

NOTE ON THE CHANNEL CONNECTING THE LAKES MANASAROWAR AND RAKAS

COL. COOMMDT. R. C. WILSON, D.S.O., M.C., I.A.

ACCORDING to the map "India and Adjacent Countries," Sheet No. 62, 1/1,000,000, the altitude of Manasarowar is 14,900 and of Rakas 14,850. The channel joining the northern extremities of the lakes is some 2 miles in length.

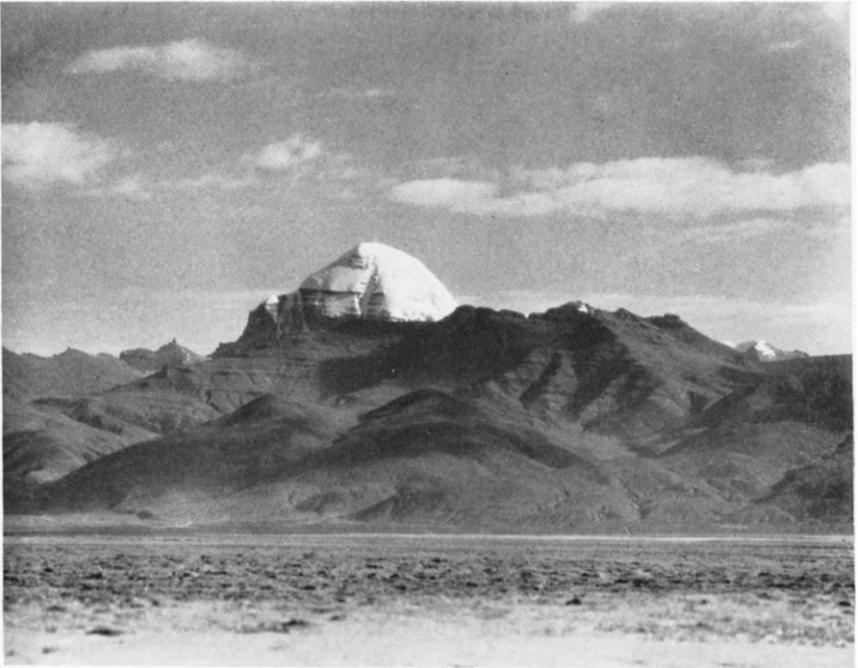
I arrived at Jiu monastery (at the manasarowar entrance of the channel) on 19 July 1926. At this time of year the snow which feeds the lakes should have been in process of melting, and a certain amount of rain, the "overs" from the Indian Monsoon, should have been falling. The two lakes should therefore have been full, and one would have imagined that, if water ever flows from Manasarowar to Rakas, it would have been doing so. At the time of my visit, however, the channel was dry except for an occasional pool, and the entrance to the channel from Manasarowar was blocked by a bar of sand and shingle. To judge by the lines of debris on the shore of Manasarowar, that lake was falling rather than rising.

Among the party with whom I was were several prominent Bhotia merchants who had often visited the district and knew it well. I inquired of them as to the channel; they all said that it was unusually dry and that they habitually crossed it at Jiu monastery and were accustomed to wading it, the water being halfway up their thighs. They accounted for its present dry state by the late spring (the snow was not yet melting at its full rate) and the exceptional dryness of the year. The plain, they said, should have been covered with grass and the sheep well fed, whereas the plain was bare and the sheep thin.

It seems to me that this evidence of the Bhotias is conclusive on the point that the channel is usually flowing during the summer months. To disbelieve their evidence is to assume that they make a habit of wading a stream which can be crossed dryshod, as we crossed it, within a couple of hundred yards.

There are indeed other ways of accounting for the pools of water we found in the channel. One is that the channel has feeders other than the Manasarowar Lake; and another is that the water arrives there by seepage from the lake, underground. Both these conditions probably obtain; but the feeder depressions exist on the north bank only; they are too insignificant to merit the name of streams, drain a comparatively small catchment area, and would carry water to the channel only immediately after a heavy storm. Seepage undoubtedly exists.

In 1846 Capt. Henry Strachey said that the channel connecting the two lakes was 100 feet wide, 3 feet deep, and was flowing rapidly from east to west. Maybe it would require an unusually wet year to reproduce these conditions to-day, but in a normal year the water does undoubtedly flow. In 1926, at the time of our visit a rise in level of perhaps a couple



Kailas from Barkha

Phot. Mr. H. Rutledge



Gurla Mandhata from Manasarowar lake

Phot. Col. Commdt. R. C. Wilson



Phot. Mr. H. Rutledge
Channel between Manasarovar and Rakas from west side of Jiu

of feet would have been sufficient to have caused Manasarowar to break through the bar and fill the channel.

Another interesting point in the drainage of these parts is the destination of the three main streams (east, west, and centre) flowing south from Kailas Parbat. According to the lie of the country the water of these three streams, which are of considerable size, should flow into Rakas or into the channel of the Sutlej west of Rakas. Actually I could see no signs that any of this water reached the lake above ground. The streams break up into many channels after leaving the foothills, and, within a few miles, have disappeared. The water must find its way into the lake and into the Sutlej, but does so underground.

The first signs of water we found in the Sutlej was about Lajindak, where the river enters the hills; here there was a small trickle. The porous character of the soil can hardly have changed, and one must either assume that the channel of the Sutlej leading out of Rakas was cut by flood water in unusually wet years or else that the rainfall of this part of the country has decreased in recent times.

Note by Dr. T. G. Longstaff.

I camped at the Mansarowar end of the channel on 30 July 1905 and found conditions very similar to those described above. The late Pandit Gobaria of Garbyang said that he had seen water flowing in the channel, directly from Mansarowar, "many years ago." My companion, Mr. C. A. Sherring, I.C.S., secured a good panoram of the whole channel, which is on view in the upper corridor at Lowther Lodge: this is reproduced in Sherring's 'Western Tibet' (Arnold, 1906) on p. 271: on pp. 284-5 are some remarks on the Sutlej channel from Rakas Tal. Granted that progressive aridity is taking place, very little change could be expected in twenty years; but since Henry Strachey's visit the change is considerable. It is to be hoped that future travellers will copy Col. Commandant Wilson's example both in making and recording their observations at this test point