

6.2.3 The Earl of Dunmore 1892-93 (Words 8,321)

© Robert Middleton 2005

On Christmas day 1891, Charles Adolphus Murray, eighth Earl of Dunmore, left England for Karachi, where he disembarked in February 1892 at the start of a journey that was to take him over 2,200 miles through Central Asia, crossing sixty-nine rivers and forty-one mountain passes, some among the highest in the world.

His account of this journey, *The Pamirs; being a Narrative of a Year's Expedition on Horseback and Foot through Kashmir, Western Tibet, Chinese Tartary and Russian Central Asia*, was published in London in 1893. It reveals a man of considerable strength, erudition, good humour and courtesy. While the first was a requirement and the second not unusual for all the early explorers of the Pamirs, the latter two qualities were more exceptional. Dunmore was also an accomplished linguist, amateur botanist, poet, painter and musician, with a fine sense for natural beauty.



Sunset on the Alichur Pamir

On the Pamirs I have often seen evening tints in the sky, the colours of which I do not believe that any landscape painter in the world could give a name to, and the after-glows, which would almost answer to our twilights in Europe, are so exquisite in their refinement, that it were absolutely impossible to attempt to describe them.

His qualities stand out even more in comparison with some of the dry accounts published by contemporary travellers on the Pamirs. Major Charles Sperling Cumberland, for example, travelled in almost the same areas as Dunmore three years previously and met en route Grombchevsky, Dauvergne and a team from Nikolai Mikhailovich Prjevalsky's last expedition to Tibet, but his book *Sport on the Pamir and Turkistan Steppes*, published in 1895, contains hardly a single interesting or amusing story: it comprises essentially a series of excruciatingly detailed hunting reports. Where Dunmore frequently expresses concern for the welfare of his native companions, Cumberland is less put out at the death of one of his native guides than at the loss of one of his ponies.

Of course, many of these trips – whatever their real purpose – were indeed described by those participating as ‘sport’. Dunmore – aged 51, remember – on the way up the Taghdumbash Pamir, at an altitude of nearly 5,000m, in temperatures of about minus 15°C, spent several

days and nights stalking Marco Polo sheep, sleeping out on the snow and, on one occasion, sliding headlong down a glacier into a crevasse. He notes, with imperceptible irony, that “there is no doubt that we have come here at the wrong season of the year.” On meeting a bear, he comments sardonically that he held his fire until the bear was dangerously close because he could only see his head and to aim at it “would have shattered his skull, which was the only part of him I wanted to keep.”

Nothing should surprise today’s reader about the explorers of an age where there were considered to be no limits to knowledge or to human endeavour and improvement. General Sir Charles MacGregor had described the ideal cogently in 1882 in his *Wanderings in Balochistan*.

The sight of a map with blank spaces on it produces in me a feeling of mingled shame and restlessness. Of course it is not any particular fault of mine that maps have blank spaces on them, but I always feel the glaring whiteness of the blanks looking reproachfully at me. Judging from my own feelings, I think it would be a good plan if the Geographical Society were to have all unexplored tracts painted on their maps some conspicuous colour, say scarlet, as the sight of these burning spots, thus prominently brought to their notice, would, I feel sure, rouse much of the latent energy of young Britons, and perhaps divert a good deal of it from mooning about the Row to more useful wanderings to unknown regions.

A broken rib sustained in a riding accident in Rawalpindi led to a short delay in setting off but gave Dunmore time to review his plans and extend his planned itinerary from the Pamirs to other parts of Russian Central Asia. The fitting out of the expedition included procurement of not only tents, stores and sporting guns, but also scientific instruments for making observations en route.

Baggage includes eight tents, thirty beddings, camp-furniture, stores, carpenters’ tools, medicine chest; navvies’ tools, horse-shoeing tools, 3000 nails and 420 horseshoes, guns, rifles, ammunition, spare saddlery, our own kit and that of thirty men; kitchen utensils, scientific instruments, photographic apparatus, etc. ... fifty-one men and 130 live animals [74 yaks and 56 ponies].

Dunmore was joined at Leh in Ladak by Major Roche of the Indian dragoons, who stayed with him until they reached Kashgar six months later and, on 23 June, their party set off for the Chinese frontier, crossing the Karakoram pass on 9 July. They reached Yarkand on 4 August and, two weeks later, headed west towards the Pamirs, reaching Tashkurgan and Sarikol at the end of August. Dunmore notes that the population of Sarikol “numbers about 6000 souls and is purely Aryan.... They all look upon His Highness Agha, Sahib of Bombay, as their spiritual leader, who in virtue of his being the offspring of the prophet and himself a pious man, has alone the power of absolving his followers from their sins. Some of the Sariq-qolis who are his most ardent disciples go so far on the road towards Buddhism, as to believe that Ali takes birth in every successive Agha.”

Dunmore notes that the Ismailis of Sarikol were respectful of their women who “are not treated as mere machines, as they are in other Mahameddan countries, but are looked up to with respect by their husbands and children and are entrusted with the entire household arrangements ... they are free to come and go as they please, without any restriction; and the use of the veil is practically unknown to them.”

On 1 September they reached the foot of the Tagdumbash Pamir – their ranks increased by this time to thirty men and sixty horses (having had an undignified fall from a yak, Dunmore seems to have abandoned the idea of using these animals). There they were welcomed by an unseasonable snowstorm: “Roche and I sat huddled up together, trying to imagine we were getting shelter from a juniper bush three feet high. The ground was wet, and so were we, and bitterly cold into the bargain ... As we were ravenously hungry, we thought to pass the time by ordering imaginary dinners – Roche at the Naval and Military, I at the Guards’ Club.”

Their privations, however, were mitigated by the arrival of a parcel from Younghusband, for this was a time when it was a matter of course to send runners from Hunza to a mountain pass in the Pamirs just to deliver tobacco and newspapers for the sahibs.

The incompetence and corruption of the local Chinese officials encountered by Dunmore – together with the legendary hospitality of the Kyrgyz – goes far to explain the warm welcome they received from the local nomadic herders and the rapid spread of rumours that they were official envoys of the British government, come to take possession of the Pamirs. The Kyrgyz of the Little Pamir preferred the British to the Russians, since the latter had told them that they would be liable to military service if found on what the Russians claimed as their territory in the Little Pamir.

Some of the Kirghiz head-men from Aktash, wishing to cross over into Hunza to buy grain, came and asked me to give them a pass to Captain Younghusband, as they are afraid of being turned back at Misgah by his Kunjuti outposts as none but *dâk* [official communications] carriers are allowed to pass. Ahmed Din wrote them a sort of passport in Persian to show at the outpost, and I signed it. ... I hope these men will get through. They wish to become British subjects and emigrate over into Hunza as a body, as they say the Chinese will not do anything for them, but allowed them to be turned out of their homes by the Russians.

The Chinese were, indeed, concerned that any mission by Englishmen in the frontier region at that time was for more than just hunting Marco Polo sheep. Dunmore recounts that shortly after the British had subdued Hunza in December 1891, the Chinese had prepared a boundary stone, with appropriate ancient-looking inscriptions asserting that it marked the Chinese frontier, and had buried it with an image of Buddha at the top of the Minteke pass leading into Hunza, where – if there were ever a boundary dispute – it could conveniently be ‘discovered’.

On 27 October, Dunmore and Roche received an official visit from a representative of the government in Urumchi, to check on what they were doing.

He had the same drawling hesitation in his speech that I have already noticed, especially in the case of the Amban of Kargalik, who used to remain on the drawl on one particular note, say B flat, and then jerk his voice up to F natural, and come out with his sentence. This Amban, when hesitating in his speech, lacked the musical (?) drawl of the other one, and simply said ‘jigga, jigga, jigga, jigga’ with the utmost rapidity, which resembled much more the going off of an alarm than the articulation of a human being, and he continued jigga jigga-ing until he got the word he wanted.

A few days later, the party left to find a way through the Little Pamir to Zor Kul (known to the British then, as we have seen, as Lake Victoria). This was not the route taken either by Wood or by Trotter, who was the next European to arrive there in 1874, and the way had to be sought among the many small side valleys. The indefatigable Littledales had been there in 1888 and had gone over the Andamin (Benderskiy) pass above Chakmaktyn Kul, but Dunmore did not have their travel report with him and had to improvise. In the previous year, Younghusband had intended to try to cross this way but had been stopped by the Russians at Boza-i Gumbaz in the Wakhan.

A further problem was that, naturally enough, none of the local people recognised the name Victoria. More confusion was caused by the different, often similar names used by local people for various natural phenomena – a glance at the map of the region reveals a multitude of names combining *ak* (white), *kara* (black), *kyzyl* (red), *tash* (stone), *su* (river), *kul* (lake), *kurgan* (tower), *kum* (sand), *gumbez* (dome) etc. Dunmore notes that in the Pamirs there are “two Tashkurgans, two Serez, two Neza Tash passes, three Gaz-Kul lakes” and that the lake in the little Pamir which is the source of the Aksu river bears several different names: Chakmaktyn, Oikul, Kul-i-Pamir Khurd (Little Pamir lake), Barkut Yassin, Challap and Gazkul. Zor Kul also appeared on British maps as Serikol or Sir-i-Kol, which invites confusion with Sarikol.

In addition to problems of terminology, Dunmore's guides turned out not really to know the terrain well or to have any sense of time or distance¹ and he occasionally gives vent to an unusual display of frustration: "... if our different Chinese and Kyrgyz guides could understand the Queen's English, they would hear many remarks unflattering to themselves. They also seem to have a passion for crossing rivers unnecessarily."

By now it was -22°C inside their tent and Dunmore's narrative could only be continued by periodically getting the cook to unfreeze the ink bottles, until finally he had to resort to pencils. A further catastrophe was the discovery that their stock of tea was almost exhausted and they had to resort to the shocking expedient of actually boiling the leaves in the water in order to make it go further. Anyone who has enjoyed the abundant hospitality of the Kyrgyz in the Pamirs will sympathise also with his complaint that "we have now been eating mutton twice a day for 179 consecutive days."

On 4 November, they crossed the Little Pamir over the Andamin (Bendersky) pass and followed the river of the same name down to the Great Pamir plain.



The Great Pamir

It was now even colder and Dunmore admits for the second time, with fine British understatement, that "Roche and I have finally come to the conclusion that the winter is not exactly the season to choose either for purposes of sport or of exploration on the Pamirs."

The next day they camped on the frozen shores of Lake Kokdjigit, and, in the morning, rode the three miles to the eastern end of Zor Kul, noting the presence of seagulls and an abundance of sea shells. They stayed close to the lake for a further two days and then headed along the Pamir river as far as Khargush, with "the thermometer last night only registering 40° of frost or 8° below zero [-22°C]."

Although this temperature is nothing really abnormal, still we seem to feel the cold very severely. Personally I feel it ten times worse than I ever have before, either in the Arctic regions of Spitzbergen, or in Canada, where I have frequently marched with troops, with the thermometer

¹ This is still the case. After more than ten years' travelling in Central Asia I have come to the conclusion that the Tajik word "nazdik" (nearby) can mean anything from 100m to 20km and that "hozzer" (shortly) can mean anything from 5 minutes to five days.

ranging from 30° to 40° below zero [-34° to -40°C]. It is just the difference between an absolutely still cold and a cold with wind like we have here. In the morning the men cannot use their hands either to strike the tents or load the ponies ...

On 9 November, “as this was the Prince of Wales’ birthday, we drank His Royal Highness’s health, and although the toast was drunk in tea, I venture to think that the wishes for his health and prosperity were quite as hearty as if the toast had been drunk in champagne.” They then struck north towards the Alichur Pamir rather than south along the Pamir river since, as Dunmore admits in an unusual moment of candour, “our object was to find a new pass between the Karghoshi and the Besh-Gombež.”

Once on the Alichur plain, they passed Sasi Kul (the “stinking lake”, although quite why it has deserved this name is a mystery, as there is no apparent smell from or near the lake) and Tuz Kul (“salt lake”), noting the saltpetre deposits on the shore which can be seen today exactly as then. Arriving in Bulunkul on 10 November, their party was astonished at the large quantity of fish in the lake. The fish are there in similar quantities today and have led to the establishment of a sizeable community of fishermen and their families from Shugnan, an island of non-Kyrgyz in what is today the largely Kyrgyz district of Murghab, offering a welcome respite for today’s traveller from the local diet of mutton about which Dunmore had complained earlier.

Next day they pushed on round the eastern end of Yashilkul to Sumantash (Dunmore calls it Surmatash), where two military campaigns in the Pamirs had been decisively concluded. The most recent had taken place only four months before Dunmore’s arrival (see Chapter 6.1) between Cossacks of the first Russian ‘flying’ detachment under Colonel Ionov and a group of Afghan soldiers.

The earlier campaign concluded in Sumantash in 1759 with the rout by the Chinese of the Khoja (Muslim) rulers of Kashgar. It is commemorated by a stone now in Khorog, capital of Gorno-Badakhshan.

The two Muslim leaders reached Badakhshan but were subsequently killed by Sultan Shah, the ruler there. A legend arose that, in their death throes, they laid a curse on Badakhshan and prayed that it might be three times depopulated. As Sir Henry Yule points out in his account of the incident, “in fact, since then it has been at least three times ravaged; first, a few years after the outrage by Ahmed Shah Durani of Kabul, when the treacherous Sultan Shah was put to death; in the beginning of this [19th] century by Kokan Beg of Kunduz; and again in 1829 by his successor Murad Beg, who swept away the bulk of the remaining inhabitants, and set them down to die in the marshy plains of Kunduz.”

Some years before Dunmore was in Sumantash, another explorer, T.E. Gordon, reported that the fleeing Muslims “are said to have driven their women and children, mounted on camels and horses, into the lake, to meet their death by drowning rather than that they should fall into the hands of the enemy. The Kirghiz have a legend that the sounds of lamentation, and of people and animals in terror of death, are often heard near the lake.”²

² T.E. Gordon, *The Roof of the World*, London 1876, p. 158.



Sumantash Stone

Until the conclusion of the final border agreement with China in 2002, it was feared in Tajikistan that this stone – indeed of less doubtful authenticity than the one placed on the Minteke pass above Hunza (see above) – might be used by the Chinese at some time to reassert sovereignty over the Alichur Pamir.³

On 15 November, Dunmore's party had crossed the Alichur plain, past the enormous Chatyr Tash, rising from its centre and resembling, in Dunmore's words, "the Sphinx of the pyramids of Egypt, without its head" and was in sight of Murghab.

The Russians were expecting them and sent an escort with three officers (the interim commander Savonov - Ionov was absent - and Captains Reiffeld and Brjesickis) to welcome Dunmore, one of whom proudly informed him that he had been present at the famous occasion when Younghusband had been threatened with arrest in 1891 at Boza-i-Gumbez (in the Wakhan); another had, in the same year, "had the pleasure of meeting Davison at Yashil Kul" – a euphemism for his being packed off to the Russian base at Marghilan as a prisoner: both incidents of some discomfort for the British as they were statements of the extent of the authority claimed by Russia in the Pamirs.

The Russians had prepared yurts for their distinguished British guests and, within the limits of the supplies of the Murghab garrison, everything was done to make their stay comfortable. Dunmore was able to reciprocate by introducing them to the game of Ludo.

³ Dunmore says that he saw the inscription in a museum in Tashkent and it must have been separated from the stone by Ionov's troops and taken there after the campaign (the stone itself being too heavy to transport easily). The stone is reliably reported by local inhabitants to have remained in Sumantash until the early 1960s, when it was removed to Khorog and placed in front of the local museum in Lenin Street. In 1969 – at a time of border tension with the Chinese – it was replaced by a bust of Lenin and buried next to the pedestal. In 2004, when the main road in Khorog was widened, this important historical monument of the Pamirs was dug up and is awaiting a final resting place.



Chatyr Tash ('House Rock') on the Alichur plain

On 19 November, accompanied by Savonov, Brjesickis and an escort of Cossacks, they left Murghab up the Akbaital valley. Shortly before the turn east to Rang Kul, Savonov left them and returned to Murghab: "it was with genuine regret, I hope on both sides, on ours at any rate, that we bade each other adieu; we felt indeed that it was impossible for us to express to him our gratitude for the many kindnesses he showed us during our sojourn in his hospitable camp."

The party continued past Shor Kul to Rang Kul, noting on the way the so-called Lamp Rock ('Chiragh Tash') at the top of a cliff, the luminous properties of which Dunmore (on the basis of Younghusband's account of an earlier climb up the rock) ascribes to a cave pierced through the rock. The local Kyrgyz today ascribe to the light to the presence of phosphorescent matter and it is still visible today, despite the fact that the rock was used as target practice by the Russian border guards in the 1990s. Dunmore notes that Rang Kul is the smaller of the two; this is no longer the case, although these are "intermittent" lakes, the size of which varies according to the seasons and from year to year.

A specially prepared yurt was awaiting them again in the Rang Kul fort and the next day, well-rested but cold at -23°C , Dunmore and the Russians "had recourse to various expedients to keep warm." After Russian peasant and cossack dances, he taught the officers the intricacies of Scottish dancing to the sound of a Russian accordion: "the first Highland reel ever danced on the Pamirs."⁴

The next day, it was so cold the pin of the thermometer was frozen fast to the glass at the lowest temperature registered by it: -20°F (-29°C). Dunmore estimates that in reality it must have been about -34°C . The group, with Brjesickis and the cossack escort, rode up towards the Chinese frontier enjoying splendid views from the Kok Beless pass (4,246m) of the high mountains in Shugnan and Rushan to the west and Kongur and Mustagh Ata to the east, and spent a last night on Russian territory, again in a yurt prepared for them by the Russians, at the foot of the Ak-Bhirdi mountain.

⁴ Just over 100 years after Dunmore's dance in Rang Kul, I had the privilege of dancing the Gay Gordons at the confluence of the Yazgulom river and the Oxus with Barbara Hay, the British Ambassador, not to keep warm but to show the local people, in response to their hospitality, that we too could dance – perhaps the second time Scottish music ever sounded in the Pamirs.

Despite the yurt, in the morning “our blankets were white with small icicles, where our breath had touched them, and my beard was the same” and he spares a thought for the men who had “suffered a good deal” sleeping outside. They parted company with the Russians and set off up the mountain. Brjesickis, displaying excellent knowledge of the British sense of proprieties, “did not attempt to embrace us” although one of his officers did and caused great indignation on the part of Roche “at being kissed by a great hairy man, while I, who did know their ways, submitted like a lamb.”

Their route took them north over the Ak-Bhirdi mountain, for the “so-called Ak-Bhirdi pass is, in reality, no pass at all it being the actual summit of a mountain, 17,330 feet above sea-level.” Although Brjesickis informed them that no Europeans had ever been this way before, Dunmore subsequently found out that Captain H. Bower of the 17th Bengal Cavalry had been across it in 1891.⁵

The descent down the Chinese side was very precipitous and the “frozen snow and sheets of ice we met with were so slippery ... that in one very steep place I had to crawl down on my hands and knees backwards, so as to face my horse, and thus be able to avoid his slipping down on the top of me.” They had spent five and a half hours on the mountain and stopped at an encampment, where again they were offered a yurt for the night and a gift of sheep by the hospitable local Kyrgyz.

On 24 November, they were met by an emissary of Macartney from Kashgar who brought food, fodder and newspapers. Dunmore disgustedly compares “the trash which is served up for the public to digest” with the reality that he has encountered en route. For example

<i>Newspaper paragraphs</i>	<i>Comments on same</i>
<p>“Colonel Younoff reports that from several towns in the Pamirs, the natives have come to him to pay their respects and to ask to be united with Russia.”</p> <p>“The Chinese had arrived in the Pamir territory 500 strong and fixed their headquarters at Shindi. Hearing the Russians were advancing on the Chinese Pamirs, they advanced eastward 250 strong, against the Ak-Baital pass, and when they advanced against the village of Aktash, the party of Chinese from Shindi opposed them. A fight ensued, which ended in the signal defeat of the Chinese. Meanwhile the Russians fortified their position at Aktash.”</p>	<p>There is not a single <i>house</i> nor <i>village</i>, much less a <i>town</i>, on the Pamirs.</p> <p>There has not been a <i>single Chinese soldier</i> on the Pamirs during the year 1892, except a non-commissioned officer and eleven men at Aktash. Shindi is a village in Sariq-qol, about seventy miles east from the Pamirs, with a high mountain range between them, and if the Chinese <i>had</i> advanced <i>eastward</i>, they would have gone towards Yarkand, and in the contrary direction to the Pamirs. The Ak-Baital pass is 120 miles from Shindi, with <i>six</i> mountain ranges between them. The Tash-korum pass is 130 miles from Aktash, with <i>eight</i> mountain ranges between them. No fight has <i>ever</i> taken place between the Russians and Chinese on the Pamirs. Aktash is not a village. It is a large white rock on the plain of the Ak-su river, and there is not a house within many a hundred mile of it. So far from fortifying themselves at Aktash, the Russians pulled the Chinese fort down and then retired unassailed on Murghabi.</p>
<p>“Pamir is a country infested by wild tribes.”</p>	<p><i>The Pamirs</i> are not infested by wild tribes, but are the summer grazings of a quiet, peaceable, nomad tribe called Kirghiz.</p>

Reporting of the Tajik civil war in 1992-1993 in the European press was marginally more accurate but not much, although there was conceivably less interest by the outside world in these reports than in those quoted by Dunmore.

After being detained temporarily by Chinese frontier guards they reached Kashgar on 1 December and were welcomed by Macartney, who had organised a few protocol visits for Dunmore, the only problem being that he had no suitable clothes.

On Tuesday, Mr. Macartney had made arrangements that I should visit the Taotai [local head of civil and military affairs] Li-Tsung-Pin (I make use of the first personal pronoun, because I could never persuade Roche to visit anybody), and as we had already received an ample apology from the Chinese Government for our detention at the Frontier, with an assurance that the culprit, "Ching-Wang," should be severely punished, there was every reason I should go and visit the chief official of Kashgar. Had the apology not been tendered, I should not of course have visited the Taotai, and the matter would have then been placed on another, and more serious footing, as Mr. Macartney would have referred it to the Government of India. Things, however, having been satisfactorily arranged, I made my preparations to pay the Taotai a visit of ceremony.

No clothes that I could produce, amongst the small stock which constituted my wardrobe, would please Macartney, who said that a Chinaman judged a European by his outward appearance entirely, and he regretted very much, that I had not brought some uniform with me!

Fancy taking a uniform over the Karakoram and into the Pamirs!

At last, to please him, I consented to array my person in an old uniform great-coat of Younghusband's, with a political officer's brass buttons and an imposing cape on it.

It being two sizes too small for me, it was therefore very tight and uncomfortable; but I thought of the old lines, *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, and bore the discomfort with Christian resignation, being told it was for my country's good; so the whole of this original and grotesque costume being supplemented by a Tartar fur cap, I was pronounced at last as "fit to be seen," and, mounting our horses, we rode through the bazaars, preceded by Macartney's chuprassie, Jaffar Ali, clothed in a bright scarlet *halat*, and followed by an admiring rabble of the youth of Kashgar. Being market day, the streets and bazaars were crowded, and locomotion was difficult, but we eventually arrived in safety at the Taotai's Yamên [office and residence]

Passing through the inner chamber of a sort of pagoda, reserved only as a passage-way for guests of the highest distinction, we reached a large hall in which stood the Taotai himself got up in his very best, waiting to receive us.

He is an oldish man – in fact, for a Chinaman, a very old man – portly and with a jolly sort of look about him, as if he was in the habit of "doing himself pretty well." He advanced to meet us and shook hands most cordially, Chinese fashion, and then conducted us to an inner chamber and seated us on a raised dais, covered with red cloth, with a table in the middle of it, on which he placed with his own hands, most reverently, two cups of tea, much in the same way as a priest places a holy vessel on to an altar, and then seating himself on our right, the conversation commenced by his putting to me the usual Chinese query, as an opening to a dialogue, of "How old are you?" After having put him in possession of this piece of valuable information, he commenced by making profuse apologies for the manner in which "my excellency" had been treated by a Chinese official at the Frontier, etc., etc.

Undoubtedly, Macartney was right, and Younghusband's great-coat was working wonders, as I saw the Taotai's eye wandering with unfeigned admiration up and down the two rows of brass buttons.

After the usual interchange of remarks about the weather, which I find that as a topic of conversation, when every other one fails, holds its own in Central Asia equally with Europe, the Taotai conducted us to another spacious hall, where eight Chinese servants stood round a table laid

⁵ It is possible that Ney Elias, too, had taken this route in October 1885.

for three. On seating myself, I found opposite to me a small saucer, two chopsticks, a diminutive soup-ladle, and a small china cigarette ashtray, which turned out to be a wine-glass.

The rest in Kashgar had obviously revived Dunmore's spirits as well as his sense of humour. On 13 December, he left Kashgar, having divided the caravan: half continuing with him, the other half returning with Roche to Kashmir via Maralbashi on the Tarim river. Dunmore's group reached the last Chinese settlement at Ulukchatt, where he was held up by an official who was finishing his dinner and requested that Dunmore wait until he had finished.

This I flatly refused to do, and told the messenger to inform the Amban that if he did not choose to look at my passes *at once*, I should proceed without further delay, and report him to the Taotai at Kashgar, for keeping me waiting. The arrogance of these small Chinese officials is as well known as is the courtesy of those holding higher positions, and I had been long enough in the country to know that the only way to deal with this class of gentry was to pay them back in their own coin, only with interest ...⁶

After a day spent hawking in the company of a group of Kyrgyz, met by chance on the road, Dunmore reached the Russian frontier at Irkeshtam on the evening of 20 December and was warmly received by the commander and his wife. He left the next day, accompanied by the commander and an escort of 30 Cossacks, who sang their way through to evening, when they returned to the fort and left Dunmore to camp and continue the next day towards the Terek pass, Gulcha and Osh.

It is perhaps surprising, with our knowledge of the route to Irkeshstam (and to the Pamirs) over the Taldyk pass chosen later by the Russians for construction of a road, that until well into the 20th century the apparently much more difficult route via the Terek pass was the route of choice. Dunmore describes the Kok-bel pass as "a very difficult pull"; a little way up the Kok-su river he was confronted with "another precipitous ascent", the Borak pass, and he describes the descent from the top of Terek-dawan to Sufi-Kurghan (Sopu-Korgon on today's maps) in the Gulcha valley as "awful". Ralph Cobbold, who travelled in the Pamirs a few years later than Dunmore (see below) commented that "passes such as the Therek-dawan, or even the Alai, are not to be taken for roads; there is not, in most places, even an attempt at a road; horses make their own path in the snow according to the conditions of the weather and season. This caravan road is open all year round, and when in summer time the melting snow makes the Therek-dawan impracticable the caravans make the circuit over the Alai, which is two or three days longer but not so steep."⁷ Lady Macartney, a few years later, explained that "at midsummer the Terek pass is closed on account of avalanches, and caravans must go by the Taldik, which, for about a month, is free from snow, and has a wide easy road over it; but it is a considerably longer way."⁸ Once motor transport was available, the Taldyk became the obvious choice – moreover, as a result of climate change, the Taldyk pass is now snow-free for at least four months.

On Christmas Eve, the coldest night on the journey, when the temperature dropped to -40°C, Dunmore camped in the snow at the foot of the pass and next day crossed to Sufi-Kurghan, where he was met by an emissary of Colonel Grombchevsky and taken yet again to a specially prepared yurt. The emissary, Hassan Beg, turned out to be from Badakhshan and they conversed in Persian. It being Christmas day, Dunmore, with typical good humour, decided to have a Christmas Pudding for dinner.

... calling in Ramzan, I commenced by explaining to him as best I could in the Urdu tongue that this day was the great festival of the Christian's year, and one on which all right-minded Franghis were wont to spend the first half of the day at their Mosques, the inside walls of which were decorated with green branches and made as much as possible to resemble a jungle, and the

⁶ Dunmore's technique still works in Central Asia.

⁷ Cobbold, p. 293.

⁸ Lady Macartney, *An English Lady in Chinese Turkestan*, Oxford 1985, p. 104.

other half of the day and most of the night in over-eating themselves with the most unwholesome food their Khansamas could procure in the *bazaars*, and, therefore, as I did not wish to be behind-hand in following the example of my brother Franghis, but wished – in the absence of my mosque – to keep the day as near as possible in accordance with the articles of my faith, I called upon him as a good Mussulman, to come to my assistance in the manufacture of the most unwholesome edible compound the united ingenuity of our inventive brains could devise.

So after a long discussion and close inspection of our resources, we built up between us, using the Beg's doster-khan [literally 'tablecloth', in this context a gift of food], a Christmas Pudding, which turned out so successful that I cannot refrain from giving a minute description of its architecture.

First of all we took some dark-coloured Kirghiz flour and some baking-powder and the frozen yolks of six Kashgar eggs, which we scraped with a knife into a yellow powder, and after being well kneaded, this compound was rolled out, my telescope making a grand rolling-pin. We then stewed in a small Degchi [cooking utensil] all the Beg's apricots and raisins with some of my own honey. Another corner of the fire was occupied by a frying-pan, in which I fried the kernels of the pistachio nuts, in the only butter I could get, which I very carefully took out of a fresh tin of *Sardines au Beurre*. When the paste looked as like the beginning of a roly-poly pudding as we could make it, we poured the apricot, raisin and honey stew into the middle of it, then rolled it up and stuck the outside of it full of the fried kernels of the pistachio nuts, until the result looked like a new-born porcupine. We then proceeded to bake the whole thing as best we could, and I venture to say that no cook in Europe, on the 25th December, 1892, could have been as proud of his Christmas Pudding as I was of mine.

Although its manufacture was not the least interesting part of it, still the eating of it was more pleasurable than most enforced duties are usually, notwithstanding the slight suspicion of a flavour of sardines about it, which at any rate was a new departure in Christmas Puddings, and possessed the one great advantage and charm of novelty.

En route to Gulcha, Dunmore encountered the Austrian archaeologist Dr. Troll, on his way to Peking, and, at the end of his trip, met the Littledales in Trebizond, on their way back to China through Turkestan and handed over to them his faithful caravan leader Ramzan. Decidedly, travel in the region was becoming a little common-place.

After a pleasant stay in Marghilan, where he was entertained by the Russian commander, General Karalkoff, and treated to an excellent performance in the latter's residence of classical music by a Captain Bourkowsky on a "very good full-sized grand piano, of German manufacture", Dunmore's account ends with his arrival in Istanbul (then Constantinople) on 15 February 1893. With typical courtesy, he expresses his gratitude not only to the Russians ("Of the civility we received from the Russians of all ranks, I cannot speak too highly") but also the Kyrgyz ("undoubtedly the most hospitable people in the world") and compliments his caravan leader and the "excellent and hard-working" Ladakis who had travelled with him all the way.

Dunmore was, no doubt surprised to find a concert grand piano in Marghilan. He would have been even more surprised, had he returned to the Pamirs a few years later, to find a piano in Khorog. In 1914, the Russian Commander in Khorog, Grigori Andreevich Shpilko, arranged the transport of a piano made in 1875 by J. Becker of St. Petersburg, from Osh more than seven hundred kilometres away. It was brought by cart as far as Murghab, and then the remaining three hundred kilometres by some twenty bearers. It was placed in the chapel of the military base where in the evenings officers and their wives would gather. It now has pride of place in the Khorog museum.⁹

⁹ Some years earlier, Catherine Macartney – wife of the British representative and later Consul-General in Kashgar from 1890-1918 – had brought a piano from England that had to be carried in a similar way over the passes to their home in Kashgar. (Lady Macartney, *An English Lady in Chinese Turkestan*, Oxford, 1985.)



The Becker piano in the Russian officers' mess in Khorog

What was the real purpose of Dunmore's trip? There is, indeed, something odd about it. Dunmore recounts receiving a confidential despatch from the Viceroy containing "the views of the Foreign Office regarding my attempting to cross either the Chinese or Russian Central Asian frontiers," the content of which he coyly declines to share with the reader. Since however, all the stops were pulled out by the British government to facilitate his journey and he was received as a VIP wherever he went, there must have been a serious political purpose behind his projected travel plans that met with full official approval.

That he spent five weeks in the inhospitable Tagdumbash Pamir and that Macartney, British representative in Kashgar (NB not Consul, only Russia had consular status¹⁰) joined him in this location, would seem to confirm that his 'sporting' trip was indeed officially sanctioned and had the purpose of assessing potential threats to British India from the Pamirs. As noted above, Younghusband had been stopped in the Wakhan by the Russians in 1891 before being able to explore the route to Zor Kul (Lake Victoria) through the Little Pamir. His failure may explain why the British government gave such encouragement to Dunmore's itinerary.

Roche's role too is a mystery. The party carried a compass, thermometer and aneroid barometer but no surveying equipment, although we learn that he took many photographs (most of which, regrettably for him and for us, were lost in a snowstorm on the Boujil pass on his way back to Kashmir). He does not appear to have been stimulating company for Dunmore, since scarcely any of Dunmore's anecdotes directly involve him, nor does he appear to have been a talented hunter – although, according to Dunmore, he used to whistle popular tunes, he appears to have been rather dour, and was "very much averse to visiting or receiving visits from any Oriental;" indeed, as already noted, Dunmore "could never persuade Roche to visit anybody." We may fairly assume that Roche was part of British intelligence, that this was known to the Russians and was the reason why he was not permitted by them to accompany Dunmore on the second leg of his journey from Kashgar to Alai and other parts of Russian Turkestan. They politely but firmly turned down his application for a special passport: Petrovsky, the Russian consul in Kashgar, informed him, pointedly and with

¹⁰ After the Chinese overthrow of Yakub Beg in 1877, Russia rapidly recognised Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang and was rewarded accordingly. The British were "punished" for the official overtures made to Yakub Beg by the trader Robert Shaw and the explorer George Hayward in 1869 and the Chinese did not agree to the opening of a British consulate in Kashgar until 1908. (Lady Macartney, p. 62.)

irrefutable logic, that “to obtain permission to visit Russian Turkestan is almost as difficult as to obtain a permit to cross the frontier of the Hindu Kush.”

The much later release of Foreign Office papers reveals that, in addition to his travel notes, Dunmore was indeed sending confidential reports back to his sponsors in Simla and that their main cause of concern at the time was Chinese weakness in policing the territories they claimed in Central Asia. This weakness left a vacuum that the Russians were rapidly in process of filling. While the British felt they had little to fear from the Chinese, who were unlikely to have strategic designs on British India, the Russians were expanding and must be contained before they came too close to the Hindu Kush. Dunmore’s long stay in the Tagdumbash Pamirs, close to the entrance to Hunza, and his highly critical remarks about the failure of the Chinese to occupy and defend the forward positions on their western frontiers all relate to this nagging British preoccupation and gave urgency to the need to envisage negotiations with the Russians on defining frontiers in the Pamirs.

In one of these confidential reports, Dunmore states confidently the official position that

There is no doubt but that China and Afghanistan meet on the Alichur Pamir. The Chinese Mandarin, in charge of the Pamir frontier, told me that his Government claim from Uz-Bel north of the Kizil-Jik pass to Sarez west of longitude 73° on the Murghab river, then in a line south taking in the whole of Yashil Kul Lake. The Afghans claim the whole of Roshan, Shignan and Wakhan, including Yashil Kul and Surmatash as far east as Chadir Tash on the Alichur Pamir.¹¹

More realistically, he recognises that

The Chinese by way of asserting their rights to the Alichur Pamir placed posts on different points in 1879 after the defeat of Amir Yakub Beg and their recovery of the province of Kashgaria, but these posts were subsequently removed and at this date the Chinese have no posts on any part of the Pamirs. [Dunmore’s emphasis] The Wakhan district of the Pamir extends as far east as Aktash. The Chinese claim Victoria Lake and east of Aktash. To sum up, it may be said that the Afghans claim everything the Chinese claim, and Russia claims the whole. I am in possession of the Chinese official map of the Pamirs 1892 (manuscript) on which is shown over 20 forts on different parts of the Pamirs, whereas they have none.¹² ... I consider it a grievous error on the part of our Imperial Government to allow them to advance any further south or to allow [the Russians] to take possession of Shignan and Roshan west. Once the Russians have the two latter districts, then the Badakhshan, which is at the moment ripe for revolt against the Amir of Kabul, would assuredly fall into their hands, and as a Russian possession, would be of infinitely more danger to us than if the whole of the Pamirs were Russian.

Dunmore was badly mistaken in his scornful dismissal of the British newspaper reports he received on arrival in Kashgar that the inhabitants of the Pamirs had requested assistance from the Russians: these were, indeed, substantially correct and, in his comment that “there is not a single *house* nor *village*, much less a *town*, on the Pamirs,” Dunmore showed that he was totally unaware of the situation of the western Pamirs.

In 1883, contrary to understandings reached between the British and Russians in 1873, and unchecked by the British, the Afghan Emir, Abdur Rahman Khan, claimed the territories of Shughnan and Rushan, on the right bank of the Oxus, and invaded them. Ney Elias had warned much earlier that “the Afghan rule in Shignan and Badakhshan was detested, and that the inhabitants would probably welcome the advent of Russians.”¹³ Major E.G. Barrow, of Indian

¹¹ Quoted by A.V. Postnikov in *Схватка на «Крыше Мира» - Политики, разведчики и географы в борьбе за Памир в XIX веке* (Struggle on the “Roof of the World”: Politicians, spies and geographers in the contest for the Pamir in the XIX century), Moscow 2001, ISBN 5-88451-100-0, page 285.

¹² This Chinese map was based on the information provided to them by Grombchevsky two years previously – see Chapter 5.

¹³ Postnikov, p.232.

Intelligence, had also recorded in an official report in 1888 that “Afghan tyranny has sown the seeds of rebellion and there is not a Tajik from Badakhshan to the Great Pamir who would raise a finger to resist Russian aggression.”¹⁴ In 1889, even Francis Younghusband – not otherwise inclined to give any support to Russian claims – noted on his visit to Tashkurgan that “this year many fugitives from Shighnan had been driven here by the Afghans.”

The brutal treatment of the local population at the hands of the Afghan invaders was such that they did indeed seek Russian help against the Afghans, even requesting (as some of their leaders did again at the height of the civil war in 1992) direct annexation by Russia.¹⁵ Ralph Cobbold, writing to the Foreign Office in 1898 after his trip to the Western Pamirs, reported that

Owing, however, to the ‘zulum’ [wrong-doing] and extortion practised by the officials of the Amir, the Tajiks of Roshan and Shighnan invited the Russians to take these valleys under their protection ... [They] showed them the only possible roads in this most difficult country, and helped them with transport and supplies, [and] forced the Afghans to cross the Panja after the fight at Somatash, and later on a skirmish at Yaims [Yemts], above Kala-i-Wamar.¹⁶

The Russians were somewhat reluctant to oblige until they knew exactly how the cards were stacked but, as far as Dunmore’s travel was concerned, they obviously joined in the sport, since they had nothing to hide: they were already firmly in control of Kokand and, *de facto*, in possession of the Pamirs: they could only gain by showing this to Dunmore. Indeed, such was the official British concern at Dunmore’s eyewitness reports, that – as we have seen – it did not take long from Dunmore’s return before final agreement was reached with the Russians in 1895-1896 to fix the Pamir borders that obtain today. Both Empires saw an interest in creating a buffer zone in the Wakhan Corridor; the Afghans were presented with a *fait accompli* and the Chinese hardly consulted.

The Russians had achieved their objectives: with the exception of some last paroxysms in Tibet (well described in Meyer and Brysac’s *Tournament of Shadows*), the Great Game was over. One may legitimately wonder if, indeed, there was ever a real ‘game’ or – as suggested in Chapter 4 – whether it was all a figment of the over-excited imagination of a few jingoist politicians, journalists and officers on both sides.

Certainly, the competition for influence and resources in Central Asia continues today – with different players and different stakes. However, anyone who has seen the incessant convoys of trucks travelling full from China to the former Soviet republics of Central Asia – and travelling back empty, or with, at best, a cargo of scrap metal – must be aware that this 21st century extension of the ‘game’ is also almost over – the Chinese are in no hurry.

¹⁴ Postnikov, p.211.

¹⁵ B.L. Grombchevsky, unpublished notes from a military report, New Marghilan, 1891, quoted in *ПАМИР* (Pamir), M.S. Asimov (editor), Moscow 1987; and B.I. Iskandarov, *Восточная Бухара и Памир во второй половине XIX века*, (Eastern Bukhara and the Pamirs in the second half of the 19th century) Dushanbe 1962.

¹⁶ *Report by Mr. Cobbold on his journeys on the Pamirs and in Chinese Turkestan*, National Archives, Kew (ref. PRO FO 881 7079X), p. 2.