

To the south-west and west the country opened to the wide valley between Khara-nor and Lop-nor, and to the south, we could see the ground rising gently, on the other side of the Su-lo-ho, to the foot of the Astin-tagh.

We steered south-west through low, broken country. Sand-dunes were visible at a distance in the direction in which we were travelling. We passed a single tamarisk and a small withering reed-bed. We saw the tracks of two camels, quite fresh, that had not been there the day before when our scouts were out.

When one looked ahead, in the west, the country appeared to be level; but we had not got far before we lost ourselves in shallow ravines, and found ourselves once more surrounded by hillocks. Drift sand had collected here and there in crevices; but there was not a blade of vegetation. We came upon narrow stretches of sand that we were able to go round. High dunes appeared in the north. The wheels, that had hitherto made grooves 3—4 cm deep, now sank in to a depth of 6 cm.

By taking frequent look-outs from the tops of hillocks, we presently found a narrow winding passage through the belts of sand. When we had made our way through the fine yellow sand we reached coarse dark sand rippled by the wind. The bed of a little salt-lake appeared not far to the right. A river-bed ran into this lake. It had a hard bottom that offered a firm road. We pitched camp (No. 131) at sunset, having covered 56 km.

None of us washed the next morning, as we had to save water. We proceeded along the dry bed, where a rock 4 m high had long ago been cut off sharp by flowing water. An old cairn stood on its summit. The surface of the bed was covered with a thin layer of crystallized salt.

We drove, as through an open door, into a sharply defined valley that cut through the hills with a cairn on each side. Just here we found in the river-bed itself an open but shallow salt-water spring. On the left, or eastern side, there was a pronounced erosion terrace, while on the right the hills fell steeply to the river-bed. The spring had two vents, the upper one being close to a little stone barrier forming a basin, now covered with ice. We took the ice with us. Several empty drums were also filled with water, so that we might find them frozen on our return. Tamarisks and reeds grew in abundance near the spring. Altogether, the place was pleasant and inviting — a regular little oasis in the melancholy mountain desert. We gave it the name of Sui-Sin-bulaq, after the two provinces of Sui-yüan and Sinkiang.

Dry wood for three camps was loaded onto the cars. Wild camels' tracks crossed this region in all directions, and we often noticed their fresh dung. The reason why we so seldom saw the animals themselves was no doubt mainly that the noise of the cars frightened them away.

Cairns, always erected on conspicuous hillocks, were common. One of these consisted of four stones, the others of stones and slabs of various sizes piled up in