

WILEY



---

Moorcroft and Hearsey's Visit to Lake Mansarowar in 1812

Author(s): Hugh Pearse

Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Aug., 1905), pp. 180-187

Published by: geographicalj

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1776210>

Accessed: 26-06-2016 20:50 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Wiley, The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The Geographical Journal*

## MOORCROFT AND HEARSEY'S VISIT TO LAKE MANSAROWAR IN 1812.

By Colonel HUGH PEARSE, D.S.O.

THE mission to Lhasa having aroused general interest in Tibet, a short account of the visit to Lake Mansarowar, by way of the Niti pass, made in the year 1812 by the traveller William Moorcroft and his less-known companion, Hyder Hearsey, may be of interest. The names and histories of both men were well known in India in their day, but Moorcroft is now chiefly remembered by the unfortunate termination of his second and last journey, while Hyder Hearsey is unknown, even to geographers, who only mention him to confuse him with his more famous cousin, General Sir John Hearsey.

Hyder Young Hearsey, born in the year 1782, was the son of Captain Harry Hearsey, an English officer in the Maratha service, who fell at the head of his cavalry regiment in the battle of Merta, in 1790. Hyder Hearsey was educated in England, and at an early age followed his father's footsteps, being appointed a cadet in the Maratha service before his seventeenth birthday, and receiving promotion, a few months later, to the rank of ensign, for good service in the field. He was kindly treated by General Perron, the French commander-in-chief of the Maratha army, but, like other Englishmen in that service, soon found his position uncomfortable, and entered the army of the celebrated George Thomas, Raja of Hansi.

In the year 1801, Thomas had become so formidable that Perron decided to crush him, and a sanguinary struggle followed, in which Hyder Hearsey bore an honourable part. When Thomas eventually fell, Hearsey, who remained faithful to him to the end, raised a force of five thousand men in Mewat and established himself as an independent chief. He married Zuhur-ul-Nissa, a princess of Cambay, adopted daughter of the Emperor Akbar II., successor of Shah Alam; he owned large properties, and was in a position of no small importance.

On the breaking out of the war between the British and the Maratha confederation in 1803, Hyder Hearsey at once declared in favour of his countrymen, and was severely wounded in a minor operation in the early part of the war. In accordance with Lord Wellesley's proclamation, calling on all English subjects to assist in the war, Hearsey disbanded his own troops, except one cavalry regiment, which he was permitted to bring in and command. With this regiment, he served in the relief of Delhi and the battle of Deig, and subsequently did good service until the end of the war in 1806.

In 1808 Hearsey accompanied Lieuts. Webb and Raper in an expedition to trace the source of the Ganges, and in the following year he was actively employed in expelling a party of Gurkhas who had

taken possession of part of the Oudh Terai. This service was achieved with success, but the incursion of the Gurkhas was one of the aggressions which eventually led to the war with Nepal in 1815. In this war Hyder Hearsey took a prominent part. There is ample evidence in the Parliamentary Papers connected with the war that he was much consulted by Lord Moira's Government; and, in consequence of the ill success which attended our early operations, he and his brother-in-law, William Linnæus Gardiner, who had married another of the princesses of Cambay, were employed to conduct an independent expedition against the province of Kumaon. This operation was eminently successful, but Hyder Hearsey himself was very severely wounded and taken prisoner, his life being saved by the intervention of a Gurkha chief, whose friendship he had made during his expedition to Lake Mansarowar. Hearsey died in 1840.

In the year 1812, Hyder Hearsey, who was living on his property near Bareilly, undertook the exploration of Western Tibet with his friend, William Moorcroft. The latter was a native of Lancashire, who had been educated as a surgeon, but had been persuaded by the celebrated John Hunter to turn his attention to veterinary surgery, a science then much neglected in England. Moorcroft completed his studies in France, and, after making a considerable fortune by the practice of his profession in London, most of which he lost by an unfortunate investment, he accepted an offer from the Court of Directors of the East India Company to go out to Bengal as superintendent of their military stud. He went to India early in the year 1808, and soon formed the conviction that the native breed of horses in India, then of poor quality, could best be improved by an infusion of the blood and bone of the Turkoman horse of central Asia. Mr. Moorcroft, who was a man of many interests, also desired to be instrumental in promoting commerce between India and the neighbouring countries, and he was also desirous of serving his country as a geographer.

To such a man the friendship of Hyder Hearsey was no mean acquisition, and it was undoubtedly thanks to Hearsey's tact, knowledge of native manners and customs, and widespread influence, that the two travellers achieved their remarkable exploration of Western Tibet and returned safely to India.

A summary of Mr. Moorcroft's account of his journey, in company with Hyder Hearsey, to the sacred Lake Mansarowar, is to be found in vol. 12 of that rare publication '*Asiatick Researches*,'\* published at the *Calcutta Gazette* Office in the year 1816. The summary was made by Mr. H. T. Colebrooke, the President of the Asiatic Society (to use the modern spelling), and certain details of general interest, omitted by Mr. Colebrooke from considerations of space, are still extant in

\* The earliest series of *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* commenced in 1788.

Hyder Hearsey's notes on his journey, and will be found in the following pages.

Mr. Colebrooke, an acknowledged authority of the period on Indian exploration, states in his introductory remarks that the journey to Tibet was "undertaken from motives of public zeal, to open to Great Britain means of obtaining the materials of the finest woollen fabric. The arduous and perilous enterprise in which Mr. Moorcroft, accompanied by Captain Hearsey, engaged, and which was prosecuted by them with indefatigable perseverance and admirable intrepidity, undismayed by the difficulties of the way and the dangers with which the jealousy of the Nepalese beset them on their return, and undeterred by hardships and privations, and in Mr. Moorcroft's instance by frequent illness, has in the result not only accomplished the primary object which was in view, but has brought an interesting accession of knowledge of a never before explored region; and has ascertained the existence, and approximately determined the situation of Manasarovara, verifying at the same time the fact that it gives origin neither to the Ganges nor to any other of the rivers reputed to flow from it. Mr. Moorcroft . . . found reason to believe that the lake has no outlet. His stay, however, was too short to allow of his making a complete circuit of it: and adverting to the difficulty of conceiving the evaporation of the lake's surface in so cold a climate to be equivalent to the influx of water in the season of thaw from the surrounding mountains, it may be conjectured that, although no river ran from it, nor any outlet appear at the level at which it was seen by Mr. Moorcroft, it may have some drain of its superfluous waters, when more swollen and at its greatest elevation, and may then, perhaps, communicate with Rowan lake, in which the Sutlej takes its source, conformable with the oral information received by our travellers."

Returning to Hyder Hearsey's notes of the journey, we find that the travellers crossed the British frontier of Rohilkhand and entered Kumaon, then occupied by the Gurkhas, on May 9, 1812, disguised as Gosains, or Hindu pilgrims. They were accompanied by no less than fifty-two natives—mostly hill coolies, no doubt, but including an Afghan soldier of fortune named Gholam Hyder Khan,\* who had long been attached to Hyder Hearsey, and two pundits, or educated natives, who had been engaged as surveyors.

Moorcroft states that Hearsey undertook the survey of the entire route traversed, and that Harkh Dev, one of the pundits, paced the road; two of his ordinary steps measuring exactly 4 feet.

From May 9 to 24 the travellers went over ground that had already been explored by Colonel Colebrook; but on the latter date they left

---

\* Gholam Hyder Khan afterwards accompanied Moorcroft on his ill-fated expedition to Bokhara, and was the only member of it who returned to India.

the Badrinath road at Joshimath, and thence travelled over unexplored ground to the village of Niti, which they reached on June 4. At this point the Tibetan authorities began to make difficulties about further progress, pointing out "that this was a road by which pilgrims to Mansarowar seldom came; that we were armed; that we had many people; that report said that we were either Gorkhals or Firingis come with designs inimical to the Undes; and that measures had been taken accordingly." (Undes, or Hundes, was the name applied to Tibet by the travellers.) The disguise as Gosains had, then, not been altogether successful, as might have been anticipated; and nothing but the great tact, patience, and courage shown by the travellers enabled them to complete their journey to the sacred lake. The Tibetans have from time immemorial shown the greatest aversion to any visits by Europeans from Ind'ia, while the hill states of Kumaon and Garwhal were at this time in the hands of the Nepalese, whose policy was most hostile to the English. The Gurkha war, which broke out two years later, was in fact already brewing. Moorcroft and Hearsey explained to the headman of Niti that "for pious and humane reasons we wished to visit the Lake of Mansarowar; that for defraying our expenses we had brought certain articles from our country for sale; that we had for our own defence certain arms which we were willing to leave in his keeping during our stay in the Undes."

This declaration seemed to give satisfaction, but the travellers were requested to await for a period of fifteen days, until the reply of the Tibetan rulers of that province could be received.

After many days of fruitless and wearisome negotiations, it at length became clear that the delay was entirely caused by the headmen of the Niti villages themselves, the authorities on the Tibetan side of the pass having no means of stopping the travellers if the Niti headmen chose to introduce them to their northern neighbours. The sacrifice of a bottle of brandy, made into punch and well sweetened, was not without effect in a heated debate which took place on June 23; but the ascent of the pass did not finally take place until the last day of the month.

Travelling slowly and gradually establishing friendly relations with the chiefs and priests of the province, Moorcroft and Hearsey reached the town of Daba (some 20 miles over the border) on July 3. They had experienced considerable difficulty in traversing the Niti pass, the road being of the roughest description.

They describe Daba as "perched upon the top of a rock which juts out towards the river with an irregular declivity, and is surmounted by the highest eminence in the whole line which defends it from the north-west." They add that at Daba they found a few cultivated fields, which were the first that they had found in Tibet. The river referred to is the Tiltil, a tributary of the Sutlej.

There were three persons of importance at Daba, styled by Moorcroft the Lama, the Wazir, and the Deba, or head zemindar.\* The wazir was absent on business towards Mansarowar, and his son represented him. Hyder Hearsey's notes, which are more plain spoken than Mr. Moorcroft's narrative, run as follows:—

“After breakfast this day (July 4) Umar Singh sent word to us to come and pay our respects to the wazir's son, in council assembled with the lama and the son of the deba. We proceeded about nine o'clock attended by the pundit and three or four other servants, carrying the presents for these people. The presents consisted of 3 yards of superfine scarlet broadcloth, some sugar and spice, all arranged on a brass plate. We first entered a gate, over against which was fastened a very large and handsome dog, something of the Newfoundland breed; the entrance stunk very much of him.

“We then had to stoop to enter another door—filthy enough, stench abominable. We then proceeded up a few steps of earth and stones, all broken. We turned to the right and entered a small antechamber, to the right of which was the women's room. A greasy, filthy purdah was then lifted up, and we entered the parlour. Here we found a clean mirzai, or poor woollen carpet, spread for us in the centre of the room. In front was a vacant seat, opposite to which our presents were placed. On the right sat the lama on a cushion; before him was placed a kind of tea-poy (three-legged table), on which were two wooden varnished plates, painted and gilt. There was also a fire-pan. The old gentleman appeared about seventy years old, had a shrewd countenance, said very little, and eyed us all the time. He was dressed in a coarse, woollen, red garment, the manufacture of the country, greasy and dirty in the extreme. This was the bishop of this see.

“He had another priest sitting to his right, more black, more filthy, and more ugly than himself. Opposite to me sat the son of the deba, a dark but sensible, though rather heavy-looking person, aged about twenty-nine or thirty. He had a paper in his hand at our entrance, as if in the act of writing. He was seated on a leather cushion stuffed with wool, over which was a carpet; before him was a sort of small table, on which were two of the wooden plates before mentioned, a china cup, an inkstand, a wooden pen, and a knife. To his right lay a long silver pipe. He was dressed in a red, blue, green, and yellow striped woollen gown.”

It appeared that the paper was a letter to the commander of Gortope (or Gartok), a neighbouring seat of government, explaining that Moorcroft and Hearsey really were harmless pilgrims, and not the dreaded Firingis, and requesting that they might be permitted to

---

\* It appears that the terms “wazir” and “deba” were incorrectly used, the former not being a Tibetan word, while *deba* is merely a respectful suffix.

proceed to Lake Mansarowar. Suspicions were again aroused on the following day by the discovery that Hearsey wore half-boots of an English pattern, a curious slip on his part, which his fellow-traveller records with obvious relish, adding that he himself had taken the precaution of having turned-up toes added to his own shoes.

On July 8 an answer to the deba's letter was received from Gortope, which was conveyed to the travellers on the following day. It was to the effect that the governor had been informed three years previously that some Europeans were about to come into the country. He therefore desired to see the travellers.

Messrs. Moorcroft and Hearsey accordingly set out from Daba on July 12, and, after a six days' march, reached Gortope, which they found to be a large encampment of blanket tents in clusters. The deba, however, had a small house, surrounded by a fence about 4 feet high, and to this residence the travellers were at once summoned. The interview was a long one, and the council, similarly composed to that at Daba, was at first distrustful, but the travellers were at length enabled to allay all suspicion as to their being Europeans.

On the following day, July 18, trade relations were established, and the Kashmirian wakil, or agent, of the Raja of Ladak, who was at Gortope, expressed a desire to open a commerce with Hindustan.

By July 22 Mr. Moorcroft was on friendly terms with the "deba," who, when asked what articles he would like brought up for him from India, said that "a sword and a necklace of large pearls of a rose-colour, pear-shape, and free from flaws or irregularities, would be most acceptable." Evidently an enlightened man, the deba, and a shrewd man of business too, for Mr. Moorcroft adds that he gave a sketch of the necklace which he desired, worth probably about two thousand rupees, but the cost of which the deba estimated at three or four hundred. The deba then gave the travellers leave to visit Mansarowar, but ordered them to confine themselves strictly to the usual pilgrim road, and to return by the Niti pass.

It is worth mentioning that Hearsey was informed by the wakil of the Raja of Ladak that the *Ooroos*, or Russians, had long been in the habit of trading with that country, and had, in the last three years, pushed a lively trade into Kashmir by means of agents. The *Ooroos* had not yet visited Ladak in person, but the Deba of Daba asserted that caravans of five or six hundred of them, on horseback, had come to the fair of Gortope. In a later conversation the Ladak wakil said that a few Russians had been in Kashmir.

The travellers left Gortope on July 23, and on August 2 arrived at "the Lake of Rawanhrad, a large sheet of remarkably blue water, said . . . to communicate by a river with the lake Mansarowar." On August 5 they came in view of the holy lake, and on the following day halted on its bank. The travellers remained for two days, exploring

the shores of the lake. Mr. Moorcroft describes Mansarowar in the following terms: "In form it appeared to me oblong, the sides of the east, west, and south nearly straight; that of the north, and especially to the north-east, where there is a plain at the foot of elevated land, indented and irregularly tending to the east. The angles were not sharp, or its figure would have approached nearer to a square than to any other, but it may be considered as an irregular oval. Its breadth from south to north I estimate at about 11 miles, its length about 15. The water, except where disturbed by the wind near the beach, where it is sandy, is clear and well tasted. No weeds are observable on its surface, but grass is thrown upon its banks from the bottom. The middle and sides farthest from the spectator reflect green, and, taken altogether, it has a noble appearance, whether in an agitated or a quiet state." Mr. Moorcroft discovered a number of caves, inhabited by religious recluses, and mentions that one of the nuns, struck by pity, no doubt, at his haggard and worn appearance, offered him hospitality, but "with the most cordial salutation and expression of thanks by dumb show," he took his leave and went on with his survey. Mr. Hearsey, meanwhile, cut Moorcroft's name and his own on a stone, and left it in a secure place, an excusable act under the circumstances.

The return journey was begun on August 8, and on the 22nd the party again reached Daba, where the children received them as old friends. The travellers had some difficulty in obtaining transport to carry them back over the mountains, but eventually left Daba on August 26, and by September 3, after an arduous journey, were delighted to see trees once again. Their worst troubles were, however, to come, for after an interesting march through the hill country, during which they resumed their European dress, the travellers were arrested by the Gurkha rulers of Kumaon.

On October 9, Banda Thapa, a chief who had communicated by letter with the travellers four days previously, met them by appointment at Chandpur. Banda Thapa, "a stout old man of seventy, and altogether not superior in his appearance to one of the zemindars of Ghazipur," \* inquired why Messrs. Moorcroft and Hearsey were travelling through Gurkha territory, and particularly why they had disguised themselves. The travellers replied that it was the custom for travellers to disguise themselves, and that by no other means could they have entered Tibet. They asked if any complaint had been made as to their conduct, and, on receiving satisfactory assurance on that head, pointed out that hundreds of Nepalese were allowed to travel at their pleasure through the Company's territories.

Banda Thapa took his leave, apparently satisfied, but on October 15

---

\* Moorcroft's residence in India.



the travellers were finally arrested, and placed under a military guard. They were informed that the local authorities were in consultation as to what should be done with them, and it transpired later that their arrest was in fact ordered by letter from Khatmandu, the Nepalese capital. Mr. Moorcroft, who was armed at the moment of arrest, was treated with great violence, and his arms were pinioned. Hearsey was held by several men, but not bound. The pundits and other followers of the party were shackled to wooden blocks. Mr. Moorcroft acted with great courage and firmness, and after a time secured his own release and that of his servants.

Hyder Hearsey writes with great indignation of the manner in which he and Mr. Moorcroft were treated, but as the Gurkhas had been ordered by their rulers to arrest the party, who obviously declined to stop when requested to do so, it is hard to see how violence could have been altogether avoided. After various communications with Bam Sah, the Gurkha governor of the Almora district, and Amar Singh, the commander-in-chief of the Gurkha army, Moorcroft and Hearsey were released on November 1. The Pundits, however, still remained in irons until November 5, when a letter arrived from the Maharaja of Nepal, directing that the whole party should be set at liberty and escorted into British territory.

So ended this adventurous journey, the first occasion on which English travellers from India traversed the Himalaya mountains into Western Tibet, and visited the sacred lake of Mansarowar, the great plain between the Himalayas and the Kuen-lun mountains, and the upper waters of the river Sutlej.

---

## NOTES ON A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NORTHERN PENINSULA OF NEWFOUNDLAND.

By H. C. THOMSON.

IN spite of the fact that the railway now goes right across Newfoundland, the interior is still comparatively little known, more especially that portion of it extending from Bonne bay to Cape Norman, forming part of the French shore, and commonly known as Le Petit Nord. Before long it will be traversed from end to end in the search for the mineral wealth it is believed to contain, for the country itself is an easy one to travel in. Last summer a friend, Mr. W. H. Burt, and myself spent six weeks in wandering through it, and these notes may be of assistance to those who wish to undertake a similar journey.

Sir Robert Bond, the Premier, very kindly gave us letters of introduction to different people along the coast, and also to Mr. J. P. Howley, F.G.S., the Director of the Geological Survey, who knows more