TRIP REPORT

SUBJECT: Notes on Herding, Pastures and Nomads in the North Central Registan

This report is based on a two-day field trip into the North Central Registan desert made during the middle of November 1973. This is the area bordered on the North by the Arghandab River, on the east by the Helmand River, and on the north and west by the Duri River. Roughly translated, Registan means the place or country of sand(Farsi). The trip was made with a USAID driver from Lashkar Gah, and a Baluch nomad, a man of perhaps 50-55 that we located in a newly established camp 5-10 miles south of Darwishan. Considering that he continiously re-directed our vehicle on to the proper course and we hit our destinations without backtracking or making any major deviations in course in this area with few land marks observable to me (with my topo-map), it became obvious that he knew the area well. The routes shown on the government topo map vary considerably in their visibility. In some of the flat areas the routes are equivalent to a jeep road, clearly marked with use. In other areas, particularly through the sand dune areas (which drift), the routes tend to be visible only periodically and probably change on occasion. This report, while tentative in its conclusions, should be considered supplementary to the memo "Herds, Pastures and Nomads in the Lashkar Gah Area," written in October 1973 to Mr. James Wedberg, Assistant Program Officer.

We entered the desert from the Darwishan irrigation - drain system near the shrine (zyarat) of Amir Beland Saheb about 10 miles south of Darwishan. Almost immediately after leaving the flood plain of the Helmand River the sand dunes begin, gradually growing larger. The ridges of these dunes generally run in a north-south direction. The highest of these dunes could be no more than 50-75 feet high and so do not compare with the much larger dunes reported farther south and also farther north along the Arghandab River in the Kandahar direction by Francois Balsan in the Journal of the Royal Asian Society, 1972. In the south he reports dunes of up to 80 meters.

According to the topographical maps there should be an "Asadullahkhan Kala" about 10 miles east of our starting point. Neither our Baluch guide nor villagers in the area of the shrine, our starting point, had any idea of its location or existance. If it is there we must have passed not more than 1 1/2 - 2 miles from it. The areas 5-10 miles into the sand dunes are notable for the increase in quantity and size of desert "trees" which are probably some variety of salt cedar. They do not get very tall but the trunks, buried in sand, range up to 6-7 inches in diameter. The increase in the size growth is likely related directly to the ability of heavy vehicles to get into the area to collect fire wood. (see photo) For the first 3-5 miles there is evidence of

considerable truck traffic, gradually diminishing. Camel tracks and trails are noticeable at any point throughout the entire area covered.

In the area through which we passed, the sand dunes gradually diminish into more rolling hills. At perhaps 20 miles, these hills flatten into a plain. This change in topography is accompanied by a change in vegetation with the salt cedar type of bush largely disappearing; it continues only along a series of washes flanked by sand that cut through some of the region. The ground cover becomes much thicker with what I can only guess at: mostly sage and other tough varieties of small bush and grass. I did not notice much camel thorn. The relatively dense ground cover of vegetation is probably the combined results of rain-fall and lack of intensive grazing; the area does receive limited use.

Fairly soon after emerging on to the rolling plain our guide began to point out a number of the "tanks" or hand-dug ponds noted in the previous report. These are referred to as nawer (Pashtu). They are larger and have a much more permanent look about them than most constructions for water collection noted in the clay deserts north-west of Lashkar Gah.

Our guide directed us to the first of a number of clusters of nawer located in the bottom of what appeared to be a dry, shallow lake bed without vegetation. This was the Gorestani Nawer with which the guide was associated. These dry lake beds, or sinks, are sometimes a mile across; others are relatively narrow (100-300 yards) but long closed "valleys" sitting between gently rolling terrain. Some are shallow (10-20 feet below surounding ground) while others are deep with escarpment banks with drops of 50-75 feet.

The nawer are of generally one design. (see photo) They are elongated horseshoe shaped structures 25-35 yards long and 10-15 yards wide with the open end facing upslope. In the dry lake beds this slope is not easily determined. The earth removed is piled around the edges. The actual excavation may be 3-4 feet deep with the larger nawer. In some cases in the flat lake beds where the flow of rain water requires directing, small earth works were constructed out from the nawer entrance to deflect and catch more of the water. In two cases there was evidence of tractors having been used in cleaning and deepening the excavations. Most likely these come in from the north, which appears to be the most common direction of entrance into the plain region for wheeled vehicles.

The nawer is apparently a kin group -- camp group operation but the size of group or number of tents associated with any particular nawer is a subject for observation. The cluster of nawer in a sink indicates a concentration of population during the season of use. Unlike the clay deserts to the north, the sandy nature of much of the soil probably limits the wide dispersion of tents over the plain during even the rainy season. In the clay desert, water collects in natural sinks and along the washes allowing nomad