

TRIBUTARIES FROM THE TARIM

Still farther down the stream we halted again at the point where the Dilpar arm pays the Konche-darya a tribute of scarcely 1 cub.m per second. But the Konche-darya, here 60 m wide, still carried a volume of 94.92 cub.m a second, while its depth was 6.6 m and the speed of the current 1.2 m per second.

On April 16th we measured two more tributaries, the Gurgur and the Aq-bash, carrying respectively 2.5 and 0.5 cub.m of water; they came from the Inchike-darya, which has its source in the T'ien-shan, flows past Shah-yar to the south of Kucha and joins the Tarim at a place called Eshek-öldi. The Gurgur arm forms a small waterfall, 0.75 m high. Below it a picturesque wooden bridge crosses the tributary, which is a good meter higher in the autumn. All these little arms are said to come, in their last stage, from a lake or marsh, Chong-köl. The Yarkend-darya, or Tarim proper, flows to Yangi-köl and almost dries up there during the summer.

The river made the wildest bends. Sometimes we were not far from completing a circle when the river swung off again at the last moment in the opposite direction, away from the loop in which it had been wasting so much time. Again herdsmen came down to the river and gave us eggs and fish.

RAPIDS

We had just passed a patch of wood called »The Seven Poplars» when we heard a dull, thundering noise ahead, while the river narrowed to a width of only 20 m, and the current grew swifter. We landed to make a reconnaissance, to avoid being wrecked. This done, I ordered full speed ahead and led our fleet to the critical point. Our paddlers yelled and uttered shrill cries of warning. But my double canoe was already in the grip of the rapids, and white-crested waves were dancing round us. My paddlers realized that it was neck or nothing now! Keeping the boats' course parallel with the banks, they guided us forward between treacherous shallows, for they knew that if we got broadside on to the stream the canoes would fill in a moment.

Just at this point the river executed a very sharp S-shaped double bend, and great care was necessary. The waves swept over the canoes, there was a splashing and a hissing all round us, and each moment we expected to run aground and capsize. The roaring of the torrent drowned the cries behind us. But we were now nearly through the worst. The white-crested waves grew smaller, the river widened again and became quieter. The whole episode had lasted not much more than a minute.

We pitched camp at Kalpuk-ochogu, on the left bank. The men were still shaken by the exciting voyage down the rapids. The canoes could hardly weather swifter rapids than those at »The Seven Poplars».