

From the top of the pass the ground falls away gently towards the basin of the Lower Kum-köl. At first we kept to a glen of moderate size, then after crossing over a small saddle, we continued our march down a second similar glen. Both are bordered by soft, rounded offshoots from the ridge in which the pass is situated, and which itself forms a westward prolongation of the Kalta-alaghan. After that we steered our course towards the south-east, passing on the left, that is the north, the entrance to the big, broad latitudinal valley by which in November we had travelled to Kum-bulak, namely the valley which intervenes between the Kalta-alaghan and the Piaslik or Tschimen-tagh. This valley appears to be directly continuous with the self-contained basin I have just described, though between the two there must be a flat saddle or threshold. The glen that we now left on the north is a transverse glen through the Kalta-alaghan, and affords a passage to the river that we found in the western part of the latitudinal valley. Towards the west the Kalta-alaghan comes to a rather sudden end, though it is continued by a minor, detached butte. Through the gap between the two we again saw the snow-capped crest of the Piaslik. Here, as at Kum-bulak, its relative altitude appeared to be rather insignificant, owing to the fact that the latitudinal valley just mentioned lies at such a great absolute elevation. As we advanced away from the mountains the country grew more and more open, the surface sloping at a remarkably gentle angle towards the south-east. In front of us we now perceived the two small detached buttes which we had noticed in our November excursion. It was at the eastern foot of the eastern butte that we then encamped (see Atlas Pl. 44); we were now approaching the western one at an acute angle, having it pretty close on our right. It forms a short and rather low crest, stretching east and west. On the left we passed another small detached butte, lying east of the principal mass, and thus marched as it were through a rocky gateway. And now we saw spread out before us the broad blue sheet of the Ajagh-kum-köl; to the left the Kalta-alaghan, its summit faintly white, formed an impressive feature as seen in foreshortened perspective. The country here was remarkably flat and open, such irregularities as do exist not impeding the view. The ground was hard, and excellent for travelling, consisting of gravel, coarse sand, and dust, and the farther we got down, the drier it became, for the brooks from the melting snows are not able to reach so far down. Generally the surface was quite barren, grass and scrub being rare. There is nothing to indicate which way the surface slopes except the beds of the dry watercourses. Thus there exists, north of the free-standing butte, a gentle swelling, from which a brook descends towards the north-east, hugging closely the northern foot of the small insular butte. From the same swelling a second brook runs towards the south-west, but this must evidently describe an arc round the larger butte, going south, south-east, and finally east. Kulans and orongo antelopes were numerous, though at this season lean, for the young summer grass had not yet begun to sprout.

At the spot where we encamped, quite close to the lake shore, there were no springs. We dug several wells, but the water they yielded was salt. One of the shepherds who had accompanied us from Unkurluk possessed however sufficient instinct to point out to us a place where he undertook to say we should find drinkable water, and he was right. We dug down through the sand until we came to