

We drew up to GEORG's camp without anybody noticing us.

»Well, how goes it?» I asked.

»Why, everything's going A I.»

»Is the axle usable?»

»Yes, perfectly; we straightened it out cold and didn't need to use heat.»

The tyres were put on by the light of electric torches and lanterns. We chatted round the fire till eleven o'clock and then crept to bed, seven of us in one little tent.

I was awakened next morning by the refreshing sound of »Edsel's» engine; the lorry was doing a trial trip round and round the camp, its circles growing larger and larger. »Edsel» was saved, thanks to GEORG's ingenuity.

But the small car was a casualty instead. The cross-bar that supports the whole chassis in front was cracked, and must, I was told, be temporarily strengthened if I was not to have a spill. These repairs would also take two days.

»No thanks, not now; load up the cars and get ready at once.»

And at two o'clock we started westward again, driving slowly to spare the small car. At eight in the evening we were back in the main camp at Wild Horse Well.

Here we had to sacrifice a day to strengthen the front cross-member of the small car. Once more the camp resembled an open air mechanical workshop and a colony of settlers in the wilds.

THROUGH THE BLACK GOBI

The following day, January 25th, we set out on the great caravan-route. Crossing numerous erosion gullies, whose sharp contours showed that it really could rain hard in that arid region, we passed Hung-liu-ka-ta-ching, near which there were small, vegetation-clad cones. Other mountains rose ahead of us, at whose foot we traversed a deep-cut watercourse. As we doubled the first black promontory, that sprang out of the mountain like a cape, fresh gullies appeared. Another promontory was passed. The road ran along the foot of the mountains, growing worse and worse. Up and down and in and out we drove, over ravines, gullies and hills. The ground was everywhere covered with rough, black, sharp-edged gravel. Hoping to find a better surface, we drove down a nasty, black-gravel offshoot of the mountains, finding ourselves presently in a steeply descending gully that was too narrow for the lorries. We signalled back to them, and they found a practicable way through. After this we clung faithfully to the foot of the mountains, always over the same tyre-destroying gravel. In places the lorries took on such an alarming list that one expected them to turn over at any moment. Slowly and cautiously the small car crept forward, followed by the four lorries. A road would certainly have to be made here for the traffic of the future.