

Two miles higher is the Ghijak ravine, along which a road runs to the Alai and Khokand by the Kárátásh and Kizil Art Passes*. Another seven miles up the stream brought us to our halting-place at Aktala. As we ascended, the increasing bulk of water was very appreciable, partly owing to the snow melting under the increased temperature, but also doubtless in some measure due to a large quantity being lost in the gravelly soil, which, as I have before had occasion to mention, frequently absorbs much water, that would otherwise profitably be employed in irrigation. We had crossed the river shortly before it enters the plains, and although its banks are there several feet in height, the natural bed immediately afterwards opens out on the stony plain and much water must be lost. The river divides into two main branches, the Odelang to the north, and the Ghalchak to the south. These irrigate the villages on the Grand Trunk Road between Kudok and Yangi-Hissár.

Above Ghijak the road closes in and we get several very picturesque views as we advance. The scenery is very bold, hills several hundreds of feet in almost perpendicular height enclosing the narrow valley. Fuel, water, and grass are in abundance. At Aktala the valley opens and the river branches into two streams of nearly equal size. Some miles up the western branch is the Kirghiz village of Chumbáz, by which a path is said to lead to the Kaskasú Pass. Our third day's march was to Sásak Taka, 13½ miles up stream, by a bad stony road through a very bold defile: there was plenty of wood and grass, which also appeared to be very abundant in some of the lateral valleys. About 2½ miles short of camp, a deep ravine comes in from the east, and the main stream turns to the south-west, retaining that general direction until arrival at the Kaskasú Pass, which we crossed on the 25th March. At five miles above Sásak Taka a stream joins from the south-east called Kinkol, and gives its name to the river lower down. On this day's march (fourth from Yangi-Hissár) we passed numerous Kirghiz camps containing altogether as many as 30 or 40 tents or Akooes; amongst their tenants I encountered some who came originally from the neighbourhood of Almáti. Although passing along a valley bounded on both sides by spurs from lofty hills which rose some thousands of feet above us, the scenery was not so bold as where we had passed through on the previous day; the slopes were more gentle, and numerous grassy valleys entered on both sides, up which we saw many camels, yaks and sheep.

On the fifth day (25th March), we left camp with the thermometer at 7° F. starting early in order to avoid the slush and water to be expected later on in the day from the melting snow. At first we had a bitterly cold west wind, which however moderated after an hour or so, and we had a very fine day for crossing the Kaskasú Pass. The ridge which we had to cross is a spur from the Kizil Art mountains, and separates the drainage of the Kinkol River flowing towards Yangi-Hissár, from that of the Chárling River, which goes to Yárkand. For two miles after starting our direction was a little north of west, and then for nearly three miles up to the pass nearly south of west. The road leaves the ravine (which is steep and inaccessible) and winds up the side of the valley, passing round the head of the ravine, and over a flat ridge, at the end of which commences a steep descent of about five miles. The height of the pass is 12,930 feet, and although the length of march was only 10 miles, the baggage ponies did not arrive in camp until late in the afternoon, owing to the slippery descent on the south side, where our loads had to be transferred to yaks. There was a great deal of snow on the pass, as well as on the grassy slopes on

* This road is said to cross two passes before it reaches the Kizilart Diwan, and to pass, by Kichik (little) Karakul, a small lake probably not more than four or five miles in circumference, from which a road leads to Chong (great) Karakul five marches off and probably four or five days' journey in circumference. This road is said not to cross any large river but to pass mostly over high table land; abundant supplies of grass and fuel exist throughout, and I was told that camels can traverse it the whole year round. It was formerly used by merchants going from Yarkund to Khokand but is now closed. A direct road from Yangi Hissar joins it at one day's march from Ghijak at a place called Karatash. Another road leads from Opal (about 30 miles south-west from Kashghar) to the Kizilart Pass and Alai. This road was recently used by an Envoy sent from Karatigin to Kashghar one of whose suite was wounded in an encounter with the Alai Kirghiz, who are subject to Khokand. The portion nearest to Kashghar is often used as an alternative road to Khokand when the Terek Pass is closed.