

On the morning of March 27th I let the camp remain where it was, and set out with my assistants and half-a-dozen labourers to the east-south-east. I there hoped to strike approximately in the middle the line of towers I had sighted. Three miles across the scrub-covered plain brought us to another conspicuous clay ridge with a troglodyte dwelling occupied by a half-crazy wood-cutter. That he, being an orthodox Chinaman, expressed stereotyped ignorance about ruined towers and everything else was not a matter of consequence. Pushing onwards we passed through a belt of exceptionally thick scrub and low tamarisk cones, in which an inundation from the Su-lo Ho was steadily spreading. Nothing could induce our civilized slum-dwelling coolies to wade through the narrow channels. As they had each time to be mounted on ponies, one by one, progress was far too slow for my eagerness.

At last we emerged on a bare pebble Sai with much dead wood on the ground and isolated stunted Tograks still living. The whole dreary ground bore the stamp of desiccation. But this was not the time for such observations. Right in front of me I saw rising the cone of an old watch-tower just of the shape and construction I had first seen in the desert westwards, and towards it I galloped as quick as 'Badakhshi,' my hardy pony, would bear me. Before reaching it I noticed a low mound composed of the familiar fascines and clay layers, stretching away across the bare gravel to the nearest tower on the east, and continuing also with a divergent angle south-westwards. There could be no longer any doubt: I was back again on 'my' wall!

The watch-tower, built entirely of regular courses of hard clay about four inches thick, with thin layers of tamarisk branches laid between them, still rose to over twenty-two feet. In order to give additional cohesion to the solid base measuring about twenty feet square, numerous wooden posts had been set in it vertically, and their ends were sticking out on the top. The wall once guarded by the tower had passed to the north of it, with a bastion-like projection at about six yards' distance.