

## CROSSING A MOTOR TRACK

Not far from camp XXXI at Ulan-tologoi we passed the wheel-tracks of three motor-cars, a very uncommon and surprising sight in these desert tracts. Later we heard from LARSON that he had reached Ulan-tologoi with his advance caravan at the same time as the motor-cars. He even happened to know one of the drivers from Urga, whence they had come. They were on the way to Ning-hsia to fetch fifteen Russian instructors who had been in FENG YÜ-HSIANG's service and were now going to return home.<sup>1</sup> Our people had had a pleasant evening with the Russians, who had invited LIEBERENZ and his film camera for a trip of fifty li, giving him an opportunity of taking some interesting pictures of a car that had got stuck in the sand and had to be dug free with spades.

Our road of September 7th led down through a sharp-contoured valley, a stream-bed running between steep hills. We saw a deserted Chinese homestead that had been taken over by Mongols. Here Dr HAUDE had cast aside an empty hydrogen-gas cylinder. Occasionally one passed a stately wild elm growing in the bed of the stream. The route led right under one of these, and for a moment one heard the soughing of the breeze in the foliage, and felt the grateful shade afforded by the leafy canopy. It was cool and delightful, and the fresh breeze among the leaves sounded like the plashing of a waterfall, a greeting from a distant land. But the moment was soon past, and one was once more riding under the blazing sun.

We left the valley and turned up to the left in a lateral erosion-bed leading to a little pass with an obo. On the plain at the foot of the hill the ground was shot with green, and there about a hundred camels belonging to a resting merchant caravan were browsing. On the yonder side of the ridge a ravine, a real valley of death, led down to the plain. Here, in one single spot, lay ten camel-skeletons.

Day after day we journeyed on to the west, little dots in a limitless desert. Hardly a trace of vegetation, no surface water, no life. Occasionally a little lizard scuttled past. We pitched camp at the well Shara-khulus, or The Yellow Reed. It would not be easy to find this little hole in the ground if the spot were not marked with a heap of stones. The latter was horribly crowned with the skull of a camel, stones in the gaping jaws. It looked ironical, hateful, cruel.

On this day we had a maximum of 30.8° C. The last nights the minimum had been + 5.5° and 9.6° C. Owing to the strong insulation one felt the heat of the day like an oven. One counted the hours till evening, which always came as a relief and a blessing. What would it have been like if we had passed this way two months earlier?

<sup>1</sup> On the Russian »40 verst map» there is a road between Urga and Ning-hsia crossing our route somewhat to the east of a place called Ulan-tologoi-khuduk, which may be the equivalent of our Ulan-tologoi. The road then passes the temple mentioned in the previous note (Shartzan-sume). F. B.