

July 30th. In the morning the lake and its environs were shrouded in a thick damp mist, so that nothing of the Kalta-alaghan was visible, and we were unable to get so much as a glimpse of the northern shore of the lake. Farther south, and later on in the day, the mist did it is true lift, but by that the mountain-range was so far distant that its outlines were only faintly discernible. All that we were able to see distinctly was the immediate vicinity of our route. The atmosphere was still and the mosquitoes pursued us in veritable clouds. It was not until the afternoon was well advanced that the air cleared.

We now left the bottom of the Kum-köl depression, and climbed slowly up towards its southern border-range and water-divide. The rich grass soon came to an end, proving to be only a narrow girdle around the lake, broadest at its eastern end, where the springs are numerous, but gradually narrowing towards the west in proportion as the springs gave out. On the northern shore there would appear to be scarce any grass at all. Immediately south-west of our camp were a couple of small lagoons, separated from the lake-shore by a low sandy ridge. Thence we directed our steps towards the south-south-west, crossing on the way the extremities of the offshoots from the sand, which point westwards like long, narrow fingers, sparsely covered with grass. These outlying dunes do not therefore possess the usual semi-crescentic or conchoidal base; such formations only appear farther east, where the sand is bare. The sandy ridges are to a great extent held together by vegetation, though the grass is so scanty, that at a distance it makes no difference to the usual yellow glare of the sand. Many of these ridges upon coming themselves to an end are continued by smaller insular dunes built up in the form of knolls. The slopes of the dunes were here frequently pretty steep.

In the hollows between these apophyses, or fingers, the hard, but moist, earth produces a richer crop of grass, and in most of them there are one or two small lagoons of fresh water, although with a slightly brackish taste. These lagoons, like the lake, are evidently fed from springs, which gush out underneath the sand. The high dunes, which here generally turn their steep sides towards the south-east, approached quite close to our route on the east; but as we advanced they receded to an increasingly greater distance, whilst at the same time their crests grew both lower and flatter, and finally they died away altogether. Meanwhile the surface became hard and gently undulating, here and there strewn with gravel, but otherwise dotted over with a thin sprinkling of steppe-plants and grass. At some distance to the west were yellow hills, which so far as we were able to judge in the hazy atmosphere likewise consisted of drift-sand, though I would not venture to assert that they were so. It is however quite possible that the large river, which we were now about to cross over, made a breach in the expanse of sand; this is in reality greater than I thought it was.

The river to which I have just alluded has carved for itself a deep, wide bed through the yellow clay and soft soil, and we now descended into it by three distinctly marked terrace-like steps, the last of which was pretty steep. The slopes down to the level ground at the bottom sometimes consist of flat knolls, and sometimes are steep and sharp-cut, especially where the stream presses against them. At that time the water covered but one-tenth of the full breadth, and the flood, which