

The 'royal' ride to Leh-Pangong Lake



Not many would want to take a solitary bike ride on the Leh-Pangong road, and yet for me it turned out to be the most thrilling of my adventures so far. Once I had made up my mind, Mr. Punchok of Greater Ladakh Tours at Changspa road showed me a couple of bikes to try. While testing the Royal Enfield 500 CC Classic, I tripped as the foot brake hit the road while I was making a turn, and injured myself. Mr. Punchok being the gentleman, offered me another one, this time a 500 CC Bullet. It was not the smoothest experience, but we coped, the bike and I.

At the rest house that night I met a

group who had just arrived from Pangong, and they warned me about the weather and shared their experience of one brake failure on the way. Just the kind of conversation to boost my courage!

The next morning I got up at 6AM, and armed with my bike, its papers, and the restricted area travel permit, took off within half an hour. The early start was to allow me to reach Karu early and find riders to ride along the road. Apart from the full 14 liters fuel tank, I took an additional can with 5 liters petrol at Kalachakra Stupa. Turning left from the Leh gate, I moved onto the Keylong-Leh

road. Missing even just one turn here could make life quite difficult, as failing that turn would take you on the route straight to Srinagar in 6-7 hours, and all that without you even realizing that you are on the wrong way! Shey is the capital of Old Leh. Part of the Shey Palace and a number of beautiful monasteries will be visible on this road.

I reached Karu in around 40 minutes, and stopped at a junction of three roads. Here breakfast lured me, and I enjoyed steaming alu paratha at Druk restaurant. On asking the restaurant guy where I could join a group of riders for Pangong, he said it was

unlikely as it was nearly the end of tourist season. My luck! I waited for about 30 minutes there with dwindling hope. So I took a left again, off on my solitary way. Riding on I first reached Sakti and later Tathok, where I finally met a couple of cyclists training at those steep roads! They had a car carrying their spare bikes and supplies. But, even then I didn't realize I was off the usual route to my destination. The mountain passes with their oblique turns had started by now. If you look at this road on Google maps, you might think that a kid's doodle as a road would be less scary.

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