PICTURING

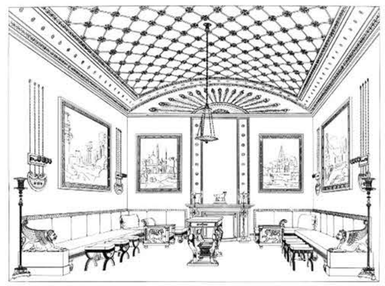
"The shores of Asia have been invaded by a race of students with no rapacity but for lettered relics: by naturalists, whose cruelty extends not to one human inhabitant; by philosophers extirpations of error, and the diffusion of truth. It remains for the artist to claim his part in these guiltless spoliations." So wrote Thomas Daniell, an artist who came to Bangalore with his nephew William in 1792 and "at the Hills to the Sd. [southward] of Bangalore," collected "several scenes."

The Daniells and other artists at the time were exponents of an emerging practice in England called picturesque art. It treated landscape as a subject in itself and it encouraged an aesthetic of irregularity, ruggedness, and variety. "Plant rugged oaks instead of flowering shrubs:" wrote one promoter of the art, "break the edges of the walk: give it the rudeness of a road; . . . in a word instead of making the whole smooth, make it rough; and you make it also picturesque." Picturesque subjects could be found but they were as easily contrived as when ruins, carts and other 'rough' objects were inserted into scenes. Picturesque art, it is said, is not just a picture of what is real and therefore a representation; it is like a picture of what is real and therefore admits the possibility of misrepresentation.

The artist in search of the picturesque was encouraged to seek nature or 'return things to a natural state.' "The picturesque eye," noted one critic in 1794, "abhors art; and delights solely in nature.... [A]rt abounds with regularity; . . . and the images of nature with irregularity."

The droogs of the Mysore Tableland were curiosities that required little, if any, 'return.' These 'natural' fortresses were subjects of war and of art in 1791-92 when Cornwallis' army based in Bangalore fought for possession of the tableland.

Thomas Daniell's 1799 painting of 'celebrated buildings in India' was commissioned by Thomas Hope for the drawing room of his London mansion. (It is seen hanging on the right side of the room in the adjoining perspective.) The painting assembles a number of scenes and artifacts that the Daniells 'captured' on their travels through India including the trident of Shiva and chakra of Vishnu from their drawing of Gavi Gangadhareshwara temple in Bangalore that the Daniells visited on May 1st 1792. The painting reveals the 'object' nature of picturesque art and its potential to portray unreal but believable scenes. It is a potential that would become intrinsic to disciplines such as architecture, history and archeology.

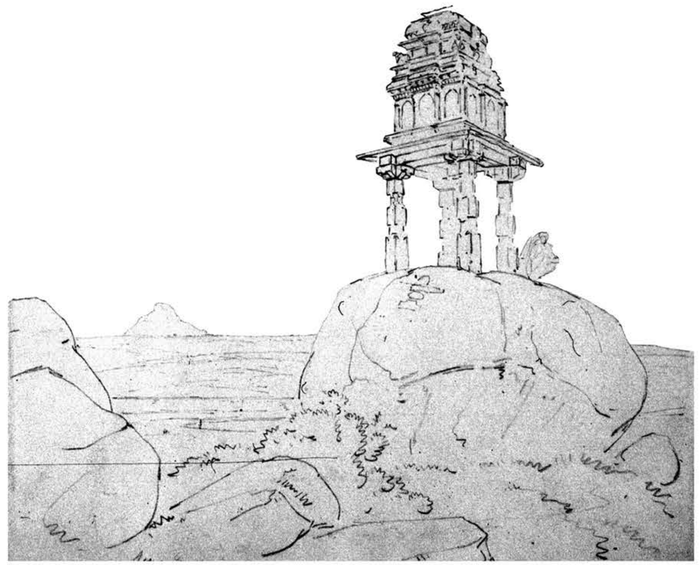


The Daniells' "Entrance to a Hindoo Temple, near Bangalore" presented the Gavi Gangadhareshwara temple in Bangalore to a wide audience through their published work, Oriental Scenery.

Unlike the Daniells James Hunter did not use the camera obscura, the pin-hole predecessor of the modern camera. His presentation of the Gavi Gangadhareshwara temple in Bangalore appears 'less accurate' than the Daniells.

The Daniells claimed accuracy on the basis of their use of the camera obscura, the predecessor to the photographic camera. "The execution of these drawings is indeed masterly," a reviewer notes of the Daniells' work in the early 1800s. "Every thing is drawn with the most astonishing accuracy. The animals, trees, and plants, are studies for the naturalist."

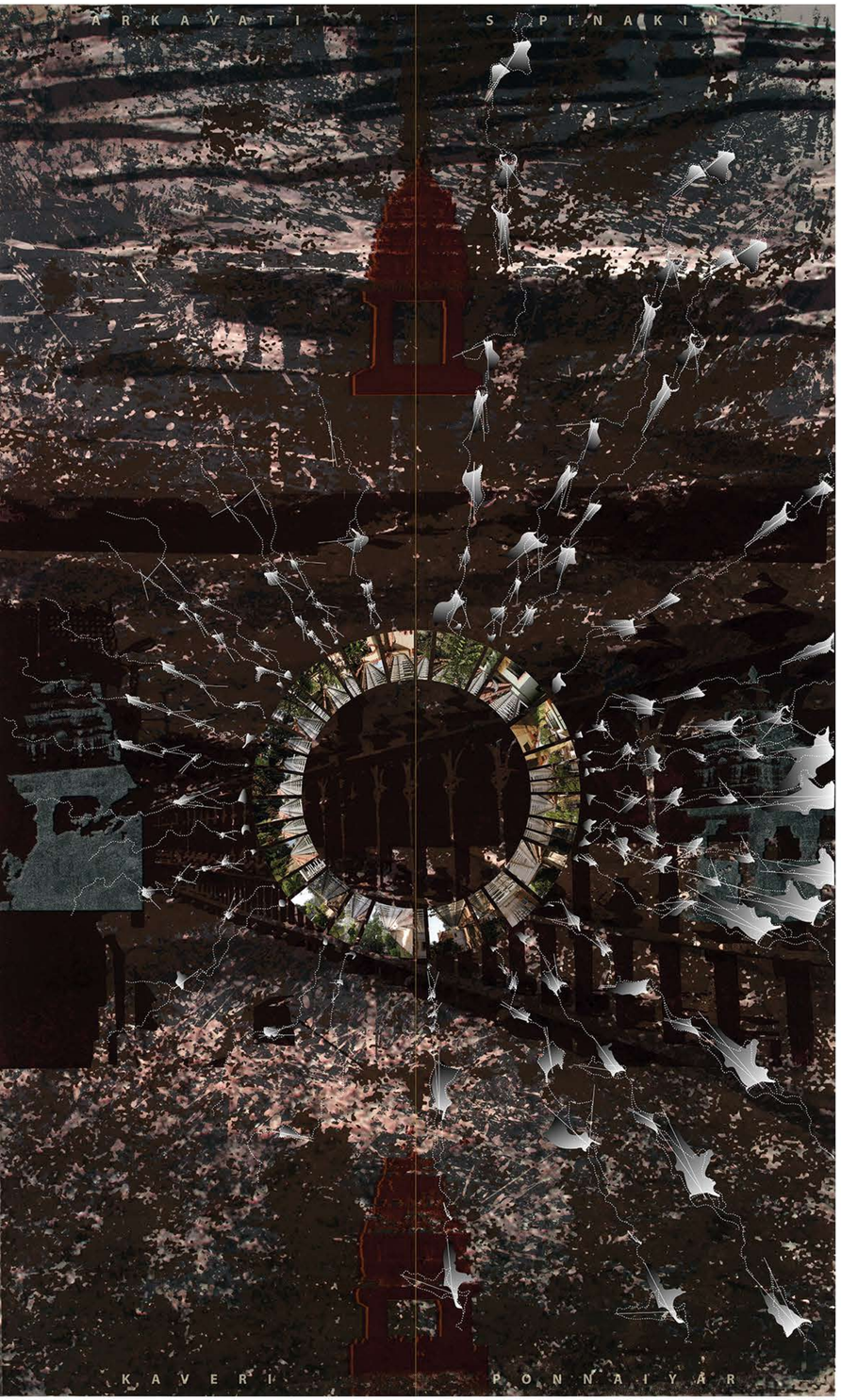
The legacy of picturesque art is in sciences, in the portrayal of the subjects of botany, anthropology, zoology, etc.



One of the many sketches of a mantap to the east of the Gavi Gangadhareshwara temple in Bangalore done by the Daniells with the help of the camera obscura on May 1st 1792.

On the tableland, however, an unfamiliar place or perhaps a place intrinsically picturesque, artists saw themselves as presenters of a new reality rather than representers or misrepresenters. As such picturesque art was the chosen mode not just of artists but amateur scientists who were recording the 'true' forms of plants, animals, buildings, places, people, etc.

But even as the picture was conveying 'facts,' it was constructing a tension between the detached view of the spectator artist and the embodied experience of rituals and everyday processes enacted behind the scene.



HIGH GROUND

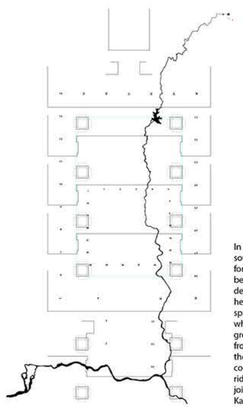
"Every traveler, who has ascended the Ghauts," noted Captain Newbold in the 1840s, "is struck by the singular appearance . . . of detached hills . . . starting up abruptly from the surface of the flat plains spread before him, . . . presenting a coup d'œil which has caused the not inapt comparison of a table with tea-cups here and there reversed on its surface." These tea-cups, many of them made into fortresses or droogs, attracted artists in 1791-92. "This stupendous fortress," writes artist Robert Home of one of these hills, "enjoys such advantages from nature, as to need little assistance from art." These 'natural artifacts' made ideal picturesque subjects.

Beneath these hills, was a gently undulating land surface. It is on a gathering of rises on this surface "southward of Bangalore" that the Daniells came upon objects which like the droogs stood out as 'natural artifacts' - two monolithic granite chakras, a granite trident, "the statue of a large Bull carved out of the solid rock," temples, etc. It was a landscape of rock that consumed a major portion of the Daniells' two day stay in Bangalore.

This was also a landscape of water, a ridge dividing the Arkavati and South Pinakini valleys. This 'ridge' is not a simple line of high points; it is a line of the highest origins of flows, flows that could be made to run one way or another with the subtlest modification to the surface. It is, in other words, an ambiguous high ground and Kempegowda I chose to begin Bangalore on it in 1537, a kilometer north of the Bull Temple, as if to take command of its ambiguity.

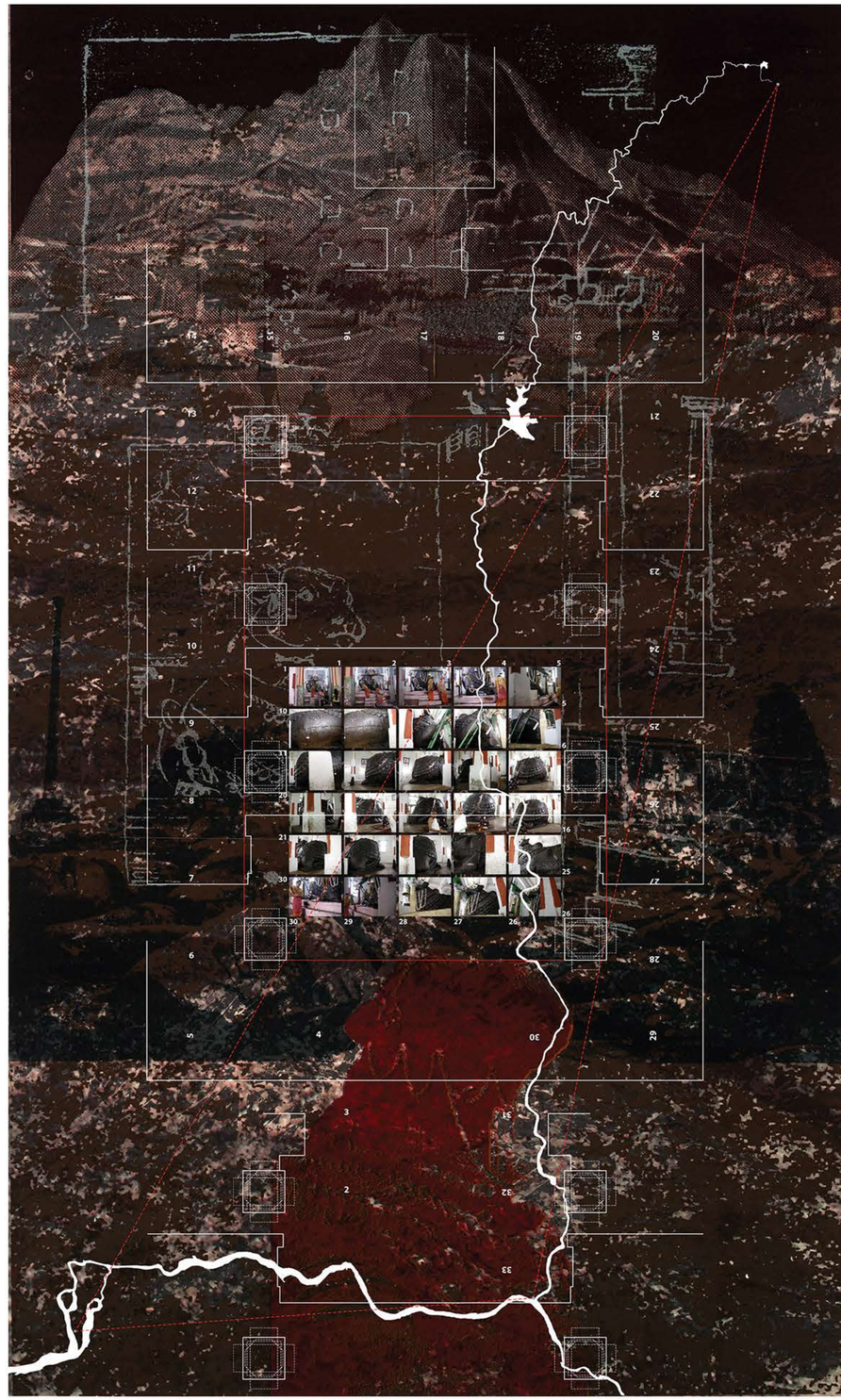
The waters coming off the two sides of the Bangalore ridge flow initially through a series of tanks, eventually reaching the Bay of Bengal as the Kaveri and Ponnaiyar. In the late 1800s this divide was overcome at a place called High Ground. A reservoir was built here to collect waters from low points on both sides of the ridge with the aim of distributing them either way. It would begin a terrain of pipes, pumps and valves that would weave through the undulations of the Mysore Tableland, giving it a new measure of 'water pressure' and absorbing the duality of Bangalore's flows into a single water supply and sewerage scheme.

In the 19th century travelers to Bangalore were told to seek high grounds marked by "lookouts." Four of these lookouts are protected monuments, said to be built by Kempegowda II in the 1500s to mark the limits and cardinal points of his vision of the city.



In the 'Bull Temple' the Daniells faced a source. An inscription below the right fore leg of the twelve-foot high Nandi, better known as the 'vehicle' of Shiva, declares that the Vrishabhavati originates here. The marker may refer to an unseen spring; but it could also refer to the whole surface of one side of the high ground separating the Arkavati valley from that of the S. Pinakini. In the zone of the Bull Temple (and Bangalore), the collection off the west surface of this ridge forms the Vrishabhavati before joining the Arkavati and eventually the Kaveri.

"In one of the Temples on the Hill," writes William Daniell on May 1st 1792, "is the statue of a large Bull carved out of the Solid Rock which measures twelve feet from the top of his head to the bottom of the Chest. Near to the Temple is a Stone Pillar between thirty & forty ft. in height."

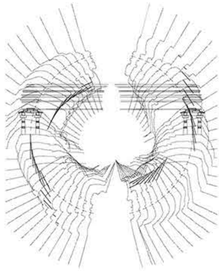


MANTAP

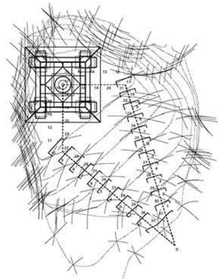
On the gently undulating surface of the tableland even low rises were coveted places. They were sites for what British surveyors in the early 19th century called "lookout houses" -- "sentry-box shaped constructions of brick and mortar, on four pillars of grey granite on various hills, which were formerly Tippoo Sultan's military 'lookouts.'" To Lewin Bowring in 1872 these structures were "picturesque little temples, called 'Mantapams.'" Archeologists would single out four of these structures as 'watchtowers' built by Kempegowda II in the 1500s to mark the limits of his vision of the city.

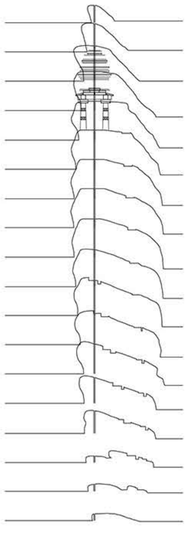
Artists during Cornwallis' campaign chose the rises marked by these towers as vantages to draw the 'Mysore country.' It was the beginning of a trend of travelers who came to India "in search of the picturesque" and were told that to "obtain some of the best glimpses … of the beautiful surroundings of Bangalore, the visitor should first seek these lookouts."

One mantap however was not a lookout as much looked at. It was the only one drawn by artists during the 1791-92 war when Bangalore was the camp ground of Cornwallis' army. Yet it has eluded the myth of limits projected by archeologists perhaps because it does not command the highest point in its immediate vicinity. But it does command the rise upon which it stands, a 12-foot high rock hewn with steps which was part of the artifact rather than its base. It confounds the architectural limits of the archeologist's watchtower as "constructions of brick and mortar, on four pillars of grey granite."



Two flights of steps in the rock include the mantap in a circumambulatory.

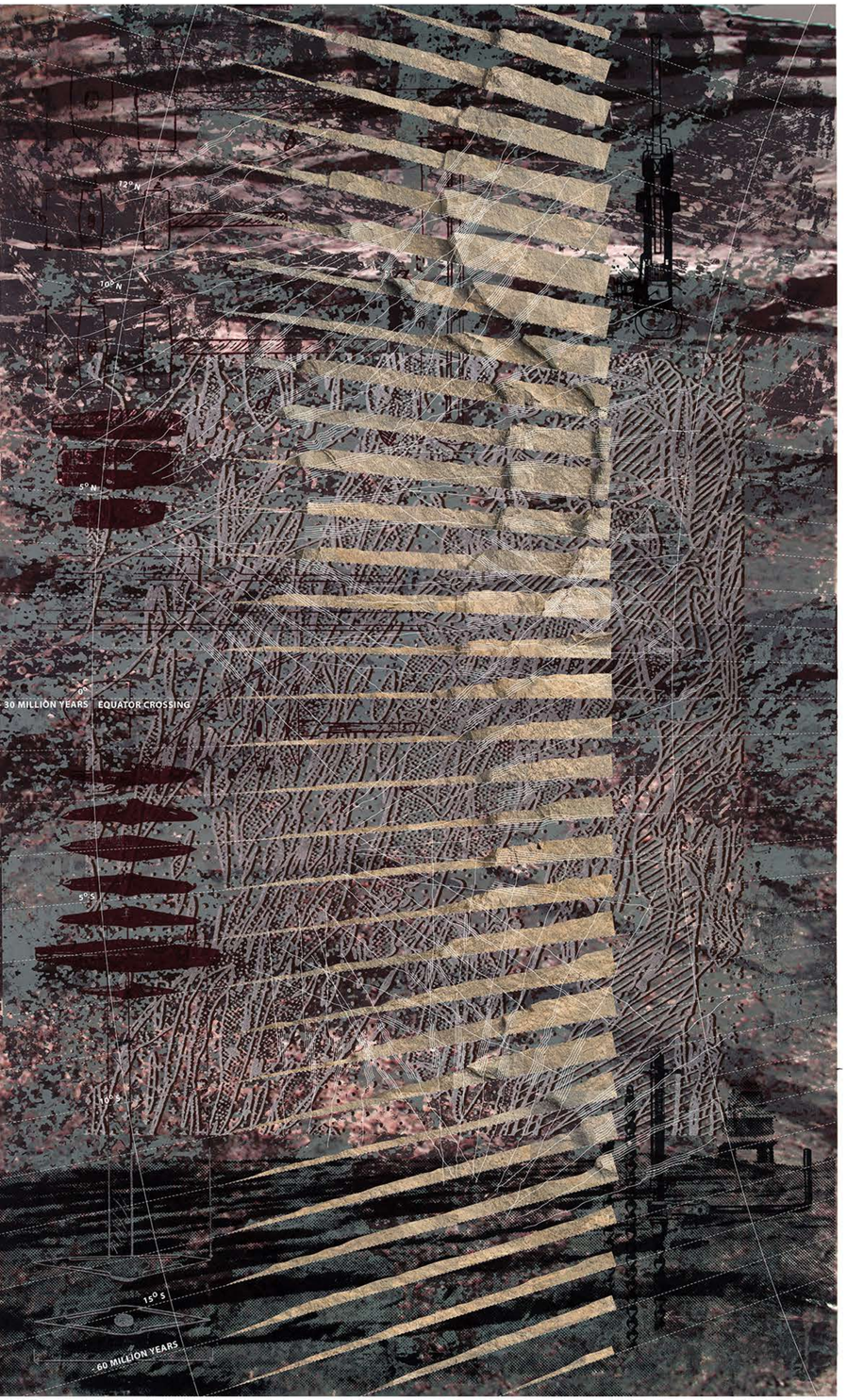




Cracks are powerful levelers on the tableland. They initiate a break up of high grounds into the soil of the lowlands. The high ground of the mantap is however held fast. This structure strides a crack through the rock, a crack that artists in the 1790s drew into their scene. These men were perhaps drawn as much by the strangeness of the 'object' as by the roughness of the rock.

The Daniells who drew the mantap many times on May 1st 1792 describe it as "a pavilion very neatly executed, which probably was the place for exhibiting to the multitude the idol belonging to the adjoining temple."

Robert Home's 1791 "Distant View of Savandroog" and "View of Bangalore" are anchored by the mantap.



OUTCROP

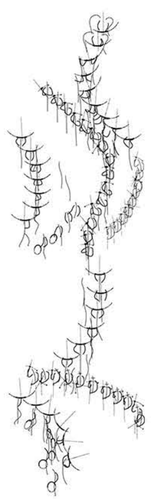
The "bare extensive surfaces of the granitic, trappean, and hypogene rocks" of the Mysore tableland observed an amateur geologist in the 1840s, "afford, on a grand scale, exposés, not to be surpassed in any other portion of the globe . . ."and the geological anatomist of the earth's skeleton may, in the peninsula of India advantageously study a huge and disjointed mass of the nether-formed rocks which constitute the framework of our planet."

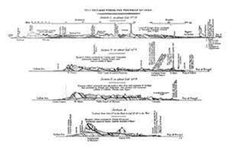
In 1975 this dimension of the tableland -- the nether-formed rocks -- was declared a national monument. The site chosen to present this monumentality was the Lalbagh Rock. Called Peninsula Gneiss by William F. Smeeth in 1916, this rock is "among the oldest rocks of the earth dating back to 3000 million years." With increasing evidence of 'events' that did not just rework the substance of the rock but introduced new material from the earth's mantle, geologists today prefer to call it the Gneiss Complex. It signifies a rock that has undergone "several plutonic, volcanic and sedimentary cycles which have telescoped together more than once through deformation and metamorphism."

One gets a glimpse of this hyperactivity on the surface of the Lalbagh Rock. A maze of foliations -- flows of material under high stress -- reveal the many times this rock reached the high temperatures and pressures necessary for the re-crystallizing and reordering of its mineral matter but not high enough to return it to magma. Besides foliations the surface features islands of gneiss, flows of granite, and fields of pegmatite. It is a complexity that is multiplied at the scale of the tableland where geologists see a maze of enclaves, belts, sutures, basins, fissures, and collisions.

Foliations are flows of rock material under high stress. In a quarry they are planes along which gneiss split by the heat of burning leaves, accelerating what happens to this rock under the sun. "The exfoliation of whole mountain masses, on a grand scale, by such natural causes produces some of the most picturesque features of an Indian landscape," writes Newbold in 1846.

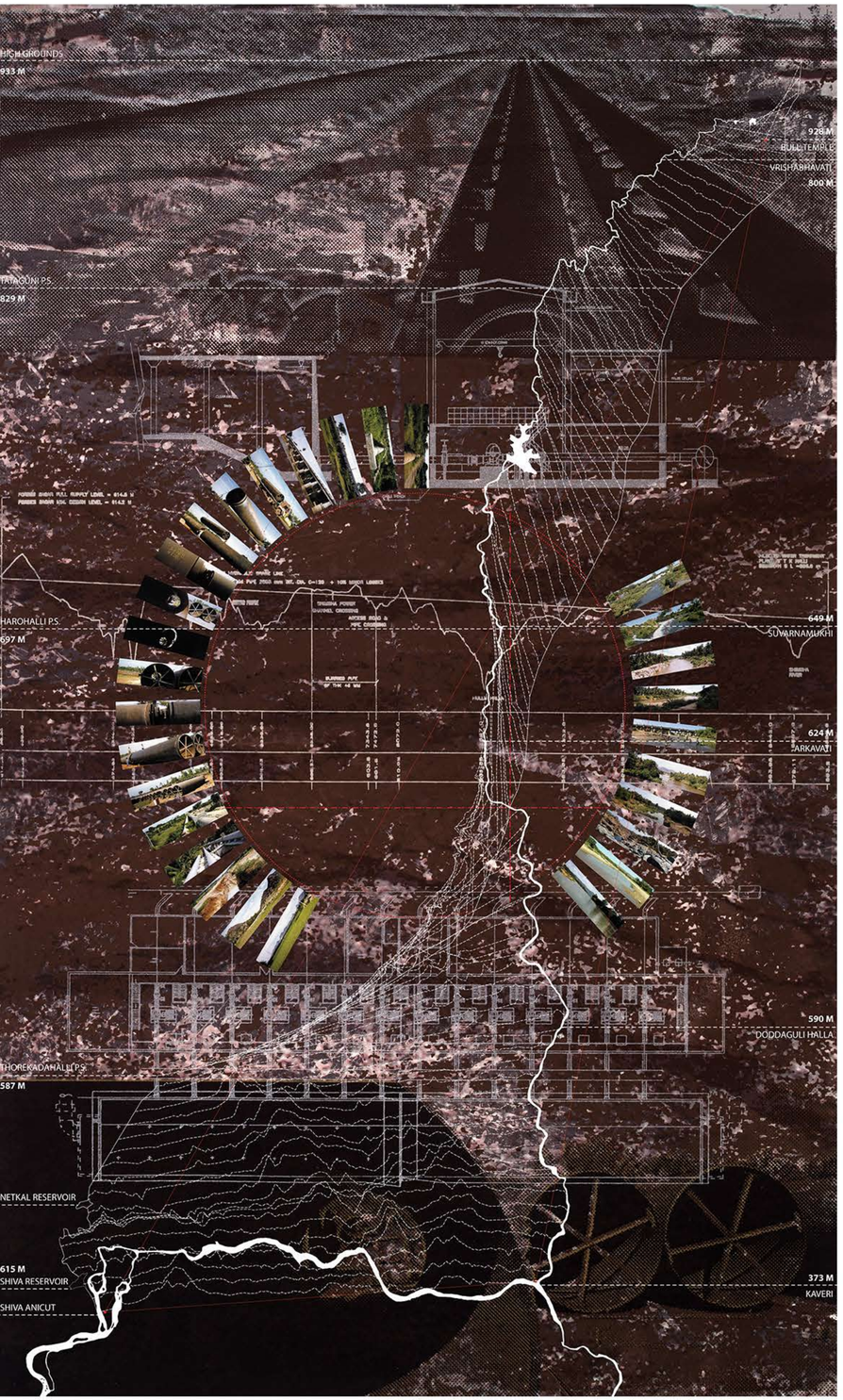
Flows, islands, and fields on the surface reveal the dynamism of the Lalbagh Rock before it attained 'geological stability' 3 billion years ago. But this stability is relative given the widely accepted view today that the Indian subcontinent rafted up on the lithosphere following the break up of the super-continent, Gondwanaland, 100+ million years ago. It is also relative given on-going processes of weathering such as exfoliation that steps the surface.





Captain Newbold's "Four Sections Across the Peninsula of India" in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1846.

Gneiss quarries, notes the Geological Survey of India, are "an endless source material for research in all the various branches of Earth Sciences." They facilitate the study of rock. In a working quarry however, the language is not of rock but stone, and gneiss is the 'ordinary stone' of the tableland. "Large slabs, of from 3 inches to 2 feet in thickness," writes Lewis Rice in 1877, "are readily obtained by the simple application of heat to the surface. Then by pooling small holes in the required direction and wedging, the stone can be separated with great precision into pieces of almost any dimensions."

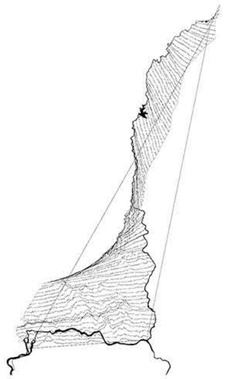


FOURTH ISLAND

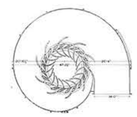
Geologists speak of a gradual increase in metamorphism from north to south of the Mysore tableland. At some point near the Kaveri the grey-white peninsula gneiss so visible in the Lalbagh Rock gives way to a "darker," "more coarsely granular," "greasy-looking" rock called Charnockite. Flowing from west to east, the Kaveri meets this transitioning rock with a transition of its own. From a meandering stream across a plateau it becomes a rapid through gorges. The point of transition is the island of Sivasamudram. Here, Buchanan notes in 1800, the Kaveri "precipitates its waters over a perpendicular rock.... The pencil of an artist might be well employed in imitating its magnificent scenery, and would convey a better idea of its grandeur than my power of description can venture to attempt."

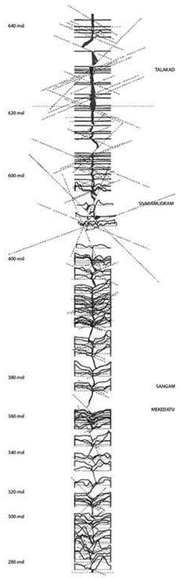
In 1791 however, it was enclosure rather than the scene that drew people to Sivasamudram. They were seeking protection from Cornwallis's army. "Every human being on the route," writes Mark Wilks, "was so completely removed beyond the reach of the English army, that they appeared to be traversing a country of which the population had been utterly destroyed by some recent convulsion of nature... in fact they were all collected with their cattle and moveables on the island of Sheven Sumooder."

Protection situates Sivasamudram in a more extended trajectory, between the islands of Seringapatam and Srirangam. Called Adiranga, Madhyaranga and Antyaranga (beginning, middle and end), these islands are dedicated to Ranganatha, the protector reclining on a five-headed serpent whose coils indicate the cycles of time.



The Kaveri above Sivasamudram has a history of division by anicuts (sill structures), "from each of which one or more channels have been led off for purposes of irrigation." One divide is however more visible than others, the Sivasamudram anicut. Water from here travels to Bangalore via four pipelines only to return, at least in part, via the Vrishabhavathi and Arkavati to the Kaveri downstream. These flows construct a 'Fourth Island' in the Kaveri after the three recognized ones of Adiranga, Madhyaranga and Antyaranga.



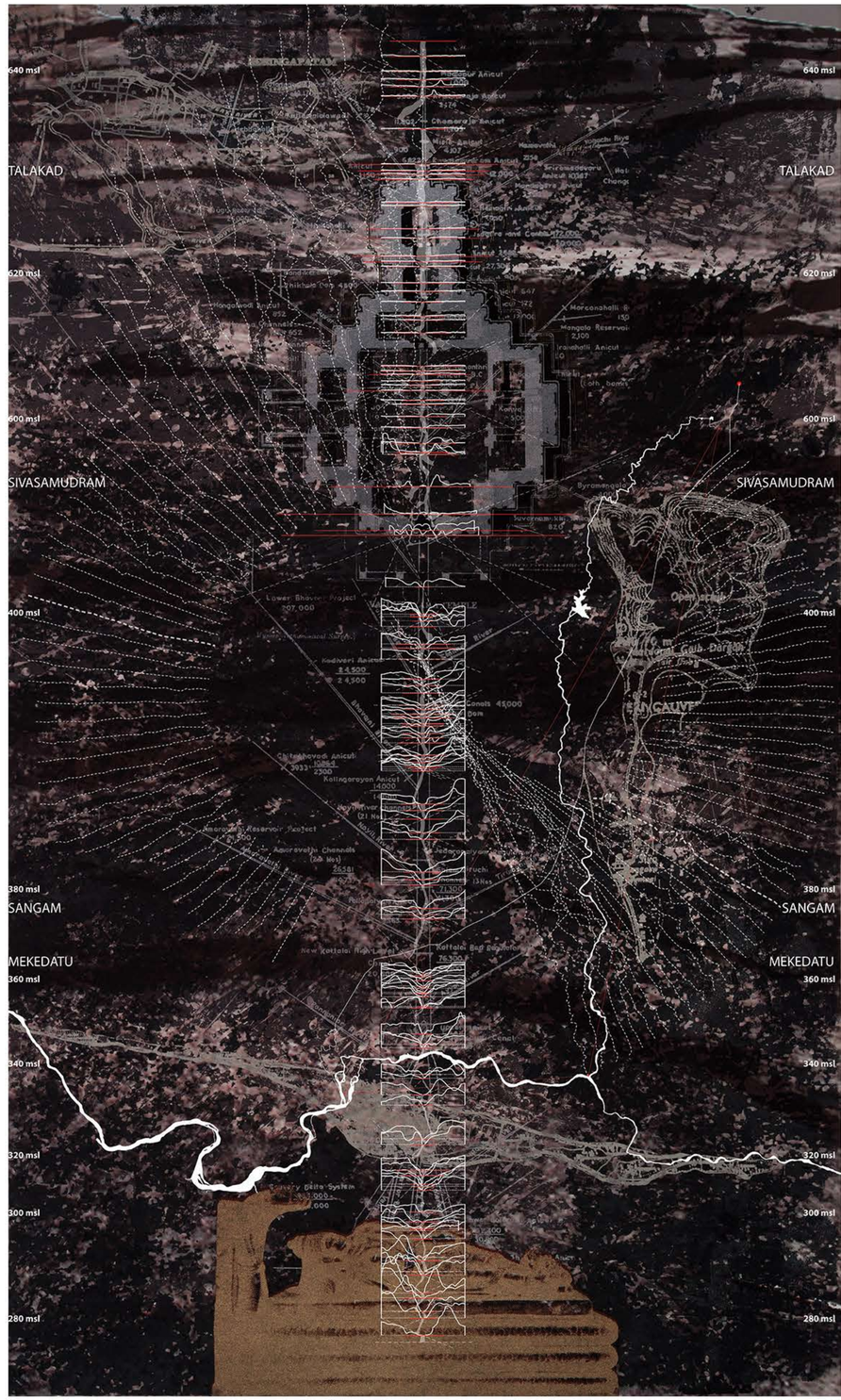


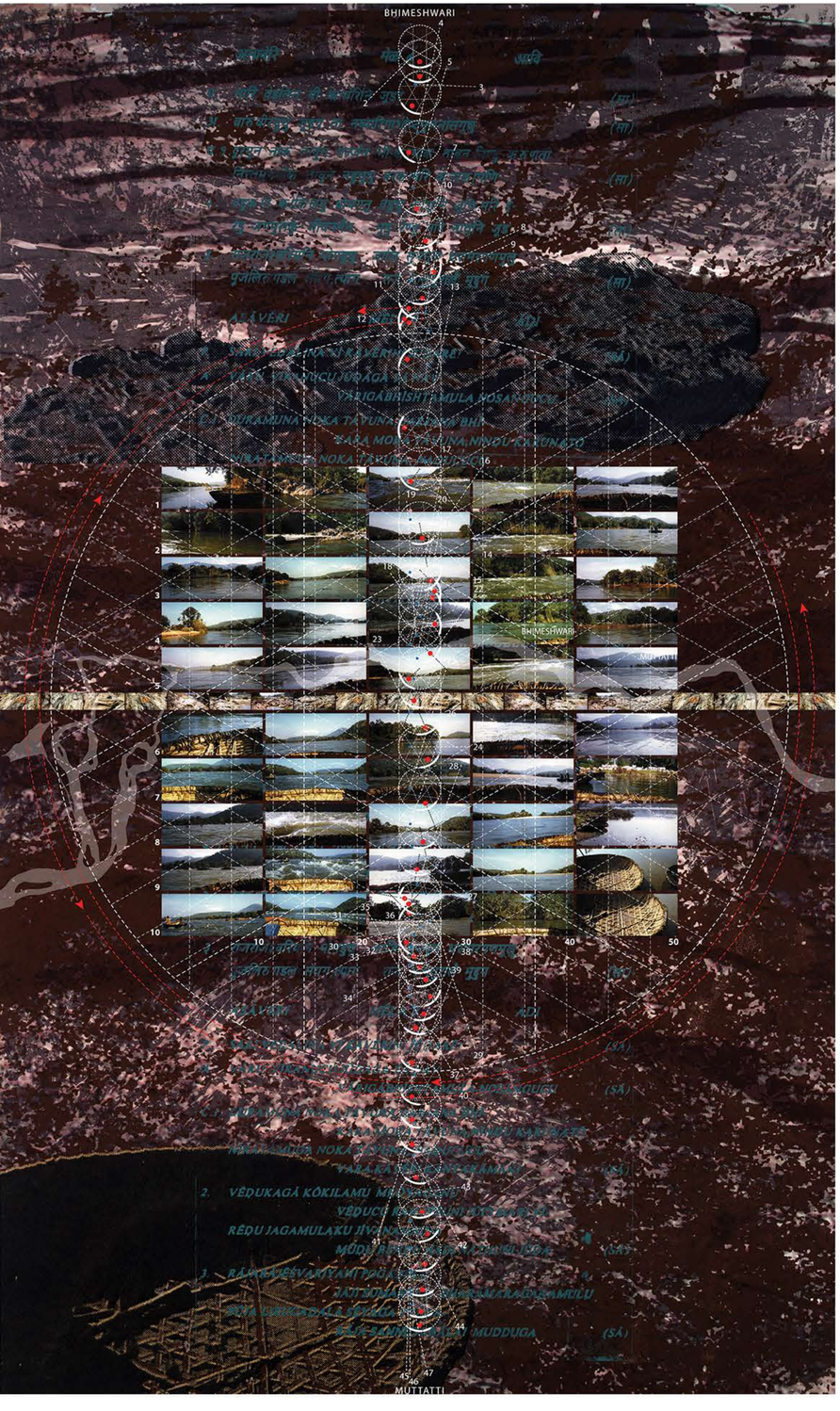
Between Talakad and Mekedatu the Kaveri falls over 300 meters in a transition from the flatness and sand of the Mysore Plateau to the gorges and rocks of the Biligirirangan Hills.

When the Sivasamudram Falls are dry, the Kaveri is a river of a metamorphic rock called Charnockite. This rock apparently of a higher grade of metamorphism than peninsula gneiss, geologists say, is a "window into the deep crust," a storehouse of information on the (in)stability of continents.

"I have the honor," writes the Dewan of Mysore to the British Resident in 1900, "to request that you will be so good as to obtain the approval of the Government of India to the State of Mysore undertaking the works necessary to develop and utilize the natural power of the Kauveri Falls at Sivansamudram, which is now running to waste." It was the first such project in Asia and the engineers came from America after completing the plant at Niagara Falls.

Thomas Fraser of the Madras Engineers was one of the first of a stream of artists to capture the Kaveri Falls at Sivasamudram. "The solitude of the spot," writes Lewin Bowring lends "a picturesque charm to its beauties."





WATER

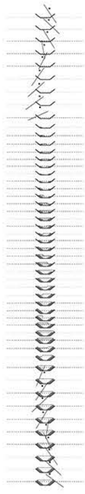
Rivers, geomorphologists say, move from youth in hilly tracts to maturity in alluvial plains. The Kaveri, however, reverses this trend momentarily when it falls dramatically at Sivasamudram, cutting its way through the rocky terrain of the Biligiririrangan hills.

Moments before it begins a new life at Sivasamudram, a mature Kaveri is celebrated in the Panchalinga darsana at Talakad. Here a meandering Kaveri carries a remarkable power. It cuts the outer bank of a bend while depositing sand on the inner bank, changing course like a moving snake. At Talakad, however, the sand collected on the inner bank developed into dunes that buried the once famous capital of the Gangas. People withdrew in the face of this phenomenon, believing it to be the curse of Rangamma the consort of the Vijayanagar governor of Seringapatam. Betrayed by Raja Wodeyar of Mysore in whose care she had left the reigns of government while she attended her husband convalescing at Talakad, she threw herself into the Kaveri, damning the place: "Let Talakad become sand; let Malingi become a whirlpool; let the Mysore Rajas fail to beget heirs."

Today even as archeologists uncover temples, people have situated five of these temples in a movement that follows, perhaps appeases, the meander. At a time determined by celestial alignments people gather at Talakad. Beginning in Vaidyeswara Temple -- the temple that escaped burial -- and the adjacent tank, they visit four temples, each associated with a cardinal direction of the flow of the Kaveri as it winds around Talakad.

A meander deposits on the inner bend - a 'point bar' - and erodes the outer bend - a 'cut bank'. It is a mode of flow across relatively flat alluvial terrains. The flow around Talakad is unusual in that in one bend the Kaveri aligns with all the four cardinal points.

The Vaidyeswara Temple was spared by the sands of the Kaveri. Between this "celebrated temple dedicated to Iswara and the present channel of the river," writes Francis Buchanan in 1800, "were formerly situated a large fort and a great number of temples."



The Kaveri gathers waters; but it also gathers particles of crystalline rock eroded off the tableland. In standing water this sand settles quickly; in a flowing Kaveri however, it could be held in suspension until the delta where it extends and deepens the alluvium of the coastal plain. Much of the sand though settles midstream in braids from where it is mined by men in circular iron vessels and trucked to places like Bangalore for the construction industry.

Kirtinarayan Temple excavated from the sand-hills.

The Sivasamudram Falls is the beginning of a Kaveri, the crossing of which requires either a "goat's leap" as at Mekedatu or vessels called koracles. Domingo Paes described these vessels in 1520 as "round like baskets; inside they are made of cane, and outside are covered with leather; … Men row them with a sort of paddle, and the boats are always turning round, as they cannot go straight like others."