

known human occupation, at least in places. Yet we were, as our survey showed, still twelve miles in a direct line to the south of the ruins traced by Hedin.

By that time we were already in the clutches of an icy north-east wind which in the middle of the following night nearly blew my tent down. This bitter wind continued with short intervals during the whole of our stay in this region. With minimum temperatures rapidly falling below zero Fahrenheit it made life exceedingly trying for us all. Had it not been for the plentiful fuel supplied by the rows of bleached dead tree-trunks to be found near ancient river-beds, the men would have suffered even more than they did. Even with the sun shining brightly I could not keep head and hands warm with my thickest wraps and gloves while that piercing wind was blowing.

Chinese copper coins of the Han type, bronze arrowheads and other small objects had been picked up with increasing frequency on December 17, when at last in the afternoon, after crossing a broad and well-marked dead river-bed, the first ruined mound indicating proximity of the site was duly sighted in the distance, exactly where Hedin's sketch-map had led me to expect it. The excitement among our band of labourers was great after the growing anxiety they had felt as to the end of this long quest. Some eight miles across steep clay banks and sharply cut trenches between them had still to be covered before by nightfall I was able to pitch camp at the foot of the ruined Stupa which stands out in this weirdly desolate landscape as the landmark of the main group of ruins (Fig. 59).

By next morning the excavations were started which, carried on unremittingly for eleven days with a relatively large