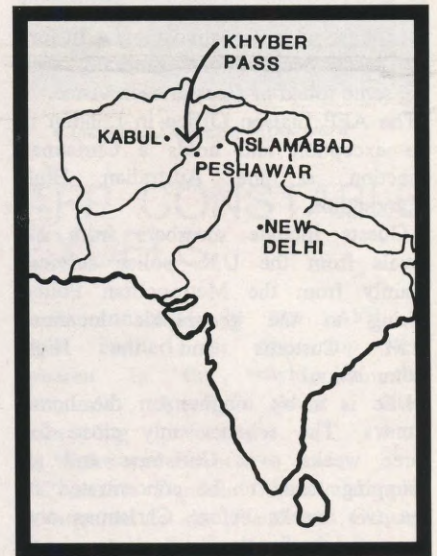


NO CARRY ON

UP THE KHYBER



Sevgi Blake at the Western end of the Khyber Pass



One of the friendly faces in Landi Kotal



BANDITS, wild tribesmen and a nearby war were all part of the attraction for a group of Australians who visited this famous area.

The AFP Liaison Officer in Islamabad, Detective Inspector Steve Polden, filed this report.

The Khyber Pass first became an important and strategic passage through the mountains which separate Afghanistan and the Indian sub-continent in 1586 when the Moghul Emperor Akbar built the Grand Trunk road.

This road connected Delhi and Kabul by the most direct link. The Pass and surrounding mountains are still controlled by the Pathan tribesmen. The Khyber Pass is situated in the tribal area of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, about four hours drive from Islamabad.

The Pakistan authorities - as did the British before them - have great difficulty in

The Frontier Constabulary escort



policing the Pass and safeguarding caravans and travellers.

The Pass itself has been closed to foreigners for several years due to terrorist attacks, tribal unrest, banditry and the bombing and artillery shelling of areas on the western side by the armed forces of the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.

Recently, however, three women from the Australian Embassy in Islamabad together with a small number of people from an Asian Study Group, managed to get permission from the Pakistan authorities to travel up the Khyber Pass as far as the tribal town of Landi Kotal at the western end. Getting permission took quite a long time because the Pakistan Government is extremely sensitive about the goings-on in that area of the Frontier Province.

On October 30, Mrs Bev Polden, Mrs Sevgi Blake (wife of the Senior Administrative Officer and also the AFP LO's Administrative Assistant) and Mrs Libby Haigh (wife of the Counsellor) and others from the Asian Study Group left Peshawar en route to the Pass.

In Peshawar they were joined by two groups of armed Frontier Constabulary provided by the Pakistan Government.

Shortly after leaving Peshawar the bus passed across a dusty plain into the tribal area. The mud-walled compounds, complete with turrets, gunholes and huge corrugated iron gates in which the Pathans live could be seen dotted here and there.

The Pass itself begins at Jamrud Fort which is about 18 kilometres from Peshawar and it is fairly wide at this point.

Jamrud Fort was built in 1823 by the

Local weaponry demonstrated- fix bayonets!



Sikhs.

The road then zig-zags upwards for about nine kilometres where one can look back to the Peshawar Plain in the distance.

En route the bus passes pickets on every possible vantage point which are manned by the men of the Khyber Rifles, and the Shagai Fort which is similarly manned. Shagai Fort was built by the British in the 1920s.

Just past this point the road descends for about four kilometres to the narrowest part of the Pass. Before it was widened there were areas here where two fully-loaded camels could not pass each other. High above this section is Ali Masjid Fort which not only guards this part but commands the entire length of the Pass.

Still proceeding west towards the Afghan border, one can observe several fortified villages complete with watch towers and gun slots in the walls.

A few kilometres on one arrives at

The symbolic gateway to the Khyber Pass, the Bab-el-Khyber at Jamrud just outside Peshawar.

Landi Kotal, a smugglers' town, where all types of smuggled goods including cloth, electrical goods, firearms of all types and drugs are openly for sale in the bazaar.

The Government of Pakistan has very little control in Landi Kotal and the Frontier Constabulary men were noticeably a little nervous at this point.

The Pathans swagger around the town and bazaar carrying all sorts of weaponry ranging from modern assault rifles to .303 rifles left over from British rule or made locally in Dara.

Members of the Afridi Tribe, who comprise most of the population in the Khyber, are taught from childhood to distrust all mankind (including their relatives) and to be in readiness to strike the first blow for the safety of their own lives.

In fact, lives in the tribal area are still taken with the same disdainful ease as they were a century ago. Landi Kotal is not unlike a town out of the old wild west. Photography is not encouraged.

A short distance further on from Landi Kotal is a vantage point from where one can see the Torkham Border Post and Afghanistan itself. The Frontier Constabulary men were not prepared to proceed past this point and so this was as far as the group was able to go. From Peshawar, Torkham is about 56 kilometres and it can be easily recognised as a patch green on the barren Afghan plain at the western end of the Pass.

Generally, during their visit to the Pass, the Pathans treated the visitors with curiosity and although they were not particularly friendly, were not aggressive.