



THE PATH TO THE HILLS

*History of the plantations on Western Ghats
And a tribute to the pioneers*

Compilers note:

Some of the most interesting material has been contributed directly and indirectly, by the grand children of men who have left the East after long service as planters, I have acquainted over my years in plantation tourism related activities, which they shared with me in kindness along travels to their first homes they spend until their teens, and compiled from publishing's dating from 1950s-1990s.

Often during the search for information connected I have dwelt upon some long forgotten item of interest, some quaint, faintly nostalgic anecdotes high lighting those old receded days, what may well be asked, of the wives of men who hewed their way into jungle far remote from towns and cities...Shared to their kins by the strong women. And the Bungalows themselves, In early days they were frequently no better than grass thatched huts with mud and wattle walls; which today we suffice fine living for travelers as Plantation Home stays - were you find the testimony of the Men and women who braved the hills...

Our mission:

"History is the record of the past, which live in the present, and wait for the future".
At stayhomz we are at the passionate journey of seeking the past. Take a South India tour with us along our destinations, which are on the Benevolent Mountains of Western Ghats. Restoration of Bungalows and support of Plantations Tourism, rooted in the past, footed in the present. Promotion of destinations, on Western Ghats through nature friendly hospitality services.

The land of Future and the Past

The western friars who caught the trade winds knew Malabar as the rich Coasts of the East.

Historians say takes its name from the Dravidian "mala" a hill and Arabic "barr" a country Although the earliest Egyptian merchants mention a town "Mali" on the West Coast which was then the centre of pepper trade. Malabar and the "Maanbar" of Marco polo are no doubt one and the same.

The land rich in pepper, coconuts and their by-products, Lemon Grass, Timber and fruits of many kinds, and there was gold in the foothills. No wonder the coast was the hunting ground of merchants, adventurers, no wonder kings send forth their fleets from the West in search of greater wealth, and the land became for centuries a scene of battle and murders and endless strife amongst those who sought to conquer it.

But throughout the early history the country little or no mention is made of the mountains, which for generations towered above the ceaseless conflict, safe in their majesty and in accessibility.

The history of commerce by sea, with its coast probably goes back to 3000B.C. For Teak wood of Malabar is said to have been found in the ruins of Ur, From our coasts came the treasures of King Solomon ”.

The king had at sea a Navy of Tharshish with navy of Hiram; once in three years came navy of Tharsish, bringing gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks “ (1ST King x-22). Almost certainly much of the wealth came from Malabar.

The natives of Roman Empire, and then the fleets of Albuquerque, Vasco Da Gama and Cabral stood off her shores, and those navigators could not have failed to observe the majestic Western Ghats, which stand 70 miles inland.

The early traders in Malabar little dreamt how new speculations would in time develop, or how one day Tea, Coffee or rubber would pour out through the Ghats to the coastal ports, in thousands of tons, to flood the world’s market and capture this trade from Chinese or North Americans.

The Benevolent mountains

Turquoise Arabian Sea gently laps the golden coasts of the legendary Konkan and Malabar in Peninsular India. Behind the swaying coconut palms, which fringe the two coasts, is the 70 miles wide Western Coastal Plain, a fertile land of paddy and mango groves. And then, rising abruptly from Eastern edge of this lush coastal plains are the Western Ghats.

In this hills are planting country, it is a land where the swirling mist make dawn dull grey and evening short .It is the land where jungle trails and footpaths through cultivated areas still out number roads, it is a land of few roads, at times twisting and climbing to nowhere. In some of the remote patches of the estates It is still a land of few people were by dusk, who cuddle in their labour lines and bungalows in the comfort of kumbli (blanket) and fire. It is still a part of South India with the least population density

Today as we drive for a while up a winding but well tarred Ghat road edged by plots of mixed cultivation, to the sights of acres of neatly contoured rubber plantations, spice gardens of nutmeg, pepper and into the hills laid out in an orderly design of tea and coffee clearings and with miles of roadways and tiny villages intersecting them; the sights of hills dotted with canopy of the cardamom plantations, factories, houses, bazaars, temples and churches.

There are buses and Lorries carrying passengers and goods; peddlers, beggars, cattle and dogs; schoolchildren with plastic carrier bags and neat uniforms; all signs of a thriving and lively community.

However, scarcely more than a hundred and fifty years ago the scene would have been entirely different. – Jungle folk living in the forest and nothing more? No it is something more... The priceless Flora and Fauna we have lost forever ...

Their houses were covered platforms secured to the branches of tall trees, their roads were elephant tracks. They hunted for the Sambhar Deer with bow and arrow and snared the ibex that lived on the rocky cliffs. Only seldom did they venture out of the jungle to exchange the honey and cardamom they had collected for salt and cloth.

The mountains were the home of a handful of people who lived and died in primitive simplicity, unconcerned by any knowledge of the millions who lived below on the plains. Where there were a few hundred tribals, a few thousand seasonal workers and a few dozen British Planters there are, tens of thousands who form a permanent population, who have established villages, townships and towns. And who enjoy the latest amenities of Indian urban civilization.

The transition of the thick jungles to the large and small estates of our times is worth telling, as memories of the great pioneers, who believed in living and let living, which may brighten up our commitment to co-existence with nature.

Who are those men? Moreover, how did they come here, plant and survive the most challenging conditions for it is a story of enterprise, courage and self-reliance.

History of Coffee

Legends, accepted as history in the absence of contenting theories, has it that Hazarat Shah Janab Allah Magatabi, better known as Baba –ud-din, or Baba Budan had gone to Mecca on a pilgrimage some time around 1600 and had been intoxicated with the fragrance of coffee flowers ...

The expansion and consolidation of coffee in Karnataka

In the 1820s 30s coffee was the only consistently saleable crop in the Malnad region other than arecanut.

Coffee in Nilgiri Wayanad

Even as coffee was striking deep roots in Mysore and Coorg, coffee cultivation began to spread throughout the southern reaches of Western Ghats. By 1863-64 there were 40 estates in Wynad. Yet the pioneers in the fever-stricken jungle were looked upon as “Enthusiastic Lunatics”!

SHEVAROYS (Tamilnadu) Plantations

The local district officers long before the possibility of the Nilgiris knew these hills as a sanatorium were appreciated in 1819 itself... The first officer to attempt to opening out the hills was Mr. M. D. Cockburn, who was collector of Salem from 1820 to 1829... He built a hut on his property, in 1821 the first European dwelling in the Shevaroyes...

Nilgiris (Tamilnadu)

The Nilgiris remained undiscovered by all but the native tribal till about 1602 when a Portuguese priest named Ferreri determinedly climbed them and came upon the Todas, the oldest tribals living in isolation.

The next expedition attempted was almost 200 years later when Francis Buchanan attempted to explore commercial and agricultural condition in the hills and failed to reach the plateau. It was in 1812 that an assistant Revenue Surveyor named Keys, and his apprentice

,Macmohan, were sent up by the collector of Coimbatore to make detailed study of the hills to the North of Coimbatore .They were the first Englishmen into Nilgiris ...

In 1819,two members of the Madras Civil Service, Whish and Kindersly, pursued a band of smugglers up a small pass to the Nort-East of Kotercherry(now Kotagiri) and discovered a table land “possessing an European Climate “...

Later that year, John Sullivan, then collector of Coimbatore, journeyed into the hill, began work on a home for himself about a mile or so from kotagiri, and became the first European resident in the Nilgiris...

The History of Tea

Long before South India tea made its presence in the world markets, in fact, long before Indian Tea became a major crop, the world was aware of the romance of China tea. Tea was used in China as medicine, by boiling fresh leaces in water, as far as back as 2000BC.Around the 4Th centuary some Chinese began using tea as a daily beverage. And as it grew into a custom, tea processing began.Kup Pu wrote an essay in the middle of the forth century which mace mention of methords of tea planting and drinking...

The initial attempts of tea planting in India

The British now began to make haste.The agricultuara and Horticultural Society of Calcutta had addressed Bentick; “The shrub exists already planted by the hand of nature ,through a vast extent of territory in Upper Assam ...

The story of south Indian Tea begins with Assistant Surgeon Christie was was in the Nilgiris in 1832, ordering some tea plants from China as he noticed that Camellia which closely resembles tea, grew well in the Nilgiris. However, before they could arrive, he died...

Coffee in Mysore (Karnataka)

Chickmagalur North Mysore

The South-Western part of Karnataka Carved against a mountainous canvas this beautiful malnad district is full of surprises... lofty peaks... delightful dales... racing rivers... sparkling streams... captivating cascades... and the bracing mountain air - a balm to the work-weary. Climb high above the world where the mountains seem to touch the sky. Marvel at the unspoilt beauty of the snow-white coffee blossoms...

NILGIRI-WYNAAD

Wayanad District lies in the Western Ghats at an altitude of 2300-7000ft.It has an area of around 2100sqkms and a population of around 7,70,000 people which makes it the least populous district in Kerala.This adds to its charm, for people who have been to Wayanad are captivated by the pastoral serenity and the slow pace of life they encounter everywhere.

Brief History

Towards the end of eighteenth century, history shows that North Malabar including Wynaad was transferred to east India Company, and was placed under the government of Bombay, following the end of the second Mysore war in 1792...

Coorg (Karnataka)

Coorg, a 1600 sq mile plateau averaging a little over 3000 feet, is a fertile land grit by the Western Ghats on the West and the South separating it from Malabar, while old Mysore abuts it on the other sides

Coffee plantations..In 1854, European capitalists started to grow coffee, and from that, time prosperity increased in a remarkable manner.

Peermade (Travancore-Kerala)

Peermade, and the Little town of Kuttikanam is the land of lush green tea plantations, lofty peaks and gushing streams, lies in the Peermade village of Idukki district, Kerala, in southern India, 3,500 feet (1,100 m) above the sea level. Clouds gently touch the peaks that flank the verdant slopes of Kuttikkanam. Indeed, the streams silvering down from the top hilland peaks will is a very enchanting experience.

History of Travancore

Travancore is located in southern Kerala. The rulers of this state were named Sree Padmanabhadasan - servant of the deity, Padmanabha Swamy, an aspect of Vishnu. The former kingdom's geography is defined by three natural terrains - a coastal area to the west, a midland in the centre and mountain peaks as high as 9,000.

Coffee Plantations

The Cardamom Hills became an important source of revenue for the Travancore Raja, who laid claim to all timber grown in the forest. Between 1817 and 1820 the whole state was surveyed by Lieutenants Benjamin. SwayneWard and Cannor. Moreover, shortly afterwards a conservator of forests was appointed to supervise the felling of timber as well as collection of cardamom which grew wild in the forest.

Anamalais (Tamilnadu)

The centre of the Anamalais estates is the town of Valparai (10°20'N 76°57'E) about 175km from Cochin. Although the two groups of estates are only 13km apart as the crow flies, the distance by road between Munnar and Valparai is 175km. The estates in the Anamalais generally occupy the ridges and upper slopes surrounding the Sholayar Dam, with elevations ranging from 940 to 1300 m.s.l

As the pioneers of plantations two names stand out Mr. G .A. Marsh (better known as “Carver Marsh”, and regarded by many as the father of Anamallias, the second name is C .R.T Congreve whose active interests in the affairs of the district was to continue until the time of his retirement in 1945. And so the rush for Anmallias land began, though slowly at first.

Vandiperiyar or Periyar Valley (Kerala)

Several miles east of Peermade the track descended into the valley of the Periyar river which wind its way through the hills, its banks covered with thick jungle, where the onllysounds were that of running water, the cry of peafowl and the sharp crack of eatta (bamboo) snapped off by elephants as they thrust their way through the forests.

Making of the Mullaperiyar dam:

A dam built in the most hostile condition s on sheer self-reliance, and selfless commitment of a British engineer John Penequick.

South Travancore

The hills of South Travancore , separated from Peernade Hills by the Mekarai and Ariankavu Pass, are called Agastay Range, but in planting circles thayare Ashambo, or Ashtamudi.They were first pioneered in 1870s when William Marshall opened out Merchiston for the Young and Marshall Brothers.

The Nelliampathis

The Nelliampathis is the name given to the small range of hills situated in the north of the erstwhile Cochin State, but overflowing eastwards into the forests owned by the family of the Rajah of Kollengode in South Malabar.

From the observations made for its position held halfway up the ghat, Sherenelly is likely to have been one of the pioneer ventures., if not the first, while Nellikolam was reconed to have been one of the earlier planting on the plataue

It is quite certain that the areas around Padagiri formed the beginning of the planting district, though "Perumputhie" which was the location of another Kadan "Puthie " must have been planted early on .In 1877 when it was found to be in an abandoned state.

The very early developments must have coincided with the arrival of leaf diseases, while coffee was planted without shade, and little care taken in soil conservation resulting in disastrous results.

Malaria too was a present scourge, about which knowledge is less, and it may be wondered how any of the pioneers came through their trouble.

Those who did so paid a heavy price for their experience! Practically all these pioneer developments by private individuals, who usually posed more in ate way of initiative and Guts than they did of capital, and it is right to remember how much we who followed was taught by their experiences and mistakes. As remembered by Arthur Hall who succeeded his father who reached the hills in 1877 and planted until 1888 in Nelliampaties.

Kannan Devan (North Travancore-Kerala)

The area was from time a long time is known as the Kannan Devan hills of Munnar Munnar Located at the North –Eastern side of Idukki district of Kerala bordering Tamilnadu –Munnar is a green delight of gentle rolling hills, tea estates with panoramic views and high mountains above 1200 to 3000 MSL which is right on top of the preferred holiday destination in south India.

The evolutions of plantations

Urban Verres Munro (Son of Colonel John Munro who was the Dewan of the Travancore for a short period from 1811- 1814 in the Regency period of Gowri Lakshmi Bayi. Urban Verres Munro was the First conservator of forest in Travancore from 1820 -1830 and his son John Daniel Munro was acting as the Devan of the cardamom hills for Travancore from 1870 to 1878.

John Daniel Munroe was stationed at Peermade and was opening up coffee with the Henry Bakers who pioneered in the Peermade hills.

In 1877, the sporting proclivities of J D Munro of peermade led him frequently into the wildest parts of Travancore at request of government he made a report, still extant, on much of the country now included in Devikulam Taluk. There appeared at tis time to be some doubt as to the claim made by the Poonjar Rajas to their ownership of the land, but Munro was able to assist in proving this.

The Brothers Turner

It was the year 1878. With the advent of steam, ocean going traffic was being speeded up , but still took many wearisome weeks to travel from Madras to London. So, Civil Servants and others still chose to spend long leaves in the country , usually for the purpose of Shikar , for it primarily an age of field sport.

Henry Gribble Turner and his half brother Alfred William Turner who was officers of kollam -Madras civil service had come to Kannan Devan hills for a long holiday, for a shikar (game Hunting). They crossed the Western Ghats from east to west on a line drawn roughly between villages of Bodinayakanur in Kumbum Valley near Madura, and the port of Alleppy on the coast of Malabar.

These were the first European; anything like extensively, this promised land. They established their base camp at Bodinayakanur where outcrops of the foothills of the ancient range extend into plains on either side for some miles.

The age of the Finlay's

It was in the year 1894 that Sir John Muir Baronet of Deanston visited the High Range...

The Billigirirangans (South –East- Karnataka)

Pioneers of Billigirirangans

The pioneer of the Billigirirangans, Randolph Hayton Morris, son of Rev. William Morris of Oxford and later of Muthill, near Crieff, in Scotland, was born with an adventoures spirit.

Mundakayam Valley (Kerala) Central Travancore

Short History

Kottayam was ruled by the Rajas of the independent little kingdom of Thekkumkoor who ruled from Thazhathangadi, from AD 1150 a place in the present day Kottayam, till mid-18th century. At that time, Marthanda Varma, the king of Travancore annexed Thekkumkoor and surrounding areas of Kottayam to the Kingdom of Travancore.

Kottayam was the first town in India to attain 100% literacy, an event that triggered a mass movement to make Kerala the country's first complete literate state. The town is also the birthplace of the publishing industry.

The Meenachil River borders the city of Kottayam on the northern and western sides, which empty into the Vembanad Lake.

The eastern part of Kottayam is the fertile midlands, which is the home of the extensive rubber plantations. Much of the beauty of Kottayam is laid out in all its glory along the road that winds from Kottayam to Periyar Wild Life sanctuary in Thekkady, through plantations of rubber, tea, coffee and pepper and touching the towns of Ponkunnam, Kanjirapally, Mundakayam. Vandiperiyar, Kumily and the bordering District of Idukki.

Mundakayam is 55 kms east of Kottayam in one of Travancore's main arteries, the Kottayam –kumily road. (N H 220) which is an ideal base to move towards the Periyar Ghats.

The commercial rubber plantations in India had originated from Mundakayam

The land lies within the taluks of Meenachil, Kanjirapally, and Peermade with the southern border along the forest of Ranni reserve.

EARLY EVENTS -1840 - 1860

The Bakers eldest son, named Henry, who was also known as Henry Junior, after schooling in England, married Rev. Isaac Kitchens' daughter, and returned to Kottayam in 1843 to take up duties as a C.M.S missionary like his father. He started missions in Pallom district near Kottayam, where five years later he was approached by a deputation of hill Aryans, requesting a missionary to the settlements in the hills.

History of Rubber

Natural rubber is nature's most versatile vegetable product.

During the 19TH century, several epochs –making discoveries were made in the processing, compounding and use of natural rubber, which resulted in tremendous increase in the demand of this product. The future of rubber is bright in view of its special qualities and its competitiveness with synthetic rubber, the production of which is dependent on the high – priced and the non –renewable petroleum resources...

Introduction of rubber to the Far East

Meanwhile, Sir Joseph Hooker, an eminent taxonomist of Kew gardens, England became interested in Para rubber by the drawings and specimens sent to him by Henry Wickham Henry Alexander Wicham, a botanist who had been plantig Hevea on a small –scale in Brazil from 1866 and knew all about the tree.

Early Commercial rubber plantation in India

The first attempt however was started by band of planters who formed the 'Periyar Syndicate' in 1902 with Messer's. J. J. Murphy, J. A. Hunter, K. E. Nicoll and C M F Ross commenced prospecting for rubber land on the banks of Periyar River.

Expansion and consolidation

The year 1904 saw the birth of the industry on a commercial scale when planting began in Mundakayam on lands acquired partly from the Travancore government and partly from Vanjipuza Chief and Poonjar Chieftains owners of “many thousands acres of valuable jungle”...

Lampard's Vision has ensured tha Harissons and Crosfield's now Harrison Malayalam , are the largest rubber producers in South India today. But when few believed him at that time , the promise of the future he predicted was not far way...

The important names associated with the developments in association with the early planters along with independent local ventures with the leaders of plantations in Meenachil, Kanjirapally and Mundakayam were christian families well knit by marriage alliances and their collective efforts on planting triggered economis developments in the plains

A Community of enterprising planters from Meenachil

Most of the land in Travancore was under Devasoms (Temple trusts) illams (Brahmin community associated with the temples) kovilakoms (Khetriya chieftains in alliance with the rulers who protected their interests) or Mana (Mana is the home for the Kerala Brahmins known as Namboothiris) from AD 1700which was conveyed to enthusiasts who became farmers in tropical produces and later to planters in cash crops like coffee rubber Tea and pepper and cardamom.

Cardamom Hills (Kerala- Periyar)

The Cardamom Hills are part of the southern Western Ghats located in southeast Kerala and Southwest Tamil Nadu in South India. Their name comes from the cardamom spice grown in much of the hill's cool elevation, which also grows pepper and coffee. The Western Ghats, Periyar Sub-Cluster including the Cardamom Hills, is under consideration by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee for selection as a heritage area...

The history of cardamom goes back into antiquity; it was one of the spices for which India, and especially Malabar, was famed. Cardamom in those days was gathered from the plants

growing wild in the rain forest, perhaps by the tribal inhabitants. It was brought down to the great inland emporiums of ancient Kerala, situated upon the largest rivers coming up from the coast and its network of backwaters. These centers of trade usually found a place at the eastern extremity of the rivers' navigable waters, just before they climbed into the forested hills, where no trading boats could go. ...

Every few weeks, a small group would leave for civilization, to sell the cardamom they had collected and to buy provisions like rice, ghee, tobacco, salt and sugar. This was the pattern of life in the thavalams in the Cardamom hills, and this way of life lasted well into the days of Malayali settlement in the 50s...

MALABAR (Kerala –Karnataka)

Nearest Airport –Calicut 60 kms

Railhead Calicut -60 kms

Port Calicut -60Kms

Nearest plantation destination of interest –Wynaad -80km (Coffee and Spices)

The Malabar Uplands, West of the Wynaad and in Northern Kerala today, is a part of planting country that will forever be associated with the name C.H.Browne who appears his hands in every planting venture.

Nilambur

The early plantation destination located along The Nilgiris range of the Western Ghats on the banks of the Chaliyar River.

The land belonged to the Kovilakom; the head of the family was called the Thirumulpad of Nilambur.

The first rubber plantations in India were tried in Nilambur valley on an experimental scale on the foothills of Nilgiris

Singampatti (Tamilnadu)

The Agasthiyamalai hills cut off Tirunelveli from the southwest monsoon, creating a rainshadow region.

Singampatti is part of the legendary Agasthiyamalai hills along the Bay of Bengal and flanked by the Kakachi forests and Kalakad Sanctuary. Singampatti experience an ideal climate suitable for plantations.

"Singampatti" is a Tamil term for "hamlet of lions," which suggests that the "king of the forest" once roamed in large numbers in these jungles. It is perched on the southeast tip of the Western Ghats and reflects nature's beauty at its elegant best. We access the Singampatti through Ambasamudram and across the Manimuttar dam.

The plantations of B B T C

The Bombay Burmah Trading Corp. was incorporated in 1863 by the Wallace Brothers is today the oldest Rupee Company in India founded with public participation. As the name suggests the company in its early years dealt with trading and timber from Burma (Mynmar).

History of Singampatti group estates

The plantation history of Singampatti can be summed up from notes of F. Simmons and E.A Stone who was the pioneers with the B.B.T C.

The Singampatti forests

The Singampatti rainforest of Tamilnadu is one of the few tropical rainforests left in India. This forest, which occurs along the Western Ghats of South India, houses a vast diversity of plants and animals. Nevertheless, this bountiful ecosystem is as fragile as the other forests of its kind.

High Wavys - Meghamalai Hills,

Theni district Tamilnadu, India Meghamalai, -Hills covered with clouds popularly called in Tamil as “Paccha kumacchi” or Meaning “Green Peaks

“High Wavy Mountains is a cool and misty mountain range situated in the Western Ghats in Theni district, Tamilnadu, South India.

It is a place of natural beauty dotted with cardamom plantations and tea estates. The place is situated at an elevation of 1,500 m above sea level and it is rich in flora and fauna.(Bordering periyar Tiger reserve) at the west.

The word “High Wavys “ used since the late 1920s in variably have been derived to describe the high undulating range of hills and mountains, steep and preceptious as seen from the plains

Geographically High Wayys forms part of the Varushanad Range of hills, a part of the Western Ghats

Years 1920 to 1925s, High Wavys was a Botanical station for the most entusiatic botanists. It is therefore, very difficult to get at their flowers and fruits .In most cases it is impossible to climb the trees. Ropes and hooked Knives on long sticks are useful under ordinary circumstances, but up there they could rarely be used.

In many cases, the gun was the only instrument to get leaves and flowers down .the stems are usually straight and so close together that that huge trees, whose lower parts have decayed, are kept in position by their neighbours.

Pioneers to these mountains were a group of planters Led by Napier Ford of Brooke Bond

Kothamangalam (Foothills of Munnar)

Kothamangalam is a plantation town about 60 kms from Cochin and 80 Kms before Munnar on the Cochin -Madurai National Highway 49 .One of the finest land were planting attempts were made by the Native Planting community just along the course of the developments by the pioneers from European community in and around Kannan Devan Hills .The Bhoothankettu (Dam Buit by Spirits) across periyar is an attraction, enshrouded in a Beliefs that those Huge Boulders were Raised into position by Gigantic Humans to block the River.

Coast Firms.

The History of the coast firms, at any rate those which have been established on the coast upwards of eighty years, In 1950s is very much the history of the planting community; and the reason is not far to seek. They, or their equilant, have always accompanied any pioneer efforts like the pening up of virgin country, especially when communication are of a primitive nature as they were in most countries when Planting Industry began.

The story of U .P .A S. I (United Planters Association of Southern India)

The pioneers was here from the 1800s foraying into possible and quite inpassable pieces of land with their self reliance and great dedication, the Story of U P A S I deals with the main matters concerning the evolution and development of its planting district in a summarized manner.

An Association, which is serving the planting industry addressing its needs and achieving its goals with elite representation, all started in 1893 by the vindication causing injury by the following lines.

“Some planters from SouthIndia ...

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