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A Journey from Omdurman to Mombasa Viâ Lake Rudolf: Discussion

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etc., of the men, and bringing to his notice the names of those especially deserving of recognition, it was my sad duty to wish them all a long good-bye and return to Cairo on October 3. A week later, Major Bright, Dr. Garner, and I were on the high seas bound for England, where we arrived on October 15, 1901.

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Before the reading of the paper, the PRESIDENT said: Many here present will no doubt remember the papers that were read three years ago by Colonel Macdonald and Major Austin giving a most interesting account of their very successful work, and especially of Major Austin's work along the western side of Lake Rudolf. Since that time Major Austin has been very actively employed, and he has now made a most remarkable journey, during which there were very great hardships and sufferings to be endured, from the Nile to Mombasa. I will now ask Major Austin to read his paper.

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

Major BRIGHT: Major Austin having given you a graphic description of our journey of some 2400 miles through British territory, from Omdurman to Mombasa, I will confine myself to saying a few words on the geographical features of the country through which we passed, from the swampy regions of the Nile to the magnificent highlands of British East Africa. They are of absorbing interest. The great Abyssinian plateau, which, roughly speaking, lies north and south, bounds a large plain extending several hundreds of miles to the Nile. In this plain there are small ranges of mountains rising abruptly from the surrounding country. The natives inhabiting this region are suspicious and very shy, which is not to be wondered at, as they are constantly harried and raided by the Abyssinians. While passing through the Musha district we frequently saw the tracks of flocks and herds, and sometimes came across a few sheep and goats, but never met with a human being. We spent some time in the neighbourhood of the Omo, which is by far the finest river in this part of Africa, and the sole perpetual feeder of Lake Rudolf. Its banks are clothed with fine trees, and some parts are extensively cultivated by the natives. This is a valuable piece of country, not only for its fertility and timber, but for its supply of fresh water, that of Lake Rudolf being far from good.

As the remainder of our journey had been previously sketched by Major Austin, he here closed his survey with the most satisfactory results on his position of 1898. Observations had been taken by him nearly every night with a 5" theodolite for latitude and time, and as we had carried with us chronometer watches, the positions of our camps were generally fixed in this way. He had mapped our route with thousands of bearings with a prismatic compass, and used pedometers with satisfactory results. The methods of azimuths and latitudes were frequently used, the former being taken from points he had fixed. The map was plotted at 4 miles to 1 inch. The heights of mountains were determined by theodolite observations from data supplied by aneroids, and thus the map you have now before you was compiled. The country on the north-west of Lake Rudolf is an open plain with a few stunted trees. The beach is composed of black sand—this is evidently the reason why it is called by the Swahilis the "Black lake"—whereas Lake Stephanie, whose shores, I have been told, are of white sand, is termed by them the "White lake." Before reaching the Turkwell river, the country becomes a dreary desert, and there are steep cliffs rising from the beach. The Turkwell has its source in the extinct crater of Mount Elgon, and is joined by the river Wei Wei, but their united waters never reach the lake, being gradually absorbed by the porous soil. Following this river

down, its bed becomes wider and wider, until all traces of it disappear. On the west are the Chemorongi mountains (a range we had crossed in 1898); they are a continuation of the Suk hills. The slopes of these last-named mountains are well watered by small streams, forming in places beautiful cascades. This country is finely timbered and cultivated, the fields being cleverly irrigated with ingeniously contrived water-channels. The valley of the Kerio river divides the Suk mountains from the Kamasia and Ribo ranges.

From here we passed through a hilly country covered with thorn bush, being fortunate enough to find the same waterholes we had used nearly four years previously. A short but steep ascent took us on to the plateau, which slopes gently down to Lake Baringo. The view from this plateau is glorious, and the air exhilarating. In all directions are ranges of mountains. At Lake Baringo we were met by Mr. Hyde Baker, who showed us the greatest kindness. Here our journey was practically at an end. We had marched over 1100 miles, and were within 80 of the Uganda railway. Too much cannot be said in praise of this wonderful piece of engineering, and of the officials who, having surmounted incredible difficulties, have completed the line to the Victoria Nyanza. If this line at some future time is extended to join the Sudan railway, the country we traversed, with the exception of the latter portion—which could be easily avoided—would present no engineering difficulties.

I cannot conclude without a tribute of esteem and affection to Mr. Garner. A better or more unselfish companion it would be hard to find, and although far from well during the last few weeks of our journey, he never spared himself in his efforts to mitigate the sufferings of the sick, and to do even more than his share of work. Our escort from the 10th Sudanese, under a native officer, Mabruk Effendi, behaved throughout the journey in a manner beyond all praise; while the transport men, suffering more than their disciplined comrades, did as well as could be expected under such trying circumstances.

Colonel WATSON: It is with some diffidence that I rise to make a few remarks, because the part of the Sudan with which I am personally acquainted lies considerably to the west of the country through which Major Austin has just made his successful journey; but I know sufficient of those places to realize, perhaps better than many who are in this room, the skill and knowledge which were necessary to enable him and Major Bright to bring so difficult a journey to so successful a conclusion. The Geographical Society owes to both these officers, and also to Dr. Garner, who so ably supported them, and perhaps without whose assistance neither Major Austin nor Major Bright would be in the room to-day, the greatest thanks for the work which they have accomplished. There is one point to which some people in the room might like attention directed. Certain people believe in the future of a Cape to Cairo railway. I have not much confidence in the idea myself, but at the same time it is interesting to know that a very considerable part of this railway will have to pass through the very difficult country which Major Austin has spoken of. My own belief is that a Cape to Cairo railway is rather a chimerical idea, and every paper I hear on the subject tends to confirm me in that view. My feeling is that any money that can be devoted to railways in Africa should rather be devoted to lines such as the admirable line which has recently been opened from Mombasa to the Victoria Nyanza. England is a maritime nation, and what we have to do is to make railway lines inland from ports on the sea-coast, and thus open up the interior—such, for instance, as the line which is now spoken of from the Red Sea to the Nile, and which ought to have been made over twenty years ago. There is one point I would like to ask Major Austin a question upon. When I was working up the Nile and surveying the river

to the north of Gondokoro, there was in this part of the country a branch river which ran in a north-easterly direction, and a very intelligent Arab who was with me expressed the opinion, which he said he had learnt from a native, that that river continued to run north-east and joined the Sobat. If so, it must have run into the Pibor, of which we heard to-night, and I should like to ask Major Austin if such a branch could run or not. I cannot help expressing the hope that on some future occasion Major Austin may go back, and instead of turning to the south-east he should just go south-west, and give us a little information of the watershed between, we will say,  $7^{\circ}$  N. and the Sobat station. There is one other point I would like information upon. Major Austin, when he was showing his views, spoke about the station at Taufkia having been founded by the late General Gordon. Well, I was up the Nile with General Gordon, and at that time we had the Sobat station in the same place as it is at present. The station of which Major Austin told us something was established by Sir Samuel Baker—a name the Geographical Society should never forget. That station was established by Sir Samuel Baker under very difficult circumstances, the river Nile being completely blocked, and he had to wait for a year; but he established the station in what he believed to be the healthiest place, and it is to me a matter of great interest to know that more than thirty years afterwards he should have been proved to be right. I will say no more except to tender my personal thanks to Major Austin for his excellent paper and to Major Bright for the assistance he has given.

Major AUSTIN: In reply to Colonel Watson's inquiries regarding the river which branches off from the Nile at Gondokoro, I think it is more than probable that it is the Pibor river in its upper waters. Very little is known of the Pibor at present, the furthest point navigated being about  $7^{\circ} 30'$  N. Some years ago Colonel Capper proceeded up in one of the Egyptian gunboats, and he got to about  $7^{\circ} 30'$  N., and there found that the Pibor river rose in a large area of swamp. Now, that swamp has to be filled from some other water-supply, and I think it is more than possible that the branch you describe as striking north-east is a loop, and it is quite likely that the Nile and the Sobat are connected by this loop. These loops are very common features about all that region. Two years ago Major Bright and I came across numbers of them, which, for no apparent reason, seem to leave the parent stream, and then rejoin it some distance lower down. It is quite possible, therefore, that the Nile and the Sobat are connected by the branch Colonel Watson mentions.

The PRESIDENT: I am sure we have all listened with very great interest to the account of this very remarkable journey, and what will have struck us all, I think, is, that during the severe hardships and the anxieties from the attacks of natives, and the terrible sufferings during the latter part of the journey, these officers, and especially Major Austin, should have continued to take observations regularly and with accuracy, so that he has been able to construct a valuable map of a region a portion of which is quite new. For this I think he deserves our admiration, and I am sure the meeting will wish to pass unanimously a vote of thanks to Major Austin for his paper, and also to his companion for the observations he made afterwards.