

# TRAVELLING ON THE WILD FRONTIER



*Mount Rakaposhi*

**P**EOPLE reputed to be the descendants of the soldiers of Alexander the Great and some of the highest mountains in the world are features of life in a rugged part of Pakistan.

The AFP Liaison Officer in Islamabad, Detective Inspector Steve Polden, reports:

The region is called the Northern Areas and it takes in part of the North-West Frontier Province, the Gilgit Agency and Baltistan.

Bordered by Afghanistan in the west, China in the north and India in the east, the terrain is rugged to say the least.

I recently took two private trips into this wild northern region of Pakistan.

The first trip took me and some Australian Embassy staff to the Chitral and Kalash valleys and the village of Garram Chasma.

The second journey took my family and I to the Khunjerab Pass on the Chinese border (see map).

The trip to Chitral takes about 13 hours along an extremely bad road through the Malakand Pass and the 10,500 feet high Lowari Pass.

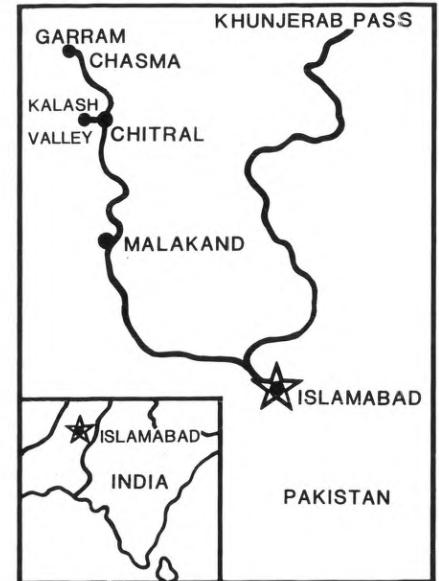
On the western side of the Lowari Pass there are no fewer than 47 hairpin bends

and a glacier tail to cross. The road is only open for a few months of the year due to heavy snow, glacier tails and landslides.

Chitral is a dusty little town on the river of the same name. It is surrounded by high mountain peaks and is bitterly cold in winter. The highest mountain in the Hindu Kush range, Tirichmir (25,230 feet) is clearly visible from the town. There are two or three small, spartan, hotels for the traveller.

From Chitral we visited the Kalash Valley and a border village, Garram Chasma. The valley is inhabited by a tribe of non-Muslims — the Kafir Kalash. It is an enigma in this country which is almost totally Muslim.

The Kalash people are reputed to be the descendants of the armies of Alexander the Great which passed through the region. They are of European appearance

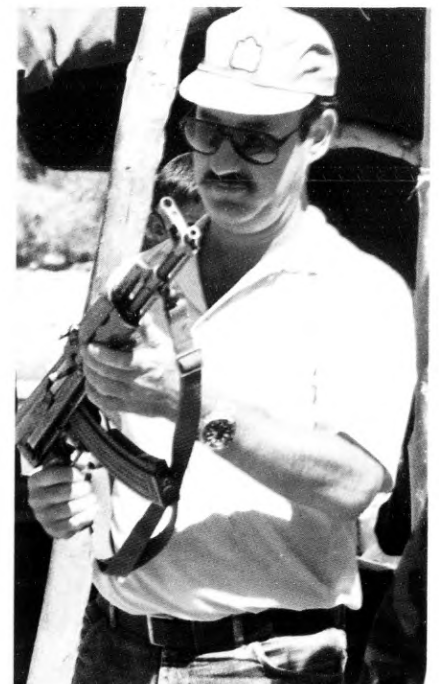


and their dress is not like that of any other group in Pakistan. The women's clothes are not unlike those of Thai hill tribespeople.

The Kalash Valley is reached by using one of the most terrifying roads I have ever travelled on. Several times everyone in the vehicle — except the driver — got out and walked through some of the worst sections. It is a dirt track cut out of the side of the mountain and is barely wide enough for one vehicle. It has shale overhangs that collapse without warning and there is a drop into a ravine with a fast-flowing mountain river at the bottom.

The drop from the road is vertical and just weeks before our trip a Swedish

*Detective Inspector Polden with a guerilla weapon.*

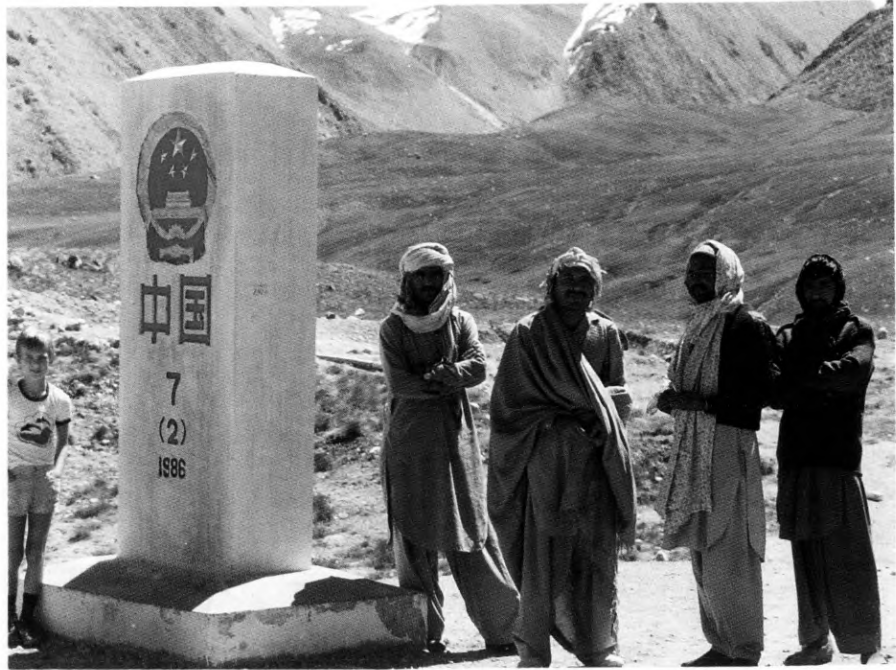


couple was killed when the side of the road collapsed and their four-wheel drive vehicle fell several hundred feet into the ravine. Notwithstanding the road, the scenery is nothing short of spectacular.

North of Chitral we visited the village of Garram Chasma. Most of the people there are Afghani. The Mujahideen guerillas cross into Pakistan at this village (and many others like it) for a respite from the fighting with the Russians in Afghanistan. We found the Mujahideen a friendly bunch and only too keen to show off their weaponry.

The second journey into the north of Pakistan with my family involved a 1,750 kilometre round trip to the 16,000 feet high Khunjerab Pass on the Chinese border.

The Khunjerab Pass is reached via the Karakoram Highway, an engineering feat which took 20 years to build and cost the lives of 500 Pakistani and Chinese



*Luke Polden and friends at the border with China*



*Some of the occupants of Garram Chasma*

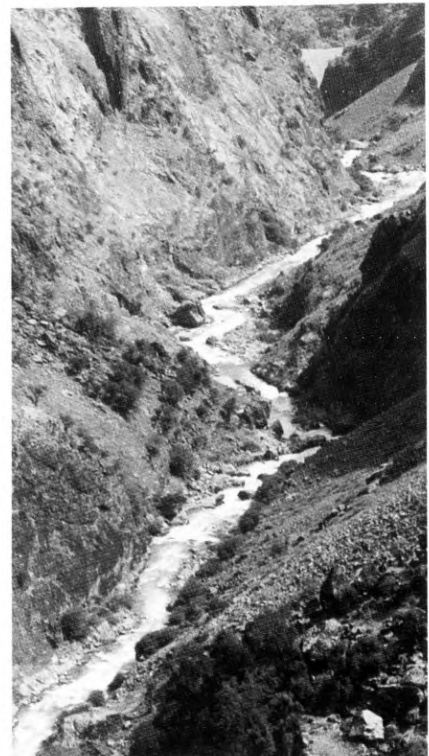
workers. At the peak of construction a total of 15,000 Pakistanis and 10,000 Chinese were employed. Often the engineers-turned-climbers were suspended high above fast flowing mountain rivers, thousands of feet above the valley floors, to drill into the rock face to place explosives.

In many places the road is carved into the mountainside with the mountain hanging over the road like a half tunnel. Progress was measured in metres rather than kilometres and landslides were the workers' constant companion. Even today glacial shifts, and mud and rock slides continue to damage the highway. Two days after we returned from our trip the road was closed for several weeks by bad weather and six separate landslides.

The Karakoram Highway travels through some spectacular scenery and past the Rakaposhi (22,550 feet) and Nangar Parbat (26,660 feet) mountains. Along some parts of the road the scenery resembles moonscape, with glacial moraines and jagged peaks. There is no sign of human life or vegetation. The place is cruelly hot in summer and biting winds rush through the gorges in winter.

The highway also passes through the Hunza Valley which is a beautiful place where the mountains are covered with snow even at the height of summer. It then climbs steadily and follows the ancient caravan route, crossing many big and small glacier tails.

The road to the Khunjerab Pass itself traverses narrow chasms with sheer



*En route to the Kalash Valley.*

sides. When we got there nearly everybody in the party suffered some form of altitude sickness because it is 16,000 feet above sea level — more than twice that of Mount Kosciusko.

At the top there is a small bare plateau with a border post manned by Pakistani border police.

All in all the journeys are well worth the effort... once.

## LETTERS

Sir,

I was recently given a copy of the September, 1987 issue of 'Platypus' which I read with considerable interest.

I found the range of articles to be diverse, informative and timely; a number provided members of the public with a good insight into the current and future operations of the Australian Federal Police.

These articles were balanced with valuable articles from contributors as notable as the recently-retired High Court Justice, the Right Honourable Sir Harry Gibbs.

I would like to congratulate you and your staff on the production of such a high standard publication. I look forward to reading future issues.

Yours sincerely,  
**(Dr) Malcolm C. Hall,**  
 Managing Director,  
 Forensic Science,  
 Technology International Pty. Ltd.  
 South Australia

Sir,

I am writing you to express my thanks for assistance rendered on Saturday 15th August 87 by Senior Constable Graeme Gill of Woden Police. Senior Constable Gill, through his sound advice and professional manner was directly responsible for an amicable solution to a property related matter.

I hope you will convey my appreciation to him for his assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely  
**Mal Howard**  
 Curtin

Letters of thanks from the public often canvas sensitive issues that are inappropriate to publicise in 'Platypus' but the officers concerned still deserve a mention.

Constable Paul Spooner and First Constable Perry Hume have been praised for the way in which they handled a Children's Court matter in Canberra.

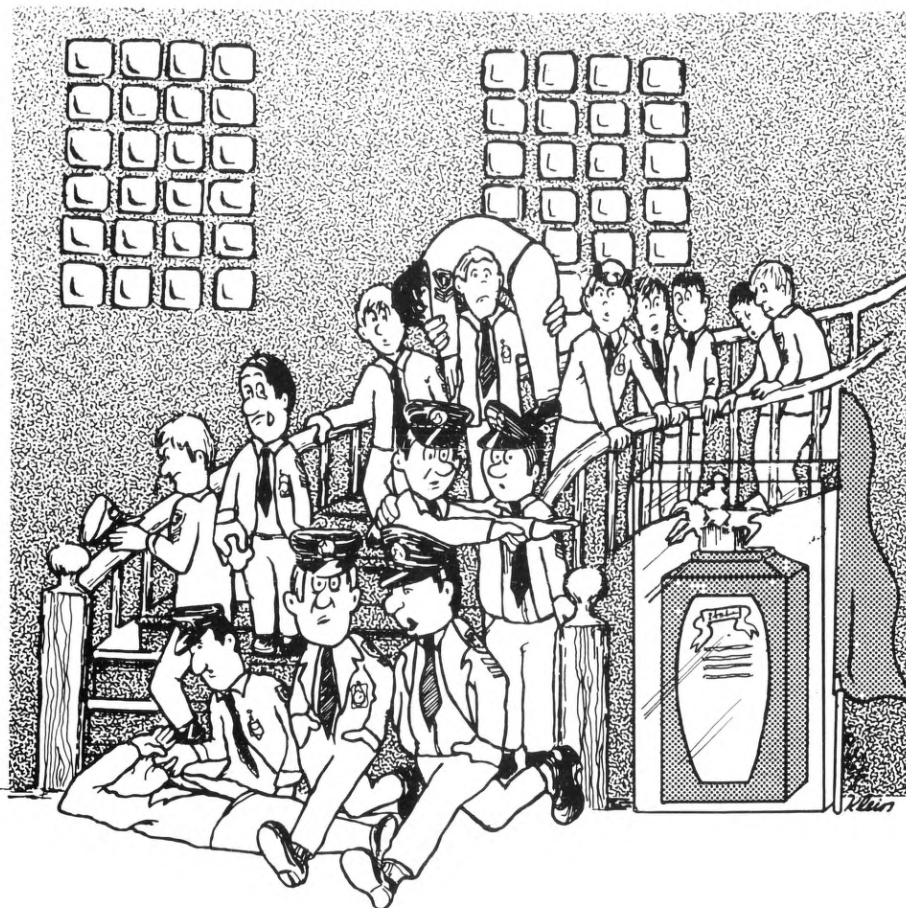
Another letter praises the way Senior Constable Melita Zielonko and First Constable Brian Carter from the Belconnen Station in Canberra handled a young person with a drug problem.

Several officers from Southern Region have been praised by a member of the public for their work in a drug matter still before the courts.

They are Detective Senior Sergeants Shane Castles, Brian Graham and Peter Seel; Detective Senior Constables Stephen Lamborn and John Perce and First Constable Neil Jones.



(From left) H.E. Air Marshal Sir James Roland, Mrs Grey, Lady Roland and Commissioner Grey at a formal dinner at Barton College on September 24. (Picture by Sen. Const. Kathy Wells)



"Looks like Stage 8 means trading our stripes for ulcers."