

by a minor range, which was however pretty broad. We reached the first saddle by means of a sandy watercourse; but after that had to cross over an entire series of spurs, branches, and ridges, separated from one another by small rain-channels. At length, however, we attained the summit, and then had a steep descent into a tolerably narrow latitudinal valley proceeding west. Southwards for as far as we were able to see — and the atmosphere was fairly clear — there stretched a long series of minor ridges; though to the south-eastwards the zone appeared to grow narrower, for in that direction, we could just perceive, beyond the last saddle, a faint yellowish gleam, indicating either the kamisch steppe or an expanse of sand. South-west the country was broken, and in the extreme west we could distinguish a mountain-crest. We had had some idea of trying to reach Tschigelik-kuduk, on the road between Abdal and Sa-tscheo; but as in the little latitudinal valley into which we had descended the wild camels' tracks were extraordinarily numerous, I thought it better to follow them westwards, for possibly they led to a spring. Accordingly we kept along the northern foot of the ridge that bordered the little valley on the south, crossing in succession over its numerous slopes and ravines. As however the ridge soon came to an end, and gave place to minor undulations, we bore more to the south-west, especially as the camel-tracks appeared to bend round to the north-east, possibly making for Pavan-bulak, a spring we had heard spoken of the year before; but it lay too far off our line of march, and the uncertainty of our finding it was too great for us to attempt to search for it. Two or three kilometers to the north-west we noticed stretches of low fiery red hills and table-topped elevations, which appeared to accompany both sides of the little valley we had left. In this quarter the crests of the Kuruk-tagh stretched east and west.

On the 17th February, after crossing over the broad range, and skirting round the western end of the other which lay south of the latitudinal valley, we directed our steps towards a projecting part of a third crest, which however came suddenly to an end like the others. A fourth and a fifth range both extended a little farther west, but both terminated equally suddenly. In other words, all these five parallel ranges came to an end in the same locality, although each successive range to the south stretched a little farther west than its neighbours. They were evidently the same lines of heights that we had crossed whilst travelling northwards from Toghrak-kuduk. At a pretty considerable distance to the west, and on the other side of a gap or saddle which was faced by the terminals of all the five ridges, we perceived a somewhat higher range, and, further, through a gap or notch in it yet another range, which appeared to be higher than all the others in that quarter. As the position of the caravan was growing desperate from want of water, we made straight for these mountains, where there was more likelihood of our finding a spring than there was to the south. For in that direction, as also to the south-west, lay the Desert of Lop, a gleaming yellow, barren expanse as boundless as the sea; and we knew from our experience of the year before that there was no prospect of digging down to water there. The *astin-jol*, or road from Abdal to Sa-tscheo, was too far off.

At first the ground was broken. On the right we still had the latitudinal valley, but it had now broadened out to a depression lying north-west of the terminals of