

They were the first human beings we had seen for nearly three weeks past. Quaint specimens of humanity as they were, their appearance cheered up the spirits of my men greatly. I had never before had occasion to try my modicum of Chinese on people so humble in education and general intelligence, and that now, after repeated attempts, I succeeded in eliciting answers to some of my simple queries was felt by me no small encouragement. From them I learned that the place where we had met them was known as Shu-yu-t'ou, and that the cart tracks were those of people fetching timber and fuel to Tun-huang.

The route still continuing eastwards then crossed a succession of long-stretched gravel-strewn ridges, which from the glaxis-like Sai on our right jutted out to the north like the fingers of a hand. The reed-filled depressions between them connected with a broad salt-covered basin north, manifestly containing a river course or lake bed, but too far off for close survey. After about six miles from Shu-yu-t'ou the narrow continuous ridges gave way to a wide bay bare of vegetation, and covered with rows of those characteristic clay terraces already familiar from the vicinity of lake basins dried up or undergoing desiccation. All the terraces had their long side stretching from north to south. There could be no possible doubt that they represented the remnants of earlier continuous ridges, such as we had just marched across, which the erosive force of the violent east winds and of the sand driven before them had slowly sawn through and broken up.

It was a very instructive illustration of a geological change still actually proceeding. The ridges themselves had evidently originated from the depressions between them having been scooped out by the drainage which during periods of much heavier precipitation came down from the foot of the mountains south, and cut up the clay sediments of a far more ancient lake bed. After another three miles of such ground we emerged on a level flat extending unbroken for three or four miles northward to the shore of a large sheet of dark blue water. At last we had come in sight of the Khara-nor lake, for which the map of Roborowsky and Kozloff had prepared us. But its