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## Fabled Afghan province of Nuristan keeps US at bay

By Ben Sheppard

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A region of soaring mountains, rare languages and isolated tribes, Nuristan in northeastern Afghanistan has long held a special fascination for writers and hardy travellers.

A British colonel in 1910 described it as "more impracticable than either of the poles," and in recent years the United States army has learnt that the area's formidable reputation is well deserved.

Just 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) inside the provincial border, a convoy of US military vehicles comes to a halt on a rocky, winding track.

"It takes an act of God to get us to go further," says Captain Matthew Frye.

Any advance into Nuristan beyond the Gondalabuk bridge brings guaranteed rocket and gun attacks from insurgents who use the rugged terrain and their local knowledge to keep the US soldiers away.

The only permanent US military presence in Nuristan is now at Kalagush in the southwest corner of the province.

One US post, Camp Keating, was established in the mountains near the border with Pakistan in 2006 to disrupt insurgent safe havens and to tackle smuggling.