

flanked by red terraces, here and there white with salt. The altimeter showed 830 m above sea-level.

Far in the west and very pale we could discern a new mountain ridge. To the south, the ground ran in a number of very slight undulations to reach the dim outline of the Astin-tagh.

THE EASTERN BORDER OF THE LOP DEPRESSION

The soil became softer and softer. TSERAT turned off to the south between low black rounded hills. A gully ran south-west. The lorry toiled and groaned, and the wheels sank deep into the soil. Then, through a last gate in the hills, we drove out into absolutely open, flat country. Only in the south was a hardly noticeable ridge belonging to the Qum-tagh. EFFE cast an astonished look over the boundless level desert, crying: »Why, we're driving right down to Lop-nor!»

He was right. Ahead of us, to the W. S. W., lay the »wandering lake». But the distance was too great for us to see it. To the W. S. W. especially, the horizon was as level as a sea. And a lake in such country is completely hidden by the curve of the earth. According to the altimeter, we were 800 m up. Or probably 25—30 m higher, for the height of Lop-nor is 820 m.

At last we drove down between two low and flat but very clearly defined banks, to pitch camp, after a run of 72 km, on the coast of the dried-up inland sea whose sole relic is the »wandering lake».

Our camp No. 133, where we pitched our tents on the evening of December 7th, 1934, was extremely interesting from a geographical point of view. We had crossed and left behind us the outer and last border chain of the Pei-shan mountain system, and were on the northern edge of the belt of desert, 120 km in width, that separates the Pei-shan in the north from the Astin-tagh in the south. To the top of the outermost chain of the Astin-tagh system the distance was 150 km. It is this desert that the Turkis call the Qum-tagh, or »Sand Mountains», so named because of the huge sand-dunes in its interior, piled up like mountain chains.

The Qum-tagh Desert not only separates two mountain systems, it also forms a connecting link between two great desert regions — in the west, the Takla-makan's sea of sand in the Tarim basin, and in the east, the Gobi Desert proper.

We reckoned that we were about 100 km from the nearest point on the eastern shore of the new Lop-nor, to the W. S. W., while Altmish-bulaq was 158 km away to the W. N. W. as the crow flies.¹

When December 8th began to dawn over the deserts and mountains, we were confronted with the question as to whether we could discover a practicable route

¹ When constructing the maps it has been found that these distances calculated in the field were too high. The party was only about 42 km from the nearest shore of Lop-nor and 130 km from Altmish-bulaq. F. B.