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NOMADISM IN ETHIOPIA

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The object of this paper is to present a picture of nomadism in Ethiopia and its relation to the malaria problem of the country.

As nomadism is connected in the main with pastoral life, a description is given of the people living this type of life within the country.

The Country and its Physical Environment

Ethiopia is a vast and rugged country with tremendous variations in topography. The central highlands extend from the north to the south of the country, from the Red Sea coast to Lake Rudolf. The altitude of the plateau area, which lies mostly between 2100 - 5000 m., covers a major part of the country. The plateau itself is not uniform but is broken by tremendous gorges and valleys. The perspective in the northern part of the country is one of mountain masses with barren peaks exceeding 3000 m., of extraordinary configurations, with flat topped conical peaks abruptly interrupted by deep gorges and plains through which flow great and small rivers.

In the northern part of the plateau, the ancient, historical and independent Kingdom of Abyssinia existed 2000 years ago and embraced parts of the present provinces of Eritrea, Tigre, Gojjam, Shoa and Begemdir. In the west of the country, the plateau drops and the rivers Takazze, Omo and Abai (Blue Nile) and others flow towards the west and south-west to neighbouring countries. In the north-east the plateau falls abruptly to the arid Danakil plain and to the Red Sea. The highlands of Ethiopia, due to the high altitude, enjoy a temperate climate, but experience heavy rains during the months of June to September.

The country is divided in two by the Rift Valley which extends from Tanganyika to the Red Sea. Along the floor of the Rift Valley are numerous lakes, Abaye, Shala, Langano, Zwai, etc. and part of the river Awash. To the east and south of the Rift Valley loom the central massif of Arussi and the mountains of Harrar Province. The mountain ranges drop slowly towards the Ogaden and Somalia. In the lowlands in the east and west of Ethiopia, where the plateau terminates, the climate is both hot and oppressive.

The People

The wide topographical variations in the land with its huge mountainous areas and deep gorges form numerous natural barriers. It is remarkable how the people of the country achieved and maintained their unity throughout the centuries in spite of such a hostile environment.

Originally the people living in the highlands were of Hamitic or Cushitic stock and included the Somali and Danakil peoples and the tribes of the Nubian desert to the north-west. In very early historic times, Arab tribes from Southern Arabia occupied the northern part of the plateau and mixed with the indigenous inhabitants. With them they brought their culture from their land of origin, their Semitic language, and a written alphabet which, though it has undergone changes, is still the written script of the country.

These highland peoples after their fusion with the southern Arabian tribes had the custom of building their villages on elevated points on the plateau. They were good agriculturists and knew the use of the plough. They were also conversant with irrigation methods as practised in southern Arabia.

In the southwest, the infiltration of Nilotic tribes modified the racial type and the language of that part of the country.

The present day inhabitants of Ethiopia are made up of the following peoples. The Amharas who inhabit the central highlands are the dominant tribe in Ethiopia. The Falashes who live on the north-western edge of the plateau belong to the same stock as the Amharas but follow the Judaic religion, probably as a result of contacts with Arabian states before Moslem and Christian times. The Galla who are of Hamitic origin appeared in Ethiopia as invaders in the 16th century - some authorities believe that the Galla migrations commenced from Somalia from the 12th century (G. Huntingford). The Galla make up a large element in modern Ethiopia and are the predominant people in the south and west. (See Maps 1 and 2). In Shoa and Wallo provinces they have become assimilated with the Amharas to such an extent that it is difficult to classify them in any one group. In the lowlands and deserts to the east are found the Somali and Danakil (Afar) who are of Hamitic origin. In the 7th and 8th centuries they embraced the Moslem faith. They are almost exclusively nomads or semi-nomads.

Other peoples of uncertain origin also inhabit parts of Ethiopia. In the west the "Shankallas" are Nilotics or of negroid origin. Pockets of negroid tribes are found along the rivers among the Somalis in the east. Guraghas, whose origin is obscure, are part Christian and part Moslem and inhabit the country south of Addis Abeba, and are employed as manual workers in the capital.

De Castro estimated in 1936 that the proportion of the various ethnic groups in the country was as follows:

Amharas	32.6%
Galla	42.7%
Sidama	10.1%
Somali	6.1%
Nilotics and others	6.6%
Afar (Danakil)	2.0%
	<u>100.0%</u>

The total population of the country is estimated at 17.4 millions (I E G estimates 1957).

The foregoing outline of the different groups living in the country gives a picture of the many different patterns of life to be found. Each race has its main cultural features, its own social organization and tribal structure and its own economy. The Gallas, Somalis and Danakils are however the main ethnic groups involved in Ethiopia in nomadism.

The Galla - Main Economical Features.

The Galla are fundamentally a pastoral people and remain so to this time in the southern lowlands of Arussi and the Boran. The eastern Galla tribes practise agriculture alongside cattle raising, forming an intermediary between the sedentary Ethiopians of the highlands and the wandering tribes in the eastern deserts. Many Gallas own very large herds of cattle and in Arussi some possess more than 3,000 head of cattle. With the exception of some established villages, they live mainly in scattered dwellings, as do the bulk of rural dwellers, and the traveller may gain the impression that the country is deserted which is far from being the case. Besides cattle, the Galla possess large numbers of horses, especially in Arussi. In historic times the Galla were known as a "nation of horsemen". Other stock reared are sheep, goats, donkeys and mules.

In view of the large numbers of livestock kept, there evolved the periodic movement from the permanent habitations in search of good pasture land for the animals. In the Awash valley where the WHO Pilot Project is established it has been observed that considerable numbers of dwellings are deserted during the rainy season. The inhabitants with their cattle move up to 50 to 100 kilometres to newly formed swampy areas or to other areas where grazing is more abundant. They settle under rudely constructed huts made of stakes and covered with straw or grass for periods of two to three months and return in October and November after the rains to their permanent habitations.

Agriculture

The common crops are cereals and legumes and often potatoes, onions, coffee, sugar cane, cotton, garlic, pepper and citrons are grown. Aromatic plants are grown in the west.

The main foods are meat, milk and cereals. The diet is well varied with other dairy products and condiments; vegetables and fruit are not very common however.

Housing

The Galla tukul, or round hut, which is the main form of dwelling, consists of the following types. A circular hut with an acute-angled conical roof and a verandah, or with eaves and without verandah. A circular tukul with an obtuse angled roof with or without a verandah. This is a large tukul and has a less steep roof pitch. It often has an inner concentric wall consisting of upright poles, and between the two walls there is a circular narrow space 0.70 to 1.0 m. in depth (Shoa). There is a more carefully constructed type with an average diameter of 5 m. with a centre post of a height of 5 to 6 m. (Jimma). A third type has walls and a roof on the same plan but with a straight or curved roof.

The circular walls are constructed of thin poles stuck in the ground and tied with horizontal cross branches. The whole is plastered with mud or cow dung, but in many cases is left unplastered. With such types of surfaces consisting of poles and branches it is difficult to check the effectiveness of insecticides with bioassay tests.

Religion and Pilgrimage.

A proportion of the Galla are Christians, others Moslems and an ever decreasing number are pagans. In view of this variety of beliefs, there is a considerable diversity of religious rites performed. There are a number of sacred sites in the areas inhabited by Gallas which are subject to pilgrimages. On Mount Zuquala, 30 kilometres south of Addis Ababa, there is a holy place sacred to a pagan saint. With the adoption of Christianity the cult has deviated towards the Christian church and an annual pilgrimage is made each October to the spot. The pilgrimage coincides with the malaria transmission season, and though the site on the mountain is not malarious, the surrounding approaches are subject to serious malaria epidemics.

There are many sacred places in Shoa and in the western provinces, but the pilgrimages connected with them are of a local character.

Two sacred centres, which are of importance and which attract pilgrims from remote areas, are the holy sites of Abba Muda and the tomb of Sheikh Husain. The tomb of Sheikh Husain is situated in the southern part of the country, some 90 kilometres north of Magalo near the Webo Shebali river. It is a religious centre which grew up before the development of Harrar as a seat of religion. The tomb of Sheikh Husain is in Arussi and borders on Ogaden on the trade route from the coast to the interior of Ethiopia. It is reckoned that several thousands of pilgrims visit these religious centres, mainly on foot, each year (Map 3).

The Somali - The Region and Population

The Somali inhabit the horn of Africa and are contained to the west and south by Ethiopia and Kenya, and to the east by the Indian Ocean. In the north they neighbour with the Danakil tribes, on the south with the Warda Galla, and on the west by the different tribes of the Ethiopian plateau.

Politically the Somali people are residents of French Somaliland, British Somaliland, the U.N. Trustee Territory of Somalia, and of south-eastern Ethiopia.

The climate in general is hot and dry especially in French Somaliland, but is more temperate in those districts extending on the Ethiopian plateau and along the rivers Webe Shebelle and Juba which extend into Somalia (See Map 1).

The Somali are mainly a nomadic and pastoral people of Islamic faith. Animal husbandry forms the basis of their economy. In the north, arable land is very restricted and permanent cultivation in these barren areas is impossible. Camels form the bulk of the livestock though in the south camels are to a degree replaced by cattle and cultivation is practised along the rivers. The Somali population is estimated as follows:

French Somaliland	(Deschamps)	25,000
British Somaliland	(Hunt)	640,000
Ethiopian Provinces		350,000
Somalia	(Italian Sources)	1,436,706 ***

The Somali have a vast system of segmented groups. In the Somali society the social relation is expressed genealogically. The tribe is a highly segmented group with its own traditions, name and tribal characteristics and tribal territory. The principal Somali tribes are the Darod, the Ishak, the Dir, the Pre-Hawiya and the Hawiya, the Sab and the Rahanwein (See Map 3). All these tribes are nomads except the Sab in the south who are sedentary. In the Ogaden there are a number of settled negroid groups who are established permanently along the rivers.

Main Economic Features

Livestock is the basis of the Somali economy, even among those who are sedentary. They depend on milk and dairy products from camels, cattle, sheep and goats, for their diet and sustenance. In the north the camel is of the most importance. In addition to its being a beast of burden, it is able to tolerate the dry, harsh, environment and the lack of water. Agriculture is practised in the south; an important feature of the Somali economy is the production of spices.

*** This figure includes the Bantu population. The autochthonous population is estimated at 1,275,584.

Types of Dwelling

There are two main types of housing. The first is used by the nomads and is a movable round hut of simple construction consisting of a framework of branches bound together and covered by a compactly woven water-tight straw matting. The interior height varies between 1.50 and 2.50 m. It is collapsible and easily transported on the back of a camel.

The second is the more permanent hut of the semi-nomadic cultivator living along the rivers. It is a circular hut, rather more round than conical. The walls are formed of upright branches bound tightly together. The roof is also constructed of branches and is reinforced on the inside by a wooden disc. The door is about 1.0 m. in height and the total height of the hut is from 1.80 to 3.0 m. The walls are usually plastered with mud or dung.

Nomadism.

The Somali tribes are based around a number of home wells. During the dry season the tribes concentrate around the home wells and water points which they share with friendly tribes. After the big or heavy rains from end of March to end of May, they migrate to new pastures. The maximum extension of this movement corresponds usually over the whole tribal grazing area. As a rule each tribe has its own grazing area defined by the position of the home wells or watering points, the movements of neighbouring tribes, and the natural barriers. The tribes often travel long distances from their base. Hunt enumerates the causes and factors affecting the time and the extent of the movement in the following order:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Good Grazing. | - Dependant on the seasonal rainfall. |
| 2. Water. | - Dependant on the seasonal rainfall. |
| 3. Salt-grazing or "licks". | - Regularly periodic. |
| 4. Transport, availability of burden-camels. | - Personal. |
| 5. Temperature. | - Seasonal. |
| 6. Inter-tribal war. | - Variable. |
| 7. Natural barriers to migration. | - Permanent. |
| 8. Stock-diseases. | - Irregular. |
| 9. Human diseases. | - Irregular. |
| 10. Administrative direction. | - Irregular. |

At the onset of the main rainy season in April and May (occasionally from March - the Gu rains), the tribesmen move off in search of the best pastureland. When they find good green grazing, they dig pits in which is collected rain water. If the rains are sufficiently extensive they may be able to remain in the Haud through the dry season up to August and September. In a good year they may be able to remain even to November or December. In general however, when the rain pools in the Haud dry up, the tribesmen are compelled to return back to their home wells.

The construction of cement water tanks in recent times along the borders of the Protectorate and Ethiopia supply a source of water for tribesmen during the dry season. All these water collections favour mosquito breeding and may constitute a major health problem.

It appears that the major part of these movements are between British Somaliland and Ethiopia in the so-called "reserved grazing areas" of the Haud (See Map 3). Most of the nomadic population come from the Protectorate to the Haud. After the 1954 agreement between the Imperial Ethiopian Government and the Government of the Protectorate, these movements have been well controlled and inter-tribal quarrels and fights kept to a minimum.

The Danakils

The Danakils inhabit the country between the Dire Dawa - Djibouti railway in the south and the Buri peninsula in Eritrea on the Red Sea (See Map 3). The country is very arid and consists largely of desert, salt lakes and lava outcrops. The only fertile areas are along the river Awash and around Lake Assa. The Danakil are very closely related to the Somali and the Saho and their language is practically identical. The Saho tribes occupy an area to the north-west of the Danakil. The majority inhabit Eritrea and are mainly living a pastoral life. The estimated population is 48,000. (Races and Tribes of Eritrea, 1943). The Danakil of Ethiopia are estimated to have a population of 88,000 (Nadel, Trimmingham). They are mainly Moslem by religion and are almost exclusively pastoral in economy. The Danakil tribal unit is smaller than that of the Somali. They possess large herds of camels, sheep and goats. They make seasonal periodic movements, depending on the rainfall, in search of grazing for their live stock.

The Effect of Nomadism

The nomad problem is most serious along the borders of the Somaliland Protectorate and the northern border regions of Somalia and in the south-eastern areas of Ethiopia.

The fact that a constant number of unknown malarial carriers cross the borders over a distance of more than 750 kilometres, testifies to the seriousness of the problem.

The number of population participating in these movements cannot be defined exactly as it is dependant on a number of factors, some of which have been enumerated in this paper. However, it is certain that many tens of thousands are involved.

During a recent short survey along the Somaliland Protectorate border, the writer formed the opinion that the problem will require careful planning on an international basis with the participation of all parties concerned. Larviciding in conjunction with antimalaria drugs might play a preponderant role.

Conclusion

Nomadism is largely connected with pastoral life in Ethiopia. Although some pilgrimages are observed within the country, the main problem is related to the large movements of stock breeders. The pastoral Galla tribes are semi-nomadic, but real nomadism is observed among the Danakils and especially among the Somalis in the eastern part of the country.

A malaria eradication programme including the areas occupied by these peoples would have to be carefully planned on an international basis.

Summary

A brief description of the country is given. The people have been described with special emphasis on the main features of life among the pastoral Galla, the Danakils and Somali nomads. Of these nomadic peoples the problem appears more serious among the Somalis, as their movements, take place between the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, British Somaliland and Somalia.

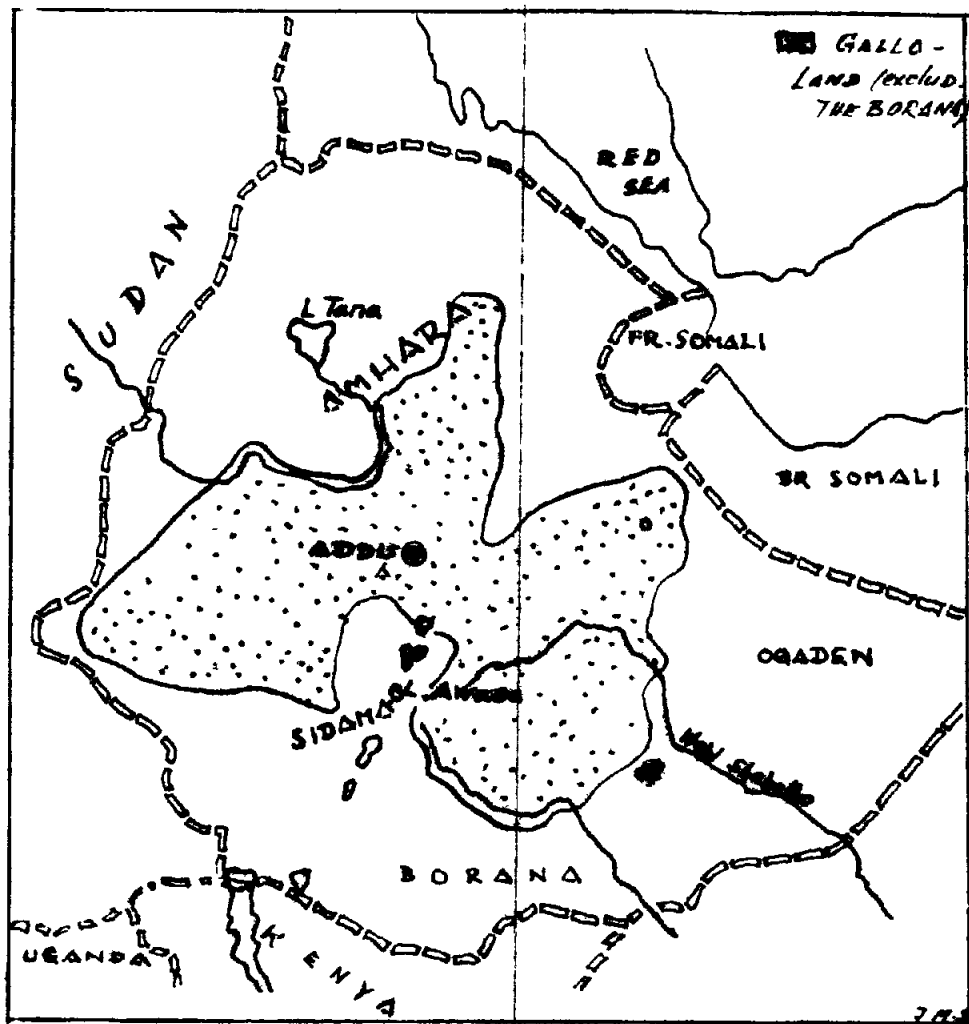
A country-wide anti-malaria programme would have to give serious consideration to this fact.

Acknowledgements

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GALLA LAND IN RELATION TO ETHIOPIA
(EXCLUDING THE BORANA)

Boundaries (1935)
0 100 300 miles

MAP 2

Massawa
Asmara

Adigrat

(DANAKIL) SOMALI LAND

AFAR

FRENCH

AMHARA

Addis Ababa

Awash

Sheik Hussein Tomb

ANZIYA

MALINGUA

GUUNDABA

BERI BIRBI

BERI BIRBI

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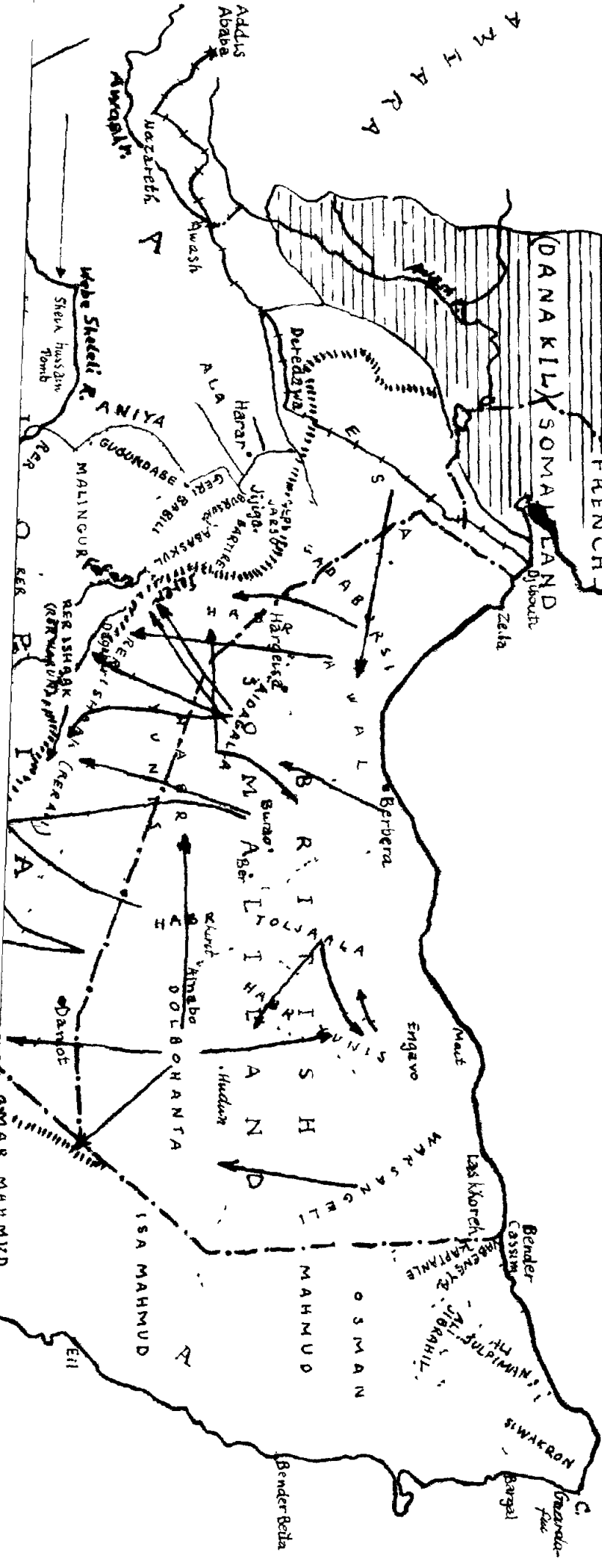
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TRIBAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SOMALI, DANAKIL AND SAHO

Scale 1/5 000 000

Legend:

- International Boundary
- Limit of Wet Grazing area
- Danakil
- Saho
- Tribal movements
- Notes

