



# Tracing the Silk Route on 2 Wheels

## *Travelogue of my Motorcycle Expedition to the Eastern Himalayas*

Being an avid motorcycle tourer, I decided to set my tyre trails on The Silk Route. The Silk Route, regarded as the world's first information superhighway was used for the trade of Chinese Silk as early as 200 B.C. Today a significant portion of this route lies in East Sikkim. This is by far the longest (1900 kms) and toughest motorcycle trip I have done till date.

### **Riding schedule:**

- 1.2.16- Kolkata-Siliguri
- 2.2.16-Siliguri to Gangtok
- 3.2.16 to 4.2.16 - Local Sightseeing
- 5.2.16-Silk Route Circuit
- 6.2.16-Gangtok to Siliguri
- 7.2.16-Siliguri-Kolkata

I rode on my KTM Duke 200, a very capable motorcycle to munch on the endless highways and take on the harsh himalayan terrains with ease. After reaching Gangtok, I spent 2 days for local sightseeing and getting the Inner Line Permits done. In Gangtok, I visited the Rumtek Monastery, Banjhakri Waterfalls, Ganesh Tok, Hanuman Tok, Tashi View Point, rode the Gangtok Ropeway and did paragliding at Ranka. By 4th evening I had my permits for going to Silk Route, which is now maintained by the BRO and controlled by our very own Indian Army.

On the 5th, I started slightly late at 8 AM but I was determined to cover the entire silk route, no matter what. On the way I encountered slush and black ice. At the beginning of the day, the climate was completely in my favour. The sun was shining bright and melting the ice all along the roadsides. The view through the shield of my helmet was

mesmerizing, mountain peaks covered in snow and pine trees poking out of them.

I reached Tsomgo Lake (12,300 ft) at around 10:00 AM. The lake was completely frozen and appeared like an ice skating rink. From Tsomgo, I headed to New Baba Mandir as Nathula Pass was closed for some security reasons. Baba Mandir is a shrine built by the army in the memory of Major Baba Harbhajan Singh, who is revered as the hero of Nathula. From here, I set rolling again towards Kupup Valley. The climb became very steep from here. I could feel the bike nauseate at times. But the electronic fuel injection and the oxygen sensors did a very good job and never allowed the engine to stall during the climb. I rode up to an altitude of 13,900 ft and reached Gnathang Valley. From here, I got a clear view of Mt. Kangchenjunga. The feeling was top of the world.



13,900 ft conquered

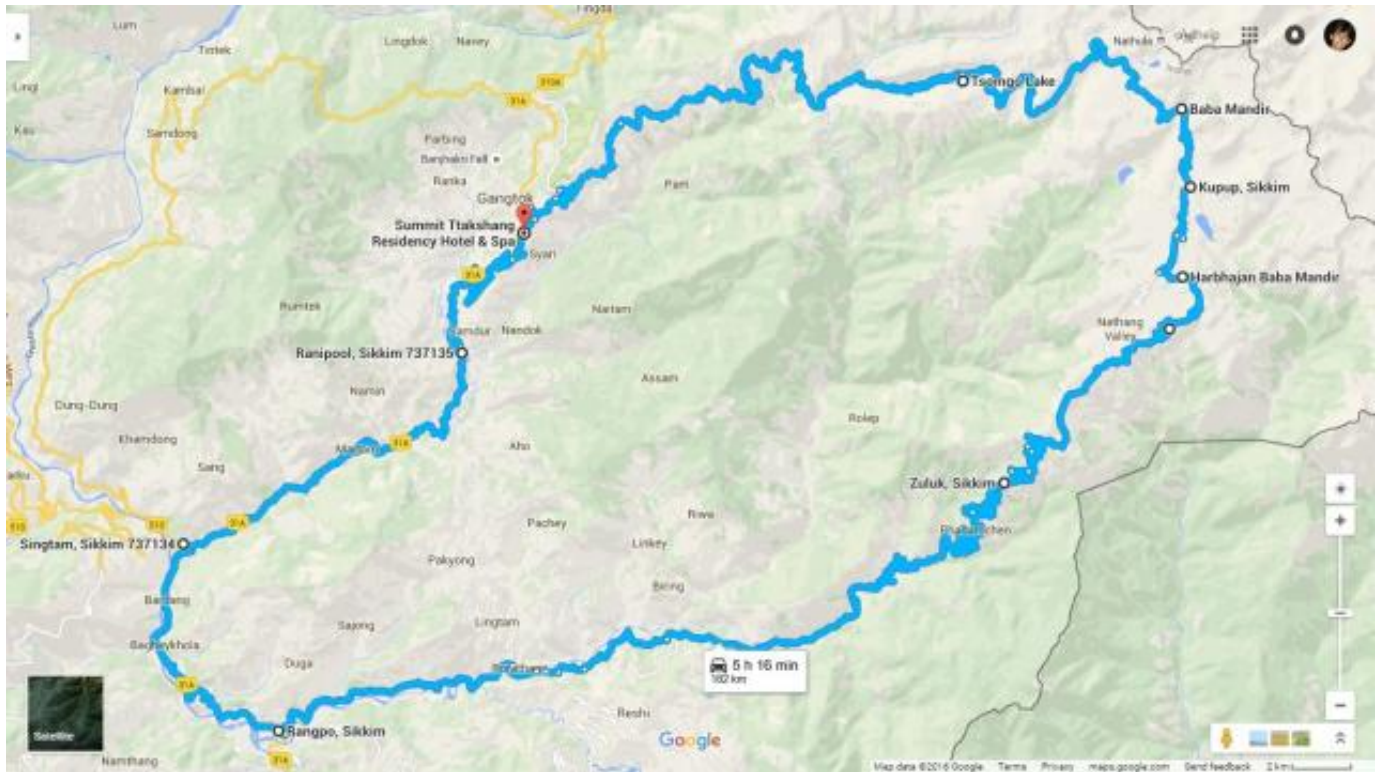
After Kupup, black ice paved its way into large chunks of ice on the road. The only way out was to ride slow and through the tyre trails made by the Army trucks and jeeps. Slightest of distraction could have been fatal. The entire hill was draped in white. The only thing that could be seen was the trail of the road like a winding serpent. The old silk route is famous amongst motorcyclists for the 32 hairpin turns that it gives. The entire sight of all the hairpin turns is visible from a place called Thambi View Point (11,200 ft). I was not that

fortunate to get this view since the weather had deteriorated and had become too foggy. I reached Zuluk at 2.00 PM and took a break at a home stay for lunch. I finished the lunch within 30 minutes and set to ride again. The weather had deteriorated much more. Fog was so thick that visibility had reduced to as low as 10 metres and cold winds started. This patch was the most difficult for me as my helmet visor was frosting every now and then. I had to ride with the visor open in spite of such adverse climatic conditions. The fog started disappearing once I crossed the Phadamchen (8000 ft). Then I reached Rongli check post by 3:30 PM. I made it to Gangtok by 5:45 PM. I had completed the Old Silk Route Circuit starting from Gangtok in nine and half hours.



Old Silk Route





## The Old Silk Route Circuit

As they say, all good things must come to an end. So did my Himalayan Expedition. It was time to bid good bye to this beautiful place only to be more determined to come back again to explore these young fold mountain ranges higher than before.

I believe ambitions and dreams must get bigger by the day. My next plan is to do a tri-nation ride through India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Read my complete travelogue here at: [Xbhp Blog Entry](#)

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