

western border of the gently undulating Ling-zi-thung Plain), in traversing which the traveller crosses, almost without knowing it, the water-shed between India and Central Asia. After passing the water-shed the road crosses a small stream, one of the head waters of the Kárakásh, and then goes over a spur (Kompás La) 18,160 feet in height and descends into the bed of Kárakásh River, which it strikes, at an elevation of 17,400 feet above the sea and follows to Kizil Jilga.

The portion of the road between the Changlung Pass and Kizil Jilga is perhaps the most trying part of this route. The great elevation and consequent bitter cold is much aggravated by frequent snow and a piercing wind which blows from morning to night; the long dreary marches cause one to arrive, after dark, at camps where there are scant supplies of fuel and no grass; occasional ice beds block up the whole road, one of these extends for three miles down the Kárakásh River; all combine to try most severely both man and beast.

At Kizil Jilga the road just described joins an alternative road (taken by Captain Biddulph on the outward journey), which, leaving the usual route a few miles north of Gogra, crosses the Changlung Barma Pass (19,300 feet) on to the Ling-zi-thung plains, along which it passes at a still higher elevation than the western road. It descends into the Kárakásh River at Kizil Jilga; the greater elevation makes this road perhaps even more trying than the western route.

The third route from Gogra before alluded to leaves the Changlung valley 8 miles above Gogra and the Ling-zi-thung plain may be reached by either the Changlung Barma or the Changlung Yokma Pass a little further to the east, and of about the same elevation. This is the pass taken by Mr. (now Sir Douglas) Forsyth in his first mission to Yárkand. By it, the road followed by Captain Biddulph (striking the Kárakásh River at Kizil Jilga) may be joined, but a more northerly route passing over a succession of elevated plains was taken by the former mission, and the Kárakásh River was met a few miles above Sora at the sudden bend that the river takes when its course is turned towards the west (in north lat. $35^{\circ} 55'$) by the Kuen Luen Range. From this point the road followed the River to Sháhidúla.

In addition to the intense cold the principal objection to all three routes skirting or passing over the Ling-zi-thung (also called Aksai Chin) is the extreme elevation at which the traveller has to remain for so many marches: the cattle are exhausted by this, and too frequently suffer in addition from the pangs of hunger and thirst. These difficulties nearly brought the first mission to Yárkand to a disastrous end, and the same causes have proved, and will probably continue to prove, sufficient to deter the experienced merchant from following this road. The older, shorter, and better known route by the Kárakorum is likely always to be preferred by the merchant even in summer, whereas in winter an attempt to traverse the Ling-zi-thung plains must almost always result in disaster.

From Kizil Jilga the road follows the Kárakásh River to Chong Tash (or "Great Stone"). From this point the eastern variation, taken by Captain Biddulph, follows the Kárakásh River right down to Sháhidúla, a distance of 166 miles, while the western or more direct road is only 113 miles in length, and although in the latter there are two high passes *viz.*, the Kárátágh (17,700) and the Sugét (17,600) to be crossed *en route*, yet they are neither of them difficult ones. The Sugét Pass may be avoided by going over the lower and still easier pass of Fotash by which the Kárakásh River is struck one march above Gulbashem. In the circuitous line from Chong-tash down the Kárakásh, the road is bad, but there is the advantage of plentiful supplies of grass and fuel which are almost altogether wanting on the Kárátágh line. The Ling-zi-thung routes meet the Kárakorum summer route at Aktágh or at Sháhidúla according as the western or eastern variation is adopted.

At the angle formed by the Kárakásh River above Sora, when turned by the Kuen Luen range, the traveller can proceed to Khotan direct (a distance of 160 miles or 11 marches) by crossing the Kuen Luen Range by the Yangi or Elchi Diwan (crossed by Mr. Johnson in his journey to Khotan in 1865), and estimated by him at 19,500 feet in height; after passing this there is another formidable glacier pass, the Naia Khan (height 18,659 according to Johnson) which has to be crossed before reaching the plains. The Elchi Diwan is said to be open for only three months in the year.