

stories of the torture from thirst, the frantic search for water, and final death of the few of their number who have attempted to cross the desert in summer or fall, when the scanty water supply is in most places undrinkably saline. Yet in ancient times, up to the second or third century of our era, Chinese records show that the main trade route from China to the West traversed this now desolate region.

Such contradictory statements suggest that great changes have taken place during the past two thousand years, and so, too, does the fact that on ancient Chinese maps Lop-Nor is located a degree north of its modern position. This latter circumstance has given rise to much controversy. Przhevalski and other Russians, on the one hand, hold that the modern lake, the Kara Koshun of the natives, can properly be identified with the ancient Chinese lake of Lop-Nor; Von Richthofen and Hedin, on the other, hold that it cannot. Question has also arisen as to whether the ancient expansion of Lop-Nor, of which there is unmistakable evidence, persisted into historic times, or had come to an end before man occupied the country. In the hope of contributing something toward the solution of these questions, I planned to travel completely around the unexplored part of the ancient lake, crossing the Lop desert in its widest part. As a result of the journey, I became convinced that two thousand years ago, the lake was of great size, covering both the ancient and the modern locations; then it contracted, and occupied only the site shown on the Chinese maps; again, in the Middle Ages, it expanded; and at present it has contracted and occupies the modern site.

Now, as in Marco Polo's day, the traveler must equip