



GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 7

The Ancient Silk Road

In ancient times, many merchants traveled a trade route that linked China to the west. This trade route was called the Silk Road. Though most of the route was actually a rough caravan track through mountains and deserts, it was used for hundreds of years. The route began in China and covered some 4,000 miles (6,436 kilometers) to Damascus and on to Antioch. From there, merchants from the East traded with those of the Roman Empire and others from the West.

Traveling the Silk Road

Most merchants did not travel the entire route of the Silk Road. Instead, they traveled part of the distance and sold or bartered their goods to other merchants who continued onward. This was due in large part to the difficulty of the terrain. There were rugged mountains along much of the journey, including the Tian Shan and the Kunlun Shan. Hundreds of miles of lifeless desert, such as the Taklimakan, made the central region of the journey very dangerous. Merchants also had to cross rivers, valleys, and plains, and deal with bandits. The many cultures and languages along the route also created barriers. All of these features made for a difficult trip, and many travelers lost their lives along the way.

There were also many countries along the Silk Road that wanted to control trade within their borders. Persia, for example, would not let Western or Eastern merchants pass through its lands. This forced merchants to exchange goods in Persia and allowed Persia to tax their trade goods.

Exchanging Goods and Ideas

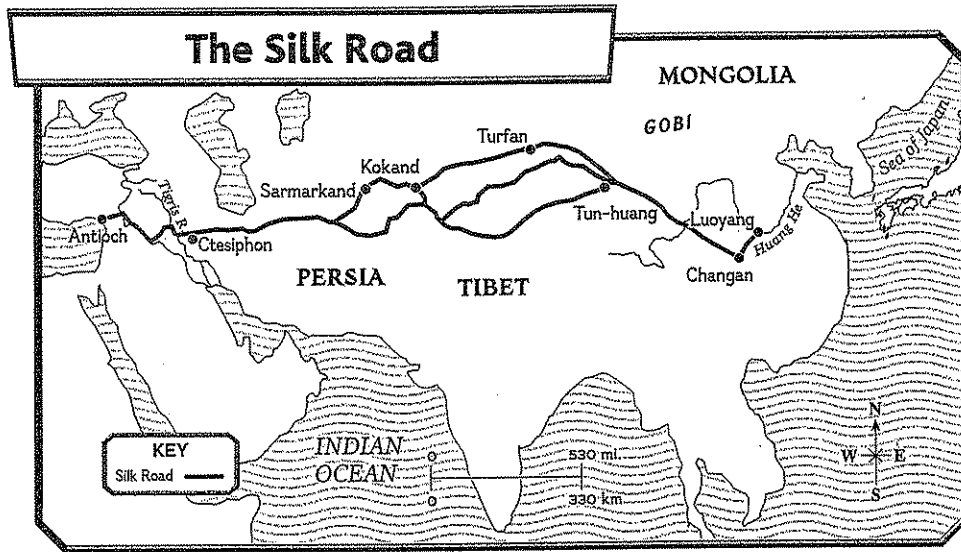
Despite the challenges of a journey along the Silk Road, such a trip could earn a merchant great wealth. The longer the distance goods traveled, and the more merchants' hands they passed through, the more expensive the goods became. Merchants could sell the products at increasingly higher prices.

Silk was not the only good that was traded along the Silk Road, though it was perhaps the most famous. Many flowers, such as roses and azaleas, and fruits such as oranges, peaches, and pears, traveled to the West. In return, China received items such as green and white jade, colored glass, Central Asian horses, grapes, figs, and chives.

Technology and ideas were also exchanged along the Silk Road. Advances in metalworking and animal breeding traveled both ways along the road, as did new forms of language and writing. The various cultures along the route also learned of other religions and philosophies, including Christianity, Judaism, Confucianism, Taoism, and eventually Islam.

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 7 (continued)

The Ancient Silk Road



Directions: Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. What goods flowed into China along the Silk Road? _____

2. Why was the journey along the Silk Road difficult? What geographic features added to the difficulty?

3. Why were merchants able to make a profit on the Silk Road?

4. Which city is the easternmost city on the Silk Road? Which city is the westernmost?

5. **Analyzing** Do you think that trade between countries today still leads to the exchange of technology and ideas? Explain your answer.

CHAPTER 7