

Steering as steadily as I could to the south-west I was glad to avail myself of such saddles as offered in the successive lines of Dawans. Even thus the track to be practicable for the camels had each time to wind up and down again for half a mile along the crests of the main dunes piled up on the Dawan, and across the isthmus-like ridges connecting them (Fig. 129). Tiring as it was to have almost constantly to negotiate these sand escarpments, big and small, running diagonally across our route, the regularity of their bearing seemed a propitious sign; for from my experiences gained by the rivers which lost themselves in the Taklamakan, I concluded that we were now passing into the region of the high riverine sands, which would keep as usual parallel to the Tarim. And the latter's course here lay from north to south.

Wherever the ground between the Dawans was flat, soft shells of fresh-water snails abounded; and at one point, about twelve miles from Camp CXXVIII., we crossed what looked like the bed of an ancient lagoon about a mile broad with a clearly marked shore-line westwards. We came upon neolithic remains in half-a-dozen places; but the rarity of dead wood continued so extreme as to cause us a good deal of anxiety. The few fragments we discovered here and there were so completely shrivelled up and decayed that it was quite impossible to determine from what trees they had come or where these might have grown. It was a great relief when, after more than half of the day's weary tramp was done without yielding fuel, we came upon a few armfuls of much-perished tamarisk roots on a patch of hard gypsum. This just sufficed to save us from a camp without warm drink or food. It was not a cheerful spot where darkness obliged us to halt at the foot of a big Dawan, and the night, with a perfectly clear star-lit sky, proved the coldest of the winter. The minimum temperature dropped to 48 degrees Fahrenheit below freezing-point; yet we had to do without a fire to warm us after ice had been melted for tea and for the simplest cooking.

Next morning we sacrificed a couple of packing 'Shotas' from the camels' gear to get tea and a little warmth,