

ENGLISH



SILK ROAD

~Summary~

-by Nick Middleton

Departure from Ravu

The author left Ravu along with Daniel, an interpreter, and Tsetan, who was a tourist guide. Before leaving, Lhamo, the lady who had provided them accommodation at Ravu, gave the author a gift of a long-sleeved sheepskin coat, as they were going to Mount Kailash, where it would be very cold. Tsetan knew a short cut to reach the mountain. He said the journey would be smooth if there was no snow.

They Saw Drokbas on the Way

As they passed through the hills, they saw individual drokbas (nomad shepherds) looking after their flocks. Both men and women were seen. They were wearing thick woollen clothes. They would stop and stare at their car, sometimes waving to them as they passed.

Encounter with Tibetan Mastiffs

As they passed the nomad's tents, they saw some Tibetan mastiffs, which were dogs used by the shepherds. When the car came close to their tents, they would bark furiously and fearlessly. They would chase the car for some distance and would then go back. In earlier days, Tibetan mastiffs became popular in China's imperial courts as hunting dogs. They were brought along the Silk Road as a tax payment from Tibet.

Ice Blocks the Road

The turns became sharper and more difficult as they climbed. The author started getting a severe headache. Suddenly snow started falling and soon blocked the route. Daniel and the author got out of the car to reduce its load on sharp bends. The altimeter watch on the author's wrist indicated that they were at a height of 5210 metres above sea level. The icy top layer of the snow was dangerous, as the car could slip off the road. When they reached a height of 5515 metres, which was the top of the pass, the atmospheric pressure became so low that Tsetan had to open the lid of the petrol tank to release the evaporated fuel.

Back on the Highway

By late afternoon, they had reached the small town of Hor on the shore of Lake Manasarovar, which was on the old trade route between Lhasa and Kashmir. Daniel returned to Lhasa from there. Tsetan got the flat tyre of the car repaired there. Hor was a grim, miserable place. There was no vegetation whatsoever, just dust and rocks. There was accumulated rubbish everywhere. Unlike the past, the place no longer appeared holy.

By 10.30 PM they reached Darchen, where they found a guesthouse to stay in. It was the end of the road. The author had a very troubled night. His nostrils were blocked and he was not able to get enough air into his lungs. Most of the night he sat up, as he was unable to sleep.

Next Day

The next day Tsetan took the author to the Darchen Medical College. The doctor told him it was just the cold and the altitude which were giving him trouble. The doctor gave him some medicine and that night the author was able to sleep well.

Tsetan left the author in Darchen and went back with the car to Lhasa. He did not mind if the author would die in Darchen. He was a good Buddhist and believed in life after death. However, he was worried that the author's death could affect his business, as he may not get more tourists who required to be accompanied till where the road ended.

The Author Looks for a Companion and Meets Norbu

Like Hor, Darchen was dusty and a lot of rubbish could be seen all around. The town appeared to be sparsely populated. There were no pilgrims there, as the season had not yet started. He had reached there too early. He actually wanted to reach Mount Kailash to do kora to get a feel of what a pilgrimage was like. But he didn't want to do it alone. He was looking for someone who could speak or understand English.

When he was sitting in the only café at Darchen, Norbu, a plump Tibetan working in Beijing at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, saw him reading an English book. So Norbu introduced himself to the author. He also was there to do kora, although he was not a religious person. So both of them decided to do kora together.

Conclusion of Silk Road

To sum up the Silk Road summary, we learn about the author's journey through the silk road and the determination of pilgrims and the hardships they face.