

perfectly bare of vegetation. On the right we had an almost unbroken belt of dunes, at only one or two hundred meters' distance from the water. It was here we came upon the first signs of human beings, namely two men, probably hunters. Cow-droppings showed that live-stock had been grazing there recently. Of wild animals we noticed wild-duck, wild-geese, swans, gulls, terns, and crows, hares, foxes, roe-deer; and there were vast quantities of wild-boar tracks, as well as of a species of *Felidæ*, probably the wild-cat, which the natives call *molun*. And here too there were enormous quantities of mollusc shells, of the same kind as those we observed in the old Lop-nor, scattered over the ground down to the water's edge; indeed they were under the water, but there are no molluscs living in it there. The same thing applies to them as to the few dead and withered poplar-trees which still remained standing on their own roots in a few places along the shores. It may sound paradoxical to talk of trees and molluscs being dead beside water. Of this there exists only one possible explanation, but that is as clear as the noonday. It is this: both trees and molluscs died during an intermediate arid period, and the remains which we now found along the shores were much older than the existing lake; for this last is far from being permanent, but changes, even as the winds and the dunes do in this ever-changing region.

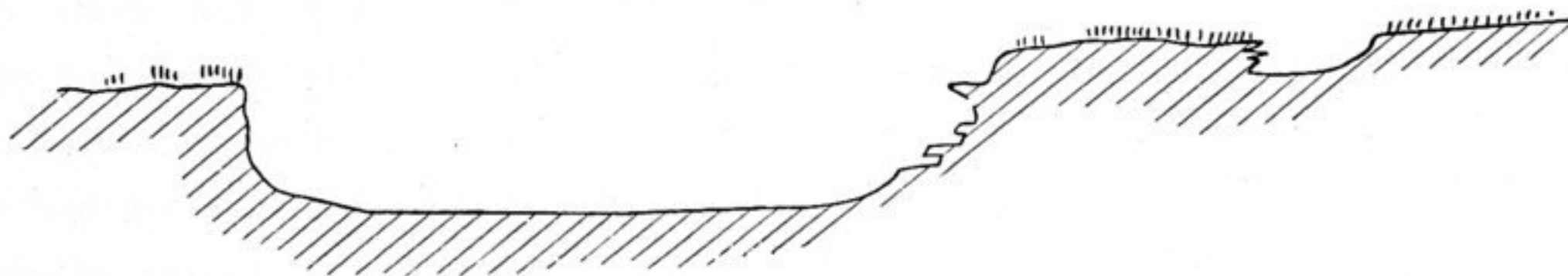


Fig. 83. OLD BED OF THE TARIM.

After coming to the termination of our lake, which ended in a long narrow bay, and after we had seen no water for a good long time, we proceeded towards the south-west, travelling along a distinctly marked, open »passage» between two dune-chains, built up of individual dunes of regular and beautiful formation, semi-crescentic in shape, and standing each tolerably detached from the others, and with their steep sides as usual turned towards the south-west. The open groove in the middle was part of the ancient lake-bottom, still clothed in places with rotting kamisch-stubble, a survival of the last preceding period of watering. Immediately south of that we crossed over an old river-bed of the same dimensions as the lower part of the existing Tarim, namely 45 m. broad, and 6 to 7 m. deep, most distinctly outlined and exceptionally well preserved (fig. 83), with quantities of kamisch-stubble still standing on its banks. There cannot be any doubt that the Tarim once flowed along this channel; for what other river could have scooped it out so deeply? I have already discovered, that the Tarim formerly turned off to the east at Schirgetschapghan, flowing through the arm which is now called the Tokus-tarim. The river-bed I have just mentioned — another loop of which we crossed shortly afterwards, with three slender poplars that died young still standing on its banks — this is in all probability the eastward continuation of the Tokus-tarim. The Tarim flowed here sufficiently long to give the forest an opportunity of springing up, though to a limited extent only, on its banks. But before the trees were able to grow to