

yards wide; generally it must be nearly double that width. Its course is very tortuous, being marked by willow-trees and beds of reeds: in a direct line the distance to the mouth of the river is said to be nine leagues, but by water twenty-five. We were delayed crossing in the canoe by some immense troops of mares, which were swimming the river in order to follow a division of troops into the interior. A more ludicrous spectacle I never beheld than the hundreds and hundreds of heads, all directed one way, with pointed ears and distended snorting nostrils, appearing just above the water like a great shoal of some amphibious animal. Mare's flesh is the only food which the soldiers have when on an expedition. This gives them a great facility of movement; for the distance to which horses can be driven over these plains is quite surprising: I have been assured that an unloaded horse can travel a hundred miles a day for many days successively.

The encampment of General Rosas was close to the river. It consisted of a square formed by wagons, artillery, straw huts, etc. The soldiers were nearly all cavalry; and I should think such a villanous, banditti-like army was never before collected together. The greater number of men were of a mixed breed, between Negro, Indian, and Spaniard. I know not the reason, but men of such origin seldom have a good expression of countenance. I called on the Secretary to show my passport. He began to cross-question me in the most dignified and mysterious manner. By good luck I had a letter of recommendation from the Government of Buenos Ayres¹ to the commandant of Patagones. This was taken to General Rosas, who sent me a very obliging message; and the Secretary returned all smiles and graciousness. We took up our residence in the *rancho*, or hovel, of a curious old Spaniard, who had served with Napoleon in the expedition against Russia.

¹ I am bound to express, in the strongest terms, my obligation to the Government of Buenos Ayres for the obliging manner in which passports to all parts of the country were given me as naturalist of the "Beagle."