The Heart of the World: A Journey to the Last Secret Place

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Main content

THE HEART OF THE WORLD: A Journey to the Last Secret Place. By Ian Baker. Penguin. 511 pp. $27.95

When I was in Tibet in 1993, there were rumors of all expedition to the Tsangpo Gorge in the southeastern part of the country—the deepest gorge on earth, and a place that had been closed to Westerners since the 19th century. It seemed unlikely that the expedition would succeed, given the restrictions on travel and the minor dangers of the area. How thrilling, then, to read, in Ian Baker’s The Heart of the World, a vividly rendered account of that expedition aim the several that followed.

Baker, a longtime resident of Kathmandu and a student of Tibetan Buddhism, first became interested in the Tsangpo Gorge through inquiries into beyul, sacred...

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Much like the secret key behind the Hidden Falls of Pemako I guess, I'll continue my endless journey for the perfect, beautiful spiritual travelogue! So far, The Snow Leopard is still my favorite treasure. ...more. flag 7 likes · Like · see review. Dec 07, 2010 Scott rated it liked it. Shelves: nature, rivers, walks, 2000s, tibet, hills. The beyul that he seeks in this book is called pemako and is reported to be the heart of the world. The adventure in the story comes as Baker is thwarted in his first attempt by massive tiger leeches, running out of food, rebellious porters, mudslides and Himalayan winter weather and must overcome arduous obstacles to realize his goal in his second attempt 1 year later. A British officer described it as “one of the earth’s last secret places”. Even satellite photographs are unable to show details of the area, which is perpetually covered in mist and shadowed by immense mountains. Adding to the mystery is Pemako’s legal status – much of it lies in disputed territory between China and India. The Chinese labeled it a special military region in
the early 1980s, when the rest of Tibet was opened to tourism. Baker is no doubt someone who wants to find out. He combines spiritual and exploratory journeys, attempting to bridge the inner and outer worlds and locate the connection between them. One of the only frustrating things about The Heart of the World is that Baker flits around the edges of revealing exactly what he experienced internally in Pemako. The heart of the Tsangpo Gorge remained a blank spot on the map of world exploration until world-class climber and Buddhist scholar Ian Baker delved into the legends. Whatever cryptic Tibetan scrolls or past explorers had said about the Tsangpo's innermost gorge, Baker determined, could be verified only by exploring the uncharted five-mile gap. The myth of Shangri-la originates in Tibetan Buddhist beliefs in beyul, or hidden lands, sacred sanctuaries that reveal themselves to devout pilgrims and in times of crisis. The more remote and inaccessible the beyul, the vaster its reputed qualities. Ancient Tibetan prophecies declare that the greatest of all hidden lands lies at the heart of the forbidding Tsangpo Gorge, deep in the Himalayas and veiled by a colossal waterfall. much was speculated; one of the last remaining secret places of the earth, which might conceal a fall rivaling the Niagara or Victoria Falls in grandeur.

Lieutenant-colonel F. M. Bailey, 19131. The hagiographic myth of a spiritual journey through material difficulties to the attainment of divine grace would become a paradigm of travel to haunt posterity . . . by promising the ideal as the ultimate goal . . . it served as that purely mythic and always unachievable paradigm located in our historical memory, by contrast with which all human traveling—whatever its achievements and successes—can never transcend. The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple by Ian A. Baker Paperback $42.12. In stock. Ships from and sold by tabletopart. He has written several books on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism, including The Tibetan Art of Healing, Celestial Gallery, and The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple: Tantric Wall Paintings from Tibet. He is also the coauthor of Tibet: Reflections from the Wheel of Life and has contributed articles to Explorers Journal and National Geographic magazine. Product details. Item Weight: 2.13 pounds.