

obstruction and, as noted by a good authority, 'must on the whole be classed as exceptionally easy'²³.

The distance of 500 li, or approximately five marches, which the *Hsi-yü-chi* records for the journey from the midst of the Pa-mi-lo Valley to the kingdom of Chieh-p'an-t'ò, agrees well with the route sketched above. According to the latest map of this part of the Pāmīr region prepared by the Survey of India, the journey from the eastern end of the Great Pāmīr by the Kizil-Rabāt and Payik Passes to where the Payik Valley debouches into the Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr would cover about eighty-four miles, while a march of only some sixteen miles further down would bring the traveller to the village of Dafdār and the commencement of the cultivated part of the main Sarīkol Valley.

Route over
the Wakhjīr
Pass.

Past Dafdār and the approach to the Payik Pass there leads also the third alternative route connecting Sarīkol and Wakhān, to which we had occasion to refer in the opening of this chapter. It ascends the whole length of the Tāghdumbāsh Valley, and then crosses the Wakhjīr Pass at its head to the source of the Āb-i-Panja branch of the Oxus (Fig. 7). That part of the valley which properly bears the designation of Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr may be said to extend from the Wakhjīr Pass to a short distance above Dafdār, where the river makes its sharp bend to the north. Forming an unbroken continuation of the central valley of Sarīkol, the Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr, with the broad grassy flat along its bottom for a distance of upwards of fifty miles, looks as if created by nature for a convenient thoroughfare from Sarīkol to Wakhān.

The Wakhjīr Pass, close on 16,200 ft. above the sea, is, it is true, higher than either the Naiza-tāsh or the Payik Pass, and is certainly deep in snow in mid-winter. Its approaches, both from the east and the west, are, however, remarkably easy. Similarly, the descent in the Āb-i-Panja Valley to Bōzai-Gumbaz, where the Little Pāmīr route joins in, and further down to Langar offers no difficulty of any kind. In accord with these observations we find it attested by Col. H. Trotter's inquiries, made in 1874, that the Wakhjīr Pass was in former times 'much used by the Bajaori merchants who used to go from Badakhshān to Yarkand by the Tāghdumbāsh and Tung Valley roads'. Considering that for centuries past the commerce of the mountain region north and south of the Hindukush has to a very large extent been in the hands of these enterprising traders from Bajaor, the evidence recorded by Col. Trotter as to their usual route over the Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr possesses some historical interest²⁴.

Supply diffi-
culties on the
Pāmīrs.

At any period of regular trade intercourse between Sarīkol and Wakhān, the Tāghdumbāsh Valley route was bound to receive attention on account of a topographical fact which deserves brief notice. There is one feature of the Pāmīrs which seems to have impressed travellers of all ages with equal thoroughness: it is the total absence of permanent habitations and the want of all local resources. We can trace this feeling of utter desolation and sterility through the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims no less than in the records of European travellers since the days of Marco Polo and Goëz. From the elaborate arrangements for supplies and shelter which were deemed necessary on every occasion when large parties of western visitors such as Col. Gordon's expedition or the Pāmīr Boundary Commission had to cross, or to camp on, the Pāmīrs²⁵, we may judge of the difficulties which must always have attended the movements of trading caravans or military bodies across that region.

In view of this serious obstacle in the matter of supplies, it must always have been an important consideration to travel, if other physical conditions permitted, by a route on which

²³ See Sir Th. Holdich in *Report of Pamir Boundary Commission*, p. 41.

²⁴ See *Yarkand Mission Report*, p. 270.

²⁵ Compare, e. g., Gordon, *Roof of the World*, pp. 124, 163 sq.