

To the south the scenery was most impressive. We saw, hardly 7 km away, a very low, dark ridge, resembling a sharply defined sea-coast. Beyond and above it were visible three more ridges or elevations, coloured pale blue and becoming progressively paler as they grew more distant. This part of the desert was quite confusingly like the sea, with its mighty, rolling swell. We could not take our eyes off the superb scenery; but we listened in vain for the roar of the surge against the cliffs. All was quiet and still, but for the west wind that howled and shrieked in the radiator of the car. And the waves of stone were dry; there was not a drop of water.

In the middle of our camp-preparations JOMCHA arrived in his lorry with KUNG as passenger. KUNG told us that the situation at camp no. 23 looked rather serious. GEORG had made his plans. »Edsel» was to be unloaded; the bent front axle was to be laid with its ends supported on two blocks of wood, but otherwise hanging free like an arched bridge. Then a fully loaded lorry was to be placed with one of its back wheels against the bent axle at the top of the curve. With the help of jacks the wheel was to be lowered gently and gracefully, and the car's weight would force the axle back into shape. Heat from a blow-lamp was to be used to prevent the cold steel from snapping. Could so difficult an operation be successfully carried out in the middle of the desert? I was sceptical, and was quite prepared to lose »Edsel.»

Next day we crossed a whole string of arena-shaped valleys with a scanty growth of Ephedra bushes. The hills continually changed colour — grey, black, red and yellow. The soil, too, was yellowish-red. The road wound along — excellent, hard and sandless. In some places there were skulls and whitened bones of dead camels. It must have been several years since they had fallen by the wayside, for trade had been paralysed during the civil war.

After crossing another little ridge we came into a labyrinth of low hills, valleys and dry stream-beds. A little side-valley led to Yeh-ma-ching, »Wild Horse Well», very difficult to find except for one who, like TSERAT, had been there before. Here camp no. 25 was pitched in the valley, which had rather strongly marked hills on all sides.

As I wanted to find out for myself what the situation looked like at GEORG's camp, even if I could do nothing to help my clever mechanics, I decided to go back in the small car. The distance was only 100 km; but even this was a long way in a waterless desert where one might also expect to be attacked by robbers. I started just before noon with YEW as travelling companion and JOMCHA as driver. We took some ice with us to add to GEORG's supply, in case he had to stay for some time at camp no. 23.

On our way eastward we saw a single wild camel at a distance. As soon as he scented the car he accelerated his speed and vanished like the wind among the desert hills to the south.