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Report on a Journey Through Mekran

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the dry season, in consequence of the rising of the surface of the water in the barred lagoons, that they cannot then be traversed. The expedient of the traveller is to descend to the seashore, and to cross upon the sand-bar. When the channel is opened by the rains, the route returns to the upper ford. In the case of the larger rivers the sand-bar is never complete, and the lagoon is never completely formed. There is then always a clear and rather deep channel open, both to the outflow of the river and to the influx of the tide. The consistency of the sand-bars is so solid, and the silt is so well and closely driven down, that it becomes as hard as rock; and, on one occasion, it was actually cut out and quarried for building purposes.

In the action of these Natal rivers we find Nature working exactly as Mr. McIvor is striving to do in the Neilgherry Hills. The heavy surf of the ocean forces the fresh water to deposit its silt and form a bar; exactly as the artificial contrivance, invented for the purpose, forces the Neilgherry mountain stream to do the same thing. The rains of Southern Africa force a channel annually through the bar, just as the Monsoon storm cuts down the *bund* in the Neilgherries; and all that man has to do, to preserve the lake in its integrity, is to provide for the escape of the surplus water.

4. *Report on a Journey through Mekran.* By MAJOR E. C. ROSS.

[Abstract by C. R. MARKHAM, Esq., C.B., Secretary R.G.S.]

THE region between Persia and India, which was traversed by Alexander the Great, and the coast of which was minutely examined by his General, Nearchus, has, from that time until the present century, been almost unknown to Europeans. Our knowledge of Beloochistan was confined to the routes of Pottinger (1810) and Grant (1811), and to the surveys of the coast by officers of the Indian Navy. But the recent operations connected with the establishment of telegraphic communication between India and England, and the Persian boundary questions, have led to the exploration by British officers of this region,—the Gedrosia of Alexander and the Greeks, now known as Mekran or Beloochistan. Colonel, now General Goldsmid, has taken the lead in the examination of this country, and has supplied geographers with much new information. Major Ross, Assistant to the Political Agents at Kelat and Muscat, has also traversed Mekran by a new and unexplored route, and the results of his journey are given in the present "Report on a visit to Kej, and route through Mekran from Gwadur to Kurrachee."

Leaving Gwadur on the 10th of September, 1865, he took the shortest route to Kej, the most important place in Mekran, accompanied by a Sepoy escort and by one Moola Doora, a confidential agent of the Naib of Kej. Mekran may be described as a series of parallel ridges, rising one above the other, from the shores of the sea of Oman, enclosing intervening terraces or valleys. The route of Captain Ross led, at first, over a barren and almost uninhabited tract at right angles to these parallel ridges; but after crossing a ridge of rocky mountains by a pass called Talar, there is a marked alteration in the character of the soil and country, and the pleasant green of the under-wood and occasional patches of cultivated land were refreshing, after the barren ugly tract previously traversed. This district is known as the *Dusht*, a valley or plateau of great extent, containing much rich and fertile land, with a river, called the Khor Dusht, flowing through it, and enriching it with the alluvium which it brings down in certain seasons. It reaches the sea near Jewni, to the westward of Ras Pishkan. It is not, however, a continuous stream, at all times, from source to mouth. It is only during the rains that it

deserves the name of a river, and at other times, though starting and continuing for a considerable distance in the character of a flowing stream, the dry sandy soil of Mekran soon checks its course, and so absorbs its waters that the deeper pools alone remain. Cotton and several grains are produced along its banks.

The next parallel valley, north of Dusht, is that in which Kej is situated. The valleys are divided by a range of hills, through which the river forces its way, the same stream thus watering both valleys.

The Kej valley is a remarkable feature in the geography of Mekran. From the eastern extremity of the province of Kolwah two parallel mountain ranges extend unbroken to the borders of Persia, a distance of at least 250 miles in an E.N.E. and W.S.W. direction, preserving a distance between them of 12 to 20 miles. In the street-like valley thus formed most of the important places in Mekran are situated. The eastern portion, for 60 miles, is occupied by the province of Kolwah. Then follow Sami and Kej, and further to the westward are the considerable settlements of Nusserabad, Toomp, Mund, and Peshin. The authority of the Khan of Kelat extends as far west as Toomp. These long valleys are called *Dummok* in Beloochee.

Kej is generally mentioned as the capital of Mekran, but there is, in reality, no town; it should rather be called a "settlement," in which there are a number of forts and villages, extending for several miles, and including, under the general name, villages and forts, each bearing its distinctive appellation. This is the system throughout Mekran, and the settlements are called "*Abadees*."

The *Abadee* of Kej is situated in the centre of the valley, between two lofty ranges of hills, about 12 miles apart. The fertile and inhabited part, which constitutes the *Abadee*, extends east and west about a dozen miles on either side of the river, here called Kej Khor, but lower down met with under the name of Dusht Khor. The whole breadth of Kej is not more than three miles; the rest of the valley, between it and the hills, being barren and stony land. Fine groves of date-trees line the banks of the river, and form the most prominent feature in the scenery; and *karezes*, or artificial watercourses, intersect the country in all directions, flowing through the groves and irrigating the fields which skirt them. The forts and villages are concealed among the date-trees, except the *Miri*, or fort, which is the residence of the Naib, who represents the Khan of Kelat. The tradition is that the *Miri* was built by Bahman, the son of Isfundear, of the first Persian dynasty, who met his death in Kej. It is also related that Mekran was the penal settlement for Persian convicts in ancient times, from whom sprang the original Mekrani race. Major Ross was told that *Mekran* was from *Makar* (deceit), and means "the country of rogues."

The population of the Kej settlement is about 10,000. The chief product is dates, which are grown in large quantities and of good quality. Rice, barley, wheat, cotton, and tobacco are also grown, besides several kinds of fruit.

Captain Ross travelled eastward from Kej for about 20 miles along the same valley to Sami, and for 26 miles further, at which point he crossed the range of hills to the north, and reached another valley called Balgetter. He then turned south again and entered the district of Kolwah, the most fertile in Mekran. It possesses no stream, and the land is dependent for irrigation on the supply of rain, for the retention of which dams are constructed; yet barley is grown in large quantities, and flocks and herds are numerous. Thence the party travelled on, by Jow, to Bela, over a sterile tract, where there are no villages and no inhabitants. The province of *Lus-Beyla* is here divided from the western provinces by a lofty well-defined range of mountains, the pass through them being excessively steep, and so narrow that laden camels are unable to pass. The construction of this pass is ascribed by the natives to the

famous Persian statuary Ferhad, who pierced the hill, they say, to win the beautiful Shireen, a daughter of a former king of Lus-Beyla. The supposed tomb of the lovers is situated close to the *lak*, or pass, and a pool of water is called *Koomb-i-Shireen*, or the Pool of Shireen. Close by it is the grave of the old woman who is said to have betrayed them both to death, and every Beloch who passes considers it his duty to cast a stone or piece of rubbish on it. A great heap has been thus collected.

After leaving the pass, the road emerges on the level plain, where stands Bela, the capital of the province. From this point Major Ross proceeded, by forced marches, to Kurrachee, where he arrived on the 9th of October. He fixed the latitude of several points on the route by sextant and artificial horizon, but was obliged to trust to dead reckoning for his longitudes.