

THE CROSSING OF THE KHAIDU-GOL

The channel through the ice was at last completed, and we could begin to transport our heavy baggage to the embarkation quay on an island. Two ferry-boats had already crossed, one carrying twenty men, four horses, two cows, a donkey and a loaded cart — a weight of about 2½ tons in all. So that ferry-boat could easily carry one empty lorry.

Now things grew lively. »Edsel» was loaded with part of our store of petrol and driven to the place of embarkation, after which the cars went to and fro between this point and the camp. The southern shore of the island formed a perpendicular drop 2.3 m high. Here an old scow served as a quay. The work of constructing gangways and an approach went forward swiftly, and the first lorry was taken over without mishap.

The ferry-boat was warped a little way upstream along the southern shore of the island, and then punted over with long poles. The crossing took 18 minutes. When the right bank was reached, two big planks were laid out as gangways from the ferry-boat, and on these the car rolled quietly and gently onto dry land. Meantime, the ice-free surface was growing wider and wider, and next morning the river was open.

The mayor had done us splendid service. The men he had set to work had done together 140 man-days of work, for which they were paid 40 silver dollars. This was considered royal pay. He knew that merchants in the town had paraffin; the only difficulty was to locate their hiding-places. We paid a few hundred dollars on account. And after we had crossed over to the right bank with the whole camp the mayor actually brought us 500 gallons of paraffin, which cost 404 silver dollars. This was at least some compensation for the eighty gallons of petrol out of which we had been cheated in Hami and Turfan.

Our plan for the immediate future was as follows. At Korla the expedition would be divided into two parties. BERGMAN, with GEORG and some of the men, was to go to Lop-nor, while the rest of us would drive to Kashgar via Kucha and Aqsu. The Kashgar party was to take 400 gallons of petrol and 200 gallons of paraffin. If we reckoned four miles to a gallon, our three cars could thus travel 800 miles (1,287 km). It was only 650 miles to Kashgar, and there we could certainly replenish our fuel supply. BERGMAN was to receive 550 gallons of petrol and 300 gallons of paraffin. From Korla to Lop-nor he had only 240 miles to cover. But in the event of our being detained in Kashgar for any reason, or expelled to India or Russian Turkistan, BERGMAN must have sufficient fuel to get to Anhsi or Suchow. At Korla we would fix a time-limit, beyond which he was not to wait for us.

'Professor LI' and his party, and the Poles, came to see us during our stay at Qara-shahr. PLAWSKY now told us that he was an occultist and fakir and had