

assistance. So Chiang-huan, the *soi-disant* guide, was given a big gourd full of water and his pony a good drink, and then sent back to track and bring in the missing men if possible. No blame could attach to Chiang and Naik Ram Singh; for they were certain that no one had been left behind on our route. Nor was my own conscience burdened, seeing that a responsible rear-guard had been appointed, and had done its work as well as a tramp in the darkness through desert and jungle permitted.

Our march on April 13th was short, but not without further excitement. Judging by the survey carried along from Lop-nor (see inset *A* of Map 1.), we were only about seven miles in a straight line from the route then followed. For about four miles we made our way through the belt of thick tamarisk jungle, soon mingling with reed-beds, and found tracks of wild camels and deer in plenty. Curiously enough we also came upon traces of old wheel-marks in places where there were bare clay surfaces showing cracks as if baked by the sun after some great soaking. Then, crossing a narrow belt of gravel absolutely bare, we found ourselves in a depression filled with a salty marsh stretching away to the south-east. We had sighted before only a single tower, and this did not suffice to fix our position with certainty. Down below by the marsh edge we could not make out any definite landmark, and the marsh itself had for some reason connected with the configuration of the ground remained wholly unobserved when we first moved along the route to Tun-huang.

In spite of the apparently hard salt crust covering great parts of it, the marsh proved quite impracticable for the animals, and threatened to cut us off for many a hot mile from the fresh water we eagerly wished to reach. But at last we found a place where the boggy soil would bear laden animals, and pushing up the gravel slope I arrived at what could now be easily recognized as the tower I had numbered T. XII. (Fig. 169). The Chinese of our party rejoiced greatly when they found themselves on the well-worn cart-road, safely escaped as it were from the dreaded 'Gobi.' They looked still more pleased when, marching five miles west, we halted by the small reed-fringed lake,