

were built, the lake-basin was in that part deeper than it is now, and its water perfectly fresh and well stocked with reeds; whereas at the present time there does not exist one reed-stalk, and the water is slightly saline and very shallow. But how far the reeds disappeared during the waterless period, when the tamarisks died, or whether they perished in consequence of the increasing salinity of the water, cannot be decided, though the former is more likely the case. Perhaps it was the advent of the arid period which led to the huts being definitively abandoned, otherwise the natives would have taken their canoe with them, for when it was left behind it was doubtless sound and whole.

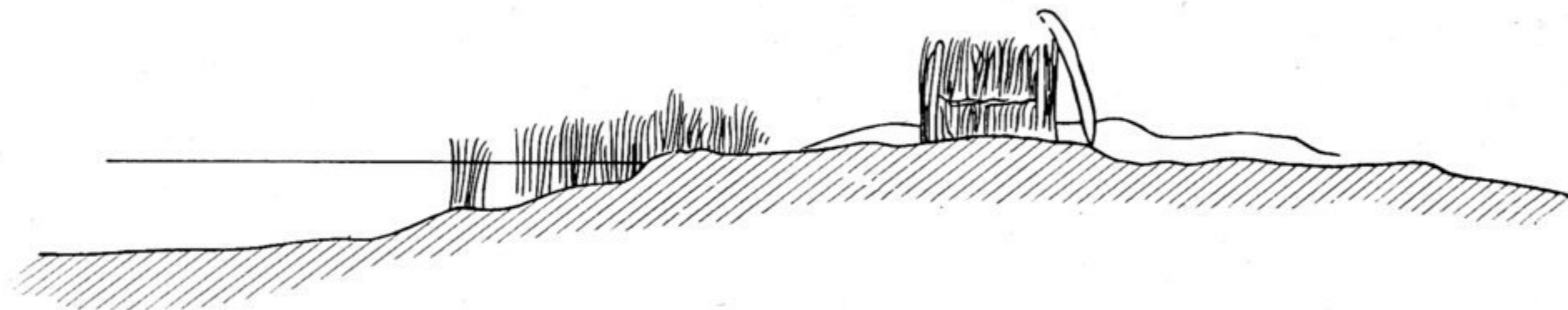


Fig. 115. THE HUTS WHEN STILL INHABITED.

If the lake was formerly deeper, as I have good reason to believe, then it is far more the filling up of the lake than its shrinkage which has in time caused it to grow shallower. This is clearly proved by the fact that the bases of the posts of the framework lie only 1 to 2 dm. above the existing level; in fact the lower end of the canoe was actually a couple of dm. below the existing level, and it is this which caused it to rot. Fig. 114 shows the position at the moment of our discovery, and fig. 115 the condition of things when the huts were still inhabited. The drift-sand and dust have elevated the lake-bottom, but the huts are certainly about the same distance from the shore now as formerly. Another clear indication that this little fishing-station was deserted a pretty long time ago may be seen in the fact that none of my attendants had ever heard speak of them, and still less of the other four huts situated farther to the north-east. The circumstance, that they as well as the village of Kara-koschun (which Prschevskij after his visit calls Kara-kurtschin) and the village of Örtäng (Ujtun) were deserted one after the other, proves that the lake is undergoing a steady shrinkage and that the population beside it has diminished. The lake is unable to support so large a population as formerly, and many of the inhabitants are already abandoning their old mode of life and devoting themselves to agriculture.



Fig. 116. VERTICAL SECTION OF THE SHORE REGION.

At length we reached the north-east corner of the lake, and could then turn to the west-south-west. Here we observed some low mud-islands, partly overgrown with tamarisks. The shore was exceptionally straight; parallel with it grew a belt of köuruk, and farther away the belt of low sand with its sprinkling of tamarisks again made its appearance. North of that stretches the extensive barren schor desert,