

we were now crossing. Just at the mouth of this valley the big Chinese caravan had dug a well, and here a good part of our van were busily engaged watering their camels. The surface of the water was twenty-five centimeters below ground level, and the water itself was no more than ten centimeters deep. Though it filled again fairly rapidly it took time to water the whole caravan. Near the well grew some poplars. An endless view stretched away to the E. S. E.

At the beginning of our day's march we had found MÜHLENWEG's third missive, in which he merely reported that he had not yet made contact with the big Chinese caravan. Here at the well he had hung letter no. 4 in a poplar. This was dated November 27th and was to the effect that he had caught up with the rear part of the Chinese caravan and been told that it was a good five day's journey to the village Ta-shih-t'ou. Flour or peas he had not been able to buy from the caravan.

Camp no. LXVIII was pitched in the mouth of a lonely valley. Our hunters went out after game, but without result. They were not even able to find any fresh tracks.

TSAGHAN-BURGASUN

The 4th of December found us travelling north-west through a labyrinth of little winding valleys. Sometimes one of these would be blocked by a transverse ridge, on the other side of which one came down in another valley. Finally, however, the country opened up somewhat, and in the distance we saw a new oasis squeezed in between the hills, where several springs gave life to poplars, tamarisks and reeds. The tents were set up in a nice little poplar grove. The sheets of ice from the spring stretched a couple of hundred meters to the north before they came to an end. The valley itself fell steeply to the north to a longitudinal valley running from east to west at a considerably lower level than our camp. Even before we reached this camping-place, which evidently corresponded to the region of springs that SEMUKOV had called Tsaghan-burgasun, we had seen a route coming from the south-west and joining ours. This route runs between Suchow and Uliasutai. From our valley-camp we could see its white band continuing northwards over unknown desert.

We spent two rest-days in this place. It was picturesque and attractive, squeezed in as it was between black hills and rich with gnarled old poplars lifting their ragged and depopulated arms over dense yellow reeds and blue-shimmering sheets of ice. The view to the north was almost bewildering. The boundless plain stretched away in shades of light blue reminding one of the sea — an illusion that was strengthened by the fact that this endless sea with its distant horizon was framed between the dark hill-slopes on either side of the valley. One had a strong impression of being at a coast; one might just as well have been at the Coast Range in California as in the heart of Asia.