



Fig. 22. Mesa column on an island, May 15th

CHEN and I and our cook, CHIA KUEI, had this time only two double boats with twenty-six deck planks. We had 150 catties of roasted and unroasted flour, and all necessary provisions for a couple of weeks or so. We took with us five cleaned petrol-tins, in which we carried fresh water for use in the event of our losing our way on the salt lake Lop-nor. Curiously enough, our men had never heard of Lop-nor, and they were rather depressed when they learned that it was two and a half times as large as Baghrash-köl, the biggest »sea» they knew.

The storm howled all night; and the following day it had still not abated. This weather had lost us three days — May 11th, 12th and 13th; and on the 14th the whole country was shrouded in an impenetrable fog. It came rolling up from the south, dark and gloomy, like gigantic mattresses and bolsters. Two hours later the wind veered round to the south-west. But this did not drive away the mist. Everything was enveloped in a regular London fog. We could see only the nearest hundred meters or so of the lake. It was a weird picture — the lake a dirty grey, with thick mist over it and the reed-beds looming up indistinctly. A few light showers fell, and at 1.30 p. m. harder rain set in and continued for an hour.

During the night it rained heavily, but not for long. The sun rose into a bright blue sky as we set off once more to look for the tortuous waterway to Lop-nor. From a high *mesa* we had another of those phenomenal views over the Lop delta. The lake, on whose northern shore lies the fort T'u-ken, closed like a bag. So all the water that was carried into the delta must find its way out into Lop-nor somewhere else. But where? We tried an arm running south-east, but there was no current in it. The water was crystal clear.