

*shōr*-covered ground a number of small fragments of oxidized iron, C. ccxxxviii. a. 02-6. The significance which this find, obviously representing the remains of some completely decayed implement, has with regard to the line likely to have been followed by the ancient route, has been fully discussed by me before at the close of the chapter recording the search for the ancient Chinese high road.<sup>13</sup> There, too, I have reproduced Afrāz-gul's observations regarding the western shoreline of the dried-up sea-bed where he struck it two miles farther to the east.

On February 24th the journey was started which was to bring the small party over wholly unsurveyed ground to Chainut-köl, the nearest point to the SW. where drinkable water could be hoped for. Regard for the camels, which would have to go without food until then, made it necessary to follow as straight a line towards that goal as physical conditions permitted. Notwithstanding this limitation Afrāz-gul's survey serves to throw adequate light on the character of the westernmost extension of the ancient sea-bed and its dismal shore. The topographical features recorded in his plane-table sheets and reproduced in Maps Nos. 29 and 32 are sufficiently detailed to permit these notes taken from his route report to be restricted to essentials.

Within a quarter of a mile from camp a stretch of hard salt crust, obviously an inlet of the salt-encrusted sea-bed, was entered. After  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles of this trying surface of upheaved salt hummocks there was reached clayey ground, covered with gypsum<sup>14</sup> flakes and flanked by Mesas, 20 to 25 feet high, with the usual NNE.-SSW. bearing. These alternations of clayey soil and hard salt crust repeated themselves throughout the day's march, which covered well over 25 miles. They suggest a much-indented coast-line on this side of the ancient sea. No Yārdangs or Mesas were passed near the route after about ten miles' march. An interesting feature farther on was a wide winding depression encrusted with hard salt (see Map No. 32. A. 3) which the surveyor was inclined to take for a deltaic river-bed.

On the march of the next day the first 9 miles or so were covered over hard salt-encrusted clay. Then followed for close on 10 miles difficult stretches of hard salt crust where blocks of solid salt were heaped up like hummocky ice to a height of 3 or 4 feet and in places even higher. In the midst of this dismal ground trunks of dead Toghraks were found. They had obviously been brought down by floods in the beds which were crossed at frequent intervals and became more and more well defined. These beds obviously represent the termination of the dead delta of the Kuruk-daryā. Near one of these beds the clayey bank retained dead reeds. At Camp ccxl. a. (Map No. 29. D. 4) the banks of such a bed showed small wind-eroded terraces of clay covered with dead reeds; within the bed dead Toghraks lay in plenty.

Notwithstanding such encouraging signs of approach to ground which in historical times was reached by river water, the march of February 26th still proved a trying one for men and camels. The clayey ground with dead reeds and Toghraks after about 10 miles gave way to hard salt crust with crumpled-up ridges 2-3 feet high. But after crossing this ground for c. 7 miles a dry river-bed was reached, and beyond it small tamarisk-cones in plenty on wind-eroded sandy soil. Here at Camp ccxli. a. the most trying portion of this Lop exploration was ended.

The next day's march led over wind-eroded sandy ground. From the camp onwards an old river-bed could be sighted for a considerable distance. Rows of dead Toghraks, standing still upright, clearly marked its winding bed. Its direction indicated connexion with the bed traced close to the fort L.K. and farther west. Coarse pottery and fragments of iron were picked up near the bed within  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from camp. Tamarisk-cones, first dead then living, were passed in increasing numbers. Small lake-beds with *shōr*-deposits of manifestly recent date on their margins assured the surveyor that he had arrived at ground which was still within reach of floods from the

<sup>13</sup> See above, i. p. 312.

<sup>14</sup> Shown throughout the map with the erroneous entry of 'mica'.