

the Mongols erect to their spirits. And finally, they came to an end altogether, and one noted from this detail that one was leaving human dwellings behind. On the other hand, one did note here and there an occasional common route-cairn in the form of a little stone pyramid that had been set up by caravan-men.

Next day the route bore due north. We wondered why it did not swing off to the west. At this rate we were certainly getting no nearer to Hami.

An icy north-west wind blew shrewdly across our track. It is no easy matter to draw a map in such a wind; one's hands soon become numb, and it is a slow business warming them between taking the bearings.

The path led between hills, time and again crossing a dry erosion-bed. At last we came out again on the open plain, and pitched camp, after a rather short stage, on salt-encrusted ground with a water-hole called Sebestei.

PARTING FROM NORIN'S COLUMN

After bidding a hearty farewell to NORIN, BERGMAN and MARSCHALL, not forgetting also the little antelope Dicky, that we saw here for the last time, we continued to the north-west, leaving NORIN's column to set a course due west. We now had the mountains that formed a continuation of Tostu on our right, while to the left was the system to which the Black Fox Mountain belonged, and that we had traversed the previous day. The vegetation was, as usual, wretched, hard, dried up and stunted. To offer such pasture even to the patient camels would be inhuman, one might just as well make sawdust of our wooden boxes and give them that for fodder. However, on passing a belt of saxaules in sand-bound country we came upon a creeping, in part still green sort of bush that appealed to the camels, and here we pitched camp.

THE FIRST SNOWSTORM

On the morning of November 19th little white patches of snow lay in all the camel-tracks, in all the depressions and on the leeward side of every tussock or erosion-edge; and fine crystals of snow were driven through the air by the raging north-west wind.

The Siberian winter had come on a sudden visit. The wind was murderously cold; and if one went outside for a moment to have a look at the weather one soon hurried in again to put fresh fuel on the fire and to thaw out. Outside, the wind howled and roared with a will. The yurt creaked and groaned, and threatened to collapse on the windward side. As during the previous storm, it was anchored with heavy boxes. On my desk, as I worked, a miniature desert began to form, and a fine mizzle of dust and sand fell on my notes.