

thence they would descend later in the season to graze along the main valley. All the way the great snowy range to the south, with Mount Kaufmann rising to close on 23,000 feet, presented grand panoramic views in the distance.

Long before reaching Daraut-kurghan I came at an elevation of about 9000 feet upon traces of former cultivation and remains of roughly built stone dwellings such as are occupied now by the semi-nomadic Kirghiz lower down during the winter months. Similarly, on the Kashgar side cultivation is to be found at Irkesh-tam and above it to about the same elevation. Thus wayfarers of old could be sure of finding shelter and some local supplies all along this ancient route except for a distance of less than seventy miles on the highest portion of the Alai. Though the snow lies deep on the Alai from December to February, the route would be practicable even then just as the Terek pass (12,700 feet), much frequented from Irkesh-tam to Farghana, is now at that season, provided there were sufficient traffic to keep the track open.

Such trade between the Tarim basin and the middle Oxus as was once served by the route through Kara-tegin and the Alai no longer exists. Balkh and the rest of Afghan Turkestan to the south of the Oxus have long ceased to see traffic passing from China. What little local trade comes up Kara-tegin from the side of the Oxus proceeds from Daraut-kurghan to Marghilan or Andijan in Farghana, while exports from the Kashgar side find their way across the Terek pass to these places on the Russian railway.

Daraut-kurghan, where I was obliged to make a short halt for the sake of arrangements about transport and supplies, is a small place at the point where the Kara-tegin valley