

and set out for what proved an encouraging day's march. It is true there were four Dawans of big size to be crossed; but the areas of relatively open ground between them, with low dunes and occasional erosion terraces cropping out, seemed to get gradually broader. What dead wood we had come across for the last two and a half days had invariably lain in small fragments on eroded hard soil without any indication of its original place of growth. So it was cheering when, after ten miles, a few low cones with dead tamarisk *in situ* were sighted. Their wood looked extremely decayed and of great age. Close by we found pottery fragments of very coarse make, probably neolithic, as we had noticed before at intervals.

I tried to keep up the men's spirits by offers of rewards for the first tree sighted or sign of animal life; and soon shouts announced the discovery of dead Toghraks. Some shrivelled trunks still stood upright amidst the low dunes. About the same time with great satisfaction I myself noticed ahead a 'sign of land,' *i.e.* of living vegetation and water, in the shape of fine hairy seed-pods of reeds floating in the air. The Lopliks knew them as 'Pakawash.' After surmounting a broad Dawan we pitched camp that evening at its west foot, in a depression over a mile broad. There were plentiful dead trees, all Toghraks, and many of them of large size, stretching in lines from north to south. It was clear that we were now nearing ground where lagoons and beds fed by the Tarim might have existed within historical times. But the look of the dead tree trunks seemed decidedly more ancient than, *e.g.*, near the Niya site. There was good cheer for us all in the huge flaring bonfires we were able to kindle that night, and I felt as if I were beginning to have a little holiday after all the fatigues and cares of the last month. But the men felt the pinch of supplies running out, and some of the camels had begun to show increased signs of exhaustion. When should we strike the line of lagoons fringing the east bank of the Tarim?

Our march of January 3rd brought no striking change in the aspects of the desert, such as the men hoped for; and they were becoming impatient for a sight of the