The Roads to Tibet

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CORRESPONDENCE.

The Roads to Tibet.

IN Mr. Freshfield's paper in the *Geographical Journal* for January last, no allusion is made to a route which I described in a paper read before the British Association at the Bath meeting in 1888—a route which then seemed to me, so far as I knew it, to be by far the shortest and easiest of all the routes which pass from Bengal to Central Tibet.

I believe that I was the first European to visit the Jelepah in company with Mr. W. T. Blanford, F.R.S., in 1870 (Cf. *Journ. As. Soc. Bengal*, vol. xl. Pt. ii., 1871). After the mission to Lhasa, organized by the late Mr. Macaulay in 1886, of which I was a member, was withdrawn, I made an expedition with Mr. Prestage, C.E., then on the staff of the Darjeeling railway, to try to discover an easier road to Chumbi, in case that, as it turned out, a military expedition had to be made there. Starting from Laba, a place in British Bhotan at an elevation of 6600 feet, and only about 18 miles from Bulabari in the Duars, to which, I believe, there is now a light railway from Jelpaigori, we ascended along a spur through dense forest to Pankasari, 8100 feet, in about 7 miles: here there is good water and camping-ground. From here a gradual ascent along a ridge, with only some slight ascents and descents, which could be easily avoided by cutting a new path (we had to follow an elephant path most of the way), led us in about 9 miles to the top of Rishilah, about 10,300 feet. Here there is a large extent of open ground, mostly covered by scrubby jungle, with plenty of pasturage for sheep and cattle. From this point the route has been surveyed by Mr. T. Roberts, who went over it in 1885, and leads along a ridge with some ascents and descents to Padonglah, or Pangolah, 10,600 feet in about 10 miles. Here there is open camping-ground surrounded by forest. From here to Singidom (not marked on my map) is an easy march of about 6 miles along an undulating ridge to Nathong or Salambi, about 10 miles, which has a steep ascent (impassable at that time for ponies) up the shoulder of Lingtu.

The expense of making a good pony road from Labah to Salambi was estimated by Mr. Nightingale, then executive engineer at Darjeeling, at about 20,000 rupees only. The total distance by this route from Labah to the Jelepah is thus only about 54 miles, without any long descents or rivers to bridge, and the saving in ascents over the route now taken is from 10,000 to 12,000 feet.

It must be remembered that the cart road now in use up the Tista valley is on account of the great heat of the valley and the absence of fodder for draught cattle or mules, as well as its unhealthiness during the greater part of the year, very trying to those accustomed to the dry and cool climate of the Chumbi valley and Tibet, and that the nearer a frontier trading station or dépôt for supplies can be brought to the plains, at an elevation which is tolerable for the inhabitants of the highlands for which the country between the Rishilah and Pangolah seems suitable, the less the objections to the existing routes will be felt.

If a light railway was extended from Bulabari to Jungiguard, at the foot of the hill below Labah, it would be easy to go in three days from Calcutta to the Jelepah, and the route, when opened out and cleared, would provide much better grazing for cattle and pack-mules than the existing one.

The late Colonel Tanner proposed an alternative route from Kalimpoong to Labah, of which a section is shown in the accompanying plan, showing the ascents and descents which have to be made by the three routes. It must be remembered

Existing Road from Jalpaiguri to Salambi (Nº1)
with proposed modification by Mr Paul (Nº3)

A Follows course of Ponglu, large boulders and earth, B Earth, small boulders, Rock cutting

Existing road from Jalpaiguri to Kalimpong
and route thence to Salambi proposed by Col. Tanner (Nº2)

Horizontal Scale 0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles
Natural scale 1:1,250,000
Vertical Scale exaggerated 10 times

that when this plan was drawn in 1887, the cart-road up the Tista valley had not been made, and all traffic had to go round by Darjiling.

With regard to the prospects of trade with Tibet, I quite agree with Mr. Freshfield, that they have been underestimated by most writers. The Tibetans want two things, viz. tea and cloth, that we can supply them with much better and cheaper than they now get them. They can supply us with two things which Bengal cannot produce, of good quality, viz. wool and mutton. The samples of Tibetan wool which I brought home and showed at a meeting in Bradford in 1887 were considered by the merchants there equal to Cheviot wool. I have a blanket made from it, which, after thirty-three years of hard wear on many camping-trips, is still as good as when made, and if flocks of Tibetan sheep were driven down

**Route from Jalpaiguri to Salambi via
Ambiokh and Richi La proposed by Capt. Elwes.**

*Note Beyond Richi La the route is identical
with N° 2 proposed by Col. Tanner.*

to Labah and killed there, the mutton, of excellent quality, might be in Calcutta twenty-four hours later.

From what I saw in 1870 and in 1886, and from what I have heard since, I have no doubt that the Tibetan people, as distinguished from the lamas, who now have a practical monopoly of trade in Tibet, would welcome free intercourse; and, as there is no other known point in the whole range of the Himalaya where the passage from Tibet to India is so short and so easy, and where the dry climate of the highlands comes so close to the plains, as in the Chumbi valley, I look forward to this route becoming in the not very distant future one of the great trade routes of the world.

H. J. ELWES.

Sadiya, *viâ* Dibrugarh, January 30, 1904.

I have just read Mr. Douglas W. Freshfield's "The Roads to Tibet," published in vol. xxiii., No. 1, of the *Royal Geographical Journal* for January, 1904, and with reference to the following paragraph at p. 79, viz. "The frontiers meet in the far east, where the Brahmaputra breaks out of the mountains through narrow valleys of which their wild inhabitants still preserve the mystery," beg to point out that this statement is quite incorrect. Mr. Freshfield is evidently not aware that I marched right through these supposed "wild inhabitants" in [1885*], when I visited Rima, and was everywhere well received and treated by them! The Mijus, who border on Tibet, due east of Sadiya, are in no sense a "wild" tribe; and their half-brothers, the Digaros, whose habitat reaches from our borders to about halfway between Sadiya and Rima, have traded at our marts for generations, and have always been known as a peaceable and well-behaved community. The Mijus are quite as peaceful and well behaved, and the only reason why we see less of this portion of the tribe is that the Digaros, acting as middle men with regard to all goods obtainable from our marts, prevent them coming in in order to retain the trade in their own hands.

F. J. NEEDHAM.

MEETINGS OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, SESSION 1903-1904.

Sixth Ordinary Meeting, January 25, 1904.—Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM,
K.C.B., F.R.S., President, in the Chair.

ELECTIONS.—*Reginald Bate; Lord Osborne de Vere Beauclerk; Rev. C. T. Collyer; Edward Denne, A.C.P.; Lieut. Montagu C. Dobson, R.F.A.; Albert Bevan Evans; Captain George Bennett Gosling, Rifle Brigade; Captain Frank Ernest Gunter, R.A.M.C.; Angus Hamilton; Robert William Hutchinson, B.Sc.; Richard Blair Hutton; Lieut.-Colonel Louis Jackson, R.E.; John J. Lawton; George McDonald; Lieut. John Arthur McQueen, R.E.; Edmund Maurice; Lieut. Gilbert Russell (Grenadier Guards); Henry Farrington Searle; James Sorley, F.R.S.E., F.S.S.; Ernest Edwin Speight; Charles Thursby; Herbert Perkins Vacher, A.M.I.C.E.; G. W. F. Wright.*

HONORARY CORRESPONDING MEMBER.

Colonel J. de Shokalsky, Secretary, Physical Section of the Russian Geographical Society.

The Paper read was:—

"The Geographical Pivot of History." By H. J. Mackinder, M.A.

* Mr. Needham leaves the date blank, but we presume this is the journey to which he refers. Mr. Needham's letter is based on an obvious misunderstanding. Mr. Freshfield was writing of the Tsanpo Brahmaputra. The Zayul Chu (sometimes called the Lobit Brahmaputra), which Mr. Needham explored on his journey in 1885 from Sadiya to Rima, is an eastern affluent of the great Tibetan river.—ED. G.J.