

But we failed to detect any signs of a fresh bajir; though the steep sandy walls which a long way off in the east faced towards us proved that there were bajirs there. The tamarisks, being more widely scattered, looked like black dots on the unending expanse of yellow sand. Finding, in a valley between two high dunes, a few living tamarisks, and some kamisch that was tenderer and fuller of sap than any we had hitherto come across, we decided to encamp. Throughout the whole of this desert journey, we did not see a single trace of a poplar; not even an ancient trunk rewarded our search, although I did discover one a pretty long way in the Desert of Takla-makan. It was not until we reached the extreme south of the desert that we found dead poplar-trunks.

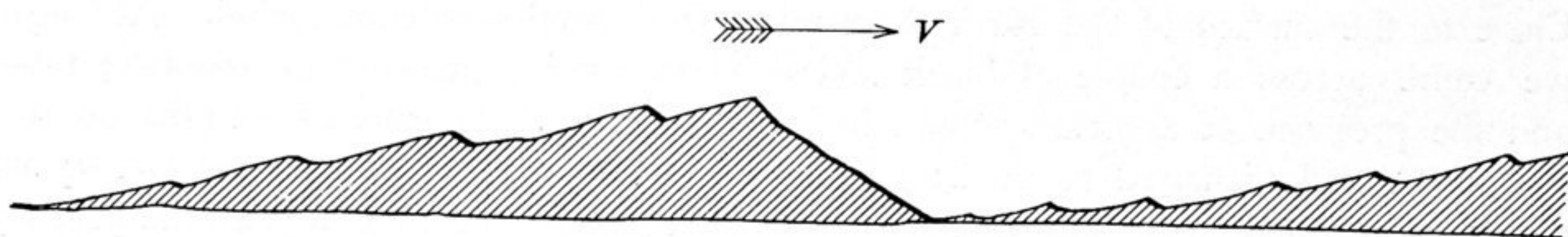


Fig. 278. VERTICAL SECTION OF A SANDED-UP BAJIR FROM EAST TO WEST.

The peculiarity of the belt of desert in which we now were was that the dunes were no longer piled up in gigantic ranges or chains, but were more individually separate and more uniform in elevation. It was only occasionally that a pyramidal dome towered above its neighbours.

On the morning of the 2nd January it was snowing softly, and the ground was buried under a white sheet, through which projected only the reed-stalks that the camels had not plucked off. I had never before seen the dunes shrouded in this funereal garb, but its effect was to enhance still more the bareness and desolation of the desert, and give it the appearance of being sunk in an even deeper and chillier swoon of death than heretofore. The snow did not however consist of the ordinary stelliform flakes, but of needles and crystals of an extremely fine, thin shape, resembling a severe rime-frost. But before noon it had all disappeared off the slopes that faced southwards, and in the afternoon the sand everywhere resumed its usual yellow colour, except in certain sheltered hollows, where a few white strips still clung.

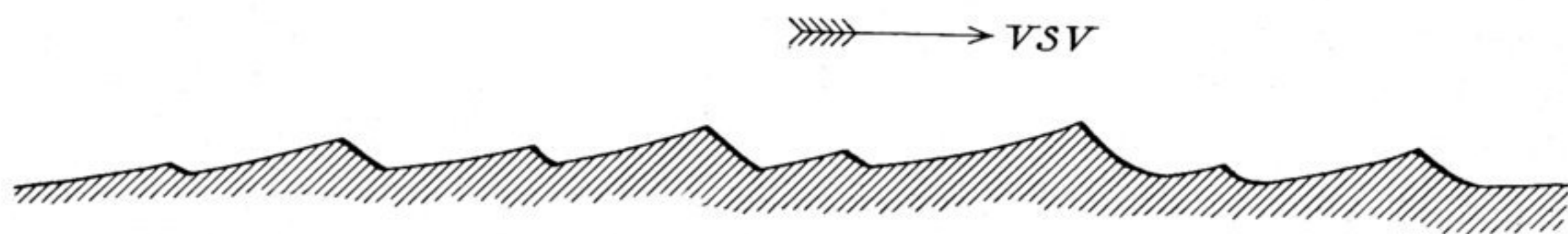


Fig. 279. VERTICAL SECTION OF THE PART OF THE DESERT WHERE THERE ARE NO BAJIR-DEPRESSIONS AT ALL.

Again we lost ourselves amongst the heavy dunes, which indeed appeared to grow bigger as we advanced; and gradually the vegetation came to an end. We failed to strike any fresh bajir. The steep leeward faces of the dunes were all turned towards the south, the west, or the south-west; here it would have been absolutely impossible to advance to the north or to the east. During the day's march I observed that there were accumulations of dunes corresponding to the thresholds