

Northwards, immediately under our feet, lay the broad expanse of the salt lake, while the new freshwater lake stretched a long way to the east. Between the two is a long, narrow strip of land traversed by a couple of ridges. At the foot of these, that is to say on the northern shore of the freshwater lake, the grazing was wonderfully good, and there was any quantity of game. For instance, there were kulans and wild yaks, large numbers of hares, and in the distance we saw a fox, and at night heard the wolves howling, while wild-duck and wild-geese swarmed all round the shores of the lake. A small caravan might support itself here for some weeks; nor did I neglect the opportunity, for while the camels were given a rest at Camp XXXVI, I made a little excursion to see what this lake region was like.

Our outlook hill stood on a peculiar, fantastically shaped peninsula, the outlines of which we only thoroughly understood after another excursion. To the south was a bay of the freshwater lake, and beyond it a sort of long, narrow natural pier, low-lying and somewhat curving, that terminates in an island. Then, very nearly parallel with the shore of the bay, are two semicircular flattened ramparts or ridges of very regular formation, and consisting of gravel and coarse sand tightly packed together. On the western shore of the peninsula again there are two similar ramparts at exactly the same elevation above the water as the first two, but in themselves both lower and smaller. Ensnconced between the first pair of ramparts are five elongated pools, the water in which was perfectly fresh; they lay about 2 m. above the level of the lake. The western pair of ramparts likewise embrace two elongated pools, both of pretty large size. Inside each of the inner ramparts there is a large shallow sheet of water. On the peninsula again there are several other pools, though these are in no way connected with the ramparts.

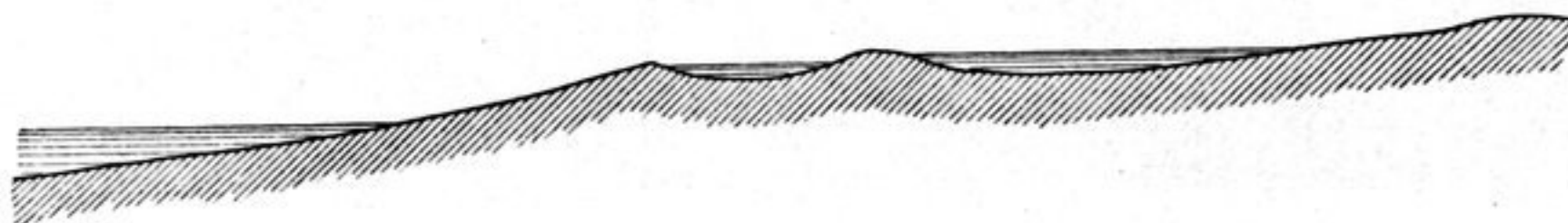


Fig. 92.

That these ramparts mark older beach-lines (fig. 92) of the lake admits of no doubt, so that the lake is obviously shrinking. In both cases alike the rampart next the lake is lower than the outer one, which was formed when the lake rose to a higher level. The narrow depression between each pair of ramparts is especially suited to serve as a reservoir, and its bottom must be cemented with fine mud and clay, which does not allow the water that gathers in it after rain, or that from small springs, to percolate into the ground and so escape. As for the lake itself, it lies due south of the salt lake, and the water it contains is perfectly fresh and tolerably limpid, and after having received the river, with its 30 cub.m. in the second, it empties itself into the salt lake through the sound already alluded to.

On August 30th we started on the little reconnoitring excursion. After crossing the mouth of the river, a matter of some difficulty even with the help of the boat, we steered towards the east-south-east, across the narrow »stalk« of the peculiarly shaped peninsula, having water on both sides of us, on the left the lower basin of the river and on the right a bay of the freshwater lake, entirely filled with islands,