

foot-pads, what with the trials of salt 'Shor' and sharp-edged clay-banks, had got badly cracked. I heard the poor beasts still groaning when I went to rest about midnight.

Two hours later I was awakened by violent gusts of wind shaking my tent and driving in sand. To secure the tent-pegs by slabs of hard clay piled up over them was unpleasant work in that icy blast from the north-east. Though the fall in the minimum temperature, which had ranged about 12 degrees Fahrenheit since leaving Abdal, was but slight, the cold seemed suddenly to have doubled. I did not know then how much of our stay in this region was destined to be spent in the clutches of this freezing and unrelenting north-east wind! I was up by 5 A.M.; but the men crouching round the fires were, with the exception of my two hardy hunters, so benumbed that I did not manage to get the transport started until towards nine.

Cutting as the wind continued, its velocity was not great enough to lift high the sand which from here onwards seemed to become of somewhat coarser and heavier grain. So on fixing the plane-table above our camp in the morning, I was able to sight a low reddish-brown ridge far away to the north, the first sign of the desolate barren hills of the Kuruk-tagh at the foot of which our goal lay. To the south the high snow-topped range of the Altin-tagh could still be made out quite clearly under heavy cloud banks. So for a while I could cheer myself with the thought that my eyes were resting alternately on those two great chains of innermost Asia, the T'ien-shan and the Kun-lun. Somehow it seemed to relieve that sense of overpowering vastness which the desolation of this lifeless Lop desert produced. I now decided to shape our course due north, so as to strike the area of ruins discovered by Hedin somewhere near its centre, and thereby reduce the chance of missing its landmarks altogether owing to some difference in the reckoning of our position. Another reason was that I should thus, as I had tried to do ever since leaving the last fishermen's camping-place, be able to keep about midway between the two routes Hedin had