

SILK ROAD

NICK MIDDLETON



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Middleton teaches geography at Oxford University and is a fellow of St Anne's College. He is a Royal Geographical Society award-winning writer, and the author of Travelogues.

Dr Nick Middleton's background is in the physical side of geography but his interests span the entire subject. His academic role is supplemented by his work as an environmental consultant and freelance author having written more than 200 articles in journals, magazines and newspapers, and 16 books. He has also co-written and edited another nine volumes.



The author chronicles the challenges and hardships he faced in the Silk Road regions as they are now. The reader finds it refreshing to traverse such vast tracts of physical geography, expanses of the natural world that remain largely untamed.

As a trade route, the Silk Road has been less a single highway and more a network of overland routes linking Europe with Asia, making trade possible between those with a passion for silk, horses and exotic fauna and flora. Just about every transaction imaginable has occurred along its many trails over the centuries.



Leaving Ravu:

The author left Ravu in the company of Daniel and Tsetan. Before leaving the place, Lhamo gave him a gift. She gave him a long-sleeved sheepskin coat. Their next destination was Mount Kailash and Tsetan knew a short cut. He said the journey would be smooth if there was no snow.

The sight of Drokbas:

As they passed by the hills, they could see the lonely drokbas tending their flocks. There were men and women, well wrapped. They would pause and stare at their car, occasionally waving as they passed.

The Tibetan Mastiff:

As they passed the nomad's tents there were the Tibetan mastiffs. They would explode into action as they neared the tents. They barked furiously and completely fearless. They would chase the car for some distance and would then go back.



Ice blocking their way:

The turns became sharper and bumpier. The sudden and unexpected fall of snow started blocking their way. Both the author and Daniel got out of the car for Tsetan to drive it safely, taking sharp bends. They were at 5210 meters above the sea level. The icy top layer of the snow was very dangerous; the car could slip off the road. The snow continued blocking their way. As they reached 5515 meters above the sea level, the atmospheric pressure became very low and Tsetan opened the lid of the petrol tank to release the evaporated fuel. The author experienced severe headache.

The town of Hor:

By late afternoon, they had reached the small town of Hor. Daniel returned Lhasa and Tsetan repaired the flat tyre of the car. Hor was grim, miserable place. There was no vegetation whatsoever, just dust and rocks. There was the accumulated refuse everywhere. Unlike the past, the place no longer appeared holy.



Reaching Darchen:

By 10.30 p.m., they reached a guesthouse in Darchen. The author had a very troubled night. His sinus were blocked and he was not able to get enough oxygen and finding it difficult to sleep. Most of the night he sat up and was not able to sleep. Visiting the Medical College:

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

Tsetan leaving for Lhasa:

Tsetan left the author in Darchen and went away. 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 it could affect his business, as he may not get more tourists to be accompanied.



Dry Darchen:

Like Hor Darchen was dusty and heaps of refuse could be seen all around. There were not many shops in Darchen. The town appeared to be sparsely populated. He felt lonely, as they were not any pilgrims. He had reached there very early in the season.

Meeting Norbu:

The author wanted to reach Mount Kailash to do kora. But he didn't want to do it alone. He was looking for someone who could speak or understand English. One day he was sitting in a café. When Norbu saw him reading an English book he came and introduced him to the author. He was a Tibetan, but worked in Beijing at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He too was there to do kora. But he was not a religious person. Both of them decided to climb Mount Kailash

