

HUNZA (BALTIT)

also called Baltit, **town** in **Pakistani**-administered northwestern **Jammu and Kashmir state**, in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent.

Formerly a small principality under the **Mir of Hunza**, it joined with **Pakistan in 1947**.

The **town**, situated on the west bank of the **Hunza River**, was a stopping place for travelers descending from the **Hindu Kush mountains** into the **Vale of Kashmir**.

Surrounded by snow-capped mountain peaks such as the **Rakaposhi**, vast glaciers such as the **Ulter**, and deep gorges, **Hunza** is accessible by mountain road from **Gilgit**.

Roses, pansies, lilies, zinnias, and cosmos grow wild in the area, as do **willow, fir, and poplar trees**.

Snow leopard, markhor (a goat), ibex, yak, red-striped fox, duck, and Marco Polo sheep are found.

The local inhabitants use **irrigation** to grow crops of **rice, corn (maize), fruits, and vegetables**.

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Karakoram Mountain Range

Chinese (Wade-Giles) K'a-la-k'un-lun Shan

great mountain system of **Central Asia** extending approximately 300 miles (480 km) from easternmost **Afghanistan** southeastward into **Jammu and Kashmir**. The system occupies about 80,000 square miles (207,000 square km).

The **Karakorams** consist of a group of parallel ranges with several spurs and are characterized by craggy peaks, steep slopes, and heavy glaciation. The range forms **one of the highest mountain systems in the world**, with an average height of about **20,000 feet (6,100 m)**. Four peaks exceed 26,000 feet (7,900 m) in elevation, the highest being **K2 (Godwin-Austen)** at 28,251 feet (8,611 m), the second highest peak in the world. The international boundaries of **China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and Tajikistan** all converge within the highest mountains of the system.

The **Karakorams** serve as a **watershed** for the **basins** of the **Indus and Tarim rivers**, whose principal sources are the melted waters of both seasonal and perpetual snows and glaciers.

The regional climate in the **Karakorams** is for the most part **semiarid** and **sharply continental**. The **southern slopes** are exposed to the humidifying influence of the **monsoons** coming in from the **Indian Ocean**, but the **northern slopes** are extremely dry.

Surrounded by a number of other very high mountain ranges with immense glaciers, the **Karakorams** are **virtually inaccessible**. Mountain passes are situated at elevations of about 16,000 feet (about 4,900 m) and are open only five or six months of the year. The completion of the **Karakoram Highway** in 1978 improved transportation in the region.

Owing to **severe natural conditions**, the **mountain population is very sparse**. In the **south** the inhabitants are concentrated mainly in a few small towns; while on the **northern slope Tibetan** farmers live in villages at elevations up to 14,800 feet (4,500 m). Most engage in **subsistence agriculture** and livestock raising.

Wild animals of the region include the snow leopard, wild yak, and Tibetan antelope.

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Karakoram Mountain Range

Physical features

Plant and animal life In the lower valleys almost all profuse vegetation is anthropogenic (i.e., affected by human activities). **Mountain oases** perched on rocky outcrops are watered by intricate irrigation channels from melting glaciers. The arid and rocky lower slopes support only discontinuous grazing areas, but extensive undulating pastures intersperse the high peaks.



Terraced fields of the **Hunza River Valley** in the Karakoram Range, Pakistan.

The **Karakorams** have upper and lower tree lines, the upper delimited by cold and the lower by aridity; within these lines is found only degraded, sparse tree cover. **Willow**, **poplar**, and **oleander** thickets occur along watercourses to 10,000 feet. **Juniper** is found on high slopes among seasonal snowfields. **Shrubs of the genus Artemisia** provide sparse cover on the lower slopes.

Hunting by the local populace, and especially by **military troops** stationed on the frontiers, has taken a severe toll on mountain wildlife. **Marco Polo sheep** now breed in the eastern Pamirs and migrate to the **western Karakorams**. The **Ladakh urial** inhabits the high, flatter mountains to the east, while the **Siberian ibex** and the **markhor (both wild goats)** negotiate the craggy slopes. The brown bear, lynx, and snow leopard are endangered species. The **Khunjerab National Park in Pakistan** and the contiguous **T'a-shih-k'u-erh-kan (Tash Kurghan) Nature Reserve in China** serve as refuges for high-mountain animals.

In the eastern margins, the kiang and several other wild ungulates, including a small number of wild yaks, roam the desolate plateau. Large raptors, notably the Himalayan griffon, lammergeier, and golden eagle, soar in the updrafts of mountain winds.

The people

The population of the **Karakoram Range** is concentrated in three towns—**Gilgit** and **Skardu** in **Pakistan** and **Leh** in the **Ladakh region of India**—and in **small villages** throughout the region perched on rocky slopes or beside raging torrents. Most mountain-dwellers are **Shi'ite Muslims** of the **Isma'ilite (Sevener) or Ithna 'Ashariyah (Twelver) sects**. **Tibetan (or Lamaistic) Buddhism** is prevalent in Ladakh. Wakhi-speaking mountain Tajik (Tadzhik), interspersed with Turkic-speaking Kyrgyz and Uighur, inhabit the northern slopes, while on the southern slopes **military troops** from lower India and Pakistan intermingle with Kohistani- (Dardic-) speaking people in **Gilgit** district and with the Tibetan-speaking population of Baltistan and Ladakh.

On the **northern**, much drier Karakoram slopes descending to the oases around the Tarim Basin in **China**, population density is quite low. **An enclave of Burushaski-speaking people exists in Hunza and Nagir and in the adjacent valley of Yasin. Their language is not known to be related to any other.**

Despite the marginality and remoteness of the **Karakoram Range**, the local population has undergone considerable movement throughout its history. Raiding by caravans crossing the range and a **slave trade** that resulted from continual warfare caused wide dispersals. Passes for foot traffic across the mountains, no longer used, led northward from Skardu and Leh and from the Vale of Kashmir into **China** to T'a-shih-k'u-erh-kan and thence to the ancient trading centres of Yarkant (Sha-ch'e) and Kashgar (K'a-shih) and to the Tarim Basin oases. **Buddhist monasteries** formerly exercised great control over subjects and land.

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