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Herds, Pastures, and Nomads in the Lashkar Gah Area

INTRODUCTION

USAID as well as the ROA is frequently in need of accurate information of all sorts on which to make realistic decisions on projects, programs, and plans. Reliable information, however, is rarely available. This is especially true of information on the patterns of life of the people as they directly relate to projects. The purpose of this memo is to outline as clearly as possible, given a limited amount of time to collect the information, the socio-cultural context of nomadic sheepherding in the Helmand Valley, specifically in the region of Lashkar Gah. This memo does not pretend to be conclusive, but a beginning. This region is a major wintering-over area for numerous tribes and sub-tribes, and has become more important for these groups in recent years vis-a-vis drought conditions that have reduced available natural desert pastures forcing the herders to take refuge in the artificial environment associated with the canals and drains of the massive irrigation system.

Considering the major role the nomads play in the total livestock picture of the Helmand Valley, and so the economy, it can be concluded that, in terms of funded projects and government action, more attention should be paid to their conditions. The first step in this process is the collection of information. The information to be reported in this paper was mostly collected during late winter and spring, 1972, but was supplemented by further information collected during the fall and winter of 1972-73. It was collected during relatively short field visits to various camps, wells, and pasture sites in the area and illustrates the sort of information that can be collected (and its uses), with a minimum of effort and time. No major obstacles were met in the collection of the information. Hopefully, some of this information may help pin-point some potential problem areas associated with the recent drought conditions. A large portion of this paper was written in November 1972 but was never put in final form.

Location: To get a picture of the context of nomad sheepherding activities in this area, it is necessary to understand the range of choice of camping areas available to these seasonal residents -- the subject of this paper.

On Government Land: One of these choices is to camp and pasture on government land, frequently but not always areas planted in trees, where the nomads may or may not pay the government for grazing and camping rights. An official statement was not sought for such arrangements. These areas offer grazing along the numerous drains and canals as well as on grasses produced by irrigation system seepage, and the watering of the tree planted areas. Groups were questioned in an area between Nad-i-All and Marja. Some stated that they paid 10 afs. per head per season for grazing rights. Other groups said they paid by the camp unit. The actual arrangements were not clear but apparently there has been a greater demand for such camp-grazing sites over the past 3-4 years due to the gradual loss of natural desert pastures in the drought. Several of the groups questioned stated that their traditional camping areas were on desert wells in the region to which they planned to return after 1972's extraordinary rainfall. Several other groups indicated that they, for the first time were coming into the Helmand for winter camping. Their usual winter areas were as distant as Farah and southern Herat. Whether the drought produced permanent changes in some groups' migratory patterns is unknown.

There were some hints that this recent shifting of camping patterns was affecting the health of the herds; this being aside from the losses resulting from the lack of pasturage. It has long been noted that herds grazed in the marshes, and along the system of canals and drains, are infected with liver fluke. There was an outbreak of Black's disease in 1971-72 in the Darweshan area. Virtually every camp group questioned indicated some level of infection with liver fluke. Among the groups that had only recently moved in from traditional desert grazing areas, there were statements that before this move there had been no such infection. With the return of the herds to these traditional desert pastures, many made this return during the fall of 1972, they will carry the liver fluke with them, the infection being permanent. Whether the conditions are right to generate a Black's disease outbreak is not known, i. e., the presence of the vectors necessary for the disease cycle. There is a potential, however, and could be realized between the return of the nomads into the region beginning in early September, and the beginning of the cold weather in November-December. A relatively close monitoring of the situation should be maintained during these warm months, especially with the desert camped groups who may not be in a position to report on outbreaks of disease due to physical isolation or social distance between themselves and government agents.

On Helmand River Floodplain: Related and perhaps over-lapping the government forest land grazing patterns is Helmand river floodplain camping with some camps returning to the same place over the years. Many others have come within the past 2-3 years. Camping and grazing in these areas is apparently free-of-charge although technically the floodplain is probably government land. Because of the availability of water and the linear nature of the floodplain, unbroken by the potentially hazardous (in terms of nomad-farmer conflict) planted agriculture areas, there is likely greater flexibility of movement and choice of campsite than in some other types of areas. Further, the floodplain may provide an alternate route through this agricultural valley to the road system along the canals.

Village Camping: Camping in and around the farm villages of the Helmand is a common pattern and sometimes involves groups of related tribal origins, e.g., Barakzai nomads camping near Barakzai villages. There were also, among others, Ghiljai and Baluch in similar campsites, some of long term origin. Further study needs to be done on the relations between these groups in the Helmand since they likely have direct effect on the settled populations. In some cases, the main source of grazing was along the edges of the ditches and drains. In others, the sheep were being grazed on fallowed land of local Khans at apparently no charge. This pattern was said to add to the fertility of the soil. There were some hints that these same Khans and/or the village Malliks (official village headmen) acted as representatives of the nomads on occasions where government contact was necessary. If these relations follow the patterns found in other Middle Eastern Islamic areas, there is probably some level of patronage involved.

These groups do not appear to be greatly involved in trade, outside animal products, as is apparently found in other regions of the country, as outlined by Ferdinand (1959 and 1962). Steven's survey (p. 84) in the Helmand in 1964 supports my findings.

Some information from surveys in the Khalaj market (Shamalan) perhaps indicate something of the nature of the relations between nomads and villages, especially Khans. Of the 136 sellers of sheep and goats (an estimated 1/4 to 1/3 of the total sellers, although possibly 1/2+ of the animals) 103 (76%) were nomads. Of those 38 persons selling camels (at least 3/4 of all camels being sold), 28 or 74% were nomads. This was occurring in mid-February (18 Feb 72). When questioned on what was motivating them to sell their animals, including

females, the nomad reply was that they were in debt, frequently landowners were mentioned, and they were in the process of paying back before they began their annual move. The early moves in February-March 1972 were sparked by the rains that very rapidly revived the desert pastures. Whether this pattern of debt is the usual one or a product of the drought is difficult to say. We might guess that it is a usual pattern but one aggravated or expanded by the drought.

The position of the nomads vis-a-vis the landowners in this area is likely something quite different from that reported by Ferdinand (1959 and 1962) vis-a-vis the more marginal farmers in the Hazarajat and its fringes. The Hazarajat pattern of relationships is described as one where the nomad acts as a middleman and trader of needed goods brought from the wintering-over low lands and sold on credit to subsistence farmers (e.g., cloth, sugar, and tea). Through default in payment in these trade relations, the nomad has gradually come to own sections of land in the Hazarajat, leaving the Hazara as share-cropper to work it. The exact extent of this change in landownership is not clearly known, but in some areas was estimated at about 5%. Ferdinand indicates that these trade relations apply mainly to the Ghilzai in the eastern part of the country. The area of our study involves primarily Durrani who are noted for their purer pastoral economy.

Recent developments on both sides of the exchange relationship in the Helmand (the nomads exchanging their animal products for basic supplies and foodstuffs produced locally) have probably placed the farmers, especially the larger landowners, in a more advantageous position (if not dominant) over the nomads. The farmers have increased their wealth with greater grain production, while most of the rest of the country produced less, plus the effects of the drought on nomad flocks. As natural desert pasture was reduced, nomads were required to reduce herd size. The price of sheep was considerably reduced. This was very apparent during the fall and winter of 1971-72. The nomads apparently became more dependent on the farmers than in the past with the ending of much of the desert pastures. They apparently were required to buy more grain, corn stalks, and other feed items for their animals produced by the farmers.

The usual pressure to begin spring migration is the appearance of the new crops growing in the fields. Crop damage by their flocks could result in a break in what is probably a mutually dependent relationship between the grain and forage growing farmers, and the animal products of the nomads. In the winter and

spring of 1972, however, conditions were apparently somewhat different with relatively heavy rains. The desert pastures, as noted, began to be revived, and the nomads began to move out to these more isolated areas before beginning their annual move north into the mountains with the late-melting snows.

Desert Camping: There are two variables that influence the mobility of the nomads in the desert areas: Water and pasture. The 2-3 years of drought in the Lash area, apparently ending with the rains in the spring of 1972, reduced the natural desert pastures to the point where many groups left their traditional grazing areas for refuge in the HAVA irrigation system or along the Helmand River. To some unknown extent the nomads returned to their traditional desert grazing areas during the winter of 1972-73.

The center around which groups camp, especially fall and early winter, is the desert well. Even when the pastures were abandoned during the drought, the wells had water. It should be noted that the descriptions presented here come mainly from information gathered about 13 such desert wells located north and to the west of Lashkar Gah.

These wells are hand-dug and generally use animal power, but sometimes human, to draw water to the surface. Cast-off metal cable apparently of HAVA-HAVR origin is in common use but sometimes other hand-made ropes of doubtful strength were being used. Of the two wells whose depths were measured (Pay Sarak and Myan Sarak) the range was 68 to 76 feet respectively. Some wells were said to be of much greater depth. The well shafts are between 1½ to 2 meters across and appear to be rock-lined to some depth. Some of the wells carry the names of those group leaders responsible for having the wells dug, others do not. Locally it is known who had the well dug, what group the well belongs to and who is the present leader.

The kin-group breakdown of the different camp groups is not known in any detail, but we should expect these groups to represent some basic sub-tribe unit or clan, of inter-marrying relatives, with perhaps a limited number of subordinate "stranger" households attached. This is roughly the pattern of kin affiliation found in all nomad camp groups I am aware of recorded in the Middle East Muslim world. The sub-tribe affiliation, as best I can reproduce what was stated for 11 of the wells, is listed below:

<u>SUB-TRIBE</u>	<u>NO. WELLS</u>
Khani Khiel	2
Nurzai	4
Barakzai	2
Asaqzai	1
All Kozai	1
Dagai	1

From this we should note that at least for this particular area there is no homogeneity by tribe of well ownership. It was stated in fairly clear terms that the water in the wells belonged to the groups that traditionally camped there, and except for transit groups, the water was not shared with other groups. The wells were used for human and animal consumption and, except for one well being used by salt miners during the period of drought, there was no evidence of irrigation or other commercial uses.

At least during the dry season, from mid-fall to mid-winter with the first rainfall, the well location limits mobility. The herds were said not to require water every day but every other day. As with the kin-group make-up of the camp groups, more study needs to be done on the herding practices as they relate to range controls. The implied pattern was that animals were watered, taken to distant pastures, grazing as they went, and returned one or two days later. There were generally one or two shepherds with the herds. The herds appeared to be grouped communally, i. e. belonging to the camp group or a section thereof. Before the rains, then, well location appears to place limits on ranging activities and limits the pasture reachable by any well group.

With the rain comes greater mobility and what appears to be a greater dispersion of tent groups. The camp groups on the wells appear to be in the range of 15-20 tents, generally grouped together up to about 1/4 mile from the actual well. I found no evidence of permanent camping in the immediate well location. One explanation was that small children, who have a great deal of freedom to roam the camp area, would be falling in the well if it were near. These are generally long-term campsites with mud walls, perhaps a meter high, being built inside the tent to reduce the problems of the cooler winter winds. (Cartographic Note: On most of the maps of this desert region, in the area of the wells there are symbols indicating "ruins." These "ruins" as seen in air photos sometimes become the low, new walls of the yearly deserted but continuously re-used campsites on the ground. Thus, without checking out on the ground specific sites, it is not possible to distinguish between real ruins and nomad campsites.) Commonly there is a "mosque," in some cases a cave dug into the hillside nearby. There are also graveyards indicating the long-term use of the particular area. In some cases, as old wells cave in or for some other reason come into disuse, new wells are dug nearby, carrying the same name, being used by the same group.

With the rains in mid-winter or early spring come, within a few days, the sprouting of new grasses in the desert. Water collects in pools in the low spots in the various washes that cut across the desert area. In other areas the nomads were seen to have

thrown up small dams or earth works at the bottoms of short wash areas to make, in a very small and crude way what in Texas are known as "tanks." These various pools give the camp groups a great deal of mobility away from the well area. After the rains, then, it is not common to find the full group still camped on the well but to be scattered in groups of 3-5 tents over the desert. The actual patterns of dispersion are not clearly known but a water source is the variable.

Conclusions: This paper has been basically descriptive in nature although somewhat superficial. More study needs to be done in the area to more clearly spell out the socio-cultural variables involved with nomad sheep-herding. These herders of camels, sheep and goats represent a major part of the economics of the area although they only reside there during the winter. Hopefully, in the future planning for the Helmand region, their problems will not be ignored.

REFERENCES:

- Klaus Ferdinand, Preliminary Notes on Hazara Culture, Kobenhavn, 1959, 51 pp.
"Nomad Expansion and Commerce in Central Afghanistan," Folk,
Vol. 4, 1962, 123-159.
- I. M. Stevens and K. Tarzi, Economics of Agriculture Production in Helmand Valley,
1964, appendix on Sheep Herding.

SKETCH MAP OF NOMAD WELLS

NORTH AND WEST OF LASHKAR GAH

(Well names are a combination of what was said by locals plus names from other maps. There is room for error.)

