

A JOURNEY TO NORTHERN TIBET AND AKSAI CHIN.*

By Captain H. H. P. DEASY.

STARTING from Khotan on May 18, 1898, I took the direct route to Polu *viá* Utroki, Hasha, and Nura, in the hopes of getting fine weather, and being able to get a good value for my longitude by triangulating from two peaks, fixed by the Survey of India, in the Tekelik Tagh. For this purpose I halted for nine days close to the peaks I wanted to observe, but unfortunately the hazy season had commenced, and I was unable to see either peak.

The Bey of Polu having informed me that the direct route to the Aksai Chin *viá* the At To (horse's back) pass, called Ghubulik At pass on the R.G.S. map of Tibet, is closed to all, natives of Chinese Turkestan included, since the murder of Dutreuil de Rhins many hundreds of miles away, I wrote to the Amban of Keria for permission to use that route, as my passport covers the Aksai Chin, and, pending a reply, camped on the high plateau close to, and about 2000 feet above, Polu, in hopes of getting a fine view of the Kuen Lun range. There I was again unfortunate, and during the fortnight that I was obliged to spend at Polu and its vicinity, only on one day, and then merely for a few hours, were the fine snow-peaks of the Kuen Lun range clearly visible. The Amban of Keria, who several times informed me that the Aksai Chin is part of the province of Sin-chiang and under his jurisdiction, refused to allow me to use the Polu route, and would not permit me to obtain sufficient supplies at Polu. Being short of transport, owing to the sheep not having arrived from Tadakh, I was forced to go to Keria to obtain more transport, and again asked for permission to travel *viá* Polu to the Aksai Chin, but was again refused. As my passport, which was shown to the Amban of Keria, includes the whole of Chinese Turkestan, I fail to see any reason for that official ignoring it and refusing to allow me to use the direct route to that part of his district, causing me considerable delay and inconvenience, not to say extra expense, by forcing me to take the lengthy route *viá* Sorgak, Kara Sai, and Tibet.

From Kara Sai the ascent to the Tibetan plateau is very easy, being for most of the way up the gently sloping valley of the Tolan Khoja river. To about halfway up this valley there is plenty of excellent grass, but for the latter part it was necessary to supplement the scanty supply of burtza with bhusa. The pass at the head of this valley is a very easy one, and from a little way south-west of it, the Shor Kul depression and adjacent mountains are plainly visible; but, alas! the country thereabouts is barren and waterless, with the exception of close to Shor Kul, where there is a fair amount of coarse grass called lungma

* Dated "Yarkand, October 31, 1898."

by Ladakis and Tibetans, and but very scanty supply of fresh water, Shor Kul being a salt lake.

The general run of the Kuen Lun range for some distance west of Polu is along lat. 36° N., but a little way east of that village it is several miles north of that parallel, continuing slightly north of east to the Tolan Khoja river. East of this river there are no snow-peaks, at least for some distance east of Kara Sai, the range rapidly becoming lower; and only very low grass-covered hills have to be crossed between that place and the long valley of the Tolan Khoja river. Part of this valley as far as Yaluk is called Tolan Khoja, and above this place Sarok Tuz (yellow salt). Having been told by the men of a temporary post that the Amban of Keria had established at Yaluk, in the Tolan Khoja valley,—nominally for the purpose of rendering me assistance and providing supplies, but really merely for show,—that there is a southerly route from there to Ladak, I went some distance up the most likely looking valley in search of it; but I was forced to return, as the valley became too narrow and rocky for laden animals, while not a blade of grass was to be found in it, and the very high barren mountains, with almost vertical sides, limited the view to a few hundred yards towards the mouth, and considerably less higher up. Repeated attempts were made to find a route other than that by Shor Kul, but the utterly barren nature of the country certainly as far south as lat. $35^{\circ} 30'$ N., and the great probability that it is waterless too, constituted a strong natural barrier which I did not consider it advisable to try and pass. There were many natives with me only too eager to earn the rewards I offered if another route was found, but all declared the country to be barren and waterless, and from what I saw of it I can corroborate their statements.

For some weeks after leaving Kara Sai the weather was exceedingly bad, snow falling continually in July, and I was unable to take observations for some time, or to see any distant peaks. Besides this cause of delay, illness was another, dysentery, chest, and liver diseases being the principal ones I was called upon to treat. While I went west from Yepal Ungur, on the Keria river, three exploring parties were sent out to try and find routes in any direction between east and south. But though the men were warned not to, on any account, go north of the rising sun, two of them went much too far to the north of east, while the third party, Kara Sai men, speedily returned, their excuse being that they did not think any one else had been before them, an excuse which they did not appear to be in the least ashamed of giving.

Thinking that from the peaks near Aksu, on the west branch of the Keria river, some of those in the Kuen Lun range or in the west of the Aksai Chin, which had been fixed by the Survey of India, would be visible, I began triangulation there, and thence worked backwards to south of the Shor Kul, only to find but the scantiest supply of burtza.

Compelled to retreat from this part, I tried a route which one of my men assured me was feasible, and led to a lake he remembered having gone to with Pike and me in 1896. This, however, proved to be worse than the first, as after a few miles east of my most easterly camp, approximate long. $82^{\circ} 35'$ E., not even burtza grew, while for fully two marches south there was not a vestige of any kind of vegetation to be seen; so I returned once more to Yepal Ungur, on the Keria river.

This river has four principal tributaries—the two westerly ones, that by Aksu, and another east of that place being larger than the easterly ones, except that nearest to Yepal Ungur, which for a short time in the summer is fed by the melting snow on the very high range on the right bank of the Keria river. This extensive range of snow-capped mountains, in which there are some magnificent peaks rising to fully 23,000 feet, extends from about long. $82^{\circ} 30'$ E. to $81^{\circ} 30'$ E., and there becomes lower and lower, gradually dying away west of Yeshil Kul. The range on the opposite side of the valley of the Keria river does not boast of more than a couple of snow-peaks until Iksu is reached, west of which every peak is covered with snow, and all the valleys filled with glaciers.

Not far distant from the pass north of Togral Onpo is a singularly extensive and rounded snow-capped mountain, to which Pike and I gave the name "Mount Cumulus," owing to having mistaken it in 1896 for a cloud of that name, when first seen from near Horpa or Gurmen Cho. At this point the range changes direction, its general direction being now almost due west as far as 81° , where there is a very fine double peak, the most westerly point being 23,490 feet high.

After leaving the valley of the Keria river, I went *via* the north side of Yeshil Kul to camp 15 of 1896, for the purpose of extending the triangulation done in 1896 eastwards and northwards. This place not admitting of sufficiently long bases in the required direction, I moved camp a short distance in an easterly direction, and measured bases of over 7 miles in length. Favoured by fine but very windy weather at this camp, I obtained most extensive views in all directions, including the high snow-range south of Horpa Cho, that on the right bank of the Keria river, and that in the middle of the Aksai Chin. By about 11 a.m. each day at this camp, the prevailing westerly wind became so strong that it was necessary to securely tie the legs of the theodolite to heavy stones to prevent it being blown over, which made the task of observing and recording by no means a pleasant one. Having accomplished my task, I returned to Baba Hatun, and connected the triangulation done previously at Aksu and elsewhere with that of 1896.

Within a few hundred yards of my camp at Aksu, the Amban of Keria established a temporary post, apparently for the purpose of making it plain to me that the Aksai Chin, at least the part I was in, was under his jurisdiction. The season was now well advanced, the minimum thermometer having fallen to -9° Fahr. during the night of

September 20; the solar radiation thermometer, black bulb, registered 106° the following day at the same place, and as the supply of grain was now very low, I turned west to Ulugh Kul. After crossing a low and very easy pass a few miles south of this salt lake, I came to the upper waters and sources of the Khotan Daria, the latter being in lat. 35° 35' N. and approximate long. 81° 40' E.

The first intimation I had of the proximity to Ulugh Kul of the sources of this river was from two shikaris who had just returned from the Khotan river, where they go annually in search of yak. This was corroborated by two other shikaris whom my caravan bashi met close to it. The latter party stated that they are well acquainted with the upper waters of this river, and informed the bashi that, owing to the narrow and deep nature of the valley about half a march west of where I camped, it is not possible to take a caravan down it, to where there are two or three places frequented every summer by those who earn a poor existence by digging for gold.

My supplies not admitting of my testing the statement as to the impracticability of the Khotan Daria valley, I returned to Ulugh Kul, and thence along the south of the lake, and two other small lakes, to At To (horse's back) pass, at the top of the Polu gorge. Being anxious to endeavour to carry on triangulation to Polu, I halted close to the summit of this pass for a day in quite the most dreary place that fate has compelled me to camp in. Not a vestige of vegetation is to be found within several miles of this inhospitable spot, and not even enough dung to boil a cupful of water; but fortunately the water-supply was just sufficient. A few donkey-loads of bhusa and a little corn brought from Polu enabled me to keep the few animals requisite for carrying the tents, instruments, etc., till the work was finished.

I fear that the time spent close to the At To pass was time wasted, as, owing to the very steep and narrow nature of the valley north of this pass, and its precipitous sides, there is but a very poor chance of seeing from the plateau above Polu, any of the peaks observed from near the At To pass. Unfortunately, the weather changed the day after Polu was reached, and it was not possible, except for a few hours, to see the fine peaks, now quite white, of the Kuen Lun range. The most striking meteorological circumstances were the absence of any very strong or prevailing wind north of the very high range on the right bank of the Keria river, and the registering of 20° of frost on the night of July 25. The great scarcity of game and the ample evidence forthcoming as to the roving habits of the yak were very noticeable, but I must confess to a considerable amount of surprise at seeing a yak approach my camp near the At To pass, miles away from all vegetation.

A noteworthy feature was the discovery of a large and deep—at least 12 feet—bed of dried weeds, similar to those found round some of the lakes visited by Pike and myself in 1896, at an approximate

altitude of about 17,500 feet, far away from any lake or trace of one, and on the low hills of the left bank of the Keria river.

The topographical work was done by a sub-surveyor of the Survey of India, under my supervision.

SVEN HEDIN AND DUTREUIL DE RHINS IN CENTRAL ASIA.*

By Colonel Sir T. H. HOLDICH, K.C.I.E., C.B., R.E.

AMONG late works of travel, Dr. Sven Hedin's book stands pre-eminent as an exposition of scientific geography. Never was a book of this sort so welcome as at present. We have had more than enough lately of geography which is not scientific, and of popular works of travel which have added no really valuable addition to our map information; neither have they assisted to unravel any of the ethnographical riddles with which Asia and Africa abound. The unexplored spaces in High Asia are narrowing year by year, and with so much good geographical material as exists already, we want more exact information and more accurate observation to improve the old work, and fill in the new. In traversing Central Asia Sven Hedin departed from the usual Asiatic programme of exploration, and did not make Lhasa an objective. That city, which is still enveloped in a halo of most undeserved romance, has been visited often enough by Europeans to destroy the illusions which are usually draped around it, and, although there is certainly much yet to be learned about its quaint political institutions and weird customs, our knowledge can hardly be improved by any process short of actual residence within its walls; and of this there seems little chance at present. Lhasa was visited early in the last century by Desideri, who lived in the city for thirteen years; and by Della Peuna, who was for some time there with Desideri. Then followed the Dutchman Van der Putte, who was so afraid of the reception that his Lhasa records might receive in Europe, that he destroyed them. In 1811, Mannering was sent on a political and commercial mission from India; and in 1845 the two devoted Jesuit missionaries, Huc and Gabet, were well received there. For more than fifty years no European has seen the inside of that city, although the native employés of the Indian Survey, the Pundit Nain Sing, Krishna, and the Lama Unguen (who accompanied Chandra Das) have all contributed to give us a fairly accurate account of it. Such persevering travellers as Bower, Littledale, and Bonvalot have all been refused admission, even to the neighbourhood of the sacred city; and now we have Grenard's story of De Rhins' failure. Sven Hedin wisely avoided Lhasa, and devoted his remarkable energies to investigating the phenomena which surround the natural features

* 'Through Asia,' by Sven Hedin. 2 vols. Methuen.—'Dutreuil de Rhins, Mission Scientifique dans la Haute Asie, 1890-95.' 2 vols. Paris: Leroux.