

EXPEDITION THROUGH SOMALILAND TO LAKE RUDOLF.*

By Dr. A. DONALDSON SMITH.

DURING a sporting trip in Somaliland over two years ago, I conceived the idea that I could carry an expedition across that large extent of unexplored country lying between the Shebeli river and Lake Rudolf, with Somalis as a guard, and camels as pack-animals. Accordingly I came back to England, and set to work to fit out an expedition, engaging the services of Mr. Edward Dodson, a young taxidermist at the British Museum, and preparing to do as much useful work as possible. The Society gave me the only material assistance I received, in the shape of a loan of valuable instruments, so that, with these and the excellent instruction I received from Mr. John Coles, I was able to make an accurate map of the country traversed.

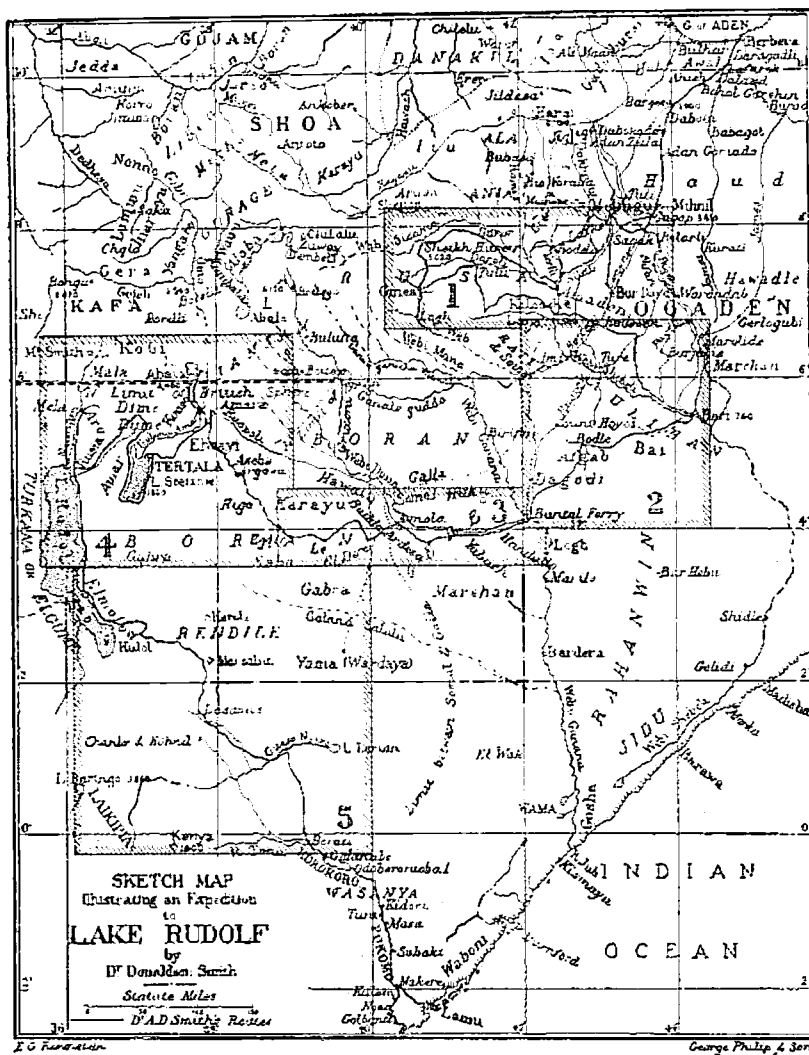
My friend, Mr. Fred Gillett, asked me to permit him to accompany me, with twelve men and twenty camels, in order to get some big game shooting. To this I willingly agreed, as I was desirous of his companionship. Grave doubts were expressed, both here and at Aden, of our ever being able to enter the Galla country, let alone our reaching Lake Rudolf. Ever since the days of Sir Richard Burton, who first endeavoured to make the journey, many attempts have been made to reach Lake Rudolf without success. Captain Bottego and Prince Ruspoli had gone far up the river Jub, or Sosana, and it was reported that the Gallas had resolved to unite in preventing any other white men from entering their country, on account of the manner in which these two Italians had acted, and that it would be impossible to cross the Galla countries without a very large army. However, with light hearts, and fully confident that we should be successful, we set sail from London on June 1, 1894.

We were soon in Berbera, with eighty Somalis and two good headmen. The thousand preliminary details need not be dwelt upon; it is sufficient to say we were heartily glad when July 10 came, and we were able to give the order to march. But I wish to thank Mr. Charles MacConkey, of Aden, and Mr. Malcolm Jones, resident at Bulhar, for their kind assistance in enabling us to get off so early.

When we started from Berbera, we had only 75 camels, instead of the 110 we needed to carry our stores. This was owing to the fact that there was such a drought that camels could get nothing to eat near the coast. The 75 camels we gradually increased to the required number as we went inland, but I was obliged to move slowly at first. I will not detain you long with an account of our journey through Somaliland, as the lions have long ago offered sufficient inducements to explorations in that country. Hiring extra camels to carry water

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at Hargesa, we were soon across that 100 miles of bushy, waterless plateau-land called the Haud, and found ourselves at Milmil, in the Ogaden country. This is the land of fat camels and fine-looking men and women. The people have lighter complexions and finer features than any other Somalis. The boys are all obliged to attend school to



learn Arabic, a bit of training that improves them in every way. The country is mostly flat, but the Abyssinian highlands are continued down in Western Ogaden in the shape of low mountain ranges and hills till they lose themselves above Ime; and another mountain range runs from Milmil south to Bari, on the Shebelle river.

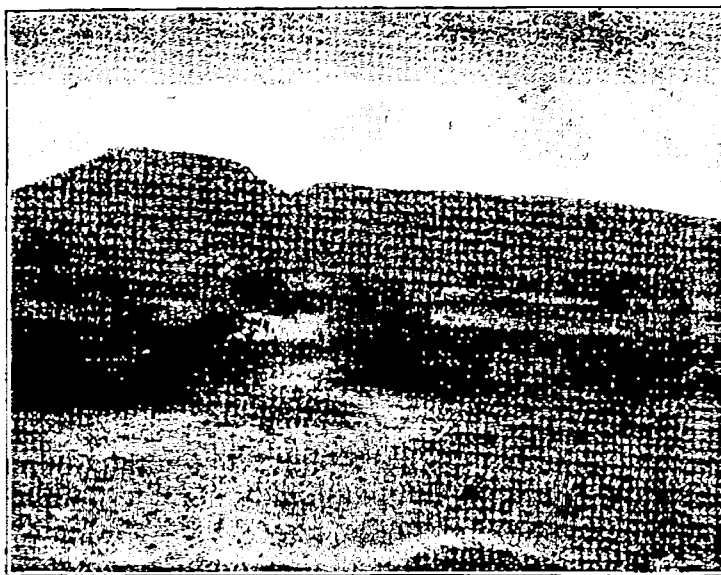
As our route lay directly west, it was principally through a rough country. The Ogaden is dry like the rest of Somaliland; the wells and pools of water in the river-beds are far apart, and to the southwest the water is brackish. This is not the case, of course, during the spring and autumn rains; but it is astonishing how quickly the country assumes its half-parched appearance after the rains have ceased.

From Milmil we marched a little south to Sesabene, a settlement that was of much importance. It was situated in a little valley, where there were many wells and a good deal of green grass. I saw more cattle and donkeys here than in any other place in Somaliland. The people were very civil, and glad to trade with us. You may imagine my chagrin when I heard, a few days afterwards, that they had just been raided by the Abyssinians under Ras Makonnen. Their animals had all been driven off, the boys and girls taken as slaves, and the older people killed or mutilated. This same Ras Makonnen has been a great leader in the war with the Italians.

The country now became gradually more interesting to us, as it was more unknown. We had one march of three days through a waterless hilly country called Sibi. The Somalis also call this Habr-a-erde, which means "bad for old women." This name impressed us very much, as we had seen the sad state in which old women roam about Somaliland too often. The Somalis are the best savages in Africa, but they have their little ways, and one is not to trouble about a woman after she gets old, whether she be sister or cousin or aunt. So many of the poor old wretches are doomed to wander about, eating berries or begging, till they die of gradual starvation, or are caught by lions or hyenas.

The middle of August found us at Bodele, on the Terfa tug (*tug* is the Somali for *wadi*, a dry river-bed); but before reaching here we had the pleasure of meeting Captain C. J. Perceval, who had penetrated farther than any other white man, except ourselves. At Bodele we found a few Somalis, the last we were to see for many months. My desire was to keep on as nearly west as I could, but the Somalis told me that was impossible—that even a man empty-handed could not reach the water of the Erer, owing to the great rocky walls that surrounded it. The only thing to do was to go and see for myself. Leaving Mr. Gillett with the caravan at Bodele, as he wished to do some lion-shooting, I started off with Dodson and a few boys. We had many difficulties, having to lift five camels bodily over rocks several times. Finally we had to abandon the camels, but not until we had got within a mile of the river. It took some climbing to reach the water, but we were rewarded for the trouble, as a more lovely valley is not often seen. Narrow, and with high mountains rising on either side, it is nothing but a mass of colour, from the yellow reeds along the edge of the stream to the flowering vines covering the rocks. There were many birds, the most striking being a crested starling, of which only a single specimen

had been seen before. There were deserted Galla villages along the edge, and I saw fresh footprints, but I did not succeed in getting any native to approach. For three days on this trip Dodson and I lived on the flesh of a rhino, that had managed to get within a yard of me before I could stop him. On reaching my caravan, I found Mr. Gillett had killed a fine lion. Of course there was no crossing the Erer, so we had to march down Terfa tug to its junction with the Shebeli river. The Shebeli was flooded, and it was all we could do to cross it. We succeeded, but not without the loss of a camel-man, who was washed away and drowned, and two ponies. Mr. Gillett's mule fared badly also, through the greediness of a crocodile. Now was the time for the terrible



LAFERUK, TWO MAECHES FROM BERBERA.

(From photograph by Mr. P. Gillett.)

Gallas to appear. Where was the country teeming with lusty warlike people? Certainly not here! What we found as we progressed was only a few poor villages of a hundred huts each, and the natives presenting the most abject appearance imaginable. Only four years ago they must have been a fine race of men; they loved to tell us of their former glory; their eyes would light up, and they would forget for the instant their present condition. Now the Abyssinians are the masters, and these poor people are only the remnant of a great tribe. They are the Arusa Gallas, and their native land extends 150 miles west of the Shebeli river. You could not find over five thousand souls among them now.

B. L. 14, 42° 21' N, 7° 41' E

flowing white garments. What is most remarkable, they are at peace with their neighbours the Dagodi and the Borans.

Our route lay for a short distance along the Daua, and then, as that river veered off towards the north, we left it and kept as nearly west as possible. There was plenty of game about, and I had good sport; but the one animal that above all else succeeds in breaking up the monotony of a day's march, whether you wish it or not—the rhinoceros—was not about.

The Daua is fringed with palm trees, from the juice of which the natives make an intoxicating drink. I crossed one day, and went at right angles to the stream for some distance with two of my boys. To my annoyance, I came upon the Daua again, flowing in an opposite direction; but I was surprised to find, at the bend of the river, a band of about a dozen wild-looking men and women, thoroughly intoxicated, and having a fiendish sort of time together, dancing and tumbling about. I tried to approach them as gently as possible, but it was of no use; the instant they caught sight of me they screamed and bolted. Hundreds of monkeys overhead caught the idea there was something wrong about my white face, for, setting up a deafening screaming, they pelted us with the fruit of the dum palm until we were glad to retreat. Except very near the river, the country was barren, and great wind-storms were raging when we were there. It was not an uncommon occurrence to wake up at night and find our tent-ropes dragging about over our bodies, and clouds of dust thrown in our faces. The Daua is 40 yards wide, but only 2 to 3 feet deep, with a current of 4 miles an hour.

Bidding farewell to rivers for a long time, we continued west, and arrived at the wells of El Modo on March 3. This was an important place, as beyond there is a mountainous tract of country in which there is no water for three days (45 geographical miles). A rest of a few days was not enough for my tired camels. It was all we could do to get across the desert. I had to throw away many boxes, including such luxuries as wine and tinned fruit; and we could carry so little drinking-water that we suffered greatly the last day. We had to undergo all this in spite of the fact that we had seven camels carrying cloth for trading, besides many others carrying beads and brass wire. Twelve camels died on the way, and when we reached Aimola, where there was water, there were only 60 camels left, and most of these were completely tired out. The natives had all fled; there was but one thing to be done, and that was to run after them and force them to come to camp and have a shauri with us. We could catch no natives, but succeeded in finding great droves of fine camels. This is what we wished, as the owners must surely come to us when the camels were in our hands. We had not long to wait; soon the camp was full of natives, to whom I returned every animal I had taken from them. The effect

was instantaneous—the whole country came to trade, and, to show their confidence, most of the men brought their wives and children along.

In the ten days we spent there we bought about forty camels and many good cattle and sheep, the natives forcing us to give, however, a high price for everything. I had some good sport here with elephants, rhino, and giraffe very near our camp. Aimola is situated on a fertile plateau, and is just on the border of the Boran country. The Gallas living here belong to the Gere Libin tribe, and are not Mohammedans. The plateau itself, called the Budda Ardesa, is not inhabited. The district inhabited by the Gere Libin begins one march to the north of the Budda, and extends north about 60 miles, the banks of the Daua river being the most thickly settled part.

The spring rains had now begun, and were to continue almost incessantly for two months. It was very cool, and so it was with the best spirits that the two Europeans of the party, at any rate, tramped down the edge of the plateau and found themselves in the lovely valley of San Kural, in the country of the Borans, of whom native traders had brought out such glowing reports.

We were astonished to find that, instead of being divided up into innumerable tribes, these Borans were one great united people. Their history resembles many a European one. The Karayu Borans, who were the strongest, subdued their neighbouring kinsfolk, and by excellent management formed a strong central government, in which at present nothing but harmony prevails. The hereditary king of the Karayu Borans is therefore ruler of all the Borans, and the present owner of that title is named Abofolato, a fat, clever old man living far to the north-west. The Borans I found about San Kural were the Sakuyu, and there were with them some of the Gabra or low caste Borans, who use bows and arrows. The chief difference I noticed between the Sakuyu and the other Borans was that the former have their heads shaved, and a tiny little pigtail sticking straight up from the middle.

The Borans received us with every show of friendship, as they said they had heard we wished to travel peacefully. As we gradually proceeded through their country they brought animals to trade, and provided guides. It was a lovely fertile country from beginning to end—a series of well-watered valleys, lofty mountain ranges, and cool, delightful plateaux. The roads were often difficult for the camels, and we should have to spend a whole day hard at work to do a distance of 5 or 6 miles. Seventy miles past San Kural are several most extraordinary wells—great round pits dug in the solid rock 80 feet deep and 50 feet wide, with long entrances cut gradually down to the bottom. The beginning of these passages would be 60 yards from the well itself in some cases, and would have rough steps cut in them, reminding one of the steps of Clovelly. The wells were cut by people that were much more civilized than the Borans.

Aimola 4°N, 40°20'E



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