

We were fairly high up again, 1,738 m, according to our Paulin altimeters. Antelopes grazed by the wayside or displayed their slender silhouettes on the hill-tops.

Crossing a shallow pass with an obo on the summit, we proceeded westward. Turning off to the left was the road we had followed in the summer of 1927 through the narrow Murguchik valley, whose dark hills were visible some way off to the south. This is the beginning of «The Winding Road» of OWEN LATTIMORE. The road we now followed for a short distance was the same as that used by Sir FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND in 1889. Another road, which runs rather far north, is no longer used by Chinese caravans, as for quite a long stretch it goes through Outer Mongolia.

The scenery was desolate and monotonous. Blue-grey clouds were piling themselves up in the west, and there was a fresh breeze. The wind swept through the scanty tuft of steppe vegetation and miniature dunes were created on their lee side.

HALT AT UNYEN-USU

Our tents were pitched by the streamlet Unyen-usu, «Cow's Water». Immediately after us a strange lorry arrived, carrying eleven men and one woman. They had neither tent nor provisions with them, and had no idea of the road to their destination, Ning-hsia. They spent the nights with merchants or nomads and got along by asking their way. They had started from Kuei-hua and were to travel via Wang-yeh-fu in Alakshan. The lorry had been bought in Tientsin for MA HUNG-P'ING, who was in charge of the defence against SUN and his troops, while his cousin, MA HUNG-K'UEI, was civil governor of the province of Ning-hsia. He was the adopted son of the well-known MA FU-HSIANG. MA CHUNG-YING belonged to the same MA family.

A camel-caravan arrived at the Unyen-usu the same evening as ourselves: 32 animals carrying skins and hides from the Edsen-gol to Pao-t'ou. At the Hailutain-gol the caravan was to meet a man from Pao-t'ou, who would tell them whether there was any possibility of travelling to that place, where General SUN lay with his army. If there was none, the caravan was to proceed to Kuei-hua, sell its load and buy cooking-pots, tea kettles, cans and other iron and bronze goods, and then return to the Edsen-gol. The owners of the caravan were two merchants, who made this journey twice a year.

We decided that a day of rest was necessary. BERGMAN felt ill again, one or two of our servants had headaches and temperatures, and the cars had to be greased and overhauled.

On the morning of December 1st we awoke to a brilliant turquoise sky; the night temperature of -6.3° C. was abnormally high for the time of the year.