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John Muir

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Written July 1, 1881

Ashore—A Siberian Village—The Arctic Hunter's Luxurious Home—Arctic Cemeteries—Botanizing on the Siberian Shore—Tracing the Ice Floods.

STEAMER CORWIN,
EAST CAPE, SIBERIA, July 1, 1881.

After getting our search party on board at Tapkan, we found it impossible under the conditions of ice and water that prevailed to land our Tchutchi dog-driver, who lives there, and who had come off with the party to get his pay. He was in excellent spirits, however, and told the Captain that since he had received a gun and a liberal supply of ammunition he did not care where he was put ashore—Cape Serdze, East Cape, or any point along the shore or edge of the ice-pack would answer, as he could kill plenty of birds and seals, and get home any time. The dogs and sledges were left in his care at Tapkan, to be in readiness in case they should be required next winter.

Speeding southward under steam and sail we reached East Cape yesterday at 7 A. M. By this time the wind was blowing what seamen call a "living gale," whitening the sea, and filling the air with blinding scud. We found good anchorage, however, back of the high portion of the Cape, opposite a large settlement of Tchutchin.

A SIBERIAN VILLAGE.

This morning Mr. Nelson and I went ashore to see what we could learn. The village here, which we passed through on our way up the mountain-side, consists of about fifty huts, built on a small, rocky terminal moraine, and so deeply sunk in the face of the hill that the entire village makes scarcely more show at a distance of a few hundred yards than a group of marmot burrows. The lower portion of the walls is built of moraine bowlders, the upper portion and the curving beehive roof of drift-wood and the ribs of whales, framed together and covered with walrus hide or dirt.

During the winter they are entered by a low tunnel, so as to exclude the cold air as much as possible. The floor is simply the natural dirt mixed into a dark hairy paste, with much that is not at all natural. Fires are made occasionally in the middle of the floor to cook the small portion of their food that is not eaten raw. Ivory-headed spears, arrows, seal nets, bags of oil, and rags of seal meat or walrus, and strips of whale blubber and skin, lie on shelves or hang confusedly from the roof, while puppies and nursing mother dogs and children may be seen scattered here and there, or curled snugly in the pots and eating-troughs, after they have licked them clean, making a kind of squalor that is picturesque and daring beyond conception.

In all of them, however, there is from one to three or four luxurious bed-rooms, walls, ceiling and floor of soft reindeer skins, and with a trough filled with oil for heat and light. After hunting all day on the ice, making long, rough, stormy journeys, muffled and hungry, the Tchutchi hunter comes into his burrow, eats his fill of oil and seal or walrus meat, then strips himself naked and lies down in his closed fur nest in glorious ease, to smoke and sleep.

BOTANIZING AND HUNTING FOR GLACIER MARKS.

I was anxious to reach the top of the cape peninsula to learn surely whether it had been overswept by an ice-sheet, and if so from what direction, and to study its glacial conditions in general and the character of the rocks. I therefore made haste to make the most of my opportunity, and pushed on through the village towards the lowest part of the divide between the north and south sides, followed by a crowd of curious boys, who good-naturedly assisted me whenever I stopped to gather the flowers that I found in bloom. The banks of a stream coming from a high basin filled with snow was quite richly flowered with anemones, buttercups, potentillas, drabas, primulas and many species of dwarf willows, up to a height of about a thousand feet above the level of the sea; beyond this, spring has hardly made the slightest sign, while nearly a thousand feet of the highest summits is still covered with deep snow.

AN ARCTIC CEMETERY.

Mr. Nelson soon left me in pursuit of a bird, and in crossing a rocky ridge to come up with me again, he came upon a lot of other game, which seemed to interest him still more, namely, dead natives scattered about on the rough stones at one of the cemeteries belonging to the village. The bodies of the dead, together with whatever articles belonged to them, are simply laid on the surface of the ground, so that a cemetery is a good field for collectors. A lot of ivory spears, arrows, dishes of various kinds, and a stone hammer, formed the least gaudily of his spoils.

GLACIER FOOTPRINTS.

Leaving Mr. Nelson alone in his glory I pushed on to the top of the divide, then followed it westward to the highest summit on the peninsula, whence I obtained the views I was in search of.

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Written July 1, 1881

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The dividing ridge all along the high eastern portion of the peninsula is rounded from north to south nearly. The curves on the north begin almost at the water's edge, while the south side is quite precipitous along the shore. There is also a telling series of parallel groves and ridges trending north and south across the peninsula. The highest point is about 2,500 feet above the sea, and the mountainous portion has been nearly eroded from the continent and made an island like the two Diomedes, the wide gap of low ground connecting it with the high mainland being only a few feet above tide-water. In this low portion there is here and there a rounded upswelling of more resisting rock with trends, all telling the same story of a vast over-sweeping ice-flood from the north.

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I also had a clear view of the coast mountains for a hundred miles or thereabouts, all of which are tellingly glaciated in harmony with the above generalization. So also is the Western Diomedes Island standing well out in Behring Straits between the continents. w /

ANOTHER CEMETERY.

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On my way down to the shore I crossed another of the village cemeteries on a very rough and steep slope of weathered granite, several hundred feet above the village and to the westward of it. Whole skeletons or single bones and skulls lay here and there, wedged into chance positions among the stones, weathering and falling to pieces like the ivory-pointed spears, arrows, etc. mixed with them. The mountain that they were lying on is crumbling also—dust to dust.

ICE CRYSTALS.

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The damp, lower portion of the wild north wind, as it was deflected up and over the slopes and frosty summit of the peninsula, has given birth to a remarkably beautiful covering of white ice crystals on the windward sides of exposed bowlders, and in some places on the snow. The crystals resemble white feathers in their aggregate forms, but are firm and icy in structure and as evenly and gracefully imbricated on each other over the rough faces of the rocks as are the feathers on the breast of a bird. The effect is marvelously beautiful and interesting as seen on those castellated rock piles, so frequently found on bleak summits. The points of the feathers grow to windward, and indicate by their curves all the varying directions pursued by the interrupted wind as it glints and reverberates about the innumerable angles of the rock fronts. Thus the rocks where the exposure to storms is greatest are all the more lavishly clothed upon with beauty—beauty growing with and depending upon the violence of the gale. JOHN MUR.