

We did not now descend into this main valley, which is that of the Panja River, the principal branch of the Oxus, but kept along high up the mountain-side, about fifteen thousand feet above the valley bottom. Darkness had come on, and I was unable to see how far down the valley the glacier extended; but at rather more than a mile above the point where the route by the Wakhijrui Pass descends into this same valley, we came down into the valley bottom, and found there no glacier, but a considerable stream—the Panja. The pass which we crossed was situated about eight miles south of the Wakhijrui. There are no signs of a path by it, and, as far as I could learn, not even a Kirghiz had been by it before. But it presents no particular difficulties, and we were able, as I said, to take yaks the whole way, and were generally able to ride them. The pass has, however, no importance, as the Wakhijrui is easier and more direct.

Arriving in the dark at midnight, and with the whole country deeply covered with snow, we could find no brushwood. We had, accordingly, to content ourselves with a few tent-pegs as fuel for fire by which to heat up a little water for tea; and then, having pitched our tents on the snow, we turned in. Next day we marched down the Pamir-i-Wakhan, which, on account of its right bank facing south and so getting the sun, is much frequented by the Wakhi shepherds in the winter months; and on the day after passed by Bozai-Gumbaz. We now had to discover another new pass, for here again all the known passes were barred by my agreement with Colonel Yonoff. The range of the Indus watershed, the main ridge of the Hindu Kush, was likely to prove far harder to cross than had the last mountain barrier, and I had, therefore, for some time past taken pains to find out from the natives if any other pass than the known ones existed. It is of little use to ask the people straight out, "Is there a pass?" They would, of course, reply, "No, there isn't," and the conversation would end.