





A Journey through an unfrequented Part of Ayudhya District.

BY LIEUT. COL. J. P. ANDERSEN.

During the month of February this year I was on tour through the southern part of the country lying between the railway line to the North and the river Prasak, which comprises the north-eastern part of Changvad Lopburi and the north-western part of Changvad Saraburi, both provinces in Ayudhya Circle. As this particular part of the country is very rarely visited by anybody, I venture to hope that a description of the journey may be of interest to the Members of the Siam Society.

On Friday the 30th of January I travelled by train as far as Kok-Katiem, the first railway station north of Lopburi, here my overland transport, consisting of three bullock-carts and three carriers, awaited me. They were to transport my baggage and camp-kit to Kok-Samrong, the first lap of the journey.

Kok-Samrong, where the Ampœ-office for the district of the same name is situated, is some 31 kilometres from Kok-Katiem. As it was late after-noon before a start was made, only 3 kilometres out of the 31 were covered that day, and the night was spent in a small village called Toranee, at the foot of the low hills one can see from Lopburi, in a north-easterly direction.

As the next day would be a long one, for 28 kilometres is really too long a march to begin a jungle-journey with, a start was made just before daybreak, so as to break the back of the day's march before it got too hot.

We travelled on a new road which the people in the district had just been constructing under the direction of the Governor. It was merely a broad belt cut, as near as possible, in a straight line, through the jungle, and scrub had been cut level with the ground, and as the country here is practically flat as a table, and the surface is hard, it would be quite possible to use the road for motor traffic in a mild way during the dry weather. As a matter of fact, a couple of days later, the Governor did travel over

the whole length of the road in a motor-lorry — the ubiquitous Ford of course.

The road ran the whole way through dry thin jungle, only once came we near a village: here a halt of a couple of hours was made, and after one or two more rests of short duration, Kok-Samrong was reached about 3 p.m., quite a creditable performance for both men and bullocks.

The whole day a strong and refreshing wind had been blowing which made marching much easier. During the night this wind increased to a howling gale which lasted till midday the following day. The three days I stayed in Kok-Samrong this was repeated every day. During the day the temperature was low enough but during the night it was bitterly cold.

Kok-Samrong is a fairly large village, purely agricultural, the nearest railway station is at Ban Mee, about 19 kilometres away, where during the last 20 years a big and prosperous market has grown up. Kok-Samrong itself has possibilities of development, there is plenty of good arable land waiting to be cultivated, but what is necessary is a good all-weather road from Ban Mee to Kok-Samrong.

From Kok-Samrong I intended to go north to a village called Ban Sra bote and from there east to Bua Chum on the river Prasak, so I sought information about roads and distances, and had the same experience as so often before: nobody, neither Officials nor villagers, had any reliable information to give, they seem to take very little interest in anything outside their own district. I did find some villagers who had been to Bua Chum, but as usual their notion of distances was very vague. Some said that to go from Ban Sra-bote to Bua Chum, would take two days, others said three, and there were some who would have it a four days march. What nobody told me however was that there is no cart-road from Ban Sra-bote to Bua Chum, although everybody knew that I intended to use cart transport.

Well, on Wednesday the 4th of February, I set out again with my three carts and three carriers, the same I had before. That day I only did a short march to a village called Paniet, 8 or 9 kilometres due east of Kok-Samrong. After a short stretch over paddy-fields

the road ran through flat jungle which could easily be made into good paddy-fields.

Shortly before I came to Paniet there was at the road-side the site of a very small ancient temple, the people called it "Bote Tam Yaeh"; some of the boundary-posts, made of very roughly cut granite, were still standing upright in the ground, two and two together, but otherwise there was only a small mound of very large bricks and fragments of dressed granite.

Paniet lies at the foot of a very long and low hill, to the north is a flat plain with paddy-fields and jungle and to the east are small hills and undulating jungle. It is not a very big village nor is it particularly prosperous, but it is a very old settlement.

At the very foot of the hill, a few hundred yards from the village, there is a big almost square stone, of a reddish colour, lying on the ground, it is about 9 feet high 11 feet long and 7 feet broad. On the flat top is a very well made "Buddha's Footprint" cut in the stone, it is about 2 niu deep, 3 sok 3 niu long and 1 sok 7 niu at the broadest part. On each of the two long sides of the stone are rough sculptures, in very low relief, of three sitting Buddhas, not much more than rough outlines, each one is about 2 sok high and 2 sok broad at the base. On one of the short sides is a similar figure, and on the other short side is another figure, slightly better sculptured, and only one sok high. A rectangular enclosure is made by stones being loosely piled up into a wall, between one and two sok high; a few well-dressed square blocks of granite, like short steps, are lying about. The people call it "Wat Noi" but seem to take no interest in the place.

In the jungle, less than a mile from the village, are two springs with pure, crystal-clear water, a very rare thing in this part of the country. The people however prefer to use the water in a pond (sra) near the Wat, only when there is scarcity there do they go to the springs.

The next morning I turned northwards, and after six kilometres through mixed paddy-fields and jungle I came to a smaller village called Sakaerab: here we again joined the new road which was being cut through the jungle as far as Ban Sra-bote.

During the morning the air was cool and fresh and it was quite pleasant to walk, but gradually it became hotter, and about 11 o'clock, when Tachang, another small village, was reached, the sun burned very strongly on the open road. From here we took to the old road again, this was longer, the road not being in a straight line, but it ran through uncut jungle, so there was a certain amount of shade, and one did not feel the heat nearly so much.

At 1.30 p.m., after a days march of 18 kilometres, I arrived at Ban Sra-bote.

This is the largest and most prosperous village in the Ampoe-district, the people own extensive paddy fields and large herds of cattle and buffaloes. They are mostly what is called "Tai B'ing" (ໄທບຶງ) a mixture of Siamese and Eastern Laos.

I had been to Ban Sra-bote once before, that was 19 years ago, when out hunting a gang of robbers who were operating in that part of the country. On that occasion most of the Puyaibans and some of the villagers joined me for the latter part of the hunt. Four or five of them, now old men, came to pay me a visit in the Sala, where I camped, and we spent a pleasant hour recalling some of the incidents from that time, the last two days hot foot pursuit and the final fight in the jungle, when the gang was broken up.

In the Kamnan of Ban Sra-bote I found a man who did know something about the country outside his own district, he not only knew the names of most villages in the neighbouring districts but also the roads to them and the approximate distances. And now it was that I discovered that although there was a road from Ban Sra-bote to Bua Chum, which a man could walk in two days, it was no good to me because bullock-carts could not use it, it ran through to hilly country, and I would have to make a detour towards the north.

I left Ban Sra-bote early the next morning and continued straight north for about 6 kilometres, the whole way practically through paddy-fields, and arrived at Mahapawt a village of about 50 houses. Here it became necessary to get a guide, none of my men had ever been further along this way.

When a guide had been engaged and breakfast eaten, we continued the march and now turned gradually towards the north-east. The road soon entered jungle, this time pure red-wood jungle (ป่าตม): hitherto the jungle had been mixed and there had been a good deal of bamboo. The road led towards some small hills, and the soil gradually became poor and very stony, at places there were outcrop of solid rock, and for long stretches the road was simply a mass of cobbles and fragments of rock, and it must have been very hard on the bullocks feet, and I wondered the cart-wheels were not broken. The loose stones and pieces of rock lying about were very heavy and probably were mostly ironstone. In the hot weather this kind of jungle is very dreary and uninteresting.

We came in amongst the hills. They were small but steep, the largest was on my left hand: it is called Kao Nang Dagon. Some years ago a woman was caught in a jungle fire on this hill and unable to escape she was burned to death. On the right hand there were several smaller ones, the nearest one called Kao Hin Mat. Further on the hills opened out and surrounded a small oval valley, perfectly flat and with good soil. At one end of this valley was Ban Rung-kae, where I intended to camp. On arriving at the village I found it to consist of only a dozen small ramshackle huts, huddled together in filthy surroundings and with no fences. The people were a miserable and diseased looking lot, living in awful squalor.

I looked in vain for a suitable camping ground, out in the open there was not a single tree, not a spot of shade to be found, and the sun was blazing hot. Just behind the village, along a dry creek-bed, there was jungle, but it was impenetrable bamboo and scrub-jungle. Then the Puyaiban said there was a place with shady trees and good water a very short distance further on, and so we proceeded. The "very short distance" turned out to be 3 kilometres, but the camping ground was good enough, there was sufficient shade and, in some fairly large rock-basins, in the otherwise dry creek-bed, was plenty of water. This water was of a slightly brownish tinge from vegetable matter, but it was clear and very cold.

During the next couple of days I came to several such places, where water had been held back in the dry creek-bed, this water was

always fairly clear and very cold.

This place where I camped is called Wang Samnak. From it stretches a long low hill which encloses the Rung-kæ vally on the north-east and north. One of the smaller hills, to the south of the valley, is shaped somewhat like a slightly flattened out cone, the top is prolonged into a pike. The people in Rung-kæ declare that this pike is pure iron: if that is so, it must be a magnificent lightning conductor. The name of the hill is Kao Lack Kai.

This days march was a good twenty kilometres, and very hot it had been.

The next morning we started at the usual time, just at day-break, and for the first 8 kilometres, the road which now led straight east, ran through country similar to that of the previous day. The soil was very poor and very stony, at many places the solid rock came to the surface. I then came to Sra Pleng, where we stopped for breakfast. This is a marshy place with two or three waterholes and some evergreen jungle surrounding it. Just before we arrived there, I had seen fresh tracks of a fairsized tiger, and I also saw a barking-deer; at Sra Pleng there was a few green pigeons. This was the first game I had seen so far, although on the march from Toranee to Kok Samrong jungle-fowl were frequently calling in the jungle. There were quite a number of tracks round Sra Pleng, mostly of pig, and bones of pig and barking-deer were lying about near old fireplaces where hunters had cooked their game.

From Sra Pleng the country changed, we came first through some ordinary mixed jungle and then out on a plain, perfectly flat, with long grass and only a few trees. Towards the south was a couple of small hills and to the north, running from west to east, was a creek, at this time dry: the banks were covered with thick jungle, beyond that was probably more open plain.

The soil was good and the place seemed ideal for paddy-cultivation. By making inquiries later, I learned that attempts had indeed been made of making paddy-fields here, but the country was so feverish that the people could not live there, and the attempt had to be given up.

After 5 kilometres march over this good soil I came to Wang Kem, another all year water-hole, lying in dense jungle. Here we crossed the dry creek-bed and continued again through fairly open and flat country, sparsely covered with jungle, till we came to Yang-rak : here had been a small village, Ban Yangrak, but it was deserted some time ago owing to the people suffering so much from fever. Of the village nothing remains, and only a few fruit trees show the site. We had now crossed into the Ampoe-district Vichien, in the province of Petchabun, Pitsanuloke Circle. During the day I met some travellers, they came from Vichien and were carrying Sambhar horns, still in velvet, bones of tiger and leopard and peacocks tails, which they were taking to the market at Ban Mee railway station to sell to Chinese traders there.

I had come 16 kilometres, and as the guide did not know the road further on and could not say where water was to be found, I thought it best to camp here. There were several water holes in the dry creek-bed, the first and largest one was found to be the home of crocodiles, so another one, a few hundred yards further on was selected, and here we camped under a couple of big shady trees in the edge of the strip of dense jungle which grew along both banks of the creek.

The soft earth round the water-hole was simply pitted with tracks of animals, mostly pig and deer, partridges were calling, and just before sunset the hideous cry of peacock was heard from every direction : we had come into country where game was plentiful. The cartmen were afraid their bullocks might attract tigers during the night, so a couple of big fires were kept going.

The next day we continued through similar country, mostly flat open jungle. We passed several water-holes in the dry creek-bed, most of them seemed to be inhabited by crocodiles, at one fairly large water-hole three of the brutes were lying on the bank, at our approach they plunged into the water.

After a morning's march of 10 kilometres we came to a village called Ban Sra Kruat : this is a newly established village with less than a score of houses, close by is a mound, evidently made by man, on which is part of the foundation of a small temple (bote), all in

laterite blocks, a few more laterite blocks are scattered about on the slopes of the mound, and that is all. The people said it was very old, which was quite obvious, but they could give me no information about it.

After breakfast we continued on our way, came over large paddy-fields and a lot of newly broken land: it seems to be industrious people who have settled at Ban Sra Kruat. We passed another village of only half-a-dozen houses, and just after midday we came to the river Prasak at a place where it could be forded.

At this place the river was very narrow, and, as the water was at its lowest, the steep, almost perpendicular banks were very high, at least 30 feet. A cut had been made in both banks and even then the crossing was not easy, without the cuts carts could not have crossed at all.

Just before we came to the crossing, about a dozen carts had arrived on the opposite bank and were making preparations to cross, so my carts outspanned and we interestedly watched the proceedings.

All the carts had outspanned on the level ground, the bullocks of the first cart were then led through the cut down to the water, a rawhide rope was attached to the cart and snubbed round a convenient tree, the cart was then let down the cut, half-a-dozen men steadying it while the rest of the men paid out on the rope. When the cart reached the water the bullocks were put in and took the cart across to the other bank, then the rope was attached to the front of the cart and with a few of the men pushing the rest pulling on the rope and the bullocks putting their weight into the yoke, the carts were hauled up through the cut to level ground.

It was fortunate for us that we came just when these other carts were crossing, for we had no rope and were not prepared for such a difficult crossing. Now we not only borrowed the rawhide rope, but everybody gave a helping hand and we got the carts across without any trouble.

The crossing of all these carts had taken almost the whole of the afternoon, so we camped in the jungle on the east bank.

The country we came through the next day was of a nature one does not often see in this part of Siam. It was like a rough

park, slightly undulating grass-land dotted with small coppices and single big trees. Tracks of various kind of deer and of pig were everywhere and one of my men saw a couple of "Lamang". Later on we saw several herds of cattle and buffaloes, shortly after 9 o'clock we came to paddy-fields, and about a half an hour later arrived at Ban Na-ta-krut.

This is a well built and clean kept village of about a hundred houses, surrounded by extensive paddy-fields, but strange to say built over 2 kilometres from the river, and therefore with a none too good water supply in the dry weather. The people are "Tai Buing", and I think, with a good deal of Khmer blood mixed.

The country round Ban Na-ta-krut is full of game such as wild cattle (วัวป่า) several kind of deer and pig. Two days before I arrived, one of the villagers shot a magnificent bull, I saw the head and the skin, and the day I camped there, several of them came in from the jungle carrying loads of flesh of wild pig. I bought sufficient for the whole camp.

So far the journey had been easy enough, and although parts of the road could not be considered anything but a very indifferent cart-road, still the carts had managed to get along all right. But now we were faced with difficulties. It appeared that there was no cart-road from Ban Na-ta-krut to Bua Chum, there had been one, but for the last six years it had not been used by carts and had therefore been overgrown with jungle and disappeared. But then there was the river: it is true the water was very low, but by using small boats there would be no difficulty in getting to Bua Chum by river. So the Kamman was asked to arrange about hiring boats. To begin with, he proved to be about the most unsatisfactory man to deal with, he knew nothing, could give no information at all, he did not know if there were anybody in his commune who owned boats, in fact he was completely useless: so he was sent away, and I sat down to eat breakfast. When that important function was over, I found that the Kamnan had returned, and in the very short space of time he had been away, his intelligence and knowledge had increased in the most marvellous manner. He now informed me that there

were quite a number of boats belonging to the village, most of them however were away, but there were three left which I could have, he would make all the arrangements with the owners, so that was settled.

Three boats was exactly what I needed. These boats are small with but little space for men and baggage, each boat is manned by two men who row with a sway fore and aft if the water is deep enough, otherwise they pole.

I thought however that I had better see the owners, and settle the payment question with them myself, so I sent for them : there were two of them and one owned two boats.

They were quite willing to take me to Bua Chum or further on to Chaipadan, or even down the whole way to Kengkoi, if I so wished. This was exactly what I did wish : so I was very pleased, the payment question was also satisfactorily arranged, and so the men were asked to make arrangements to start as early as they could the next day. But now the bottom fell out, the boats were not in working order, one had just been sunk in order to close up the seams as it was leaking badly, and it would be of no use for some days, another was on shore undergoing repairs which would take another four or five days, the third one was the only one which was ready to start at once, but one boat was no use, and I had neither time nor any fancy for staying in Ban Na-ta-krut for several days.

My cart-men, who were anxious to continue to Chaipadan, because from there they could get back straight across country to their homes in three days, instead of having to return the long roundabout way we had come, now went into the village to see what information they could get about the old cart-road.

The intelligence they brought back was not very encouraging, it might perhaps be possible to take the carts through, but it would be slow and very troublesome work. However they were quite willing to risk it, so I gladly accepted their offer to go on. They had a pickaxe in one of the carts and I had a couple of heavy jungle chopping knives, so we procured a couple of hoes and a raw hide rope, also engaged a guide and were then ready to start next day.

The next morning we made the usual early start and for a couple of hours we had no great difficulty in getting along. Then we came to a dry water-course with very steep banks, called Huey Wang Nam. Here we had to cut the banks down on both sides, and a lot of debris had to be cleared away. It took well over an hour's hard work to get the carts across, then after a short rest we continued the march.

Now there was no sign of any cart-tracks and the carts had to cut their way through where best they could: it was slow work and hard, it had become extremely hot. About 2 o'clock we came out on to the bank of the river, at a place called Huey Wai, here we camped. How the tired men enjoyed a dip in the river! We had come a little over 10 kilometres, a short march but a hard one, the whole way had been through thick mixed jungle with many large trees of various kinds.

From this camp the country became more open and the going easier, only here and there was it necessary to do some cutting, but of a cart-track there were no signs; we came through some big, open spaces with only few trees and good soil, which seemed admirably suited for cultivation.

At 8 o'clock we came to Huey Keng Pak, a deep water-course which forms the boundary between the provinces of Petchabun and Saraburi.

Here we stopped for breakfast, and then set about to get the carts across. The water-course was dry, but it was deep and the banks were steep, so it was no mean task. Through one bank a cut had to be made and that took time, also a good deal of debris had to be cleared away. Then the empty carts were lowered down to the bottom with a rope and again hauled up on the other side; the bullocks were led across and all the baggage had to be carried over and again loaded on the carts. It took us a good two hours to get across. After this it was much better going, only at one or two places was it necessary to use the chopping knives, and we soon found some sort of a cart-track. As we got along, this track improved and eventually developed into a quite respectable cart-road.

The country was fairly open and perfectly flat with good soil, but there was no sign of any cultivation anywhere. I was later informed that the reason this land is not cultivated is that every year in the rainy season, when the river is in flood, it is inundated to a depth of 10 to 12 sok. If a canal was made from this point, or better from a point higher up the river, to take the surplus water over to the Lopburi river, it seems that a large tract of land could be put under cultivation. But perhaps there are natural obstacles which forbid the making of such a canal.

It had become very hot: everyday the march had been hot, but to-day was the worst. At times the heat was almost unbearable, halts of a few minutes duration had to be made whenever a bit of shade was to be found, but the jungle was deciduous and there was not much shade. Just after midday Huey Ta-klaw was reached, this is a small water-course, dry at this time of year but surrounded by bamboo-jungle. So here was shade and half an hour's halt was made, then on again under a blazing burning sun.

We had water with us, but on a march like this, it is better not to drink anything before it becomes absolutely necessary, having once taken a drink of water one feels a much stronger craving for it afterwards: my men knew this too, so abstained as long as they possibly could. My dog seemed to be most affected by the heat, when we left Huey Ta-klaw I put him on one of the carts, but he would not stay there, so I had to let him trot along with me. It was easy to see that he was feeling very distressed, and I think that if it had not been for the relief he got, when I occasionally poured a little water over his head, he would not have been able to follow.

We plodded wearily on, the country became more open still. Away towards the west we could see the belt of thick jungle and big forest trees in which ran the Prasak river. The soil now was stony and gravelly. We came past some big marshy places, overgrown with long grass, and we saw several herds of cattle, but Bua Chum seemed as far away as ever.

At last we came to paddy-fields and thought that now we had reached our goal, but we had not, this was only a patch of outlying fields. However we drew nearer to the river, and at long

last saw a house in the outskirts of the jungle, the most welcome sight we had seen that day.

And so we came to Bua Chum, and were soon sitting in the sala at the Wat, drinking water. I think I had almost a bucket full, the water seemed to soak through my whole body, bringing a sense of well being.

It was 4 o'clock, we had only come about 16 kilometres, though it seemed twice as much, it had been the hardest day's march of the whole tour, the heat had been terrific.

I may here mention that since I left Kok Samrong, the days had been very hot while the nights were very cold, so cold that the men had fires going the whole night, close to which they slept, and I found that two blankets were not always enough. Very unhealthy weather, most of us were suffering from colds, and if I had not given the men quinine at regular intervals, I think we should have had fever too.

Bua Chum is an old place but there is very little left to show its age. The present village consists of about 140 houses. The temple is simply an unsightly, very roughly built wooden shanty, placed on the foundation of a much older building. Inside are a number of small Buddhas of various sizes and description, all of them more or less damaged. There is however a pair of carved doors which may perhaps be of interest archæologically, they are very well carved and in good preservation: the carving represents two human figures, they have Chinese features, but their dress and in particular their trousers and shoes seems to show Indian origin, one is holding a Malay kriss and the other a spear.

In the jungle on the river-bank, close to the village, is another similar hideous wooden Bote, built on an old site. This Bote contains some modern made statues of Buddha and also two square blocks of sandstone, with beautifully sculptured figures at the corners and on three sides. I could not find out what they had been used for, but they were perhaps footpieces for statues which had been placed close to a wall, as they were roughsurfaced on the fourth side.

Some distance from Bua Chum, towards the east are the sites of other old towns, Muang Nong-yai-daw and Muang Poendin-tong. The villagers declared that there was nothing to see there, and as it was too much out of my way, I did not go to these places. But to my great regret I now discovered that at Ban Na-ta-krut I had missed the best of all. Only between 2 and 3 kilometres east of the village are the ruins of an ancient city called Muang Apaisalee (เมืองอภัยศาลี). The people of Bua Chum who pretended to know about the place, said there were ruins of buildings and walls and that broken statuary was lying about in the jungle. The account they gave me seemed exaggerated, but was corroborated by the guide and another man who had come with me from Ban Na-ta-krut.

It was not blessings I, in my thoughts, sent the people of Ban Na-ta-krut, not one of them had mentioned a word about this to myself or any of my men, when I was in their village. However, it could not be helped, to go back was out of the question, so after having spent the next day in Bua Chum, I continued my south-ward journey on Friday the 13th of February.

From Bua Chum to Chaipadan the road is quite good. About 5 kilometres from Bua Chum I came to the village of Ta-chang. It is a new village, only five years old, with 15 houses only, but more land is being broken to make paddy-fields, and in a few years time there will probably be quite a big village. It is always a pleasure to see waste land come under cultivation.

At this place two other roads join the Bua Chum road, one comes from Korat and the other from Chayapum: there is a very considerable traffic on these two roads, mainly with cattle and buffaloes which come from the eastern provinces to be sold in central Siam. It is estimated that about 20,000 head come this way every year. They continue on the left bank of the river down to Tah Sam Long about 18 kilometre south of Bua Chum; here they cross the river and then follow several roads towards the south and southwest until they are sold at Saraburi, Lopburi or Tarua, many of the buffaloes going still further, even down to Klong Rangsit.

From Ta-chang the road more or less followed the river, the jungle was fairly open and towards the east could be seen the highlands in Korat Circle.

I met several herds of cattle and buffaloes on their way south, and also one or two parties of men who had sold their cattle and were now on their way back to their homes, but as a rule these people use the railway to Korat on their return-journey.

We crossed the river at Tah Sam Long without much trouble, and camped on the right bank.

The next day I did a non-stop march of 12 kilometres through open country with a couple of small villages close to the river, in to Chaipadan, arriving there just after 9 a. m; the carts came at mid-day.

Chaipadan lies on the west bank of the Prasak river, where the river forms a sharp bend. It is only a smallish place, but it is the headquarters of the district of the same name.

The people are not prosperous, they seldom get a very plentiful paddy crop, but even if rice at times is scarce they need not starve. The surrounding country is full of game, there is even elephant, tiger and bison. Three or four years ago a full-grown tiger was shot on the village street, and on a former occasion, when I stayed in Chaipadan three days, a party of hunters had gone a short distance up river, the day before I arrived, to hunt on the east-bank. They were so close that we sometimes heard the shots, and the evening before I left they returned: they had shot eight Sambhar.

Now, on the present occasion, I thought that I would like to get some venison, so I engaged two hunters to try and get me some. They asked me what I would like, and I said whatever they could get, but that I would like best of all either barking-deer or wild pig: so the next day they went out, and returned in the afternoon with a barking deer. The following day they did the same, so I had plenty venison; what was not eaten fresh the men dried over fire, and they had enough not only to last them the rest of the journey but also a basket-full to take home with them. This however disappeared during the train journey from Kengkoi to Ayudhya.

From Chaipadan I was to continue the journey by boat, so the cart-men and carriers were paid off. They were very pleased that they had been able to come the whole way to Chaipadan, now they could get back to their homes in three days. They even thought they could do it in two with their empty carts and by travelling part of the night.

They gave their bullocks a rest the next day, which they hardly seemed to need; they were fine beasts and in good condition in spite of the hard trip they had. Then in the evening the cart-men and carriers came to say good-bye to me, they were starting shortly after midnight, when the half-moon had risen. More willing and cheerful transport I have never had.

Now came the business of getting boats for the journey from Chaipadan to Kengkoi. It had to be small boats the so called "rua pin ma", for the river was very low and there were several rapids. None of these are dangerous, the difficulty lies more in their shallowness.

The day I arrived there were no boats in Chaipadan in a state fit to be used, but the next day two came up with merchandise for one of the three Chinese shops which comprise the bazaar in Chaipadan. One of them was a roomy very shallow-draft boat which could easily hold all my baggage and take the men too, the other one was an ordinary small rua pin ma just sufficient for myself, a servant and provender for the day. So these two boats were engaged for the journey, which was estimated to take five days, but actually only took three-and-a-half, and a start was made in the early morning on Tuesday the 17th of February.

Travelling in a "rua pin ma" is about the most uncomfortable way I know of. The boats are covered with a barrel-roof made of attap or bamboo plaiting, this is not sufficient protection against the sun, so it is necessary to wear a topee, by sitting on the bottom-boards there is just enough head-room to do this. Of course one can vary the position and lie down now and again, but in any case one is sore all over by the end of a days journey.

This particular boat was leaking badly, so every couple of hours or so, when the water had reached the bottom-boards, it was necessary to stop, the boat was bailed and the owner, an old grey

heard, and his middle-aged spinster daughter, who was his crew, got busy caulking the leaking seams with clay, of which a good supply was carried for that particular purpose.

However, we got along quite all right and did a very good day's journey, passed the landing place belonging to Kok-sa-lung, a big village built on an ancient site two kilometres from the river, passed the big village Lan Makok Wan, lying on banks, and the smaller Ban Bük on the east bank only, and just before 6 o'clock we came to a sand-bank called King Kon Huet : here we camped. The river had been shallow most of the way, but we came through no rapids that day and had no difficulties.

The next day there was plenty of rapids, but most of them were very small, hardly deserving the name, and none of them presented any difficulties, we also passed several villages, some of them situated on both banks. At sunset we camped on a narrow sand-bank, Hat Khun Wichan: there was barely room to put up the tent.

From this camp on the country changed in character, hitherto it had been flat and covered with dense jungle and big trees, and here is also the forest (ป่าลาน) where the palm-trees grows, from the leaves of which pali-books are made; the collection of these leaves, which takes place every year in the dry weather, is a Government monopoly. But now lime-stone began to crop up, the river banks in many places were full of jutting out rocks, and small lime-stone hills were dotted about; the jungle was mostly bamboo.

We came past several villages and camped as usual at sunset, this time on a fine big sand-bank called Hat Ta Sao.

The next morning, half-an-hour after the start, we came to Kao Tam Phra. This a perpendicular rock-wall at a hair pin bend of the river, it is, I suppose, a couple of hundred feet high. About 50 feet up there is a round opening in the rock, the entrance to the cave. From the waters edge there is a rather difficult climb to where the actual rock-wall begins, and from here the cave is reached by a bamboo ladder. I climbed up to the cave, it is only a small round chamber, containing a few fragments of Buddha figures.

From here on, and practically the whole way to Kengkoi, the river scenery was very pretty, the river is fairly broad and the high, jungle-clad banks show many pretty and fantastic lime-stone formations.

Early in the after-noon we came through the Kengkoi rapid, which is the biggest of the lot, and, as its name shows, often difficult to get through. However it gave us no trouble, and we tied up to the landing place behind the market and the railway station just in time to hear the departure of the last south-going train. So I had to put up my tent once more.

The next morning I left Kengkoi by the first train and returned to Ayudhya. That was Saturday the 21st of February.

Coming down the Prasak river, I did not meet with much traffic, of course only small boats can be used at this time of the year, and what traffic there is is mostly from village to village. But in the rains there is quite an important traffic on the river with big cargo-boats which come down from Lomsak and Petchabun, with country-products, such as hides, lac, etc., and return from Bangkok fully laden with merchandise.

From Lomsak to Petchabun these large boats take two days, from Petchabun to Bangkok about fifteen days. The return-journey is of course much slower, generally 35 to 40 days to Petchabun and another 4 or 5 on to Lomsak. These boats generally do two trips in a season, a few manage to do three.

In conclusion I may say that the journey is interesting, but it is by no means a pleasure trip, and February is not the most suitable time to undertake it, the month of December would be better.

Ayudhya, 9th September 1925.