

him why we had come. He nodded approvingly and assured us that we were welcome in his master's district. Actually, it was doubtful whether the Torgut prince would welcome the construction of a motor-road to Sinkiang, for a new and freely used traffic-artery through his district might in several respects restrict his freedom and autonomy.

Evening was coming on and the sun was sinking. Now came an adventurous drive in the dark through copses and brushwood, over ravines and dunes. Dry branches cracked under the wheels. One after another stuck fast. The moon went up behind clouds, and we could see a little of the fantastic landscape. It took us several hours to negotiate a very few kilometers; but at last we regained the dry bed of the Oboin-gol at a place called Baller, where we intended to encamp for some time.

REST DAYS AT BALLER

The new camp on the left bank of the Oboin-gol looked very inviting. The tents were picturesquely grouped under tall poplars with a background of tamarisk-clad dunes. There were said to be water and ice-floes 10 km upstream; and a winter-flood was expected at Baller in a month's time.

The doctor made arrangements with our nearest Torgut neighbours for us to hire a large, roomy yurt, which was erected the very same evening. This was to be our mess, where we were to have our meals, and read and write letters.

Everyone was so delighted with the mess-tent that we hired three more for living quarters and kitchen. As for myself, I remained in my ordinary travelling tent.

One or two of our Mongol guests told us that the authorities in Suchow some time ago had sent policemen here to forbid the Torgut prince to let any motor-cars bound for Sinkiang pass through his territory. We had originally intended to send GEORG with a lorry to Suchow to send off and fetch letters, but perhaps the car would be confiscated in that city; and it might perhaps be safer to make use of Mongol couriers on swift camels. One of our visitors undertook to ride there in six days. So it was clear that we must wait at least a fortnight, or till the courier returned. Meanwhile, YEW and KUNG were to make reconnaissance-trips in the delta to find the most suitable places for the construction of bridges over the arms of the river and a motor-road to connect them.

The first days were spent in letter-writing. I had also to write reports to our immediate chief, the Minister for Railways KU MENG-YÜ, and the Prime Minister WANG CHING-WEI. On the evening of December 30th our post was ready and sewn up in a bag. A Khalkha Mongol, CHAGDUR, whom we knew before, and a Chinese camelman, LIANG, who was the head of our petrol-caravan, were to ride as couriers to Suchow on camels.