

CHAPTER LXXXVI

IN A DEAD DELTA

OUR journey was resumed in good spirits on the morning of February 7th. If we were right in the position assigned to our camping-ground we ought to reach the grazing-ground of Koshlash, where Hedin found the river ending, in three days. Shaping our course upon this assumption we steered west-by-south, and after passing for some five miles through regular thickets of dead trees between high bare ridges, emerged on more open ground, where dunes were quite low and live tamarisks plentiful.

Here we picked up a dry river bed, well defined in some places, but elsewhere again completely smothered by drift sand (Fig. 282). After a few miles it became continuous, its width varying from sixty to a hundred yards, and its depth from twenty to thirty feet. For a distance of eleven miles we steadily followed this winding river course, and then tried to cut off a great bend by going due south. The result was that, after some three miles' progress through dead forest, we found ourselves between two huge accumulated ridges of drift sand, with no trace of the river bed that was to guide us, and not a single living tree in sight.

We were, by the showing of our plane-table, still a long way north of latitude 39° , where the waters of the river lose themselves in the sand, and our chance of getting water by wells depended entirely on following some dry bed receiving the drainage from the terminal river course. The safest plan was to regain the old river bed we had left, before it was too late. So with beasts and men much fatigued—even the hard-marching Lal Singh had dropped