

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 5

Alexander's March Across the Gedrosian Desert

In 336 B.C., Alexander the Great became king of Macedonia. Soon after, he and his large army of Macedonians and Greeks set out for the lands to the east and south. In a period of 11 years, Alexander conquered nearly all of the known world.

However, one of Alexander's greatest challenges would be leading his troops home from their conquests. To return home, Alexander's troops had to cross the Gedrosian Desert.

A Hostile Place

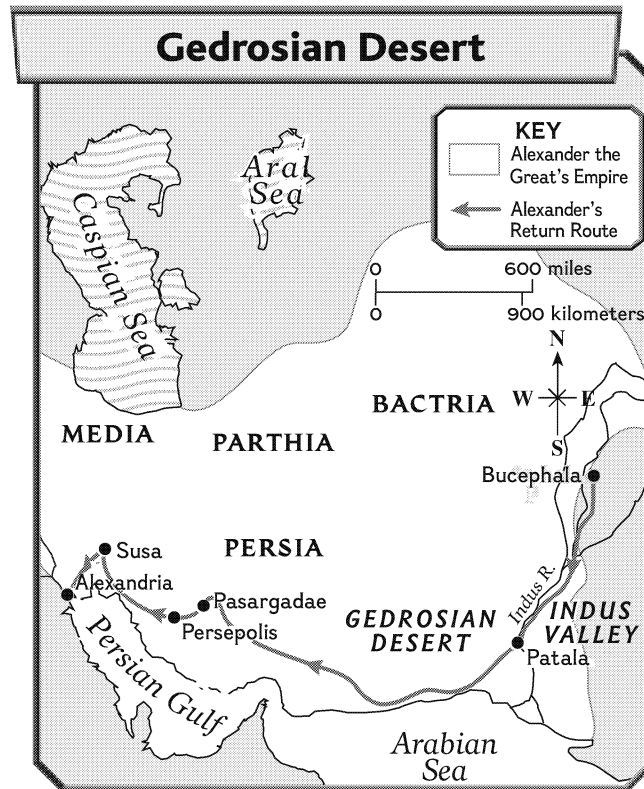
By 325 B.C., Alexander had conquered the tribes in the Indus River Valley of India. His war-weary troops, however, demanded to return home. Alexander led them back through the Gedrosian Desert.

The reason Alexander chose that path instead of a safer route farther north puzzled historians for many years. The Gedrosian is in the southern part of what is today Pakistan and Iran. It is one of the hottest, driest places in the world. There are no trees to provide shade. Daytime temperatures are over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38°C). Rainfall is less than a few inches a year. Fresh water is scarce.

However, Alexander was more than just an invading general. He was constantly looking ahead for the future of his empire. He wanted

to map out a trade route for ships sailing from the Persian Gulf to the mouth of the Indus River.

While Alexander and his army went by land, a fleet of 150 Greek ships was supposed to follow by sea. The ships were to supply the army with food. The army, not realizing how dry and



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barren the territory before them was, was supposed to supply the ships with fresh water. However, powerful storms called monsoons kept the fleet from sailing on time. Alexander had to begin his march without them.

Many Lives Lost

During the march across the Gedrosian Desert, Alexander lost an estimated three-fourths of his army. They died from heat exposure and thirst. Alexander eventually had to lead his troops farther inland, where the climate was better. He arrived back in Persia with only a handful of his 30,000 troops left.

Two years later Alexander died at the age of 32. His empire fell apart soon after his death. But Alexander's march across the Gedrosian achieved its goal. The coastal area was mapped and sea routes were opened up between east and west. After the arrival of the Greek fleet that was supposed to follow Alexander's army, the Greeks realized that sailing between Persia and India was possible. Both regions would benefit from the future trade.

Directions: Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. Why did Alexander lead his army across the Gedrosian Desert?

2. What is the name of the body of water south of the Gedrosian Desert?

3. Why was the Greek fleet unable to follow Alexander's march across the desert?

4. Why were Alexander's losses so great on the march across the Gedrosian?

5. **Evaluating** What do you think the march revealed about Alexander as a leader?

