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Government of Madras.

Revenue DEPARTMENT.

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*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Revenue Department,
1st July 1863.*

No. 7. Read the following letter from Captain R. H. BEDDOME, Officiating Conservator of Forests, to J. D. SIM, Esq., Secretary to Government, Revenue Department, Fort Saint George, dated Ootacamund, 22nd June 1863, No. 569 :—

SIR,

I have the honor to forward a Report and Map by Captain Michael upon the higher ranges of the Annamallays, lately visited by him; I would suggest that the same be printed as an Appendix to the Annual Forest Report for 1862-63.

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REPORT.

1. The tract of high table land of the Annamallay hills, about to be described, lies between longitude $77^{\circ} 3'$ and $77^{\circ} 14'$ east, and latitude $10^{\circ} 13'$ and $10^{\circ} 25'$ north.—Sheet No. 62 of the Grand Trigonometrical Survey of India.

2. Several exploring parties have before visited part of the range via Annamallay, Poonachy, and the valley of the Toracadavoo river, but on the present occasion the route adopted was via Oodoomalacottah, Dhullee and Poondy. On the whole the latter route is the preferable of the two, inasmuch as a higher, more open, and safer spot is reached for a halt, the first evening, than can be attained on the Poonachy path; the distance to be travelled on the first day is moreover comparatively short and less fatiguing. The second day's walk is about equal in distance and difficulty by either route.

3. Our party during the trip consisted of three: Mr. Hannyngton, Captain Hill and myself. We went from Polachy (distant from Coimbatore 26 miles) to Oodoomalacottah (18 miles) and thence to Dhullee (8 miles), from which village a sandy road running 6 or 7 miles, in a south-westerly direction, leads to the foot of the mountain pass by which the Pooliar village of Poondy is reached; here there is a small Pagoda, formerly no doubt deeply buried in the jungle, but now opened out by cultivation. The ascent commences at this spot, the Ghat is exceedingly steep and rocky, quite impracticable for horses; the hills rising abruptly from the plain to a height of 1,500 feet, at which elevation a plateau is reached of considerable extent, well watered by perennial streams, and covered with thin and rather stunted jungle, interspersed with bamboo and frequent open grassy glades. It is very beautiful in appearance, but bears a notoriously bad name as a most feverish locality for low country visitors, although it is on this plateau that the Pooliars generally reside at their villages of Poondy, Mavadop, Cooramallay, Vendyum, &c. The Pooliars are a jungle race, resembling Mulcers and Iroolars in their habits and mode of life, but differing somewhat in their language (a Tamil patois) and in personal appearance, the most remarkable feature of which is the pride taken by the men in the length of their hair. It is never cut, but is twisted and matted into six or eight long rope-like coils, which are gathered into a huge knot at the back of the head. In one instance the hair of a tall man, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches in height, trailed about a foot on the ground when loosened.

4. From the foot of Ghat to Poondy is a fatiguing walk of two hours and twenty minutes, and from thence a more gradual ascent of three-quarters of an hour leads to a high open ridge at the base of a mountain, called Appia Mullay. From the south side of this ridge a fine view of the Toracadavoo ravine is obtained, the magnificent bluff of the Tangachee Mullay overhanging the thickly wooded gorge, and the high ranges towering above, form a most beautiful piece of scenery. This ridge makes an excellent encamping ground for the night, as water is obtainable; the country is open, ventilation free, and the elevation ascertained by the Aneroid to be as nearly as possible 3,900 feet above the sea level.

5. The next day's march leads along the northern slope of the Toracadavoo ravine, the numerous spurs which have to be crossed rendering the path very undulating, and in some places even precipitous and difficult for loaded coolies. It was observed that since 1851 a great deal of Coomri cultivation has been carried on by the Pooliars and Moodoors on these slopes. Indeed, the greater part of the ravine on both sides shows signs of having been thus cultivated and abandoned to the growth of scrub jungle. After a walk of about an hour and a half the track joins that which leads from Poonachee, near a very remarkable rock, shaped like a bay

stack, and nearly the whole of the rest of the day's journey is steep ascent, winding round the base of the Tangachee Mullay, through thick Sholah jungle, in the midst of which the Toracadyoo river is crossed, and after a further climb the Sholah suddenly ends, and the path emerges on to the open side of the hill, which is covered with short sweet grass studded here and there with the *Rhizophora*, *Azadirachta*, *Ocotelea*, *S. acuta*, *Gnaphalium*, and other flowering bushes and shrubs identical with those found on the Nilgherries. The ascent continues for several hundred feet up the slope, the track leading to a small swamp called Sengany column, the vicinity of which makes a good halting place. The elevation is 5,900 feet, and the distance can be accomplished by a good unburdened walker in 3½ hours. The direction taken up to this point is south-east, but here the course turns more directly south, and two hours' walk over difficult ground brings the traveller to the northern extremity of a beautiful plateau first visited by myself in 1851, and subsequently by Dr. Cleghorn, Captain B. Deane, Colonel Hamilton and others, and now known by the name of Michael's Valley. This day's march leads through a vast extent of magnificent Sholah forest, which stretches from the river below far up the slopes of the hills, and is admirably adapted for the cultivation of Coffee and Chinchona.

6. The point of confluence of the two fine streams by which this valley is watered is within half a mile, the river being here called by the Poonias Koneel Aur, and about half a mile lower down it falls abruptly in a cascade of about 200 feet in height into the gorge and afterwards takes the name of Toracadyoo Aur.

7. This spot, the elevation of which is as nearly as possible 6,000 feet, forms an excellent locality for a head-quarter camp from which to explore the surrounding high lands. The climate is most delightful (Thermometer varying from 41° to 45° at daylight in the month of March), the scenery beautiful, and the situation sheltered from all high winds. No one can fail to be struck, on looking down on Michael's Valley from one of the surrounding mountains, with its singular fitness for a European settlement, such as Ootacamund. Its contour is pear-shaped, the smaller end being towards the north and the larger to the south; its length is about 5 miles, and its greatest breadth about 2½ miles. Besides the two principal streams there are hundreds of rivulets running from the Sholahs in all the smaller ravines; firewood in abundance is to be obtained from the vast forests at either end of the valley without detriment to the smaller woods, and in every direction the eye meets with eligible building sites amongst the waving succession of grassy knolls of which the whole plateau is composed.

8. The bottom of the valley, especially the eastern branch of it, is singularly flat, and as though nature had intended that it should be converted into a lake, the knolls forming the extreme northern end approach each other so closely that a dam of only 250 feet in length would give a perpendicular depth of water of more than 150 feet, and would convert a portion of the valley into a lake with an area equal to, if not greater than, that of Ootacamund. The western side of the valley is shut in by a lofty range of mountains, of which the Ukka Mullay is the most northern and the highest point (elevation 8,500 feet). There is a considerable extent of table land on this range sloping off towards the westward, and varying in elevation from 6,500 feet to 7,500 feet. Much of this land might be utilized for building purposes and cultivation, but that portion of it which has a westerly aspect would no doubt be very much under the influence of the south-west monsoon. Below these slopes miles and miles of dense Sholah forests stretch away to the west and south as far as the eye can reach.

9. It is to the eastward, however, that the finest situation for an European colony is to be found. Starting from the northern extremity of Michael's Valley there is an excellent path (made by those excellent practical Engineers, the Bison and Sanbur) leading almost due east. There is a gradual rise for the first four miles of 1,000 feet, where the highest ridge is crossed, a descent then occurs of 600 feet in about two miles, and in the remaining two miles an ascent of 750 feet is regained and an extensive plateau is reached, the average height of which is 7,000 feet above the sea level. The path is remarkably easy in its gradients, and might be carted over on a track in its present state. Nothing can exceed the grandeur and beauty of the scenery in

all directions. To the north-west lie the Ukka and Tangachee, and the neighbouring mountains and ravines, down which latter glimpses of the low country of Coimbatore are obtained, and to the south-west and south may be seen the Ungeenaad Valley (or Valley of the Ambrawathy river) with its green patches of rice cultivation, lying immediately beneath, and the Pulny hills rising in a magnificent mass from the opposite side.

10. There are several circumstances which tend to a probability that this portion of the high plateau is by no means so much influenced by the south-west monsoon as that lying more to the westward, and it may hereafter be found that there is as marked a difference in the rainfall as exists between Ootacamund and Coonoor. The slopes are far less heavily wooded, the grass is shorter and finer in quality, and there are fewer leeches in the Sholahs, showing a less degree of damp. It was of course impossible to make any more reliable observations with which to substantiate this opinion; but the matter is important and worthy of consideration. A locality as much free from rain as Coonoor, and 1,000 feet higher, would probably possess a climate nearly approaching perfection. There are two paths leading down to Ungeenaad and Murraoor by which this portion of the high land might apparently be made accessible, but heavy rain and mist unfortunately rendered it impossible on the present occasion to explore these paths thoroughly; but judging from a bird's eye view obtained from a high peak hanging the valley, it is apparent that the villages at Ungeenaad must be at a very considerable elevation above the plains of Coimbatore, and probably at least 3,000 feet above the sea level. The actual rise, therefore, to be accomplished by a Ghât cannot be more than 4,000 feet; but there are other difficulties in the way of making this route a good approach to the high ranges of the Anamallays at the present time. The Ungeenaad valley bears a bad name for fever, and the foot of the Ghât, if one were made, would probably be 30 miles from Oodoomalacottah, or at least 20 miles from any low country town which can be considered safe. The journey under present circumstances may be, therefore, set down at (say) 20 miles of level or gradual ascent to Ungeenaad, added to an abrupt rise of 4,000 feet in (say) 5 miles more. It would, therefore, be impossible to accomplish this journey with laden coolies or bullocks in one day without the aid of a good road and a practicable Ghât, and to sleep at Ungeenaad would be a risk which few Europeans or low country Natives would be disposed to run.

11. Indubitably the most practicable and safest method by which the whole Annamallay plateau may be opened out to Coffee, Tea and Chinchona planters, and to general resort, would be to construct a cheap bridle-path up the Ghât to Poondy, and thence over the Appia Mullay ridge (where a rest-house would be required) round the base of Tangachee Mullay, to the northern end of Michael's Valley; the distance is between 9 and 10 hours' walk in the aggregate, for a man carrying no burden and in good wind, and may be called 25 miles. This would probably be increased to 35 by improving the gradients, but the journey would be divided into two stages, with a safe and good halting place half-way, whilst it would be perfectly practicable to ride the whole distance in one day.

12. When the question of constructing a regular Ghât for wheeled conveyances comes forward, as no doubt it will at some future time, the line to be adopted from a northerly and westerly direction is manifestly via Poondy, and along the bank of the Toracadyoo river, which flows from the north end of Michael's Valley to the plain near the village of Annamallay, through one continuous and gradually descending ravine, which is admirably adapted, as far as the eye can judge, for the formation of a Ghât, but when so great an undertaking is contemplated, the relative merits of this route and that via Ungeenaad must be thoroughly gone into.

13. The slopes of the hills on all sides are richly wooded; but the forest almost without exception is composed of thick, dark jungle, known by the name of Sholah, containing few timber trees of any value excepting here and there a Poon (*Calophyllum Augustifolium*). It is only in the immediate vicinity of Poondy that the more valuable descriptions of timber trees, the Teak, Vengay (*Pterocarpus Marsupium*), Kurra Merda (*Terminalia Glabra*) Black-wood (*Dalbergia Latifolia*), and some others are to be found, but they are one and all

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stunted in size and of no great value. It would, however, be desirable that this portion of the forest (which has been roughly marked off in red on the sketch map attached) should be reserved by Government. All other forest might with advantage be made available for Coffee, Tea and Chinchona planting. In the upper part of the Toracadvoo ravine, and in those which run up to the high ranges on the northern and western slopes, the supply of such land is equal to a very large demand, the elevation and aspect being a mere matter of choice. To the south there is also an unlimited extent of similar forest land, but it lies within the Travancore boundary.

14. As much of the high table land as could be visited or seen from peaks on this occasion, has been roughly marked off on the map in blue. The whole of the plateau so marked off varies in elevation from 5,500 to 8,500 feet above the sea level. There is a peak visible to the south-east, nearly due south of Coomarekul Mullay, which is apparently much higher still, but mountain peaks when viewed from a distance are very deceptive, and it is to be regretted that bad weather and mists rendered it impracticable to reach the summit of the peak in question to ascertain its height with the Barometer.

15. The higher parts of the Annamallays are quite uninhabited, being only visited occasionally by the wandering tribes of Pooliars and Moodoors, who live in small temporary villages on the slopes of the mountains, and who earn a livelihood by collecting indigenous productions of the forest, and cultivating small patches of ragée. They are very few in number, and like all jungle tribes are useless to any thing like regular service or employment. Future planters must therefore depend upon the low country for a supply of laborers.

(Signed) J. MICHAEL, Captain,
Assistant Conservator of Forests.

Cochin,
15th April 1863.

ORDER THEREON, L. J. 1863, No. 1451.

1. The Acting Conservator will convey to Captain Michael the thanks of Government for his interesting and useful Report, which will be printed for general information.
2. The portion of the Annamallay marked in red on the Map will be reserved. The locality indicated in paragraph 7 will be reserved for building sites, and will, if applications are received, be suitably laid out, prior to sale.
3. Both the above tracts should be surrounded by such boundary marks as will preclude unintentional encroachments. The Collector will arrange accordingly.

4. The rest of the Annamallays will be saleable on freehold tenure under the rules of the 5th March 1863, No. 476, the upset prices being those sanctioned in G. O. 23rd February 1863, No. 383, plus cost of survey and boundary marks.

5 Rupees for forest land } per Acre
21 " " for grass do. }

(Signed) J. D. SIM,
Secretary to Government

1154.

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*Submitted by the Acting Conservator of Forests
J. Michael*

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N^o 4th / 6th the upset price being 5 Rs. for forest land
~~Sanctioned~~ 2 1/2 Rs. for grass-land & perann
~~Refuse~~ per acre as laid
down in G. O. 23rd Feb^y 1863 N^o 383
plus cost of survey and
boundary marks.

J. H. S.

14 Rs. for the 10th of the 2nd of the 2nd
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1 - - - - -

