

A bitterly cold day spent in the Kirghiz camp of Bozai-gumbaz made it possible for me to visit the Little Pamir Lake. It lies at a height of 13,000 feet on one of those bleak and wide upland valleys which form so characteristic a feature of the 'Roof of the World'. What looked from this flat expanse like a modest hill range, still snow-covered, separated us from the Great Pamir Lake. Past this, I knew, lay the route which Marco Polo had followed on his journey through the wilderness of the 'Roof of the World' and which he so graphically described. Hsüan-tsang, too, the great Buddhist pilgrim, whom I have grown accustomed to claim as my Chinese patron saint, had passed there when, centuries before, he came back from his long pious wanderings in India. Not until nine years later could I follow their track there and that of Captain Wood, who in 1838 was the first European since Marco Polo to visit the great lake.

It was along the uppermost course of the Ab-i-Panja, the main feeder of the Oxus, and on an ancient route, that we reached the foot of the Wakhjir pass. It is flanked by the glaciers where Lord Curzon had rightly placed the true source of the Oxus. A long day of toil saw us across the pass and so across the Afghan-Chinese border. We started by 3 A.M. Our Afghan escort remained camped behind at the foot of the pass to make sure that our Wakhi and Kirghiz transport would not desert half-way. Enormous masses of snow still covered the Wakhjir (Fig. 15). In spite of a minimum temperature of 25° F. in the morning their surface soon grew so soft that the powerful yaks of the Kirghiz had to be relieved of loads and left behind. Only fear of our Afghan protectors induced the Wakhis and Kirghiz to persevere in their efforts to carry our baggage across. Even so