

the men this *oghre-bērgan yol* (' thief-granted path ') seemed to give great assurance. A couple of miles beyond we crossed another narrow inlet of the sea-bed which seemed to continue some little distance farther ' inland '. The remainder of the day's march, amounting to a total of twenty-one miles, lay over gently rising ground of detritus with low outcrops of decomposed slate here and there, producing little swellings and hummocks. Westwards from our track, at a distance of four to five miles, the edge of the level salt waste was to be seen, stretching away quite unbroken to the horizon. At two points we crossed the footprints of a wild camel ; they seemed to lead away from the foot of the hills towards the dry sea-bed. According to Tokhta-Ākhūn even its trying crust of salt does not deter the wild camels from covering great distances at the rutting season.

The morning of March 4th broke with a close hazy atmosphere, foreboding the approach of a Burān. It had become painfully obvious that we must bring our camels as soon as possible to ground where they could find something with which to allay their hunger. The straw from the last few saddles that we could spare, as no longer needed for loads, had disappeared in a moment down their gaping mouths. We therefore felt encouraged when the first three miles' march across a stony Sai broken by low ribs of decomposed slate brought us to a depression holding two small tamarisk bushes. Though stunted in growth, they were still alive and had evidently supplied the thieves, who had camped there, with a little fuel. After another three miles and a half their track turned off to SSW. towards the last sharp-browed offshoot of the Sai. This evidently had served them as a landmark when they crossed the great dry bay.

Northern
shore-line of
bay struck.

The sea of *shōr* westwards was fully in sight here, though its coast, where the old route had probably lain, and the bay southwards were hidden from us by the headland. But knowing that the bay lay now close in front of us, and wishing to shorten our way along its northern shore, I now changed our course to the south-east. For about two miles we crossed a gentle glacis of white gravel, curiously suggesting approach to a sea-coast. We then suddenly found ourselves on the brink of steep clay cliffs rising about a hundred and twenty feet above the sea-bed. This stretched away unbroken to the south, south-east, and south-west as far as the eye could reach, like a petrified brownish-grey sea. The low marshy shore about Achchik-bulak on the opposite side of the bay, some twenty miles away, was invisible, evidently lying below the horizon. Nor could I anywhere discover with my glasses those strings of high Mesas which, as I knew from our survey of 1907, rise near the caravan track between Achchik-bulak and Kum-kuduk (Map No. 32. D. 4).

Progress
along
foreshore.

The easier gradient in a small gully cut into the cliffs allowed us to bring the camels down safely to a strip of gravel, about a hundred yards wide, which stretched along the foot of the cliffs and formed the foreshore of the dried-up bay. Progress eastwards along this was easy, and produced all the sensations of a tramp by a real sea, with the billowy surface of hard salt stretching away unbroken to the horizon. Three miles from where we had descended we passed a bold bluff projecting from the line of cliffs. Beyond this the hill range above us gradually rose in height and the coastal cliffs were broken here and there by dry drainage channels. No trace of vegetation was to be seen in any of them. At a point about two and a half miles beyond the bluff we came upon the first evidence that the ancient route had followed this easy foreshore. It was a carnelian bead, C. cv. 02, which evidently had suffered prolonged corrosion on the wind-swept ground. It was picked up under my eyes by Tokhta Ākhūn.

Narrow
track
noticed.

As we followed this foreshore farther eastwards the hunter's attention as well as mine was caught by an unmistakable narrow track impressed into the gravel. By its side led a wild camel's recent footprints. We could trace it without any difficulty for over a mile, running on both over the gravel and the small intervening patches of *shōr*. Then we lost it where the line of cliffs curving