

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY TO THE INTERIOR OF HAINAN

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With plates 13 and 14.

The Island of Hainan lies at the extreme north of the gulf of Tongking and is separated from the mainland of China by a shallow strait some 15 kilometres across at its narrowest part.

Roughly speaking the north-eastern part of the island is an undulating plain, while the central, southern and western portions are mountainous. Not many naturalists have been there. Swinhoe in 1868, Tetsu a Chinese collector, and Whitehead in 1889, visited it, but owing to the difficulties of travelling in the interior at the time did not remain long. Whitehead and all his party contracted malaria, while he, to judge by his symptoms as recorded in his diary, died of it. Later on Ogston of Yokohama sent a Japanese collector there. He was more successful, and penetrating to the central range of mountains made considerable additions to our knowledge of the fauna.

Quite recently Mr. F. A. McClure of the Canton Christian College visited the island and spent some months there in botanical work. He travelled across the Loi Voi range and was the first white man to reach the summit of the Five Finger mountain.¹

Early in 1923 my wife and I made a short expedition to the country. We were accompanied by two trained native collectors and by a boy, who acting also as cook, made up a party of five. Our chief object was to obtain herpetological and botanical specimens.

Landing at Hoi-hao on January 7th, we travelled up the Ding-an river as far as Tung-ai, and from there a two days' march brought us to Ka-chek near the south-east coast. Ka-chek is one of the largest towns of the island and maintains a considerable traffic with Hoi-hao and Kiung-chao the capital. The country we passed through was undulating and almost entirely treeless, and with its short grass and broad views strongly reminiscent of English downs. Small patches of cultivation occurred frequently,

¹ Lingnaam Agricultural Review, Dec. 1922, Vol. 1 No. 1.

but the soil was sandy and rocky in nature and not particularly fertile. Animal life in general was consequently lacking. A very conspicuous bird in this country was the White-necked Crow (*Corvus torquatus*) which was frequently seen in company with its all black relative *C. macrorhynchus hainanensis*.

At Ka-chek we were hospitably entertained by the members of the American Presbyterian Mission and at once set about obtaining carriers and boats to continue our journey. We had some difficulty with the latter as a crowd of native soldiers had just come into the town and were seizing all the craft they could lay their hands on to enable them to reach the sea coast. Three boats finally managed to evade them by hiding some miles up the river, and on January 13th as the sun was setting we started for the interior, the blue mountains of which were visible in the far distance.

Traffic on the lower reaches of the Ka-chek river is conducted regularly, and the first part of the journey is performed in the dark in order that the more difficult parts of the stream can be negotiated in daylight. Night travelling we found was commonly done in other parts of the island, the Hainanese boatmen having apparently no difficulty, if required, in working steadily for 24 hours at a stretch.

Daylight on the following morning shewed us that the river had narrowed considerably, with low hills all round coming down to the water's edge and numerous small rapids that required all the strength of our boatmen to get through. At 9 a.m. we reached Tun-fao, a small Chinese village, which was as far as our boats could take us. Here we remained two days, camping in a deserted house and investigating the country near by. The hills round about were fairly well wooded but the soil sandy and rocky and dry everywhere; from a collecting point of view it was not productive.

From Tun-fao up to Kap-hao the river is a succession of rapids, and special boats are required to ascend it. Their carrying capacity is not great and we needed five of them to convey us and our kit. From the start the boatmen usually strip entirely, at least

half their time being spent in the water hauling and pushing the boats. The scenery on this day was wild and extremely beautiful, the rocky river, the swift, foaming waters, and the hills on every side covered with thick, green jungle, all combined to make a memorable picture. On this day too we met with our only mishap. A small gang of robbers suddenly appeared at one of the rapids, and swooping down upon our hindmost boat that was in difficulties at the moment, seized all the baggage they could conveniently carry and made off with it. Unarmed our men could make no defence and we were too far ahead to be of any assistance. Fortunately the stolen articles were not irreplaceable, all our most valuable kit being with us.

Kap-hao is a wood-cutters' settlement on the bank of the river, consisting of two long huts and a small Confucian temple. In this latter, a single-roomed brick building about 12 ft. square, we installed ourselves, and were very comfortable. The spot lies about 175 metres above sea level and in the midst of hills, the highest of which lay facing us across the river some miles away. On the morning after our arrival we set out to climb it, and after passing through a number of betel-nut plantations, ascended by the bed of a rocky stream, and thence through a belt of dense grass one and a half to two metres, high to the summit, which was almost bare. Here we had our first day's good collecting.

At Kap-hao the remainder of our carriers joined us—15 altogether—and picking up a guide from the village we left the river and set out for the Five Finger mountain. The route lay by narrow paths, for the most part up and down steep hills and across innumerable streams; these had all to be forded as bridges were non-existent. Wet feet, in fact, was one of the minor discomforts we had to put up with throughout our whole stay in the mountains; except in camp we were never dry-shod.

Two days' walking through well wooded country brought us to Tin-si, a small town lying on the edge of a plateau some 400 metres above sea level. This part of the country, as we discovered later, was the most fertile of all we passed through, and we were

sorry afterwards, that in our haste to reach the Five Finger mountain, we did not remain in it longer.

At Tin-si we left the Chinese people behind us and entered the country of the Loi, a primitive folk talking a language of their own and said to have come originally from the Lei-chao peninsula on the mainland of China. The country here was much wilder and with fewer villages. Much of this land has been denuded of forest. Jungle fires, started originally by the inhabitants to clear the land for planting and repeated systematically at intervals, have cleared the hills and left them bare, except in the ravines. Sometimes we walked for hours across the hills, an endless panorama of mountains in all directions, but most of them entirely bare except of grass. It was sad to see so much magnificent country laid waste in this ruthless manner.

The Five Finger mountain fortunately has not yet been despoiled, and still remains in all its primitive grandeur, uninhabited and almost untouched. Evergreen forests clothe its steep sides from base to summit. At the foot of the mountain (600 metres) we found a small Loi village and camped near it in some dry paddy fields. From there we explored the lower slopes, and discovered, at 900 metres, a wood cutter's clearing delightfully situated on a high spur between two rocky streams. To this we moved, leaving a good deal of our heavy baggage in the village below. From this camp, which lay on the northern slope, we had an excellent view of the upper portion of the mountain, three of its peaks shewing up clearly when the weather permitted. Heavy mists that blotted out the landscape completely came down every afternoon about 4 o'clock, and remained until nine or ten the following morning; the rest of the day was generally brilliant sunshine. The temperature at this camp fell to about 50° F. during the night, and at mid-day in the sun was about 80°. On dull days the thermometer did not rise above 60°.

On first enquiring as to our chances of getting to the summit of the mountain we were told it was impossible. No one had ever reached it, although several attempts had been made. This we

found hard to believe, as from what we could see there did not appear to be any physical obstacles in the way. From previous experience of climbing mountains in dense jungle, however, where one can seldom see more than a few yards ahead, I knew how difficult it would be for us to attempt it without a guide, and I told our headman he must try and find one in the village below.

Two mornings later they turned up, and as soon as the mists had begun to clear we started. Passing through a damp cloud belt at about 1200 metres we found a clearer atmosphere above, and ascending by narrow tracks that required the constant use of the knife to clear them, we reached, in about five hours, what appeared to us to be the second highest peak—1860 metres as measured by the anaeroid. The summit of the mountain we judged to be some 200 metres higher still, and accessible only by means of a narrow, curved ridge extending onwards from the point to which we had climbed. Except for this ridge the peak appeared to be surrounded by perpendicular walls of bare rock that dropped straight down for several hundred metres. The ridge, however, did not present any particular difficulties, and had there been a few more hours of daylight to spare we could certainly have reached the top. Mr. McClure who ascended the mountain from the south-east, the side invisible to us, states that he found it extremely steep and difficult to climb. The day of our ascent was one of brilliant sunshine and the views were magnificent.

Due no doubt largely to the cold, but also to the rocky and precipitous nature of the mountain, the lack of animal life in general, birds excepted, was disappointing. Although we never saw the gibbons (*Hylobates hainanus*) which live in these forests, we could hear them calling every morning. Barking deer visited our clearing at night, and at 1200 metres a large, pale grey squirrel, and a small, yellow rat, the only two rodents met with, were encountered. No bats were seen. The new mole (*Mogera insularis hainana*) was obtained at the foot of the hill.

Birds on the other hand abounded. Small flocks of the beautiful Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus speciosus fraterculus*) came

through our camp frequently, and the Fork-tail (*Henicurus leschenaulti sinensis*) was common in the streams that ran just below it. The Laughing Thrush (*Dryonastes castanotis*), the Orange-bellied Chloropsis (*C. hardwickii lazulina*) and the Broadbill (*Serilophus lunatus polionotus*), were shot near the top of the mountain. Imperial Pigeon could be heard crooning all day long at our upper camp, and every evening as the mists began to gather, would fly backwards and forwards over our clearing, too high, however, to be reached by gunshot. A specimen of the Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle lugubris guttulata*) was obtained at the base camp, a solitary individual¹

Reptiles and batrachians on the whole were scarce, and the best results were obtained by hunting up the streams after dark with a lantern. In this way a fine series of a new frog (*Staurois planiformis*) was caught, clambering about the perpendicular walls of rock, usually in the vicinity of waterfalls. The only two snakes found on the mountain were coiled up in a state of semi-torpor.

Butterflies and insects generally were far from abundant. A year before we had visited the Nakon Sritamarat mountains in Peninsular Siam, and the clamour of insect life there—particularly of the cicadas after dark—when contrasted with the silence of these Hainanese forests, was very noticeable.

At an altitude of 1200 metres pines of two species were found, while the summit of the peak to which we climbed was clothed largely with a mixture of stunted pines and dwarf bamboos. A small orchid was abundant on the trunks and branches of the pines, but otherwise these plants were scarce. Ferns were abundant, both along the streams and in the forest.

Our journey back from the Five Finger mountain was not quite the same as that taken to reach it. Instead of going through Ka-chek we retraced our steps as far as Tin-si, and then took a direct route to Ding-an on the river.

¹ For the identification of the birds I am indebted to Messrs. Robinson and Kloss, of the F. M. S. Museums, Kuala Lumpur.

ERRATUM.

Page 190, line 15, for *Staurois planiformis* read
Rana hainanensis.



The weather became colder as soon as we left the mountain, and the lowest temperature we experienced was at Ka-chai—altitude 400 metres. We had walked all day with a cold wind blowing and on nearing the village pitched our camp in some open fields. With the setting of the sun the wind dropped also and it became perfectly still, but under the clear starlight it grew rapidly colder. At 7.30 when we sat down to dinner the temperature had dropped to 40°, and on leaving our tent in the morning there was hoar frost in patches on the grass all round.

This part of the country where there was more cultivation abounded in game birds. The Chinese Francolin (*Francolinus chinensis*) could be heard on all sides as the evenings drew on, and Jungle Fowl and a species of green pigeon were plentiful. The Chinese Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis hainanus*) also was common, and the birds were so fat that they were well worth shooting for the pot.

The town of Tin-si, as I have already stated, lies on the edge of a plateau, the beginning of the high land that leads up to the mountains of the interior. We discovered this unexpectedly on our way back, the whole country to the north and east, less than a kilometre from the town, dropping suddenly before us, so that we looked down upon the plain below stretching away as far as the eye could see. The main route for traffic goes straight down this hill, and in about twenty minutes' walk descends nearly 300 metres.

Between Tin-si and Lia-mui the district is fertile and well wooded, with many small villages and much cultivation. Sometimes we walked for miles through narrow, shady lanes, with high fern-clad banks on either side and glimpses of the woodland beyond. Once again we were reminded of English scenery, this time of the deep lanes of the southern counties.

From Lia-mui to Ding-an it is barren, and we had a trying walk through almost desert land to reach the river, where it winds slowly over a vast, sandy plain. It was at the coolest time of the year that we were there, and the glare and heat from those miles of yellow sand in the hot months of the year must be terrible. At Ding-an we engaged a market boat, and travelling slowly and

steadily all that day and the following night, were back in Hoi-how at dawn.

Hainan is still a rich storehouse for any naturalist, and the following information may be useful to those who intend to visit it. It applies of course to the district we visited, and this should be remembered, for by all accounts travellers in other parts of the country have not got on as well as we did. We were favoured also by unusually fine weather for the time of year.

Owing to the lack of proper government at the present time, and the consequent lack of law and order generally, travellers with anything worth having are liable to be held up by gangs of armed men and their baggage plundered. They usually content themselves with robbing and not taking life, but it would be difficult without an armed escort to resist them. They frequent chiefly the coastal regions; the mountainous districts of the interior where villages are few and the inhabitants poor, appear to be free from them.

Fresh food such as pork, chicken, ducks and eggs could be obtained everywhere, and hand-milled rice could be bought in every village. We also obtained on different occasions, onions, turnips and green peas, and a species of hairy tuber which was an excellent substitute for potatoes. A fern (*Diplazium esculentum*) was also plentiful, and if enough were gathered made a good dish; only the young fronds are eaten, boiled and served with butter. Although there is game in the country it is not easily obtainable, and it would be unwise to rely upon one's gun for the pot.

Transport of baggage is by hand only, except on the bigger rivers. Carriers can be obtained usually without much difficulty, and each man will carry between 60 and 90 lbs over the hills, and up to 140 lbs on the flat, and do from 12 to 18 miles a day. On trying marches their usual drink was water, to which they added a good pinch of salt, a curious custom that would have been expected to aggravate rather than allay their thirst. These men take practically no personal luggage with them, and sleep and feed in the villages on the way. Loads that one man can carry are

preferred; the only article of our equipment that required two was our tent.

Lodging in the smaller Chinese villages is not pleasant for the European, but is often convenient when on the march. A room is easily obtained, but it is small and dark and windowless, and the lattice partitions which dividé it from the rest of the house make privacy of any sort impossible, except under cover of darkness. Even more annoying is the lack of quiet, the talking and coughing of the family at all hours of the night, the growling of dogs and grunting of pigs, and worst of all the noise of the poultry that, for safety, are brought into the house at night, render sleep difficult.

The money of the country is both heavy to carry and cumbersome to use. The silver dollar, and "cash" of which about 1200 go to the dollar, are the only forms of coin in use in the interior. Twenty cent pieces are accepted and are convenient to have with one. In the more remote villages "cash" is practically the only money in use, and the change out of a dollar may amount to a string of these coins some three or four feet in length and weighing several pounds.

The winter months, although the most comfortable for travelling in, are not the best for collecting purposes, at any rate in the mountainous districts owing to the cold. Lower temperatures than we experienced have been recorded by other travellers, and sharp frosts are not uncommon at high altitudes. March and April would probably be the best months. The weather then is much hotter, while the advent of the heavy rains would bring forth that abundance of life which only those who have lived in a tropical country where there is a seasonal drought can realize.

Malaria is prevalent throughout the country. During our stay, due no doubt to the cold, we hardly saw a mosquito, and usually slept without nets. We took the precaution however of taking quinine regularly.

Drenching dews fell every night during our stay in the

mountains, and specimens or instruments that could be injured by the damp should be carefully protected.

In concluding this narrative I wish to acknowledge our gratitude to Mr. Robert Bristow, British Consul at Hoi-hao, and to Mr. R. Y. Nelson, Commissioner of Chinese Customs, for their assistance to us during our stay on the island. Most of all, however, our thanks are due to the members of the American Presbyterian Missions at Hoi-hao, Kiung-chao and Ka-chek. Their knowledge of the people and of the country were of the greatest use to us in arranging the details of our expedition, and without their help, so willingly given, it would have been impossible for us to have undertaken the trip in the short time in which we did.



OPEN COUNTRY NEAR THE FIVE FINGER MOUNTAIN.



OPEN COUNTRY NEAR THE FIVE FINGER MOUNTAIN.



VIEW OF FIVE FINGER MOUNTAIN (IN BACKGROUND).



FIVE FINGER MOUNTAIN (IN BACKGROUND) FROM CAMP AT 1,000 METRES.

