

Nor did it rain during the night, a fortunate thing for us, for next day we travelled through a country that was extremely sensitive to wet. Even as it was we found it difficult work to get on, our progress not exceeding 3 km. in the hour. In some places the surface had dried somewhat during the last twenty-four hours, yet not sufficiently to have acquired its normal degree of firmness. A layer of dry fine dust, a decimeter thick, rested upon wet blue clay intermingled with sand, and into this the animals dropped foot-deep. All the watercourses that we crossed over were directed towards the west. On the whole the surface rose as slowly as possible towards the south, that is towards the mountains which border the latitudinal valley on that side. The country was however fairly rolling, for we crossed over one flat ridge after another. Several of the drainage channels between these ridges were especially difficult to get across (fig. 3). Although only half a meter wide they were a meter deep, and we had to make wide detours to get round them, or, as happened in one or two cases, had to fill them up with earth, before we were able to effect a passage across them. Other depressions between the hills presented the shape shown in the accompanying sketch (fig. 4). In them too the surface consisted of fine yellow sand and dust, resting upon a substratum of blue clay. Most of the watercourses contained water and emptied themselves either into pools or into a small lake which we passed at some distance to the west of our route. Directly opposite to this lake we detected, unexpectedly enough, the footprints of camels, though in one locality only. These had nothing to do with our caravan, for during my absence my men had never penetrated so far south. Possibly they were due to some Mongol caravan, which contrary to the usual custom had left its camels in the mountains, and had continued its journey to Lhasa with horses or hired yaks. At intervals we also came across traces of older camp-fires. We saw here the skeleton of a recently shot and slaughtered yak. Wild animals were now becoming scarcer, an orongo antelope or kulan showing itself occasionally, though there were hares and ravens. The vegetation was thin. Except for wild garlic, which was quite abundant in places, there was scarcely anything else but *japkak* and *jer-baghri*.

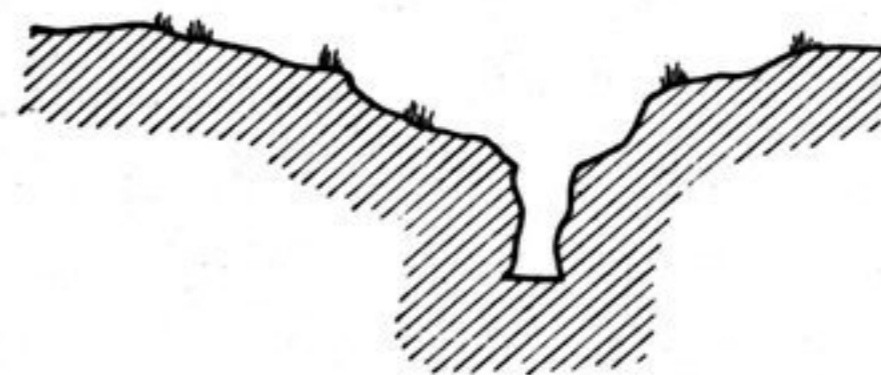


Fig. 3.

On the whole the country was painfully monotonous: we travelled all day without finding any noteworthy change. Immediately to the east of our route was a stretch of low hills and it was off their summits that all the brooks flow which make their way into the lake.

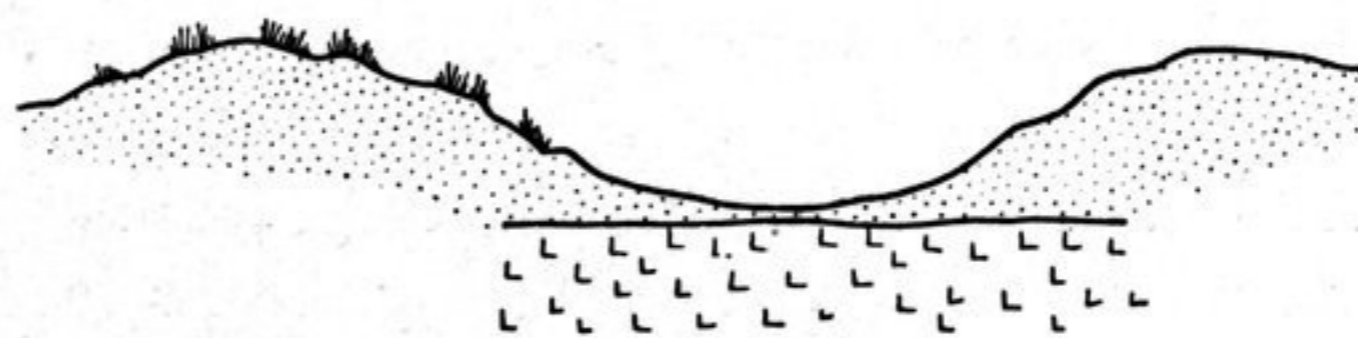


Fig. 4.

The eastern shore of this is flat, and the lake shallow, while the shore-line is very irregular, being diversified by bays, promontories, and low-lying islands. The whole belt of shore consisted of barren mud, so soft that it refused to bear the weight of a man. Consequently we were unable to get any nearer to the lake than we actually did. Most of the brooks that enter this basin pursue each an independent course, some with, others without a delta; only a