

clear blue Yarkand River turned sharply to the east, bending, as I subsequently ascertained, in such a manner that it flows for several miles in nearly parallel stretches not far distant from each other. The valley was here very narrow, bounded by the lofty, rugged and barren mountains characteristic of the region, and the way was completely barred by a perfectly vertical cliff. Looking up the Yarkand valley, I noticed a very narrow track leading across a steep gravel slope a good height above the river. Whether this track was formed by men or animals I could not guess, but in either case its course was worth investigating, and I sent Abdul Karim forward to ascertain whether it was such as could be travelled over by lightly-laden ponies. While Abdul was investigating I set up the theodolite and made some useful observations. At night, with Abdul recording, I fixed astronomically the latitude and longitude of this spot, the most westerly point in the course of the river. Abdul's report having been favourable, I resolved to follow his footsteps next morning with a few ponies, and with provisions and corn sufficient to last for three or four days. It might be necessary to cross the Yarkand River, which, even in shallow places, was considered too deep for laden ponies; and, for the purpose of transporting the baggage, the Ming Bashi was induced to supply me with two camels. Of the two camelmén sent with them, however, one was a stranger to the neighbourhood and the other was an idiot.

After we emerged from the Mariong valley the first obstacle was the gravel slope already mentioned, which, though steep, did not stop the advance of the laden animals. The breadth of the track, which at first was but a few inches, was widened by the tread of each pony, and, though the improvement was of short duration owing to the slipping down of more gravel, neither nerve nor