

and beyond it the gleaming white of the salt-encrusted lake bed, a vision of nature in death. At last we arrived at the halting-place of Chindailik, where in the midst of boggy ground we found a fairly large ice sheet formed over a salt spring. The distance had been close on twenty-four miles, and the last of the hard-tried donkeys did not come in until midnight. We did all that was possible to get ice melted in sufficient quantity for all the ponies and donkeys to get the sorely needed drink. But the process was necessarily slow, and some of the donkeys were so utterly exhausted that I was not surprised when next morning three were reported to have died.

Our march on February 24th proved longer and even more trying for the animals. We had followed the foot of the old lake shore, showing steep cliffs of clay forty to fifty feet high, for barely two miles when its line turned off to the south-east, manifestly to bend round a big bay. To avoid this great *détour* the track we were following now entered the absolutely flat, salt-encrusted waste which extends over what in an earlier phase of the present geological period was a bay of the lake and probably down to historical times remained an impassable salt marsh. In fact, were it not for the narrow track which the traffic since the reopening of the route has worn into the hard salt-cake surface, caravans would probably find it easier to skirt round the bay and thus save fatigue and sore feet to their camels. I was therefore by no means surprised to learn subsequently that Mr. Huntington, who passed along the first five stages of the route a little over a year before me, had with his usual keen observation noted traces of such an earlier track following the lake shore. There were, of course, no means of judging when its use had been discontinued, whether recently or long ago.

For fully sixteen miles we moved in a straight line across this great bight of what was the true dead sea of the Tarim, the crumpled salt surface recalling that of a river over which the ice-pack had set and got compressed in the freezing. The going was so rough that I greeted with relief the first sight of 'land' when it showed at last in the shape of large isolated clay terraces fringing