

Chadyrkul; another authority referred the name more particularly to the plains at the head of the Aksai River. The Kirghiz living in the districts we had passed through seemed to be entirely ignorant of the name, and did not recognize it; but after my return, on asking the Hákim of Kalti Ailák the whereabouts of the Syrt, he immediately replied that I had just come from it, and that the name was applicable to the whole district between Artysh and Ush Túrfán; on his evidence I think the name may remain on our maps where it is. The country can, however, by no means be considered as a high table-land rising immediately above the plains of Turkestan; it should rather be represented as a series of parallel mountain ranges, running, as a rule, from west to east, each one decreasing gradually in height, from the main ridge on the north to the lowest on the south; each subsidiary range also decreasing in height as it goes eastward. Between these ranges and running parallel to them, are extensive level plains, very little higher than the plateau of Eastern Turkestan, but gradually rising towards the north and sloping down towards the east. Thus the Túghamatí Plain, about 45 miles north of Káshghár, is about 2,000 feet higher; while the Jai Túpa plain, the same distance east of Túghamatí, is only 1,000 feet higher than Káshghar. The combined effect is to give a general slope to the south-east.

These large plains have in most cases much grass and fuel, though but little water. From the Sogón eastward we came across no flowing stream. What water is derived from the very moderate annual snowfall seems to percolate into the earth, moistening it generally, and issuing in various places in the form of springs, near which are usually to be found Kirghiz encampments. In the Tigarek plain, at the foot of the Belowti Pass, there are, I believe, no springs; and although there is good grass, the only time of the year in which the plain can be tenanted by the Kirghiz, is that at which we happened to visit it, the sole substitute for water for themselves and flocks being the actual snow, which was then lying on the ground. In the Jai Túpa valley there are water-courses running from north and east, but the supply of water is so precarious that the Kirghiz told me that it was only after years in which there was a more than average snowfall, that they attempted any cultivation at all, and under the most favorable circumstances the extent is extremely limited. There appeared to be no outlet through the hills surrounding this valley, in the lower portion of which lies the forest before alluded to. The moisture in the soil would seem to be sufficient to nourish these stunted trees. Much of the ground in the plain is covered with saline efflorescence, and from near Jai Túpa itself large quantities of crystallized salt are collected and despatched to Káshghar.

The Kirghiz who inhabited the country in the time of the Chinese appear to have led a more jovial life than at present. Under no master, they used regularly to levy black-mail from passing travellers and merchants at every camping ground; and as prompt payment always ensured a safe passage, there was seldom much difficulty in collecting their dues. Under the strict rule of the Amír they are now disarmed, and are comparatively poor, as they dare not venture on any of their old tricks. A single sepoy of the King's, selected from among themselves, is stationed in each encampment, and is responsible for the good conduct of its members; an annual present of a choga, a certain amount of grain, and remission of taxes is the remuneration he receives from the State. The Kirghiz pay as taxes annually one sheep in 40, one sheep for every two camels, and one-tenth of the agricultural produce (when there is any). In these parts horses or ponies are scarce. Nature aids the inhabitants in their poverty by a plentiful supply of a plant called locally *kuruk* or *teric*, a kind of millet which grows wild and from which they make a preparation called "*talkan*" corresponding to the Ladákhí *suttoo*, which they eat uncooked moistened with a little water. I tried some, and found it to be not unlike Scotch oatmeal, and, as it may be had for the picking it may be looked upon as a bountiful gift of Providence to these otherwise poverty stricken people.

Our march from Kyr Bulák to Kalti Ailák was for a great part of the way down the Sogón River. A kárawul, garrisoned by a few sepoys is situated where the river enters the hills south of the Ayok Sogón plain. The valley occasionally widens out into small grassy flats. After a time, the river is left (it goes off in a south-east direction and is, as before explained, soon swallowed up by the thirsty gravelly soil) and the road traverses some very bleak and desolate broken ground without a scrap of vegetation or sign of life. After passing through these hills and then over a few miles of flat stony desert we reached Kalti Ailák.