

The Travels of Thomas Witlam Atkinson, 1799-1861

Between 1847 and 1854, Thomas travelled in central Asia. For most of this time, he was accompanied by his second wife, Lucy, and from November 1848, by their infant son, Alatau. Upon returning to England, Thomas published a book about his travels entitled *'Oriental and Western Siberia; a narrative of seven years exploration and adventure in Siberia, Mongolia, the Kirghis, Chinese Tartary and part of central Asia'*. After Thomas' death in 1861, Lucy published her own account of their travels entitled *'Recollections of the Tartar Steppes and their Inhabitants'*. This gives what is thought to be a more accurate description of the route which she and Thomas took.

The map included in this pack is primarily based on the account given by Lucy. The numbered points show the approximate locations of some of the places she and Thomas visited. However, it is important to remember that the route Thomas and Lucy took was not a linear one. They seem to have used several of these locations as bases for exploring the surrounding regions. It is therefore likely that they travelled far more extensively than this route suggests.

The latitude of the area Thomas and Lucy covered on their travels is enormous; Lake Baikal/Baikul (Point 18) lies around 3,500 miles to the east of Moscow (Point 1) where they started from. This is around 6 times the north-south length of Great Britain. Qapal (Point 13) in modern-day Kazakhstan lies over 1000 miles south of Tobolsk (Point 6).

The map included in this pack is a modern one, so the national boundaries shown are not necessarily the ones that would have existed in the 1840s and 1850s. However, many of the towns and other landmarks Thomas and Lucy visited still survive. The names of some of these places can be translated in several different ways, so you may come across variant spellings of place names if you choose to research these locations. In addition, the names of some locations have changed.

Both Thomas and Lucy wrote about the places they visited on their travels and the people and animals they encountered. Some of their recollections are summarised in the table below:

Location No.	Location Name	What they saw/did
1	Moscow	City buildings, carnival, melting snow, impressive gates leading out of the city, men in chains being sent into exile. Set out on horse-drawn sledge and travelled along frozen rivers.
2	Nijni Novgorod/ Nizhniy Novgorod	En route from Moscow: Starry nights, forests. Nijni Novgorod: Ancient city, domed churches, Oka River, glassworks.

3	Kasan/Kazan	Entertained by governor, went to a concert, saw Kasan University. Steep hills beyond the city.
4	Ekaterinburg/ Yekaterinburg and the Oural/Ural Mountains	Mining of iron, gold, platinum and jasper. Works where stones were cut, polished and sculpted. Large European mines and engineering and munitions factories. Bears, bandits, mosquitoes, peasants living in poverty.
5	Eastern Ourals/Urals and the valley of the Techa River	Forest and bogs, convicts being transported to Siberia
6	Tobolsk	Deep snow, city at the junction of the Tobol and Irtisch/Irtysch rivers.
7	Omsk	Cossacks (warriors on horseback), town not prepossessing, inhospitable accommodation.
8	Tomsk	En route from Omsk: Decorated villages, packs of wolves, robbers. At Tomsk: Balls, parties and Easter festivities in the town. Rich miners and merchants.
9	Barnaoul/ Barnaul	En route from Tomsk: Orange valleys containing globe anemone, forget-me-nots, shrubs and blossoms on the banks of the Ob. Forests and open country, mosquitoes. At Barnaul: social gatherings with officers and merchants, fireworks, large gardens, magpies.
10	Bisk/Biysk	En route from Barnaul: Crossing the Ob, mud, Altai Mountains in the distance. Upon leaving: steep ascent up the Valley of the River Bia (above Bisk), pine forests, thunderstorms, Cossack settlements, narrow rocky ledges on granite mountains, tall vegetation. Travelled on horseback and on foot, slept in a tent and under the stars.
11	Altai Mountains and Altin Kool	Village settlements high in granite mountains, streams rivers and rapids, views of snow-capped mountains, lots of green vegetation. Altin Kool – ‘the Golden Lake’, lake high in the mountains surrounded by rocks and trees, with mountains on every side. Travelled around the lake on horseback and on foot taking in wooden huts in Kalmuk villages, waterfalls, caves, fruit bushes, snow and ice in ravines. Ate fish from the lake. Continued southwards through the mountains: Wild flowers, bees and honey, rocky mountain roads above the line of vegetation, mountain rivers, a perilous descent, wild animals grazing. Thick snow at the foot of Mount Bielouka/Belukha (21), red fruits and insects. Travelled by boat, heavy rain and low cloud.
12	Semipolatinsk (now Semey)	En route from the Altai Mountains: Silver smelting works and cottages of workmen at Zmeinogorsk, Tatar merchants selling Chinese wares. Crossed the Irtisch/Irtysch River. Carriage transported across the river by ferry. People in decorative Asiatic costume. Sheep and cattle grazing.
13	Kopal (now Qapal)	En route from Semipolatinsk: Travelled on camels, stayed in yourts (yurts) among the Kirghis people. Travelled along desolate, stony route through country with little vegetation; came upon a hill with large stone tombs. Copper ore – orange coloured rock, a lake of salt, lack of water. Saw the snowing peaks of the Alatau mountains

		<p>ahead. Followed by a large, brown dog.</p> <p>At Kopal: Son Alatau born (Kopal at the foot of the Alatau), moved into a basic house one week before, having been living in a yurt/yurt before that. Visitors in colourful costume, musical soirees with dancing. Miserable weather in winter; better in Spring. Wild flowers, many visitors, short excursions in the mountains to sketch beautiful scenery, Easter festivities.</p> <p>Arrived in late September, departed in May.</p>
14	Ala Kool/Alakol (A lake in the mountains)	<p>En route from Kopal: Saw vast herds of cattle, ascended into mountains (and thick cloud), looked down at rivers below. Beautiful mountain scenery, colourful shrubs and yellow and pink flowers, waterfalls and springs, many varieties of wild fruit. A torrent strong enough to break down trees. Lambs, goats, horses and gazelles. Sometimes travelled above the snow-line. On descending, saw birch, aspen and poplar trees. Used bulls to carry baggage. A fight on a mountainside, intense heat, insect bites, black eagles.</p> <p>Ala Kool: Sandy shores, lake surrounded by mountains, vapour rising from the lake in the heat, frequent storms. Intruders chased away.</p>
15	Chinese Tartary	<p>En route from Ala Kool: Swimming across rapid streams with tall reeds growing in them, avoiding attackers, riding wild horses, plagued by mosquitoes.</p> <p>Chinese Tartary: Approached town of Choubachac/ Chougachac. Choubacha: Saw Minarets, approached by Chinese soldiers, not permitted to enter the town.</p>
Return to 9	Barnaoul/ Barnaul	<p>En route from Chines Tartary: Return to the Khirghis Steppe: orchards in the mountains.</p> <p>Return to Zmeinogorsk</p> <p>Barnaoul: Nearly killed by smoke (fire and lack of ventilation). Christmas festivities: balls, music and theatrical performances. Siberian weddings.</p> <p>Arrived in December, departed in May.</p>
Return to 8	Tomsk	<p>En route from Barnaoul: Silver mines.</p> <p>Tomsk: Many visitors and gifts.</p>
16	Minousinsk/ Minusinsk	<p>En route from Tomsk: Travelled over rough ground by carriage, visited mines, encountered Russian exiles. Travelled along river banks, pretty scenery, views of snow-capped Taskill mountains. Alatau almost bitten by snake.</p> <p>Minousinsk: Purchased a boat and began voyage on Yenis-sey/ Yenisey) River.</p>
17	Irkoutsk/Irkutsk	<p>En route from Minousinsk (along the Yenis-sey River): Beautiful scenery, wild horses, convicts digging and washing gold, dangerous rapids, thick forests, a forest fire, rivers running together, people of the Tougooz tribe with tattooed faces.</p> <p>Irkoutsk: A pretty town, stayed in lodgings on the banks of the Angara River, snow, Russian exiles living in the town, an earthquake.</p> <p>Arrived in September, departed in May (The River was frozen through the Winter and thawed in March.)</p>

18	Travels in the region of Lake Baikal/Baikul	Beside Lake Baikal: Hot mineral springs, rocky valleys, a pretty church, forests.
19	Saian/Sayan Mountains	In and amongst the mountains: Spring flowers, ice and snow higher up the mountains. The White and Black Irkout: 2 mountains, one black, one white. Kara Noor: a lake in the mountains. Muddy valleys between mountains. A volcanic crater, rocks set in lava. Snakes, wolves and wild boars.
Return to 17	Irkoutsk/Irkutsk	Balls and Christmas festivities. Remained until February.
20	Kiatcha	En route from Irkoutsk: Freezing conditions, frozen waves on Lake Baikal. Kiatcha: Russian town on the border with China, dinner parties with hosts and occasionally with the Chinese. Neighbouring Chinese town of Maimatchin: Colourful lanterns outside houses.
Return to 17	Irkoutsk/Irkutsk	
21	Mount Bielouka/ Belukha	Ascended the mountain (which is 4506m tall). Rock formations and vegetation.
Return to 9	Barnaoul/ Barnaul	En route from Bielouka: Thunderstorms, farewells to acquaintances, picnics. Barnaoul: Soirees, balls, a ball for Alatau's 4 th birthday, New Year festivities.
Return to 4	Ekaterinburg/ Yekaterinburg	En route from Barnaul: Travelled across the countryside; pretty cottages on the edge of woods. Ekaterinburg: Cloud, rain and snow, booming bells to mark Easter. Excursions in the Oural Mountains: Iron-works, gold mines, pine forests, lakes and Mountains.
22	St Petersburg	Travelled by frozen rivers, returning in late 1853.

For more information you may like to refer to:

'Oriental and Western Siberia; a narrative of seven years exploration and adventure in Siberia, Mongolia, the Kirghis, Chinese Tartary and part of central Asia'.

Thomas Witlam Atkinson, 1858

You can read this online:

<http://archive.org/stream/orientalandwest04atkigoog#page/n15/mode/2up>

Alternatively you can read some popular passages from the same book:

http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Oriental_and_western_Siberia.html?id=eSUPAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y

A bound copy of this book is also available in the Discovery Centre, Barnsley, situated within Barnsley Town Hall.

Lucy Atkinson's book '*Recollections of the Tartar Steppes and their Inhabitants*' is also available online:

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/atkinson/steppes/steppes.html>

Bound copies of this book can be purchased from numerous online sellers.

You may also wish to refer to:

'Travels in Tandem: The Writing of Women and Men Who Travelled Together' by Susanna Hoe

This is available from www.amazon.co.uk