A CAMEL JOURNEY TO TIBESTI

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In accordance with a recent decision of the P.C.G.N. native names in French territory are here spelled as on the French official map, Croquis de l'Afrique Française au Millionième, and those in Italian territory as on the map of the Ministero delle Colonie, 1/3 M. Serviz. Cart. N. 729, 1937.

The magnificent mountains of Tibesti are in the Colony of Tchad in French Equatorial Africa, on the frontier of Italian Libya to the south-west of the oases of Cufra. They extend approximately 200 miles from north to south, and 250 from east to west, and contain by far the highest summits in the Sahara. Emi Koussi is 11,200 feet in height, Toussidé, 150 miles away, is 10,700 feet high, and Ehi Timi or Ti nearby is 9970 feet high. Tiéroko, the most magnificent of all the Tibesti mountains, Ehi Mousgou, Tarso Toon, and numerous other peaks are but little short of these in height. Tibesti is surrounded by desert. To the north and east is the waste of the Libyan sands, to the west the vast emptiness of the Sahara, while to the south the barren dunes extend from Borkou to Kanem and Ouadaï. These mountains are the home of the Tibbu, a hardy race of Libyan origin who ranked amongst the most redoubtable raiders in Africa. The French forces under Colonel Largeau conquered the large oases of Borkou from the Senussi in 1913, and from this base Tibesti was explored during the following years by Lieutenant-Colonel Tilho. Before the occupation of Borkou, posts had been established from Bilma at Bardaï in the north-west of Tibesti and at Zouar on the north-western edge of the massif, but these were evacuated owing to the Tuareg revolt in Air in 1916, and the French did not again occupy the mountains until the Italians had captured Cufra in 1930. But various military expeditions, of which that under Lieutenant-Colonel Tilho in 1925 was the most important, mapped and explored the country. The arrival of large armed bands of fugitive Fezzan Arabs, traditional foes of the Tibbu, and the fear of

1 A description by Colonel Tilho of his explorations in Tibesti, Erdi, Borkou, and Ennedi is to be found in the Journal (56 (1920) 81-99, 161-83, 241-67).
Italian penetration led to the establishment of a number of new posts in the mountains. Tibesti has however remained all but unvisited and unknown to the outside world.

The wish to visit Tibesti had grown strongly on me during the three years that I had served in northern Darfur, and I decided to spend my 1938 leave in travelling among these mountains. I left Tini on the Darfur-Ouadai frontier on 3 August 1938. I had hired camels to take me as far as Borkou, after which it would be necessary to use Tibbu camels accustomed to travelling among the mountains. Besides the Zaghawa who accompanied these camels, I had with me Idris Daud, a Zaghawi lad of the Kobé tribe who had been with me for the past three years, and an elderly Bideyi named Khatir, who knew the Tibbu tongue, having lived among these tribes as a boy. We travelled light, the distances before us being great and the time at our disposal short. We carried flour, sufficient to last us for three months, from which to make the assida or flour paste on which we lived, dried meat, onions, and "ladies fingers," for the mulah or seasoning, and a sufficiency of sugar and tea. We had no kit other than our rifles, sheepskins, blankets, and a small tent. We entered a country of stony plateaux covered with scattered thorn bush, of rocky hills and well-wooded watercourses belonging to the Nawra section of the Kobé Zaghawa.

The Kobe are a powerful tribe of semi-sedentaries owning large herds of cattle and many horses. Their villages were generally placed on the summits of rocky hills. We were hospitably received by these people, who were Idris's kinsmen. Then crossing the Oued Haouach we entered Bideyat territory and marched along under the western edge of the Ennedi mountains, which rise to a height of 5000 feet.

The Bideyat know these mountains by a number of different and local names. The collective name of Ennedi is used only by the French. Ennedi consists of a number of plateaux, intersected by numerous precipitous-sided wadis, and there appeared to be no outstanding peaks. The tableland itself was stony and devoid of vegetation, whereas the sandy wadi beds contained numerous trees, principally acacias amongst which were some fine heraz trees. The cliffs were much eroded and there were many detached bastions of rock among the dunes, several of which were of fantastic shapes. There is a small annual rainfall among the mountains, and the water is caught in rock pools often hidden at the back of deep fissures in the cliffs. The knowledge of such pools is carefully guarded by the Bideyat. There are also a few springs such as those at Archei, a short distance to the south of Fada. Here is a string of deep but narrow pools at the end of a winding valley closely shut in between sheer walls of rock. There are no reeds nor other vegetation. Basking on the edge of these pools I saw six small crocodiles, the largest 5 feet in length. The many shoals of small fish provide them with a sufficiency of food. Nearby is a large cave at the back of which are many small stalagmites. There are some interesting rock-pictures in different colours in this cave. I found another and more varied series in some small caves in the Wadi Tuku, which showed great variation in conception and execution. Many of these drawings, of which I copied a large number, were of considerable artistic merit. The plateaux walls were often honeycombed with caves and grottoes, and several of them were decorated with rock-pictures. These portrayed hunting scenes,
horsemen, a few camels, long-horned piebald cattle, and both clothed and naked figures. Some of these drawings closely resembled those previously known from 'Uweinat and the Ahaggar (Hoggar) mountains. Whereas the drawings I found in Tibesti were petroglyphs, with the exception of some painted figures under an overhang near the Bardai–Aozou road, all those I found in Ennedi were painted. The Bideyat told me that these rock-pictures
were especially common in the Basso in the heart of Ennedi, round whose southern and western sides they principally live.

The Bideyat are nomadic, though never ranging far afield, and own fair-sized herds of camels and cattle. Their encampments are huts of grass matting, similar to those of the Goraan, or crude shelters of grass and branches woven through a framework of sticks, and placed under a tree for shade. They call themselves collectively Toba, and are divided into two main sections, the Birriera-Kureira, who on occasions at least have followed the Sultans of Darfur, and live round the well centres of Baō, Ito, and Am Djeress on the southern and south-eastern edge of the mountains; and the Boragat, who live farther to the west and owed allegiance in the past to the Borgu Sultans. The Bideyat dialect is similar to that of the Zaghawa tribes of northern Darfur and Ouadaï, and they resemble them both in their appearance and in many of their customs; but they are a wilder, harder race and have retained more of their old pre-Islamic customs than the more sophisticated Zaghawa. On the eastern edge of Ennedi to the north of the Birriera are the Mourdia Goraan, who extend up into the inhospitable waste of Erdi, while to the west are the Gaida Goraan. Both tribes are entirely nomadic, possessing large herds of camels and goats but no cattle. Their dialect is similar to Tibbu. The Mourdia claim to have originated from Tibesti, but the Gaida say that they have come up from the south.

Fada is the headquarters of the circonscription of Ennedi. Here I was most hospitably entertained by the French officers. Two sections of the Groupe Nomade or camel corps passed through Fada the day that I arrived, and I was very pleased to have the opportunity of seeing this splendid body of men. These Groupes Nomades are composed of Tirailleurs Sénégalais commanded by French officers. They live continuously under active service conditions and are in consequence extraordinarily fit and hard. They remain far out in the desert, moving from place to place continuously. Few places are unvisited by them, though their movements naturally depend to a certain extent on the grazing. They delight especially in choosing inaccessible and waterless spots for liaisons with neighbouring Groupes Nomades. The life of these officers is a hard one. It takes three months to arrive from France. They then serve for two years, with the choice of extending the period for a third year, before a visit to France and transfer elsewhere. The Groupes Nomades trek in a country harsh and bare in the extreme, and though they carry tents they have no camp kit other than a folding office table and chair. Despite its hardness, or perhaps even as a result of it, all the officers I met were enthusiastically in love with the life they lead.

Leaving Fada we crossed the intervening desert to Faya in Borkou, which is the headquarters of the Borkou, Tibesti, and Ennedi administrations. We had as guide a Gorani of the Gaida tribe. For the first day we wound our way among great bergs of rock 400–500 feet high rising abruptly from the sand. Wild sheep were not uncommon and watched, high up on the bare faces of rock. We watered at the three oases of Oueïta, Oudé, and Moussou; shallow depressions in the sand where water, much of it brackish, lay close to the surface and siwack bushes and small long-suffering acacias were abundant. They were on the regular caravan route from Borkou to Ouadaï and Darfur,
and in consequence the bushes had been grazed bare, so that my camels wan-
dered disconsolate from one to the other, weak from lack of food. Anxious to
save them as much as possible we marched much by night, for the sun was
burning hot by day. Near Moussou a sandstorm swept down upon us as we
lay among the dunes, waiting for the moon to rise, and lasted for two hours.
Wrapped in our tobes we crouched against the camels beset by a curious and
uncomfortable feeling of isolation as the storm howled by. When it had passed
the accumulated weight of sand had squeezed all but a drop of water out of
our skins. After two hours’ marching the guide, confused by the overcast sky,
confessed his sense of direction was gone and pointed S.S.E. for north.
Almost without water and doubting if the camels would stand another full day
in the sun, I took the lead with my compass. Soon after dawn the guide recog-
nized to our relief some rocks which lay not far from Moussou. We had a last
march of twenty hours to the edge of the palm groves of Borkou. A grey dawn
found us on an empty plain of hard sand across which swept scuds of rain,
chilling and dispiriting; having no wood we were unable to cheer ourselves
with the customary three glasses of sweet tea. We trudged along short-
tempered and apart, until at midday we reached the first of the palms. Here
we rested, entering Faya next day.

Faya is a small but attractive Saharan town surrounded by palm groves.
These extend almost without a break to Aine Galakka, 50 miles to the west,
which was the Senussi headquarters in Borkou until the French captured the
fortress in 1913 after severe fighting. In Faya there are numerous gardens,
many of them adjoining the houses, and some good vineyards and fig trees.
For though rain is all but unknown here, water is abundant and can be found
almost anywhere in this depression at 3–5 feet. Trade is in the hands of the
Fezzan Arabs, who have been considerably increased by refugees from Italian
territory. The permanent sedentary population of Borkou numbers about
4000 and consists of the Dozza and their serfs, who are known as Kamadjia.
The population goes up to 20,000 in July and August when the tribes come in
for the date harvest, while caravans of Mahamid Arabs with as many as 1500
camels come up from the south. The Anakazza, who resemble the Gaida in
speech and mode of life, live in the deserts of the Mortcha to the south-east,
extending as far south as Oum Chalouba. I encountered but few of this tribe
on the outskirts of Borkou.

The French officers entertained me most hospitably for the two days that I
was in Faya, and assisted me to find suitable camels to take up into the moun-
tains. The camels of the mountain Tibbu are small, lightly built, long-legged,
reddish in colour, and as active as goats. We marched north to Gouro, where
we arrived in four days. The track passed through a waste of volcanic rocks
half buried in the sand, and we marched fast in order to leave it behind us.
This did not accord with the views of the two Tibbu who accompanied us.
One of them, a young man named Ibrahim, soon earned for himself the nick-
name of “Abu Shekwa,” or The Father of Complaints; yet his grumbles hid
a ready laugh, and his endurance was our envy. Starting in the early after-
noon, we made a forced march of twenty hours across the worst of this shade-
less blazing desert to Kada wells near Gouro. When dawn broke I saw, faint
like a cloud upon the desert's edge, the dim outline of Emi Koussi. At Gouro there is a grove of date palms and small fresh-water marshes, ringed in by black walls of rock against which the sand has drifted deep. This is the territory of the Arna tribe whose chief Adam Nater-Mi won great fame as a raider and an outlaw before finally submitting to the French. His even more famous brother Muhammad Arbei-Mi died recently in Kordofan, having preferred exile in the Sudan to submission. Many of the tribe had come in to the oasis to collect their dates and were camped upon the sands round the palms. Their huts were built of mats laid over a framework of sticks, oval in plan and 5–8 yards long. When moving the Tibbu frequently leave behind the framework against their return in the following year. The small French fort is built upon the site of the former stronghold of Said Muhammad El-Senussi, generally known as Sidi El-Mahdi, of which however scarcely a trace remains. Nearby is his tomb, a small square whitewashed building, containing his bed draped in white cloth, and a few ostrich eggs hanging from the ceiling. It was built by the French in place of the original tomb which they destroyed.

Neither of my Tibbu knew the tracks on Emi Koussi, and after some difficulty I found an elderly Tibbu, named Kuri, who had been to the summit thirteen years before. We went north to the wells of Modiounga, dominated even from a distance by the great humped-back mass of Emi Koussi, a clear sharp blue at dawn, but deep purple against the setting sun. From there we climbed with difficulty on to the rocky sun-scorched tableland, riven by great gorges descending from the mountain range to which this tableland forms a base. All life was absent here; even the camel flies had left us.

At the foot of the mountains we separated. Idris, Khatir, Kuri, and myself with the two best camels turned south to work back along the mountains and up on to the summit of Emi Koussi, while Ibrahim and the other Tibbu crossed over with the remaining camels by an easier and direct pass into the valley of the Miski. We struggled along, alternately climbing and descending, but slowly working upwards, until we came to the great gorge of the Masha-kezey, 1000 feet or more in depth and so sheer that a stone flung from the top fell clear. A faint track marked with donkey droppings disappeared over the edge. Somehow the camels went protesting down that winding path, while we lay back on tails and saddle ropes, and loosened boulders crashed ahead. We reached the farther side at sunset, our camels trembling and exhausted with the effort, and camped among a number of prehistoric stone circles. We later passed several similar sites, some of them extensive; great boulders, marking rough walls and circles upon a level space. Built by the giants of old, my men declared, for who could shift such stones to-day? Here a light shower of rain had recently fallen and pools were still lying among the rocks. I was surprised to find in one such pool, perhaps 2 feet across and 6 inches deep, a few small fish, half an inch long, silvery in colour, with crimson tails and back fins. During this night we were troubled by mosquitoes. Next morning Kuri found fresh camel tracks and a small Tibbu camp nearby, where a woman and small child herded two camels and a flock of goats. She lent us her two camels and brought us a small bowl of milk which must have been her all. These mountain Tibbu live in caves, or in crude unroofed stone circles, while they eke out a livelihood with their small herds of goats and an occasional camel, enduring
Tibbu mat huts

Inside the crater on Emi Koussi

The Faya–Gouro road
The Modra valley

Lake Yoa, Ounianga

Petroglyphs in northern Tibesti
extreme hardships of hunger and cold. No rain had fallen for two years, and this was not exceptional. During the worst times the goats are kept alive on crushed date stones, and the camels on a handful of dates.

We reached the mountain top above and camped. To the north there was an awe-inspiring view out across range upon range of mountains and jagged peaks, rising from precipitous shadow-filled gorges. To the west, beyond the valley of the Miski, a yellow streak far below, were other mountains; while to the east was the expanse of sand. The shoulder of Emi Koussi shut out the view behind. Towards evening the air turned bitterly cold, and the mountains stood out dark purple and very clear, under massed banks of cloud, molten in the sunset. Next day, after several failures, for Kuri's knowledge of the path proved vague, we found a way down into the great crater on the summit of Emi Koussi. This crater is 8 miles long and 5 miles across and appeared as an extensive plain rimmed with mountains, for the crater walls at their highest point are 1300 feet above the level of the plain. On the north the crater wall falls in two steps to the plain below. The plain is very stony and is sparsely covered with a heath-like plant some 2 feet in height, useless as camel fodder but valuable as fuel.

We camped that night under a small hill close to the great vent of Kohor, which lies towards the southern edge of the crater. It was again bitterly cold. Next morning we climbed down into Kohor, the bottom of which is covered with a deposit of a sodium salt and ashes more than 3 feet in depth. This huge hole is 1000 feet deep and perhaps 2 miles across at its widest part. Its sides are abruptly precipitous, except to the north, where there are steep screes under a small cliff. Idris and I then climbed to the summit of the southern wall of the crater, thus attaining the highest point in Tibesti. The day, unfortunately, was hazy, owing to the very strong wind which was blowing, but nevertheless the view was magnificent. It was very cold on the summit even at midday. We saw a wild sheep, and found the droppings and tracks of several others under ledges of rock. We had that morning noticed the tracks of many wild sheep round the lip of Kohor. The Tibbu snare them with noose and drag log, for amongst them trapping game is not confined to the outcast community of blacksmiths as among the Zaghawa. Then returning to our camp we loaded the camels, and climbed back out of the crater by an easy track, for which Kuri had searched in vain the day before. We went down again to the Tibbu encampment and fetched our own camels. Kuri, who was more than uncertain of the way, persuaded the woman to accompany us to the Miski. She strode ahead of us, a wild and impressive figure, with a naked knife in one hand and an oryx horn in the other. After crossing another gorge we descended at last into the valley of the Miski. Here I found a few crude petroglyphs hammered on the rock. Later in the Bardage and on the road to Aozou I found many others. Some were hammered, while others were cut, broad and deep, in the hard rock. Human figures, many of whom wore three-feathered headdresses, numerous cows, a few stereotyped camels, two large addax, and an elephant were represented. Several showed a great similarity to those discovered by Mr. Francis Rodd in Air. The largest, that of a cow, was 11 feet in length. In Tibesti I found but one set of drawings in colour, of tailed figures one of whom carried a double-bended bow. These figures were drawn
with considerable skill, but had been much damaged by the weather. They were of the bushman type.

Ibrahim had found us two Tibbu with six fresh camels from the Tika tribe, many of whose mat huts were scattered among the acacias round the wells of Bini Erdi. One of them was a lad called Dadi, a nephew of the Tika chief Abd el-Qader. The camels were lovely animals. Dark in colour and heavy in build they were of the lowland type and promised great reserves of strength. The Miski contains the best camel-grazing in Tibesti, but the bushes are *sivack*, to eat their fill of which camels must be watered daily. Dorcas gazelle were common here, and I shot several, for meat is a great luxury to these people. We then held a farewell feast for Ibrahim and Kuri which the local Tibbu attended in force. One boy who helped us to prepare the meal was prevented from eating it by the unwelcome appearance of his stepfather, since it was contrary to tribal custom for them to feed together. Three days later we reached the Modra valley and camped under the pass in a small terraced village halfway up the mountain side. The precipitous face of rock above was crowned by a clump of palms which leant out precariously over it. From the village we looked across at Tiéroko, looming over the 1000 feet of unbroken precipice which enclosed the valley at our feet, where a small swift stream ran through bulrushes among palms and gardens, sweet-scented with sage. The village headman was away, but his two sons, small boys of great beauty, brought us food, sweet stoneless dates and *assida* seasoned with curdled milk. That night the moon was full and lit up Tiéroko, filling the misty gorge below with shifting lights and shades. The music of falling waters rose up to us in the stillness of the night. In the morning we climbed the pass, and crossed a desolate stony tableland where the wind blew in tearing gusts. Then after skirting Tarso Toon we descended into the Zoumorie at the small oasis of Edimpi.

Among the barren mountains of Tibesti the Tibbu are dependent on the dates from the oases for their means of life, and of these the oases in the Bardage, the Zoumorie, and Aozou are by far the most important. In the Bardage there are some 30,000 palms in fifteen oases, while in the Zoumorie there are perhaps 7000 palms in fourteen oases. Tibesti is believed to produce 2000 tons of dates in a good year, half from the Bardage and a quarter from the Zoumorie and Aozou. But this does not suffice the needs of the Tibbu, who seek more dates from Borkou, Taisser, and el-Gatrdn in exchange for tomatoes, butter, and goats. In most of the oases there are springs of water, reed beds, and small gardens watered with *shadufs*. There are permanent villages and a small sedentary population, vastly augmented from June to September by the surrounding Tibbu who come in off the mountains for the date harvest. The small round houses are built of stones set in mud and thatched with rushes. All the date palms are individually owned, as are even the dom palms, the fruit of which, crushed into flour, is eaten by those who lack a sufficiency of dates. In their gardens they grow a little wheat, barley, maize, rye, millet, red pepper, and tobacco, and a few melons and tomatoes. But these gardens are very small and less numerous than of old. In the past they were tended by slaves, many of whom have now been liberated, and most
Tibbu will not degrade themselves by working on the soil, for though to own a garden is a sign of riches, to work in one is accounted proof of servile origin. They say that they are too few to tend both their herds and their gardens and that they prefer the harder but traditional life of the herdsman. All own a few goats, while those who are rich own several hundreds. To possess a camel is a sign of wealth, to own fifty is to be extremely wealthy. The camels of the Miski valley and of the western foothills round Zouar are dark in colour and heavy in build, resembling those of the Mourdia Goraan, and are very much more numerous than the small mountain camels. The Tibbu possess too some Tuareg and Fezzan camels, many of these the spoils of former raids. There are a few sheep in the valleys. Donkeys are extensively used, and many have run wild among the mountains probably for generations.

The French are much concerned about the future of these mountain folk. There seems to be little doubt that the desiccation of the whole area increases yearly. The failure of the rains has been especially pronounced since 1914. Within living memory the valleys on the northern slopes of the central Tarsos contained good pasturage and were thickly populated. To-day they are barren and deserted. The French are apprehensive that with no more fear of raids the Tibbu will drift away south to the Miski, the Maro, and towards Borkou, or north to el-Gatrün and Mürzuch, unless they can be anchored to their gardens. Yet these tend yearly to decrease. The Tibbu show as yet few signs of taking to a sedentary life. In the past they have been nomads and raiders by force of circumstances and by inclination. It remains to be seen if they will now become sedentary by force of circumstances if not by inclination.

They refer to themselves as Tedda, and to Tibesti as Tu; Tibbu and Tibesti being the names by which the Fezzan Arabs know these people and their country. They can probably be identified with the Garamantes of Herodotus and Ptolemy who hunted the troglodyte Ethiopians in four-horse chariots, and lived somewhere between Tripolitima and the Fezzan. Pushed south, they sought refuge in the inaccessible mountains of Tibesti, which may be looked on as the cradle of the Tibbu race. They are certainly related to the Bideyat and Zaghawa of the south-east, though they do not understand the common language of these tribes. It is generally agreed that they are largely of Libyan origin, and that there is a gradual merging into the negroid populations of the central Sudan through the Dozza Bideyat and Zaghawa, the last of whom to-day possess many negroid characteristics. The Tibbu vary considerably in colour. Many are little darker than the Fezzan Arabs, while others are very dark but never black. Their features show no negroid characteristics. They are in general small and sparse in build and possessed of great powers of endurance, especially on foot. Their staple food is dates. Flour, sour milk, and butter are luxuries, and milk is scarce except when the rains are good, and is usually kept for the small children. Meat is rarely eaten except at Eid el-Kebir and at festivals of marriage and circumcision. The men wear a loose white jibba with voluminous sleeves over which the wealthy wear a black cloak lined with red or a blue cloth decorated with gold thread. Almost invariably they wrap the end of the turban across mouth and nose, so that they appear veiled. Their weapons are a throwing spear, barbed both ways, a long arm knife, which every Tibbu wears, and a few throwing knives and crude iron
swords. In the past they possessed numerous rifles, but these have been confiscated by the French, though a few are probably still hidden in the hills. The French never met with serious opposition from the Tibbu and Goraan, such as they encountered from the Senussi. Essentially individualists, whom no chief in the past has effectively controlled, they have never combined and have always been much divided by blood-feuds. Their great fame was as raiders, and they can have had few equals for their knowledge of the desert. They raided to Air, into the Fezzan, and east as far as the Nile valley, and harried the rich lands to the south beyond the desert. Camel theft is virtually unknown amongst them, in great contrast to the Zaghawa and Bideyat tribes, to any of whom an unguarded camel is an irresistible temptation. Several times we happened on stray camels during our journeying, for such are always common in Tibesti, where they turn their camels loose to pasture, to roam at will for weeks on end, confident that should they approach a well some one will give them water. Later they are recovered after much questing and questioning by their casual owners. Nominally Muhammadan, many of the Tibbu have only been converted by the Senussi during the past fifty years, and Islam as yet sits very lightly upon them, and they lack the fanaticism of the south.

Derda Shehai Bogar-Mi, who is of the royal section of the Tuagara, was in the past the nominal ruler of all the Tibesti Tibbu, but his power as a temporal ruler must have been relatively slight. The French have somewhat reduced his rule, making Abd el-Qader Turico-Mi the independent chief of the Tika in the south, and Aleha Gater-Mi of the tribes round Zouar. Shehai, whom I met in Bardai, is small and very dark. He is old, having ruled through the Turkish, the Senussi, and the French administrations of Bilma and Faya. He is now becoming very deaf and blind, but is as yet clear-headed, and his judgments are much respected. Though he walks with difficulty, he still rides his camel across the mountains. The chieftainship is traditionally shared in turn by three families, but Sala, the Derda’s second son, is likely to succeed him.

Bardai, where Nachtigal had barely escaped with his life, was occupied by the French in 1913. It was evacuated in 1916 owing to the Tuareg revolt in Air and the siege of Agadès, and was temporarily entered by Kaossen and a large force of Tuareg. It is the nerve centre of these mountains, and whoever holds Bardai controls Tibesti. On it converge all the most important roads, and in this valley are grown more than half the dates. The oasis is of great natural beauty, with palms and gardens scattered among weathered pinnacles and turrets of rock, and with wide and distant views of Ehi Ti, Ehi Terké, and Ehi Mousgou.

From here, accompanied by Idris and Dadi, I paid a brief visit to Aozou, which by the abortive Rome Agreement was to have been handed with a large section of northern Tibesti to Italy. The road crossed the high pass of Tirenno and later entered the dark gorge of Nanamsena, where for 4 miles it wound between sheer cliffs 400–700 feet in height and barely 8 yards apart. Aozou possessed a tranquil loneliness in great contrast to the wild beauty of Bardai. From Bardai we visited Doon, which is known to the French as the “Trou au Natron,” passing many Tibbu with droves of donkeys going down to Bardai to fetch the ripening dates. The road climbed up the steep side of the Tarso Toussidé, on the summit of which is the crater of Doon. The name
Looking east from Emi Koussi

Crater of Doon, with Toussidé in the background

Near the summit of Emi Koussi
Nanamsena gorge on the Bardaï–Aozou road

Near the Miski valley

Mashakezey gorge in Tibesti
tarso is given to any high steep-sided plateau difficult to ascend yet easy to traverse when once climbed. This tarso was sparsely covered with vegetation similar to that found inside the crater of Emi Koussi. The great crater, visible only at a very short distance from its lip, is 18 miles in circumference and 2500 feet deep. Its walls everywhere fall in sheer unbroken precipices. A white carpet of natron covers much of the bottom, in the midst of which are three small cones of volcanic debris. I lacked sufficient time to attempt the descent, which would be far from easy. It is dominated by the two twin cones of Toussidé and Ehi Ti, 10,600 and 9940 feet high and some 10 miles away. Toussidé is the landmark to the caravans arriving from Bilma. We slept in a small ravine to escape the howling wind. Suddenly, soon after sunset, Idris pointed to a wild sheep silhouetted on the cliff above. We had just started our evening meal and this meat, though tough indeed, provided a welcome change. Returning to Bardai I said good-bye with regret to the lieutenant and two sergeants stationed there and left for the hot springs of Sobouroun, and for Zouar. Khatir, who had been very worn, had benefited from his rest. We reached Sobouroun after passing close under the shoulder of Ehi Mousgou, through fine mountain country. The hot saline springs were in a small valley whose rocks were fantastically streaked with shades of purple, red, orange, green, yellow, and white. Numerous small jets of boiling water were surrounded by basins of boiling mud, while clouds of steam escaped noisily from among the rocks, and the smell of sulphur filled the air. A bath in one of the small hot springs was reputed to cure any ill. Khatir bathed, and developed boils on his leg next day.

We continued through some of the wildest country in Tibesti to the gorge of Forchi. This gorge was 22 miles long, and its walls, 10–30 yards apart, were never less than 200 feet and more often 500–700 feet in height, falling not in tiers, but in one clean, unclimbable face of hard rock. A small clear stream fringed with rushes flowed through much of the gorge, amongst tangled tamarisk and acacia. In the sandy pools scoured at the base of the larger rocks were shoals of small fish, which we tried in vain to catch. In places a few ferns and small bushes, and once some stunted palms, grew out from crevices in the cliff face where water seeped down. Then, passing through groves of dom palms in the wadis Tehagam and Moussoi, we came down to Zouar.

Zouar is the headquarters of the Tibesti circonscription. The fort is in a plain surrounded by the rocky foothills of the mountains, and guards the wells, but there are no palms and no permanent village here. I arrived at Zouar on September 27, and heard of the crisis in Europe. I therefore trekked south as fast as possible to Faya, by way of Sherda and Oudigué, the lower Miski, Tigui, and Bédo. Our road lay along the edge of the foothills and was very barren. Here the only vegetation was occasional clumps of had, a small woody plant with a few prickly leaves of a dusty bluish-green colour. Had is good pasturage for camels. It took us seven days to reach Faya and we averaged thirteen and a half hours' marching a day. Camels, even the best, are never trotted in this country, and much of the marching is done on foot, almost a necessity at night in order to avoid going to sleep. We filled our skins at the deep pool of Oudigué, where the water was as bitter as quinine with the
staling of endless camels. Our next wells were in the oasis of Tigui. In the
desert, life’s pleasures are very simple but very real: a long drink of clean
water; meat to eat after weeks on flour paste; a few hours’ sleep when the
effort to remain awake has become a torture; or a short linger over a small fire
in the cold of the early dawn. There is too the clean, harsh beauty of the
desert, ethereal at dawn and sunset; and the freedom, and the comradeship of
desert peoples.

Tigui and Bédo are two of the many small oases hidden in the sand-covered
rock wastes north of Faya. From Bédo comes much of the salt for which
Borkou is famous. The salt works are some 2 miles long by three-quarters of
a mile across, and the large sheets of blue water are fringed with palms and
green grass. The water is run into small pans and allowed to evaporate, the
salt being then moulded into broad cones 9 inches high or into small half-
circles 4 inches across. It is of excellent quality and is known as sugomi. A
caravan of Mahamid Arabs from the south with fifty camels was collecting salt.
At Faya, having heard that the crisis was past, I arranged to visit the famous
lakes of Ounianga. Dadi left me here, since his animals needed rest. He had
been always gay, youthful, and indefatigable, swinging along beside his camel
and singing his interminable lilting camel songs. Born in Cufra, he had been
brought up by the Senussi, and had only left it last year, so that he talked good
Arabic of the Fezzan dialect. The hours passed quickly in his company. In
Faya we hired four camels from the Dozza and regretted it. They were
clumsy, slow, plodding brutes, soft-footed, so that they limped among the
rocks. Of water there was a sufficiency on the road, but no grazing among
these volcanic rocks and sand.

We arrived at Ounianga Kebir at dawn. The lakes lie in a deep depression,
and our first view of Yoa, the largest of the four lakes, was lovely. The sands
were golden in the early light and the dense palm groves along the water’s
edge threw heavy shadows. The water was a deep sparkling Mediterranean
blue, and the cliffs rose-coloured rock. Yoa is 2 miles in length and three-
quarters of a mile across. Nearby are the small and strange lakes of Ouma,
Midji, and Forodone. The waters of Ouma and Midji are deep red in colour;
those of Forodone a vivid green. This colouring is due to minute particles in
the water held in suspension. All four lakes are highly impregnated with salt,
but warm springs of fresh water flow into Yoa and Ouma in many places along
their shores. The salt in Midji forms crusts upthrust throughout the length
of the lake. It is collected by the Ounia and is of good quality, though tinted
rose. The Fezzan have traditions of great lakes over the whole Ounianga,
Gouro, and Tekro area, and there is ample evidence that the present lakes are
but a sorry remnant of the past. On the plateau 200 feet above the lake of Yoa
and 5 miles from its present shores, I found some fossilized bones of a hippo-
potamus.

The Ounia who live round these lakes are a small tribe. An interesting if
somewhat servile people, they have a language of their own which has affinities
with the Bideyat tongue, but it is rapidly dying out and being replaced by
Goraan; only the old men now speak it. Surrounded by the Goraan they are
abandoning their own peculiar customs and becoming indistinguishable from
them. In the past they were entirely sedentary, owning palms and small gar-
dens, and escaping from Fezzan and Tibbu raiders by swimming out into the
lakes. To-day they have acquired camels and, neglecting their palms and
abandoning their gardens, they make much money by carrying south the salt
from Ounianga and Tekro. The former is the last inhabited watering-place on
the road to Cufra, through Tekro and Sarra.

After a most interesting two days we engaged four new camels from the
Ounia and left for Fada. We passed the dozen small lakes of Ounianga Serir
which lie under a long escarpment 30 miles to the east. Only the largest of
these lakes is salt, and the others are hidden in thick reed beds. Date palms
were numerous, but as neglected as those of Ounianga Keibir. Many Ounia
encampments were scattered among the dunes. Anxious to see the far-famed
salt works of Dimi we continued eastwards towards Erdi, past the small oasis
of Ntegdeï, which before it was worked out produced the best salt in this
area. Several caravans of Ounia and Mourdia Goraan were resting here.
Approaching Dimi in company with a large Mourdia caravan we entered a
belt of moving sand dunes; a long silent line of camels, making their way by
moonlight through the soft steep-sided dunes. We arrived at Dimi in the red
light of dawn. Low black hills, landmarks from afar, dominate this sterile
depression, where a few shadeless acacias alone struggle for life round the
wells. The Dimi salt is reddish in colour owing to the sand among the crystals,
but much esteemed; it is fetched from Kanem-Batha and Ouadaï. Some
10,000 camels visit Dimi annually.

During the next few days we passed continuous caravans of Mourdia,
Gaida, Ounia, Borogat, Birriera, Kobé, and Mahamid Arabs, with each of
whom in turn we lingered to exchange our news. Soon after leaving, one of
our camels sickened, lying down if even lightly loaded, and though we marched
long hours we made poor progress. The wind blew with great violence
throughout the day and the driving sand made the midday halt a long dis-
comfort. We passed the tracks of a few addax, but though we kept a sharp look-
out we saw none of these antelopes. The Mourdia told us that there were
great herds to the north-east in Erdi. Addax inhabit the true sand desert.
They rarely if ever drink and find but little moisture in their scanty grazing,
yet they are generally fat and their meat a delicacy. There were no white oryx
here, though we found a few tracks on the Oued Haouach far to the south.
They live on the fringe of the desert, preferring country with a few bushes to
the bare dunes, though they move into these if the rich desert grass or
jizzu has come up after rain. There appear to be relatively few in French
Equatorial Africa. The great oryx herds are, or were, on the Wadi Howar in
the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Dorcas gazelle are not uncommon round the
oases and in the wadis in Tibesti. They are abundant and less wary than
usual in the Miski. Barbary sheep are numerous in Ennedi and exist through-
out the greater part of Tibesti, in greatest numbers probably on Emi Koussi
and round the precipitous sides of Doon. Jackals levy a heavy toll from the
herds of goats. The Tibbu trap them in elaborate box-traps built of stones.
Hyaenas are very rare, though I saw the tracks of two, probably of the striped
species, round Bardai. Leopard exist in Ennedi. We found fresh tracks at
Archeï, and the tracks of cheetah in the desert south of Fada. The Bideyat
told me that there were lion on the south-eastern edge of these mountains. I
have shot them on the Wadi Howar, where they follow the oryx herds. We passed in the Wadi Nkaola the grave of Ababo, reputed ancestor of the Gaida, a crude stone wall round a tattered mat shelter before which small offerings are made. Many times in Tibesti we had stopped to make these roadside offerings of flour and water, where small heaps of gravel indicated those that had been made before. Then, crossing the north-west edge of Ennedi, where the wadis seemed very green after the harsh mountains of Tibesti and the empty deserts to the north, we entered Fada.

My leave was nearly finished and I had regretfully to abandon my desire to return through the Basso, taking instead the direct road by which I had come up. We travelled for a while with a Kobe caravan from Dimi and then, pushing on, we entered the Warra country. Hamid, Idris's grandfather, had been melik (king) of this section until the French had shattered the Kobe forces at Tini and killed their aged Sultan. Hamid had been carried from the field with a shattered thigh by Daud, Idris's father. Idris's uncle was sheikh of the village at which we camped, and here we first saw at sunset the moon of Ramadan. That night we feasted greatly and then, sitting among our camels, heard tell of bygone fights, successful raids, and overwhelming losses until far into the night. Idris, like many young Zaghawa, fretted at security, craving at heart for those wild and lawless days. Possessed of reckless courage, the desert gave satisfaction to this inborn desire for conflict, so that he had sought continuously to rival and outdo the Tibbu in feats of endurance. Though quick-tempered and jealous of his freedom he was a happy, care-free companion and staunchly loyal. At Tini, owing to a misunderstanding, the car which was to have met me had not arrived. El Fasher was still 260 miles away, and but four days of leave remained. We took new camels, and after parting with regret from Khatir, whose herds were on the Wadi Howar, Idris and I rode south through my old district. We reached El Fasher on November 1, after being in the saddle for seventy hours out of the ninety-six.

I had covered a considerable distance during these three months, some 2000 miles in all, but only at the cost of continuous travelling. Many of my observations were in consequence superficial. From the French officers whom I had encountered I had received an almost embarrassing hospitality, a never-failing kindness, and help to go wherever I desired. To them and to the authorities who gave me permission for my journey I owe a great debt of gratitude.

Note: In a few cases the author prefers alternative names to those followed in this paper on the authority of the French official map. He would write Tarso Toh for Tarso Toon, Oued Teghane for Oued Tehagam, Youan for Yoa, Ounianga Saghir for Ounianga Serir, and Niteguedi for Ntegdei.