

ponies could not do without fodder, and how to carry enough of this for a month with the rest of the men's food was the crux. To procure camels for the purpose proved impossible. The few Charklik camels which I had secured for the march across the Lop-nor Desert were still too weak from the fatigues undergone to be taken along without imminent risk of a break-down, which would have seriously hampered us when once started on the long desert journey.

So I fell back upon those patient donkeys which had proved in December so useful a supplement to the ice-carrying column. There were plenty of them at Charklik, and through the effective magisterial pressure exercised on my behalf by excellent Liao Ta-lao-ye there was no difficulty in raising the twenty odd animals which we needed. But, naturally, the hardy little beasts would have to be fed themselves, however modest their demands, and equally also the men to take charge of them. Their united rations for a month would make up loads for almost as many donkeys again, and so on and so on. Thus when I first started, while still at Miran, calculating my transport requirements, these donkey estimates seemed to swell out alarmingly.

Of course, I recognized very soon that the only method would be to make detachments of the donkey train return to Abdal by relays when their loads were consumed. But even thus the safe calculation of the numbers needed on this plan and their fodder supplies was a troublesome mathematical operation. Worst of all, I had good reason to fear that the shrewd householders of Charklik would try hard to let me have on hire as many unsound animals as possible, in the hope that they would break down on the journey, and either be promptly sent back or else earn substantial compensation for their owners by dying on the route. In order to protect myself against such schemes and their hampering consequences, I had arranged early to have a large number of donkeys, considerably in excess of our real needs, sent down to Abdal for selection. It was no easy task to pick out a fairly reliable lot of animals, and almost as troublesome to assure that they were properly looked after before our start, and fraudulent substitutions prevented.