

we went the cars created the greatest sensation. Peasants stood dumb with amazement; people rushed out of farms to the roadside, unable to believe their own eyes. Horses shied and flung off their loads; but donkeys and oxen looked at the unknown monsters with philosophic calm.

We crossed low, vegetation-clad dunes, again approaching the broad, shallow bed of the Tang-ho. It did not contain a drop of water, but was full of soft sand. Here we needed all the patience we could muster. Both cars stuck fast in the sandy bed, and it was only with the help of rope-mats that we were able to get them across the scrub-clad dunes on the right bank. Here it soon became clear that we could proceed no farther. We spent hours toiling and moiling — moving forward a few meters at a time. But at last some men came along with half a dozen camels and two ox-carts. The baggage was loaded onto these — a means of transport more suited to the country — and carried to firmer ground on the steppe. And last of all the oxen had to drag the cars through the soft sand of the dunes.

Beyond an old watch-tower, Ch'ien-tun-tze, the vegetation grew scantier and the clay desert flatter and harder. Startled antelopes dashed away from the track at frequent intervals. This road through the wilderness was not completely dead — even here one or two fuel-gatherers were about, with camels or donkeys.

The road led northwards, so we were not approaching our destination, Altmish-bulaq, which lay to the west. We sought vainly for some track turning off in that direction. The guide the mayor had sent with us, an unusually burly, heavily built fellow, seemed to have an unconquerable aversion for the country farther west. There was nothing there but sand and gravel-beds, he declared — impossible ground for our cars. He knew only two roads, to the north-west and N. N. E. Both ran over low passes in the outer chain of the Pei-shan, though the latter was the easier of the two. However, our road did, in fact, lead us a good way farther north before we found any possibility of turning off west.

On the morning of November 10th there was a light veil over the sky, and the sun was visible only as a yellow disc shedding a misty light. The mountains to the north were very faintly outlined.

The contours of the southernmost outer chain of the Pei-shan became clearer. We stopped for a while at a little stone cairn and looked west. We had climbed 200 m from our last camp, No. 120. We had already crossed the Su-lo-ho without taking any particular notice of its flat bed; but at Anhsi we had found it a clearly defined river, certainly with little water in it, but still a current. The bed of the Tang-ho we had found equally dry and disused. But this was not the high-water season.

We were now indeed at the parting of the ways. Should we turn off sharp to the west and try the old Silk Road? On that road I had made a mere matter of a day's march, on February 6th, 1901, from Achiq-quduq (165 km W. N. W. of Tunhuang) to Toghraq-quduq, before striking north through the Pei-shan mountains.