

spite of their felts, and two more donkeys had to be shot in the morning. Then we moved on into the side valley to the north-west, and near a cairn at its mouth found a store of Burtze roots white with age but still serviceable.

The pass in front proved nearer and lower than Johnson's sketch map had led me to expect. A well-marked track led up to it, and the animals crossed without much additional exertion. The elevation was just about 16,500 feet. At the top was a large and well-built cairn in perfect preservation, and the sight cheered my Khotan men greatly; they now felt convinced that we were on a 'Padshah's high road,' and had only to stick to it to get back to human beings. It was a characteristic proof of the dryness of the climate even on this high elevation that the cairns, the stacks of Burtze roots stored for fuel, and other small relics, such as a horseshoe, left behind here by those who followed this route during the few years it was last in use about 1864-66, had survived almost intact.

The descent was delightfully easy over broad detritus slopes, where the old track, not trodden by man for over forty years, was perfectly well defined. Officious—or could it be timorous?—hands had taken the trouble to mark it with small stone-heaps at intervals of only a few hundred yards. After six miles or so from the pass we halted near rows of big slate blocks laid out as if to mark Tibetan 'Obos.' Some small birds which had taken shelter among them lay dead. Had the frost stopped them in their flight to the warm South?

Some three miles lower down, our valley joined a still wider one, showing a good deal of coarse grass and gently trending south. It probably drained into the unsurveyed basin seen westwards on the preceding day's march. But what interested us far more was to find that the gap which we had noticed from above by the side of a high range facing us, and by which we hoped to effect our passage to the Kara-kash drainage, was not a pass but a wide and almost flat saddle, about 16,000 feet above the sea. As we marched over it to the north, passing a scarcely perceptible watershed, there appeared before us two parallel valleys separated by a rocky ridge and descending