

and the flanking terraces on either side rose to a height of about 3 m. Behind these were desolate, weather-worn hills and crests. The altitude was 1,120 m or 300 m higher than Lop-nor.

Looking S. S. E. we could make out three mountain ridges. The nearest, which was quite low, flanked the valley we were following, while the farthest seemed fairly big, and was only a pale mass dimly visible in the distance. Probably it was the outer and southernmost chain of the Pei-shan complex. Farther on, our valley cut through dark grey porphyry cliffs.

Our course now wound between little black ridges, a labyrinth of low hills, gullies and passes. Here, fine-grained gneiss, very strongly crushed, predominated, along with fine-grained amphibolite.

Far away to the south we could just faintly discern, like a desert mirage, the outline of a snow-clad mountain chain. This was the border range of north-eastern Tibet, 180 km away. Our eyes strayed over the belt of desert depression between the two mountain systems — a barren region, devoid of life.

We were soon following another valley, less clearly marked, between red and black cliffs. It gradually opened out, to become an undulating plain, bounded at some distance by low hills.

After a run of 50 km we reached the spot where KUNG and SAN WA-TZE were waiting for us. Here we pitched camp No. 130, 1,050 m above sea-level, 230 m above Lop-nor and 270 m lower than the last camp. Diabases and diabasic porphyrites formed solid rock in the neighbourhood.

The water in the well was saltish; but it was perfectly drinkable when frozen and then melted. The first 28 cm down was a stratum of salt-encrusted loose earth resting on a stratum of sand 20 cm deep. Below this again was solid rock. The new well was 34 cm deep. The point where we had turned back the first time, baulked by the sand-dunes of the Ghashun-gobi, ought to be nearly due north of camp No. 130.

It was decided to devote the next day to reconnaissance towards the north-west. TSERAT was the pilot, and only the small car was taken. I remained in camp. When our scouts returned in the evening they reported the finding of a salt spring with the skeleton of a camel (probably tame), camel and horse dung, and faint traces of an old camping-site. They had been on the farther edge of a belt of sand 3 km wide, which they did not consider would present any obstacle to the lorry.

Everything that could be dispensed with was left at camp No. 130, where SAN WA-TZE and CHOKDUNG had to stay with one of the tents, a supply of food and 160 gallons of petrol. The lorry was therefore a good deal lighter when we started out on December 5th in brilliantly clear and pure air.

We drove west through absolutely barren country, an undulating plain of black gravel resting on soft soil. A cairn surmounted a hillock where we stopped for some time.