
Le Vaillant's Grotto at Heerenlogement

Author(s): H. H. W. Pearson

Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Jan., 1912), pp. 40-47

Published by: geographicalj

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1778328>

Accessed: 27-06-2016 02:41 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), Wiley are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Geographical Journal*

These waters seem to be most salubrious, and are credited with medicinal virtues. This is a very volcanic region evidently. From the great clefts in the mountain-sides, where one can distinctly hear the bubbling of the flowing hot waters, rise clouds of steam. Here grows the argal, the so-called grape of Sodom. The Zerka, a stream almost as great as the Arnon and amid surroundings of much the same character, but having a small plain on the seashore that might very well be cultivated, flows into the sea 15 miles farther north. Here, as elsewhere, the wild oleander, with its beautiful pink flower, is abundant; also the reed, with its feathery tuft or bloom "shaken by the wind." Then here, on the east side, as well as on the west shore and south shore, evidences of the encroachment of the sea upon the land is very noticeable in the submerged forests of large trees still standing in the death-dealing waters. Here it may be noted that in connection with the increase of the rainfall noticed in Jerusalem since the Palestine Exploration Fund has kept the records since the year 1861—where, for the first ten years, the average was 21 inches and a fraction, for the next ten, over 24; for the next ten, over 28; and for the last ten, over 29—the peninsula recorded at the northern end of the sea on the maps and pictures of this region of twenty-five years ago, has turned into an island, to be in turn submerged and finally swallowed up.

Our trip lasted a week. We left Jerusalem at 3 p.m. on June 14 last, by carriage, arriving at the north end of the Dead sea at about 8 o'clock, where we spent the night. On Thursday, the 15th, we were on board with our luggage and effects by 5.30, and reached Engedi at 10.15 a.m. We remained here until the next day at 3 p.m., when we took up anchor and steamed southwards to Masada, which we reached at about 5 p.m. On Saturday, the 17th, at about 9.30 a.m., we arrived at Jebel Usdum. On Sunday morning we left Ghor-el-Safieh and reached Ghor-el-Mizra on the 18th, about noon. We started from here on the 19th, Monday, and arrived at the Arnon at sundown. The Zerka and Calirrhoe were visited on Wednesday morning, the 21st, and in the evening of that day we arrived at our starting-point. Every night was spent upon the boat, where no mosquitoes or sandflies troubled the party. The temperature, although over 100° Fahr., was tempered by soft breezes from the north and south, these being the prevailing winds.

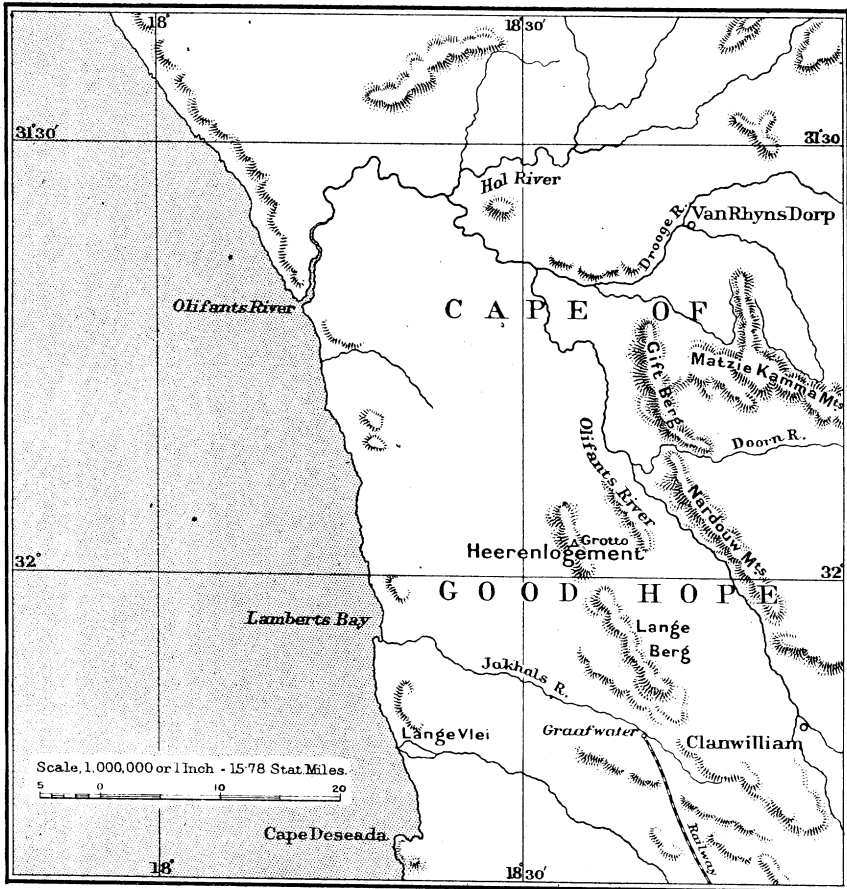
LE VAILLANT'S GROTTO AT HEERENLOGEMENT.*

By Prof. H. H. W. PEARSON.

THE early South African travellers have left few permanent memorials of their journeys save in the form of their published writings or their collections of natural history specimens and other objects of interest. Their writings frequently are insufficient to determine with precision the

* Percy Sladen Memorial Expeditions in South-West Africa, Report No. 17.

route they followed, particularly through districts which were sparsely inhabited. Their halting-places are in very many cases described under names which have long ceased to be used or perhaps never were used save in the itineraries for the purposes of which they were invented. In regions like Namaqualand, where the few white inhabitants are for the most part descendants of families who settled there generations ago, and have been influenced but little by events in the greater world which lies beyond

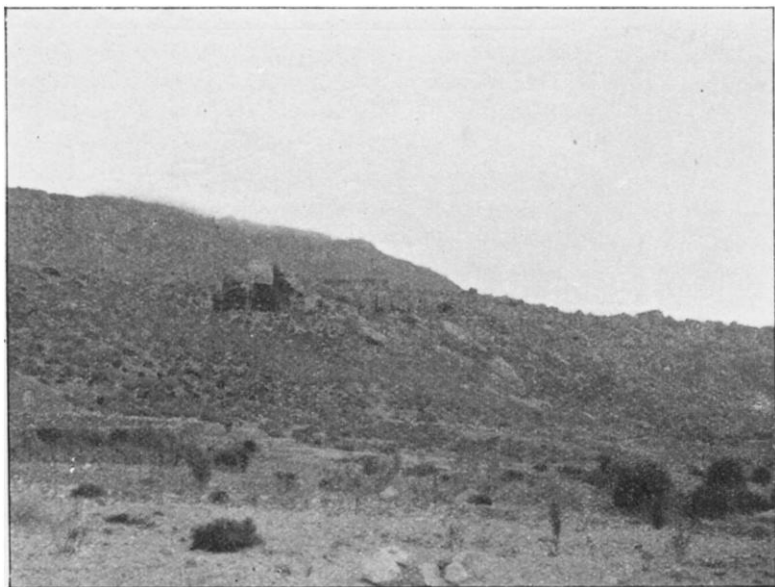


Sketch showing the position of Le Vaillant's Grotto

their own horizon, there still linger traditions of the passage of Drège, Alexander, and other pioneers of the early part of the last century. The father of a man still living provided Alexander with additional oxen for his team; a farmhouse on the flanks of the Khamiesberg in which Drège stayed in 1830 is still standing. But of the travellers who preceded these even tradition is silent, and in the country through which they travelled the traces of their journeys are now very few.

In the eighteenth century, the traveller to Namaqualand going over-

land from Cape Town was offered the choice of two routes. One lay in the sand-belt parallel with the coast and not far from it, until the mouth of the Olifants river was passed. The eastern boundary of the sand-belt is formed by the range known as the Olifants river mountains, on the eastern side of which is the bed of the Olifants river. The second route passed along the eastern flanks of this range through the Olifants river valley. This route was discovered by the Dutch expedition led by Danckert in 1660. It provided a hard road, but it led over difficult mountain passes which, until comparatively recent times, seem to have kept the majority of travellers to the road through the heavy sand of the

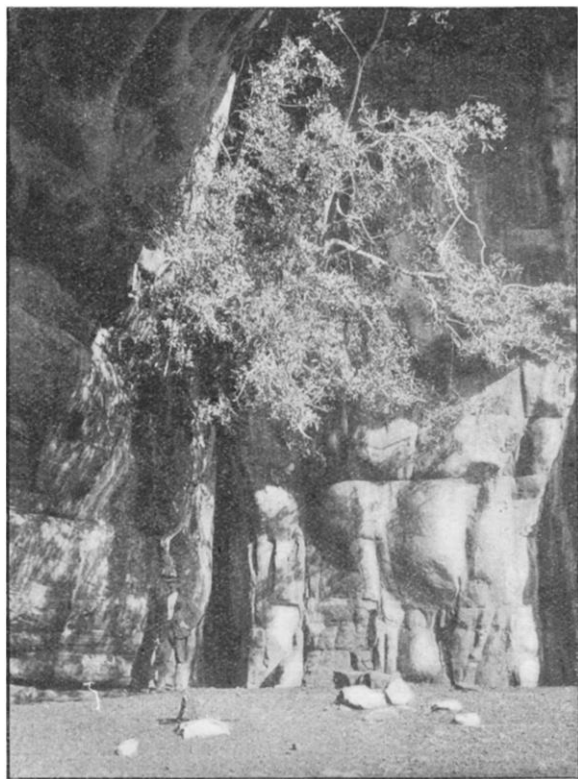


THE MOUTH OF LE VAILLANT'S GROTTO.

coast belt. But the building of a reasonably good roadway over the Pickenier's pass, through the Olifants river-valley to Clanwilliam, and thence to Van Rhyns Dorp has taken the traffic out of the sand-belt, and the old route has for many years past fallen into disuse; it is, however, now being reopened by the gradual advance of the Malmesbury railway from the old terminus at Piquetberg towards Van Rhyns Dorp. The railhead, at the moment at Graafwater in the Jakhals river-bed (see sketch-map), is situated not far from the road followed by Le Vaillant in the eighteenth century, in his journey through Piquetberg to the Olifants river mouth, and thence into Namaqualand.*

* 'New Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa by the way of the Cape of Good Hope in the years 1783, 84, and 85.' Translated from the French of Le Vaillant. London: 1796.

On his way from Piquetberg northwards, Le Vaillant experienced great difficulty from want of water and ignorance of the road. He stopped at Lange Vlei, a "plantation" in a "sandy and miserable" district not far from the coast, almost midway between Cape Deseada and Lambert's bay. Further on he found "nothing but a sandy desert covered with briers and rushes" (in which Graafwater lies), which he traversed on his way to Heerenlogement. Of this place he had received information as unreliable as that which the unwary traveller in Namaqualand frequently



BACK WALL OF LE VAILLANT'S GROTTO, SHOWING *FICUS CORDATA*.

receives to-day. He was led to expect "a very abundant spring of water, a most agreeable retreat, and groves and grottos covered with inscriptions and figures." When he reached it, "its waters were soon rendered turbid by my Hottentots and cattle. With regard to the grotto, the inscriptions, the creeping shrubs hanging in festoons, all these like a dream vanished on our approach. I saw only a large cavern which served to shelter me and my caravan. It was spacious and lofty; and being open at the east,*

* A translator's error. In the French edition the cave is correctly described as opening towards the west.

we were covered without being shut up in it. Situated upon a small mount, it overlooked on one side my camp and the plain, . . . and on the other was joined to an immense chain of dry mountains extending in the form of an amphitheatre." It must be said that the description is inaccurate in some details, and the print which illustrates the scene* bears very little resemblance to it. He proceeds, "I made preparations for passing the night in the grotto; but I was obliged to share it with jackdaws and wood-pigeons; which repaired to it at the close of the day and perched in hundreds on a tree, the roots of which were implanted in an enormous crevice, while one of its branches overspread the floor of this natural hall." The figures and inscriptions consisted only of a few caricatures of the elephant and ostrich, with the names of three or four travellers who had probably stopped here formerly, like myself, to refresh themselves." He stayed at Heerenlogement for seven days. "At length, however, on the fourth of July . . . I quitted the place, *after having left my name and the date of my arrival in the grotto*, according to the custom of proceeding travellers."

A more accurate account of the cave is given by Alexander.† On his way westwards to Walfish bay in the latter end of the year 1836, he visited Heerenlogement, "where was a pool of water under a hill, some distance up which is a large and open cave or kliphais. A small tree grows out of the fissure in the rock above and partly overshadows the cave, whilst on the north side is carved the names of travellers and hunters from the year 1712 to recent periods. Among others conspicuous is that of the renowned

‘F. VAILANT, 1783.’

Looking from the cave in a westerly direction, the eye ranges over a wide extent of plain in which bushes are scattered."

The cave at Heerenlogement was visited by the writer in September last, in the course of a Percy Sladen Memorial Expedition to the Khamiesberg. The sandstone which forms its walls and roof is very friable, and there are abundant signs that its area is diminishing by reason of the breaking away of rock at the entrance. It is used as a shelter for stock, and some of the inscriptions are so worn down by friction that they are now almost obliterated, and of the few who have visited it in recent years a considerable proportion have felt impelled to inscribe or paint their own names on the walls at the risk of confusing the earlier and more interesting records. The situation of the cave renders any adequate measure of protection exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, and there is every probability that before many years have passed it will have lost the principal feature of the interest which it possesses to-day. It there-

* Le Vaillant, *loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 216.

† J. E. Alexander, 'An Expedition into the Interior of Africa,' etc. London: 1838.

fore seemed desirable to place on record the fact that the name which Le Vaillant carved on the wall in the week ending July 4, 1783, is probably as distinct in 1911 as it was when Alexander saw it in 1836.

The first photograph shows the mouth of the cave about 100 feet above the base of the hill. In the second is seen its eastern wall, from a large crevice in which there emerges a well-grown tree of *Ficus cordata*. There is little doubt that this is a part of the same individual as that described by Alexander, and it is probable that the main branches are those which he saw. It is not, however, the only *Ficus* stock in the cave, and although the crevice in which it grows is the



INSCRIPTIONS ON THE NORTH WALL OF LE VAILLANT'S GROTTO.

only one to which Le Vaillant's epithet "enormous" could be applied, it is, perhaps, not safe to assume that the tree at present existing is the one on which the jackdaws and pigeons perched in July, 1783. There is, however, no *a priori* improbability in this, for it is well known that species of *Ficus* do attain a great age. This is probably the nearest approach that there is to definite evidence as to the rate of growth of the common Namaqualand fig, *F. cordata*. If this is Le Vaillant's identical tree, it can have increased but little either in the diameter or spread of its branches within the period of a century. The third photograph shows a view of the north wall as seen from the middle of the cave. The name "F. Vaillant," with the date 1783, stands near the centre.* Immediately above it is that of *K. Zegher*, the famous botanical

* It is said that Le Vaillant was not highly educated, which might be inferred from the fact that he has misspelled his own name.

collector. The partnership between C. F. Ecklen and K. Zegher, which did so much to increase the knowledge of South African vegetation, was entered into when the former returned to the Cape after a visit to Europe to dispose of his earlier collections. In 1829, while Ecklen visited the eastern parts of Cape Colony and Kaffirland, Zegher went northwards to Clanwilliam, the Olifants river, and the Cedarbergen, and thence to Namaqualand, the Khamiesberg, and the valley of the Orange river. This journey would give him the opportunity of visiting Heerenloement by the same route from Clanwilliam as was later followed by Alexander. It is interesting to note that Alexander himself resisted the temptation to leave a similar record of his visit. The date 1712, to which he refers in the description quoted, is seen above Zegher's inscription, but it is not now possible to be certain of the name to which it belongs. The "few caricatures of the elephant and ostrich" seen by Le Vaillant may have been Bushman drawings; they are no longer recognizable.

Other names of interest are those of "W. F. J. Baron von Ludwig, 1853"—a well-known plant-collector and cultivator, the founder of a private botanic garden in Cape Town; and "A. G. Bain, 1854," a pioneer worker on the geology of South Africa.

The comparatively excellent water-supply at Heerenloement made it an important place of call on the old road to the north, and in former times it must have been visited by the great majority of the travellers between Cape Town and Namaqualand. According to local tradition, there is in its neighbourhood a relic of an expedition which preceded that of Le Vaillant by nearly a century. Almost the largest exploring party that has ever left Cape Town for the interior was that of Governor Van der Still, which numbered no less than sixty-two persons, of whom fifty-seven were Europeans. The principal object of the expedition was to extend the existing knowledge of the geography of Namaqualand and the districts to the south of it, and, in particular, to locate the copper-bearing rocks which were known to occur to the north of the Olifants river. It has even been claimed that Van der Still saw the Orange river. This, however, is improbable, though his inquiries undoubtedly first established the fact of its existence. This large party, with an equipage consisting "of a calish drawn by 6 horses; of 8 asses, saddle-horses, 2 field-pieces, 8 carts, 7 waggons, one boat, and 289 draught and pack oxen, together with 6 other waggons, each drawn by 8 oxen," travelled northwards by way of the Olifants river-valley, and must, therefore, have passed to the east of Heerenloement. On their return, however, they came south through the sand-belt, and, having crossed the Olifants river, made for Lambert bay, a line which would probably bring them into the close vicinity of Heerenloement. There now lie in the sand, a few miles from this place, the broken pieces of a large iron pot which tradition asserts was a cooking-utensil used by the Van der Still expedition. According to the description, it resembles the pot which is still in general use for

culinary purposes among the natives, South Africa, but so large that while still whole it was employed as a tank for sheep-dipping. There are so few traditions of this kind among the inhabitants of Namaqualand that the story has an air of probability, though it must be remembered than an even larger expedition—that of Hendrik Hoff, of which the botanist J. A. Auge was a member—passed through the same district seventy-five years later. The pot has recently been purchased from the farmer on whose land it lies, and it will probably soon be moved into a more accessible place where its claims to be regarded as a relic of the great journey of Van der Still can be properly appreciated.

BASE-MEASURING APPARATUS.*

I.

By Sir DAVID GILL, K.C.B., F.R.S.

SIR DAVID GILL described a 4-metre comparator which had been designed by him for the Government of India and constructed by the Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company. This apparatus was designed for the purpose of comparing standards of all lengths up to 4 metres and including the determination of their absolute coefficients of expansion by heat.

The 4-metre comparator of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures at the Pavillon de Breteuil, Sevres is arranged for the determination of temperature coefficients of standards of 4 metres only, and the 4-metre comparator of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington only permits the intercomparison of two bars which are at the same temperature, but does not permit the determination of their coefficients of expansion except by comparison with another standard whose temperature coefficients have been independently determined. In neither of these establishments were means provided for the *automatic* maintenance of temperature in the comparator-tanks, but that is provided for in the Indian comparator. The microscopes can be clamped at any points along an iron beam supported on two brick piers. This beam consists of a hollow cast-iron box about a foot square and about 15 feet in length, which is filled with water and covered with non-conducting material, so that it changes its temperature very slowly.

There are two long copper-lined tanks of teak upon a travelling carriage which can be moved at right angles to the direction of this beam. Of these No. 1 is a simple box lined with copper in which one bar (resting on a supporting beam fitted with slow motions) is immersed in water nearly at the temperature of the surrounding air. The other tank, No. 2, is a double one, the water in the outer tank being connected with electro-heating arrangements and a thermostat, so that it can be continually supplied with water at a constant temperature, which water communicates its heat by conduction to the interior tank through the copper sides of the latter.

There are three electro motor-driven pumps of one-quarter horse-power each, which circulates the water in the inner and outer compartments of Tank No. 2 and in the constant-temperature Tank No. 1, changing the whole water in each tank every 90 seconds. In this way a uniform temperature throughout each

* Research Department, November 16, 1911.