

set to work cutting ice, and by the light of big bonfires the filling of the huge bags of coarse wool brought for the purpose from Charklik proceeded until midnight.

Next morning I roused the men by 5 A.M.; but it was four hours later before the fully loaded column could be set in motion. The bags of ice, of which each of the eleven camels set apart for this portion of the transport was to carry three, had been made far too heavy. So all of them had to be opened again, and the surplus weight distributed as well as it might between the remaining camels carrying our supplies and indispensable baggage. How glad I was that this troublesome rearrangement could be effected not on the backs of restless camels groaning piteous protest, but on those business-like stacks or 'Shotas'! According to Turkestan practice these are made up of two short ladders lashed at the top, and when once charged with the loads can be lifted on and off the camels' saddles without great trouble (Fig. 126). Ordinarily four men suffice for the operation. But now, when we had to put loads of over four hundred pounds on the back of each available animal, six men were not too many. In addition, we had some thirty donkeys laden with smaller bags of ice. It was my intention to make them march for two days beyond the last point where drinkable water or ice was available, and leave their ice there for a sort of half-way depot. Of course, the donkeys would need water; but with a two days' thirst and relieved of loads they could be trusted to return quickly by the track we had come.

As to the camels, they had under Hassan Akhun's supervision been given a thoroughly long drink, six to seven big bucketfuls each, from a hole cut through the ice, and that would have to last them, for all that we knew, for some weeks. Once we had left the last lagoons and salt pools behind us, no fodder of any sort could be hoped for them until they reached the reed beds of the Altmishbulak salt springs, well to the north of Hedin's ruins. But Hassan Akhun had not forgotten to include in our equipment a few skins full of rape-seed oil, in order to provide each of our own camels at least from time to time with a pound or so of this evil-smelling luxury. It was