
A Journey Through Part of Somali-Land, between Zeila and Bulhar

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Note.—I have deposited in the Map Room of the Royal Geographical Society specimens of the salt collected at different points in the Darya-i-Namak, in the course of our march across it. In a bag labelled A is a sample taken at a distance of about eight miles from its margin, as described at p. 653. In that labelled B is salt gathered at a point about three hours' march distant from the preceding. At both these places the salt deposit appeared to be of very great thickness. Bag C contains salt taken about a mile from the margin, where the thickness of the deposit did not appear to be more than about two feet, and the salt was soiled by contact with the earth.

A Journey through part of Somali-land, between Zeila and Bulhar.

By Lieut. CHARLES G. NURSE, Indian Staff Corps.

Map, p. 700.

ALTHOUGH a British protectorate has existed in Somali-land since the evacuation of the country by Egypt in 1884-5, and Indian troops are stationed at three places on the coast, the country is not nearly so well known as it should be. Part of it has been roughly surveyed, but even the most recent maps are by no means accurate. The coast-line on the charts is so inaccurate that I was informed by a naval officer that on laying down his position when anchored off the coast, he found it to be, on his chart, some distance inland, instead of about a mile out at sea. During the past three or four years, although several shooting parties have visited the country near Berbera, I believe little or nothing has been placed on record regarding the country and tribes visited by them. Mr. James's book, 'The Unknown Horn of Africa,' gives an account of a journey into almost unknown territory to the south-east of Berbera, but this is, I believe, the only recent publication on the subject, and does not deal with the country between Berbera and Zeila, which is more subject to British influence than any other part. The Aden Residency has of course a considerable amount of information regarding the Somali country, but much of this is, for various reasons, not available for the general public. The scanty nature of available information, and the desire to arouse greater interest in this part of Africa, must be my excuse for giving the following account of a short journey through a portion of Somali-land.

In October 1890 I was ordered to accompany Colonel Stace, C.B., the political agent, to Somali-land, with an escort of about thirty men. In order that the object of our journey may be clear, I must, at the risk of repeating what is already well known, give a short résumé of previous events.

When Egypt evacuated the country it was taken over by England

for various reasons, but chiefly to ensure the meat supply of Aden not being cut off in the time of war. The towns of Zeila, Bulhar, and Berbera are now garrisoned by Indian troops, and the administration is carried on by British officers. The language of the natives is Somali, but Arabic is understood by many of those who live near the coast, especially in the towns. The natives of the interior are divided into numerous tribes and sub-tribes, and raids of one on another are of frequent occurrence. The British Government does not interfere in this intertribal warfare, so long as the towns on the coast remain unmolested, and provided that the caravan routes remain open. In the summer of 1889, however, a portion of the Eesa tribe made a raid on the town of Bulhar, and killed upwards of sixty men, women, and children. In consequence of this and other outrages, a small force of about 350 men, consisting of Indian troops with a few sailors from H.M.S. *Ranger*, was despatched from Aden in January 1890, to punish the tribes concerned. The force was too small to inflict severe punishment on an enemy unhampered by transport in such a country, but in spite of difficulties as to water-supply, &c., a fair measure of success was attained, and eventually the tribes implicated in the above-mentioned outrages sent in to sue for peace.

It was considered advisable to extend British influence as far as possible while the effects of the expedition were still fresh in the memory of the natives, and to endeavour to put a stop to intertribal raids. The political agent, therefore, invited all the tribes to send representatives to meet him, and discuss their differences and all matters relating to their interests and the interests of trade. Accordingly we started from Aden on 16th October, and sailed in the first instance for Zeila. After visiting the boundary between French and English territory, which is situated near this town, and arranging matters as far as possible with the tribes here, we sailed for Dunkaraita, or Dungarita. We had arranged for camels and provisions to be sent to meet us here, and on our arrival found them waiting for us. We were unable, however, to start at once, as the headmen of the Eesa tribe whom we had seen at Zeila, refused to come and meet the other tribes in the interior unless we brought one of their chiefs, who had been one of the leaders against us in the early part of the year, and who had since been detained at Bulhar to keep him out of mischief. He had been sent to meet us, and consented to go by sea to Zeila, and thence by land with the other headmen to the place appointed for the "palaver." I mention this to show how distrustful the Somalis are; conscious of being untrustworthy themselves, they are always suspecting others, and fear being led into a trap. All these negotiations took time, and though we landed the men and baggage at Dungarita, we did not start inland till October 21st.

A few words on the Somalis generally will here not be out of place. The boundaries between the territory occupied by the different tribes

are not strictly adhered to, nor are they clearly defined or known, and this is the cause of much intertribal warfare. All the tribes are pastoral and nomadic, and if the rain is not plentiful in their own part of the country they often wander into the territory of others in search of pasture for their flocks. Then a collision occurs, and blood-feuds are occasioned, which cause still further strife. The Eesa are perhaps the most formidable tribe in this part of Somali-land; they almost invariably attack by night, but they fear the Habe Awal horsemen by day, as they possess scarcely any horses. These two and the Gadabursi are the principal tribes here, but all are divided into numerous subtribes. Into these subdivisions, or into the numbers of the various tribes, I will not attempt to enter, as they are very imperfectly known to the Somalis themselves, and information given on these points is often far from accurate. As the temper of the tribes in this part of Somali-land is very uncertain, we took with us wire and strong posts to form a good wire entanglement round our camp, to guard against possible night attacks. We also carried ten lamps, especially made for the purpose of throwing a good light round our camp or zariba. These precautions are very necessary in a country like Somali-land, and the lamps especially gave the sentries confidence.

There is no village at Dunkaraita, and it is only by two palm-trees growing together close to the shore that it is possible to recognise the place. The landing is on an open beach, and there is often a considerable amount of surf; men had to enter the sea to their shoulders to carry ashore our baggage, and the horses were thrown overboard, and allowed to swim. The country around Dunkaraita is mostly open plain, but some of the wadis, or dry watercourses, are covered with bushes and long grass. We obtained water a few feet below the surface in a wadi, but it was decidedly brackish. I should mention that we carried water-skins sufficient for two days' supply of water, and rations for fifteen days for the escort, besides a small amount of baggage for each man; this, together with the ammunition, our own baggage, and food carried for the Somalis who accompanied us and were to meet us, brought the number of camels to upwards of forty. This may seem a large number for so small a party, but the Somali camel only carries about 200 lbs. whereas in India a camel is calculated to carry 360 lbs. The camels had no saddles, but as is customary in Somali-land mats were tied on before loading so as form a rough kind of saddle. Although it is rather more difficult to fix bulky articles of baggage on to camels saddled in this manner, yet it seems to a great extent to prevent the backs getting sore, and I scarcely saw a sore back while in the country.

Our first march was only about nine miles; the country was mostly flat, with occasional bushes and trees, and was good going. We halted for the night in the open plain, having brought water with us, and

formed our wire zariba as usual, about thirty yards square inside, sentries being told off to each face. The Somalis who accompanied us made a bush zariba, outside ours, for themselves and the baggage animals. Next morning we started early and marched about fourteen miles to Ossuli or Ussli, which had been selected as the spot for the "palaver," being situated near the junction of the nominal boundary of several tribes. The first half of our march was good going, but the latter part was through thick thorn jungle, and across dry water-courses deep in sand. It was also extremely hot. We saw recent traces of a large number of elephants, and some women whom we met near the water informed us that a large herd had been there in the early morning. Water is plentiful at Ussli all the year round in a running stream of considerable width, but ceases a short distance farther to the east. The water extended for some three or four miles to the westward, and was excellent in quality. To show how little known this part of the country was, even to the Aden Residency, before we visited it, I must mention that during the expedition in the early part of the year it was at one time intended to send a detachment of fifty or sixty men to hold the "wells" at Ussli, as it was believed that water only existed in wells below the surface. Fifty men would not have been much use in holding three or four miles of water.

We halted here on the 23rd and 24th October, and made a strong wire zariba, having to do a good deal of clearing, as the ground was thickly wooded in all directions, except on the hills to the west. White ants were very numerous. While we were halted here, the Ughaz, or chief of the Gadabursi, came in with thirty horsemen. The country of the Gadabursi is very extensive, reaching to the borders of Abyssinia, but they have to pass through the Eesa country to reach the seaports for trading purposes. Those whom the chief brought with him were mounted on strong serviceable little horses, and were good riders. They gave us an exhibition of what they considered horsemanship, coming up towards us at full gallop, and stopping dead when about three yards from us. Their bard also made a long speech in sing-song, setting forth the power of the English, and ending up by saying that they had made a three days' journey to meet us, and were all very hungry. Some twenty representatives of the Eesa also came in, and as they all had to be fed, we were obliged to send a man in to Bulhar to bring more dates and rice. He started at 8 p.m. on horseback, and arrived at Bulhar, a distance of about 60 miles, at noon the next day. We heard that a portion of the Eesa tribe had collected a number of men with the object of attacking us, but from what we afterwards heard, we gathered that they had no intention of assuming the offensive, but feared that we had come to attack them again, and that our "palaver" was only a stratagem to throw them off their guard. During the two days we remained at Ussli the representatives of the different tribes, some 200 men altogether,

held friendly meetings to discuss different matters, but as these discussions seemed likely to be interminable, so long as they all remained comfortably here, and were fed without any expense to themselves, we decided to move on, taking them with us. We therefore marched on to Kabri Bahr, a distance of about 12 miles. This part of the map is accurate, especially regarding the position of the hills. An officer of Royal Engineers was to have accompanied us in order to make a sketch of the country through which we passed, but he was prevented at the last moment through illness. We did not know he would be unable to accompany us until we arrived at Dunkaraita, and therefore we took no surveying instruments, which we much regretted. The first three miles of our march was through a thickly wooded country to the Ussli gorge. The road through the gorge was very bad, and the stream had to be crossed several times. The gorge itself was very picturesque, the hills on both sides rising almost perpendicularly to a considerable height. The pass is about a mile and a half in length; on the further side there was a fair amount of pasture, and here we saw large flocks of sheep and goats, and a few cattle.

There are now very few cattle left in this part of Somali-land, nearly all having died of pleuro-pneumonia, which raged during 1889-90. A mile or so beyond the gorge the country is very barren and rocky for some distance; further on the bush becomes thicker, with high grass, until the Ballai jheel or marsh is reached. This marsh is only of small extent, and the water it contains is putrid, though used by the natives for watering their flocks, and probably also for drinking. Beyond the marsh the country is densely wooded, with high trees, till the wadi in which the wells are situated is reached.

Kabri Bahr was found to be 1800 feet above sea-level, and we remained in camp here two days. Our camp here very narrowly escaped destruction by fire. At night the dew was very heavy, and wet everything through, causing several cases of fever. We found the clothes we had brought quite insufficient to keep out the cold at night, though it was intensely hot during the day.

During the time we remained here the representatives of the tribes brought their negotiations to a conclusion, agreeing to abstain as far as possible from raids and encroachment on one another's territory, though some points regarding disputed boundaries were left open. They, however, said that they could not promise that raiding should entirely cease, as a raid was often got up by a few young men of a tribe, anxious to distinguish themselves, and acting against the advice of their elders. We were aware of this, and knew that the nominal headmen, or Akals as they are called, have little real authority in their tribes. But even if no permanent peace can be effected, it was certainly a good thing to bring the tribes together. One of the most intelligent Habr Awal Akals, who spoke Arabic, told me that he had heard about the Gadabursi

all his life, but never saw one of them before. After holding a general durbar, the headmen were dismissed to their tribes, some of them going with us to Bulhar to return by sea.

On October 27th we marched about 10 miles, pitching our camp to the south of Jebel Gumbur Bur, and carrying water with us, as no water is to be found *en route*. The Somalis who acted as our guides, seemed to have a very poor knowledge of the country, and scarcely ever knew where we should obtain water. The first half of this march was through thick jungle, and the latter part up the dry bed of a stream. The map in this part, as regards the position of the hills and their names, is fairly accurate. The next day we marched about 14 miles to Biji. There is no water on the way till the last three miles, where it is found in several places along the Wadi Waranwis.

Biji is 1200 feet above sea-level. We halted here one day, and then marched about 11 miles to Kerbilleh, the road being rather heavy, principally along dry watercourses. Some suspicious looking natives were seen here reconnoitring our camp, and we sent out a party, which followed them to Mount Elmas, and spoke with them. They said they were a band of robbers, who levy blackmail on caravans, and naively admitted that they had been considering the desirability of attacking our camp, but decided that we were too strong for them. We strengthened our camp, but were not further troubled by them, and next day marched to Bulhar, whence we sailed for Berbera in a native boat.

The great want of the country through which we passed is of course water. Of the places we visited, only at Ussli is there a really abundant water supply above ground; in many other spots it can be obtained from existing wells, and still more frequently by digging in the wadis. When it rains heavily on the mountains to the south of Somali-land, these wadis are often converted suddenly from dry places into raging torrents, although perhaps no rain may have fallen, except in the hills. After the water has passed, carrying everything before it, the wadi becomes in a few days as dry as before. We saw no signs of attempt at cultivation anywhere, and the country is generally unsuited for it, though there are some spots which might possibly be cultivated on the system in vogue in Southern Arabia. A large proportion of the plants and trees are more or less thorny, but there is good pasture for sheep and goats in many places, and almost everywhere sufficient for camels. The castor-oil plant grows freely on the banks of most of the wadis; the natives might make something of this were they not too lazy and indifferent. The myrtle also grows in many places. We were always able to find plenty of dry wood for firing, but saw few trees suitable for timber. The heat near the coast was considerable, especially before 10 a.m., when a sea breeze generally springs up. Game was fairly abundant: we saw traces of elephant, lion, ostrich, koodoo, hyænas, and oryx; and shot several kinds of deer, bustard, florican, hares, guinea-

fowl, sand-grouse, and other game. I also saw a large sounder of wart hog near Dunkaraita.

In conclusion, I must state that since we visited this part of Somali-land raids have not entirely ceased, but I believe they have occurred less frequently than before, and the natives are beginning to see how much better it would be for all parties to abstain from fighting. The ports of Berbera, Zeila, and Bulhar have considerable trade, which is increasing every year. The principal exports are sheep and goats, gum, hides, and coffee (from the interior), and the chief imports are dates, rice, and other food-grains, piece goods (mostly American), salt, &c. Intoxicating liquors are not used by the Somalis, nor is tobacco, except by those who have acquired the habit among Arabs. The Somali of the interior has few wants at present, but among those who live near the coast and in the ports, a demand has begun to arise for European goods, and this will doubtless increase as civilisation advances.

Notes on the Sabæans.

By Dr. A. HOUTUM-SCHINDLER, F.R.G.S.

IN a note on the port of Muhamrah ('Proceedings,' 1891, p. 297), I see a remark on the Sabæans, and the expression of a desire for some information. For readers who will content themselves with some little information on the subject, the following extracts from my note-book may be of interest, and for those who wish to study the subject further, I attach a bibliography.

Mir Abdul Latif Khân Shushtarî, a Persian author who wrote at the end of last century, says as follows in his 'Toḥfat ul 'Âlem': "Some unbelievers called Şab'ah live at Shushtar. Their religion is considered to be a mixture of the Christian and Jewish faiths. They are not the planet-worshippers mentioned in the Gor'ân, for they do not worship the stars. They also are not idolaters, and are neither Christians nor Jews. One of their customs is to go every morning into the river up to their waist, look towards the sun and pray, wash themselves, and then go away. Most of these people are goldsmiths, and some are clever agriculturists. One of my relatives frequently conversed with them, and asked them questions as to their faith. They said that their prophet was John, the son of Zacharias, and that Jesus, the son of Mary, had been one of his principal disciples. One man gave out that Ibrahîm Khalil Ullah (Abraham) was a son of John's maternal aunt, and that he brought up and educated John. My relative questioned these people many times and wrote down everything they said, but their statements varied every time. This religion exists only in Khûzistan, and not in any other part of Persia. Some people have

