

took with him only bread, soup-cubes, sugar, and a large tea-pot, with water — also a compass, watch, measuring-tape and camera. There was fuel everywhere. Three of the boatmen accompanied CHEN at their own request.

They did not start until 5.45 p. m. They walked quickly, and soon disappeared in the labyrinth of *yardangs*. Dusk fell at eight o'clock, and the crescent moon shone down bright and sharp over the desert. I sat up for a long time, writing in the pleasant cool of the night. A wonderful silence reigned; only the cry of a night-bird was heard from time to time.

The following day was once more stiflingly hot. I beguiled the hours of waiting by drawing and painting the curious landscape that surrounded us.

As soon as it had grown really dark, after 8 p. m., the bonfire was lighted and spread its orange light over the country round. The clay ridges raised their yellow backs out of the surrounding darkness, suggesting dragons and dolphins. ALI called, but there was no reply out of the night; all was quiet.

And a silence like that of the night prevailed when I awoke next morning. CHIA KUEI and I were alone in the camp; ALI had gone to meet the missing men. I was growing increasingly anxious about them. Their food-supplies were inadequate, and they might have found no water on the way to Lou-lan. Perhaps they had gone astray and had been unable to find their way back to our camp on the edge of the lake. I knew from experience that even hobnailed boots left only faint marks on the hard sedimentary clay, uniformly sculptured by the action of the wind.

At 11 a. m. I climbed to the top of a high *yardang* again to have a look through my glasses. I had hardly got to the top when I saw a man dragging himself wearily towards the camp. There came two more, and then another man, alone.

They were up to me in a few minutes — CHEN and his three companions. They were fearfully tired and hungry. To me it was like waking from a nightmare to have them back safe and sound. I am sure they all felt how overjoyed we were to see them.

I proposed to the weary marchers that they should have a good breakfast and then sleep as long as they liked. We were in no hurry, for ALI was not back yet. But CHEN was so full of what he had seen that he wanted to tell me all about it first. Then I made him lie down and rest, and he slept like a child.

It had been farther to Lou-lan than we had calculated — 18 km, not 12. After starting on the 21st they had walked hard till 8 p. m., when they encamped by water and dead tamarisks. They had crossed two channels on the way; and the next morning they had waded across another, 20 m wide and 0.8 m deep, running south-east and possibly connected with Lop-nor. Then they had crossed a dry river-bed running S. S. E. This was 35 m wide and about 3 m deep. There were sand-dunes in its bottom, showing that no water had flowed along the channel since the Qum-darya was recalled to life. Next followed a belt of *yardangs*, only