

I had decided not to take the usual route to Semipalatinsk via Bakhty by car, but to go by boat on the Irtysh to Omsk.

By a curious accident we were delayed in Chuguchaq for four whole days. The entire western part of the town was flooded by the irrigation canal carrying water from the Tarbagatai to the fields and gardens of Chuguchaq. The canal had now changed its course. Two human lives were lost as well as a number of sheep and cattle, and no fewer than one hundred and twenty houses collapsed. Also in HOKHRIAKOV'S compound the walls of several outhouses were demolished.

FROM CHUGUCHAQ TO ZAISANG-NOR

With horses and four-wheeled *telegas* we now set off to the north-east, to cross the Tarbagatai over the pass Kuseinsky-pereval (Kuseun). Here there is a Russian frontier-post, where our papers were examined and where we were hospitably entertained with tea and bread. And so we left Chinese soil.

The road was not of the best, but our *telegas* were equal to it; and after three days' journey we arrived at the little town of Zaisang, where a mild customs examination took place.

When a day later we reached the little fishing-place Topolev-mys or »Poplar Point» (though there is not a single poplar there now), we had driven 920 kilometers from Urumchi.

WITH RIVER-BOAT FROM ZAISANG-NOR TO OMSK

Topolev-mys is the terminus for the steam-boat traffic on the Irtysh. It is situated on a flat spit of land thrusting out into Zaisang-nor. This lake is from south-east to north-west 120 kilometers in length, and its greatest breadth is nearly thirty kilometers. The Black Irtysh, coming from the Altai, disembogues into its south-eastern part. From the north-west part of the lake the Irtysh proper flows out as an imposing and mighty stream to break through another part of the Altai with its meandering course.

We drove direct to the *pristan* or landing-stage, which consists of a huge anchored barge, on which a couple of wooden barracks have been erected. The boat was already due, but we had to wait for three days before it came. It was a little paddle-boat, on which there were three different classes. The first-class had cabins and was spotlessly clean. For an extra charge one could get sheets, pillow and blanket, but we contented ourselves with our old sleeping-bags. On the lower middle-deck were open sleeping-berths for second-class passengers; and on the after-deck the third-class passengers had to accommodate themselves with their bundles as best they might. Before the bridge was a promenade-deck.