

towards the east-south-east and the south-east, and soon appeared to be pretty deeply incised. It no doubt joins the eroded watercourse that forces its way through the minor parallel range and then runs to the north-east, though after the junction the united channel must proceed towards the south-east.

Having crossed over the eroded watercourse at its lowest part, we directed our march towards the north-east, and soon plunged into a labyrinth of hills and broken ground, in and out amongst which wind a number of dry watercourses, issuing from the lower heights which we saw towards the north-west, and all running down towards the principal watercourse. This last does not appear to be joined by any side-glens from the right, at all events in that locality, although it is so lower down, as we shall soon find.

At the point where we quitted the valley, we again came across the old road of the day before, and it now turned out to be a *tschong-jol* or highway with *iles*, or »landmarks», set up on every dominating hill. These consist of small pyramids of stones, generally visible a long way off, and wherever doubt might arise as to the direction in which the track threads the hills, they stand closer together. The road itself is for the most part distinct, revealing itself especially in the hard gravelly and sandy soil as five or six parallel, faintly marked depressions or grooves, an indication that the route had been used by large companies or travellers with several horses marching abreast. In places the surface is so hard that it would require a very lively traffic to make even such grooves or tracks as those we saw. So long as we were marching towards the north-east we passed no less than 13 cairns of stones. The question naturally arises, what was the object of this road, now so completely forgotten? Did it belong to the period when, as one of my men, a hunter well acquainted with that region, declared, the Mongols of northern Tsajdam used occasionally to resort to the grazing-grounds of the Tschimen valley, and especially those of Temirlik? Or was it used by Mongol pilgrims bound for Lhasa during an unsettled and warlike time, when for fear of either Mussulmans or Tanguts, it was expedient to travel by such a back-road as this, situated as it is remote from all inhabited regions? Anyway it does not seem to have been a chance road, for in that case the users would hardly have taken the trouble to build up the cairns of stones. Nor does it seem to have been a pilgrim road, for in that case we should have found similar heaps of stones farther in amongst the mountains. Nor can we assume that this road was connected with the landmarks which we observed in the gorge of Toghri-saj, for that would have meant an unaccountable and unnecessarily long detour to the west. The first-mentioned supposition seems to me to be the most likely; it is indeed probable that the road dates from the time when the Mongols dwelt beside the Kara-koschun and had their flocks and herds in the mountains, and that it was used for the purpose of maintaining communication in summer between these Mongol settlements and those in northern Tsajdam and Särtäng, and lapsed into forgetfulness, perhaps indeed was never used, after the Mussulmans settled beside the Kara-koschun and the former Mongol inhabitants retired. Later on we shall come across this old road once or twice again.

It struck me, that by following this route we should have the best prospect of finding water in such an inconceivably arid region as that is; indeed in this