

Leaders Report – Tibet 2007



The nine strong Derbyshire / Yorkshire based group spent the whole of August travelling through China, (particularly Tibet & Xinjiang), Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Initially we flew out to Almaty, (Kazakhstan), and then travelled overland to Xinjiang, crossing the border at Khorgos, which was time consuming and quite expensive.

Unfortunately two members of the group found that their main baggage failed to reach Almaty on 2nd August. The airline was less than helpful in tracing and returning the bags. Both bags were only returned to the group members on 30th August – two days before returning to the UK, (more of this sorry tale later).

Once in China the group fell into a smooth routine, which was professionally organised by Osman Mamtile, (Alip), of Xinjiang Caravan International Travel Service. We travelled to the mountain pastureland near Yining, then south to Korla and Turpan before catching the sleeper train to Dunhuang and on to Xi'an. Throughout this period the group took the opportunity to view some of the cultural riches of this part of China, (including the Terracotta Warriors, The Emin Hoja and the Mogao Thousand Buddha Caves).

From Xi'an we flew to Lhasa for an unforgettable few days in the city. We then travelled by road to Lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailash. This remote area of Asia offers some spectacular sights; I'm sure that the cloud shrouded pyramid of Kailash and the wide horizons of Manasarovar will remain with all participants for many years. Possibly the most striking feature of our journey through Tibet was the positive impact that almost all the Tibetans that we met had on the group.



Whilst in the Manasarovar / Kailash area we intended to undertake at least one demanding trek, which we had to foreshorten. This disappointment was due to a combination of reasons; some members' difficulties with the altitude, missing equipment, poor weather on the mountain and an element of confusion over catering logistics. The prudent course of action was to curtail trekking activities and to return to Xinjiang.

On a further disappointing note I need to mention the poor condition of the camping ground at Manasarovar. The area, spiritually the centre of several Asian faiths and an important pilgrimage site, was marred by large quantities of non-biodegradable litter and human faeces, which I for one found very depressing given my longstanding ambition to visit this area. I'd like to say thanks to the expeditioners for making some effort to dispose of the plastic litter in the immediate vicinity of our tents.

From Ali in western Tibet we had to swap our Landcruisers and our fantastic Tibetan drivers for a difficult 35 hour 'sleeper bus' journey back to Xinjiang. Not too bad if you're a 5'2" smoker, but very uncomfortable for a 6'2" non-smoker who needed to breathe!

In Xinjiang we first visited Kashgar and then went into the mountains at Karakul, spending several days living with a group of Kyrgyz yak herders on the lower slopes of Mustagata. In addition we managed to ascend to Mustagata Basecamp and had a close inspection of the lower glaciers on the mountain.

Following a second spell in Kashgar and some determined shopping at the Sunday bazaars, (fortunately no livestock was purchased); we travelled on to Kyrgyzstan. After an easy(ish) border crossing, where we lost Alip and gained Olga, we travelled to Tash Rabat in the Tian Shan where we stayed in a yurt camp, (looked after and fed by Uri and Zoya). The landscape, food and people of Kyrgyzstan came as a pleasant surprise to everyone on the group. From Tash Rabat we moved on to another yurt

camp on the shores of Issyk Kul where everyone enjoyed the food and the swimming. Then we travelled to Bishkek for a last night in a hotel and a welcome reunion with the two missing bags.

Our return journey was difficult with a long road journey and difficult border crossing into Kazakhstan followed by a long wait at Almaty airport, a four hour delay on our flight resulting in missing our connecting flight from Istanbul, an unexpected diversion to Zurich, a dash across the airport to catch our connecting flight to Manchester, which we reached some 8 hours late. Oh, and losing all our bags including the two returned only 48 hours earlier.

Fortunately all the lost baggage was returned on 3rd September!

As group leader I'd like to thank the guides in China and Kyrgyzstan and all participants in the trip. The leaders did a fantastic job; Allie in getting Chinese and Kazakh visas organised and in controlling Crossley Minor in his wilder moments, Dr Anna in looking after us, especially when she didn't feel to well herself, and Lucy for organising the training and helping throughout the trip. The expeditioners were exceptional Richard for his haggling skills, Sam & Chris for stoically managing without and bags for 30 days, Emily for coping with the boys and Giles for acting as unofficial interpreter. Several people said that the group didn't function as a traditional expeditioner / leader group, but as a group of friends on a challenging trip.

Thanks to you all for making the trip so enjoyable.

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