

TWO NOTES ON SINKIANG

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I. The Tuga pass over the Barköl Range, Eastern Tien Shan

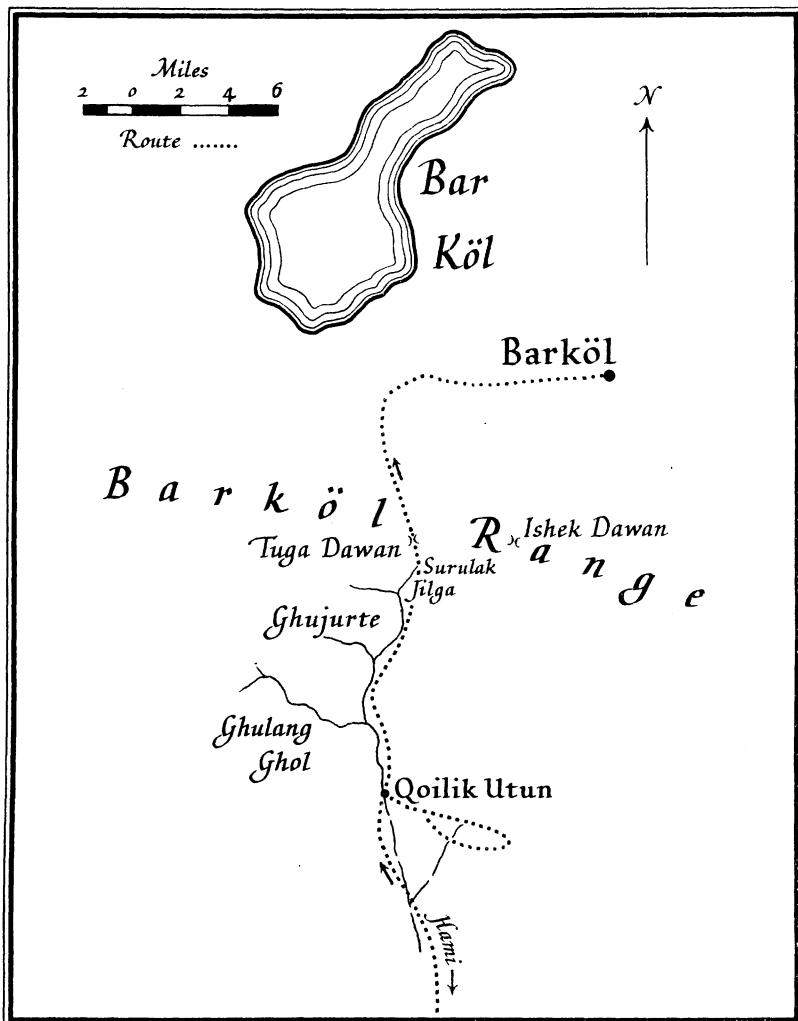
THE Tien Shan, east of Urumchi, the capital of the province of Sinkiang, falls into three well-defined sections, clearly visible and distinct to a spectator viewing the range from a distance. There is in the west, above and north-east of Urumchi, the Bogdo Ola, with its high central peak of Bogdo San and its small lake. At the eastern end of this massif is the remarkable gap or pass between Taoshui (not shown in the Survey of India 1/500,000 map), which is 18 miles south by east of Tashihto, and Chikuching, a small oasis on the southern slopes of the mountains. The Barköl Range rises gradually from this depression, then falls somewhat to a point north-west of Hami or Qomul, where the final section of the Tien Shan culminates in the Qarlik Tagh or Snowy Mountains, that smooth, almost level crest of snow and glacier that lies above the oasis of Qomul, marking the end of this great mountain range in the east. Beyond is the dreary and desolate Gobi.

Standing between the stately massifs of Bogdo Ola and the Qarlik Tagh, the Barköl Range looks somewhat insignificant, although the actual altitudes do not greatly differ. This range, seen from the south, presents a monotonous line of stark and sterile hills, unrelieved by vegetation, and with little promise of what the interior holds. The northern sides, on the other hand, are very different, as they are clothed with thick forests of conifers, and are truly Alpine in character. None of the passes over the Barköl Mountains are possible for carts, which have to go round by Chikuching. There are however several tracks across the mountains used by the local inhabitants, of one of which this account is given; the route illustrates the deceptive nature of all Central Asian scenery, and indicates to some extent the water problems in that area. The important passes in the range are the Tuga, or Camel Pass, and close to it, on the east, the Ishek, or Donkey Pass. The names give some clue to the difficulties of the passes, but the first pass is but seldom available for camels, whereas the second is more often passable by donkeys. From the outside the approach to the mountains is uninviting, with a dismal stretch of rising plain, stony and dry, and the wide, shallow watercourses, scantily fringed with desert vegetation, so well known to and so detested by every traveller in Turkistan.

It was thus that we approached the foothills in March 1928, hoping, early though it was, that we should be able to struggle through the snow. The Qomuliqs were polite but protesting. We were deluged with dissuasion, and we could not make the people understand that a long, roundabout, dull route did not strike us as in any way attractive. But these choruses of disapproval are known only too well to any one who has ever tried to leave the beaten track in the East, and we disregarded them, firmly stating that we meant to go by the Tuga pass.

On reaching the foothills we halted at the prosperous village of Qoilik Utan or Utun, presided over by a Qurban Niaz Beg, one of the twelve *begs* in charge of the mountainous districts of the Khanate of Qomul. Behind this settlement was a long narrow gorge, with a stream of clear water that at once lost itself in

the desert. On a brilliant day in early spring we plunged into this ravine, and as we wound up the densely wooded gorge we realized how deceptive appearances were. Out of sight from the plain were forest-filled glens, with stretches of pasture and budding flowers; yet a glance behind showed us the shaking



Col. Schomberg's route across the Barköl Range

mirage rising from the waterless plain. It is always a source of wonder how such abrupt contrasts can exist so close to each other.

The "Aq Terek," or white poplar, often mistaken for the chenar of Kashmir, was very abundant. The growth of the trees testified to the favourable conditions of the climate, as most of them were 50 to 60 feet high, and a few in favoured places as high as 80 feet. The willow was very plentiful, with other



Foothills of the Barköl range from the south



Approach to the Tuga pass from the south



*From the Tuga pass looking north towards Barköl
(The diagonal line is a photographic defect)*



Looking east from the summit of the Tuga pass



Solfatara on the Zemish Tagh

undergrowth, and the track was often difficult to follow. After 5 miles up the narrow glen the tall precipitous black sides ended, and the main valley turned off west in the well-wooded Ghulang Ghol, with two prominent peaks at the head. The path to the pass now turned north-east, passed a patch of cultivation with a ruined house, and led up the defile of the Tang-i-tar, where there was just room to squeeze through. Then suddenly the trees ended and the track ascended a widening valley into the grazing area of Ghujurte, which even at this early season supported large herds of sheep. We had now reached a fairly Alpine country, and 10 miles from Qoilik Utun brought us to the Surulak Jilga, where the snow was deep, and the ponies ploughed through with difficulty. Although we were still on the south of the range, where the rainfall is less than on the north, the pine forest was thick and extensive and the trees were well grown. The northerly aspect of the wooded slopes favoured the growth. The track was still awkward, as we pushed through the heavy snow on the hillsides with nothing to guide us. At length, 14 miles from our starting place, the top of the Tuga pass was reached. The height was approximately 8500 feet. To the right and east the Ishek pass was visible a few miles away, and appeared to have more snow on it than did the Tuga. It would seem that the Tuga pass is identical with that marked "Koilak Otun" in Mr. Douglas Carruthers' map in Volume II of 'Unknown Mongolia.'

The view from the pass was exquisite on this enchanted day of early spring. Not a cloud flecked the serene sky, not a breath of wind stirred, and the Barköl lake lay at our feet studded with ice-floes and with strange ribbons of blue water crossing it. To the east was the town of Barköl, with the Metshin Ola beyond, and to the north-west was a tumbled mass of low, barren hills, contrasting with the dark larches that streamed down the hillsides from the top of the pass.

Although the town lay near enough to spit on, as the men said, we had to hurry from this lovely view, for the day was short. We scrambled down the face of the hill very steeply, and then plunged into forest with the snow piled in drifts. Our progress was slow, the evening was coming on, and great care was needed to prevent the tired ponies from falling into the bed of the valley below. Suddenly the forest ended and we were in the barren environs of the lake. The town was hours away, and we should have liked to halt, but there was no water and little fuel, though only a mile or so above was the snow and the trees. At last, after a tedious but interesting day, we arrived at the town, having been fifteen hours on the road. The magistrate at Barköl most courteously allowed the gates to be opened for us, for it was pitch dark and long after closing time. We were thus saved a very cold night on the snow outside the city walls among the dead dogs and garbage; and we found a comfortable house belonging to a very disgusted Turki merchant, who resented the arrival of his fellow Moslems, but had to make the best of it.

Barköl is a dreary town, truly described by Mr. Carruthers as a town of stagnation, and a stagnation too that has increased of late years. Caravans no longer come by way of Barköl. It is at a dead end, with no attractions at all. The climate too is famous for its severity, exposed as the town is to the blizzards of Zungaria. The place abounds with temples, both within and without the walls, but many are neglected, and the appearance they present adds to the

desolate aspect of the place, with its crumbling walls and derelict spaces. The environs are more agreeable, and the forests running down to the town, the pale lake with the barren hills beyond, and the Chinese farms lining the slopes of the Metshin Ola attract the visitor to make a longer stay and explore the surroundings of this little-known place.

The Barköl Mountains remain quite unvisited. They have much to attract, and the Qomuliqs are always friendly and helpful. The grazing is good, and the scenery pleasant, but nowhere really grand. There is a complete absence of big game on the south side, and the same will soon be true of the north. Bird life, too, is somewhat scarce. The chief charm of the mountains lies in their situation between two deserts; the views offer unending contrasts at all times. The distance from Qoilik Utan to Barköl town was 32 miles.

II. *Solfataras in the Kucha District*

In many of the older maps of Chinese Turkistan a volcano is marked in the neighbourhood of Kucha, but there appears no explanation of how this mysterious mountain ever found itself on European maps. Perhaps it was due to a muddle similar to that caused by the red sandstone hills of Turfan being called the "Fire Mountains" by the Chinese, which led Western geographers to expect volcanic traces in that area. Travelling up the Kucha river in November 1928, I heard reports of mining and factories—an unusual combination in Chinese Central Asia—and so went to see what the rumour meant. Crossing a high ridge of red sandstone above the village of Kan, and passing under cliffs and bluffs, we went through a narrow defile and found ourselves on the right bank of the Kucha river, here a broad bed with very little water at this time of the year. Opposite, huddled under a cliff, was the squalid village of Zemish Tagh or Alum mountain, and behind, barren and ugly, was the Alum mountain itself. The word "Zemish" or "Zamuch" means alum in Turki. The pronunciation in the Kucha district was always with "sh" and not with "ch." The alum was dug out of the hills, boiled in large cauldrons in the open, and then run into shallow troughs, where it crystallized on twigs placed on the surface of the liquid. The coal to heat the furnaces came from the hill behind. Although everything was done in a simple, not to say primitive, fashion, the result was pure, clean alum.

More interesting however were the solfataras visible on the hill above. I counted eight of these, visited several, and was told that there were more. In the cool morning air before the atmosphere had become hot, their vapour was clearly seen from a good distance. Most of the solfataras were cracks in the ground, from which a good deal of vapour and a little trickle of water issued. The surrounding soil was much impregnated with sulphur. The largest (illustrated) was partly in a cave and partly outside, and the heat was so great that it was only just possible to enter. An apple was roasted in four minutes. The Turki with us dug down outside the cave and turned up a number of stones covered with clean sal-ammoniac crystals. This is the *nashurde* of the native, much valued as a drug. In his efforts to dig out the stones the man burnt himself at a depth of 18 inches down, which shows how very hot the ground was. Besides the encrustation of ammonia there was a good deal of sulphur deposit, and the smell of it was strong.

It seems that these evidences of volcanic action may have led to the belief that there was a volcano in the neighbourhood, and the smoke seen from a distance does give ground to the idea. Curiously, there was no sign of a hot spring, and the small trickle of water, probably due to the melting of a recent fall of snow, was not a permanent spring, but infiltration.

MASTER HORE'S VOYAGE OF 1536

PROFESSOR E. G. R. TAYLOR

THE account published by Richard Hakluyt in the 'Principal Navigations' of a voyage of Master Hore and divers other gentlemen to Newfoundland in 1536, a voyage in which, although it lasted but six months, one participant at least claimed to have been so altered by hunger and misery that his own mother did not know him, has always aroused a certain degree of scepticism. Hakluyt, it will be recalled, obtained the story in part at first hand from Thomas Butts, son of one of the Royal Physicians, and in part at second hand from reminiscences given at a much earlier date to his cousin of the Middle Temple by Oliver Dawbeney, another participant in the voyage. These reminiscences included a gruesome account of starvation and cannibalism on the part of the ship's crew. Now Thomas Butts must have been at least seventy years old when Hakluyt visited him to obtain material for his collection of voyages, and he was recalling events of half a century earlier. Dawbeney, save for this early adventure, spent his life in humdrum Civil Service appointments at the Irish Mint and the London Customs House. The stories of both would thus in all probability be highly coloured and inaccurate in detail.

A laborious search at the Public Record Office for contemporary evidence of the voyage has proved successful, owing to the accident that a suit was instituted against Richard Hore in the High Court of Admiralty within six weeks of his return. The relevant legal documents, six in number,* yield no details of the incidents of the voyage, but they indicate its purpose and achievement, simply the capture of Newfoundland fish. The leader of the expedition, Richard Hore, was a citizen of London and a leatherseller, who had chartered a ship, the *William of London* (not the *Minion*, Hakluyt must have misheard the aged Thomas Butts), owned by William Dolphyn, a London draper. According to the latter's deposition the voyage was appointed to be "from the port of London to the place or land called in English the Newe found land in the most remote parts."

The *William*, according to her owner's statement, set out in April and arrived safely in Newfoundland, where Richard Hore "caught fish, or caused them to be caught." The return voyage was also made in safety, the ship arriving in the Port of London in "September or October," that is to say at the end of the one month or the beginning of the next. Hore failed to carry out the terms of his contract, and hence Dolphyn obtained from the Court an order for the arrest of the cargo of "fish and other goods" that was on board. The case was before

*H. C. A. Series 24, No. 2, and H. C. A. Series 30, No. 542.