

The Silk Road

The Silk Road was not a single road, and it was not made of silk. It was a series of trade routes across Asia that stretched over four thousand miles, connecting the Western civilizations, such as the Greeks and Persians, with the Eastern civilizations of the Chinese. Trade began during the second century, or perhaps even earlier, and continued for hundreds of years until transportation by ship became a safer **option** around the 1400s.

Many goods were transported over the Silk Road. It was silk that originally **fueled** the development of this trade, however. The Romans were very interested in this beautiful, soft fabric, which was very different from the wools and linens they were used to. Eventually, silk only accounted for a small portion of the goods traded. Merchants took coral, glass, gems, gold, ivory, precious metals, and textiles eastward to China. They also brought rare plants and animals such as falcons, gazelles, hunting dogs, leopards, lions, ostriches, parrots, and peacocks. Traveling westward were traders with bronze, ceramics, cinnamon and other spices, furs, iron, jade, lacquer, tea, and even **rhubarb**.



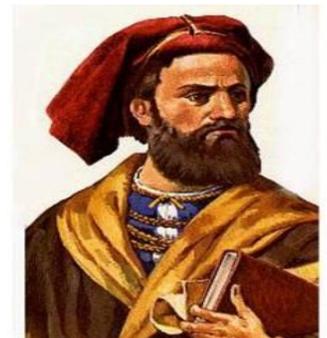
Traveling this route was very dangerous for the caravans. Parts of the Great Wall of China were built to help protect the travelers on what would later become the Silk Road. Harsh weather conditions are found along much of the Silk Road, from scorching deserts to freezing mountain passes. Travelers also had to worry about having enough water in this **arid** part of the world. Blinding sandstorms could strand caravans for days. Crossing high mountains could lead to altitude sickness. Probably the greatest danger faced by those traveling the Silk Road was bandits. The wealth of merchandise being carried across **uninhabited** lands was very tempting to those who chose to rob these traveling merchants. A single camel could carry up to five hundred pounds of trade goods. To avoid thieves, **caravans** banded together and hired armed guards. As many as one thousand camels might be grouped together for the journey. Chances were good, however, that not all the members of the caravan would survive the trip. For this reason, many who traded on the Silk Road began using boats and waterways to carry goods. These routes were also known as the Silk Road.



Very few traders traveled the whole **route** as it took over a year to go just one way. In fact, there are no records of Chinese businessmen making it to Europe. Usually, merchants ventured only part of the way and then sold their goods to other traders. A single item might pass through the hands of many different traders before reaching its final destination. Many goods never made it to the end of the route, ending up somewhere in the middle of Asia instead.

Trade goods were not the only things that passed along the Silk Road. Religion, especially Buddhism, was spread along this **corridor** as well. Technology was also shared. The Silk Road brought glass-making to China and paper-making to the West. Unfortunately, disease was also transmitted along the Silk Road. The bubonic plague that would eventually devastate Europe originally moved westward along the Silk Road.

Probably the most famous traveler on the Silk Road was Italian explorer Marco Polo. He was only seventeen years old in 1271 when he made the **trek** all the way east to present-day Beijing, China. He returned to Italy in 1295 with many interesting tales to tell about his travels.



There is no doubt that the history of the Silk Road is tied to the history of much of the world's cultures. The exchange of ideas and goods along this trade corridor had effects that have lasted to the present day. Our civilization owes much to those brave adventurers who sought to become **wealthy** through trade along the Silk Road.

A. Match the synonym to a word from the reading.

Synonym	Word from Reading
1. Path	
2. Vacant	
3. Passage	
4. Rich	
5. Alternative	
6. Journey	
7. Encouraged	
8. Dry	
9. A type of plant	
10. Groups	

B. Answer the following questions from the reading.

1. Describe the importance of the Silk Road.

2. Why was silk so interesting to the Romans?

3. List five (5) dangers that traders faced when taking a journey on the Silk Road.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

4. How long would it take to travel the Silk Road?

5. Why did many goods never make it to the end of the route?

C. Complete the following analogies

6. Silk was to Ancient China as _____ was to Rome.

7. Paper-making was to the West as _____ - _____ was to China.

8. _____ are to land as pirates are to _____.

D. Complete the following organizer by listing each missing cause and effect.

CAUSE	EFFECT
The Romans liked Silk	
	Cities sprang up along the route in places where there were good supplies of water.
	Only goods that could make a large profit were traded.
Bandits liked to rob the merchants.	
	Europeans learned more about Chinese culture.
	Merchants only took their goods part of the way along the route.
Sailing became a safer and easier method of transporting goods.	
Diseases were often transmitted along the Silk Road.	