

on his way to join me. I arranged through Muḥammad Bāqir, who was eager to try his luck as a hunter while we halted, to leave directions for the young surveyor under a cairn at the spring of Yaka-yārdang-bulak. But it was uncertain when he would be there and whether he would find the instructions.

### SECTION III.—TO ANCIENT GRAVEYARDS BY THE KURUK-DARYĀ

Start for  
Kuruk-  
daryā.

On the morning of March 6th we set out for the Kuruk-daryā, after a night during which a strong wind from the north-east had allowed us little rest or comfort. In order not to load our camels too heavily, we left behind all baggage that could be spared and took a restricted store of ice, expecting to be able to supplement it from the ice sheet to be found at Yaka-yārdang-bulak. Our way for the first two miles led down the stony bed extending south from Yārdang-bulak. Then I struck to the south-south-east, where Dr. Hedin's map showed Yaka-yārdang-bulak to be situated; with this guidance and that of a tracing of Lāl Singh's survey, I hoped to have no difficulty in finding the spring, even without the help of Muḥammad Bāqir, who had failed to rejoin us. We were proceeding over absolutely bare gravel Sai when a violent Burān sprang up from the south-east and with the dust haze carried before it effaced all the distant view. After we had covered about six miles from camp under these dismal conditions, the bearing followed brought us down over steeply eroded clay banks into a bay-like depression studded with Mesas.<sup>1</sup> Those close to which we passed all rose to a height of 30 to 35 feet, and at once carried me back to well-remembered sights around the ancient Lop Sea. Having skirted this strange Mesa-filled area, which was found by subsequent survey to extend about four miles farther to the east, we reached a wide network of shallow beds clearly representing the main drainage channel into which are gathered all the flood-beds we had passed since leaving Jigda-bulak.

Halt at  
Yaka-  
yārdang-  
bulak.

Here we came upon living tamarisk-cones and also, before long, the first patch of reeds. Following the shallow flood channels to the south-east, over ground which the blinding dust raised by the icy gale made still more deceptive, we arrived, about three miles beyond the Mesas, at a belt of open salt-encrusted ground. As Lāl Singh's plane-table suggested that he had camped near the north-eastern edge of this, I now steered to the east and halted on reaching some luxuriant beds of reeds after a total march of twelve miles. Recognizing this as approximately the place where Lāl Singh's camp had stood, I halted the baggage and set out with Shamsuddīn to search for the more northerly of the two springs which the plane-table indicated. But this attempt was frustrated by the unlucky combination of the 'low visibility' resulting from the Burān and the absence of Muḥammad Bāqir; returning that morning to Yārdang-bulak from the place where he had shot the wild camel, he had failed to meet us when we crossed the Sai. We found indeed to the north-west a narrow channel, coming from a little Nullah marked by steep clay cliffs, in which the *shōr*-covered soil felt moist. We walked up it for about a mile and on digging there came upon water at a depth of only one foot. But it was utterly salt and undrinkable even for the camels.<sup>2</sup> We then looked for the spring marked to the eastwards, amidst the low salt-encrusted hillocks, like miniature 'White Dragon mounds', which there skirt the foot of the gravel glaxis; but our

<sup>1</sup> The well-defined edge of this Mesa-filled depression ought to have been clearly marked in Map No. 29. A. 3 to the north of the entry 'Mesas up to 30'.

In the same portion of the map the spring symbol close to Lāl Singh's Camp 76 should be deleted, as wrongly placed through a draughtsman's error.

<sup>2</sup> It is this point to which the spring symbol shown in the map about two and a half miles to the north-west of our camp

refers. According to Muḥammad Bāqir's subsequent information the above-mentioned channel receives its moisture from a spring which is to be found farther up in that Nullah between Mesas, but forms only a very small ice sheet. It is probable that this little Nullah connects with the valley containing the spring of Kara-aghzi or Kara-yārdang-bulak; this lies much farther away among the foot-hills to the north, and its approximate position has been marked on the map.