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IN

ABYSSINIA.



*Presented to the House of Commons, in pursuance of their Address dated
November 26, 1867.*

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P R E F A C E.

THE object of this compilation is to collect together the information on the routes in Abyssinia which is scattered through the works of different travellers. This information has been arranged in the following order:—

General description of the country and of the different routes by which it can be entered.

Short outline of the nature of the Government, the religion and character of the inhabitants, the currency, the military system of the country, and the career and character of the present Emperor Theodore.

Reference to the Portuguese expedition of 1541, and to the places of entrance into the country which have been adopted by travellers since the 16th century.

Detailed account of the routes leading from Massowah and Ansley Bay to Gondar and Magdala.

Extracts from works of various travellers bearing upon the different lines of roads.

A map, compiled from the records of travellers, is given at the end. The orthography of names of places, &c., in Abyssinia is so indefinite, hardly any two travellers agreeing, that it has been found impossible to avoid, in all cases, discrepancies of spelling between the maps and the text. Abyssinian villages and towns appear to be often of a very temporary nature, and those recorded by one traveller are often not mentioned by the next one who follows the same route; some of the places laid down may therefore be no longer in existence, and others may have sprung up. The data also for laying down many of them are of very doubtful accuracy.

Compiled at the Topographical and Statistical Department of the War Office, by Lieut.-Colonel A. C. Cooke, C.B., R.E.

HENRY JAMES, Colonel R.E.,
Director.

INDEX.

	PAGE
General description of the country of Abyssinia and of the different routes leading into it	1
Principal Towns.....	13
Government.....	14
Religion and Character of Inhabitants	15
Currency.....	17
Military Strength of Country	18
Description of Theodore	22
Portuguese Expedition into Abyssinia	27
Routes to Magdala from the North	30
Routes from Massowah and Ansley Bay to the Highlands	34
Extracts from the Works of Travellers	38
List of Works referred to	38
Index to Routes	39
Salt's Journey from Massowah by the Taranta Pass to Chelicut, near Antalo	42
Pearce's Journey from Antalo to Lake Ashangi.....	45
Ferret et Galinier. Journey from Massowah by the Taranta Pass to Adowa.....	47
Ferret et Galinier. Journey from Gondar to Adowa, Goundet, and Massowah	56
Mansfield Parkyns' Journey from Massowah, by Ailet to Adowa	62
Ditto from Adowa along the Takazze	73
Münzinger's Route from Massowah to Kaya Khor	75
Col. Merewether's description of the Agametta Plateau	79
Do. Report on roads from Massowah to Ailet	82
Major Harris' Journey from Tajurreh to Ankobar	83
D'Hericourt ditto ditto	118
Isenberg and Krapf ditto ditto	120
Coffin's Journey from Amphilla Bay to Chelicut	129
Hamilton's Journey from Suakim to Kassala.....	130
Bruce's Journey from Gondar to the Gwangwe.....	134
Krapf's Journey from Magdala by Lake Haik, &c., to Massowah	137
Dr. Beke's Journey from Debra Tabor to Adowa.....	172
Rüppell's Journey from Halai to Addigraht (Ategerat)	181
Rüppell's Journey from Addigraht to Tackeraggiro (Takirakira)	182
Dr. Beke's Letter on a route from Ansley Bay to Tohonda.....	183
Description of the different Divisions of the Provinces of Abyssinia	186
Combes' and Tamisier's Journey from Massowah to Adowa	189
Do. do. do. Adowa to Devra Tabor	191
Don Alonzo Mendez. Journey from Amphilla Bay to Fremona	194
Lefebvre. Journey from Atebidera towards the Salt Plain.....	198
Do. do. Massowah to Adowa	200
Do. do. Adowa to Antalo	202
Do. do. Adowa to Massowah	205
Do. Routes	208
Bruce's Journey from Massowah to Gondar	221
Steudner's Journey from Chankar (south-west of Gondar) to Magdala ..	245
Line of Advance of the Expedition	251

RETURN to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons,
dated November 26, 1867; *for*—

“Copy of a Pamphlet and Appendices relating to the Routes
in Abyssinia.”

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY OF ABYSSINIA AND OF THE DIFFERENT ROUTES LEADING INTO IT.

ABYSSINIA is often represented on maps as bounded on the east by the Red Sea. This, however, is an error. Abyssinia proper consists of a high mountainous table-land, the eastern boundary of which may be considered roughly as following the 40th degree of east longitude. Between this mountainous region and the sea there is a tract of arid, low-lying, waterless country, inhabited by the savage Danakil tribes; this region at Massowah is only a few miles broad, but it widens out to 200 or 300 miles at Tajurrah. In climate, inhabitants, soil, cultivation, &c., these two regions are totally opposite, the highlands being salubrious, temperate, generally well watered, and traversed by paths in every direction, whilst the low country is arid, waterless, with few exceptions trackless and uncultivated.

This inhospitable region effectually cuts off the highlands from all communication with the sea, except at three points, Massowah and its neighbourhood on the north, Amphilla Bay about 100 miles to the south-east, and Tajurrah on the south.* From these three points the roads into the interior are of a very different character, for at Massowah they very soon climb the eastern boundary of the highlands,† and continue along the elevated land, whilst from Tajurrah they have to traverse 200 or 300 miles, and from Amphilla Bay from 50 to 100 miles, of the low lying country before they reach the highlands.

The western and southern boundaries of Abyssinia are very undefined, but they may be taken roughly as coterminous with the edge of the highlands, as shewn on the map in the margin of the route map at the end.

The different character of the high and low country has an important bearing on the nature of the transport, for, whilst in the latter camels are chiefly used, these animals are useless in the highlands, where they are replaced by asses, mules, oxen, and men.‡

* Travellers speak of other tracks known to the natives, but none have been explored.

† A circle drawn with the centre at Massowah and Ailet on the circumference (a radius of 20 miles), would apparently sweep the spurs of the mountains where they descend into the plains. Camels can, however, go much further, as to the foot of the Taranta pass, about 40 or 50 miles.

‡ That camels are useless as beasts of burden on the highlands seems beyond a doubt. They are invariably changed at the foot of the Taranta Passes for bullocks. Major Harris on approaching Ankobar, the capital of Shoa, from Tajurrah, says:—“As well from the steepness of the rugged mountains of Abyssinia, which towered overhead, as from the pinching climate of their wintry summits, the camel becomes useless as a beast of burden; and none being ever taken beyond the frontier, many of the Widasma's retinue now gazed at these ungainly quadrupeds