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UNKNOWN MONGOLIA



A Record of Travel and Exploration in
North-West Mongolia and Dzungaria

China
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BY
DOUGLAS CARRUTHERS

GOLD MEDALLIST OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

WITH THREE CHAPTERS ON SPORT

BY
J. H. MILLER, F.Z.S.

AND A FOREWORD BY
THE RIGHT HON. EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON,
G.C.S.I., Etc.

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CHAPTER XIX

SPORT IN THE HIGHLANDS OF DZUNGARIA

By J. H. MILLER

THE middle of June found us once more among the mountains, revelling in the balmy breezes that ruffled the flower-studded grass of the Barlik-Maili Range. Life was again made enjoyable, and we had a further proof of the complex nature of Central Asia, in that, in two short marches we had risen from the enervating, furnace-like heat of the insect-infested plains, to a restful, green land of bubbling brooks and matchless pasture. Wisps of smoke hanging lazily in the air, and the presence of numerous flocks and herds added to the peacefulness of the surroundings, and proclaimed the presence of large Kirei encampments. The Turki words *maili* (fat) and *barlik* (everything) give the best idea of how this region appeals to the nomads, for it is indeed a "fat" land, possessing everything which the heart of a herdsman could desire.

The chance of procuring specimens of that rare sheep—*Ovis sairensis*—lured us to this region, but our quest was tantalizing and unsuccessful. The range of this sheep, which was first discovered by Mr. St. George Littledale in the Sair, or Jair, Mountains at the eastern end of the Tarbagatai, and south-east of Lake Zaisan, extends southwards through the Urkashar and other

the one well-defined ridge in this area of mountains. Both the north and the south slopes are exceedingly steep, especially the former, where precipitous cliffs drop into extensive forests. The grazing is of the best, and large numbers of yurts scattered over the lower slopes account, in no small degree, for the scarcity of game. I shall not weary the reader with an account of the strenuous days spent in searching for those scarce and elusive sheep ; only one small band of ewes and three yearling rams were sighted. A few ibex live a nervous existence among the crags, and wapiti, roe, and bear are said to frequent the forests. In spite of the absence of sport, however, we spent an enjoyable time camping in those emerald valleys of knee-high grass, or scrambling among the higher slopes, carpeted with that short, tufty variety of grass so beloved by mountain game. On the boggy patches below the snow-drifts yellow and purple pansies, gentians, poppies, and other flowers grew in profusion. Marmots and numerous varieties of smaller rodents were almost everywhere in great numbers, enabling Carruthers to add considerably to his collection.

Before moving into the Borotala we spent two days in hunting on the Western Maili plateau, almost overlooking the Dzungarian Gate. This plateau is formed of innumerable small hills and hollows, the latter being of a very uniform height,—something like a sheet of corrugated iron, except that, instead of being parallel, they were jumbled up in hopeless confusion. There were no commanding positions for spying ; so all we could do was to ride along on the chance of coming upon game.

One morning, while turning a corner in this tantalizing country, I came face to face with the only “ respectable ” ram we saw the whole time, but he was out of sight

crests are fringed by thickets of willow, poplar, and much rich grass.

We called a two days' halt in one of these delightful spots, while we made a thorough exploration of the surroundings. Carruthers ransacked the higher nullahs for ibex, while I scoured the lower slopes in search of rams. A female ibex and a ewe were shot for food, also five wolves. In those two days I must have seen not less than three hundred ewes and young, but not a single ram.

Carruthers saw a few female ibex, and a stag with fine horns, though, of course, still in velvet. Ibex ground without any tree in sight is a curious place to see a stag ; it had probably fled there for protection from the native hunters, who at this season would be busy among the northern forests.

All the wolves in the neighbourhood seemed to have collected in the vicinity of this abundant meat-supply, for I saw no less than fourteen in the two days. On the first evening we surprised an old wolf and six well-grown cubs on the prowl ; after watching them for some time sniffing at marmot-holes, and playing on the hillside, I shot two of the cubs, whose fur, though short, was in beautiful condition.

On the next morning, having crawled to the top of a ridge quite close to our camp, I saw an enormous wolf coming straight towards us up the opposite slope, evidently hurrying home after a nocturnal foray. He did not see us, so, allowing him to come within forty yards, I bowled him over as he stopped for a moment to look back over his shoulder. Not long after this, while riding high up on the hillside, our attention was directed by loud yaps and snarls to the valley below. It was a

the horses had ceased, and they stood with hanging heads, satiated with a night's grazing on the short, rich grass. A faint grey light began to creep into the east ; the stars disappeared slowly before its ever-increasing strength ; the snowy summits turned from grey to a delicate pink, and then hardened as that longed-for sun-line crept down towards us ; and then, with a leap, the great fiery ball rose clear of the hills and bathed us in its welcome rays. Snow-cock began to chuckle round us, and chats and snow-finches to flit from rock to rock. Black specks far away on a skyline indicated a hungry herd of sheep. Of all this wild life, the lazy, over-eaten marmot alone remained curled up at the bottom of his snug burrow, waiting for the sun to gain in power before he ventured out. But the beauties of nature do not compensate for the absence of breakfast, and we lost no time in searching the surrounding country from a neighbouring eminence. As no human being was within sight, we decided to make straight for the Urta Saryk, since, even if Carruthers' camp were difficult to find, there was a small Kalmuk post at which we could get food. Four hours' riding took us off the plateau, down the well-timbered valley to the main stream.

Here we fell in with some herdsman, one of whom we "pressed" as a guide. At four in the afternoon, after fording the river, we came upon that welcome green tent pitched among some pines, and lost no time in putting ourselves outside a kettle of tea and pounds of bread and meat.

A man was at once despatched to find our caravan ; it turned up next day with a very anxious Pereira at its head. We were never able to find out exactly who was to blame in this matter, since each of the Kalmuks noisily