

visible, and I could recognise the valley at the entrance of which the Surghak gold mines lie. The march was over a stony steppe and almost too short, only about eleven miles. But our 'Darogha' thought, probably rightly, that the camels could not cover the whole distance to Niya in one day, and as there is neither water nor shelter to be found on the remaining twenty-four miles, I had to acquiesce. Ovraz Langar consists of a solitary mud-house, tenanted by a 'Langarchi.' Supplies and ice had been sent on from Ui-toghrak, so we were fairly comfortable. The room I occupied was low, and the fireplace smoked badly; but even thus it was preferable to a tent in the sharp wind that blew from the east.

The start for Niya next morning was made cheerful by the arrival of Niaz Akhun, who, with the ponies and my mail from Khotan, overtook me before I had left Ovraz Langar. He brought me letters from home which had travelled by the Farghana route to Kashgar and thence by Chinese post. The latest of them had left my brother's hand on the 7th of December, and seemed quite recent, considering that the mail from Europe that reached me via Gilgit bore dates in the second week of October. It was impossible to ignore the postal advantages which the Trans-Caspian railway has secured for the European in Central Asia, though for safety I preferred to rely on the Indian post-office and its Dak via Hunza.

The whole of the twenty-four miles' march from Ovraz Langar lay over a pebble-strewn 'Sai,' the detritus washed down from the great southern range. Here and there sand-dunes advancing from the desert stretched their last offshoots across the hard 'Sai.' There was no trace of vegetation until we got within about six miles of the Niya oasis, when tamarisks and some hardy brushwood appeared in small patches. The oasis of Niya is formed by a series of hamlets and villages extending along the river that leaves the mountains near Surghak. In its upper course it is known as the 'Darya' of the Ulugh-Sai Valley. After 3 p.m. I had reached the western edge of the cultivated area at the hamlet of Kangsarigh, and a further two miles brought me into the central village containing the Bazar of Niya. I was received in due form by the