

We had been told that the Great Pámír, on account of snow, is rarely passable till the end of June, and were assured that it would be impossible for a large party like ours to succeed in any attempt earlier. On the 15th April I despatched a sepoy of the Guides with two of the Mír's men towards the Great Pámír Lake to report on the depth of snow, so that we might take advantage of any possible chance of passage. They returned in eight days, bringing such an account of the road as induced us to determine on trying it. They found the snow deep and heavy in the drifts and hollows, but the fact of their having been able to reach the lake made us regard the journey as much less difficult than had been previously represented. The Mír visited us the day after the return of the Guides, and, referring to their report, said that he would give all assistance in his power to gratify our desire to see the Great Pámír Lake, and go back by a different route than that by which we came. Our baggage horses had not recovered from the effects of the severe journey over, but as the Mír undertook to give help in that way, we were able to commence preparations for return to Sirikol. The Mír also made arrangements for the provision and carriage of eight days' supply of food for men and horses.

On the 25th the weather changed suddenly from cold to mild, and a heavy fall of rain that night, succeeded by a warm day without wind, gave signs of coming spring. On the 26th we paid a farewell visit to the Mír, and left Kila Panj that day, Captain Trotter, Doctor Stoliczka and I for the Great Pámír, and Captain Biddulph, accompanied by Resaidar Muhammad Afzul Khán, for the Chitrál Passes, a spot in the Aktásh valley being appointed as our rendezvous on the 4th of May.

We (the Great Pámír party) halted the first day at Langar-Kisht, a considerable village on the right bank of the Great Pámír stream, and the last in the valley leading up to the lake. Near it is the Issár Fort, built on a solitary rock, standing out high on the plain, and said to be of very ancient date. We examined the ruins, and found them to show no signs of greater antiquity than those of Táshkurgán-Sirikol. The mud used as cement in the walls indicated no great age. No hewn stones were seen in the whole place.

The Mír's eldest son visited us in the evening at Langar-Kisht, to say good-bye and present a pair of ibex hounds, which were evidently considered a valuable gift. The sporting tastes of the Wakhis lead them not to regard the dog as a mean animal, similarly as other Muhammadans do. Wood mentions how a slave was given in exchange for a dog, and the Mír, when we took leave of him, said that he would be always glad to see the English, that even a dog of theirs would be welcomed, and he would himself rise in the night time to see food cooked for it.*

From Langar-Kisht our road lay in a general north-easterly direction, at some height along the slopes of the mountains on the right bank of the stream. The mountains on each side rise by a very gradual incline from the deep rocky gorge in which the stream flows. The Zerzamín and Mútz streams join from the north, at eight and nineteen miles from Langar-Kisht. The upper road to Shighnán leads along the latter. Bar Panja, the capital, is said to be reached in eight days by it, and Shákh Darrah in three days. Shákh Darrah was at one time a small independent Mírship, but it now forms part of Shighnán. The Kirghiz, who formerly occupied the western end of the Great Pámír, are now located in Shákh Darrah. According to the Wakhis the Mútz stream has a course of about twenty-five miles, rising near the crest of the mountains to the north, which form the boundary between Wakhán and Shighnán, the stream from the opposite side of which falls into the Murgháb.

The Great Pámír appears to begin twenty-five miles above Langar-Kisht. The valley which up to that point is narrow, the base of the mountains approaching the bed of the stream, opens out there, and the hills on either side show low and rounded. Thence the road lay in the same general direction, over flats and long easy slopes the whole way to the lake. Birch and

* *Note.*—This seems to be a general expression of welcome; for the Dadkhwah of Yarkand, Mahomed Yunus Khan, said the same to me in 1870.