

Treasures from the Ustyurt and Mangystau

Mangystau region of the Republic of Kazakhstan occupies in addition to Mangyshlak peninsula a considerable part of the Ustyurt plateau and Buzachi peninsula, the southern end of the Caspian depression making in total area of over 16 million hectares.

The landscape of the region is unique. For many hundred million years it was the floor of the ocean. However, it is characterized by regular regression of the Caspian Sea and change in its shoreline due to underground processes of the Earth. At such times uniform many meters thick marine deposits have been impregnated with layers of huge sites, which had been in a fire in the epoch of dinosaurs, as well as fossils of the saber-toothed tigers and remote ancestors of horse. Present day lunar landscape of the Mangyshlak peninsula and chinks of the Ustyurt is the result of amazing events in the geological history of the Earth. Approximately 25 million years ago the chalky pavement of the Turan plate has been ripped up over a distance of more than 300 km by the older bend of the Permian-Triassic age. The underwater earthquake of incredible force turned the bed of several kilometers thick inside out. Thus there appeared mountains locally called Karatau and Karamaya. The Karatau overthrust has lifted some sea deposits and cut them forming numerous fractures. Eight million years ago the Turan plate began to rise slowly graded westward. High waves of regressing ocean have eroded soft limestone fractures creating cretaceous cuesta, canyons, and fanciful lost mountains. The wind and rainfalls put the last band to majestic creation of nature. Thus there appeared cliffs of the north and south Aktau, legendary mountain of Sherkala, valley of castles of Akmyshtau, unique fields of spherical concretions, boundless salt wastes of Kenderlisor, Tuzbair and Karashek, the deepest in CIS depression of Karakiya, sand dunes of Bostankum and Kyzylkum, heavenly peaks of Bozhiry and Elshibek, beach lagoons and cliffed coasts of the Caspian Sea.

Geologists call Mangystau geological book of sedimentary rocks. Just as the spot one can make a journey into the innermost corners of history of the Earth leaping from the kingdom of cephalopods, which could grow to a giant size, to the diverse world of the sea hedgehogs or to the warm seas abundant in the most ancient sharks, whales, dolphins and bony fish.

The climate of the region is sharply continental with severe winter and not much snow. Spring is short, dry and windy, as a rule. Summer is hot and long with no clouds. Fall is warm for the most part. The Caspian Sea surrounding the

Mangyshlak peninsula on three sides has an impact only on the narrow coastal strip.

Atmospheric precipitation is very insignificant. Here there are no open sources of fresh water, except for the rare springs giving life to small green woodlots.

Analysis of location of archaeological monuments of the primitive cultures showed that while making choice of the site for settlement due account was taken of topographical and landscape features. First and foremost it must have been a coastal zone of the Caspian sea, where, as a rule, have been located on the banks of dry beds of seasonal water streams or near takyr depressions, which at the times of abundant rainfalls could accumulate and hold a great capacity of freshwater resources. Secondly, there were boundary zone of the sandy deserts of Bostankum, Tujesu, Karynzharyk, Kyzylkum, Sam with ground water discharge. Surprisingly, but in some present-day wind-blown sand areas archaeologists find the remains of permanent and seasonal sites of roaming hunters. Thirdly, they were located at the edge of chinks, on the residual outcrops, on the flanks of canyons, gullies and sors occasionally with springs or wyches nearby.

The sites abandoned by the late nomads bear seasonal character and most commonly are dependent on the availability of grazing lands. Winter camps have been located in the areas protected from the winds and summer pastures – in the blow mountainous area.

Starting from the Bronze Age fortresses were built at the inaccessible narrow edges of the chinks or on the residual outcrops.

Medieval settlements and towns have been located on the caravan routes and on the sea coast with convenient bays and deep navigating channels.

Geological and paleoecological investigations of the north Caspian coastal area, with its natural and geographical environment similar to that of Mangystau, enabled us to reconstruct climate data sheet of this region.

Historical events occurred in Mangystau already find material confirmation and attract genuine interest of the scientific world. Each newly discovered archaeological site of the region is given its place of honour in the annals of history of Kazakhstan, as well as of all mankind. Among them are the Old Stone Age workshops of Sarytash gulf, a complex of sites of Koskuduk dated back to the close of the Stone Age, proto-towns of the Bronze Age such as Toksanbay, Manaisor, Aitman, sanctuaries of the early Iron Age: Baite 1-3, Kyzyluyk,

Tasastau, Kainar, Aurentobe, Sokky, Akpan, Medieval towns of Zhezdy, Karakavak and Kyzylkala, underground mosques of Skapak-ata, Karaman-ata, Sultan-epe, Shopan-ata, Beket-ata, huge complex of burial necropolises of the Middle and New Ages. The new sites are entered in the register of the historical, archaeological and architectural monuments every year.

Used materials: "Treasures from the Ustyurt and Mangystau" by Samashev Z., Kosherbayev K., Amanshayev E., Astafyev A.