

We rolled off westward along the tracks made by the lorries of the day before, through sand and gravel, between gullies and tussocks. We drove now in top gear, now in second or first, according to the softness and nature of the ground — one had to be changing gear the whole time.

Antelopes were so common that we ceased to pay any attention to them. A couple of well-defined peaks rose ahead of us — Bayan-undur, »The Rich and Lofty«. We soon passed these on our left, however, and once more we had the unbroken plain ahead of us. This place must be situated almost due north of the big lamasery Shande-miao. The ground was sandy and soft, and we could not increase our speed beyond 5 km an hour. Occasionally we passed a saxaule bush. Bare sand-dunes stood out against the northern horizon at some distance. It was nearly dark when we pitched camp at Gung-khuduk, »Deep Well«.

SNOW

On the 18th the sky was overcast, and a few snowflakes were falling through the still morning air. There was no need for us to be cold where we were, for quantities of scrub grew in the marked gully in which we had camped. We were now in the border region between the steppe and the true Gobi Desert. There were stretches of hard gravel, but these were interrupted here and there by belts of soft soil. To our right the dunes raised their pretty yellow curves.

We had not got far before a strong northerly wind set in and a snowstorm with it. The whole landscape was blotted out. A hill to the north-west, which had been our sole landmark, disappeared. In a depression tamarisks were growing in such abundance that we stopped and gathered a few armfuls of boughs, for there was no knowing whether we should get any fuel for the evening otherwise. Now and again we passed older car-tracks — those of the British missionaries HUNTER and FISCHBACHER in 1932, of MONTELL and SÖDERBOM in 1930, and others.

Now the whole country was white, and a few solitary elms raised their naked trunks out of the snow. The ground offered excellent going along the foot of a row of hills to the right. A river-bed through these hills afforded a beautiful road. Many trees grew in it — delightful to see in that almost treeless desert.

At Hoyar-amatu we were out in open country again. There we found a whole village of some ten yurts and a few merchants living in tents. The omnibus company had a petrol-dump there. This station is on the northernmost route between the Edsen-gol and Kuei-hua. Soon after, we drove across a stretch of absolutely barren desert, a true *gobi*. We still had the belt of sand-dunes on our right, but the yellow dolphins were now white with snow.

Along the dry bed of the Saglarin-gol we drove down to the neighbourhood