

# MOTORCYCLING THE HIMALAYAS

## PART 3

### PUSH FOR EVEREST

*We had just been denied entry to Tibet at the Chinese border-crossing after travelling hundreds of miles through the most difficult and challenging terrain I've ever ridden. The thought of riding that again was excruciating. And what was the reason the Chinese turned us away? It was their lunch time.*



ROAD TO EVEREST

**BY KOZ MRAZ**

The Chinese officially-designated lunch break mandated all border military to take lunch, at the very same time and without explanation we were told to return in two hours! Chinese takeout anyone? A huge relief we were not sent back to Kathmandu, but now we have to sit on the Nepalese side and go through this again. So what do three Aussies, a Kiwi and three Yanks do at the Chinese/Tibet border for two hours? Play cricket of course. A rousing match ensued, the Yanks learned how to play cricket, the Aussies got on splendidly and the Kiwi kicked some arse.

I surmised that the Chinese watched the Himalayan 7 play raucous games of cricket on the many cameras pointed at the border, because when we finally did go through, it was much smoother than expected. In fact, there was a TV crew from CCTV filming us as we sauntered by. It turned out we were the first group of motorcyclists to pass through the new Chinese border. How apropos, Himalayan Roadrunners was the very first to offer motorcycle rides in Tibet and was now the very first to pass the new border.

It was done! The entire team was now in Tibet and what a shocker it was. Brand new two-lane roads with beautifully banked turns and switchbacks, massive lighted tunnels, secured embankments, rock wall protection. The Chinese had spent the last three years building a road that obviously involves some future transportation plans for Tibet. It was a welcome relief in contrast to the prior two days of riding.

### PUSH FOR EVEREST –THE LONGEST DAY

The view from my room in Kerung was amazing. This was why I was here, and this was our longest riding day.



186 miles to Tingri and our first look at Mt. Everest. The prior days' trials and tribulations vanished and we were now motorcycling the most majestic mountains in the world. The air was crisp and crystal clear, the smooth double-lane paved road was nestled in green valleys covered in pine trees and snow-capped mountains that cut straight to the sky, and it was magical. 26,000 foot peaks surrounded us as we rode valleys filled with herds of giant yaks, (and paused to let farmers cross their goats) and steeped in the rich history, mystery and beauty that is Tibet.

We began the steep ascent of Kerung Pass, one of Tibet's most notable collection of switchbacks, that snake their way up the mountains to an elevation of 17,339 feet. Stopping to soak in this expanse, it was here where high altitude made its powerful presence felt. I couldn't walk ten steps without losing my breath. How do climbers do this? My energy drained, every step was a bitch, and it was freaking cold, thirty degrees cold. Rob told the Himalayan 7, "We can't linger here long." I was glad to get back on my trusty Royal Enfield, descending thousands of feet on our journey to Old Tingri.

As we dropped into Old Tingri on the Tibetan plateau we could see Mt. Everest, the highest mountain in the world above sea level. A sight to behold. Yet the surrounding land is flat, barren and cold. Along this expedition I had gotten to know Ping Ping, our Tibetan guide. On any trek or ride you take into Tibet your guides will make or break your experience. Ping Ping knew this area and its people well and he took us to visit the Lang Kor Village and Lang Kor Monastery. Its structures date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, 1097 AD. It is truly amazing to experience such culture that literally



**PAIKU TSO LAKE AT 15K FEET**

could be a thousand years old.

We visited with his friends, who welcomed us into their multi-story primitive home. The first floor was for animals, the second was living quarters as they proudly displayed their loom for making blankets. The large kitchen was full of brass pots with a stove in the middle, serving as their cooking station and central heating system. Dried yak dung was their fuel that kept family and guests warm.



**RONBUK MONASTERY**

The Lang Kor Village had four generations of families, and this mother of three children had four husbands. That was the tradition here, they were all brothers and the man we met was the eldest. The others had homes elsewhere in the village. Because he was the eldest, these were his children and the tradition

here is that if something happened to him, the next brother in line would become the head of the household. They laughed about their unusual sleeping arrangements.

We were totally accepted into their homes because we were Ping Ping's friends. I can imagine these 'strange looking tall men dressed in moon suits' were equally curious to them as they were to us. At one point the mother just grabbed her baby and began breast feeding as if we weren't there, and another young Nepali woman kept staring at me and rubbing her face. I asked Ping Ping what she was doing. He said Nepali men have very little facial hair and she wanted to touch my beard...that made her day.

This is why one goes on such an expedition with Himalayan Road Runners. Rob is, in essence Tibetan; he takes you on roads and to places that truly embody the heart of the Himalayas, untouched by the throngs of tourists and trekkers. I can't relay enough how important it is for Westerners to experience firsthand a culture with such mystery and nobility, yet one that is threatened by the incursion of Chinese tourism and government oversight.

**LANG KOR TEMPLE**

Outside the village is an eleventh century temple that survived the Maoist Cultural Revolution in 1957 for several unlikely reasons. First, the temple became a kitchen for the Chinese army. Then it became storage for grains and other foods. Inside you can see slight remnants of the original wall paintings destroyed by the smoke and time. No monks live inside the monastery because they are afraid. Afraid the Chinese military will arrest them. There are three full moon services that will bring the monks and the local Buddhists out en masse, and that's the only time they feel safe to appear in their robes at this monastery.

From Old Tingri, it's five hours of hard riding on dirt roads. By now dirt roads were the least of my worries, it was the soft sand and streams. Have you ever ridden through six inches of silt and sand on a street bike, with street tires? I didn't think so. You need to keep the rear wheel



**LANG KOR TEMPLE**



### HIMALAYAN 7 AND MT. EVEREST

spinning and power through. But when the rear tire starts fishtailing, that means there's too much power, when the front tire gets squirrely you need more power. When you hit a sandy corner you shift your weight forward and stand on the peg opposite of the corner to keep the motorcycle upright. Remember to do all this as your heart's in your throat because you've just crossed a stream of slippery rocks and there's a massive sandpit on the other side.

Needless to say, we had another man down, no injuries, just a bruised ego. We passed some spectacular scenery and tribal people on horseback in full ethnic Tibetan regalia.

Finally, we hit hard tarmac, the valley opened its arms and behold, there she was, Sagarmatha, 'Mother Goddess of the Earth' as the Nepali call her, Mt. Chomolungma by the Tibetans, and Mt. Everest by the English. All our trials and tribulations had culminated to this moment. The sky was azure blue as cotton clouds lilted by Mt. Everest's majestic peak. It was amazing, the excitement was palpable. We had come a long, long way, five days, hundreds and hundreds of miles and finally, here we were, standing at the foot of Mount Everest.

**Side Note:** We are all mispronouncing Mt. Everest. Named after the British Surveyor George Everest in 1856. The correct pronunciation of George's last name is "eve" (woman's name) and "rest," George Everest's surname was actually pronounced Eve-rest, with the emphasis on 'Eve,' like the woman's name. But the mountain is almost universally referred to as we commonly hear it (with 'short' "e" up front) in the English language.

We stayed at the Rongbuk Monastery, the highest monastery in the world right at the base of Everest. If you fancy looking at photos of Everest you've seen it. It was built in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and was completely destroyed by the Chinese in the Maoist Cultural Revolution. From what I can gather, it was rebuilt several hundred years ago and currently houses 35 male and female monks. Again, Ping Ping is very good friends with them and we were able to see much more than most visitors would ever encounter.

Then we were escorted upstairs to a sacred shrine room where services are held in front of an absolutely stunning, giant brass statue of the eighth century Guru Rinpoche. The massive forty-foot brass statue was against a wall in a tiny room only ten feet deep and forty feet wide, a small area to actually view this beautiful statue. My mind reeled I tried to absorb the magnitude of this. *"Who comes here, upstairs to*

*view this statue?"* I asked the monk. *"You!"* he replied in very Buddhist-monk-mode.

I was honored to be granted access to view such things, to ask questions through Ping Ping and to take photographs. Rob and I were the last to leave and sat in the courtyard for a long time in silence. It was in that silence I sensed his deep respect and understanding of Tibet, its culture and history. He has spent a lifetime not only offering foreigners a very unique way to see this country, he offers much more to those who are willing to see it. A lens deep inside that the outside world will never see or understand.

But all this majesty comes at a heavy price. You have no idea what it's like at 17,000 feet unless you've been there. At sea level, the earth's air pressure bearing down creates a very dense oxygen atmosphere. As you rise in altitude there is less pressure so the oxygen molecules thin out, it's just not as dense. The higher the altitudes the thinner the air becomes and everything is hard. What's worse is, as you sleep, your heart rate normally slows and your breathing deepens. Imagine this: In a deep sleep, you've just exhaled all the air from your lungs and thoroughly relax, slowly sinking into a soothing pool of warm water. It feels as if you're floating, but within a few seconds your body switches into self-preservation mode, you need another breath, but you're under water.

Panic sets in, you're dying, and you bolt up in bed, gasping for air, three or four-- no, five deep desperate breaths, your heart's pounding, it's not a dream... it's a reality, and it happens over, and over again. Your body hasn't acclimated to high altitude and needless to say, we were all eager to head down to lower altitude the next morning. Finally, we're looking forward to a day of relaxing riding on new paved roads through the most majestic mountains in the world.

Little did we know that the ride out of Everest would be the most dangerous and the most challenging motorcycling of the entire expedition...

- Helmet – Shark Evoline Series 3
- Gloves – Alpinestars Equinox Outdry
- Boots – Alpinestars Campeche Drystar
- Jacket – Scorpion Sports
- Pants – Scorpion Sports

*--See more photos at [www.QuickThrottle.com](http://www.QuickThrottle.com) in the Gallery!*



**MT. EVEREST AND THE WORLD'S HIGHEST MONASTERY**