

Ever since leaving the Mören-gol we had not seen a single human being. We were travelling in what might aptly be called The Land of Silence.

My usual questions to MENTU after the first four hours of the day's march were: »Is LARSON still on the march, or has he pitched camp? Is there any pasture to be seen?« To which the answers were: »LARSON is in sight at a distance of three or four li«, or »LARSON has pitched camp, but I can't see any pasture.« I sometimes had a feeling of shame towards the camels, being borne, as I was, almost as in a sedan-chair while they with their heavy burdens had to take these hundreds of thousands of strides without being able to allay their hunger every day. Now, however, some kilometers ahead of us we saw a gleaming yellow belt. MENTU declared that it was grass. Splendid, splendid, then at last the animals would get something to eat. After a while one could clearly make out the different fields of waving reeds or grass: there, too, one saw small clumps of poplars and tamarisk copses.

THE IKHEN-GOL OASIS

After traversing some two-meter-deep erosion beds we rode over small diamond-shaped fields with sides of five meters in length and walled in with low earthen ramparts. These were abandoned Chinese poppy plantations. A purling streamlet flowed from a spring, forming, somewhat farther down, blue-shimmering sheets of ice.

The tents were set up in an old field, and the camels were already out to pasture. We should have to rest here for some days, for this place, which bore the name Ikhen-gol, was the first oasis we had touched at since the Mören-gol. After the sterile desert tracts we had been through it seemed to us like an earthly paradise.

On the morning of November 25th HEYDER shot a gazelle¹ buck, and later in the day three more. He was the expedition's best hunter. Now he had put an end to our meat shortage for the next few days at least. LIEBERENZ shot also some mountain partridge, singularly beautiful birds with lilac and rusty brown colouring, with black streaks on the head and wings. Their bills were red and the toes, also, had a reddish tinge. Sand grouse and pheasants, too, were among the game to be had. Wild asses (kulans) came to this oasis at night to drink. The paths they had tramped for themselves led in several directions. In a couple of places we observed the spoor of wild camels, wolves and argali-sheep.

The oasis was formed around a river-bed running from south-west to north-east. The big Chinese caravan had left behind two camels and a horse. Three of their dogs, all with bells round their necks, had stayed behind on their own account, hoping to be able to eat their fill when the animals had died.

¹ The gazelle or antelope in this part of the Gobi is *Gazella subgutturosa hielleriana*. The same species occurs also to the east of the Edsen-gol. The easternmost point at which I have seen one is at Khongkhor-obo in Dunda-gung *hoshio*. F. B.