

As we skirted these swamps on their north side we again struck the winding bed of the stream by which we had camped, but found that its water, now extremely sluggish in flow, had turned too salt for drinking. Our onward route lay along the foot of bare spurs covered with reddish detritus. Up to a level of eighty to one hundred feet above the present marsh bed they all showed well-marked old shore lines; in places eight or ten of them could be clearly distinguished. When the water of the lake had stood so much higher, it probably communicated with a big extension of the basin which was visible westwards beyond a line of broken ridges fringing the extant salt marsh. The march along the detritus terraces was most depressing. Not a sign of life showed, and my thoughts turned back to the description of a big subterranean lake which had much impressed me in one of Jules Verne's stories read when I was a child. The valley which the day before I had sighted in the north-west corner of the basin, and which I fondly hoped would give us access to the Kara-kash drainage, seemed ever to retire farther.

At last after rounding a beautifully regular alluvial fan, some ten miles from camp, below an amphitheatre of small barren Nullahs, there suddenly opened a big valley due north. From its debouchure, fully one and a half miles wide, some snowy peaks showed, perhaps of a spur near the main range. The sight encouraged me to hope that at last we might be nearing the valley from which Johnson's sketch showed the "Kitai diwan Pass" leading north-west across to a feeder of the Kara-kash. But certain features, due as it proved afterwards to erroneous sketching, still effectively interfered with any clear identification. Confirmation appeared unexpectedly in the shape of two small stone-heaps I noticed close to the debouchure, half-buried under coarse sand and gravel. These were manifestly meant to mark a route coming from the south, and the first trace left by human hands we had seen since the Baba Hatim Pass.

Half a mile farther up my eye caught straight lines of stones laid on a level expanse of sand at the foot of some