CHAPTER - 7
SILK ROAD

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Notice these expressions in the text.
Infer their meaning from the context.

ducking back
swathe
careered down
manoeuvres
cairn of rocks
salt flats

billowed

Answer

ducking back : quickly going inside and then coming out

manoeuvres : military exercises involving a large number of soldiers, ships, etc.

billowed : filled with the air and swelled out

swathe : literally: a long strip of land of something; contextually: a land stretched with snow

cairn of rocks : a pile of stones that mark a special place such as the top of a mountain or a place where somebody is buried

careered down : descending the slope

salt flats : thatched roofed houses covered with snow

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Understanding the Text

I. Give reasons for the following statements.

1. The article has been titled 'Silk Road.'

Answer

The title of the article has been named on the historic silk road or routes. The network connected the Afro-Eurasian landmass. It established trade of Chinese silk, spices, teas and porcelain; Indian textiles, precious stones and pepper; and the Roman Empire's gold, silver, fine glassware, wine, carpets and jewels. The road was named Silk Road largely because of the silk trade with China. In the chapter the author travels to Mount Kailash, exploring the Himalayan belt in Tibet. Since the author explored this region, the chapter is titled as Silk Road.

2. Tibetan mastiffs were popular in China's imperial courts.

Answer

Tibetan mastiffs were popular in China's imperial courts as hunting dogs. They were brought along the Silk Road in ancient times as tribute from Tibet. They were huge black dogs used as watchdogs. They explode into action like bullets. They are furious and fearless.

3. The author's experience at Hor was in stark contrast to earlier accounts of the place.

Answer

Hor was a grim, miserable place. The dust and rocks were scattered everywhere in abundance; there was little vegetation. The place seemed unfortunate and dejected, though it sat on the shore of the Lake Manasarovar. The author was flabbergasted to realise the contrast in his experience to that of the earlier read accounts. A Japanese monk, Ekai Kawaguchi, who had arrived there in 1990, was so moved by the sanctity of the lake t hat he burst into tears. The hallowed waters had a similar effect on Sven Hedin, a Swede who was not prone to sentimental outbursts. However, for the author, when he reached Hor, first he had to get two punctures mended. The only relaxation was the tea served by a Chinese youth in the only café in the town, which was constructed from badly painted concrete and had three broken windows. The good view of the lake through one of them helped to compensate however.

4. The author was disappointed with Darchen.

Answer

The author was disappointed with Darchen. The high altitude was giving him health problems. He had a bad cold and was not able to sleep at night. Since he was one of the early arrivals there weren't any pilgrims coming to the place. The place was dusty, partially derelict and punctuated by heaps of rubble and refuse.

5. The author thought that his positive thinking strategy worked well after all.

Answer

The author was disappointed with Darchen. He also complained of bad health. Tsetan had left for Lhasa. He was feeling rather lonely with no pilgrims around. It was then he met Norbu, a Tibetan who too wanted to visit Kailash. They would be a good team as both of them were academicians who had escaped from the library. The author started thinking positively and it gave him some delight and a new enthusiasm.

II. Briefly comment on

1. The purpose of the author's journey to Mount Kailash.

Answer

Nick Middleton is an Oxford Professor as well as an adventurer. He follows the most difficult terrain

Nick Middleton is an Oxford Professor as well as an adventurer. He follows the most difficult terrain through the Silk Road and reaches mount Kailash. He visits the holy place to complete the kora- going around the place.

2. The author's physical condition in Darchen.

Answer

The author was not physically well when he reached Darchen. His sinuses were blocked due to the cold wind at Hor and he was not able to sleep well at night. The next day Tsetan took him to the Darchen Medical College and the doctor there gave him some medicine that gave him some relief.

3. The author's meeting with Norbu.

Answer

The author was feeling rather lonely without Tsetan who had left for Lhasa. There weren't any pilgrims at Darchen as he had reached the place much early in the season. It was then he Norbu who was a Tibetan and also an academician. He too was there to visit Kailash and they decided to go there together.

4. Tsetan's support to the author during the journey.

Answer

Tsetan was a good and efficient driver. He drove the car very carefully. During the journey, he spoke to the author giving information about the places they were visiting. He was very caring. At Darchen when he found that the author was not well, he took him to the medical college and got medicine for him. He was a good Buddhist.

5. "As a Buddhist, he told me, he knew that it didn't really matter if I passed away, but he thought it would be bad for business."

Answer

Tsetan was a good Buddhist and believed that death was not the end of life. Kailash being a holy place it would be better for him as it would take him to heaven. Then if the author would die there, it would be bad for his business as his credibility will be at stake in looking after the tourists and later he may not get any customers.

Talking about Text

Discuss in groups of four

1.The sensitive behaviour of hill-folk.

Answer

The hill-folk are quite unsophisticated and innocent. People like Tsetan very religious and God-fearing. They are very much hospitable and take care of the visitors from out side.

2. The reasons why people willingly undergo the travails of difficult journeys.

Answer

The author was an academician, hence, he undertook the journey for the purpose of education. For him it was a learning experience. Secondly, people undertake such journeys because of the spirit of adventure. The areas covered by the author are some of the most difficult terrains in the world. The third can be a religious reason. People visit places like Mount Kailash as part of their pilgrimage.

3. The accounts of exotic places in legends and the reality.

Answer

There are many accounts of exotic places in legends and the reality. Places like Mount Kailash, Manasarovar occupy a prominent place in legends. There are many articles written about these places.

Thinking about Language

2. What do the following utterances indicate?

(i) "I told her, through Daniel ..."
(ii) "It's a cold," he said finally through Tsetan.

Answer

(i) She was not able to follow English but Daniel translated what he told in English in the Tibetan language to her.
(ii) The doctor spoke in Tibetan language, which Tsetan translated into English for the author.

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3. Guess the meaning of the following words.
kora, drokba, kyang
In which language are these words found?

Answer

Kora: Walk all the way round, circumambulate
Droka: shepherd
Kyang: It is a wild Tibetan ass.

These words are found in Tibetean Language.

Working with Words

2. Explain the use of the adjectives in the following phrases.
(i) shaggy monsters
(ii) brackish lakes
(iii) rickety table
(iv) hairpin bend
(v) rudimentary general stores

Answer

(i) shaggy monsters: hairy, unkempt
(ii) Brackish lakes: salty
(iii) Rickety table: wobbly, shaky
(iv) Hairpin bend: very sharp bend
(v) rudimentary general stores: elementary.