

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07085-0 - Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia: With a Narrative of
a Residence in China: Volume 1

Peter Dobell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS
IN
KAMTCHATKA
AND
SIBERIA.

VOL. I.

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07085-0 - Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia: With a Narrative of
a Residence in China: Volume 1

Peter Dobell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-07085-0 - Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia: With a Narrative of
 a Residence in China: Volume 1
 Peter Dobell
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

TRAVELS IN KAMTCHATKA, &c.



CHAPTER I.

Author's arrival at Kamtchatka—Bay of Avatcha—Port of St. Peter and St. Paul—Frequency of dikes and mounds in Kamtchatka—Author's departure from St. Peter and St. Paul, in company with the Commandant, to visit the Governor, General Petrowsky, at Nijna Kamtchatsk—Route described—Village of Avatcha—Brantzoff, the hospitable old soldier—Voyage in canoes—Starrie-Ostrog—Annoyance from the Mosquitoes—Hospitable treatment at Korakee-Ostrog—River Bistra—Malka—Bears—Fish—Ostrog of Pooschinna—Islands on the river Kamtchatka—Hospitality at the village of Kamtchatka—The modern Merlin—Werkney Kamtchatsk—Singular contrivance of Canoes—Kirganik—Mashura—Construction of ballagans and jourtas—Native fruits—Striking scenery—Klutchee—Majestic volcano of Klootchefsky—Kammina—Arrival at Nijna Kamtchatsk.

It was on a fine moon-light night of the 21st of August, 1812, that I first made the land of Kamtchatka, a little to the westward of Chi-poonsky Noss. We ran into what appeared a

large bay, and anchored with our small bower-anchor in eight fathoms water.

When daylight enabled us to see exactly where we were, we found ourselves in a fine deep cove, opposite a sandy beach, at the eastern part of which is a lake of about two or three miles in length, called in Russian *Bolshoy-Ozera*. This lake has an inlet from the sea, and in summer abounds with fish of the salmon species. We saw several large bears on the borders of the lake; but it was impossible to land, on account of a heavy surf beating violently on the shore.

The wind continued to blow directly into the cove for two days in succession, but so light withal, as to baffle every attempt we made to beat out again. I therefore ordered a kedge to be laid out to windward, and warped out, when, a fair breeze springing up, we directed our course towards the bay of Avatcha, only a few miles to the westward. Previously to warping off, I sounded over the cove, in my boat, and found the soundings gradually decrease from eight fathoms and a half to two and a half close in with the surf, and the holding ground not good, being principally gravel, sand, and mud mixed.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07085-0 - Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia: With a Narrative of
a Residence in China: Volume 1

Peter Dobell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

BAY OF AVATCHA.

5

Whilst there, we caught several very fine cod-fish and flounders; and again, whilst becalmed for a short time at the mouth of Avatcha Bay, the crew literally covered the decks with them.

Owing to light airs and calm weather, we did not get into the Port of St. Peter and St. Paul until the 25th. The bay of Avatcha is forty versts in circumference, encompassed by forest-covered mountains, and large tracts of low lands. In this bay the united fleets of Europe might ride in perfect safety, the holding ground being so tenacious that it is oftentimes difficult to weigh an anchor. On the whole it affords a combination of picturesque beauty, grandeur, and security rarely equalled in other parts of the globe. Within the large bay are five other bays, namely, Solovarny, Rakovy, St. Peter and St. Paul's, Ceroglasky, and Tarinsky. The first two are small and unsafe, being much exposed to the north-west and south-east winds. St. Peter and St. Paul is well known for its sure and safe moorings. Rakovy and Tarinsky are both large and safe bays, particularly the latter, which has fine deep water, and is from ten to twelve miles in circumference. Two rivers, the Paratoonka and the Avatcha, empty themselves into the great bay of Avatcha, and both of

them abound with fish in the season, generally of the salmon and trout species. Avatcha river has upwards of one hundred mouths; and these, together with several salt water inlets from the bay, intersect an immense tract of low grounds, which, in former times, have been banked to prevent them from being overflowed.

The dikes and mounds are very numerous, not only here, but also in many other parts of Kamtchatka; a circumstance proving strongly that the country has once been thickly peopled. Some persons endeavoured so persuade me those mounds were natural,* and caused by the river often changing its course; but it is impossible to see them and not feel convinced that they are the work of art, and cost a good deal of labour. Evident marks remain where the earth has been dug out and thrown up; the holes which were very deep are now ponds, whilst the shallower ones have been filled up with soft mud, and have a thick surface of turf upon them, resembling what is called a shaking bog. There is no doubt of their being the work of man; but when and how it was performed is

* As I afterwards lived five years at Avatcha, the reader will naturally conclude I had a good opportunity of examining them, to confirm my opinion.

ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL.

7

what I could not discover. The Kamtchatdales themselves could have had no inducement to undertake such a laborious task; as when they were first known, they had neither horned cattle nor horses. They were probably made after the conquest of that country by the Russians, when domestic animals were introduced; as they are evidently intended to preserve the low lands for hay and pasture. This has been so well accomplished, that the greater part of them are actually in perfect good order.

On my arrival at St. Peter and St. Paul, I found there the colonel, who was second in command under General Petrowsky (the actual Governor), with whom I immediately made arrangements that we should go together to Nijna Kamtchatsk, seven hundred and fifty versts distant, to see the general, — the colonel not being authorised to enter into my views without his permission. We fixed on the 1st of September for our departure; and, in the mean time, I dined with the commandant, and gave him a dinner in return, as well as a ball to the whole town. I cleared the quarter-deck of my vessel for this purpose, where I collected the young and old to the number of forty, and with two bad fiddles, and some stentorian soldiers'

8 BRANTZOFF, THE SOLDIER.

voices, and plenty of wine and aniseed cordial, we contrived to keep the party dancing until three in the morning.

Being provided with a good stock of powder and ball and two guns, we set off on the 1st of September, in our ship's boat, for the little village of Avatcha, twelve versts from St. Peter and St. Paul's, where we were to procure canoes to ascend against the stream of the river.

Avatcha is situated at the very bottom of the bay of the same name, which we crossed whilst the weather was serene and mild as possible. A perfect calm prevailed, that was only interrupted by immense flocks of water-fowl and seals, which sported about us; the latter often pushing their heads above water quite near to the boat, with great seeming curiosity. Many of the superb rampart of mountains that surround this bay are extinct volcanoes, of a conical form, rising majestically to the clouds; whilst the foreground is composed of hills well covered with wood; forming altogether a very interesting picture.

On arriving at Avatcha we dined at the house of a hospitable old invalid soldier, named Brantzoff, who, as he had known Captains Clarke, Perouse, and in fact every stranger who

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07085-0 - Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia: With a Narrative of
a Residence in China: Volume 1

Peter Dobell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MANAGEMENT OF CANOES.

9

had ever visited the peninsula, would not permit us to pass without breaking bread with him. He was a pensioner, and then about eighty years of age, yet was so hale and hearty that he always brought his monthly allowance of flour, about sixty-three English pounds, on his shoulders twelve versts from the port to his village! His wife treated us with fine fish, roast ducks, berries, milk and butter, served up very neat and clean—a circumstance that added much to the pleasure and zest of the entertainment.

Leaving these kind people, we embarked on two small canoes; our servants in one, and the colonel and myself in the other. Each canoe had two Kamtchatdales with long poles to pole them against the current of the river Avatcha, which we were obliged to ascend in this manner for about twenty versts, until we should come to a place called Starrie-Ostrog, where horses were prepared for us to continue our journey. We found the current for the first part quite slow; but towards evening it became very rapid; and I was pleased to see the indefatigable exertions, as well as the skill, with which the Kamtchatdales urged our canoes against the swiftest parts of the stream, and through the

most difficult passages. Our progress now became much impeded by the shallows and a very rapid current; I therefore amused myself occasionally with shooting shelldrakes, and a large species of diver, called gagara, which abounds on this river.

The banks of the Avatcha are, for the most part, composed of fine meadow lands or hills, thickly covered with birch. Indeed at Avatcha village, and on the banks of this stream, any quantity of horned cattle might be fed; but owing to the want of population all those advantages are neglected. The grass in Kamtchatka grows commonly to the height of a horse's belly; that is to say, the best sort; but that which is found on the declivities of hills, about swamps and in moist ground, grows breast-high. It is however coarse and only eaten by the cattle, whilst young.

As we left the village of Avatcha very late in the afternoon, and night was approaching, our Kamtchatdales ran the canoes ashore on the point of a small sand-island that was in the middle of the river. It was almost wholly covered with an immense pile of old trees and driftwood (heaped upon it by the strength of the current), the greater part of which, being per-