

be mere chance that the Wei-liao's notice of 'the route of the centre,' already referred to, places the Lung-tui, or 'Mounds in the shape of Dragons,' immediately before the station of old 'Lou-lan' for a traveller coming from Tun-huang. Once more a look at the map proves that the most direct route to the ruined site north of Lop-nor which represents that station, must have branched off from the Tun-huang-Abdal route somewhere near the march I have just been describing.

This march ended at Kum-kuduk, the 'Sandy Well,' where we found slightly brackish water in a well only four feet deep. The name was appropriate; for some miles before we arrived there, light drift sand covered the ground amidst thinly scattered tamarisk cones. Our journey next day, March 2nd, showed that we had now finally left behind the ancient salt-covered lake bed we had skirted so long. It was a broad but well-marked valley in which we were moving north-eastward, with the sombre, serrated hill range of the Kuruk-tagh in full view on our left, and the low dune-covered desert ridge on the right keeping within three or four miles of the route. The bottom of the depression between them, some twelve to fifteen miles across, seemed one flat, sandy steppe covered with reed-beds and less plentiful tamarisks, the whole looking quite cheerful by contrast with the dead marshes behind us.

Here and there ridges of clay and isolated terraces jutted out from the ridge on the south to the route and beyond it. All day scarcely any trace of salt efflorescence was noticed, a great comfort for the sore feet of our camels, several of which had been in need of re-soling. After seventeen miles we halted behind a boldly projecting clay promontory where scrub was abundant, and unexpectedly succeeded in getting at plentiful water after digging down only some three feet. It tasted far less brackish than that of the preceding wells; and what with this discovery and camp pitched for the first time before night-fall since the start from Abdal, men and beasts were content. Luckily the bitter north-east wind, which had been blowing into our faces for days past, stopped that afternoon, and without it a minimum temperature of 20 degrees