

WHERE was the Silk Road?



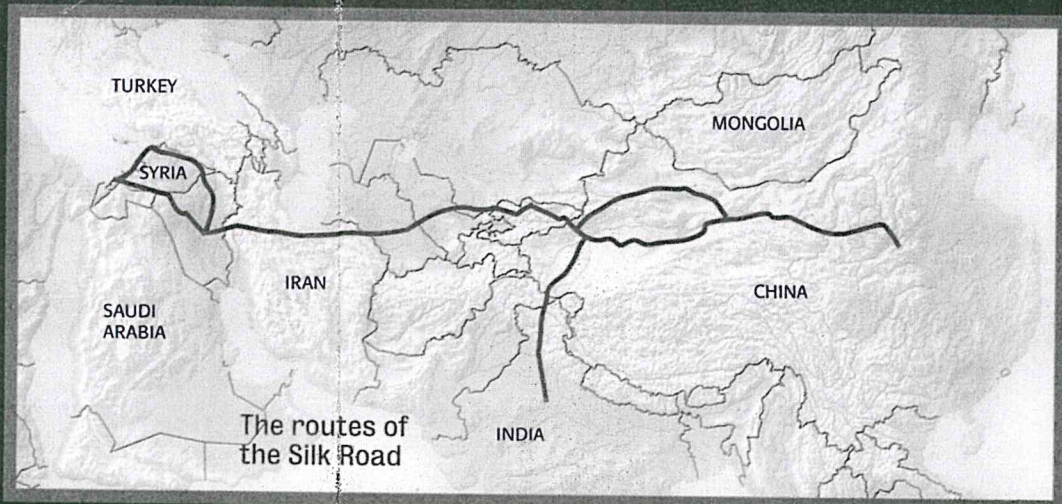
The Silk Road was a communications highway long before computers ever existed. It wasn't just one road but a number of trade routes that stretched across Asia from the Mediterranean Sea to Chang'an (now Xian) in eastern China, with branches to India. Camel caravans going east carried wool, gold, glass, and other goods from Europe and Africa. In China and India, the merchants traded their goods for silks, jade, spices, and other things to sell at home. Along the

way, cities became centers where people also traded ideas, customs, beliefs, music, and artistic styles.

Across central Asia, the Silk Road wound thousands of miles over harsh deserts and high mountains. Between cities, travelers stopped at oases to rest. After the tenth century, they could stay at caravansaries (care-uh-van-suh-reez). These large stone buildings served as inns, where people and their animals could rest and be safe from bandits.



A picture of a caravan on the Silk Road appears in an atlas dated 1385.



On the Road

Marco Polo was only 17 years old when he set off from Venice, Italy, in 1271 with his father and uncle. They traveled on the Silk Road to China, where the emperor Kublai Khan welcomed them. A few years after returning home in 1295, Polo wrote *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Almost 200 years later, the book inspired Christopher Columbus to look for a western sea route to Asia.



Long Time Gone

In 1325, when Ibn Battuta was 21 years old, he left home—and didn't return for almost 30 years. He traveled from Morocco all the way to China. Among the places he visited were Spain, North and East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, western Russia, and Indonesia. When he finally got back home, Battuta had traveled nearly 75,000 miles.