

was true steppe, to the left the Kevir, but after a while I found myself amongst luxuriant saxaul bushes on all sides. Here the ground was hard and covered with fine gravel. As the camel track continued south-westwards, I left it on the right and made southwards. The caravan was so far behind that I could scarcely hear the bells. After a while I found a small track which led down to the shore of the Kevir, and seemed quite reliable where it disappeared in winding course over the flat desert. Wondering whether it were the Mulkabad route I had heard of, I waited for my men, and after a short discussion we decided to begin the crossing. I mounted again, the scouts went in front, and the heavy caravan moved over the barren insecure ground.

The path took us south-south-west, but it often made bends to avoid dangerous spots with yielding ground. After a while we crossed a trench 20 yards broad and 3 feet deep, which was evidently the estuary of a river-bed running from the west into the Kevir. In its bottom, white with salt, were several puddles of bitter water. Fortunately the ground bore even here, though it was soaked with water and became a track of mud after the camels had passed. Nevengk tried the water, but shook his head and ran off sniffing, and somewhat vexed to find his thirst mocked by the clear water.

No termination of the arm of the desert can be seen to the west, and we cannot perceive how far it extends to the south. Perhaps we shall not cross it before evening—it would be cheerful to camp in the middle of the Kevir, where the ground may be firm enough for a rapid passage, but would not bear a more lasting burden; there would be a danger of the whole camp sinking into the mud during the night. After we have crossed a trench with its bottom paved with hard salt, we see before us a number of small dark spots which soon prove to be grazing camels, so that we are not far from the southern shore, and the strip of the Kevir we have crossed is quite narrow. Like the preceding, this trench also runs north-eastwards, and we see its bed winding out for a considerable distance into the Kevir before it thins out and vanishes in the depression.