

separated by many winding depressions. A large-scale map would be needed to show properly this intricate configuration of the ground, which resembled a strongly developed coast line with flat tongues of land left between a complex system of bays and inlets. The larger depressions were partly filled by spring-fed marshes, in places over a mile broad. Dense reed-beds fringed the sheets of open water, and salt-covered bogs extended farther away in the line of the drainage north-westwards. Elsewhere all trace of water had disappeared from the surface; but tamarisk bushes and other hardy scrub mingling with thin reed growth, as well as the salt-efflorescence, showed that sub-soil water was near in these Nullahs. The marshes and salt-encrusted bogs were quite impassable for our ponies, and often détours of miles round their edges or over strips of less treacherous ground were needed to take us from one tower or mound to another.

Then, when these swamps had been successfully taken, like ditches in an obstacle race, came the still more exciting search for the remains of the old wall. This, I soon learned, had been carried unfailingly over every bit of firm ground capable of offering a passage for the enemy's inroads and right down to the edge of the marshy inlets (Fig. 176). In fact, I convinced myself from ample evidence that this alignment of the wall had been purposely chosen by the old Chinese engineers in order to supplement their line by natural defences, and thus to save labour of construction.

Where the soil was soft and scrub-covered, as near the marshes, the eye often failed at first to discover any trace of the *agger*; for the remains of the rampart constructed with alternating layers of earth and reed fascines had here decayed badly owing to the moisture rising from the ground. The remains were obscured besides by the coarse vegetation which finds nourishment in this salt-permeated soil. But when we had gained once more the bare gravel plateau, a search along its edges would soon reveal the familiar track of the wall.

Over considerable stretches the wall still rose to a conspicuous height, attracting the eye from afar (Fig. 175). Either some peculiarity in the constructive use of the