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AN OVERLAND JOURNEY FROM INDIA TO ENGLAND

THE following is a brief account of a journey from India to England across Central Asia during the past year (1914). The time at my disposal was very limited, and the routes followed are well known. It is not to be expected, therefore, that these notes should contain anything new or very interesting.

I left a small town on the southern edge of the plains of India on the night of May 2, and reached Rawalpindi after two days in the train. Two and a half days' journey in a tonga took me to Baramulla, where the Jhelum flows out of the Vale of Kashmir. Here a houseboat awaited me, and in it I pushed on to Sopor, on the Wular Lake, where I joined Mr. W. B. Cotton, I.C.S., with whom I was to travel as far as the Chinese frontier. On the following day (May 8) we crossed the Wular Lake to Bandipur. May 9 was spent in final preparations, and we started early on May 10. It will perhaps be as well before going further to give some idea of the size and composition of our two parties. With me, besides twenty baggage coolies, were two servants, Amirullah and Hasan Batt. The former had been my Khansama for five years, and had previously accompanied me to the northern boundary of Sikkim. He was an elderly man, but volunteered for the present journey. Hasan Batt was a Kashmiri Shikari, taken by me as general outdoor servant. Kashmiris are generally abused, but he proved to be a thoroughly good and reliable servant. Cotton had seventy-eight baggage coolies, two servants, and a Shikari. Our combined parties were, therefore, over a hundred strong.

The journey from Bandipur to the Mintaka Pass via Gilgit needs little description. Our chief difficulties were in the matter of getting transport for so large a party. We had no trouble at the Tragbal Pass on May 11, but found the passage of the Burzil on May 16 a stiffer task.

The winter snow had not melted, and, in addition, it snowed for most of the previous day, and was still snowing at 2 a.m. on the morning of the 16th, when we had arranged to start. It was not until 4 a.m. that the coolies could be got to move. We reached the summit of the pass at 10 a.m., with the snow still falling so heavily that it was not possible to see more than 100 yards in any direction, and it was evening when we arrived at the Chillum Chauki rest-house. Next morning another sportsman, who crossed with us, and several coolies suffered from snow blindness.

We reached Gilgit on May 23, and spent two pleasant days there with the political officer. He has in his compound a thriving trout hatchery, from it is hoped to stock the rivers of those parts.

Four days' marching from Gilgit took us to Aliabad, where we were entertained by the assistant political officer. Seven more marches brought us to Murkushi, and the night of June 4 found us encamped where the nullahs leading to the Kilik and Mintaka Passes divide. Some of these marches are very trying for laden coolies, especially those from Passu to Khaibar, where the Bator

glacier has to be crossed, and from Khodabad to Misgar, where the parris are very steep.

At Murkushi we had to wait for a day, as the yaks from the Taghdumbash Pamir which were to meet us had not arrived. I spent the morning in going out after ibex, but saw only a herd of females near the camp. The number of ibex shot by the inhabitants of Hunza must be considerable, as they all wear ibex skin boots. The yaks arrived on the evening of the 5th. The Yakmen were Tajiks, and we examined them with interest, as they were a type new to us. On the 6th we did a short march up the Mintaka nullah and camped under the glacier.

Next day we crossed the pass, and pushed on in a snowstorm to Mintaka, where we were met by the most of the inhabitants, and entertained with tea and cakes in the khirga of the headman, Rahim Beg. We were here presented with a sheep by the servant of the Russian officer stationed at Tashkurgan, and sent a present in return. Refusing all offers of accommodation in Khirgas, we passed the night in our tents, and early next morning went on to Paik. We here met another sportsman who had been shooting in the Kukturuk nullah to the west. As soon as my loads arrived, I had them put on to fresh yaks, and sent them on towards the junction of the Taghdumbash and Masar rivers. I then parted from Cotton, who intended to shoot the Paik and Kukturuk nullahs, and afterwards to return to India via Khotan and Polu, trying for yak and ovis Hodgsoni on the way.

That evening I camped at Saik Taka, near the junction of the two rivers. The gently sloping pamir here widens out, and the view was a striking one. To the west and south were grassy valleys, with snowy peaks rising above them. To the east were the tangled mountains guarding the Yarkand River, that evening dark with storms. To the north the valley dropped down to Tashkurgan, with the dimly seen masses of Mustagh Ata beyond.

Next morning I marched twenty miles up the Masar River to Oprang, where the Khunjerab and Oprang nullahs meet. I had now with me one pony, two riding yaks, and five baggage yaks. These animals are supposed to carry 240 pounds each, but they go much better with 200 pounds. I was accompanied also by Diwana Shah, a Beg from Tashkurgan, who had been ordered by the Chinese authorities to assist me. At Oprang I was entertained with cream and bread in one of the khirgas. Here I dismissed the yaks and ponies, as I intended to spend some days in trying for ovis poli, and engaged two local shikaris, Nabi and Abdul Ali. The next seven days were gloriously fine, and I spent them in shooting the Khunjerab, Oprang, and Kava Su nullahs. The number of poli in these nullahs is very considerable, but the heads are for the most part very small. Of the three I got, the largest measured 48 inches. I saw two or three which were probably over 50 inches, but was unable to secure one. None of the five sportsmen, who had been on the Pamirs in this year up to the time of my departure, got anything bigger than 48 inches. The only other large animals I saw in these nullahs were two brown wolves. The scenery on all sides was very grand, and one view from the summit of the ridge between the Oprang and Kara Su streams was particularly striking. To the east were dark precipices, too steep to retain the snow, and to the west a wild confusion of snowy ranges. Far away to the south-east, across the Oprang Pass, was a great mountain, which must have been K. 2 or one of his near neighbours. During these seven days I was entertained in several encamp-

ments of the nomads, and received many presents of sheep, meat, cream, and bread. It was not an easy matter to find exchange gifts for everybody, and in the end I gave away some of my stores, and lived for the time on the local produce. The cream is very good, when clean, and the same remark applies to the bread. I had several visitors, among them Haji Syed Baba Shah of Tashkurgan. He is one of the leaders of the Mulai sect of Mohammedans, of whom the Aga Khan is the head, and takes the title of Hajji not by reason of a pilgrimage to Mecca, but because he has visited the Aga Khan at Bombay.

On June 14 I left Oprang, and reached Tashkurgan in three marches, putting up my tent in the compound of the Aksakal's house. The Amban, who was absent, sent me gifts of a sheep, rice, meal, and firewood, and in return I sent him a suitable present. I then called on the Russian officer, who is stationed here, with fifteen soldiers, and received calls from the Amban's munshi and a Chinese military officer. I wished to go on to Kashgar by way of the little Kara Kul and Gez, but heard that the road was closed through the rising of the rivers. It was necessary to go by Tarbashi and the Keng Kol River. On the morning of June 20 we left Tashkurgan, and did a difficult march of twenty-one miles, crossing the spur running south from Mustagh Ata by the Checheklik Pass, and camping below it. The baggage was now again on ponies, and two of them became exhausted during the ascent to the pass, and had to be unloaded. Next day we went on ten miles to Tarbashi and could go no farther, as we found no yaks ready, and the water in the river was rising fast. These valleys are full of flowers—dandelion, celandine, daisies, wild roses, white gorse, and many others, blue, pink, yellow, and white. Next morning we were away by 4.15 a.m., in order to anticipate the rising waters. The valley soon narrowed to a gorge, and the stream ran swiftly down among big boulders. In three miles we had to ford it not less than twenty-five times, and in places to march straight down it, the water being up to the yaks' shoulders. At Turbillig we changed yaks, and after marching till 7 p.m., and crossing two passes, approximately 12,000 and 10,000 feet high, we reached Tolkara on the upper waters of the Keng Kol River. The Kighirz Beg, who was named Mohammad, had everything ready for us. He was a tall, fine-looking man, and a magnificent bareback horseman. Next morning the baggage was put on two ponies, and we marched thirty miles down the Keng Kol River. At first the pasture was excellent, but farther down the valley became a bare and stony cleft. On the 24th, at midday, we reached Kach Karaul, where the valley widens out towards the desert, and permanent cultivation begins. The baggage was here put on to two camels and a donkey. These were again exchanged for ponies at Agysyar, out in the plain. I wished to camp as near to Yangi Hissar as possible that night, and it was 6.30 p.m. when the last ponies left Agysyar. Hasan Batt and I pushed on as fast as possible to overtake the leading ponies, but it became dark and we lost the road. We had nothing to guide us as the haze of the desert hid the stars, and it was not till 10.30 p.m. that we reached a village. The only people we had seen had fled when I struck a light in order to reassure them. After some trouble we knocked up an Usbeg householder, who, when he saw how matters stood, at once took us into his house, where his family of five was sleeping in a row on the veranda. His wife, not in the least put about, arose and got some bread and made tea. Having made a meal, I was brushing the crumbs away before lying down on the veranda, when Hasan Batt hastily stopped me, saying that the householder

would not like this. In the morning the latter carefully gathered up the crumbs which had fallen, and put them away. He was a very good fellow, but he held yet another superstition, as, on being asked his name, he would not tell it. It was not until the moment of parting that he whispered to Hasan Batt that it was Mohammad.

We reached Yangi Hissar early next morning, and found the rest of the party there. Hira Nand, the Indian Aksakal, a most courteous old man, entertained me at his house, and several Hindustani traders came to see me there. I exchanged calls with the Amban, who lived in a quaint dwelling. It was bazaar day in Yangi Hissar, and in the streets was a many-coloured throng. At 2 p.m. we left, and reached Yapohand at 10 p.m. For two miles the road was three feet deep in water running like a mill-stream, and the countryside was flooded. I put up in the Yapohand *serai*, which was far from clean and rather crowded. Next day we reached Kashgar at 5 p.m., after delays due to rivers being in flood. The Aksakal and a number of Indian traders met me outside the town, and conducted me to the house of the British Consul-General. Sir George and Lady Macartney had the kindness to put me up during my stay at Kashgar, and I spent three very pleasant days there. Much of the time was spent in making calls on, and receiving calls from, the Chinese officials and the Russian Consul-General, and I was also invited to dinner by the Taotai. The Russian Consul-General, Prince D. Mestchersky, very courteously helped me in regard to certain difficulties about my passport. The halt enabled Hasan Batt to wrap the ovis poli horns in felt, and pack them and the skins securely.

On the morning of June 3 I left Kashgar, having engaged ponies to go all the way to Osh. I parted here from Hasan Batt, who was to meet Cotton at Yarkand and accompany him back to Kashmir. I was sorry to part with him, as he was a most cheery and resourceful servant. In his place I engaged Maiyum, a Kanjuti, living in Kashgar.

Five days' marching, at first over a stony plain and then through low and barren sandstone hills, brought us to the Russian frontier post at Irkeshtam. On the way we met and overtook many caravans of camels, ponies, and donkeys. Those going east carried for the most part oil, cloth, and hardware, while wool was the chief article going west. At Irkeshtam a lieutenant of Cossacks was in charge of the customs house, and he had received orders from the Russian Government to pass my baggage. He gave a dinner-party that night, at which two other officers and one of their wives were present. We talked chiefly about sport, and they asked me to go to a shoot on the next day at which ovis poli were to be driven by dogs; but I could not halt. The Cossack lieutenant made up a bed for me in his dining-room. Next day, after saying good-bye, we set out for the Shart Pass in the Alai Range, the shorter route over the Terek Pass being closed by high water in the river. All day we marched over grassy hills, and, after crossing a low divide, entered the Oxus basin and camped in the Alai valley near a Kirghiz encampment. The great Trans-Alai Range closed in the view to the south throughout the march.

On July 6 we crossed the Shart Pass, 12,000 feet high, but fairly easy, and entered the basin of the Sir Darya. The Kirghiz in the Alai valley are greedy and disobliging, very different to those on the Taghdumbash Pamir. On the north side of the pass stunted pine-trees were growing, the first we had seen since leaving Kashmir. Three more marches through a cultivated country, in which many Russian *moujiks* are settled, took us to Osh, where I put up in

a *serai*. Our marches after leaving Kashgar had averaged twenty-six miles. Next morning I sold my whole camp equipment, and sent on the other baggage to Andijan in a cart. After parting with Maiyun, I followed in the motor-car which plies between Osh and Andijan. It did the distance of forty miles in two hours. On the following day I left Andijan with Amirullah by the Trans-Caspian Railway, and, after a night in the train, arrived at Samarcand. In the train I had a long conversation with a Tajik merchant, who dwelt on the beauties of Samarcand and the ease with which Russia had acquired it. The way in which the Russians mix with the inhabitants of the country is very striking. The Turkomans sit at the same tables with Russian officers and ladies in railway refreshment-rooms, and talk, laugh, and smoke, without restraint. At Samarcand I spent the better part of two days in looking at the splendid remains of the time of the Mohammedan rulers and wandering through the bazaars. The latter are full of cheap and inartistic Russian products. I then went on to Bokhara, but found that a special permit from the Minister of War was necessary for entering the city gate. On the advice of an Englishman engaged in the wool trade there, I went to Kagan and interviewed the Russian Political Officer about the matter. He obligingly offered to telegraph to the Governor-General with a view to obtaining permission, but, as this would have involved delay and possibly ultimate disappointment, I preferred not to wait, and took the train for Krasnovodsk. Thence I crossed the Caspian Sea, reached Batum by the Trans-Caucasian Railway, and, after crossing the Black Sea to Odessa, took train for Berlin. From there the journey to London was easy, and I arrived on July 30. I was lucky to get through Austria, as war was declared on Servia, and the railways were closed on the day after I passed through.

I had booked a passage for Amirullah from Batum to Bombay by the Austrian Lloyd Line. He reached Trieste on August 8, and found it impossible to proceed by that line. He managed to reach Jeddah, but arrived there penniless. He was succoured by the Consul, and is taking the chance of visiting Mecca and Medina. No doubt when he returns to India his prestige will be very great.

A word may be said about Russian passports for Turkestan. Under the rules for Indian officers permission to visit that country has to be applied for through the Indian Government. If it is granted, the Indian Government provides a passport which is visaed by a Russian Consul in India. Unless care is taken that the visa is not merely a general one, but mentions Russian Turkestan specifically, the traveller will find that such a passport is useless if, as frequently happens, the local Russian authorities have not been informed that he is coming. My own visa was merely a general one, and the Russian Consul-General at Kashgar told me that it was valueless. If I had not been able to produce telegrams showing indisputably that the journey had been sanctioned by the Russian Government, it is certain that I would have been greatly delayed.

W. J. C. LAURIE.

November 8, 1914.