

FROM PAGE 19

They said it was the way to Nubra valley and not Pangong Tso. So I should go back and take the road for Chang La! I turned around and went back to Wari La only to meet a taxi driver who told me the road through Chang La would be too long to reach that day and I should go through Agham and take a right from there to reach Pangong. I turned back again and past those misleading group of workers and reached Agham after crossing Tangyar. Taking a left from there would take one to Nubra valley and continuing straight is the road to Pangong. There is an army camp at Agham but it was deserted at that time.

Shyok is a lovely place. It is surrounded by mountains. The roads were under construction and quite easy considered to those at Wari La. Pieces of rocks were hitting me and my bike here and there. The place had no settlement around so who was throwing them? It was the doing of the stormy winds that were still blowing high up in the mountains and causing the stones to fly off from the top and onto me. At this point I realized my bike's side stand was kissing the road. The jerks at Wari La had caused the bolt to loosen, which could mean any left turns could have been disastrous! So tying up that piece to the chassis was my option, and realized that it had begun to drizzle! As I reached the Shyok river, the drizzle turned into full-fledged rain, but lucky for me that Shyok had an army camp. I parked where three other bikes stood and ran into the nearest tent. Here I met the 5 riders who had arrived on those bikes-- Ashutosh, Anik, Rishi, Nannu, and Lucky. The first four were all Chabra cousins, and Lucky was also one, but on the maternal side. But in fact they were all brothers from different mothers, and all en route to Pangong from the Nubra valley! I had finally met the companions I needed. After some tea there we took off once the rain subsided. The road and the Shyok river ran side by side for most of the

time as we darted through Shyok towards Durbuk. The rain had us stop at another place on the road before we finally reached Durbuk at 4PM. Lunch called, even though late, and it was alu paratha and omelet for me again. It's a lovely area with quite a few people. We started again quickly, as darkness was approaching fast. We passed Tangtse and at Lukung, where we had the first look at Pangong Lake, about 4km from Pangong Tso. It looked like a small blue triangle nestled between two towering mountains. We reached Pangong when it was almost dark. The area is extremely windy and dry, and the I suggest taking measures to protect skin, especially petroleum jelly is a must to protect one's lips. We used the hot exhaust pipes of our bikes to dry our wet clothes as leaving them out to dry might lead them to end up in China, carried by the winds! The six of us took to stuffing ourselves in two thick blankets simply to ward of the chill and stop shivering. I passed out in the middle of our chit-chat, exhausted from the 12 hour ride of over 250kms.

Around midnight I woke up to find myself all alone in the hut, and stepped outside to the dazzling display of a pristine full moon and its magnificent reflection in the lake. The sky was clear, with the cosmos staring back at me, winking with the twinkling stars. I soon returned to bed again to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow a ride through Chang La- the second highest motorable road of the world, awaited.

Chang La is also notorious for avalanches, abrupt snowstorms, and landslides. We started early, first Spangmik- a picture perfect village in the midst of all the high mountains. We could see herds of pashmina goats in the distance. Here we got off for some photos at the '3 Idiots' point. After imbibing the beauty of the place for an hour, we started on our way back. We had a brunch at Durbuk, and so far the weather had been very mellow. We continued at a good pace with intention of making it to

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Leh before nightfall. I was the first to reach the army camp at the peak of Chang La Pass, welcomed by the signboard proclaiming the start of the avalanche zone! Border Road Organization (BRO) has marked this place to be at 17,688 feet above sea level. Snow was all around. But I was scared to touch it because of my already partly dysfunctional fingers due to the messy storm experience the previous day. But that did not stop me from taking some time to bask in the beauty of that place. All around me were tall snow-capped mountains, shimmering white and majestic. By this time my fellow riders arrived and they also took some time to enjoy the magnificence of the place. After dealing with a leaking fuel tank and such, we started off again, away from the beautiful Chang La peak. The rest of the road was almost always downhill. I travelled most of the way with the engine switched off and letting gravity work its magic. We had fun waving at any biker groups we passed. Next we stopped for a bit at Sakti, and by now the sun was already behind the mountains and daylight was fading quickly. I darted through Sakti and by the time I reach Karu it was dark and the road wasn't really visible to continue safely. The rider group from Delhi were far behind as I couldn't see any light. So, I waited in front of the Druk restaurant and took off behind a truck, following in its trail for better illumination and visibility. It was near Shey

when my engine coughed to a stop, and I realized it was time for a refill! The reserve tank proved its worth here, and I reached the Leh gate without any more incidents. Past the well-lit Leh Main Market, I grabbed about three glasses of apricot juice from Apple Tree Restaurant & German Bakery. Few other drinks are as refreshing as apricot juice! Then straight through Zangsti road and the Changspa road, I passed the English Bakery and into the Greater Ladakh Tours and Travel's bike room. Mr. Punchok was kind of worried as it was already dark outside, but delight showed on his face to see me. He bought back my unused fuel can, and also asked for a review on Trip Advisor! He truly was very helpful in getting the necessary papers for the ride, and the Bullet's rent was just 1500 rupees per day. I highly recommend wearing proper safety gear like knee pads, elbow guards, very thick gloves (my fingers were not functioning properly for 2 weeks!), and a woolen mask.

Later that night, after a scrumptious dinner at the Tibetan Kitchen, I had one of the best night's sleep in ages.

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