

Polur people, who previously, when I noticed abandoned gold-pits in the upper Polur gorge, had stoutly denied all knowledge of any actual gold-digging in this region. But it was too late then, especially as Pasa was not particularly clever at lying, and evidently too hard-up not to be tempted by the promised rewards. So after much trouble we prevailed upon him to act as guide and to show us a track to the uppermost Yurung-kash gorge from the north-west. Discharging most of the Polur men and donkeys, I arranged to leave behind a depot of all supplies for men and beasts not immediately needed, as well as the majority of our hired donkeys. Ibrahim Beg, with the less active of the transport men, was to move his depot to the Ulugh-köl lake, one march to the south-west, on the route to Ladak, where some grazing was to be found, and to await our return there.

Then on August 18th we set out west with much-reduced baggage under Pasa's guidance, and after ascending the wide barren basin to the north-west, and crossing a relatively easy pass at some 16,200 feet above sea, reached by the evening of the following day the deep-cut valley of Zailik (Fig. 325). All knowledge of it had previously been denied by the secretive hill-men of Polur. There we found extensive gold-pits dug into the precipitous cliffs of conglomerate just above the gneiss of the stream-bed and evidently worked for long ages. Our irruption into this terribly tortuous and gloomy gorge of Zailik was quite a romantic event for the four dozen or so of gold-seekers who try to exploit what is left of auriferous layers. To us, too, it seemed a wonderful place—this long, rock-bound valley, where from an elevation of about 14,500 feet downwards all the steeply cut faces of conglomerate deposits are honey-combed with galleries and pits often in almost inaccessible places (Fig. 318).

It was difficult to guess how far back in the ages poor wretches had toiled here under all the hardships of a semi-arctic climate and practical slavery. Graves spread over every little bit of level ground which the gorge affords in its twelve to thirteen miles' course down to the junction with the Yurung-kash Valley, and on all sides the roughly