

**CHINESE TURKESTAN,
WITH
CARAVAN AND RIFLE**

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Chinese Turkestan, with Caravan and Rifle by Percy W. Church

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PERCY W. CHURCH

F.R.G.S. AND F.Z.S.

RIVINGTONS

34, KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN
LONDON

1901

PREFACE

SOME three years ago my friend J. V. Phelps and I determined to make a journey into Central Asia to try and shoot the Altai wapiti, the great stag of the Tian Shan. We knew very little about him beyond the bare facts that he existed somewhere in those parts, and was said to be a very fine beast (which he is, though he has been somewhat magnified by distance); consequently we were filled with longing to shoot him, with results which will be seen later. I am not much of a geographer, but may here say that the Tian Shan is a great range of mountains which, running east and west, separates Chinese Turkestan from Russia in Asia. The part which I propose to describe is that east of Khan Tengri, where the boundary line is some distance to the north of the main range. I have only taken up the task of writing this book because it seems a pity to spend so much time and trouble in acquiring information without giving the benefit of it to other sportsmen who may thus be saved

the immense waste of the said time and trouble which ignorance of the country and of where to find the different sorts of game entailed upon us. When I speak of ignorance of the country I do not mean that Central Asia was unknown to us: we had both on former occasions been all over the Yarkand country and into the Pamirs, while I had also made a journey into Western Thibet. Thus we possessed the experience necessary to organise a caravan, and some of our men had been with us before; also we could both speak Hindostani fluently and Turki a little, so that our orders were given directly to the servants, and not passed on in a mutilated form by an interpreter.

The interpreter difficulty is one of the most fruitful sources of trouble in a caravan. A sportsman fresh from England and unfamiliar with the East is, from the nature of things, at the mercy of his interpreter, who in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred will have but a limited English vocabulary and a vast conceit. He will frequently misunderstand what is said to him, but his own high opinion of his linguistic talents will prevent his acknowledging this, and he will put his own interpretation on what he hears rather than confess his ignorance. The result of course in camp is generally worrying and at times disastrous.

We decided on our somewhat roundabout route partly to avoid the above difficulty and partly because we both wished to revisit Kashmir, a country which when once known has an extraordinary attraction for most people. There is, of course, a very much more simple and direct route from England than the one we took. This I propose to describe further on, and at the same time to give some hints as to which part of the country I consider best worth visiting from a shooting point of view, with notes as to distances, game to be found, best time of year, and anything else which I think may be of service.

Recently Central Asia has been a good deal written about, but chiefly from scientific or political points of view. These I have left alone, knowing but little of the former, and considering that the latter does not come into the province of what is merely a journal of travel and sport. It is perhaps rather a large order to give a description of the sport to be got in so big a district, but as the country is practically new to sportsmen I may be excused for my attempt. I have travelled and shot over a good deal of it myself, and have in addition collected much information from natives; this, of course, cannot always be implicitly relied upon, and when I mention any shooting-grounds which

I have not personally visited, I am careful to give the source from which my news was obtained and my own opinion of how far it is to be trusted.

With regard to names of places I have followed the local pronunciation, which accounts for such apparent discrepancies as *kudak*, a well, being sometimes spelt *kadak*; *kol*, a lake, *kul*, etc. (*a* = short *u*; *u* = *oo*.)

Many books of travel which I have read begin, so to speak, in the middle; for my part I think it a good plan to go somewhat fully into the details of equipment and making up a caravan. These should be found of use for any part of Central Asia, and will show that an expedition there from India is not such a formidable undertaking as it sounds. If I succeed in making things smoother for anyone else who may wish to try the country written of, I shall feel that my labour has not been in vain, and that it has served a better purpose than merely that of filling up the wearisome hours after the day's march.

The distances were got by timing the caravan, and are, I think, fairly accurate, enough so, at all events, for the guidance of other travellers.

Two passports are necessary—Russian and Chinese. It is no more trouble to have them as comprehensive as possible, and it may be useful as

plans are changeable things. For these reasons I would have the Russian one to cover Russia and Russia in Asia, the Chinese to cover Chinese Turkestan (the New Dominion) and China proper ; if names of towns are required, they can easily be got from the map. These passports are to be got through the Foreign Office ; the Chinese one may take some time to procure. When in Chinese territory the passport should always be sent up with a card on arriving in a town where there is an amban. I think that special leave is required for an English officer to travel on the trans-Caspian Railway, otherwise I believe that the ordinary passport is sufficient ; but the regulations may be changed, and it would be as well to make inquiries before starting.

I am indebted to the kindness of Capt. H. H. P. Deasy and Mr. I. Morse for photos of the Yarkand country and Tekkes respectively.