

short march of only a little over ten miles we were obliged to pitch camp in the midst of towering dunes. Luckily here, too, depressions showing damp soil were frequent, and the well we dug in one of them yielded water at five and a half feet, somewhat less brackish than at the previous camp, but too scanty to save much of our ice.

Next day, February 2nd, we had a desolate march under a grey sky heavy with clouds, amidst high bare dunes rolling on all sides like the waves of a 'choppy' sea. The first five miles lay over a regular Dawan of closely packed ridges rising to fifty and eighty feet above the rare depressions. It was well that I could encourage my men by pointing to signs of moisture in the latter. With some relief, too, we sighted towards the evening two big Dawans to the south-west and south-east, perhaps marking the last offshoots of the high ridges of sand which flanked the course of the Keriya River. The dunes grew perfectly bare after about ten miles, and the apprehension about fuel obliged us to stop at the first dead tamarisk cone we encountered. In a crater-like depression a well was dug which at a depth of only five feet gave us water sufficient for the men and ponies with only a slight taste of saltiness.

Next morning, after three miles' weary tramp along the crests of huge dunes (Fig. 281), we emerged upon a broad belt of living poplars and tamarisks. It was a strange sight, this strip of vegetation stretching away to the north-north-east for at least six miles, and for two more to south-south-west. It took us nearly a mile to cross it. The trees were all growing on small sand-cones, as I had seen them often in the desert beyond the Niya and Endere Rivers. The dunes between were like dwarfs by the side of the mighty swellings of bare drift sand we had just crossed. The direction of this jungle belt was clearly the same as that of the lowest Keriya River.

After we had crossed it, a thin line of living trees still remained in view both on our right and left, though at a distance. They helped to keep up the spirits of our hapless Shahyar men, who no longer believed that they were being led to their doom, but fondly fancied the Keriya River to be quite near. It cost me some effort to undeceive them.