

About 1 p.m. we reached the mountains, after riding for six hours. They are called »Tuzkan», because the local population quarries salt under the upper layer of clay. The Avat, a small mountain river, flows SSE with a loud roar from a cleft about 300 fathoms in width. The road went along the steep western bank, at the foot of which we saw the noisy little mountain river. Twenty minutes later we came to a large, though very ruined sarai which afforded welcome protection from the rough weather. Next to it was a small mud shelter with a Chinese altar and some Chinese characters on a paper glued to the wall. A crowd of men and women had encamped in the sarai before us. Their peculiar felt »stockings» and shoes or sandals of fur, laced with thin string and with the hair on the outside, indicated that we had entered country different from the highways of Chinese Turkestan. No fodder had been sent here as promised by the Chinese authorities. Fortunately, we carried sufficient for the moment; we can replenish our supplies to-morrow at Qizil Bulaq. N of the sarai the cleft seemed to widen slightly and provide space for a narrow strip of earth with some trees.

During the day we met some caravans of donkeys with salt from the mountains and some shabbily dressed individuals on foot coming from the village of Qizil Bulaq about 42 miles from Jam. Two old women walked all this distance in order to sell a hen each, representing a value of about 15 cop.

At Avat the snow lies for about three months and is about the height of a man in depth. There are about 10 burans in the spring and about 4 in the autumn. There is a group of villages containing 100—110 houses in all on the upper reaches of the Avat. There is no cultivated land in the vicinity of the sarai, nor can any supplies be reckoned on there except fuel and small quantities of hay. Passing caravans sometimes sell superfluous fodder, so that occasionally you can obtain some maize or barley.

*March 28th.* The snowstorm continued with unabated severity, when we started this morning. *Qizil Bulaq village.* The snow almost came up to the horses' knees and the wind whipped the flakes into our faces. It was no easy matter to map the road and keep the paper from getting too wet. You could not see more than 150—200 feet ahead and there were no traces to indicate the road. It was not long before the yigit or »jai», whom the mandarin had sent to accompany me, declared that he could no longer find the way. I sent back Rakhimjanoff to request the Yuzbashi, who had arrived with fodder during the night, to accompany us. Soon, however, he also was not certain of the direction. Almost as soon as we had started we entered a gorge about 200 paces wide with a dry rain channel and followed it for about three hours. The mountain on either side is called Tope tagh and forms a kind of continuation of the Tuzkantagh near Avat. In places the gorge grows slightly wider, especially where it branches. As there are very numerous branchings and the off-shoots are about the same size as the main gorge, it was indeed easy to go astray. About an hour from Avat a few trees and large bushes grow in the gorge, especially in the wider places. A couple of times our two guides thought they had mistaken the gorge and there was nothing for it but to retrace our steps for a considerable distance. In about three hours they declared that there was no doubt they had taken the wrong road. We