

for about 35 miles, while the diameter of the eastern half is about 20, and that of the western about 12 miles. Save for a few low hillocks it is almost a level plain throughout. On the north-western, northern, and north-eastern side it is bounded by the Koktau range, from which several water-courses lead into it, one about the middle from the north, and one from north-east of considerable size, this containing a large quantity of crystalline pebbles, the rocks from which they are derived must be *in situ* near the axis of the ridge. A third big stream comes from the east leading from the Uibulak Pass. None of these streams had any water in them. On the south, east, and south-east the plain is bounded by the much lower hills composed of Artush beds, their slopes covered with gravel.

An elevated gap or saddle situated in the south-west corner appears to connect this Jilga with that of Tugurmatti. There is no drainage from this Jilga, all the water is absorbed by the enormous thickness of sand and mud which fills the entire basin. This accounts for the comparatively rich vegetation which exists in it. There are several stretches of regular poplar forest (*P. nigra* or *P. balsamifera*) up to 10 miles long and 4 to 5 miles in breadth. Besides which there are several places occupied by regular jungle of *tamarix*, *myricaria*, *ephedra*, and the peculiar wormwood, from the seed of which the Kirghiz prepare *satu*. The *tamarix* and poplars must absorb during their growth a very large quantity of the mineral salts with which the entire ground is saturated; the wood on being burnt gives out a strong smell of sulphur and chlorine.

The poplar trees are not healthy, they resemble oak trees covered with mistletoe. The branches are short, stumpy, and bushy. It is evident that the trees only exist in consequence of the subterranean moisture. There are a great number of springs through the forest and on its edges, but on account of the level character of the plain no flowing streams exist except where there has been a very heavy snowfall and very rapid melting.

It is satisfactory to observe that within three marches of Kashghar there is such a large supply of wood, though it is by no means good wood. I have already stated that the entire soil is very saline, and it is remarkable to see how snow melts on this saline ground. Thus about four inches of snow fell while we were there. In one day all was melted away on the saline ground, while near springs, where the saline matters has been gradually dissolved out of the ground, hardly any snow had melted. Where the soil is more moist or even swampy, and in river courses, high reed grass is abundant. The southern part of the Jilga, particularly south-east of Taitma, is lowest, and here a large quantity of pure salt in small cubical crystals is collected. The fact that there is such a large quantity of saline matter together with salt swamps in the southern part seems to prove that the Jilga at least, and probably most of the others, had been washed out by the sea, and that while others had gradually, though only partially, drained off the saline matter, this one retained it because it has at present no outlet. It is in fact a dried up saline lake, which at some remote time was cut off from the sea of which it was a fjord.

Jigda Jilga is occupied by about 150 to 170 Kirghiz tents, each tent may be taken as containing five souls. There are a few fields near Jigda camp, and if there has been a large quantity of snow the crops are said to prosper very well. During the winter the Kirghiz are encamped in small groups near the different springs. They do not keep many horses, but large number of sheep and goats and a few camels. One whole *akoi* is a light load for a camel. When packed the blankets are made into saddles over the hump of the animal.

A third Jilga is south of the Belauti Pass and north-east of the Uibulak Pass. It is about eight miles in breadth and the same in length. There are two large water-courses leading to it from the range. On the southern side it is enclosed by Artush and gravel beds, but whether an outlet exists is not known. It has no forest, nor any kind of trees or large bushes, and the grass vegetation is scanty evidently on account of the dryness. A southernly outlet very likely exists. We met a few Kirghiz encamped here from Ush-Turfan. The only supply of water they had was melted snow, and as soon as the beds about are exhausted, they have to retreat with their flocks to the Kakshal valley.