

Beyond the village of Gun-khuduk we approach the foot of the mountain.¹ To our left is an irrigation canal with piles in the bank. The grey, monotonous landscape is otherwise bare; the dry dust is whirled up by the camels' feet. At a distance of some kilometers, to the west, we see the white buildings of the monastery Khundulun-sume. Outside a square enclosure of clay we set up our first camp. The camels are freed from their loads. The blue Mongolian tents are put up by their owners and the routine that is soon to become a daily habit is begun. Even on this first day the whole camp was ready in record quick time. I preferred to have my sleeping-bag on canvas on the ground — the others had iron camp-beds, though these were afterwards abandoned as being too heavy and troublesome. Six members of the staff were still missing, but we had, none the less, no fewer than sixteen tents. Among these, and higher than the rest, was the double-roofed, light-green mess-tent where the common meals were to be taken.

LOCAL STORM

In the afternoon we witnessed an imposing phenomenon of Nature. A cyclone from the north-west came sweeping over the tract around Khundulun-sume and whirled up such dense clouds of dust and fine sand that even the nearest tents were blotted out. The violence of this local storm was terrific; four of the sixteen tents were levelled with the ground and the sun-roof of the mess-tent was ripped to pieces. All maps, diaries and lighter objects were quickly thrust into boxes lest they should be blown away. The storm was over in a few minutes, leaving behind a curious stillness.

As dusk was falling the two hundred and thirty-two camels were led forward to their loads, where they had to lie and chew the cud all night, to be ready for the re-loading in the morning. Camels are not let out to pasture during the night, as they cannot see to browse in the dark. Two Europeans and four soldiers were detailed off for sentry duty. The latter requested that no-one should leave the camp during the night lest they be shot by mistake on their return.

ALONG THE KHUNDULUN-GOL

The second day's march took us nearer to the mountains in the north-west. Although the year was not very far advanced the night was nevertheless chilly — at 5 a. m. only 8.8° C.

The road soon leads into the Yin-shan and the little valley of the Khundulun-

¹ Yin-shan, which on the maps is also called Wula-shan, Ula-shan or Muni-ula (PRJEVALSKY'S Muni-ulla). F. B.