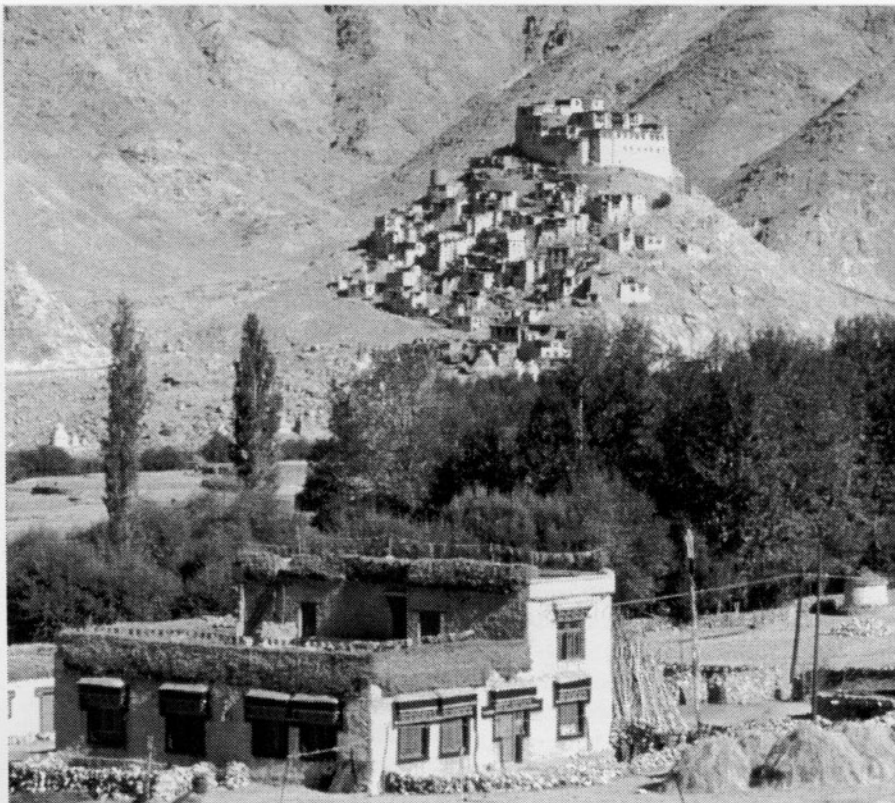


Exploring the Byways of the Silk Road

BY DANIEL C. WAUGH

Between mid-August and mid-September 2001, my wife and I had the privilege of visiting northern India. The trip, labeled the "Pundits Expedition," was organized by Palanquin Travel and supported locally by Rimo Expeditions. Its leader, Paul Harris, is a noted British photographer who has offered presentations here at the UW twice in recent years, including one on his trek in Ladakh right up to the Karakorum Pass on the old trade route to Xinjiang.

Our goal was to follow along some of the routes in Ladakh which had long been used for trade between Kashmir and Tibet, first documented by the British-trained Indian "pundits," who traveled incognito while carrying out surveying and other intelligence work in the nineteenth century. In 2001, our Pundits Expedition traveled in part by jeep and in part in a horse caravan over mountain paths. We reached the western end of Lake Pangong, whose cobalt blue salt waters extend more than 100 km between Ladakh and Tibet. Ladakh is sometimes known as "Little Tibet," and is Tibetan Buddhist in its culture. Along our route and in other areas around the Ladakhi capital, Leh, we visited several Buddhist



Chemde Monastery, Ladakh

monasteries. On one such trip we visited the monastery at Alchi on the Indus River, where there are remarkable wall paintings fusing Buddhist iconography and Kashmiri painting from around the 12th century. We were in remote villages during the harvest season, and enjoyed some of the harvest festival events held every year in mid-September.

Ladakh is high country; flying into Leh at 11,500 feet leaves one gasping for breath. As we acclimatized, we drove over the highest drivable roads in the world, one pass being over 18,000 feet. In the last few days of our stay in Ladakh, we trekked to 20,000 foot Stok Kangri, a peak to the south of Leh; I was fortunate enough to climb it. It was at about 19,000 feet on the mountain that I first heard the news of September 11, several days after the tragic events. Two days after our descent, the mountain, which had been nearly bare of snow, was buried under a blanket of snow from an intense thunderstorm, heralding the approach of winter.

Finally, we had a brief introduction to Delhi and the nearby sites of some of the most famous Mughal architecture (Agra, with the Taj Mahal, and Fatepur Sikhri). I spent my last two days in Delhi in the National Museum photographing objects that connect with the various Silk Road projects being undertaken this year at the UW. Some of the material will be posted on the Silk Road Seattle web site (www.uwch.org/silkroad) and will eventually become part of the UW's digital library collections. Check the REECAS website for a possible slide show on Ladakh and Mughal India in Winter Quarter 2002. ♦

Daniel Waugh, Acting Chair of REECAS in Autumn 2001, has traveled extensively along the historic Silk Road, and is the coordinator of "Silk Road Seattle." He will be teaching a non-credit "Wednesday University" course on the Silk Road during Winter 2002, and in Spring 2002 his regular course on the subject (HIST/SIS 225).



Market scene, Leh, Ladakh