

from camp No. 133 to Altmish-bulaq by making a detour to the north in order to get round the wide north-eastern bay of the old dried-up bed of Lop-nor.

The dry lake-bottom consists of what the Turkis call *shor* — salt-encrusted mud which is as hard as brick, and rises in ridges and crests of an average height of half a meter. I had made the acquaintance of this awful country in my crossings of the Lop Desert. It is extremely trying for any kind of transport or even for travellers on foot; and I knew that it was absolutely out of the question for motor-cars.

The only possibility would be to follow the southern foot of the outlying mountains of the Pei-shan to their western extremity, which was quite near, go round this and then steer north-west and north, rounding the »*shor-bay*» on our left.

To begin with, a reconnaissance was to be made. The Chinese drove south-west and west in the small car with TSERAT. If the ground in this direction was practicable, we would all set out with both cars.

But the reconnaissance did not last for long. I could see the car the whole time from the camp as it slowly approached the end of the outlying mountain-chain to the south-west. Here it stopped for some time, and then returned to the camp. The whole trip had lasted only an hour and a quarter, and had led to an absolutely negative result.

In the south-west and west the ground got softer and softer — fine, loose, gypsum-bearing earth. The car finally got hopelessly stuck in it; and the only thing left to do was to turn back, when, after considerable trouble, the car was got clear. From this point our scouts could see irregularities, like *yardangs*, some way off to the west. In some places, too, the ground looked like turning into *shor*. About 6 km to the W. S. W. a track was visible, only slightly sunk but quite clear; and the party found a cairn on what must have been a piece of the bank of the old Lop-nor, on a small *mesa*.

Who could have taken a caravan past the western end of the mountain range? STEIN had gone that way, but twenty years had passed since then. But HÖRNER and CHEN had camped close by at Christmas, 1930; and it was quite possible that the tracks of their caravan had remained for three years and ten months. If this assumption was correct, the reconnaissance had after all been of great importance, enabling us to link up with HÖRNER's and CHEN's map.

We now decided to reconnoitre to the north through the mountains. We followed our old tracks, having on our right a black ridge that pushed out into the low ground like a cape on a sea-coast. We steered north, driving between red, rose-coloured and black ridges and over gravelly ups and downs. Not a sign of any wild beasts; not a blade of vegetation. A low crest barred our way. We tried to go round it to the north-east, but several low black slate ridges prevented us. We studied the lie of the land from hills that commanded a view. In the north and west the country looked hopeless.

While TSERAT waited with the lorry, we made a reconnaissance with the small