

a wholly unexplored region. He was completely successful and succeeded in filling up a gap in our knowledge of this part of the Kwen-lun. Through the deep-cut gorges above Polur he reached the northernmost high plateau (c. 15,000), »adjoining the outer main Kun-lun range».

He first reached the deep-cut valley of Zailik, where he found many gold-pits »dug into the precipitous cliffs of conglomerate just above the gneiss of the stream-bed». From Zailik »we managed to ascend from it a series of high spurs coming straight down from the main Kun-lun range northward».

Average height of its crestline — 20,000 feet. From several stations he commanded

the inexpressibly grand and wild mountain system containing the headwaters of the Yurung-kash.

On the south for a distance of over 60 miles, we could see them flanked by a magnificent range of snowy peaks, rising to over 23,000 feet, and all clad with glaciers more extensive than any I had so far seen in the Kun-lun. Now at last I could form a true idea of the unfailing stores of ice which supply the Khotan river with its enormous summer flood, and enable it then for a few months to carry its waters victoriously right through the thirsty desert.

He crossed a succession of side spurs over passes 17,000 and 18,000 feet high, ascended to the extremely confined gorge of the main river, and penetrated to the glacier-bound basin, about 16,000 feet high, where the easternmost and largest branch of the river takes its rise. Stations of 18,000 and 19,000 feet were climbed and geological specimens and records taken. Thus having traced the river to its head he turned east to the Ulugh-kol Lake. His intention was now to follow the great snowy range which flanks the Yurung-kash headwaters on the S. E. and south, westwards along its southern slopes until he reached the uppermost valley of the Kara-kash River. Therefore he had first to march by the Polur-Lanak-la route to the elevated basin (c. 17,000 feet) where the Keriya River rises at the foot of a line of great glaciers. Stein found that the range from which these glaciers descend proved to be identical with the easternmost part of the ice-clad range confining the Yurung-kash sources.

Regarding the Aksai-chin Stein writes:¹

I was heartily glad when at last we left behind the watershed of the Keriya river, and could commence our exploration of the ground westwards which in our atlases generally figures as high plain with the name of Aksai-chin, but which the latest transfrontier map of the Survey of India rightly showed as a blank. Instead of a plain we found there high snow-covered spurs with broad valleys between them descending from the great range which flanks the Yurung-kash sources. A series of large lakes and marshes mainly dry extends along the foot of those spurs, at an elevation of 15,000 to 16,000 feet; but the streams brought down by the valleys rarely reach them, losing themselves instead on vast

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 261.