

SNAPSHOTS



From left: Zhang Hongying gives a herdsman a checkup; Yelxat slips and falls on an icy slope; Zhang asks a pregnant woman how she has been feeling lately.

MEDICINE IN THE MOUNTAINS

A health center in the Bozader pastoral district, set up in 1978, is still going strong



The four doctors from the health center in the Bozader pastoral district in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region (from left): Ashat, Zhang Hongying, Yelxat and Seysen.

PHOTOS BY JIANG WENYAO / XINHUA



Seysen delivers medicine to herders.

By ZHANG LEI

The Bozader Winter Pasture, in Tekes county of the Ili Kazak autonomous prefecture in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, is renowned for its pastureland, but it is also notorious for its hazardous paths. If you are not familiar with the terrain, you can easily get confused about where it is safe to walk on the snowy slopes.

Steep mountains separate the pasture from the outside world.

However, a health center in the Bozader pastoral district, set up in 1978, has been serving the commu-

nity in this unforgiving territory for the past 30 years.

The average altitude in the region is more than 2,500 meters, and there are mountains and valleys between one household and the next. In order to get medicines to every household that needs them, the clinic team constantly needs to find new routes.

To do this, they set out from the foot of a mountain, moving slowly and carefully with reins of their horses in one hand.

When they reach a certain height, they have to press their bodies against the cliffs and edge forward along the path, because the steep drop is too close for comfort.

It is easy to feel dwarfed by the sheer scale of the place, and in these conditions it is essential for the doctors to watch out for one another.

Yelxat takes the lead, with Zhang Hongying in the middle, followed by Ashat and Seysen.

The four doctors from the clinic are all dressed in warm coats and hats. Holding bronze horse whips, they look more like herdsmen than medical personnel. Only the red cross on the saddle bags is a clue to their true identity.

The full mountain medical team consists of men and women — young and old, Kazakh and Han — all dedicated to providing care in an inhospitable area.