In 1791 the East India Company army prepared to ascend the ghats from the coastal plains of the Carnatic near Vellore. It comprised 14,000 ‘effective men’, many of them on horses, 27,000 bullocks, artillery, and 80 elephants. Added to this were attendants of men and animals numbering “four times the fighting force,” families of native soldiers, merchants with their own servants, and “adventurers” “with no other view than to plunder in the enemy’s country.” The result, according to Major Dirom was “a scene altogether resembling more the emigration of a nation guarded by its troops than the march of an army, fitted out merely with the intention to subdue the enemy!”

Governor General Cornwallis would lead the army but he was in turn led by route surveyors -- men with perambulators, compasses, knowledge of the stars, but above all the ability to be ahead of themselves. Upon the route surveyor, it was often said, rested the fate of the army. They identified routes, sources of water, food and forage, sites for attacks, camp grounds, etc. They also plotted the objects that they singled out and in the process mapped ‘new’ territories.

The land to the west of the ghats was a new territory to the route surveyor. They were familiar with the Payenghat (land below the passes) through the many battles that the Company had fought since the 1740s. They were now prepared to enter the Balaghat (land above the passes) described by Sir Walter Scott as the “interior” beyond “those tremendous mountain-passes … winding upwards among immense rocks and precipices.” Cornwallis was determined “to bring the enemy to a decisive action in the field,” the enemy being Tipu Sultan who had been ‘raiding’ the Carnatic from the haven of the interior, determined as he was to rid the subcontinent of the English. Cornwallis’ eventual goal was to take Seringapatam, Tipu Sultan’s capital. The immediate objective however was to take Bangalore.

Bangalore however would not merely be a stop on the way to Seringapatam; it would become the Company’s ‘home ground’, a base from where Cornwallis would initiate a series of expeditions that in the maps of route surveyors would assert Bangalore’s centrality on the tableland.
Once through the Moolgy Pass and on the Mysore Tableland where "the air was remarkably pure and the nights very cool from the greatness of the elevations," Cornwallis raced to Bangalore. He reached it alongside Tipu Sultan’s army retreating to intercept him from the southeast where Tipu was led to expect the English. The armies converged just outside the "Round Hedge" of Bangalore, a broad strong belt of planting, chiefly the banana tree, the prickly pear, and such other trees and shrubs as form the closed fence." From March 11th to the 21st 1791, the fifty square kilometer area within this hedge was the scene of maneuvers, charges, assassination attempts, bombardments, defections and encroachments.

Tipu Sultan’s men camped to the southwest while Cornwallis camped to the northeast, astirring the petition on March 11th. In the only means of procuring forage for the cattle and materials for the siege. "Two weeks later, with the "moon shining bright" he took the fort.

For a better part of the year thereafter the centrality of Bangalore was inscribed on the map and from here Cornwallis’s men undertook a number of expeditions always returning to a place that Nizam Dinani writes, "the army looked forward to as their home. These forays involved battles for droogs. The droog, one surveyor writes, is "a hill or other a mountain, standing by itself in a plain, or so unconnected with its contiguous chains as to be out of reach of annoyance from that quarter." It is also such as to be from its density or the0nature of its soil, particularly difficult of ascent." Eventually Cornwallis conquered them all clearing the way to reach Seringapatam in February 1792 to force the Sultan to the treaty table.
PETTAH

On March 6th 1791, surveyors reconnoitred the Bangalore pettah, searching for ways to penetrate its “three-mile circumference” which was fortified with a “sofy mud wall, a thick hedge of bamboo, thorny bushes and prickly shrubs nearly a hundred yards wide, and a dry ditch.” “They chose the north gate to break in. Here they found “streets laid out with much regularity, and of great width; few towns in Hindostan can boast of better houses, or of richer inhabitants.” They also found “bales of cloth, with immense quantities of cotton and grains... Indeed the booty dug up by individuals, out of concealments and deserted houses, strongly indicated ease, comfort, and happiness in former times.”

Surveyors mapped this entity in the days that followed. When historians would later seek the origin of this town, they would find it in the life of Kempegowda, a chieftain whom they say lived it out in 1537 as a 1.5 square kilometer walled entity. Their image is the surveyor’s drawing of 1791. But these men would also uncover a myth which suggested that the petta’s beginning was in an event rather than a walled entity. The story goes that at an auspicious moment at a place where in a dream he saw a hare chase a dog Kempegowda pointed “four milk-white bullocks... harnessed to four-decorated ploughs” in four directions and let them follow the streets. Mud walls were merely moments in the unfolding of this event.

Today’s Bangalore can be seen as a continuation of this event as it intersects with the trajectories of other initiations each evolving by its own rhythms.
In 1799 the Company army returned to the tableland. This was a brief state because the land was 'tamer'. "For the purposes of the rapid advance on Seringapatam, the surveys already collected were sufficient."

Following this was the tableland placed in the hands of the Westerns, all except a few places that were tenanted by the Company. Bangalore was not one of them, the buildings being inadequate. But the Company located a 'tent station': here 'it be only to preserve tranquility in the adjacent districts.' In 1801, confident of the peace, the Company decided to centralize troops on the tableland. Bangalore, deemed 'additional salutary', was chosen for the purpose.

Lt. John Blackston designed the new cantonment a few kilometers east of the pattle. To him it was a large testing camp organized around an esplanade, a level elevation of the Mysore tableland. More than a mile long, it was noted for "brilliant manoeuvres"..."angry artillery, practicing its thunder on mock must forts," but also as a place to relax.

Blackston's camp however fast settled into a town as the "theatre of war" became a distant backdrop, and the esplanade a "park-ground." Two decades later, Blackston writes, "Since I left the country, [Bangalore] has increased both in size and beauty, and may now be considered one of the largest and finest cantonments in India. The reader will excuse me for indulging in a little exaggeration on the subject of this my architectural offspring. I consider myself, in fact, a little Romulus." Even its designer had begun to believe its permanence.
From the Eastern Ghats to Bangalore Cornwallis’ army marched across a terrain where “valleys are generally broad and open, the gradients of the rivers low, and the whole surface of the country presents the gently undulating aspect characteristic of an ancient land surface.” To the west of Bangalore, this surface grows younger. It becomes what Major Otton in 1790 called “a difficult country... full of hills and very woody.” It was “everywhere broken by deep ravines into rugged precipices.” It formed “a strong barrier between Bangalore and Seringapatam,” forcing Cornwallis to pause in his advance on Tipu Sultan’s capital long enough to make Bangalore a home and for surveyors to map these “wells.”

Bruce Foote, the Colonel of South Indian geology, noted in the 1890s that the hills in this tract are arranged in a line and not a chain. “The expression line of hills,” he explained “is used in preference to the term chain as there is a little continuity of high ground, the hills being mostly quite detached and separated in some parts by considerable spaces.” Detachment was a quality sought after in appropriating hills for strongholds and this tract had a concentration of strongholds led by Savandurga, a “fortified mountain” that was “less famed for its numerous atmospheres, occasioned by the surrounding hills and woods, than for its wonderful size and strength.”

By December 1791 this tract was saturated enough for the strongholds to become surveyors’ prospects and the forest a refuge. Here, on January 29th 1792, “the armies of East Cornwallis, Secunder Jau and Kury Punt formed one extensive encampment” before leaving for Seringapatam in three columns for the final assault on the island capital.