

# Lost Buddhist city found in Afghanistan

Nick Fielding

THE ruins of an unknown Buddhist city dating from the 2nd century have been found in a remote upland valley in southern Afghanistan, forcing historians to redraw their map of an ancient civilisation.

Known locally as Kaffir Kot, Fortress of the Infidels, the lost city is hidden behind a 12,000ft mountain pass and buried under sand.

Although it has been uncovered by villagers in the past few weeks, it is already being pillaged by illegal traders in ancient artefacts. Much of the treasure, including priceless clay Buddha's, is finding its way to Pakistan for shipment to black markets in the West.

Jim Williams from the United Nations cultural organi-



A Buddha from the lost city

sation Unesco, has appealed for the 20-square-mile area to be guarded. "Without protection it will quickly be reduced to rubble and a place of international importance will have been destroyed," he said.

Kaffir Kot, which is just over 100 miles southwest of Kabul,

is in an area that has been fiercely contested by Pashtun Taliban and Tajik Northern Alliance tribesmen. Foreigners who have detailed knowledge of where ancient ruins may be located have only recently been able to reach such areas.

Williams predicted that once it had been explored by professional archaeologists, Kaffir Kot would "radically rewrite the history books".

It was probably built by the Buddhist Gandhara civilisation, which until now had been thought to exist in pockets of northern Afghanistan and Pakistan, he said. Kaffir Kot suggests Gandhara civilisations may have been contiguous, forming a much larger empire than had been realised.

Experts are trying to work out why Kaffir Kot has so many ruins of small, square, clay



brick buildings with domed roofs. These are more sophisticated than the Buddhist architecture of Bamian, to the north, where giant standing Buddha's up to 160ft high were blown up by the Taliban last year. Archaeologists hope to discover a reclining Buddha of a similar size in Kaffir Kot.

A black charcoal line in the