

drop of drinkable water until we reached the next camp. Hence this region was rather arid, in consequence of no rain having fallen for a considerable time back. The little lake, which nevertheless was the biggest we had seen since leaving Camp XXVI, was circular, or rather somewhat elliptical, in shape. Contrary to the usual practice, the north-south axis was rather longer than the east-west axis, so that the lake lies as it were athwart the valley. Its situation is however prescribed by a minor ridge, reddish in colour and in part grass-grown, which rises close to its western side. On the east shore also there are some hills. In this way there has arisen in the big latitudinal valley a self-contained basin, elongated from north to south. The shore, at the point where we struck it, consisted of fine reddish mud, which had been brought down and deposited by the torrents off the circumjacent mountains, though at that time not one of them contributed to it a single drop of water. The shore is exceedingly flat, and next the water was a snow-white strip, which derived its colour from a slight deposit of salt. So far as we were able to see, the lake itself lay in a basin encrusted with crystallised salt, precisely in the same way as the great salt lake which I examined the year before by boat. The lake water here was impregnated with salt to such an extent that the areometer projected almost half its length out of it, and I had to make a fresh mark on the

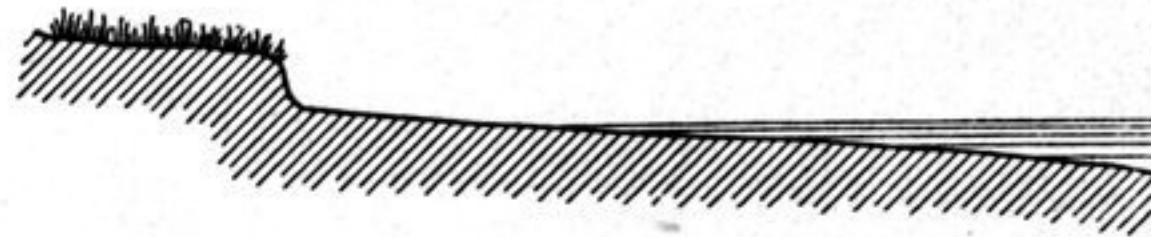


Fig. 356.

glass in order to determine the sp. gr., which amounted to 1.21. The grass nowhere reached down to the water's edge, but stopped suddenly short, as the accompanying illustration (fig. 356) shows, in the form of a rampart shorn transversely across. Below it comes the flat strip of shore, appearing to the eye almost perfectly level, and consisting of moist saliferous mud, so soft that to venture on it was dangerous. The water of the lake was of the most glorious colour, a pure deep blue, which was shown up by the ring of white salt all round it, with the red mountains for a background. The shape of the depression might have been inferred with a fair degree of accuracy from the relations of altitude in the neighbouring mountains. The strip of shore is very narrow on the east side, owing to the hills approaching within a hundred meters or so of the water-line. On the west side the slopes appears to descend rather steeply towards the water; and the strip of flat shore must be very narrow on that side also, if indeed it is not in some places altogether wanting. But on both the north and the south sides the circumstances are quite different; for the strip of shore, which appears to the eye to be almost level, reaches back to a considerable distance, and is moist, especially on the north, this being ascribable to the temporary watercourses that enter the lake in that quarter rather than to a subsidence of the surface of the lake. From this description it will be apparent that on north and south the lake is shelving and not very deep, while the deepest part, which however will not run to more than ten or a dozen m., if as much, must be sought for near the western side, where the shore slopes down at the steepest angle.