to pick out one of the biggest rams, particularly the monster that led them. At this

moment, I experience an inner trembling, a near ineffectuality at the thought of the great herd of *Ovis poli* rams that are just over the ridge. I am almost afraid to move.

Aman Shah touches my shoulder and points behind me. There are the rams, about five hundred yards away, trotting over a ridge deeper into China. Somehow they must have seen me when I glassed them from the outcrop above or sensed our presence in some unknown way. They have crossed back over the ridge below us out of sight. A terrible wave of despair sweeps through me. Then, as I watch them disappear, a final hope is born. The last seven or eight stop near the top of the slope and look back. I quickly decide to try a shot.

Moving around the boulder, I rest the rifle on it, using my left hand as a pad, and take aim at what appears to be the ram carrying the longest horns. My rifle is sighted in for 300 yards. Ballistically, the bullet will be 22½ inches low at 500 yards. I allow for this and with a prayer gently squeeze the trigger.

The chosen ram takes two or three leaps up the slope, then collapses and rolls down to the bottom. At last I have an *Ovis poli* ram! I fire two more futile shots as the others top the ridge, then I begin shouting with joy. The great quest is at an end! The men catch my enthusiasm and we embrace each other, then rush down the long slope where the ram lies in the snow.

Other than the two museum expeditions, this is the first *Ovis poli* to be taken by an American trophy hunter. I am jubilant as I fondle the great, curling horns. The ram is in splendid condition. His heavy body is light brown on the back, shading to gray speckled with white. The heavy white winter ruff on his neck is fully four inches long.

I direct Sultan Ali to go and get Sheree Ali Khan and the yak, which is carrying my camera case. He can follow this ridge down to *Kara jilga*, turn right, and follow the creek to our original vantage point about three quarters of a mile away. I send Aman Shah to the top of the ridge the rest of the *poli* went over to look for blood on the off-chance that my second or third shots hit one of them. More important, I tell him to look carefully for Chinese soldiers who may have heard the shots.

As both men depart on their missions, I check my altimeter—18,300 feet. Then I sit down to gloat over my prize. He will not measure up

to the massive-horned aristocrat that led the herd, but I am content. Here is a genuine *Ovis poli*, the absolute epitome of the trophy hunter's desire, a trophy I will never have to apologize for. "Take what the gods offer today and leave your heart's desire until tomorrow."

I look up to see Aman Shah motioning. *Has he seen blood or Chinese?*

When I climb the ridge, he points up the next valley. There is a stone hut perhaps 300 yards from us. He tells me it is Chinese. I study it intently with my binoculars. There is no sign of life, nor can I see where the snow has been disturbed around it. Still, I am uneasy. I hand him my binoculars with orders to stay out of sight while scanning the terrain carefully. I am going down to cape the ram so we can make a quick retreat if necessary. In any event, I am determined to take the cape and horns with me.

Halfway through the job, I hear sounds from above. Aman Shah is coming down the slope with great leaps, gesticulating wildly. My first reaction is one of near panic. *Has he seen a Chinese patrol?* If so, we will try to escape down the valley into Hunza. I have fourteen cartridges left for my .300, and I have already made up my mind not to be captured. If it is no more than a two-man patrol, I should be able to take them. I load the magazine with three cartridges and bolt a fourth into the chamber as Aman Shah reaches me.

"Roosh, sahib!" he exclaims, pointing up the little valley we are in. *Ovis poli* rams!

I start running up the rocky gully behind him. Staggering is perhaps a better word than running, for the long hours of climbing have sapped my strength, and I can only move at an agonized shamble.

Just as we reach a rocky outcrop that extends out into the *nullab*, I hear the rattle of rocks above. A file of big rams is trotting down the slope. I kneel down and raise my rifle, fighting to get breath. A few seconds later, they plunge down the rocky bank and start across the *nullab* fifty yards in front of me. It is pointblank range. The great ram I had seen silhouetted against the sky this morning is leading them. My first shot is back a little, but knocks him down. He staggers up as I aim again and fire. He goes down this time for keeps.

"*Margya! Margya!*" Aman Shah shouts. He's dead, he's dead.

I remain kneeling there and watch, awestruck, as the rest of them

pour down the bank, cross the *nullab*, and go over the ridge out of sight. Caught in the grip of unreality, I walk slowly to the great ram. Only when I put my hand on his magnificent amber horns can I believe it is not an illusion. My cup is full! Here is the trophy of a lifetime!

Once more I order Aman Shah to mount the ridge and keep watch. The ram is dead, but I do not want to leave him. I cannot fathom how or why this herd of rams came from the Hunza side when we saw them disappear into China an hour ago. Presently, Sultan Ali and Sheree Ali Khan come with the yak. Their explanation solves the mystery. The first ram I shot was part of another herd we did not see. While stalking the original herd, we had come upwind of where they were in the *nullab*, out of sight. According to Sheree Ali Khan, who was watching the first herd, the rams had never moved from where they lay until I fired the first shot. Then they had run down into the valley halfway to where Sheree Ali Khan was waiting. When Sultan Ali went for the yak, he crossed upwind of the herd, which then turned and came back toward their original position. I cannot help thinking what an incredible stroke of luck it was that brought the big leader

The Hunzakuts bring down the last load of *poli* meat on one of the yaks. Sultan Ali rode the other animal. The photo was taken near the hut where we stayed the night after I shot the great ram. In the near background are the meadows and rolling hills below Khunjerab and Chapchिंगal passes.



directly to me. Had I not seen the second herd and fired, I undoubtedly would have stalked over the ridge into the midst of them, but the odds of picking out and shooting the leader would have been one in sixty-five.

It is four o'clock as we take pictures and start to cape the big ram. The Hunzakuts want to take the carcass, but I decide we will finish caping the first ram and load both heads on the yak. I want to get them back into Hunza as soon as possible and well down the valley toward Kuksell. I tell them to take as much meat as they want to carry; they can come back tomorrow morning for the rest.

We follow *Kara jilga* for a while, then cut across the rolling meadows in a straight line toward the entrance of the canyon leading down to Kuksell. Sultan Ali reminds me of our food shortage and asks why I didn't shoot more *poli*. Since first sighting the rams this morning, I have given little thought to anything except the trophy hunt. Now, as we walk along, I try to calculate how long the meat of the two rams will last. It won't be enough. If we start back tomorrow, I can probably bag another ibex or two.

Rounding a little hill, I hear an exclamation from Aman Shah, who is leading. There, by the gods of the hunt, are six more *poli* rams standing broadside about 100 yards from us! These high meadows and snowy slopes of this hidden corner of the roof of the world are indisputably the Shangri-La of *Ovis poli*.

Unslinging my rifle, I kneel down and shoot one ram in his tracks. The others leap away to our left toward *Kara jilga*, their heavy-horned heads erect, running like Thoroughbreds. I miss the next shot, then miss again as they dip into a shallow valley. My reflexes are too slow from the day's exertion. I sit down, pick up the last ram in the scope as they come into sight at 200 yards, hold a steady lead, and fire. He goes down but is up immediately and trots slowly after the other four. Before I can reload, they disappear into the cut of *Kara jilga*. The first four appear on the other side, and a few minutes later the wounded ram struggles up the bank. The distance is about 350 yards. I shoot again and miss as he lurches sideways. I aim carefully and pause. There are only six cartridges left; we may need them later. As I hesitate, the ram collapses. He is dead; the binoculars confirm it.

I have difficulty getting to my feet. The day's all-out endeavor and

the adrenalin-surgings emotion have taken their toll. Insidious fatigue has set in. All three of us are close to total exhaustion. We leave the rams where they have fallen. The frigid temperature will preserve them during the night. Now, barring a deep snow, we will have enough food to take us out of the high country.

Aman Shah tells me there is an old hut a few hundred yards down the valley. We head for it as darkness comes on.

One end of the hut has fallen down and part of the roof is caved in, but it is a haven. Sheree Ali Khan is the only one left with any strength. He quickly removes enough debris to let us lie down, then gathers *burtsa* for a fire. I remember the candy bar I put in my pocket this morning and divide it into four parts. Tea is brewed, and the hot liquid sends a glow of warmth through my insides. Within minutes, Sheree Ali Khan is roasting thin strips of *poli* meat over the fire.

In the morning, Sheree Ali Khan can go down to Kuksell and bring back the other yak and the rest of the men to collect the *poli*. I fail to sleep as he works to repair the fallen wall. Altitude, 16,200 feet. Temperature, 4°.

November 6

Sheree Ali Khan is gone when I awake at daylight. Aman Shah is squatting by the fire. I feel too weak to get up, and stay there gratefully as Sultan Ali brings in more *burtsa* for the fire. Amazingly, the temperature is up to 20 degrees above zero. There is about eight inches of fresh snow on the ground.

After a meager breakfast of tea and roasted *poli*, I send them up with the yak to get the rest of the meat from the first two rams. In the meantime, I stay in the hut and begin skinning out the two heads.

In about twenty minutes, Aman Shah comes rushing back to the hut. He is out of breath. Again, the thought that he has seen a Chinese patrol flashes through my mind. "*Bharabe, sahib,*" he gasps, pointing back up the valley. "There are two!"

He goes into an expressive pantomime of an *Ovis poli* ram on the ground with something eating at its throat. I understand instantly. Snow leopards! Snatching up my rifle and binoculars, I follow his rapid stride. The legendary snow leopard is one of the rare and exotic creatures inhabiting this immense region. It ranks among the top trophies of Asia.

As we walk, Aman Shah explains. On the way to the upper *nullab*, he and Sultan Ali passed by the first ram I dropped out of the six we saw late yesterday afternoon. They stopped to examine it. Aman Shah then walked around the little hill to look across the valley where the last ram had fallen, and spotted the snow leopards feeding on it. Probably they had crossed the blood trail of the ram sometime during the night and followed it before the snowfall.

Sultan Ali is waiting at the hill. I carefully stalk up to a vantage point and use my binoculars. Crouched by the carcass are two cats—pale gray, almost white against the snow, with irregular black spots and the long thick tails that are characteristic of snow leopards. I study the terrain quickly. A stiff breeze is coming down from the pass. I can back-track for 200 yards to get well behind the hill, then cross over to Kara Jilga. Under the bank, I can stalk within seventy-five yards of them. I tell the men to wait here. The fewer people on a stalk like this, the better.

The legendary snow leopard is one of the exotic trophies that inhabit the roof of the world.



Within thirty minutes, I am inching silently up the bank in soft snow. Behind a convenient jumble of rock I stop for a minute to get my breath then ease the rifle around the side. Unaware of my presence, the snow leopards continue feeding. I center the scope on the larger one, presumably the male, and shoot. He springs high in the air and makes several leaps as I bolt in another cartridge. Before I can get the scope on him again, he goes down in the snow, kicking with all four legs. With a trophy of this caliber, I take no chances and belt him again through the shoulders. This time, he stretches out. He is mine! I look for the other leopard, but it has vanished in the jumble of glacier-shattered rocks up a nearby slope.

As Sultan Ali and Aman Shah come over with the yak, the sun appears in a hazy mist. It is the first time I have seen it in several days. The snow leopards have eaten the throat out of the ram and most of the insides, but a good portion of the carcass remains. The cape is completely ruined. I am vexed momentarily, then I think about it and smile to myself. For a snow leopard, even the cape of an *Ovis poli* is a good trade.

We load the snow leopard and the rest of the ram on the yak and head back to the hut. An hour later, while we are still skinning it, the men from Kuksell arrive. They are in good spirits and are delighted with my success. One by one, they come to me with folded hands, offering their congratulations with wide smiles. They are delighted also, I suspect, with the supply of fresh meat we now have.

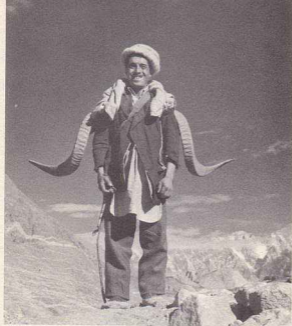
By noon, all the horns, meat, and skins have been brought down to the hut. After a quick lunch we descend to Kuksell. I spend the rest of the afternoon working on the capes. For supper we have chunks of *poli kabob* cut from the fillets. I have never eaten better meat.

The inevitable snowflakes come drifting in just before dark. We have pushed our luck as far as it will stretch. At daylight, we will head back as fast as we can travel.

November 7

A foot of snow has fallen during the night, and it is still sifting down. We load up and move out. Speed is the only thing that will save us. The Hunzakuts know it, and there is no hesitation in their pace.

I remember that today is my birthday. The *Ovis poli* rams and the



A proud Hunzakut who went with me to the Chinese border insisted on carrying one of the big *Ovis poli* heads all the way back to Baltit, where he was acclaimed for his exploit.

snow leopard are presents enough to last a lifetime, not to count the outstanding ibex.

November 9

Our luck has held for the past three days. We passed the most dangerous avalanche zone, which was frozen in by sub-zero temperatures. Now, as we climb Wad Khun pass, the unholy blizzard that has been brewing for days finally strikes in all its fury. There is four feet of soft snow near the summit, and some drifts are eight and ten feet deep. The faithful yaks are used to break trail. For two hours, there is doubt that we will make it. But the sheer courage and determination of the Hunzakuts, taking turns at the vanguard when the yaks are played out, carry us over the snow-choked pass and into the lower valley. We have won through!

The rewards of the chase, *Ovis poli* and ibex horns. We have reached Sost on our return trip, and now have horses to ride and to pack.



Days later I will learn that Herb and Big John have returned safely after much hardship of their own. Herb has been successful in acquiring two fine rams.

For me, the dream of a lifetime has been fulfilled. The Mecca of any man is, in the greater sense, but the epitome of desire in his soul. Deep in the heart of Asia, on a lofty, wind-blown slope of the roof-of-the-world, I came at last to my own Mecca and found the rams of Shangri-La. The hunter's horn has called and I have gone.

*Have you seen the heart of Asia—do you know that lofty peak
where the Karakoram meets the Hindu Kush?*

*Have you seen the snowy fastness? It is there I go to seek
for the mighty OVIS POLI known as Roosh.*

*Do you know the weary travel—have you felt the howling winds
when they clutch with icy fingers and harass?*

*Do you know the endless marching and the hope at every bend,
pushing onward 'till you reach that lonely pass?*

*Do you know the band that leads me, toiling through this frozen place
where the trail is lost in deep, eternal snow?*

*Do you know what drives me onward? I must make that final chase,
for the hunter's horn has called and I must go.*

*'Tho I've searched my soul for reason, I have sworn a sacred vow;
then I looked into the heavens for a sign.*

*Now the ends of earth are nothing—and although I know not how,
still the horns of OVIS POLI will be mine.*