

reasons for this belief have been fully set forth in *Serindia* and *Innermost Asia*. Here it must suffice to mention that they find support in interesting references furnished by Chinese historical records to this ancient delta and the dried-up sea-bed eastwards.

We had scarcely entered this desolate area when on its wind-swept bare ground flint arrowheads, knife-blades and other small implements of the Stone Age, together with fragments of very coarse pottery, were picked up in frequent succession. The same happened again, after intervals, farther on. Considering that our route had to be kept as straight as possible, and search to the right or left was practically excluded, the frequency of such finds was conclusive evidence that belts of this area must have been occupied by man in late prehistoric times.

The very trying nature of the ground did not allow us to cover more than fourteen miles of march a day at the utmost, though I kept men and beasts on the move from early morning till nightfall. Nor was the maintenance of a correct course towards the compass point by which we were steering easy on ground so much broken. For the same reason I had to take care to have our track marked at points easily sighted from each other by signposts built up of dead wood or lumps of clay. These were to assure guidance for those who were to bring up our reserve store of ice and supplies.

We were nearing the end of a second troublesome march across this waste of eroded hard clay when a number of small metal objects, including Chinese copper coins of the Han dynasty, with plentiful fragments of well-finished pottery, lying on the ground gave assurance that our route led here through a belt which during historical times has