

## TSONDOL — SOGHO-NOR BY BOAT

When we started off on the 17th we had only the barest essentials with us: mapping-block, compass, watch, pens, field-glasses. HASLUND, who had to be in and out of the water, even entrusted all his clothes, with the exception of a woollen jersey and bathing-drawers, to the caravan.

We pushed off and drifted on the current, gliding at a pleasant speed down the Edsen-gol. The banks hurried past, with their yellowing groves, their dense tamarisk copses, their stretches of grass or reed-covered plain and now and then naked or bound dunes, the latter generally with vertical sides sharply cut off by erosion. We had not progressed for many minutes before we realized that the only navigable channel was precisely along such sharply eroded banks, so we manoeuvred our unwieldy craft, as often as we could manage it, quite near the bank.

But the current often went over from the one bank to the other, and we were then obliged to cross the river-bed diagonally. It was just when navigating such stretches that we generally stuck fast, for there lurked the most treacherously concealed mud-banks. On these occasions our craft went grating onto the sand, swung round, and HASLUND hopped in to wade about for deeper water.

Meantime, I sat at my observation table, drawing my chart of the river's course. One had to keep one's wits about one for this job. Like all other rivers, the Edsen-gol follows a winding course, and it is seldom that a bearing holds good for more than a minute. I was therefore obliged to keep my eye on compass and watch the whole time, and draw uninterruptedly. Other necessary notes and observations were jotted down at lightning speed. Time and again I took the speed of the current in order to calculate the length of waterway we had covered.

On a couple of occasions we glided past long islands. Just after three o'clock we had reached the point where the Edsen-gol bifurcates to form two arms of apparently the same size. The left one is the Oboin-gol, which disembogues in Ghashun-nor, the right is called the Dunda-gol and flows into Sogho-nor. The Dunda-gol or Middle River was said to be narrower and deeper than its western neighbour, so I had decided to chart it first.

Accordingly, we glided into the Dunda-gol. On the left bank, a little ahead of our boat, rested a flock of wild geese. They turned their heads in our direction, rose into the air and flew off southwards. One heard the rushing of their wings as they flew past, marvellously lit by the sun.

The farther we progressed, the narrower did the Dunda-gol become, and the less frequently did we run aground. The business of navigation became easier for HASLUND, who needed only to sit where he was and steer with his paddle. His wading was now so spaced out that he had ample time to dry between his dips. We were now making splendid progress. Sometimes, in a sharp bend, the current threatened to bump us against the bank; but I had a slender pole at hand and could thrust off.