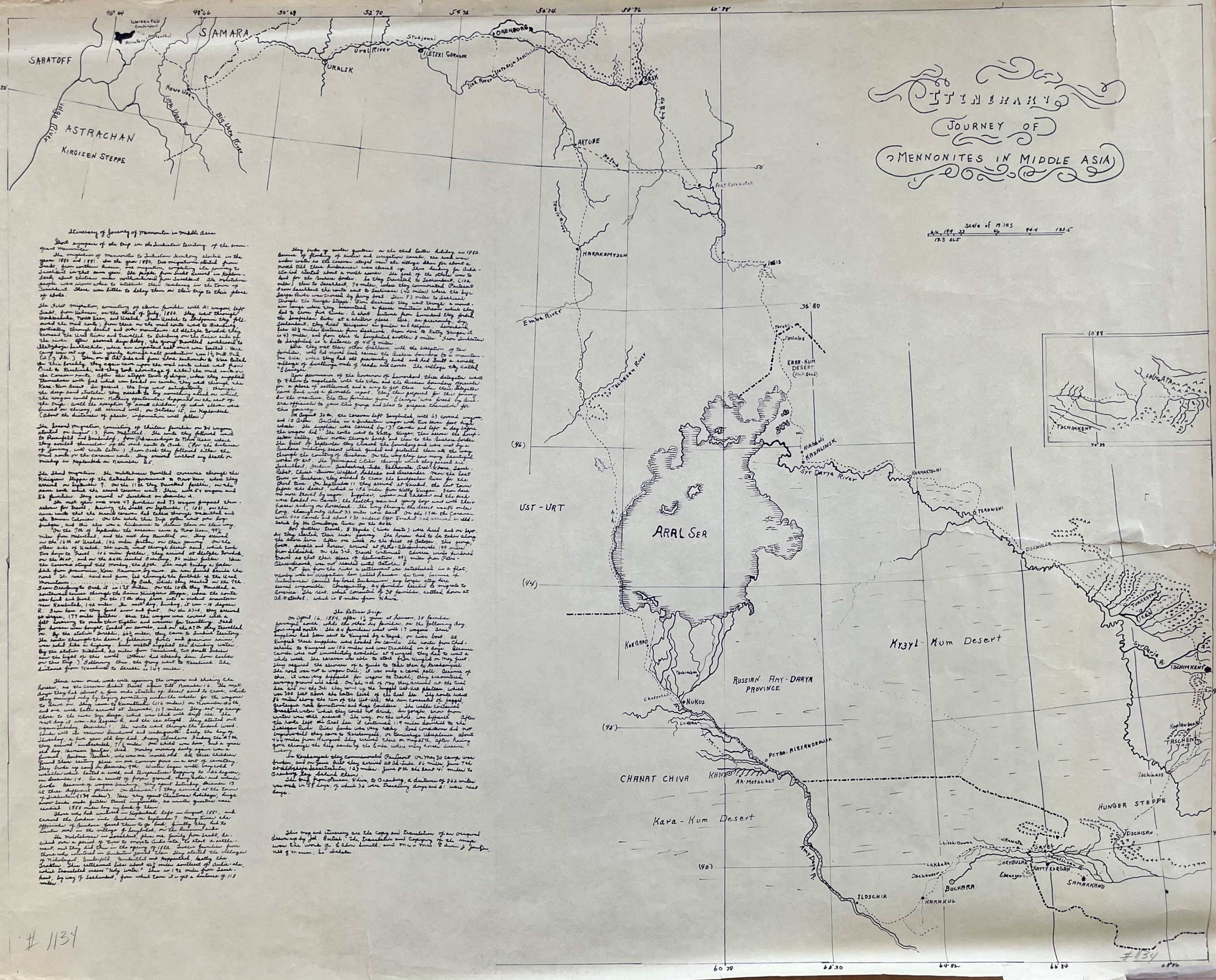
Itinerary of Journey of Mennonites in Middle Asia



Itinerary of journey of Mennonites in Middle Asia

Short synopsis of the trip in the Turkestan territory of the command Mennonites.

The migration of Mennonites to Turkestan territory started in the years 1881 and 1891. In the year 1880, two migrations started from Russia, from southern Russia, one migration emigrating like journeying to Canada in that same year. The people from Russia arrived in Kopenhagen, about thirteen miles northwestward from Sarakhof. The Molotschna people were given where to establish their residency in the town of Sarakhof. There was little to delay them on their trip to their places of abode.

The first migration, consisting of eleven families with 81 wagons, left Sarakhof, from Halbmon, on the third of July, 1880. They went through Wodkowskoe, Nowo Uzen, and Uralsk to Lbischensk they fell onto the mail route; from there on the mail route west to Orenburg, particularly through Sakhof and over mountains. At Iletzkje Gorodok they crossed the Ural River and travelled to Orsk on the Asian side of the river. After passing Orsk safely, the group travelled southward to Iletzkje Sastschite, where two wagons had crack axles and had to be repaired. Here camp was set up. Here greater exercise was practiced. Here (2 1/2 hr.) Then on to Old Aktube and from there eastwards to Kara Butak on the Irgisky, they again came upon the mail route which went from Orsk to Karabutak, at they took advantage of either the road route or the Caravan route. Often the wagon train of wagons, where they supplied themselves with food which was bought and exchanged at the Kara-Kum desert. In general, the trip went satisfactorily; though, the deep sand stretches they needed to lay something solid on which the wagons could pass. Nothing spectacular happened on the rest of the trip. With the exception of small children, of which eleven were counted on the way, all arrived well, on October 15, in Yagodnoje. (About the distances of places, information will follow.)

The second migration, consisting of thirteen families on 34 wagons, started on August 13, from Molotschna. The route they followed went to Rosenfeld and Neuhorloff, from Pokrowskoje to Nowo Uzen, where they avoided the use of the mail route to Orsk. (For the distance of journey, will write later.) From Orsk they followed either the mail route or the caravan route. They arrived without any death or mishap in September 30.

The third migration. The Molotschnaer travelled overseas through the Kirgisen Steppe of the Orenburger government to Nowo Uzen, which they arrived on September 9. On the 11th they travelled further, no rain, passing through the same route. There were 54 wagons and 54 families. They arrived at Sarakhof on October 2.

The next year one rose 47 families and 73 wagons prepared themselves for travel, leaving the field on September 1, 1881, on the same route that the second caravan had taken through Orenburg and the Russian Colonies. On the whole this trip was not very hazardous, and this also was a hindrance to delays them on their way.

On the 7th of September the caravan came to Nowo Uzen, 99½ miles from Molotschna, and the next day travelled on. They arrived on the 16th at Uralsk, 146 miles further on their journey. On the other side of Uralsk, this was a short stretch, which took them two to travel 106 miles further, they arrived at Iletzkje Gorodok on the 21st, and on the 24th reached Orenburg, 96 miles further. Here the caravans stayed till Monday, the 26th. The next bridge a failure didn't pass government Kara Nauruz by rain. The iron bridge beside the road is not used, rain and snow, this through the foothills of the Ural Mountains ..... by Orsk, which they reached on the 7th. From Orenburg to Orsk it was 175 miles. On the 10th they travelled a southwestern course through the Asian Kirgisen Steppe, where the route was hilly and level. On the 17th they given into a violent snowstorm near Karabutak, 142 miles. The next day, Sunday, it was -18 degrees R. Given here as they stayed over and rest. On the 23rd, they arrived at Irgisky, 177 miles further, where the wagons were carried over a ferry. Here they stayed over and rested for travelling. Staid for Sunday, 24th, and on the 26th they travelled on. By the station Turkul, 66½ miles, they came to Turkul territory. The water through the desert, following Orsk and garrison ruins, was sold like a highway, but mostly supplied the drinking water. By the station Kisilkul, 20 miles from Kisilkul, two small Lakes, one the largest of this world (Aralsee) had already been sighted on this trip. Following them, the group went to Karakuduk. The distance from Karakuduk to Turkul is 169 miles.

Here we made work with repairing the wagons and shoeing the horses, as the caravan didn't travel after till November 16. The next days they had about a few miles stretches of desert sand to cross, which they managed only by laying pumpkin vines under the wheels for the wagons to run on. They came to Karakuduk (116 miles) on November 20th and here later arrived at Turkestan, 111 miles. They set up camp close to the river Syr Darya, which was thick with drift ice. The next day it was -20 degrees R, and the ice stopped. They started out again Tuesday, December 1. The route went through the Kirgisen Steppe. Thursday, a few years old boy died, Jacob Abrahams. Friday the 27th they arrived at Ashabulak, 77½ miles. One child was born, and a year old boy, Hermann Quiring, died. Monday morning early again on a journey, Andreas Bartsch, who was one month old. All three children found their resting place on one common place in a sort of cemetery. They broke up camp on December 4th. Weather began with very cold. It was bitter cold, lasted a week and temperatures beginning to -46 degrees, on December 14 due to result of frozen ground, many axles and wheels broke because of wagon breaking. They spent Saturday, December 13 at three different places on the road, & they arrived at the town of Jasketan (134 miles). Here they spent Christmas Holidays, Kirgisen town broke under Russian supervision, no winter quarters were needed. 1558 miles long journey by train.

Here we left Gerhard Wiebe and Kornelius Klippenstein who had married Russian Kirgisen Lassen, who had remained in Orenburg, Orsk, Aktube, Irgisky, Turkestan, Ashabulak, Jasketan, Kisilkurgan, Kisilkul, Karakuduk, Turkul, Irgisky, Aktube, Orsk, Orenburg, Uralsk, Nowo Uzen, Nowo Uzen, Sarakhof.

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The Molotschnaer in Sarakhof, plans are mostly from Sarakhof, decided over a period of time to migrate to Asiatic Russia to start a settlement, and the first one — the spring of 1882. Twelve families from these who had lived in Sarakhof formed them. They started the village of Nikolajpol, Yuzkefeld, Gnadenfeld and Rosenfeld, lastly the Trudfeld. Their settlement lies about 40½ miles southeast of Aralsee, which translated means "Salt water." They are 192 miles from Sarakhof, by way of Sarakhof, from which town it's yet a distance of 118 miles.

They broke up winter quarters on the third Easter holiday on 1882. Because of flooding of rivers and irrigation canals, the road was under water so the caravan stayed near the village when for about a week till these hindrances were cleared up. Then leaving for Aktube and started about a month earlier. The first of the others were to head for the Russian border so they travelled to Sarakhand, 61½ miles) then to Sarakhand, 74 miles, where they commenced Pentecost from Sarakhand the route went to Irgisky (47½ miles) where the Irgis Darya River was crossed by ferry boat. Then 83 miles to Sarakhand through the Kirgis Steppe. From Sarakhand they went through a mountain range where they encamped a place mountain streams which they had to cross four times. A short distance from Sarakhand they found the Temirlyan River at a shallow place. Here, as previously by Sarakhand, they hired Kirgisen as guides and helpers. Sarakhand lies 83½ miles distance from Sarakhand, from here to Katty Kurgan it is 43 miles, and from there to Sarakhand another 8 miles. From Sarakhand to Sarakhand is a distance of 415½ miles.

Here they met their other brethren, with the exception of two families, who had moved back across the Russian boundary to a mountain site, where they had all necessaries found and had built a sizeable village of dwellings made of reeds and canes. The village they called "Elenzyk."

Upon permission of the Emir of Bukhara, three delegates went to Khiva to negotiate with the Khan for the Russian boundary stipulations for a place of settlement and a way to get there. When their delegates came back with a favorable report, they then prepared for their journey. In the meantime, the two families from "Elenzyk" were joined by Russians officials to form this group and also to prepare themselves for this journey.

On August 30th, the caravan left Sarakhand, with 63 covered wagons, and 10 Arbas. An Arba is a Turkestan wagon with two steam four high wheels. Six supplies were carried by 137 camels and left a day before the wagons did. The route went to Katty Kurgan, then across the Zarafshan valley, then north through Jizak and then to the Bukhara border, the first by Russians, they crossed the boundary and were met by a Bukhara military escort which guided and protected them all the long through the country of Bukhara. On the way they saw many beautiful works of art. The principal cities through which they passed are: Sarakhand, Jizak, Sarakhand, Jizak, Kalkhurta, Arab Khana, Jizak, Robat, Chisak, Samarkand, Wafkent, Jizak and Sarakhand. Near the last town in Bukhara, they prepared to cross the Zarafshan River for the third time. On September 11 they arrived at Sarakhand, the last town before the desert, which is 152 miles from Katty Kurgan. From here no more travel by wagon. Supplies, women and children and the sick were loaded on camels, the healthy men and young boys used with their horses riding or horseback. The long through the desert was 86 miles long, though only about 33 miles were sand. On the 17th the Caravan with 400 camels and about 130 riders left Sarakhand and arrived in Aldabek by the Amudarya River on the 20th.

For further travel, 8 kayuks (river boats) were hired and on September 23 they started their river journey. The Russian had to be taken along the entire journey. After one week on the shore of Petrovsk, this group, four people and horses, arrived at Petrovsk Alexandrovsk, 199 miles from Aldabek. On the 3rd, travel continued, covering another hundred miles so that their place of destination, 99½ miles from Petrovsk Alexandrovsk, was not reached until October 8.

Not far from the river a settlement was established in a flat, marshy area in irrigation dam called Kunyan. At this time, because of inadequate channels for boat transportation, any longer stay here seemed impossible. Consequently, 24 families decided to migrate to America. The rest, which consisted of 38 families, settled down at Ak-Metschet, which is 8 miles from Khiva.

The Return Trip

On April 16, 1884, after 1½ years at Lassan, 38 families journeyed south, while the other 24 families, on the following day, journeyed north. The 24 families left with 17 wagons. Their baggage had been sent to Kungrad by a kayuk, on which boat at Kungrad these supplies were loaded on camels. The route from Chodschakli to Kungrad was 106 miles and was travelled in 6 days. Enough camels were not immediately available at Kungrad, they had to wait a whole week. The caravan who able to start from Kungrad on May first. They acquired the services of a guide to take them to Karakamyschi. The road was not a wagon trail, it was only a camel trail. Because of this it was very difficult for wagons to travel, they encountered swampy ground and sand. On the 14th of May they arrived at the Aral Sea and on the 3rd they went up the rugged Ust-Urt plateau, which was 300 feet above the water level of the Aral Sea. The route used 86 miles along the rim of the Ust-Urt, the rim consisted of jagged, picturesque rock formations and huge boulders. The trail continued treacherous when the camels lost their footing. The gorges were from winter were still present. The way, on the whole, was different. After the route left the Aral Sea it continued 119 miles southeast to the Saragan River. River banks were very rocky. Road conditions did not improve until they came to Karakumyuk, or Seminskoje Ukrepleniye, about 464 miles from Kungrad. They arrived there on may 25th, after having gone through the deep sands of the Kara-Kum where many horses became lame.

In Karakumyuk they commenced Pentecost on May 30 camp was broken, and on June 5th they arrived at Ak-Jube, 86 miles from 7th at Petrovsk Alexandrovsk, 123 miles. June 8th the last 41 miles to Orenburg they started down.

All told from Russian Khiva to Orenburg, a distance of 822 miles was made in 35 days, of which 32 the travelling days and 21 were rest days.

The map and itinerary are the copy and translation of an original drawn up by Jak. Buhler. The translation and copying of the map was the work of Edwin Unruh, and Miss Mina Hiebert, Gnadenau, Sask.

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