

scattered lagoons of salt water. So I could safely steer my course by the compass, provided that Hedin's position for the ruins was approximately correct, without having to fear détours and loss of time.

We had marched for over two miles when we touched the southern end of such a salt lagoon which had formed part of the 'Yangi-köl' or 'New Lake,' and to the Lop fishermen was specifically known by that designation. Though no fresh influx of water was said to have reached it for three years, fish were still plentiful in it, and near a reed hut we found a great quantity of them stacked for drying. But now they were said to be dying off rapidly owing to the increased saltness of the water, and the men caught plenty of moribund or benumbed fish with their hands from under the thin crust of ice just forming. It meant a pleasant change in the labourers' diet, though the smell was distinctly high.

Large stretches of salt-covered boggy soil surrounding this lagoon and others of smaller size which we passed farther on, attested the rapid shrinkage of these sorry remnants of the 'New Lake.' Most of them had completely dried up, like the large bare basin known to the hunters as Kurban-kullu-köl, near which the ample growth of young reeds and tamarisk induced us to camp for the night. In the course of the day's tramp I had gathered interesting information from Mullah and Tokhta Akhun about the notable change which has taken place in the physical aspects of this dismal ground since Hedin saw it. For three years after his first visit in 1900 the basins of the Yangi-köl area were filled with fresh water from the Yangi-su branch of the river. Since then no water had reached them, and the lagoons had steadily shrunk, while what water was left turned more and more salt.

They knew the Yangi-köl depression since their youth from hunting expeditions after deer and the like, and could recall having seen its western edge where it was marked by rows of dead Toghraks. Their fathers had told them that the basins had also formerly held water for certain periods. So the presence of thin Kumush, dead or living, over extensive patches of ground seemed easy to account for