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Journeyings in the Pamirs and Central Asia: Discussion

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Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Nov., 1893), pp. 398-402

Published by: geographicalj

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1774115>

Accessed: 27-06-2016 07:19 UTC

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year, especially as the Oxus was closed for navigation owing to the ice, and to attempt a land journey in the snow over the Khivan desert in this, the most severe winter known in Central Asia for years, would be little short of madness; so I had most reluctantly to give it up as a bad job. Day by day the weather got more and more severe, and the snowstorms were frequent until at last the mails ceased to run, as the roads were all blocked. Telegraphic communication alone remained open, and that at last was closed; but not before I discovered by means of the wires from Askabad that my long-cherished plan of crossing the Persian frontier over to Meshed, and so working my way down the Afghan frontier, and through Beluchistan to the Persian Gulf was also knocked on the head, all the roads and passes over the mountains being so deep in snow that I was unable to procure a caravan of camels or any other beast of burden to cross the hills into Khorasan; so I determined, as soon as the roads were open across the Steppes, to proceed to Samarkand and take the Transcaspian Railway to Uzunada, cross the Caspian to Baku and take boat from there to Enzeli, ride to Teheran, and so on to Bushire, and reach the Persian Gulf that way. It was on the last day of January that I left Tashkend and started for Chinaz. Through the gorge of Jilan-uti we gradually descended till we reached the valley of the Zarafshan, and shortly afterwards the domes and towers of Samarkand came into view, lit up by the golden rays of a winter sunset.

Leaving Samarkand by the Transcaspian Railway, I arrived at Bokhara the next day, then crossed the Oxus at Charjui, and so over the sandy waste that forms the south end of the Khivan desert, to Merv, Askabad, and the Caspian. All this part of the country has been so well and graphically described by Mr. Curzon, that recapitulation on my part would be worse than useless. Suffice it to say that I crossed the Caspian to Baku, arriving there the very day the boat had sailed for Enzeli, and there was not another for a fortnight. The prospect of a fourteen-days' sojourn at Baku was not agreeable, so I went on to Tiflis, that I had not seen since 1859, when it was but a very small town, and so to Batum, where I took the steamer to Constantinople, and returned to India, landing at Karachi in March 1893, just thirteen months since I had landed there in February 1892.

Before the reading of the paper, the chairman, General STRACHEY said:—The Earl of Dunmore will now read you the account of the remarkable journey he has made during the past year, starting from the Indian side of the Himalaya Mountains, going through to Yarkand, thence into the Pamirs, from the Pamirs back to Kashgar, and from Kashgar through Russian Turkistan to the Caspian. I will leave you now in the hands of Lord Dunmore, who I think will give you an extremely interesting account of this journey.

After the reading of the paper, the following discussion took place:—

Mrs. BISHOP: I was not prepared to speak on this question, but as I have

followed the route as far as the Karakoram Pass, I am extremely interested in all Lord Dunmore has said. One or two questions I should like to ask if I may. I should like to know at what height the vegetation ceased on these high passes which he crossed? In my own experience in crossing the Digar and the Kardong glacier pass, edelweiss in enormous quantities covered the whole of the hill-sides in June at a height of 15,000 feet, and from that up to 16,500 feet, beyond which vegetation, except lichens, ceased altogether. I should much like to hear whether he made any observations on the vegetation of the north and south sides, and I should also be interested in knowing whether he observed the range of the thermometer between noon and midnight at heights of 15,000 feet and upwards? I registered solar temperatures of 157° , which was only I think 32° below the boiling-point of water at the same altitude, but the thermometer at midnight fell to 24° , showing an enormous range in twelve hours; and it has occurred to me that the extraordinary disintegrations of the mountains which one sees in Nubra, and specially in the gigantic mountains at the bend of the Shyok may possibly be attributed to these very rapid changes in temperature, occurring in such a dry climate as that of Western Tibet. I should like exceedingly to have some light thrown upon these two subjects—vegetation and temperature?

SIR THOMAS GORDON: As an old traveller in the Eastern Iceland, that wilderness of snow and ice, of which Lord Dunmore has given us a flying account to-night, and shown us some interesting sketches, I should like to say a few words. I wish to speak in praise of the splendid energy which he and Major Roche showed in pursuit of science and sport. We have seen the magnificent ovis poli heads in the next room, the result of forty-five days' stay in the Tagh-dumbash. I think we must all admire the spirit of enterprise and resolute determination, the love of adventure and sport, and the great powers of endurance the travellers showed in their very severe journey. I have some personal knowledge of the difficulties to be met with in that country. I should like, however, on the part of the Yarkand Expedition, to disclaim all responsibility for those astounding tales which Lord Dunmore heard regarding the Karakoram Pass, for we distinctly reported it as easy of ascent and descent. I think these tales must have come from the Arguns, who were employed, and whose interest it is to exaggerate all difficulties with a view of increasing their rewards. Ever since I led the first exploring party in recent times to cross and recross the Pamirs in 1874, I have observed very closely the explorations which followed ours. The famous Skobeloff immediately replied by passing down from Khokand towards Tashkurgan, and his very able assistant, Captain of the Staff, Kuropatkin, also explored in that direction. Very shortly after that, England and Russia began to vie with one another in gaining a geographical knowledge of that then comparatively little known region, and France and Germany subsequently joined in. England has had, I should say, the biggest share in it in later times. I would mention Mr. Ney Elias, then Younghusband, assisted by Davison, then Littledale, who like the lecturer to-night, was a splendid sportsman, as well as a successful explorer. Lord Dunmore has devoted himself to working in a rather remote corner, and I have no doubt he has gained a great deal of information which may prove valuable in solving the big problem which seems to be presenting itself there for early solution. I congratulate Lord Dunmore and Major Roche upon their very successful journey.

MR. W. M. CONWAY: The only remark that I think is called for from me, bears upon the question of the experiences of the party at high altitudes. I notice that Lord Dunmore mentions that he first experienced discomfort, not on the top of but whilst descending from a pass 18,000 feet high. They were at the time on a glacier and probably in a hollow place. That observation, I think, is of importance. It is not

new, but we have so few accurate observations about the effects of high altitudes, that it is important to get any testimony tending to show that you do not necessarily feel the worst effect of diminished air-pressure on the highest points; there are many other factors that enter into the production of that uncomfortable sensation, and one of the most important of these seems the neighbourhood of snow. It seems to me quite clear that in high places upon snow the effects of atmospheric pressure are more marked than in equally high places on rocks. Lord Dunmore observed next that they found it hard to sleep on an occasion when they were for the first time at 17,000 feet; but I gathered that on later occasions they maintained a high altitude for a considerable period and experienced no discomfort. At 18,000 feet, which they again rose to on the Depsang Plain, notwithstanding that they were helped by the wind, which is of great assistance in warding off the effect of diminished atmospheric pressure, they experienced the most marked discomfort. These observations are of importance, because they show that at heights of 17–18,000 feet, as noticed also by Captain Bower in Western Tibet, considerable discomforts were felt, whereas it seems to be the case in Sikkim that mountaineers and travellers can rise to higher altitudes almost without discomfort. Possibly the greater amount of moisture in the atmosphere of the Eastern Himalayas somewhat lessens the discomforts of diminished air-pressure, whilst in the dry atmosphere of the Pamirs and Mustangh regions greater discomfort is felt owing to the dryness.

Hon. G. N. CURZON : I should like to endorse what fell from Sir Thomas Gordon as to the great value of explorations such as Lord Dunmore has so well described to us. Just as Mrs. Bishop found an excuse for speaking in the fact that she had traversed some of the earlier parts of Lord Dunmore's journey, so I might find an excuse in the fact that I have traversed some of the later portions. I have had occasion to go very minutely into the question of the Pamirs and the Upper Oxus, and had intended, but for the disagreeable necessities of Parliamentary life, going to that region myself this summer. Now General Gordon spoke as a member of the first and last organised British expedition to the Pamirs, the last whose record has been given to the public, and although as he says, Mr. Littledale, Captain Younghusband and Lieut. Davison, and Mr. Ney Elias have been since, yet our record of exploration on the Pamirs is not equal in numbers or extent to that of Russia, who has, from year to year, sent parties, nominally scientific, really political, to those regions. Therefore we owe a debt of gratitude to gentlemen who, like Lord Dunmore, tour on their own account, and bring back to us and the Indian Government information of the highest value. The value of Lord Dunmore's travels in this case is two-fold, because, in the first place, he was on the Pamirs at an extraordinarily interesting time; but as what I am now saying touches on the forbidden ground of politics, I cannot pursue it further, but can only admire, and at a humble distance pursue the remarkable discretion in this respect that Lord Dunmore has shown. The second point on which we owe him gratitude is for the positive additions he has made to geography, to which, after all, as a Geographical Society, we attach higher value than anything else. Lord Dunmore and party passed over thirty to forty passes of great altitude under the severest conditions of atmosphere and temperature. Some of these have never been crossed before by Europeans. Further, by his discoveries, he has rectified our ideas about the peculiar chain of lakes existing in the region of the Upper Oxus. Firstly, there is the succession of small lakes, in or near to which the Oxus is said by him to rise. Then there is the cluster of lakes round Yashil Kul, on the Alichur Pamir. Finally, he has acquainted us with the fact that the lake called Rang-Kul is, in reality, two lakes, of which Rang-Kul is the smaller. These are, I think, positive additions to our geographical knowledge. There is one point on which I desire to ask a

question. Lord Dunmore, in his paper, talked about the real source of the Oxus, and on the screen showed us a fascinating picture of that river emerging from Lake Chakmak. I think in General Gordon's book, or in one of Colonel Trotter's maps, this is given as Oi Kul. Now, the river which rises in this lake, and then flows northwards, is the Aksu, which later on becomes the Murghab, and, after making a great bend to the west, rejoins the Oxus (as commonly accepted) at Kila Wamar. But there is another stream which some people insist upon regarding as the true source of the Oxus, where the upper portion of the Wakhan River, known as the Ak Bilis, rises just north of the Wakhijir Pass amid three great glaciers, which a Frenchman, M. Dauvergne, visited two or three years ago. I cannot help preferring that the Oxus should be held to rise in these great glaciers rather than in an insignificant lake; and I venture to suggest that this, and not the Aksu, the resemblance of whose name to the Oxus is purely accidental, should be regarded as the true parent stream. I have one other thing to say: Lord Dunmore's paper illustrated in an interesting manner the national traits of the various peoples scattered over this remote tableland. First, there are the Kirghiz, genuine nomads, and, I believe, almost always hospitable and generous to travellers. Then there are the Chinese, on political grounds supposed to be friendly towards us, a characteristic which they do not invariably show. Whatever their attitude towards foreigners, their political position on the Pamirs is most inefficient. I do not believe in the wonderful things the Chinese are going to do on the Pamirs. The most gratifying feature, however, to which Lord Dunmore paid a generous tribute, is the civility and courtesy of the Russians. Nobody can deny the fact that the Russians on the Pamirs are possible rivals to ourselves, and it is therefore particularly gratifying that, when a Russian officer comes in contact with an English traveller, they should meet as gentlemen and friends. Even when Captain Younghusband was turned out by the Russians from Bozai Gumbaz, nothing could exceed the politeness of the officer who turned him out. It is gratifying that these great national rivalries, which are too great to be entirely obliterated, do not interfere with the courtesies which should and do prevail, more particularly in inhospitable regions such as Lord Dunmore has visited. I trust that not merely the substance of the paper, but also the admirable illustrations from his own brush will shortly reappear in the book, which, I understand, Lord Dunmore is about to publish, and I hope the rest of this assembly will follow my own example by buying a copy the first day it appears.

Lord DUNMORE replied: In answer to the questions put to me by Mrs. Bishop, I can only say it was a cause of serious regret to me that I had not a botanist with me, as I myself know little or nothing of botany. I have noticed the ice-plants to which Mrs. Bishop refers; but only on the comparatively low passes between Gulcha and Osh in Russian Central Asia. I never saw any on the high passes in the Kuen Lun, Mustagh, or Himalayan ranges; but as most of those passes were deep in snow we were unable to see what was underneath the snow. I cannot think there is vegetation of any sort above 16,000 feet, as there is no animal life. The edelweiss I never saw at all. As to the great variation of temperatures, I regret that I have not by me to-night the meteorological observations taken by Major Roche and myself, but I can recollect variations of 85° to 90° between dawn and midday, especially on the Pamirs.

General Gordon was good enough to make some remarks. I read his book with great interest before starting on this expedition, and followed the track of the Forsyth Expedition from Leh to Yarkand. As regards the correctness of the altitudes, the General knows as well, or probably better than I do, that it is impossible to place any reliance on the reading of aneroids over 16,000 feet elevation above the sea-level; some of our instruments would vary only 50 feet at 12,000 feet,

and at 16,000 feet would vary 300 feet. We shall never know the correct altitudes of these passes until a proper trigonometrical survey is made. I had my instruments corrected on my return to India, and have in consequence deducted 320 feet off all the altitudes I took.

In reply to Mr. Conway's remarks regarding difficulty of respiration at abnormally high altitudes, I can only say that my experience coincides with his. The first time I suffered from the great rarefaction of the air was not by any means at a great altitude, only about 16,000 feet, when in trying to make a hole with a pickaxe in which to sink my tent-pole, I suddenly felt giddy and light-headed and fell flat on my face on the ground. At 19,000 feet we felt no discomfort, whereas at lower altitudes it was sometimes almost impossible to breathe if one made the slightest exertion.

Mr. Curzon has asked me some questions with regard to my determining the Oxus source at the north-east end of the Chakmak Lake and not in the Sarhad River source. My reasons for so doing are as follows : Between the source of the Sarhad and the Chakmak Lake is a very low watershed ; on the south-west side of this watershed is the source of the Sarhad River, which joins the Ak-Bilis under the walls of the Tomb of Bozai at a place called Bozai Gumbaz. Their joint waters flow to Isbkashem, whence they run north under the name of Ab-i-panj, until they reach Kala Wamar, a distance roughly measured by me as 240 miles, and receiving on the way the waters of the Pamir River which rises at the west end of Victoria Lake, and the Ghund River which runs out of the Yashil Kul. On the north-east side of this watershed is the Chakmak Lake, out of which flows the Aksu River. I believe myself that Oxus is a corruption of the old Kirghiz name of Aksu, meaning white water. This river, which we believe to be the true Oxus, flows north-east to Aktash, receiving the waters of the Beik, Chistoba and a few minor rivers. It then takes a turn west to Murghabi on the Sarez Pamir, and receiving the waters of the Ak-Baital runs past Colonel Yonoff's headquarters, where it becomes the Murghab River ; thence west until it becomes the Bartang, and so on to Kala Wamar, a distance from its source of 252 miles. This Aksu is therefore 12 miles longer and with a greater volume of water than the Sarhad. Mr. Curzon made mention of the Kirghiz and Chinese. I lived amongst the former for six months, and a quieter or more honest set of people I never met. As to the Chinese troops I could not judge about them, as they had but twelve men on the Pamirs in 1892.

General STRACHEY : It only remains for me now to return thanks to Lord Dunmore for the extremely interesting paper he has read to us.

THE MAP TO LORD DUNMORE'S PAPER.—The map which accompanies Lord Dunmore's paper is taken from Johnston's "Royal Atlas," and is intended only to show his route. A few corrections have been made, but the map does not contain the most recent additions to our knowledge of the Pamirs. The information brought home by Lord Dunmore, together with the work of other recent explorers, Russian and English, will be embodied in a map which is in preparation in the Society's offices. Reference may also be made to the map of the Pamirs accompanying Captain Younghusband's paper, *Proceedings R.G.S.* Vol. XIV., p. 272.