





## NOTES ON A TRIP FROM PRACHUAP (KAW LAK) TO MERGUI.

by

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The writer made the journey from Prachuap to Mergui in May-June 1932. The main object of the trip was to get some idea of the flora on the Burmese side of the boundary, as compared with that on the Siamese side. These notes, however, are chiefly concerned with the present route from Prachuap (Kaw Lak) to Mergui as compared with that used in the seventeenth century.

With regard to the flora, it may be briefly stated that there is a marked change in the vegetation on the Burmese side, noticeable almost at once on crossing the boundary, which is formed by the main watershed, here quite low. The flora of the Burmese side of the boundary, while differing from that of the adjacent Siamese territory, resembles that found a good deal further south in Siam; as, for instance, that of Chumpawn.

On the way down to Prachuap, Mr. E. W. Hutchinson met the writer, and lent him a translation of Mgr. Lambert's account of a journey across the Peninsula from Mergui, made in June and July 1662. It was at Mr. Hutchinson's suggestion that enquiries were made about the old route, and a look-out kept for traces of it.

The maps of the Survey of India indicate the various routes crossing the Burma-Siam boundary, and also show the sites of many deserted villages, some of which are named. On the one-inch-to-the-mile map of the region in question, the position of Jelinga, an important town in the seventeenth century, is indicated. There is, however, a difficulty about this site, which will be referred to later. These maps give only Burmese names for most of the places along the route, though many of these places are known locally only by their Siamese name. For instance: the villages along Klawng Singkawn, which the route follows for nearly its whole length, are wholly Siamese, and Siamese place-names are in current use. It is true that there are some Karen villages in the region, but these are all a little way back from the river. It may be noted here that these Karens are known locally as 'Meo Hai' (Clearing Meos). Siamese

villages also predominate on Klawng Nguam, as far down as Wang Yai. Below that Burmese villages are mixed with the Siamese.

Such Siamese names as are given in the Survey of India maps are transliterated by one system when on the Siamese side of boundary, and by another when on the Burmese side. This may naturally lead to some confusion, so a list of the Siamese names, with their Burmese equivalents, is given at the end of these notes; while in the attached map, Siamese names, as used locally, are given; with the Burmese names, as shown in the Survey of India maps, in brackets. The expression "as used locally" is added advisedly, for some of these Siamese names are not those usually accepted in classic Siamese. To take an example: Tenasserim is locally known as 'Manao' or 'Muang Manao', not 'Tanao Sri'.

It seems probable that the route followed by the writer is the same as that used in the seventeenth century; excepting only two stretches, one at its eastern end, the other cutting off a bend of Klawng Singkawn. This route is said to be the easiest and quickest way across the peninsula in this region, and it is still in constant use. The track surveyed for the proposed railway across the Peninsula from Mergui to Prachuap closely follows this route for a great part of its length. There are other routes to the north and south, but they are more difficult, chiefly on account of the higher hills that have to be crossed.

Mgr. Lambert mentions Kui as the first town he reached on the plain on the Siamese side, but this is not to be taken as indicating that he crossed the hills due west of that town; where, indeed, there is a path, though a difficult one. It seems fairly certain that he crossed the hills by the same path as the writer. The fact that he went through Menam Wat almost proves this. In the old days it is probable that, immediately after crossing the hills, the main route for Ayuthia turned northwards towards Kui. There would have been no object in going due east to Kaw Lak (Prachuap), unless it was proposed to take boats there, as, apparently, was sometimes done.

The tradition of a cart-road across the boundary still exists among villages on the Siamese side; but no such tradition was found

on the Burmese side: no doubt because all the villages along the old cart-road on that side disappeared long ago.

It is interesting to find that the Siamese villagers on the Burmese side all speak a southern Siamese dialect, like that of the Peninsula from Chumpawn southwards, quite distinct from that of the villagers in the Prachuap region.

Mgr. Lambert describes the country as wild. It is no less wild at the present day; or, perhaps, even wilder, as several of the villages of his time have disappeared. Game is still plentiful: both the one-horned and the two-horned rhinoceros are said to be found in the region. The one-horned species is rare, but one was shot earlier in the year by a party of men from the Burmese side. The most valuable parts of the animal were brought into Prachuap and sold there, yielding, it is reported, about 700 ticals. The two-horned rhinoceros known as 'kasu' (ကုဆူ), is not so rare. A herd of kating or sladang was seen at Nawng Bua, the supposed site of 'Jelंगा'. Wild elephants are plentiful and had left evidence of their visits along a great part of the route, but none were actually seen. The pests on which Mgr. Lambert lays such stress, the leeches, still abound. However, except for the leeches, and sometimes sand-flies, the writer's party experienced no annoyance from the wild life of the district.

Turning now to some of the details of the actual trip: the party reached Prachuap by train, about mid-day on May 27th. Thanks to the kind offices of the Governor and local officials, carriers were waiting at the station, so a start was quickly made. As, however, it was found necessary to purchase rice, and to make some re-arrangements of the loads, only one hour's march was made that day; camp being pitched at the village of Nawng Kam. It should be stated here that the rate of marching given is not a reliable guide to the time in which the trip could be done; for the party proceeded in rather a leisurely fashion, though not leisurely enough to satisfy the writer, who would have liked to have spent much more time in this interesting region.

A cart-road runs from Prachuap to Nawng Kam, and for some

miles beyond it, though there are no villages westward of it on the Siamese side. This road is used by carts going into the forest to fetch timber and fire-wood. These carts also bring out the scented wood known as 'mai hawn' or 'chanchamot' (*Mansonia Gagei*). This tree is not felled. The collectors of the wood depend on finding old, naturally-fallen trees in the forest. The villagers say that trees must lie for five or six years after they have fallen before fragrance develops in the wood.

The cart-road was followed for as long as it lasted, some nine or ten kilometers west of Nawng Kam. Some way beyond the end of the road, a long embankment, now overgrown with forest, was encountered. Legend says that this is the remains of a road built by the Burmese army. The name it goes by is, however, Tanon Bram (the Brahmin's Road).

About three hours' march beyond Ban Nawng Kam, a spot known as Tung Matum (the Field of the Bael Tree) was reached. This is said to be the site of a village, deserted only thirty or forty years ago. As far as can be seen from the path, a mango and a tamarind tree are now the only signs of a former habitation. No remains of fields were seen. Soon after leaving Tung Matum the path started to ascend the low ridge forming the boundary. The ascent, however, is not very steep, and should offer little difficulty to the making of a cart-road. The highest point of the pass probably does not exceed 240 metres (800 feet). Unfortunately the account of Dr. (now Sir Arthur) Keith's trip from Kaw Lak to Mergui was not fresh in the writer's memory, and it was not noticed if the remains of the trenches, mentioned by that author, were still to be seen. At the top of the path was the heap of stones usually found in such situations, offerings to the tutelary deity of the place. No images were observed on this heap, but no very close attention was paid to it.

On the western side of the boundary the slope is very gradual. In the afternoon camp was pitched on that side, by a small stream, known as Hui Chin. The ground covered during the day was really not more than half a day's march. Near Hui Chin the path entered

high evergreen forest, very different from the dry evergreen forest of small trees on the eastern side of the ridge. Leeches, which were absent in the dry evergreen, now began to make their presence felt. No doubt they were brought out by the copious rain which had commenced to fall, and which accompanied the party for the rest of the trip.

Soon after starting on the 29th, bamboo began to appear in the forest. This bamboo, which is known as 'mai pak' (*Oxytenanthera sp.*), got more abundant further on. In places, particularly on rising ground, it formed an almost pure growth, while on low lying ground it was more mixed with large trees. After two and a half hours march from Hui Chin, the place known as Menam Wat was reached. Here, crowning a small hill, are the remains of brick buildings. Part of these remains are evidently the ruins of a Wat, among which is a headless, stone figure of Buddha. The guide stated that he could remember the time when there were three or four such figures here, with their heads still intact.

Close to the ruins grows a palmyra palm, while the trunk of a fallen one was also to be seen nearby. A jack-tree had been here, but was recently burnt down. Whether these trees were actually here when Menam Wat was flourishing, or are the descendants of such trees, is difficult to say without some data as to the age these species may attain.

Legend relates that the ground round the building was for many years kept free of undergrowth by a large elephant which frequent the spot, but disappeared some time ago. It would be interesting to know if the clay figures of elephants noticed, some forty years previously, by Dr. Keith on the heap of stones at the top of the pass, were offerings to this elephant, as seems not unlikely.

Half an hour's march beyond Menam Wat, a fairly large stream, Klawng Ta Prik, was reached. This Klawng is really the main branch of Klawng Singkawn, which receives the name of Ta Prik in this part of its course. Boats can, with difficulty, be got up as far as this.

About four and a half hour's march beyond Menam Wat, a

large open, grassy space, known as Nawng Bua, was reached. This space probably occupies an area of 60 or 70 acres. There is good reason to suppose that it represents a former permanent clearing, most probably occupied by rice-fields. The Survey of India maps identify this spot as the site of 'Jelinga,' no doubt with good reason. The size of the clearing, by far the largest of the clearings along the old route, points to its having been the site of a fairly big place, such as 'Jelinga' seems to have been. The low hills partly bordering the clearing fit in with Mgr. Lambert's description of 'Jelinga' as being in a fertile valley; the adjective 'fertile' implying that it was cultivated. Mgr. Lambert's statement that 'Jelinga' was three days' cart-journey from Menam Wat raises a difficulty. The writer, walking at a moderate pace, only took four and a half hours to cover the distance between Menam Wat and Nawng Bua. The path between the two places runs over nearly level ground. Klawng Ta Prik, however, has to be crossed twice. This may have delayed the carts; particularly as Mgr. Lambert left Jelinga towards the end of July, when the river was probably high. It is also possible that, at that time of the year, marshy or flooded ground may have impeded the carts. Even taking the above considerations into account, it is difficult to see how the carts could have taken three days for this part of the trip, unless they were actually stopped for some time by a river in flood. It is curious that the local people have no knowledge of the name 'Jelinga'; though 'Menam Wat' is preserved. A number of villagers on both sides of the border were asked about 'Jelinga', but none of them had ever heard of it.

On the evening of the 29th camp was pitched on the bank of Hui Talemaw, about half-an-hour's march beyond Nawng Bua. On the morning of the 30th, after walking a little more than half-an-hour, a small, open grassy space was reached. There is little doubt that this space, like other such places, was once the site of permanent cultivation, and, presumably, also of habitations. Dr. Keith in his account states that buffaloes, during the dry season, are driven to these patches of grass for grazing. It is possibly on account of this that these spaces have for so long resisted the invasion of the forest.

Unfortunately, no record was made of the name of this particular spot. About two hour's march further on, another, similar, but somewhat larger space was reached. This is known as Tung Muang. The guide stated that there were the ruins of a wat nearby, but the party did not stop to look for them. About midday a small hill was reached. This was the first hill of any size that had to be crossed since leaving the boundary. Here grew a handsome bamboo; in large clumps of lofty, smooth culms. It is known as 'ram ra' (รำระ), and is probably the same as that called 'kriep' in Peninsula Siam, south of Chumpawn. Rafts for descending the river are usually made of this bamboo.

On the other side of the hill the path descended to Klawng Singkawn, which had to be crossed here. This ford is known as 'Ta Pe' (Raft Crossing). It is so called as, from this point, the descent of the river is often made in bamboo rafts. Numerous difficult rapids have to be negotiated, however, and many rafts have come to grief; particularly when they have been in charge of men insufficiently acquainted with the river.

After crossing at Ta Pe the route ran eastwards, away from the river, which here makes a big bend to the south. A small stream, Klawng Intanin, had now to be followed up, chiefly by wading. Recently fallen trees and bamboos were frequent here, and caused some delay; as a way had to be cut through or round such obstructions. The country was now much more hilly; the hills sloping steeply down to the stream on both sides. That evening, camp was pitched by Klawng Intanin.

The next morning another two hours was spent in following up this stream, again with frequent wading. Then a short ascent was made from the stream to the top of a pass. This pass is known to the Siamese as Den Noi. Its top is marked by a pile of stones. According to local tradition this spot at one time marked the boundary of Siam. On descending from Den Noi, another stream was struck, and followed down.

About here a party of travellers, consisting of seven men and one woman, was met. These were Bangkok people who had been to

Mergui to trade. They were the only people met, crossing from one country to the other. Traders, however, frequently make the trip in dry weather. Cloth is taken, chiefly by Indians, from Siam to Burma; while buffaloes and jungle knives are brought over from Burma.

That evening (May 31st) Ban Hui Sai Kao, a village of about twenty houses, was reached. This was the first village, or indeed habitation of any sort, met with since leaving Ban Nawng Kam. At the present day there are no villages on the Klawng Singkawn above Ban Hui Sai Kao, though there were several in former times. Besides the sites already mentioned, there are said to be remains of brick buildings at a place called Kao Noi, about a day by boat above Ban Hui Sai Kao.

The present position of Ban Hui Sai Kao is a fairly recent one. The village used to be further down the river, at the mouth of Hui Sai Kao. Though it has moved away from that stream, it retains its name. As the inhabitants cultivate practically all their rice in temporary clearings, it is not surprising that they have to change the site of their village now and then.

Below Ban Hui Sai Kao, and for a day's boat journey above it, there are no rapids on the river. Higher up, *i. e.*, beyond a day's journey, there commences a series of difficult rapids, where the bed of the stream is very rocky. There are said to be some thirty of these rapids before Ta Pe is reached. Fairly large boats, such as those described below, can ascend these rapids, if ropes are used to haul them over the worst places. The headman of the village stated that it took seven or eight days to ascend with such a boat from Manao (Tenasserim) to Ban Hui Sai Kao, and another four days to go on to Ta Pe. Boats, however, can be got beyond this, even as far as Klawng Ta Prik. The times taken, of course, vary with the state of the river. If the river is in flood it takes much longer to get up it. At the present day boats occasionally go as far as Ta Prik, to load mai hawm (*Mansonia Gagei*).

The boats referred to above are five-wa boats, *i. e.*, about ten metres long, with a breadth of about one and a half metres. They

usually have a low thatch roof amidships. Like other local river-craft, their basis is a hollowed tree-trunk, the sides being built up. In all probability these boats are very much as they were in Mgr. Lambert's time. The present writer, by camping each night on the bank of the river, or on sandy islets, escaped the great discomfort which Mgr. Lambert and his party must have experienced in sleeping in the boats; and the far greater discomfort which must have fallen to the lot of Dr. Keith, who had neither boat nor tent to protect him from the all too frequent rains, not to mention a ducking from the capsizing of his raft.

The greater part of two days was spent at Ban Hui Sai Kao. Only a single boat was obtainable there, and in this the party left that village on the afternoon of June 2nd. The banks of the river are not thickly populated, and there is some evidence that the population has decreased in recent times. Several villages have been deserted, or become much diminished in size, within the last fifty years or so. For instance the village known as Hat Keo, was, according to the boatmen, once a large village. Now it consists of only three or four houses. No doubt this is the same village referred to by Dr. Keith as Wat Keo, which, he tells us, had 400 inhabitants.

The journey down the river was without noteworthy incident, and Tenasserim was reached in the forenoon of June 5th. This is now quite a small place, little more than a village. It is situated on a peninsula, at the junction of the Big and Little Tenasserim Rivers. The remains of the old wall enclose a space much larger than the present town. Besides the prachedis to be seen on the small hill close to the town, there are the remains of others on the higher hills to the west, but these are now quite hidden by the forest.

On the morning of June 6th the journey was continued in a passenger launch, which reached Mergui about 4 p. m. that afternoon.

As may be inferred from the above account, the trip across the Peninsula from Prachuap to Mergui offers no particular difficulties. If it is undertaken during the rains, however, it may be rather an

uncomfortable one. It is remarkable that, of the few people who, have given an account of the trip, two should have made it in the rains: Mgr. Lambert and Dr. Keith. In the dry season the trip should be a pleasant one, with only the discomforts arriving in Tenasserim and Mergui, where one has not the kindly jungle to fall back on.

If the traveller only wishes to go straight across from one point to the other, the trip could be done in six days: provided arrangements for transport are made in advance. Ban Hui Sai Kao can be reached in four, fairly easy, marches from Prachuap. Villagers, travelling light, usually take only three days to do this part of the trip. It would save some time if the carriers waited for the traveller at Ban Nawng Kam; the journey from Prachuap to that village being made by motor-car. Carriers should be warned to take with them provisions for five days, which will give a day's margin for possible delays. No supplies of any sort can be obtained between Ban Nawng Kam and Ban Hui Sai Kao. Boats should be ordered ahead, to be waiting at Ban Hui Sai Kao. These would take the traveller down Klawng Singkawn, to its junction with Klawng Nguam, on the fifth day. At that point a motor-boat should be waiting. It could make the rest of the journey to Mergui in a day. Owing to the shallows, and numerous submerged trees, it is not feasible to take a motor-boat up Klawng Singkawn. There are no difficulties to speak of in the Little Tenasserim River, formed by the junction of Klawng Singkawn and Klawng Nguam.

However, it is to be hoped that no one is going to make the trip simply to see in how short a time it can be done. There is much to interest the biologist or the archæologist along this route. Here are wide stretches of untouched forest, as well as areas that have been under cultivation, but deserted probably more than a hundred years ago; and yet are still easily distinguishable from the surrounding forest. Such a comparatively easy route between the bay of Bengal and the Gulf of Siam was, in all probability, used long before the seventeenth century. It may well be, therefore, that a systematic examination of the deserted sites would yield

the archaeologist interesting results.

NOTE.—The map attached to these notes has been compiled from the Survey of India maps. The writer, however, is responsible for most of the Siamese names thereon. These Siamese names, with the equivalent Burmese names, as used in the Survey of Indian maps, are as follows:—

<i>Siamese</i>		<i>Burmese</i>
Chalawan	ชาตวัน	Salawan
Den noi	แดนน้อย	Ngya-taung Pass
Hat Keo	หาดแก้ว	Letpanthaung
Hui Chin	ห้วยจั้น	—
Hui Sai Kao	ห้วยทรายขาว	Thebyu C.
Hui Talemaw	ห้วยตะเลหม้อ	Ka-je-mo Chaung
Kaw Sanuk	เกาะสนุก	Hatti-nang
Klawng Intanin	คลองอินทนิล	Kalin-kwan Chaung
Klawng Keo	คลองแก้ว	Indaw C.
Klawng Meo Hai	คลองแม่ไ้	Kyein C.
Klawng Nguam ?	คลองงวม ?	Ngawun Chaung
Klawng Sai	คลองใต้	Banthe C.
Klawng Taket	คลองตากแดด	Thagyet C.
Klawng Ta Kilek	คลองท่าขี้เหล็ก	Iliam Chaung
Klawng Ta Palat	คลองตาปลัด	Tabalat Chaung
Klawng Ta Prik	คลองท่าพริก	Htaprik-yo-so
Lem Yuan	แหลมญวน	—
Manao	มะนาว	Tenasserim
Menam Wat	แม่น้ำวัด	Mai-nam-wat

Nawng Bua	หนองบัว	Naung bwa
Singkawn	สิงขอน	Theinkun
Taling Deng	ตติงแดง	Kwēgayan
Ta Pe	ท่าแพ	—
Tung Matun	ทุ่งมะตุม	—
Tung Muang	ทุ่งมวง	Htawng Mwun
Wang Yai	วังใหญ่	Kyauktalon)

*References.*

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2. *An Account of a Journey across the Malay Peninsula from Koh Lak to Mergui.* By Arthur Keith, M. B., C. M., Journ. Straits Branch R. A. S., No. 24, December 1891.

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