

years; another, EMIN AHUN from Charkhliq, had settled down there in business only three years before. They knew of no other roads to the north and west than the one we had taken from Hami to Anhsi and the road through the desert to Charkhliq, along which MARCO POLO and, forty years ago, my late deceased friend P. K. KOZLOV had come. Of any other desert road to Lop-nor and Lou-lan, or possible caravan routes in the Pei-shan mountains farther north — they knew nothing. Nor had they any knowledge of a direct road to Turfan; but they knew a Torgut named BUGHRA who had travelled by this route. Unluckily he was away at the moment. The talk we had heard in Sinkiang, of refugees, especially merchants, now and then making their way through the Quruq-tagh to Tun-huang and Anhsi, must have been considerably exaggerated, for no-one in these towns knew anything about it.

We met a Tungan who said he knew a by-road to Hami in the west. It ran north from Tun-huang, swung north-west through the Pei-shan, and then went north again towards Hami. There were springs and fuel along this road.

No-one had ever heard of Altmish-bulaq and Lop-nor, or knew of any roads to Korla and Kucha but those via Hami or Charkhliq.

This lack of information, and the absence of communications with the country to the west, are quite natural. To westward extends one of the most desolate deserts in the world, a God-forsaken country and a barrier to all human commerce. This is why Tun-huang is a blind alley, while Anhsi is a through station on the road from Suchow to Hami.

The mayor declared that a hundred years ago there was so much water in the Su-lo-ho and the Tang-ho that they were navigable for canoes and boats. Since then the volume of water had diminished year by year. This cannot have been due solely to increased irrigation, least of all in war-time, when agriculture practically comes to a standstill.

WE TURN NORTH

November 8th was another day of departure; on this date we really started from Tun-huang. We had 250 gallons of petrol on the lorry. The two cars needed one gallon to cover 5 km. The distance to Altmish-bulaq as the crow flies was rather more than 400 km. But the road was not straight, nor would the country offer easy going. I may as well confess at once that we miscalculated.

We crossed the Tang-ho on the twelve-span bridge, which is 75 m long and built about 2 m above the water. For long stretches the road was sunk as much as 3 m in the ground, the work for a thousand years past of cart-wheels, the hooves of horses and oxen, and the feet of fifty generations of pedestrians.

We drove through a belt of steppe to the village of Pa-tze-chang. Wherever