Egyptian Desert Crossing Before the Construction of the Suez Canal

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(see his biography at the end of the document.)

While surfing the web, I came across an extensively researched article about Lieutenant Thomas Waghorn's endeavours, against great odds, to develop a shorter route for a mail service between England and India. Since the late 15th century, the traditional route from England and Europe to India and beyond to the Orient had been the long route around the Cape of Good Hope. The drama of promoting a shorter route via the Mediterranean and thence overland across the Egyptian desert between Alexandria and Suez at the head of the Red Sea was first played out in the 1830s and continued until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which was a fait accompli.

My keen interest in history made Lieutenant Thomas Waghorn's story captivating to read, not only for the overland carriage of mail across the Suez Isthmus but also for the broader logistics service. Another strong motivation was personal: to research the important role P&O played in this venture. Since the age of 21, my vocation has been logistics; for almost 30 years I worked ashore in management at one of the P&O group companies. And once we retire and get grey hair, we become consultants. Well, that is what I became, focusing on trade and logistics.

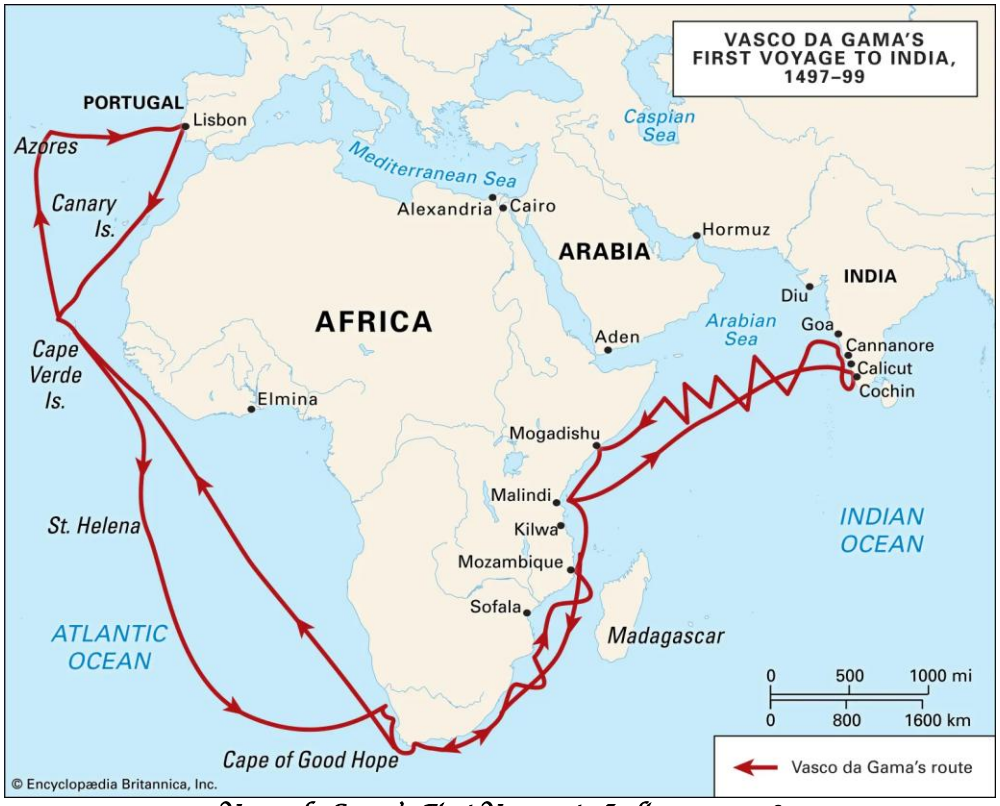
To make a logical comparison between the longer and shorter routes, it is essential to establish basic facts covering almost 30 years. The foremost task would be to assess the distance and transit time for both routes; distance and time are further affected by technical advancements in marine and overland transport, which were continuously improved during the three decades involved; the infrastructure development across the Egyptian leg of the journey; and, finally, the ease with which essential supplies, fuel, and victualling were available en route.

To simplify the comparison, we will restrict ourselves to the journey between Southampton and Calcutta. On average, the longer route covered approximately 11,500 to 13,500 nautical miles (13,235 to 15,535 miles) and took more than four to five months, provided the vessel did not encounter severe storms. Wind-driven sailing ships were therefore scheduled to depart during favourable seasons from either port to take full advantage of the trade winds. The shorter route via the Mediterranean Sea, across the Suez Isthmus, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal was 8,100 nautical miles (9,325 miles), including approximately 250 miles across Egypt, with a total average transit time of 35 to 45 days. The difference of about 2,000 nautical miles when travelling around the southern tip of Africa needs explanation. Sailing ships are unable to sail in a straight line. Because they must use the wind to propel them forward, they must apply "tacking," a process of zig-zagging until they reach the required destination. The long voyage along the western coast of Africa, ocean currents, trade winds, and weather and seasonal storms all played a part in determining the distance of the vessel's transit. The variance of about 2,000 nautical miles and the variance in transit time using this route are therefore understandable.

It would be worth briefly examining the history of the Cape of Good Hope route. Bartolomeu Dias (1450–1500), a Portuguese mariner, was the first European to sail around the southern tip of Africa. He set out from Lisbon in August 1488 and reached Algoa Bay (a coastal village in the present Republic of South Africa) in March 1489, after a voyage of more than seven

months. Although he did not proceed further, this was the first time a European demonstrated that a southward route was possible for ships in the open ocean, well to the east of the African coast. He returned to Lisbon in December 1488, completing a round voyage in 16 months and covering almost 14,000 nautical miles (approximately 16,000 miles).

A decade later, another Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, became the first recorded person to sail from Europe around Africa to reach India. He sailed from Lisbon on 8 July 1497 and anchored off the coast of Calicut, India, on 20 May 1498. His outward voyage took 10 months and 12 days, including stops, with 111 days of sailing. On the return leg to Lisbon, the sailing took 132 days due to unfavourable winds. The overall transit time was over 13 months, including stops along the way. It is understandable that the long transit times both explorers encountered were due to exercising caution as they made their way through uncharted waters. A map depicting Vasco da Gama's return voyage from India, with unfavourable winds, will highlight the zig-zag tacking of his ship in the Arabian Sea. On the outbound voyage, sailing along the western coast of Africa, the wind and the ocean current pushed his vessel further westward, which was not the case on his return journey.



Vasco da Gama's First Voyage to India, 1497-1498
Courtesy of Encyclopedia Britannica

We must recognise that this was not the first time Europeans had encountered India. Overland journeys and trade caravans, as well as short sea voyages, had been taking place for centuries before. The Silk Road, which connected China with the Middle East and beyond, was a good example. The major difference was that overland trade was not a single long-haul journey by the same individual; rather, goods moved in stages from one market to another, with profit at each stage. The exchange of knowledge and ideas was another important factor in maintaining this historical trade route.

Before continuing with the Egyptian route, we must consider a question: given the East India Company's extensive history and lucrative operations in India, did it ever contemplate other possible routes to the subcontinent? The answer is yes. Lieutenant-General Francis Rawdon Chesney (16 March 1789 – 30 January 1872), a Royal Artillery officer renowned more as an explorer than for his military service, undertook an inspection tour of Egypt and Syria in 1829. The following year, he reported on the feasibility of building a canal across the Suez Isthmus. Despite his support for the Suez Canal, General Chesney persuaded the government to explore an alternative route, which was eventually accepted three years later as a trial experiment on the 1,740-mile-long Euphrates River, which ran through the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey, Syria and Iraq) before merging with the Tigris to empty into the Persian Gulf. The trial voyage set sail on 16 March 1836 on two shallow, flat-bottomed paddle-steamers, Euphrates (186 tons), length 102 feet, drawing a 2- to 3-foot draft, and PS Tigris (109 tons), length 70 feet, drawing between 1 foot 6 inches and 2 feet 6 inches draft. Both vessels were constructed with highly innovative flat-bottomed iron plates, allowing them to navigate unpredictable, shallow riverbeds and rocky shallows without sustaining hull leaks. On Saturday 21 May, the fair weather suddenly turned for the worse, and a severe hurricane enveloped both vessels; Tigris foundered, and many of those on board drowned. By 18 June 1836, the survey of approximately 1200 miles of the Euphrates River had been completed. Before the sanctioned date to end the expedition, General Chesney left the PS Euphrates under the command of his deputy and returned to Bombay on another steamer to seek further orders. In the meantime, the President of the Board of Control ordered the survey to end the expedition. According to the expedition's report, the Euphrates River was a viable option.

A surprising fact that warrants highlighting is that, despite the advantages of the shorter Egyptian route being widely known, the men in the higher echelons of decision-making were averse to changing the status quo. However, change required a visionary, and in this instance, Lieutenant Waghorn, despite strong resistance, proved his point by undertaking the trial journey. Research in human psychology shows that most people resist change because the brain evolved to conserve energy and avoid danger. This is mainly because people fear the cost of change more than the possible reward.

Finally, once the passage across the Suez Isthmus was deemed possible and feasible, the longer route was avoided, although ships continued to ply to the British colonies in Africa. Once the switchover was established, the journey from Southampton to the Mediterranean and beyond to India was not without its problems. These hurdles were gradually mitigated, but travellers during the three decades before the opening of the Suez Canal experienced many hardships. It was no easy journey. The only mitigating factor was that the hardships around the African coast were reduced from months to weeks, and the worst of their suffering from weeks to a few days.

Lieutenant Thomas Waghorn's famous first test trip from London, travelling overland through Europe, then by a short voyage across the Mediterranean to Egypt and on to India, took place between October 1829 and March 1830. He was commissioned by Edward Law, Lord Ellenborough (1790–1871), President of the Board of Control for India, to carry government dispatches to Sir John Malcolm, the Governor of the Bombay Presidency. In the same month as Waghorn's arrival in Bombay, the 411-ton wooden paddle steamer *Hugh Lindsay*, built by the East India Company in Bombay, was officially recorded as the first vessel to open the Suez Isthmus route, carrying Company officials via the Red Sea.

A decade later, the Peninsular Steam Navigation Company received its Royal Charter on 31 December 1840 and was formally incorporated as the Peninsular and Oriental Steam

Navigation Company (widely known as P&O). The Company adopted its famous rising sun logo, which became its trademark on uniforms, cap badges, stationery, and tableware, symbolising its newly established eastern maritime empire.

The Royal Charter transformed the private firm into an official corporate body with limited liability. It enabled the Company to raise the substantial funds needed to build larger ocean-going steamships. It also facilitated the strategic development of coaling stations, docks, and repair facilities along its maritime mail routes.

P&O Flag, depicting the Royal colours of Spain & Portugal, used to carry military cargo to the Iberian Peninsula (from where this term was used for the Cos. Name).

P&O officer's cap badge depicting the rising sun and the anchor, a universal emblem for the marine sector.

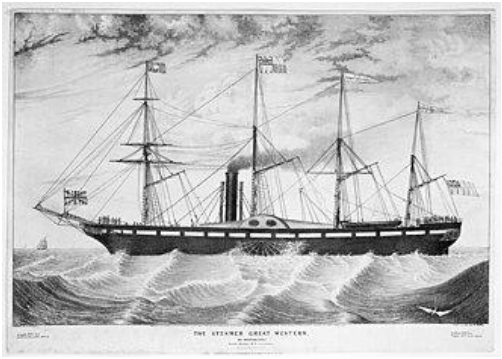
The first Royal Mail contract P&O secured was the Iberian Contract on 29 August 1837, covering the route between Falmouth and the ports of Vigo, Oporto, Lisbon, Cadiz, and Gibraltar. This was followed by the Egypt Contract on 1 September 1840, which extended mail operations beyond Gibraltar to Alexandria. The latter contract led directly to the Royal Charter, as the Company needed to restructure to raise capital for the larger vessels required by the agreement. It also required P&O to establish a new line of steamers to operate on the Red Sea route to India within two years. In December 1842, the East Indies Contract to carry mail officially added the onward leg from Suez to Ceylon, Madras, and Calcutta. Bombay was still covered by the East India Company's (EIC) marine arm; the Bombay Marine operated armed and steam-powered packet ships carrying mail between Bombay and Suez. A major task of the Bombay Marine ships was to protect the Company's assets from pirates. The Bombay Marine was renamed the Indian Navy in 1830. The British government took away the EIC's mail duties in 1854 because the military steamships were slow and unreliable. The company had to choose between security and the fast transit required to deliver mail; therefore, P&O was also awarded the Bombay mail contract.

The British government offered significant subsidies to P&O to guarantee regular, punctual mail delivery, enforcing these agreements with financial penalties for delays. Under the Iberian Contract, P&O received £29,600 annually (over £3 million today). The subsidy rose to £34,200 with the addition of the Alexandria Contract, then to £115,000 for the East Indies Contract. It further grew to £160,000 and then to £199,000 annually as routes expanded to Hong Kong and Australia. By the mid-1850s, the postal service's income from all contracts reached £400,000 each year, becoming a major part of the Company's total revenue. Meanwhile, strict penalties ensured P&O upheld its postal responsibilities. Captains faced heavy fines, often £10 to £50 per hour, for failing to depart or arrive at a designated port on schedule, regardless of weather, unless a severe storm could be legally proven. P&O could earn a bonus of £25 to £50 per day if they arrived ahead of the contracted schedule. Furthermore, the Admiralty exercised direct control by placing a Royal Navy officer on board every mail ship, who would guard the mail,

maintain a log of arrival/departure times, and report any delays directly to the government. The Admiralty also required P&O to construct all future vessels to Royal Navy specifications, so they could be converted into armed vessels during future conflicts in which Britain might be involved.

For centuries, sailing ships were the workhorses of the oceans. With the advent of the first steam-powered engine, invented by the Scottish engineer James Watt in 1769, early mechanical machines supported the Industrial Revolution. The next stage was to harness steam for locomotion. While Richard Trevithick built the earliest steam locomotive prototype in 1804, it proved inefficient. George Stephenson invented the first effective steam locomotive in 1814. It was logical that this new power source would also be used for ocean travel. In 1808, American inventor Robert Fulton (1765-1815) designed the *Clermont* (the North River Steamboat), the world's first commercially viable paddle steamer. However, her flat-bottomed hull and delicate wooden side-wheels were built strictly for calm river transport on the Hudson River, not for the rough seas. The hybrid ss *Savannah* was the first paddle-wheel vessel to cross the Atlantic Ocean in 1819. However, she was not a true ocean steamship; she was a fully rigged sailing vessel outfitted with an auxiliary steam engine. Her paddle wheels were temporary and were actually folded up onto the deck whenever the seas got rough. Over her 29-day voyage, she only used steam power for about 80 hours. The final breakthrough came in 1837 when the legendary Isambard Kingdom Brunel built the 236-foot reinforced wooden-hulled ss *Great Western*. He disproved the apprehension that a ship could not cross an ocean solely on steam because it would have to carry more coal than its own deadweight. On her maiden voyage from Bristol to New York in 1838, she initiated the world's first regularly scheduled, year-round transatlantic steamship service, crossing in just 15 days. Previously, the average westbound transit time for sail ships was 30 to 40 days. The first wooden-hulled paddle steamer to sail around the Cape of Good Hope was ss *Enterprise* in 1825.

Robert Fulton's Clermont
Courtesy of Encyclopedia Britannica



Isambard Kingdom Brunel's ss Great Western
Courtesy of Wikipedia

The next technical advance in the marine *sector* was the replacement of wooden hulls with iron hulls. The first of its kind to sail around the southern tip of Africa was the East India Company vessel *Nemesis*, launched in 1840. This 184-foot iron-hulled paddle gunboat departed Liverpool in March 1840 for India and arrived a year later. However, she proved that iron ships were structurally sound enough to survive the violent storms of the Cape. Soon thereafter, in 1842, P&O introduced the iron-hulled paddle steamer ss *Lady Mary Wood* to ply between Southampton and Alexandria. The same year, P&O commissioned ss *Hindustan* to run the Suez-to-Calcutta leg. Although the massive *Hindustan* was built of wood, she was soon converted into an all-iron paddle steamer.

During the mid-19th century, Great Britain experienced a period historians call Pax Britannica (British Peace). Although the empire was smaller in land area than it would later become, its global power was at its peak. The unrivalled Royal Navy held absolute supremacy over the world's oceans. Following the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, Britain was decades ahead of the rest of the world in industrialisation and in manufacturing goods for global markets, mainly for its colonies. Britain possessed financial dominance and ruled over roughly 460 million people, comprising one-quarter of the human population at the time. Travel between the "Home" country and her colonies was on the rise, with the heaviest traffic going to and from India, the "Jewel in the Crown!"

Traditionally, in England, P&O's operational hub was at the Custom House Quay in the heart of Falmouth's historic harbour. In Southampton, the waterfront infrastructure was outdated, comprising medieval wooden wharves built directly on the natural mud flats. To meet rising passenger traffic, the Royal Victoria Pier opened in 1833, followed in 1842 by Southampton Docks (First Basin), which could accommodate the new line of steamships at varying tidal depths. With the arrival of a rail connection to London from its Waterloo terminus in 1842, Falmouth could no longer meet P&O's requirements. Therefore, in September 1843, the Company shifted its service to Southampton. From the 1840s to the late 1860s, P&O's passenger, mail and cargo service to and from India operated under a two-tier fleet system. The main vessels on this route are listed below:

The European Leg (Southampton Alexandria)

- ss *Oriental* (1840) was a 1,750-ton wooden paddle steamer that inaugurated P&O's direct mail service from England to Alexandria. It was built to carry the heavy coal loads required for deep-sea steam voyages.
- ss *Great Liverpool* (1837/1840) was originally built for the transatlantic route; this 1,300-ton paddle steamer was acquired by P&O and operated alongside the Oriental to maintain the Mediterranean schedule.
- ss *Ripon* (1846): A prominent 1,500-ton iron-hulled paddle steamer introduced later in the decade. It became one of the most reliable vessels, carrying passengers and mail directly from Southampton's newly opened docks.
- ss *Tagus* and ss *Iberia* (700–900 tons respectively), two smaller early paddle steamers that originally served the Iberian Peninsula but occasionally supported the connecting runs to Egypt.

The Overland Suez Transit and Indian Leg

Passengers disembarked at Alexandria, travelled across the Egyptian desert by horse, camel, or Nile riverboat, and boarded the Eastern fleet at Suez:

- ss *Hindostan** (1842): A massive, purpose-built 2,017-ton wooden paddle steamer with 520 horsepower. It was sent via the Cape of Good Hope to be permanently stationed on the Calcutta–Suez line, where it inaugurated the Indian Mail service.
- ss *Bentinck* (1843): A sister ship of the *Hindostan** (1,970 tons), built to ensure a reliable monthly rotation between Egypt and India.

*Modern spelling is Hindustan (the traditional name for the Indian Subcontinent).

By the mid-19th century, the advent of paddle steamers and the introduction of the shorter "Overland Route" across the Suez Isthmus had completely transformed travel to Britain's most prized colony, fuelling an unprecedented surge in passenger traffic. This busy maritime route was a microcosm of the British Empire's diversity. First-class accommodation on early paddle steamers held between 90 and 110 passengers per voyage, and the passenger list reflected a

new wave of imperial ambition, including fresh recruits for civil, judicial, and military roles, many trained at prestigious institutions such as Haileybury College and Addiscombe Military Seminary, as well as at the traditional institutions in Oxford and Cambridge. These travellers also included young executives, known as clerks, heading to join commercial enterprises. Among them were seasoned veterans, senior civil servants, and returning officials with their families after long furloughs. Notably, the young women of the "fishing fleet" stood out; they travelled to join extended family with a clear goal: to succeed in the social scene and secure a desirable colonial marriage. These vessels also accommodated an average of one or two dozen Second Class passengers, notably servants, nannies, and others who did not fall into the categories listed above. Before refrigeration, these vessels carried live sheep, pigs, and coops of poultry (such as chickens and ducks) on deck, providing a continuous supply of fresh food for the saloon passengers and officers.

The Southampton to Alexandria route was not the only way for passengers and mail to travel. There was a hybrid option: cross the English Channel and take the overland journey across France's vibrant, scenic landscape. In the mid-century, this meant days of bone-jarring travel, crammed into horse-drawn post-chaises and rattling over cobblestones and dusty French roads to Marseilles. By the 1850s, the mode had shifted to the French railways, which hurtled passengers from Paris to Marseilles in a continuous, sleep-deprived dash of under thirty hours. The journey was a sensory overload of foreign languages, hasty border inspections, and fleeting glimpses of European culture.

At Marseilles, passengers boarded, and mail was loaded for a regular service across the Mediterranean. By the time these overland travellers boarded the connecting steamers at Marseilles, they were often covered in railway grime, nursing bruises from the road, and utterly fatigued, yet they had reached the Mediterranean in a fraction of the time. As their steamer set sail for Alexandria, cutting through calm waters past Malta, the overland passengers finally had a few days to rest and wash off the dust of Europe. Meanwhile, the Southampton travellers, though vastly more refreshed, were recovering from seasickness in the rough Bay of Biscay and were only just entering the Mediterranean. When both groups finally converged at the crowded port of Alexandria, the pristine, unbothered seafarers and the exhausted, worldly overland adventurers prepared together for the final, legendary crossing of the Suez Isthmus. The trip across the Continent saved 9 to 10 days compared with the slow transit on paddle steamers sailing from Southampton. Boredom was a constant issue on these slow-moving vessels.

The transit across Egypt was never static; it evolved over thirty years from a chaotic desert caravan into a fully mechanised railway shortcut. However, whenever a new steamer anchored in the Outer Road at Alexandria, it would be swarmed by countless Egyptian *feluccas* and their larger cousins, flat-bottomed cargo barges used to carry heavy luggage and mailbags, known as *djerms*.

There would be a mad rush as soon as the gangway was lowered to the water's level; the boatmen would aggressively jostle to secure fares. They would literally snatch valises from passengers to secure their fares. For the uninitiated young ladies of the "fishing fleet" or fresh military subalterns and civil clerks, it was an overwhelming, noisy introduction to the Middle East. Eventually, fares were secured, and the shaken passengers would be rowed through the crowded harbour to the jetty facing the Custom House, where they would undergo port formalities in a crowded, stuffy, and noisy warehouse for their passport, health, and customs-house examinations before they could officially begin the overland transit.

As passengers left the Custom-House, they were promptly surrounded by a noisy, competitive group of animal handlers. The "donkey-boys" were the most common name for the cheapest form of transport. The term "boys" covered a wide age range, from youngsters to adults, who were known for their relentless persistence, wit, and broken English as they hustled to secure fares from arriving travellers. Bedouins or camel-drivers managed the heavy baggage caravans, and the camel handlers for desert treks were almost exclusively local Bedouins. For more illustrious passengers, transport was a choice of horses or luxury carriages, and both were attended by grooms or *syces* (borrowed from the Anglo-Indian vocabulary). Finally, the dragomen, professional interpreters, translators, and official guides, were at hand to assist any traveller wishing to hire their services. This haphazard introduction upon arrival in Egypt was common at the start of the overland leg of the journey. Over time, P&O streamlined this confusion and organised transport across Egypt, covering all such expenses in their passage ticket. Passengers who were not customers of the shipping line had to fend for themselves.

During the first few years, when Lieutenant Thomas Waghorn established the overland route across Egypt, passengers' onward journeys after disembarking in Alexandria were entirely unmechanised and arduous. A combination of animal transport, as already noted above, was limited to donkeys, horses, and camels, and to heavy horse-drawn carriages. Their baggage and the Royal Mail would be strapped onto hundreds of camels. This caravan would slowly plod along the entire 250 miles to the port of Suez at the head of the Red Sea. The passengers traversed the same distance, enduring a harsh passage marked by excessive heat to which they were unaccustomed, dust, and a shortage of drinkable water, with hardly any for washing hands and faces.

The rise in traffic and competition between Waghorn's and J.R. Hill and Co. eventually led to their 1841 merger, but it proved short-lived. In 1842, a devastating livestock plague, primarily rinderpest, struck Egypt. It was so severe that it eliminated large stocks of cattle and spread rapidly across species, devastating horses, donkeys, and camels; it also killed roughly 300 of the transit operation's animals. Facing immense financial strain, Egypt's ruler, Muhammad Ali Pasha, bought out the merged Waghorn-Hill company. Thereafter, the newly established Egyptian Transit Company directly managed all desert transport, waystations, and river travel between Alexandria, Cairo, and Suez until the advent of the railway system. The cost of the entire multi-transport journey of about 250 miles was around £12 to £15 (the modern equivalent of over £1,500 and £2,000).

To avoid the worst of the uncomfortable carriage journey, travellers increasingly used the Mahmoudiyah Canal (constructed between 1817 and 1820). The waterway was originally built to supply the port of Alexandria with fresh water from the Nile. Passengers boarded narrow, crowded canal boats, pulled by horses or early steam tugs. At Atfeh, where the canal meets the Nile, they transferred to river steamers that paddled south to Bulaq (the river port of Cairo, separated from the city by about 2 miles of flooded agricultural land), effectively bypassing much of the overland route.

A break in the journey in Cairo gave passengers a day or two of rest before continuing the final and most arduous leg across 84 miles of Egyptian desert to Suez. The Egyptian Transit Company managed this inhospitable route using a chain of 8 relay stations spaced roughly 10 miles apart. The even-numbered stations 2, 4, and 6 were basic stables where horses were changed, while the odd-numbered stations 1, 3, and 5 featured small waiting rooms with water and basic refreshments. At the midpoint, station No. 4 functioned as a fully fledged desert hotel,

equipped with private bedrooms, a large dining hall, a billiard room, servant quarters, and extensive wine cellars.

Many dangers lurked on the desert crossing. In summer, temperatures often exceeded 43°C (110°F) in the shade. The biggest threat was the khamsin, a scorching, oppressive sandstorm. When it hit, caravans had to stop entirely. The air became so dusty that breathing was difficult, and visibility nearly vanished, risking disorientation for drivers and leaving travellers lost. These sandstorms could last several hours. Fresh water was scarce. Camel caravans brought water to desert stations from the Nile, or it was shipped in iron tanks from Cairo. Often brackish, warm, and polluted, the water caused frequent outbreaks of dysentery. While Station No. 4 offered food and accommodation, it was known for fleas, lice, bedbugs, and flies. Travellers often preferred to sleep on wooden tables or benches rather than in infested bedding. Alexandria and Cairo were frequent sources of cholera and bubonic plague. If a passenger fell ill, the whole group could be quarantined for weeks under harsh conditions.

It would be of interest to hear the voices of travellers who experienced the hazards of travelling along the Overland route through Egypt.

Albert Richard Smith (24 May 1816 – 23 May 1860) was an English physician, author, entertainer, and mountaineer. He was among the most popular writers of his time and a favourite humourist. He wrote: *"The instant the boat touches the quay, it is boarded by a crowd of Arabs, screaming, fighting, and pulling the baggage in all directions... It was a scene of the most complete confusion, which a traveller must expect to encounter."*

Emma Roberts (27 March 1791 – 17 September 1840), often referred to as Miss Emma Roberts, was an English travel writer and poet known for her memoirs about India. In her journal *Notes of an Overland Journey Through France and Egypt to Bombay*, she described the punishing physical toll of desert travel: "*The jolting was something terrific... those who are not accustomed to such rough movement find it almost unendurable. The dust was so thick that we could scarcely breathe*." Soon after her arrival in Bombay, she fell ill and died.

Similarly, an anonymous civilian traveller writing under the initials "A.H." in the 1844 edition of The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register described the vehicles, including the six passenger carriages, as "*wretched machines*."

While Way-Station No. 4 was widely praised for its food, the smaller intermediary outposts were despised. Sir John Bowring, a British political economist on a diplomatic mission to Egypt, published an official government report in 1840 titled Report on Egypt and Candia, in which he noted: "*The rest-houses in the desert are miserable places, swarming with vermin of every description... the travellers are frequently glad to leave them as soon as possible, preferring the open air to the rooms*."

James Silk Buckingham (25 August 1786 – 30 June 1855), a British mariner, Member of Parliament, author, journalist and noted traveller, wrote extensively in his journals about the severe scourge of fleas and lice at the desert stations, warning future travellers to bring their own leather ground sheets to avoid the infested divans.

Over the years, infrastructure gradually advanced. Although Mohammad Aali Pasha, the ruler of Egypt, first proposed a railway in 1833, work officially began only after his successor, Abbas I, signed a construction contract with engineer Robert Stephenson (son of George Stephenson)

on 12 June 1851. The railway's first section, approximately 60 miles from Alexandria to Kafr el-Zayyat on the Nile, opened in 1854, followed by the second section of about 59 miles from Kafr el-Zayyat to Cairo in 1856. In 1858, a railway line from Cairo across the eastern desert to Suez opened, and that same year the swing bridge, approximately 1,640 feet long, over the Rosetta branch of the Nile was completed. The swing span was about 230 feet to allow river traffic to pass. This development eliminated animal transit entirely. Passengers had to change trains in Cairo, and some stayed overnight at hotels such as the famous Shepheard's Hotel, which opened in 1841 specifically to cater to overland route travellers. The arduous desert crossing from Alexandria to Suez, once a multi-transport, multi-day journey, was replaced by a swift train ride lasting just a few hours, revolutionising Anglo-Indian travel until the Suez Canal's opening in 1869. However, the train journey had its drawbacks. Soot and smoke from steam locomotives, along with desert dust, polluted passenger compartments and covered travellers in black grime. Some travellers in England were forewarned to wear long smocks during the train journey; although this was somewhat helpful, some were unaware they should pack a smock in their hand luggage.

It may be of interest to provide an average recorded transit time for the mail, passengers and cargo before the arrival of the rail service.

Transit Times: Passengers vs. Mail and Cargo

Transport Type	Total 250-Mile Transit Time	Notes
The Mail	~64 Hours	Transit between Alexandria and Suez with minimum delays.
Passengers	~76 to 90 Hours (approx. 3–4 days)	Slower than mail due to an overnight rest stop in Cairo.
Cargo Caravans	~8 to 12 Days	Heavy baggage and cargo were carried on camels at an average pace of 2-3 miles per hour, making desert segments alone take several days.

The next significant milestone was the construction of the Suez Canal, which eliminated the arduous desert crossing by enabling ships to move freely from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. Bear with me if I stray a bit. Why is this 1,400-mile waterway, measuring 221 miles at its widest and about 19 miles at the narrowest point at Bab-el-Mandeb, the strait between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, called the Red Sea? There are two perspectives. The modern name is a direct translation of the ancient Greek term *Erythra Thalassa*, meaning "Red Sea." This name stems from occasional blooms of a red alga called *Trichodesmium erythraeum*. When these algae die, they turn the usually blue-green water reddish-brown. Alternatively, some ancient Asian and Middle Eastern cultures associated red with the south, black with the north, white with the west, and blue or green with the east. For example, ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians used yellow or gold to symbolise their homeland in the centre. Based on these ancient colour conventions, the Black Sea to the north might be named accordingly. However, from a navigator's perspective, this sea earned its reputation for being dark and treacherous. In winter, fierce storms whip across the water, turning it pitch-black, murky, and thick with sediment from European rivers like the Danube. Early sailors perceived these conditions as turning the sea black. Ultimately, I leave it to you to decide which explanation resonates most.

The story of the Suez Canal is another significant development in the history of navigation, linking the West with the East. Surprisingly, this concept was not envisaged in the late 18th century, when Napoleon captured Egypt in 1798, nor in the 19th century, when it was eventually built and made operational in 1869. Human endeavour to connect the two seas goes back almost 4,000 years to the early Pharaohs. The earliest recorded account dates to circa 1850 BCE, when

Senusret III (12th Dynasty) or Ramesses II (19th Dynasty) are credited with ordering the digging of the earliest irrigation and transit channel. Early Greek historians note that work was soon abandoned because they feared the Red Sea level was higher than the Nile, which would risk contaminating Egypt's freshwater supply with saltwater. Around 610-595 BCE, the next pharaoh to attempt to broaden and rebuild the waterway was Necho II. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the project was abandoned after an oracle warned him that only foreign invaders would benefit from its completion. It is also said that the difficult desert work cost the lives of over 120,000 Egyptian labourers. Darius the Great of Persia, after conquering Egypt around 500 BCE, revived and completed Necho's unfinished canal. Over the centuries, shifting desert sands frequently choked the canal, prompting the Greek Ptolemaic rulers around 270 BCE to clear and upgrade it. The canal was restored under Roman Emperor Trajan in 100 CE and later cleared again by the Arab commander Amr ibn al-As ibn Wail al-Sahmi, a companion of the Prophet Mohammad who led the Muslim conquest of Egypt and served as its governor in 640–646 and 658–664. The demise of the 2,600-year history of the ancient east-west Egyptian canal finally resulted from events that happened more than 650 miles away. In 767 CE, the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur deliberately ordered the canal to be filled in and blocked forever. He did this for strategic military reasons to cut off food and supply lines from the Nile delta's granary to rebels holding out in the holy cities of Medina and Mecca. By blocking the Nile entrance at Cairo, grain ships could no longer reach the Red Sea and then Jeddah for onward transit to Mecca and Medina. This plan worked, as the rebels were eventually weakened from within. Over the centuries, the desert's shifting sands completely buried the ancient canal.

Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps (19 November 1805 – 7 December 1894) was a French diplomat and Orientalist who later pioneered the Suez Canal, linking the Mediterranean and Red Seas in 1869. This monumental achievement drastically reduced sailing distances and times between Europe and East Asia. Lesseps' family lineage dates back to the late 14th century, with ancestors believed to have been from Spain before settling in France. His father, Mathieu de Lesseps (born in Hamburg on 4 May 1774 and died in Tunis on 28 December 1832), worked in the consular service, which led Ferdinand to join the French diplomatic service as well. He spent many years in the Middle East, where his father held senior diplomatic roles. During his time in Egypt, Lesseps befriended Mohammad Ali Pasha and formed a close relationship with Pasha's fourth son, Mohammad Said, ruler of Egypt from 1854 to 1863. This connection helped him plan the 120-mile canal. He galvanised French patriotism and raised over half of the 200 million francs needed to establish the company, but struggled to attract significant foreign investment from Britain and other countries. Construction of the canal began on 25 April 1859 in Port Said, during Mohammad Said's reign. Throughout its ten-year construction, Britain strongly opposed the project for fear of French dominance over this strategic route to India and East Asia. In 1875, Egyptian ruler Ismail Pasha faced financial difficulties, prompting Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli to purchase 44% of the canal company's shares. The Urabi revolt (1879–1882) gave Britain the opportunity to strengthen its hold over the canal. Colonel Ahmed Urabi led a nationalist uprising aimed at ending foreign control over Egyptian finances, reducing the power of Khedive Tewfik Pasha, and establishing a constitutional government. British troops under General Garnet Wolseley occupied Egypt, exerting military control over the canal zone. A similar pattern occurred in 1956 when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company. Nasser, a former army colonel who overthrew the monarchy in 1952, led the Suez Crisis in November 1956, during which Anglo-French forces seized Port Said for a week. Under pressure from the United States and the United Nations, hostilities, which began on 31 October, ended on 6 November 1956.

The opening of the Suez Canal marked a major turning point in international travel and trade. By crossing the Isthmus of Suez, the canal eliminated the arduous overland journey through Egypt and shortened the sea route between Europe and Asia by thousands of miles. Steamships could now travel directly from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, significantly reducing travel time and costs. This breakthrough revolutionised the movement of people, mail, and goods, enabling regular schedules and more reliable links between continents. It also accelerated the growth of colonial empires and global trading networks, allowing European nations to extend their influence into Asia and Africa more effectively.

By the early 20th century, luxury ocean liners had reached their golden age. These ships were more than mere transport; they were floating palaces that showcased status and advanced technology. In the Eastern Hemisphere, P&O dominated routes to India, China, and Australia. Meanwhile, in the Western Hemisphere, White Star Line, Cunard, and other Continental companies competed fiercely across the Atlantic. These ocean liners epitomised prestige, carrying passengers, mail, and cargo, and connecting global economies and societies. Their grandeur, with lavish dining rooms, orchestras, and luxurious cabins, embodied the peak of modernity and international connectivity.

The mid-20th century marked the rise of aviation. Aircraft began to dominate passenger travel, initially on short routes and later across oceans with the development of flying boats and long-range planes. The late 1950s and 1960s, the jet age, confirmed aircraft's dominance over ocean liners, as planes proved faster, more efficient, and more affordable.

Readers may be interested in a brief history of the "Air Mail Service." With the advent of air travel, mail carriage was revolutionised by offering a faster air service at a higher cost. However, surface mail continued to carry heavy envelopes and packages at a lower postal rate, with cost determined by volume or weight. Because mail was sorted by hand, it was not easy to tell the difference between the two types of envelopes; therefore, to differentiate them, American stationer Benjamin Dahlke designed an envelope in 1927 to improve visibility. He introduced a new concept for air letters when he patented a border layout featuring alternating red and blue parallelogram designs at an angle around the edge of the envelope. This design was soon accepted globally. A further improvement was introduced in 1933 when the "aerogramme" was started by Major Douglas William Gumbley, the Inspector General of Posts and Telegraphs for Iraq. On thin greyish paper, the image of King Faisal I was embossed, and the paper could be written on and folded into an envelope. This format gained popularity in the Second World War, when British troops stationed overseas wrote home quickly and cheaply without bogging down military planes with heavy mail bags. This new means of writing letters on lightweight, all-in-one foldable paper sheets doubled as both the letter and the address section of the envelope, and it also included a printed postage image, indicating the amount with the universally accepted parallelogram designs around the edge of the envelope. It gained international popularity and continued to be used for decades until emails became prevalent. Over several years, printed aerogrammes were gradually discontinued in various countries, until they were no longer used.

Air travel rendered the stately ocean liners of yesteryears obsolete; however, the allure of sea travel endured, evolving into the cruise industry, in which ships became destinations in their own right. Larger, more luxurious cruise ships offered entertainment, fine dining, and exotic itineraries, shifting ocean travel from a necessity to a leisure activity. Cruising has since become a significant industry, drawing millions seeking relaxation and adventure on these floating

resorts. It has opened access to historic ports, tropical islands, and cultural hubs through well-planned voyages.

Over the years, P&O's fleet expanded into specialised shipping divisions (containers, tankers, ferries, cruise, ports, and ancillary businesses). Once a titan of imperial transport, it found it unsustainable to remain independent in this new era. Therefore, in recent decades, under pressure from global events and intense competition, it had to divest some of its assets. P&O Princess Cruises, which had earlier acquired the US-owned Princess Cruises, the German-owned AIDA Cruises, P&O Cruises Australia, and tour operator Princess Tours, merged in 2003 with Florida-based Carnival Corporation & plc, one of the world's largest cruise groups, ensuring its legacy endures in the modern leisure travel industry.

Over nearly two centuries, maritime vessels have evolved significantly. Initially, East Indiaman sailing ships ranged from about 400 to 1,000 Gross Registered Tons (GRT), with crews of 50 to over 150 men, depending on the ship's size and period, and carried passengers, troops, or officials as needed. The next phase saw wooden and later iron-hulled paddle steamships weighing between 1,200 and 1,900 GRT, designed for roughly 100 to 125 passengers. In the early 20th century, luxury liners grew larger, averaging 45,000 to 50,000 GRT, with capacities of 2,450 to 4,500 passengers and crews of 800 to 1,150. Today, the largest cruise ships reach 248,700 GRT and can host 5,600 to 7,600 passengers, with a crew of about 2,350. Throughout history, propulsion began with wind and currents, then transitioned to coal steam engines, followed by furnace oil. Recent developments emphasise environmental sustainability, utilising Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), Marine Gas Oil (MGO), or hybrid systems combining engines, batteries, and fuel cells. These hybrid systems enable dynamic switching between power sources based on operational needs, optimising energy use and reducing emissions.

From the Cape of Good Hope to the overland crossing through Egypt, the Suez Canal's revolution in connectivity, the growth of aviation, and the transformation of ocean travel into a leisure activity, the history of maritime transport mirrors humanity's broader journey to connect, explore, and enjoy the world.

We have come a long way!

Sardar Mohammed Humayun Khan

sardarhumayun@gmail.com

25th August 2026

The following pages are facsimile copies of relevant information from the 1858 P&O Handbook issued to passengers. The complete 16-page Handbook may be viewed/downloaded from the following Australian National Library website:

https://nla.gov.au:443/tarkine/nla.obj-226982603

STEAM FLEET
OF THE
Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company.

		Tonnage.	Horse power.
Between Southampton, Malta, and Alexandria.			
PERA (Screw)	J. Soy	2620	450
INDUS	R. W. Evans	1950	450
RIPON	H. W. Powell	1900	450
COLOMBO (Screw)	J. S. Field	1860	450
Between Calcutta, Madras, Ceylon, Aden, and Suez.			
CANDIA (Screw)	J. Brown	2500	450
NEMESIS (Screw)	J. Paterson	2400	600
BENGAL (Screw)	A. B. Farquhar	2200	470
ALMA (Screw)	G. F. Henry	2160	450
NUBIA (Screw)	T. H. Tronson	2090	450
BENTINCK	C. Kirton (Acting)	2000	520
HINDOSTAN	D. Rennoldson (Acting)	2000	520
AVA (Screw)	J. B. Caldbeck	1600	320
Between Bombay, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Aden, and Suez.			
POTTINGER	J. R. Stead	1350	450
OTTAWA (Screw)	J. G. Gribble (Acting)	1274	200
SINGAPORE	G. A. Grainger	1200	470
GANGES	J. Bowen	1200	470
BOMBAY (Screw)	W. Curling (Acting)	1200	270
MADRAS (Screw)	H. Down	1200	270
PEKIN	G. C. Burne	1200	400
ADEN (Screw)	I. Bernard	982	210
NORNA (Screw)	G. S. Brooks (Acting)	970	230
CADIZ (Screw)	A. R. Aldham	816	220
CHUSAN (Screw)	H. W. King (Acting)	700	80
Between Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Canton, &c.			
FORMOSA (Screw)	J. M. Rogers	670	150
LADY MARY WOOD	H. Brown (Acting)	550	260
SHANGHAI (Screw)	J. W. Townsend (Acting)	540	100
CANTON	W. Soames	350	150
Between Hong Kong and Manilla.			
GRANADA (Screw)	W. J. Tregear	678	174
RAJAH (Screw)	W. F. Norie	350	80
Between Marseilles, Malta, and Alexandria.			
EUXINE	T. Jamieson	1160	400
VECTIS	W. H. Roberts	780	400
VALETTA	R. Roberts	770	400
Between Southampton, Vigo, Oporto, Lisbon, Cadiz, and Gibraltar.			
SULTAN (Screw)	N. Cook	1120	200
TAGUS	E. Christian	800	280
ALHAMBRA (Screw)	J. K. Joy	720	140
Government Transport Service, &c.			
SIMLA (Screw)	E. Cooper	2440	630
PRECURSOR		1800	500
ORIENTAL	A. Weston	1800	420
MALTA	J. W. Purchase	1200	450
AZOF (Screw)	N. T. Skottowe	700	180
MANILLA (Screw)	R. S. Burn	646	60
SIR J. JEEJEBHOY		130	30

Conditions, Regulations, and General Information.

PASSENGERS.

The Rates of Passage Money will be proportionately increased according to the class of accommodation required.

The Rates of Passage Money include Stewards' Fees, Table, Wines, &c., for First-class Passengers. Bedding, Linen, and all requisite Cabin Furniture are provided in the Steamers at the Company's expense, together with the attendance of experienced male and female Servants.

The expense of Transit through Egypt is also included in the Rates of Passage Money to India and China, with the exception of Hotel expenses, and also of Extra Baggage, Wines, Spirits, Beer, and Soda Water, all of which the Egyptian Transit Administration charge for separately.

Servants soliciting gratuities will be dismissed from the Company's service.

Half the amount of Passage Money, when the passage exceeds £20, is required to be paid on securing passage, and the balance a fortnight before embarkation.

Passengers not embarking after engaging passage, to forfeit the deposit of half the amount of Passage Money.

In case, however, of a Passenger being unavoidably prevented from availing himself of a passage at the period for which it is taken, a transfer of the passage can be effected to a subsequent Steamer, on sufficient notice being given, without forfeiture of any portion of the deposit paid, and accommodation will be allotted as similar as circumstances will permit.

In remitting a sum of money to the Company on account of passage, if by Cheque it is recommended, for the sake of security, to write across the Cheque the name of the Company's Bankers, "*Messrs. Williams, Deacon, and Co.;*" if by Order, Letter of Credit, or otherwise, it should be in favour of the "*Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.*"

The Company's Steamers sail from and return to Southampton.

Passengers should embark at Southampton not later than noon on the day of sailing.

Passengers must comply with the regulations established on board the Steamers for general comfort and safety.

No Berth or Cabin is to be occupied by a Passenger without application to the Agent on shore, or to the Purser on board. It is to be understood that a Passenger occupying a Cabin of two or more berths, on the departure of the Vessel (unless he shall have paid an additional sum for its exclusive occupation), is not to object to the vacant Berth or Berths being filled up at the intermediate Ports, if required.

Railway Trains from the Waterloo Bridge Station, to Southampton, in the Morning, at 6 (Parl.), 8, 9.40, (10.15 mail), (11 o'clock Express). Afternoon, 1, 3 (Express), and 5 o'clock. Evening, 30 minutes past 8 o'clock—mail. Sunday Trains, morning, at 9.15, and 10.15. Afternoon, 5 o'clock. Evening, 30 minutes past 8 o'clock—mail. Passengers should be at the Station at least a quarter of an hour before the Trains start.

BAGGAGE.

The attention of PASSENGERS by the OVERLAND ROUTE to and from India, China, &c., is respectfully requested to the under-noted Regulations in reference to Baggage; much trouble and loss is occasionally caused by their neglect, and the Egyptian Transit Administration will not accept any responsibility unless they are strictly complied with:—

All Baggage should be addressed in Paint, in full, and in addition Passengers will be supplied on Board the Steamers with printed "Destination Labels," which should be affixed to all Packages, however trifling, before arrival at Alexandria or Suez.

The Transit Administration will not forward any Package of Baggage exceeding 80 lb. in weight, and measuring more than—length 3 ft., breadth 1 ft. 3 in., depth 1 ft. 2 in., with the Passengers to Suez. Non-compliance with this rule will cause a fortnight's detention in Egypt, to such Packages as exceed these dimensions.

All Baggage should be packed in Leather Portmanteaux or Trunks of the regulation size, with addresses in full painted on the top and end, and fastened securely with case locks, padlocks and leather straps being liable to damage or removal. The Transit Administration will not be responsible for the safe conveyance of deal cases, bandboxes, carpet bags, or other unsuitable and insecure Packages.

Packages containing Jewellery, Plate, or other valuables, must be specially booked, and Freight and Transit Duty paid thereon.

Packages containing Parcels, Specie or Merchandise, are liable to seizure and confiscation in Egypt, and to detention for Freight by the Agents of the Company.

First-class Passengers are allowed 3 *cwt. of personal* Baggage free of Freight, and Children (above three years) and Servants 1½ cwt. each.

A Passenger taking a whole Cabin will be entitled to take in the Steamers, free of Freight, 4½ cwt.; and a married couple, paying for reserved accommodation, will be entitled to take 9 cwt.

The charge for conveyance of extra Baggage, should there be room in the Vessel, will be at the rate of £1 per cwt. between Southampton and Malta, or Alexandria; £2 per cwt. between Suez and India, and £3 per cwt. between Suez, the Straits, and China.

Passengers for India and China will have to pay the Egyptian Transit Administration in Egypt 14s. per cwt. for conveyance of Baggage through, should it exceed, for First-class Passengers, 3 cwt. each, and Children and Servants 1½ cwt. each.

The Company cannot engage to take any excess of Baggage over the regulated allowance, unless shipped at Southampton on the day before sailing, and Freight paid thereon.

All Baggage for the Ports of the Mediterranean, India, and China, must be shipped not later than noon on the day previous to sailing, except Carpet Bags or Hat Boxes. All other Baggage received on board on the day of sailing will be considered as extra Baggage, and charged Freight as such.

The Insurance of Baggage can be effected on very moderate terms.

Passengers embarking at Marseilles for India and China, can have 3 cwt. of their Baggage conveyed by the Steamer from Southampton free of charge; all in excess of that weight will be charged for at the rates mentioned above.

The Baggage of Passengers proceeding from Marseilles to Bombay must be shipped by the Steamer leaving Southampton a fortnight previous to the date upon which Passengers intend to embark at Marseilles; otherwise its timely arrival at Alexandria, to accompany them to Bombay, cannot be ensured, except by the more expensive mode of taking it through France.

Passengers embarking at Marseilles for Malta and Alexandria, can also have 3 cwt. of their Baggage conveyed by the Steamer from Southampton at the rate of 10s. per cwt.; the excess to be paid for at the rate of £1 per cwt.

Passengers outwards, proceeding *viâ* Trieste, and joining the Steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Company at Suez, and Passengers homewards who have been conveyed to Suez in the Peninsular and Oriental Company's Steamers, can ship their

Baggage by the Company's vessels from Southampton to Alexandria, and *vice versâ*, subject to the following charge, payable in advance:—

For the regulated allowance of 3 cwt., 10s. per cwt.
For any excess over 3 cwt., 20s. per cwt.
} Exclusive of the charge for transport made by the Transit Administration of Egypt.

Passengers not proceeding by the Peninsular and Oriental Company's Steamers, but shipping their Baggage from Southampton, will be charged at the rate of 10s. per cwt. between Southampton and Malta or Alexandria.

N.B.—The Baggage of Passengers proceeding viâ *Trieste must be shipped at Southampton so as to ensure its arrival at Alexandria a fortnight in advance of the Passengers to whom it may belong. Non-compliance with this regulation is likely to involve loss or detention of the Baggage in Egypt.*

Passengers requiring information respecting their Baggage during the voyage will learn, on application to the Commander, the name of the Officer in charge of same.

Baggage can be occasionally had up from the baggage-room during the passage by application to the Officer in charge.

No Trunks, Boxes, or Portmanteaux allowed in the Saloon or Cabins.

Notice.—*All Parties are requested to take notice that the Company do not hold themselves liable for detention or delay of Passengers arising from accident or from extraordinary or unavoidable circumstances or from circumstances arising out of or connected with the employment of the Company's vessels in Her Majesty's Mail Service and that the Company do not hold themselves liable for damage to or loss or detention of Passengers' Baggage.*

C. W. HOWELL, SECRETARY.

NAMES OF THE COMPANY'S AGENTS.

AT HOME.

SOUTHAMPTON, *J. R. Engledue, Supert.*

MANCHESTER, *W. Lodington*, 55, *Cross-street.*

LIVERPOOL, *Laird, Fletcher, & Co.*, 23, *Castle-street.*

ABROAD.

ADEN ..... *L. Thomas.*
ALEXANDRIA .... *T. H. Holton.*
BOMBAY ..... *J. Ritchie.*
CADIZ ..... *A. de Zulueta.*
CALCUTTA ..... *H. P. Lovell.*
CANTON .....
CEYLON (GALLE) .. *T. H. Twynam.*
GIBRALTAR..... *W. J. Smith.*
HONG KONG ..... *M. Fischer (Acting).*
LISBON ..... *A. Vanzeller.*
MADRAS ..... *R. Franck.*
MALTA ..... *J. Davidson.*
MANILLA ..... *Matia Menchacatorre & Co.*
MARSEILLES ... *R. Gower & Co.*
OPORTO ..... *A. Miller & Co.*
PARIS ..... *Pritchard & Monneron.*
PENANG ..... *Brown & Co.*
SHANGHAI ..... *E. Warden.*
SINGAPORE..... *H. T. Marshall.*
SUEZ ..... *G. West, H.B.M. Vice-Cons.*
VIGO ..... *Menendez & Barcena.*

AGENTS FOR THE ADEN AND MAURITIUS LINE.

MAURITIUS ..... *Maximillien Menon and Co.*

INDIA AND CHINA.

Passengers leaving Southampton by the Company's Steamers on the 4th and 20th of the month, for Aden, Ceylon, Madras, Calcutta, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, or Manilla, arrive at Gibraltar about the 9th and 25th of the month, and, after staying there, say twelve hours, proceed to Malta, at which port they remain about the same time; they then leave for Alexandria, arriving there, under ordinary circumstances, in about thirteen days from Southampton.

At Suez, Passengers embark, by Steam Tender, on board one of the Company's Steamers, which leave about the 19th and 4th of the month, arriving at Aden about the 25th and 10th, at Point de Galle, Ceylon, about the 5th and 21st, Madras about the 9th and 25th, and finally at Calcutta about the 13th and 29th of the following month.

Passengers for the Straits, China and Manilla are now conveyed by the Steamers leaving Southampton on the 4th and 20th, and Marseilles on the 11th and 27th of the month.

At Point de Galle (Ceylon) they are transferred into a Steamer leaving for China about the 5th and 21st, and arriving at Penang about the 11th and 27th, Singapore the 13th and 29th, and Hong Kong the 24th and 9th of the following month.

At the latter Port Passengers for Shanghai and Manilla are transferred into Branch Steamers, which reach their destination in about five days.

The expense of Transit through Egypt is paid by the Company to the Egyptian Transit Administration, and included in the rates of Passage Money.

BOMBAY.

Passengers for Bombay are conveyed by the Company's Steamers, which leave Marseilles on the 4th and 19th of every month. These vessels proceed direct to Malta, remain there about 6 hours, and then continue their voyage to Alexandria. Passengers are conveyed through Egypt as pointed out at page 10. At Suez they embark on board one of the Company's Steamers, which leave about the 12th and 27th of the month; arrive at Aden about the 18th and 2nd; and reach Bombay about the 27th and 11th of the month, or in about 23 days from the date of departure from Marseilles.

Passengers can also proceed to Bombay from Southampton on the 20th of January, by remaining about a week either at Malta or in Egypt, at their own expense, and joining the Bombay Steamer at Suez, about the 12th of the following month, as already stated.

NOTE.—*Commencing in February, it is the intention of the Company to place Steamers between Southampton and Alexandria in correspondence with the Suez and Bombay Line. These Vessels will be despatched from Southampton about the 11th and 27th of every month. See periodical notices of the actual dates of departure.*

TRANSIT THROUGH EGYPT.

Passengers are conveyed through Egypt by the Transit Administration of his Highness the Pacha.

The Railway is now completed to No. 12 Station in the Desert, 30 miles from Suez, and the transit through Egypt can be accomplished in about 20 hours, including sufficient time for refreshment; viz.:—

From Alexandria to Cairo, per Rail	7 hours
Time for Refreshments at Cairo	3 „
From Cairo to No. 12 Station, per Rail	4 „
Time for Refreshments at No. 12 Station	2 „
From No. 12 Station to Suez, in Vans	4 „
	20 hours

Under ordinary circumstances, however, the arrangements for the conveyance of the passengers through Egypt will be so conducted as to allow of a night's rest at Cairo.

Note.—WEIGHT AND SIZE OF PACKAGES OF BAGGAGE.—*The Transit Administration will not be responsible for the timely arrival at Suez or Alexandria, as the case may be, of any Packages of Baggage which shall exceed the prescribed limits, see page 7.*

NOTE.—*The dates of Sailings and Arrivals of the Company's Steamers on the Outward and Homeward voyages, to and from the several Ports, will be found at pages 4 and 5.*

For Rates of Passage Money to India and China, see next page.

RATES OF PASSAGE MONEY,

Including the amount paid by the Company to the Egyptian Transit Administration, for conveyance of Passengers through Egypt—viz., £10 for 1st Class, and £5 for Children under 10 years of age, and Passengers' Servants.

FROM ENGLAND TO	ADEN.	MAURITIUS.	BOMBAY.	CEYLON.	MADRAS.	CALCUTTA.	PENANG.	SINGAPORE	HONG KONG.	SHANGHAI.	MANILLA.
GENTLEMEN OR LADIES TRAVELLING SINGLY. *Gentlemen occupying a Berth in a Cabin, with two or three others, on the Lower Deck. Ladies, if booked sufficiently early, a Berth in a Cabin, with two or three others, on the Upper Deck*	£70	£100	£95	£95	£100	£105	£105	£110	£130	£150	£150
MARRIED COUPLES, *occupying a Reserved Cabin on the Main Deck*	200	240	240	240	250	270	270	290	335	375	375
CHILDREN WITH THE PARENT—*3 years and under 10*	35	50	45	45	50	50	50	55	60	70	70
ONE CHILD *under 3 years (no Berth provided)**	Free.	Free.	Free.	Free.	Free.	Free.	Free.	Free.	Free.	Free	Free.
SERVANTS—*European* In Fore Cabin	35	50	45	45	50	50	50	55	60	70	70
„ *Native* ... In Fore Cabin	20	50	25	25	30	30	30	40	45	50	50

* Except £5 Transit Expenses through Egypt, if above 2 years.

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To view the complete 16-page P&O Handbook, published in 1858, click the National Library of Australia website:
https://nla.gov.au:443/tarkine/nla.obj-226982603

Sardar Mohammed Humayun Khan has over 50 years' experience in logistics, transport, trade facilitation, and consultancy. After retiring in 1995 as a senior director with Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co. of Pakistan and Volkart Pakistan, he founded Pegasus International, advising public and private organisations. He consulted for the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Government of Pakistan, ECO, UNCTAD, and USAID-Pakistan Trade Project. He helped establish ARUP and contributed to urban transport planning in Punjab. Active in CILT, IMMTA, and Rotary, he is now retired in Lahore, writing historical works and enjoying family life with his wife, children, and grandchildren.

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