

## The Snow Sellers of Mangalat, Iran

By RICHARD A. WATSON

In the high limestone mountains north of Kermanshah/Iran, are a number of small villages populated by transhumant Kurds. It was while looking for evidences of pleistocene glaciation in these mountains<sup>1</sup> that I first had contact with the people of Mangalat<sup>2</sup>. I wished to climb Kuh-i-Parau, the highest peak in the Bisitun massif which is some 20 kilometers north of Kermanshah and about the same distance west of Bisitun spring. Bisitun, of course, is known for the bas-relief carvings of Darius and others on the steep limestone cliffs above the spring, and more recently by the cave excavations of CARLTON S. COON<sup>3</sup>.

According to custom, it was my duty and privilege to hire guides for my first expedition into the mountains. A Kermanshah businessman went with me to the village of Mangalat, whose *kadkhoda* (headman) he knew. Arrangements were made in the *kadkhoda*'s goathair tent while his daughter-in-law made the tea, at the same time keeping her year-old son swinging in a large hammock which extended from the center pole to one edge of the tent and mooved in a six-foot arc. Since it was late in the year and the snows were expected soon, I left the next morning (12 November 1959) with an old shepherd, Ali Khan, and the *kadkhoda*'s younger son, Ali Sherif. From the village to the peak and back was 30 kilometers. For the climb and descent of some 6,000 feet we needed 12 long hours. The ascent was enlivened by my guides' taking me up a route which required the climbing of rock faces, sometimes with a great deal of exposure. They would race ahead to sit in a spot where they would have a fine view in case I fell. On the way down they chose a route where we could walk. However, it was even more dangerous for me descending, since their concern to keep ahead of me at all times meant that the

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<sup>2</sup> A more complete study of the Mangalat transhumant villagers is in preparation by my wife, PATTY JO WATSON, who lived with them for three weeks. The population of Mangalat is 160; the population of Kermanshah is 125,000.

<sup>3</sup> Cave explorations in Iran 1949. Philadelphia 1951.