



HIMALAYAN HOTSPOT

by HERB KLEIN

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT DOARES

It all happened like this. I'd cut short a tiger and mixed-game hunt in Madhya Pradesh Province in central India hoping for an opportunity to spend a week or 10 days in the Kashmir—the fabulous Himalayan mountain country to the northwest of India proper.

When I got back to Delhi, however, my fixer-upper advised me there wasn't a chance. "The west boundary of Kashmir is being patrolled by the Pakistan army, and the north and east boundaries by the Red Chinese," he told me. "Our Indian army is in the middle trying to save the Kashmir from both of them. Besides, this is early spring. The roads are bad [the greatest understatement of the trip]. There's still a lot of snow and mud, and at this time of year there just isn't a shikari (hunting guide) who will take you. That country is very hard to hunt even in the fall, and it's absolutely impossible now."

I felt like kicking myself all over Delhi. I could have stayed at Nagpur with Vidya Shukla and his Allwyns Cooper outfit another week and hunted buffaloes, but here I was back in Delhi. Well, I thought, I might just as well get on the midnight plane and start for home.

The Indian police and customs bothered me all evening, and I barely had all my loot cleared—my Weatherby rifles, cameras, hunting clothes, boots, binoculars—when the flight was called. I was tired and cross and glad to get aboard.

The big plane picked up altitude fast, and the hostess had just finished telling us we'd cruise at 32,000 feet and that the next stop would be Karachi, Pakistan, when she came by and handed me a message. "It was given to me just as we locked the doors, sir," she said. "Sorry I didn't get it to you sooner."

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I've stalked sheep and goats in many strange places, but none like the fabulous peaks that guard Red China's back door. There I came upon that rare trophy—the almost legendary snow leopard

I wanted that long-tailed cat so badly I was drooling. But all I had to shoot it with was a .22 Hornet with iron sights

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It was from my floor-upper. "Just this evening," the note read, "I have receive a message from my friend at Srinagar who has a friend at Leh who has condescend to take leave from his other duties to take you on shikar for six day. No guns, no cameras, no hunting clothes, please. Regulations prevent. My friend will outfit you completely. Please make contact with me early tomorrow."

I shrugged it off. It came too late. Besides, I'd just had two weeks of borrowed clothing, borrowed boots, and borrowed guns in Iran, and that was enough inconvenience for one trip. I decided to forget the whole thing and catch some sleep. It was 12:30 a.m.

But for the next hour the hunting gremlins really went to work on me. Every time I closed my eyes I saw beautiful blue sheep and huge argali with 50-inch horns jumping all over the plane. A terrific markhor with record corkscrew horns poked his head through the window and thumbed his nose at me. Then a great band of ibex billies with tremendous four-foot horns almost ran over me. I awoke reaching for my gun. That did it.

Yes, the hostess told me, there was a plane going from Karachi to Delhi at 7:15.

Yes, the captain would see that my guns, clothes, duffel, and cameras, would go on to New York air freight.

Yes, the customs at Karachi were suspicious. (I finally had to get the captain and hostess to assure them I didn't need a psychiatrist.)

Yes, customs at Delhi thought I was too crazy for a man with only one head. I should be twins.

Yes, I was very tired when I stepped off the plane at Srinagar that afternoon at 5:30.

No, I wasn't too tired to go leopard hunting in a jeep that night.

That's how for six days I served as a "mechanic" with the Indian army.

In knocking around the world I've found that the American dollar opens many doors and makes many things possible. So it was in Kashmir. My shikari was an officer in the Indian army. He had a jeep, and he also had a helper in its back seat—a private who couldn't speak a word of English. I will call my shikari Ahmed, which wasn't his real name, and our stooge just a stooge. I never could pronounce his name anyway.

Ahmed proved to be a wonderful fellow, a fine hunting companion, and a very good shikari. He had a pair of 6 x 30 British binoculars, an English-made B.S.A. .22 Hornet, and an old 6.5 mm. Mannlicher-Schoenauer carbine with a 2¼X German Zeiss scope. For my money that wasn't much of a sheep-hunting outfit, but it was better than a handful of rocks. My pitching arm isn't as good as it used to be.

Since I hadn't been allowed to bring my favorite Weatherbys, binoculars, camera, or hunting clothes into this troubled province, I decided I might as well make the best of it. I did have



The Shah of Iran (right) interrupted his recent tour of this country to visit Roy Weatherby in California. The Shah, about whose hunting exploits Herb Klein wrote in *Outdoor Life* ("I Hunted With the Shah," October, 1954), got interested in Weatherby custom rifles when Klein gave one to his brother Prince Abdorrezza

a couple of pairs of long underwear and a pair of insulated boots. Other than that, I wore Indian army garb.

That night we hunted panthers (Indian English for leopards) until 1:00 a.m. with the jeep and a spotlight. I nailed two between the eyes with the old Mannlicher. "Good fun, old chap," I told myself, but that was before I found out I had to skin the stinkers myself. Neither my shikari nor the stooge could skin worth a hoot.

Next morning before sunup we were off on a trip I'd dreamed about since I started hunting sheep back in Wyoming during the late 1920's. With beginner's luck, I'd taken a 40-inch big-horn my first time out. That, along with the combination of a rare and grand animal, timberline country scented with alpine fir and whitebark pine, slide rock, and blue sky, made me a sheep hunter. Since then I've stalked sheep from the Yukon to Lower California and Sonora, from Idaho to Iran.

We were now in the middle section of the Himalayas, the very roof of the world, and the place where sheep and goats evolved. In the early spring Himalayan wild sheep and goats stay relatively low, driven down by the deep and terrible snows of the high country where a 12,000-foot mountain is considered a foothill among the 25,000 to 28,000-foot peaks.

I knew I couldn't hunt far back in this tremendous pile because most of the mountains are beyond the Iron Curtain. *Ovis poli*, or Marco Polo's argali, roam the Pamir range of Red China and Russia, and only a few are ever found outside those countries. There are supposed to be some in the Afghanistan Pamira. So far as the great Siberian and Tibetan argali are concerned, they might as well be on the moon. But Kashmir was a good bet.

The jeep ground along in second gear, leaping from rock to rock, slithering into ruts, and dropping into chuck holes big enough to bury a horse in.

A jeep may be the world's finest rough-country car, but for comfort I can think of lots of other conveyances—my own car back home in Dallas, Texas, for instance, or even a good horse. As the jeep lurched along like a drunk on wooden legs, my behind began to ache. So did my neck, and my ears became stopped up from the altitude. I was tired, hungry, and three quarters frozen. Right then I could hear my pretty Irish schatz back home saying, "well, dear, nobody twisted your arm."

Ahmed was driving. I sat next to him, and our stooge was perched behind us on the poop deck. The miserable track we were jouncing over was the main "highway" along the upper Indus River from Srinagar to another place called Leh. And those gray, barren peaks that rose on either side of us were the Himalayas.

Our plan was to hunt along the highway and what side roads we could negotiate by jeep. For the last 150 miles out of Leh we'd be in sheep country. We'd try to spot game from the road, then make our climbs. We'd camp at the government resthouse some 15 miles out of Leh. By plane the distance between the two towns is 75 miles, but by road it's a rugged 245.

Suddenly our helper reached forward, tapped Ahmed on the shoulder, and jabbered excitedly in Hindustani. Ahmed stopped the jeep, picked up the binoculars from the seat between us, and calmly regarded a section of snow-splotted slide rock half a mile away and a couple of thousand feet above us. "Goats," he said. "They're just to the right and about 500 feet above that last little clump of pines."

For a while I saw nothing but gray, tumbled rock, dirty snow, desolation, and emptiness. Then something moved, and I found myself looking at a herd of those incredible iron-gray goats called markhor. They're big animals

with great, black, flat-spiral horns that look something like those of the African kudu. About 40 inches high at the shoulders, they weigh from 180 to 220 pounds. Their hair is whitish with brown tips, and they have profuse black beards. Apparently a markhor papa goat must have walked across the back yards of some of our domestic mamma goats years ago because I've often seen domestic billys with horns of that type. The goat pictured in the buck-beer ads looks for all the world like a markhor.

Ahmed and I took off for the climb over rocks and snow at between 10,500 and 11,000 feet, and a weary climb it was. We were still about 250 yards from the markhor when they saw us and spooked. My first shot broke the biggest billy's hind leg, the second his back. It wasn't the best shooting I've ever done, but at least I had a markhor—and he'd be the biggest one in Dallas.

That night we hunted leopards again. There are quite a few leopards all over India, but not as many as in the Kashmir. The Sulej Valley and the middle Indus Valley are lousy with them—all half-starved, hanging around settlements, waiting for an unwary dog or goat. We didn't have to bait for Kashmir leopards, but if that had been necessary all we'd have had to do was tie up a village goat, stick him with a pin so he'd bleat, then jump out of the way before the leopards knocked us down in their eagerness to get him. Actually, there are too many leopards. I bunged five and a Kashmir lynx the first three nights, and that was enough of that.

Next day I got a urial and an ibex. We were driving on the trail above the brawling upper Indus River, looking, looking, looking. When we spotted game we stopped to see whether it was shootable or not. If it was, we'd take the jeep around a curve—never hard to find—and out of sight, and then climb up the mountainside behind the numerous huge boulders and shoulders.

The urial, or shapo, is a handsome sheep found over a wide area in the western Himalayas as well as in Afghanistan and Iran. His horns, unlike those of the American bighorn, curve out to the sides instead of the back, then arc down, and are only slightly wrinkled. Rams are brownish and have a whitish ruff, and I'd say it would take an awful big one to weigh 180 pounds.

That morning we saw several bands of urial, but none were exciting. Then along about 9 o'clock, when the sun was over the rocky canyon walls and a bit of the frost was out of the air, we saw two lone rams far above us in a position that would make a stalk quite easy—easy for the Himalayas, that is. The larger one turned out to be a respectable 35-incher, and a one-shot kill.

The world record for the Indian urial is 39 inches and for the Afghan 41½. My friend Prince Abdorreza Pahlavi of Iran knocked over a 39½-incher last fall.

The ibex were something else again. During the afternoon we spotted five

billies bedded down at the foot of a rimrock at least 2,000 feet above us. One looked good to me, so we took off after them. Two hours later, five pounds lighter, and terribly out of breath, I finally got behind some rocks 150 yards from the goats. There's precious little oxygen in that high Asiatic air. After a short rest I eased the Mannlicher over a rock, lined up the three-post reticule in the Zeiss scope with a spot behind the shoulder of the biggest billy, and squeezed one off.

All five bounded away like jack-rabbits, my big boy in the lead. I turned loose another, then a third, before the goat went down. All three shots were good hits in the lung cavity, and they weren't six inches apart.

The American mountain goat isn't the only one that's hard to kill, but of course, in my opinion the 6.5 mm. Mannlicher-Schoenauer cartridge is a sorry excuse for a big-game cartridge. I'm sure one shot from my .300 Weatherby Magnum or even my .270 Weatherby would have done the job.

My ibex was a respectable trophy, but no world record. His scimitar-shaped, olive-brown horns were 41½ inches long, but the record is 55 inches. He was an impressive beast, however, a big, rugged, bushy-looking animal with shaggy brown hair and a long black beard, and he was gaunt and smelly. Under his coarse, brittle outer hair he had a thick coat of pashm, or under fleece, which would keep even me warm in any climate. Thin as he was, I estimated his weight at 250 pounds.

I had a real thrill that evening while we were heading back to the rest-house. It was practically an adventure. The sun was already behind the peaks, and the light was beginning to fail. There was a harsh and bitter cold ranging down the canyons when I noticed, 1,000 feet up the mountain, a big grouse, then another, and then several more. They're known as ram chakora. I was weary of the domestic mutton I'd been getting, and I knew the urial would be no good since he was skinny and his flesh was blue. Some chicken would be nice. So, telling Ahmed that I'd be back shortly with some eating meat, I took the little .22 Hornet and climbed cautiously through the gnarled and stunted timberline trees toward the birds. When I was 30 yards from them I saw that they looked much like our North American blue grouse, except that they were larger. I thought how good they'd be floured and fried in deep fat—if we had some fat.

Suddenly I discovered I wasn't the only hunter in the neighborhood. As I poked my square head over a rock ledge for a peek at the covey, I noticed a slight movement a short distance off to my right. Crouched behind a small bush was a gaunt, pale, long-legged cat with a bushy tail three feet long. I recognized him immediately. He was one of the almost legendary snow leopards—a trophy so rare I doubt if a dozen Americans have taken one.

Usually the animals are found only among the everlasting snows of the

great peaks. Tens of thousands of years there have given the snow leopard his beautiful pale-lemon-and-light-gray coat, instead of the orange-and-black of the typical lowland leopard, and his hair is long and silky to protect him from the terrible cold. The intensity of the cold and the migration of the prey had driven this cat down from his habitual range.

The instant I spied the leopard I froze, thanking my lucky stars I had the wind on him. I soon realized, however, that my scent apparently made no difference to him. Very likely the cat had never seen a human before, and he was no more afraid of me than I am of my pet skunk. I was the one who was scared.

I wanted that snow leopard so badly I was drooling, but I didn't want him in my lap. No animal in the world is more vindictive or dangerous than a wounded and angry leopard, and all I had to shoot this one with was a .32 Hornet with iron sights. A shot in the heart or lungs would surely leave him frisky enough to maul me. I decided to try a brain shot, but now he was watching me, and I didn't like the front approach.

I must have put that head between his eyes half a dozen times, but every time I started to squeeze the trigger I turned chicken.

Evidently my shikari and our stooge got worried over me about that time, for presently the jeep's horn sounded. The leopard jerked his head around and I found the profile view much better. I centered the front bead on the tuft of hair in his ear, as per Myles Turner's instructions to me in Africa, and squeezed. The cat never moved a muscle, and that trickle of purple blood coming out of his ear was as welcome a sight as a flowing wildcat oil well.

"Come help me carry this grouse to the jeep," I yelled to Ahmed.

"How come, sahib? You shot but once."

"It's an awful big grouse," I told him. I led him around the bush and practically let him step on the cat. He jumped six feet.

What with sitting up most of the night skinning trophies and then half freezing for a couple of hours in my sleeping bag, I thought I was pretty well tired out the next day, but I saw something that quickly pumped my old legs full of energy. It was my first sight of bharal, or blue sheep.

Gathered in a small herd, they were exotic-looking creatures with smooth horns and beautiful blue-gray coats. There were four rams, four ewes, and two lambs. Blue sheep are about as much goat as they are sheep, but they have no face glands, no beards, and no goat smell. They reminded me of the African scoudad which I shot, of all places, in Texas. I handed the glasses back to Ahmed.

"That second one from the left," I told him. "Let's go."

Two rugged hours later and 1,000 feet higher I made a good shot with that old Mannlicher. I was starting to like the old blunderbuss. We had

climbed within 200 yards of the sheep when the wind started playing tricks. Suddenly the sheep became nervous.

"I'd better try from here," I told Ahmed, but just then the ram I had my eye on stepped behind a rock so that only his head and the top of his shoulders were visible. I slipped my folded army jacket over a rock to give me a dead rest. The gun was sighted in for 150 yards, so I held about four inches high and let one go. The ram went down like a ton of bricks. I'd broken his neck slick as a whistle—a very lucky shot.

The grandfather of all the sheep in the world is the argali, *Ovis ammon*, a breed found in one form or another all over the Asiatic highlands from Tibet to Siberia. We were on the edge of argali country, and my fondest hope was to see one. I did. One day we spotted the big ridged horns, brownish-gray bodies, and white neck ruffs of three rams far beyond a mountainside. We climbed to their level, but by the time we got there they'd moved about a mile. They were feeding, so away we went after them.

It was a couple of miles more before I finally got to within Mannlicher-Schoenauer range of one of them—an easy 150-yard shot. The ram's horns had a 17½-inch base and a curl of 44 inches. Those measurements would be tremendous for an American bighorn, but for a Tibetan argali they were just fair. The world record for Tibetan argali is 18½ x 55½ inches, the second best is 16½ x 51½ inches; but to me my argali ram was huge. It was the largest ram of any species I've seen. Dressed, he would weigh over 300 pounds, and if fat he'd have gone over 400.

My luck had stayed with me. In a few days on a makeshift hunt I'd taken snow leopard, urial, bhoral, ibex, markhor, and now Tibetan argali. My night hunting had produced a Himalayan lynx and five lowland leopards. It was all great sport, but I was getting more and more weary.

Others might thrive on hot, highly seasoned Indian cooking, but though I liked the taste of the strange stews and curries I was served, they didn't agree with me. I'd have enjoyed a nice medium-rare sirloin, baked potato, and a green salad with Thousand Island dressing.

Most hunting tales wind up with the narrator seeing that big one the very last day, making a brilliant stalk which a four-star general would be proud of, an 800-yard shot right through the heart, and then that elastic tape measure. Funny how some of those great trophies shrink by the time we hang them on the wall. Bad taxidermy, of course.

This story, alas, can't end that way. My big one actually got away—like some of the fish we often hear about.

We'd been fooling around a flat plateau some 50 miles east and south of Leh when we first saw them—a band of sheep the likes of which I didn't even know existed. There were ten of them, all rams, all tremendous. One

had massive, heavy-based horns with a full curl and at least a 6-inch flare straight out on either side. His body looked as large as a donkey's. I've looked over lots of sheep, but if this guy's horns didn't go 18 or even 18½ inches around at the base and 54 inches on the front curve I'll put up my guns—for good.

These sheep were light brown, had whitish faces, white ruffs, white bellies, white disks on their buttocks, and white on their legs from the knees down. I'd never seen anything like them.

Ahmed and I stalked those rams for four hours while waiting for them to bed down or to stop to feed. We slid through snow, hid behind rocks, and crawled through stone gullies, but the closest we got to them was around 550 yards. Several times I was tempted to take a shot, but with the Mannlicher I figured I'd have to hold about 16 feet high at that distance. Who can estimate 16 feet at 550 yards? Man, how I wished for my .300 Weatherby!

I was watching through the glasses when I saw them stop in a small basin about three quarters of a mile away. They started to graze.

"Now we've got them," I told Ahmed. "We'll follow that rocky ledge and then——"

"Sorry, sahib, but this is as far as we go," Ahmed said sadly. "This end of the basin is the west border of Tibet."

I was still watching through the glasses, and it was fully a minute before the roof fell in on me. "You mean Red China?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Then what the hell are we doing here?"

The 300-mile ride back to Srinagar was a nightmare, what with hides and horns and three weary men bouncing all over the place, but we made it.

"Those rams stay in that plateau area," said Ahmed. "I have seen them there several times. When you come back, we will look about a bit there first."

"And maybe I can bring my .300 Weatherby?"

"We know you now and we can trust you," said my pal, smiling. "Anything you wish, sahib, I can arrange."

Exactly 56 hours later I was back in Dallas. The memsahib soon had five leopard skins scattered over the kitchen floor, and was beating her pretty brains out how she was going to have a jacket, purse, and hat made from them.

I was on the phone, bragging long-distance to my two grandsons in Abilene what a great hunter I am. Funny, but I still have them fooled. THE END