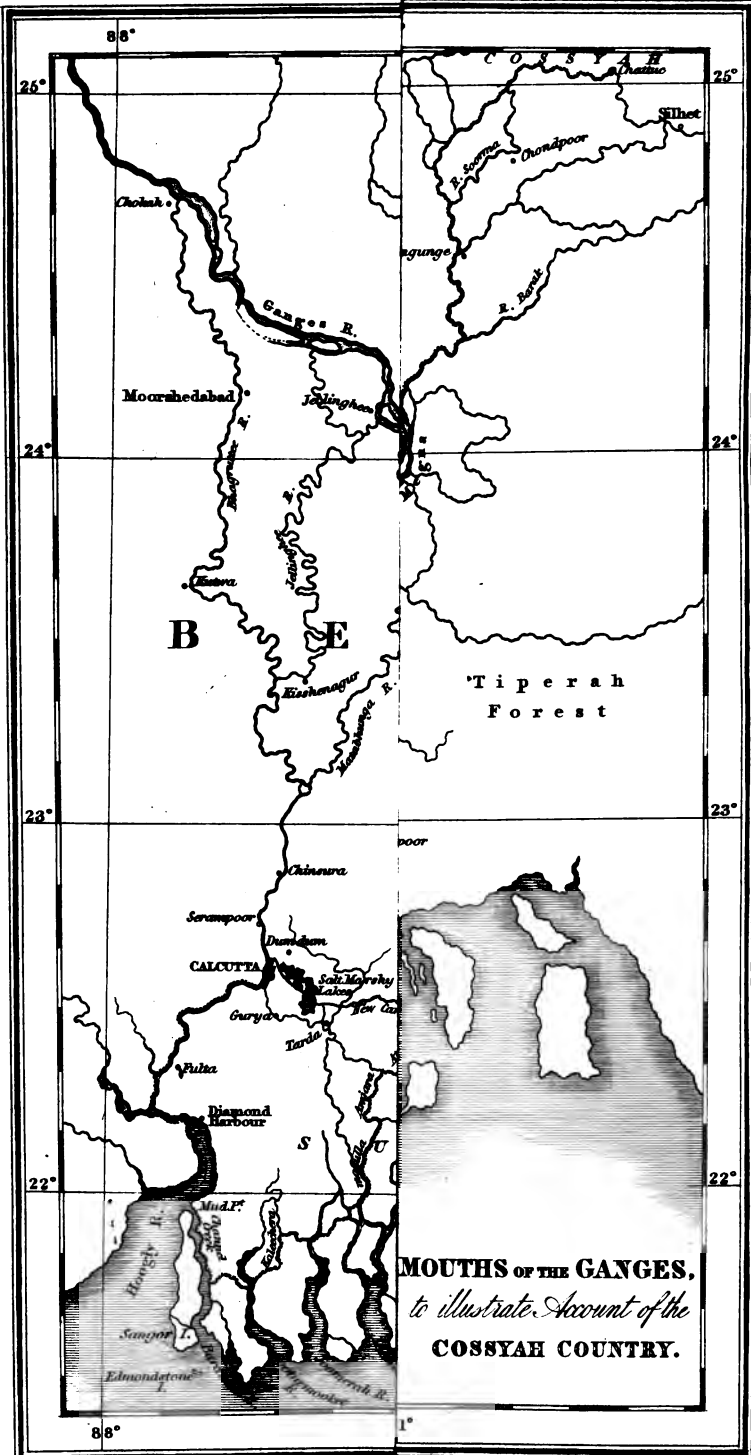


MOUTHS OF THE GANGES,
to illustrate Account of the
COSSYAH COUNTRY.



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Tiperah Forest

MOUTHS OF THE GANGES, to illustrate Account of the COSSYAH COUNTRY.

J. Walker, Sculp.

VII.—*Account of the Cossyahs, and of a Convalescent Depot established in their Country, 280 miles N. E. from Calcutta.*

Extracted from the private Letters of an Officer quartered there ; and communicated by Lieut. Murphy, R.E. Read 9th Jan., 1832.

‘ Chirra, 28th May, 1831 :


‘ YOU will not be able to find this place in the map, but it is in latitude $25^{\circ} 12' 30''$ north, and in longitude $91^{\circ} 35'$ east, thirty miles to the north-west of Sylhet, and about 4000 feet above the level of the sea. The climate was so favourably spoken of, that last July government decided upon forming a depot here, and ordered a detachment of convalescents to be sent up, whom I volunteered to accompany. We left *Dum Dum* on the 19th of August, and arrived here on the 4th of October, the last day giving us a fatiguing march of nine hours from the foot of the hills. But we were more than repaid by the delightful climate. When we left the boats the thermometer was at 93° ;—up here it was only 76° . All the men rapidly improved in health, and became as stout as when they left home. The rains have now set in, which are not so pleasant; but we have, at the same time, the satisfaction of being able to wear warm clothing, while our friends on the plains are grilling in white jackets under a *punkah*.

‘ The ground granted by the native Cossyahs for the *sanatorium* consists of a table-land about two miles long, by three-quarters, or a mile in breadth. At the northern extremity of this are low hills, varying in height from 50 to 150 feet, on which the officers' quarters, the barracks, and hospital are situated. We are bounded on the north-east, east, and south, by an immense valley, about 2000 feet deep, which commences a little to the northward, with a perpendicular face of sandstone rock; the side next to us is also perpendicular in several places; but in other parts of the valley the mountains slope, and are broken into numberless ravines, forming a prospect of which I should find it difficult to give you even a faint idea. From November until March, or, I may say, April, no climate in the world could surpass this; during December and January there was constantly a hoar frost on the ground at night, which of course disappeared soon after sunrise; and all day we had a beautifully clear sky, and a fine bracing cold air which obliged us to move about; so cold was it, indeed, that when engaged in writing I have frequently been obliged to lay down my pen and run out in the sun. You may judge what a treat this was to one accustomed to the climate below: here we never yet had occasion to carry an umbrella except when it rained.

‘ To the north, about a mile off in a direct line, is *Chirra Poonjee*, or the village of Chirra, built upon hills two or three hundred feet

higher than ours, and separated from us by a rocky mountain-stream, which forms also our western boundary, and continues to the southward till it falls into what is called the *Moosnyl* valley, forming a waterfall, just now of the grandest description. Beyond this boundary there is a high wooded hill, composed solely of limestone, in which are some very beautiful caves.

‘The Cossyahs are a fine race of people, far superior to any Asiatics I have seen. They resemble the Malays a good deal in appearance, but are stouter built, owing to the nature of their employment in bringing loads from the plains, to which they are accustomed from an early age, women and all, apparently; in fact, of the two sexes, I think the *fair* has the advantage in point of stoutness. They are also a good-humoured cheerful people, a quarrel being almost unknown among them. All their burdens are carried resting on the back, by means of a sling made of split bamboo, which passes across the forehead; in which manner they will bring up, over a most difficult road of about twelve miles, weights or loads of from a maund to a maund and a half, or from 80 to 120 lbs. for themselves, though for us they will not bring more than about 60. They are honest almost to a miracle, though extremely fond of spirits. Prejudices of caste they have none that I can see, unless we may consider burning their dead one. The spot where this ceremony is performed, is afterwards marked by a stone inclosure; the ashes being collected, put into earthen jars or pots, and then deposited in a regular square stone box with a small door to it, over which they erect immense slabs of stone, varying in number from three to seven, ac-

ording to the wealth (not rank) of the deceased,—thus  I have seen some of these stones at least twenty feet in height. The hills near the village are covered with these monuments of departed wealth, and bear some resemblance, I think, to an English burial-ground.

‘I have said that the Cossyahs are a fine race, but must not omit to add that they are likewise a dirty one, washing being a luxury they seldom or never trouble themselves about. There seems but little distinction between the rajah and his subjects. His hut is in nothing better than the rest, and all his revenue from the *civil list* is derived from fines which he has the power to levy: his turban and the cloth he wraps round his shoulders when paying his respects are certainly somewhat cleaner than those of his suite, but, in other respects, I fancy he has an equal antipathy to water. Marriages are carried on among them with considerable regularity, and conjugal infidelity is seldom or never known. Bigamy is also prohibited. The right to the throne does not, as with us, descend to the sons of brothers or sons, but invariably to those of

sisters, so as (according to them) to preserve the royal blood pure and uncontaminated. They speak a curious language, not unlike the Chinese, but have no written characters; and it is wonderful with what accuracy they keep their accounts, which they do by notching sticks. I asked a lad one day how he managed when he wished not to forget anything; he replied that he broke some eggs and then remembered it. They do the same always before setting out on an expedition, to ascertain whether good or bad fortune will attend them, but in this respect I think that inclination often decides.

'It was about forty miles to the north of this that two officers of our regiment were murdered in April, 1829; and the Cossyahs are still in an unsettled state in that quarter, now and then taking the liberty of cutting off the *dk* (post) to and from Assam. Our neighbours here, however, have always been friendly, and, I fancy, will find it their interest to continue so. As the place becomes more resorted to, they, of course, will get more employment. A party of six gentlemen came up the other day from Calcutta in a steam-vessel, to the foot of the hills, and their account of the place I hear has made the whole city of palaces desire to make a similar excursion. The steam-boat returned in six days, so you may imagine what an acquisition such a climate must eventually prove to residents in the lower provinces, who otherwise would be forced to sea, or, perhaps, home.'

[The Society having also received a copy of the report made by the master of this steam-boat, on his return, of the particulars of his navigation, some extracts from it are subjoined;—the track pursued being also indicated on the annexed sketch.]

The Hooghly left Calcutta on the 16th of April, at 4 P.M., to proceed by the Lower Sunderbun route for Chattuc, near Sylhet, the vessel being at her usual draught of water, viz. four feet five inches forward, and three feet eight inches aft. At 7 P.M. we arrived and anchored a short distance above Fulta. On the 17th, at 9-10, entered Channel-creek; but being low water at the time we met some little detention. At 1-20 P.M. entered the Sunderbuns; and at 7 P.M. arrived and anchored in the Thakooran Gong, or Joomerah River.

On the 18th, arriving near the entrance of Manick Kally last quarter ebb-tide, to save time I wished to enter the Mutwall river by the branch called the Rain Choppi; but in attempting this the vessel took the ground at 7-10 A.M., and before I could run the keedge out to haul her off, the water fell several inches, and she remained aground until 10-40, when she floated with the flood-tide. While the vessel was lying on shore, I sounded across the

upper entrance of the passage, and the deepest water was four feet in the channels (it has a sand in the centre), and it would not exceed three feet low water, and, I think, must even dry in spring-tides. It is about one-third of a mile across, and has heretofore been considered by us as a good channel in event of being too late for Manick Khal. After quitting that place we pursued the route always taken by us; and, at 7 P.M., arrived and anchored in the south-west entrance of Coalee Khal, or Goodlad's Cut.

At daylight on the 19th, the tide being favourable, we proceeded on for Kulna, and arrived there at 4-30 P.M., and filled up coals to carry us on to Dacca. On the following day we were necessitated to wait until after the flood-tide was in, as it was stated that we should not find water sufficient for us to pass through Boiereb River at low water, it being very shallow. Near a bazaar, called Fakerah Haut, we were for some time, or about a mile, running in one fathom water, and at last took the ground; but being soft mud and a flood-tide, we hauled off in a few minutes. By an acquaintance with the channels we might have passed free, as there were a few inches more water than our draft at the time we arrived there, which was at the first quarter flood-tide. The river running in an east and west direction, the tide flows into it from both entrances; and it is in consequence shallow towards the centre, nor do I consider it passable for a vessel of the Hooghly's description, at this season of the year, *before* first quarter flood, or *after* half ebb, though from its being of a soft mud, a vessel getting on shore in it does not sustain any damage. After quitting this river we passed on without further delay, and, in the evening, arrived and anchored within eight miles of the station of Burrishal.

We proceeded thence, in pursuance of our voyage, at daylight, on the 21st; and at 6-30 A.M. passed Burrishal. The river thence to the Ganges (which we entered at 8 A.M.) was very shallow; and from its being low water at the time, we were frequently obliged to slow the engines, but nothing further. On getting into the Ganges we ran two or three miles down before we could get into the proper channel, and then ran up with a flood-tide about twelve miles. We next proceeded by a river taking a more eastern direction, called the Nautter River, and thence entered the Megna at 3 P.M., near a chokee, or village, called Niah Banguay, or the New Brake, proceeding down a few miles to cross over into the channel, which was, however, unnecessary, and only caused by the ignorance of our pilots, who, in two other cases, led us a wrong passage before we reached Dacca, besides several times detaining us to make inquiries of people as we were passing near the river banks. The Megna River, near a village named Boyra, a little north of Niah Banguay, is eight or ten miles across;

and, in bad weather, vessels, like the Hooghly, might meet detention from the sea that would rise there, though a run of from two to three hours would, in moderate weather, take them into shelter, there being several islands and rivers that would answer for that purpose below the river leading up to Dacca. The Ganges, for the short distance we ran in it, was about four miles across, and in it also, especially in the rains, some detention might be experienced in boisterous weather. Between the two great rivers there is plenty of shelter, and I do not apprehend there would be any detention from the Dacca river upwards, though there must be an immense sheet of water throughout the Megna during the rainy season, the country in its vicinity being said to be then generally overflowed. On the 22d, at noon, we arrived at Dacca (and filled up coal), by which we lost one day's run. At 7 A.M., on the 23d, we left Dacca, and arriving in the Megna river at 10 A.M., proceeded up the branch called the Lowaddee; and at 6-40 P.M. arrived and anchored about six miles below Boirub Bazar, after having grounded and been unable to find a passage to proceed on.

On the 24th, at dawn, sent the boats with the chief officer to endeavour to find a channel; but, not succeeding, were in consequence forced to run back about five miles and take another passage. Thence we proceeded on, and, at 7 P.M., anchored in the river Soorma, about fifteen miles above Azmeriagunge, without experiencing any further difficulty, except once or twice slowing the engines for a few minutes, having got into shoal water. At Azmeriagunge we fell in with a pinnacle that had been sent there from Sylhet, fearing we should not find water to proceed above that place. On the 25th, proceeding on at 6-30 A.M., we entered a creek named Sitan Kally, which we found very narrow, winding, and shallow;—at the lower part only six feet water, and a current running about three miles per hour, which is caused, I imagine, by the upper entrance being broad, and the greater portion of the water from the Soorma running down it. The banks are steep and of a hard clay, so that great care is necessary in passing through, both ways, for fear of injury to the paddle-wheels and rudder.

From the northern entrance of Sitan Kally ('Chondpoor') upwards, we found the water much more shallow than below it, frequently not exceeding one and a quarter to one and a half fathoms; and off a village named Nugur, forty to fifty miles below Chattuc, there is a shoal extending across the river, which, in the dry season, is stated to have only three feet water over it. When we passed, there were six feet. From that place upwards we were several times in nearly our own draught, but did not touch the ground. We arrived and anchored at Chattuc at 5-50 P.M., and learnt that

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there was not water for the vessel to proceed above two miles farther.

On the 26th, at day-light, the gentlemen of our party left in a bholeah and proceeded to Campangunge, and I ascertained, by sounding in the boats, that there was not water to proceed more than two or three miles above Chattuc at that season of the year. The bholeah and a pinnace found no difficulty in getting up; and I am of opinion that it is practicable for bholeahs at all seasons of the year. Campangunge is about fifteen miles from Chattuc and five miles from the foot of the hills;—from it our party proceeded by land.

There was a rise in the Soorma River, previous to our quitting Calcutta, of nearly three feet; but the water had fallen again, before we reached Chattuc, two feet; and continued falling until the morning of the 1st of May, when we had a very heavy fall of rain; after which it was as high as it had been this season, rising full three feet again.

The influence of the tide is felt at Azmeriagunge in the dry season, there being a rise and fall at this place, in the springs, of about a foot. The current was not running more than one mile per hour above the river leading to Dacca;—the water was very clear, with something of the appearance of sea-water; and from the want of stream, and being calm for some days previous to our arrival, the surface was, in many places in the Megna, covered with patches of a kind of green scum, or vegetable matter, similar to what is frequently seen in tanks. With one day's rain, however, and a fresh S.E. wind, which we had returning to Edrackpore, this quite disappeared, and the water remained clear, affording every facility for steam navigation, at least to the southern entrance of Sitan Kally, when the river is at the lowest ebb; but I cannot venture to affirm that there would be water sufficient for a vessel of the Hooghly's description thence upwards. From the report of the contractor for supplying the company with chuniam there it appears, indeed, that there is not, as he informed me that his boats were forced to take out cargo at one or two places. The rise we had in the Soorma River was scarcely perceptible in the lower part of the Megna.

On the 2d of May, at 6 A.M., we left Chattuc on the return voyage for Calcutta, &c.