

the country changed again to hard gravel, and on the yonder side of a ridge the perspective was quite different. To the north-east, at a distance of about two days' march, one saw two flat mountains; and along the route ahead of us was a succession of ridges and combs of dark hills — the same lonely desolation met the eye wherever one turned.

On November 22nd we cut the day's march rather short, for we had not progressed far before we unexpectedly came across two wells. The tracks of wild asses were very common on the route, and in a couple of places there was evidence of wild camels having wandered about. In the afternoon we had snow, but the ground was only half covered.

On the 23rd the sun rose over a compact bank of cloud in the east, ushering in a day of calm and almost warmth. To the north extended a boundless plain. One seemed to divine the rounding of the earth. To the north-west, a two days' journey distant, a considerable mountain-range dreamed on the horizon in shades of lightest blue. If one turned to the left, the eye travelled over the plain to command an equally boundless view. Here and there grew saxaules, some of them quite high, but the pasture was, as usual, miserable.

We set off westwards towards a mountain that soon proved to be a range running parallel with our route, unrolling its rugged contour on our right. After a march of twenty-five kilometers we pitched camp in sheer desert, where a few dried roots at the most were all one could hope to find for fuel.

Our marches had of late been comparatively short. During the past five days we had covered precisely one hundred kilometers. This was in part due to the diminishing daylight.

The sky was overcast and the light so poor next day that the dust-laden atmosphere did not give very good visibility. We passed three old camping sites where big caravans had encamped. They were easily recognizable by the long rows of bright patches where the camels had lain in the dust. Such patches appear when the gravel has been swept away, and are rendered still more conspicuous by the heaps of camel-dung that are left behind. Our route led between hills. A dying camel lay by the wayside: his eyes were still open, and he saw the passing of a caravan for the last time. Happily he was not one of our own beasts.

From the crown of the next undulation a fresh view met the eye to the west. In this direction the ground sloped slowly, a circumstance for which we were grateful, as it meant easier going for the camels. A couple of our Mongols stopped with a camel that refused to proceed; a rider was sent up to the van to get help to carry his chests. The range of hills we had had on our right came to an end, and the view to the north stretched once more boundlessly to the horizon. At a good day's march to the north-west could be seen new mountains. In general we wandered here over shallow gravel basins between low ranges of hills. Frequently enough we traversed dry beds, the direction of whose flow when full it was not easy to decide.