



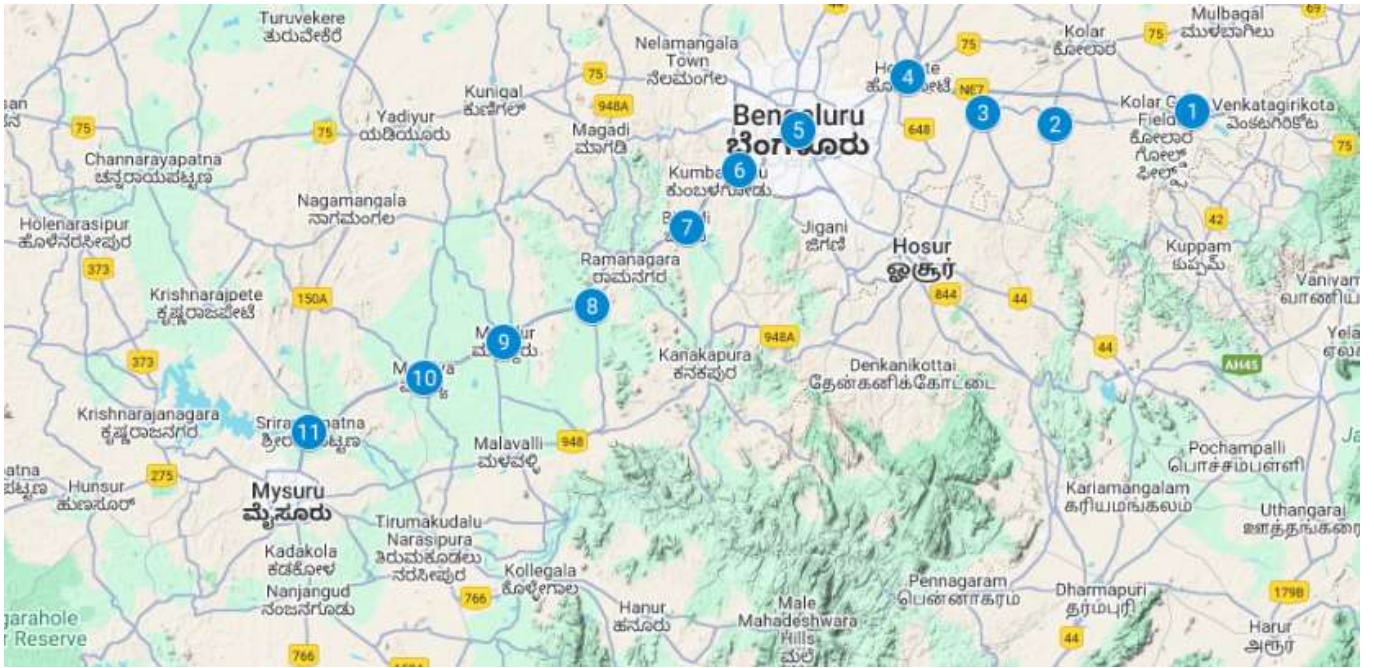
200 YEARS LATER
RETRACING FRANCIS BUCHANAN'S JOURNEY OF 1800-01
THROUGH PARTS OF SOUTHERN INDIA

Chapter I: Journey from Madras to Seringapatam (Srirangapatna)

From Madras to Conjeveram, Arcot, Vellore, Paligonda, Satgudam, Pedda Naikena
Durga, Venkatagery, Baydamungulum, Waluru, Catcolli, Taycolum, Bangalore, and Seringapatna
(Karnataka region Only)

SHIVA M
PROJECT FIELD RESEARCHER

FOUNDATION TO AID INDUSTRIAL RECOVERY (FAIR)
BANGALORE, INDIA



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Retracing Francis Buchanan's Journey Through Karnataka

In **1800-1801**, the Scottish physician and botanist **Francis Buchanan** embarked on a **comprehensive survey of South India**, meticulously documenting its **agriculture, trade, natural resources, industries, and inhabitants**. His journey provides **one of the earliest detailed accounts** of Karnataka's socio-economic and cultural landscape during the early colonial period.

Since I am focusing solely on the **Karnataka region**, this chapter begins at the **Karnataka-Andhra Pradesh border from Bethamangala** and spans across the **entire state**, covering both the **Canara and Mysore regions**. My journey follows **Buchanan's original route**, revisiting the **places he documented** while capturing insights into the **past and present landscape**.

Key Themes Explored in the Journey

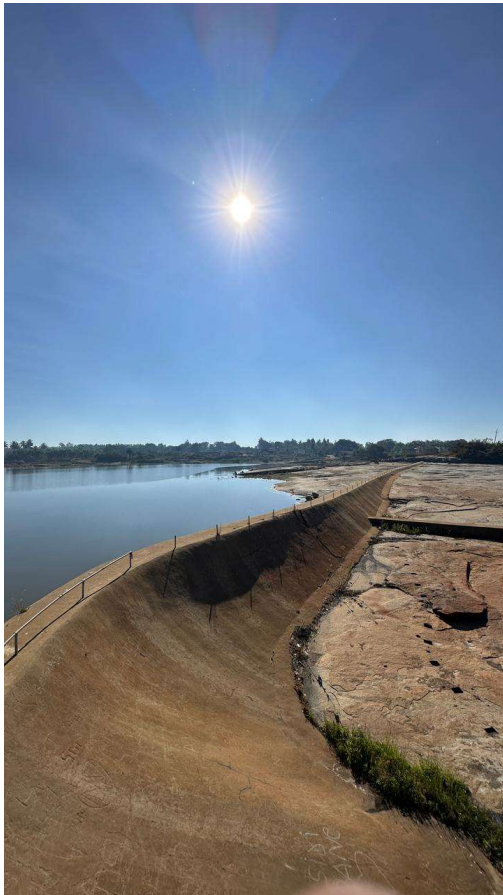
- **Cattle** and their role in agriculture and trade
- **Agriculture**, with a focus on traditional and evolving practices
- **Commodities** like **pepper, cardamom, and other produce**
- **Mines & quarries**, revealing the region's rich geological history
- **Manufacturing**, tracing the industries Buchanan observed
- **Inhabitants**, their livelihoods, and cultural transformations
- **Forests** and their economic and ecological significance
- **Marine-related activities**, including fishing and coastal trade

By examining these aspects, I aim to bridge **Buchanan's historical observations** with the **modern landscape**, providing a comparative study of **Karnataka's transformation over two centuries**.

Bethamangala (anglicized: Baydamungulum)

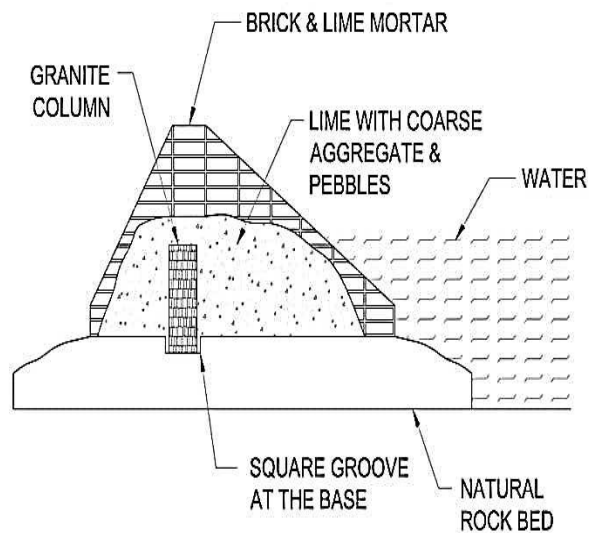


On 16th March 2025, I visited Bethamangala, a town near the Andhra Pradesh border, located 26 km from Kolar and 11 km from KGF. This place holds historical significance, primarily due to the Bethamangala Kere, an ancient and vast reservoir. The Palar River flows into this reservoir, with a masonry dam built to regulate its waters.



According to the Gazetteer, this large tank was initially constructed during the Nolamba period in 890 A.D., as confirmed by inscriptions. Historically, Bethamangala was also referred to as Vijayadithyamangala and Polaramangala, based on ancient records.

You can still witness the ancient masonry work remains, though it has been partially modified with newer structures.



Left to Right: 1. Remnants of ancient masonry work, partially modified with newer structures; 2. Sketch depicting masonry techniques from ancient times.



Clockwise from Top Left: 1 & 2. Goat herds near Bethamangala Lake; 3 & 4. Wild palm grove at the lake's edge, though no toddy tapping is practiced here, Bethamangala.



Nearby stands the old KGF Water Works, built by the British and inaugurated by the erstwhile Maharaja of Mysore, Krishna Raja Wodeyar IV.

This unit was commissioned under the leadership of Major A.J. Lotbiniere, with Chief Engineer W.M. Hutchin and Engineer J.J. Whitelee providing technical expertise. The foundation stone, still visible today, bears their names.

This unit was established to supply drinking water to Bethamangala and the mining town of KGF. However, the Palar River downstream from Bethamangala Dam is now in a deteriorated state, filled with trash and garbage, and in urgent need of maintenance.



A traditional well with outer walls built using locally available granite stones is now equipped with an electric pump for water extraction.



The soil in this region is deep red, locally known as "Kemmanu" in Kannada, making it highly suitable for cultivating vegetables and fruits, particularly pomegranates and citrus varieties. In earlier days, Yethas (manually) were used to draw water from open wells, but now electric pumps have replaced traditional methods for lifting water. During my visit to the local village, I observed wells filled with fresh water, surrounded by lush vegetable farms, indicating the continued agricultural significance of the region.



I continued my journey towards Tekal, which Buchanan referred to as Taylculum. After crossing Bethamangala, I came across the newly constructed Bangalore-Chennai Expressway (NE7), designed to connect industrial zones, with construction progressing rapidly.

Tekal is a village in Malur taluk, surrounded by rocky hills with striking stone boulders that attract passersby. To the east, large-scale quarrying operations are in full swing, shaping the landscape.

Further, I proceeded towards Malur, which Buchanan documented as Waluru. Today, Malur is an emerging industrial hub, hosting numerous MNCs and Indian companies that have established manufacturing units and warehouses due to its strategic proximity to Bangalore and excellent connectivity.



Buchanan documented his visit to a country rum distillery, likely referring to the traditional "Naatu Sara" (country liquor/arrack). He described the distilled spirit being prepared using the bark of *Mimosa leucophlea* (known as 'Kari Jali' in Kannada and 'Nalla Thumma' in Telugu), along with black jaggery and other substances. However, the preparation of country liquor is now completely banned in Karnataka.

Buchanan also sketched the liquor-making process, which closely resembles the methods still practiced in Andhra Pradesh, though with variations in ingredients and equipment.

Traveling through Hoskote, which Buchanan referred to as Catcolli—possibly derived from the Telugu term 'Kotta', akin to 'Hosa' (meaning "new" in Kannada)—he continued towards Bangalore.

Today, Hoskote has transformed into a suburban industrial town of Bangalore, witnessing rapid urbanization. The population density has increased significantly, and like other eastern parts of Bangalore, the roads remain congested, likely due to the growth of software parks, industries, and commercial establishments.



1Clockwise from Top Left: 1. Limestone kilns; 2. A charging kiln from a top view; 3. A laborer cutting large raw limestone into small pieces for kiln charging; 4. Charcoal is prepared nearby as fuel for the kiln. Limestone kilns are still in operation for quicklime production, used for domestic and agricultural purposes. These images were captured at Dodderi near Chalakere as a representation.

“The burning of these calcareous nodules into quick lime, which they produce of a beautiful white colour, is at Catcolli the occupation of about ten families. These stones are brought from a distance of five miles; some on oxen, but the greater part on men's heads. The lime is burned in kilns about six feet height; at the bottom about four feet, and at the top about two feet diameter. the structure is of mud wall; and in order to give admission to the air, it is perforated in many places through the whole height. the fuel used is charcoal, making of which is the duty of the men, and the bringing it home that of women”

-Francis Buchanan, Chapter I

Buchanan documented the preparation of quicklime in Hoskote, but this traditional practice has now faded due to urbanization and the community's adaptation to city life. The same lime preparation process he described can still be seen in Dodderi, near Chalakere.

The Upparu caste, historically involved in lime production, continues to practice this trade using traditional methods and facilities. However, the future of this craft remains uncertain, as the younger generation is showing little interest in continuing this ancestral occupation.

The further expedition from **Bangalore to Srirangapatna** is **documented in Chapters II, III, and IV**, covering **various landscapes, settlements, and historical observations** made by Buchanan. This journey provides **valuable insights into the agricultural, economic, and social conditions** of the early 19th century, offering a **comprehensive glimpse into the transformation of the region over time**.
