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Unexplored Basuto Land.

By Lieut.-Colonel Sir MARSHALL CLARKE, K.C.M.G., H.M. Commissioner
for Basuto Land.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, April 23rd, 1888.)

Map, p. 548.

BRITISH BASUTO LAND is bounded by the Orange Free State, the Cape Colony, and Natal. It comprises the watershed of the Caledon river and the basin of the head waters of the Orange river. The Caledon for the first 130 miles of its course divides Basuto Land from the Orange Free State, and the country between it and the Drakensberg, or Maluti as the Basuto call their mountains, has been known to Europeans for the last fifty years.

Here, under the protection of Moshesh, the consolidator of the tribe, the French Protestant missionaries began the work they have since so earnestly and perseveringly carried on; and here was the field of many a fight between Boers and blacks from the time of the abandonment of the Orange River Sovereignty, the consequent establishment of the Orange Free State, and the annexation of what could be reasonably saved to the Basuto by Sir Philip Wodehouse, acting on the part of Her Majesty's Government in 1868.

Since the annexation the country has been divided into magistracies, intersected by roads, and is now thickly populated, and for the most part under cultivation.

The larger section of Basuto Land, comprising the basin of the head waters of the Orange river, has hitherto been but little explored. The Drakensberg range appears to have formerly been a sandstone plateau, 8000 to 10,000 feet in height, the upper stratum of coarse friable rock sloping to the south and west, but falling away in perpendicular cliffs to the eastward. Now it is everywhere intersected by streams which have cut courses for themselves, in some places two and three thousand feet below the normal level of the mountains. The ridges between the river valleys are during a great part of the winter covered with snow and impassable. At any time of the year the best routes are obtained by following the watercourses: this is attended with some risk when the rivers are in flood, as in the narrow valleys it entails crossing continually from side to side to avoid the necessity of making considerable detours.

Until recently the mountains were uninhabited. The Bushmen, whom the Basuto on their arrival from the northward found in possession, were gradually driven to the most difficult country, till in 1871 the last remnant were, in retaliation for repeated cattle thefts, destroyed by Jonathan and Joel Molapo, grandsons of Moshesh, who lived then as now in Northern Basutoland.

During the late rebellion of the Basuto against the Cape Colony a number of the Batlokoa tribe, long settled in Griqualand East, took up arms against the Government, and, on the re-establishment of peace, found themselves exiles from their homes and dependent for their existence on the Basuto, for whose cause they had lost all they possessed. After some years, seeing they were still scattered and recipients of a grudging charity, Ledingwana, their chief, obtained permission from the paramount chief Letsie to collect and take his people into the mountains where they could support themselves on game. He settled at the junction of the Seate and Sengu, where many of his clansmen, living on farms in the Orange Free State and Natal, joined him, and proceeded to cultivate any available ground he could find in the elevated mountain valleys.

The chief object of the tour of which I subjoin an account was to visit these people and see how they lived.

At midday on the 15th of October, accompanied by an officer of the Basutoland police, together with representatives of Letsie, Jonathan, and Joel Molapo, I left Butha Buthe, the northernmost police station in Basuto Land. Our party consisted of seventeen men and thirty horses. As supplies of meat could only be obtained at certain points on the route, it was necessary to take bread and groceries to last for three weeks to allow for detention by swollen rivers. Each of the followers took with him also a supply of maize, ground very fine, roasted and mixed with sugar or salt. A quantity of this is always carried by Basuto when journeying or campaigning, and is often their main sustenance for weeks at a time.

So little is yet known of the mountains by Basuto living in the plains that it was impossible to find a guide for any considerable distance. I had therefore to be dependent upon those picked up at villages *en route*, who, as a rule, were ignorant of every place beyond their own grazing and hunting ground and the road to the chief to whom they owed allegiance.

In the evening of the 15th we got to the village of Molupi, a headman living under the chief Joel Molapo; thence, ascending the Hololo, a tributary of the Caledon, E.S.E., arrived at the foot of a steep pass called Rahane, reaching the top in four hours and a half. This proved to be on the water-divide between the Orange and Caledon rivers, 8300 feet above sea-level. At the foot of the pass to the east we crossed a strong stream called the Malibamatsu (black fountain) rising near the sources of the Caledon and forming a principal source of the Semena, which joins the Orange river. An indistinct cattle path leading south by east, parallel to a rivulet tributary of Malibamatsu, was then followed for an hour and a half to a ridge 8900 feet above the sea, dividing the Malibamatsu from its tributary the Motete, at which we arrived after an hour's further ride and there slept.

The country after leaving the Rahane was wild and bleak, and is

said to be quite uninhabitable. The contours of the hills were rounded ; snow lay in patches ; the grass was coarse and tussocky, and the exposed ground was either peat, sandstone, or sandstone gravel, clumps of everlasting flowers here and there relieving the neutral mountain tints. A few hartebeest and Vaal rheboks were seen, and several coveys of grey francolin (Cape partridges) flushed under the horses. The track in many places was undermined by small rats with white breast and belly, some being occasionally seen sunning themselves on the stones outside their burrows, which were rounds of grass and rubbish piled up, so the guide said, since the melting of the snow.

Two hours and a half from the Motete we reached a crest called Motai, at an elevation of 10,450 feet, and then, leading the horses, struck into a well-beaten bridle-path — Mopedi's — which is the road from Witzes Hoek, in the Harrismith District O.F.S., to South Basutoland. The scenery at this point was very fine. To the north, as far as could be seen, extended the bleak country already described ; to the east a river valley with precipitous sides barred the course ; while to the south no limit could be traced to the billowy sea of peak and crest.

Continuing Mopedi's road for two hours nearly due south, the path began to descend, and led into a narrow valley with deep grassy sides that met in the bed of a little rivulet. Two hours and a half thence brought us to a cattle post of the chief Joel Molapo, elevation 6630 feet.

In descending, the soil became finer and the grass sweeter. At the cattle post, in charge of a head-man named Lekunya, the grazing was good and a quantity of land was under cultivation ; the wheat looked well in ear, and the maize and millet were just appearing above ground. An hour and a half's ride further on is found Ledingwana's place, situated in an extensive valley intersected by deeply cut watercourses. The soil there is principally a fine gravel. We stopped at Ledingwana's one day.

Three miles south of our camp we found the junction of the principal sources of the Orange river, the eastern, called by the Basuto Sengu (the river), the name they apply to the Orange river, and a smaller stream the Seate. The general course of the Sengu is north and south. From Ledingwana's is distant three days' journey in a direction S.S.E., Bushman's Pass, by which Langalebalele entered Basuto Land in his flight from Natal.

On the morning of the 20th, leaving our camp, we ascended the course of the Seate in a north-westerly direction for two hours, until reaching the most advanced cattle post, whence there was neither track nor foot-path to guide us. Continuing the course for five hours more, and crossing the stream fourteen times, we encamped on its banks at an elevation of 6940 feet. During the day fresh spoor of eland was seen, and occasionally sight of otter. The scenery round the camp was very grand. The valley, at first some miles in width but traversed by spurs, had become narrow, until finally there was little room left to ride between

the stream and the bases of the hills, which rose abruptly thousands of feet on either side.

Next morning our course lay along the river for an hour; thence leaving it we entered a ravine, breaking eastward, the sides of which were steep grass slopes, ending in a precipitous fall in some places hundreds of feet to the stream below. The riding was rough; the stones dislodged by the ponies in their scrambles bounded into the water far beneath in such an audible manner as would have shaken the nerves of plain bred horses, but in no way affected our tough little mountaineers. It took two hours ascending through this ravine to the water-divide of the Sengu and Seate, at an elevation of 10,650 feet, from which point were revealed the plains of the Orange Free State with Harrismith Hill in the foreground, the northern portions of Natal and Zululand, and the long line of the Drakensberg extending towards the Transvaal, the morning clouds giving them the appearance at the first glance of a gigantic snow-clad range.

In the near distance a singular knife-shaped cliff standing prominently out and riven in some places from top to bottom was pointed out as being near the sources of the Sengu. The cliff, which took an hour and three-quarters to reach, proved to be a prominence on the precipitous wall, that for some 50 or 60 miles, without a break, forms a barrier between Natal and Basuto Land; below it we looked down some three or four hundred feet of perpendicular rock upon a singularly broken country surmounted by a solitary bluff, grass topped, but inaccessible, apparently rising the same altitude as the cliff. The picture was made wilder by a rift, 50 or 60 feet across, running the entire depth of the cliff, and having no visible outlet at the bottom. In the broken country on the Natal side rises a branch of the Tugela, whose falls could be indistinctly heard a few hundred yards distant on the Basuto Land side. A swamp, about a mile in diameter, situated in a depression of the mountain, gives rise to the Sengu; and here at an altitude of 9560 feet is the divide between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Following the course of the Sengu, which at its source is a mere rivulet, for four hours and a half, we encamped for the night, killing an eland *en route*. Next day the same course was observed for three hours and a half, and after crossing the water-divide we struck the cattle post left two days before.

The beds of the Sengu and Seate are of hard rock, red or green in colour, profusely studded with amorphous fragments of felspar; the tops of the hills are of very coarse sandstone. Three ranges divide the united Sengu and Seate from Natal. The streams taking their rise in these hills and joining the Sengu before its junction with the Seate are called Koakoatsi, Tlanyaku, Moremoholo, Mokhothlong. The Moremoholo rises near Bushman's River Pass, and it was along its course that the chief Langalebalele fled.

About the village of Ledingwana the soil is gravelly on the heights, though good arable land is found in patches close to the rivers. Here and there we observed little heaps of pebbles, the largest about the size of a pea, that appear to have been removed by large black ants when making their galleries. Owing to early frosts the people settled in this neighbourhood had reaped but one crop of maize or millet during the four years they had cultivated; but wheat, potatoes, and lentils had done well. Cattle and horses, many of which had been brought from the low countries of Natal and East Griqualand, seemed to suffer from the bleak winds and coarse food of the mountains. Sheep, however, lately introduced, promise to succeed.

Leaving Ledingwana's at 7 a.m. on the 24th, we again skirted the river, finding reeds and willow trees in abundance. Formerly all the mountain streams were lined with willows, but they have been wastefully used for building and firing purposes. An effort is now being made to preserve the residue.

After five and a half hours' ride the last of the Batlokoa villages was passed; then came those of the Basuto living under the chief Tlakanelo, and eleven miles further on the junction of the Semena and Orange river.

The Semena takes its rise near the sources of the Caledon, and has perhaps the largest drainage of any of the head waters of the Orange river. On reaching the Semena, though the main river was comparatively low, we found it in flood, and were unable to take the usual road which follows its course, but had to make a detour which took five hours and a half, and thus doubled the distance by the direct route to Tlakanelo's village.

Tlakanelo is a petty chief, placed by Letsie in charge of numerous cattle posts; his place is one day and a half from Matatiele by a pass—Leteba's—bearing 165°. Within a few miles of the village is the cave Sehonghong, formerly the home of the last Bushman chief, Soai, who ruled in the Lesutho. It is a simple overhanging rock, the wall in rear being covered with pictures of hunting scenes, war dances, predatory expeditions, and various wild animals. Eland, hippopotamus, and the smaller buck are all recognisable, while occasionally is depicted the uncouth form of the Rain-god. In all the fighting pictures the Bushman is shown victorious. He is drawing his bow with tiny hands, or balancing himself on shapely feet, throwing the assegai. His foes, on the other hand, are exhibited with disproportionately big hands, fleeing on calfless legs stuck like broom-handles into the middle of their feet, and in the rear appear Bushwomen and boys driving herds of horses and cattle, the spoils of victory.

These Bushmen were thorough Bohemians in their habits. The only traces of cultivation found by the Basuto expedition that finally exterminated them were a few little plots of tobacco near their caves.

When hungry they hunted, and when too lazy to hunt they stole. They cared not to keep domesticated animals, and ate those captured as quickly as possible, first sending a portion to the Baphuti chief Moirosi, who had married in a left-handed manner some of their women, and to whom they acknowledged a sort of fealty. The best of the captured horses were used for the chase, but when unsuccessful, they were eaten. Their most formidable weapons were arrows having poisoned heads; the secret of this poison is said to be known to some of the native Basuto doctors.

Remaining a day at the Orange river, and finding it passable, we crossed it, and riding three hours and three-quarters in a direction 320° , arrived at the top of the range bordering the river valley, 9550 feet, passing the principal cattle posts of Letsie, where the horses and cattle were to be seen grazing unherded on the slopes, the only cultivation being adjacent to villages.

A descent of the west side of the range was then made to a small stream flowing into the Mantsunyane, called the Lesobeng, along which we rode for an hour and three-quarters; then taking a westerly direction, ascended a slope for an hour and a half. Here, at an altitude of 9680 feet, was an extensive moorland, bleak and exposed, with coarse and patchy grass.

In the absence of any path a westerly course was next struck, and after skirting a number of forbidding looking bogs, amongst which the Mantsunyane rises, two hours' ride brought us to the head of a winding valley, following which for three hours and a half we came to the Mantsunyane, a strong stream having banks at the point of crossing 500 feet high. In this part many hartebeest were seen.

A ride of three hours, mostly along the hill-tops, led to the Sengunyane, which, joined by the Mantsunyane, flows into the Orange. Five hours further on is the ridge separating the Sengunyane from the Makhaleng (Cornet Spruit), whence could be seen the hills bordering the Orange Free State. We now fell into a well-beaten halter path; every plot of ground capable of cultivation was ploughed, and the numerous kraals in which the stock was confined at night showed that we had left the country where cattle is king.

Three hours' ride from the Divide brought us to the Makhaleng, a strong stream which for some twenty-five miles before it joins the Orange, forms the boundary between the Orange Free State and Basuto Land. Crossing it we rose a pass called the Lesobeng, at an elevation of 6940 feet, and then steadily descending reached the foot of the Drakensberg, near the Roman Catholic mission station at Roma, 18 miles from Maseru. Maseru is 4780 feet above sea-level.

The whole tour occupied sixteen days. Nearly 400 miles of country were traversed, a large portion of which, I understand, had never been visited by a European. There were few places where it was not prac-

ticable to ride. It appeared that most of the summits, if approached with judgment, could be ascended on horseback, though of course the animals used must be of the sturdy stock habituated to the mountains. The highest point attained was 10,750 feet above sea-level; but from thence, both north and south, distant heights appeared of greater elevation.

There are certain recognised passes and bridle-paths through the mountains; when those are left it is well to have guides. The bogs on the mountain-tops are treacherous, and from the broken nature of the country the compass affords little assistance. Frequently it takes a whole day to reach a point which in the morning appears to be distant but an hour's ride.

NOTE.—The observations on which the heights given in this paper are founded are not known. Colonel Fox, of the Intelligence Department, states that he has no information how they were determined by Sir M. Clarke, but he adds that he has little hesitation in adopting them in preference to those previously given.

On the Influence of Arab Traders in West Central Africa.

By Lieut. H. WISSMANN, Gold Medallist, R.G.S.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, June 25th, 1888.)

I PROPOSE this evening to place before you certain facts illustrative of one of the most urgent questions of the day, viz. the influence of the Arab traders in Central Africa. I invite you to accompany me into a region of Central Africa, where neither Arabs nor Europeans had intruded in 1881, when I first visited it. Regions like this enable us to study the spontaneous development of a race, which has learnt to know strangers from afar only in the shape of traders or slave-hunters, who are anxious, above all things, to enrich themselves at the expense of the native populations.

The region I refer to is bounded by the Sankúru and the Lomami, the former first crossed by Mr. Pogge and myself, the latter first made known through Commander Cameron. This region is inhabited by the Bene Ki, a division of the Basonge. It forms a rolling savannah, intersected by numerous rivulets, which have excavated their channels to a depth of 150 feet through darkish-red laterite, whose colour contrasts pleasantly with the more sombre hues of the grasses. Down in the bottom of these ravines may be seen the underlying sandstone, bedded horizontally, and often dyed ruddy by particles of iron. A narrow strip of luxuriant primeval forest accompanies the crystal streams of cold waters. A bird's-eye view of this country would present the appearance



