

During the march on September 18th, too, the pasturing was splendid — the whole region quite a distance to the west is called Goitsen-gol (or as KOZLOV has it, Goitzo). A spring in the neighbourhood formed a ring-shaped dam with a reed-clad island in the middle. The reeds here grew twice as high as the camels.

The mighty dunes to the left are said to extend a fifteen days' journey to the south without offering any water. The supply of water here on the edge of the sand-belt was all the richer. We passed two lonely trees and the votive sign Tsaghan-obo.

We passed in and out among bush-grown sand dunes where Orlogon's well is marked by a stack of dead saxaule trunks, finally pitching camp between two long dunes offering an inexhaustible supply of fuel.

At this camp (XLI) we stayed over for a day to let the camels revel in the reeds. The temperature was 28° C. in the shade, and it was swelteringly hot in the tents.

To the south extended a vast, dense wood of saxaules, reaching as far as the foot of the high sand — it was like the finest carpet.

THROUGH THE HIGH SAND

On September 21st we did not set out until the afternoon. The bushes were three to four meters in height and as leafy as trees. But finally they came to an end and we entered the high, sterile dunes. Only here and there grew an odd bush or so, and in the troughs even some stalks of reed. The route meandered up and down and in and out in the most devious ways. To the north rose some dunes of very considerable size that were absolutely sterile. They were picturesquely lit up by the setting sun.

We camped that evening at Shara-dzagh or The Yellow Saxaule.

The march to camp XLIII also took place during the later part of the day. We journeyed over and between saxaule-clad dunes. In one place a couple of wooden cairns had been erected. They gave one the impression of gate-posts. As we proceeded, the route gradually turned into horrible, soft, sucking sand. On either side we had whole mountains of mighty, sterile dunes. Between these two sand-fields runs a sort of valley or strip of rather lower dunes clad with bushes. In some places these latter are as tall as trees; sometimes it was almost like riding through a park.

The sand to the right was really imposing. The dunes for a considerable distance were so like one another that they seemed as if cast in the same mould. For quite a while we rode in the shade of a huge dune, and the sun sat riding on its comb. The sound of caravan bells approached. A first string of twenty camels was sharply silhouetted against the sun. A well-dressed merchant was riding the foremost camel. The usual greetings and questions were exchanged.