

# FLAX ROAD SILK ROAD OVERLAND July-Aug.2012



Emile Claus, flax weeding in Flanders (1887)

*The road to success is hard, harder than climbing to the clouds.  
In Flanders, diligent farmers labored the flax.  
Nothing linked them to the Silk Road. The East was far away,  
their sages inscrutable.  
But when the earth trembled, the economy tumbled and many  
lost their work,  
the flax crofters became captains of industry.  
Their fields turned into extensive industrial areas.  
Today they cross the mountains.  
Cliff roads and sky ladders join the Golden Leie to the Yellow River.*

(free after Li Bai (李白), 'The road to Shu is hard', Tang Dynasty)

## The Flax Road overland to remap our knowledge (亚麻之路)

Invigorated by their giant economic leap, emerging countries and new global champions of the Caucasus and Asia are now ready to replay a major role geopolitically and geo-economically. **Vlas route – Silk Road Overland** is an initiative of a group of Flemish (senior) entrepreneurs who will drive from Flanders to Shanghai to put these former great Asian and Eurasian civilizations along the Silk Road on their knowledge map. The drivers engage in a *once in a lifetime* experience and reconnect with the symbolism of the Silk Road along which not only goods were transported; also ideas, techniques and beliefs were exchanged between East and West.

The Vlas Route overland consists of four expeditions. The first two legs are scheduled for July and August 2012 respectively from Flanders (Belgium) to Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), and from Bishkek to Suzhou (Shanghai). In the summer of 2013 two new expeditions are planned. We aim for 20 participants in 6 to 8 off-road vehicles and assistance truck. The Flax Road is neither a rally nor a race; it is about the magic of places and the chemistry of the encounter, with a promising view on new openings.



# The expeditions

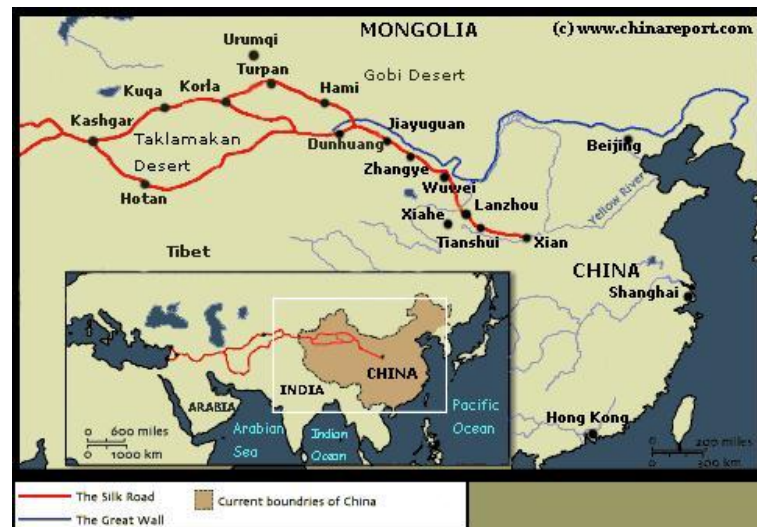
## 1: Flanders to Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan (July 2012)

We cross the Balkans and head for the Caucasus. We leave Europe in Constantinople (Istanbul) and travel East in **Turkey**, a secular Islam country. The journey continues to **Georgia**, a Christian orthodox country. Crossing borders is not always fun in **Azerbaijan** whose culture is imprinted by Turkey, with influences of Persia and Hinduism. We cross the Caspian Sea by ferry to **Turkmenistan**, from 1924 to 1991 a Soviet Republic too. Nearly 80 % of the country is taken up by the Kara-Kum (Black Sand) Desert. But the historic city of Merv still bears the traces of the Mongol invasion. In **Uzbekistan** we visit the iconic cities Bukhara and Samarkand after a confrontation with the Kyzylkum Desert between the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya rivers. **Kyrgyzstan** is a rugged with spectacular mountain ranges. In capital Bishkek, a largely soviet-built city those on Expedition 1 only leave us.



## 2: Bishkek to Shanghai (August 2012)

**Kyrgyzstan** (the "Throne of Solomon") offers spectacular scenery and unspoilt wilderness populated only by nomadic shepherds. The border with **China** is crossed via the Torugat Pass. We make our descent to Kashgar and travel along the inhospitable Taklamakan Desert. This is the centre of China's oil and gas industries. Silk Road travelers traditionally visit the minorities of the Hexi Corridor and traverse the province of **Gansu** of the military horses. **Xi'an** (terracotta army), **Chengdu**, **Chongqing** are historical cities where Belgian entrepreneurs are at home. Geographers of the Chinese Academy of Sciences detail the itinerary.



## Our objectives

- LEARN - Broadening our knowledge atlas by a spicy confrontation with the history, culture and geography of major civilizations and new emerging countries along the Silk Road. Exploring the geopolitical and geo-economic dimensions of water and energy issues that matter to China, Russia and Europe.
- DO - Establishing a convivial dialogue with academics, politicians, artists, scientists, business leaders, ... who live their truth –which is the product of a totally different culture and historical context. Explore opportunities for Flemish companies. Build relationships. The confrontation with poverty and harsh living conditions will not be avoided.
- SHARE – Developing intercultural competences to better grasp socio-cultural realities and behaviours (historically developed way of being and becoming): learn to observe, to interpret, to imagine and to check, and to adjust opinions when appropriate. This should lead to scenario-based thinking about a better and a more humane world for all.

## Criteria

1. More than driving together: becoming friends as a learning team. Each participant brings in own knowledge and strengths, and gets much more in return.
2. Be curious about other cultures. Explore ideas, places and opinions. Develop tolerance for other beliefs, customs.
3. *'Wherever you go, there you are'*. You open a door, you get a smile. You help, you are appreciated.
4. Each individual is different and unique. Share your cause, your ideals. Let that part of you shine and grow.
5. The unexpected, the unforeseen, and the unprecedented make the trip – even more how you react when it happens.
6. Go for it. Take a calculated risk. If you don't do it now, you maybe never go there. If everyone else is doing it, you're already late to the party.


## The caravan sets out

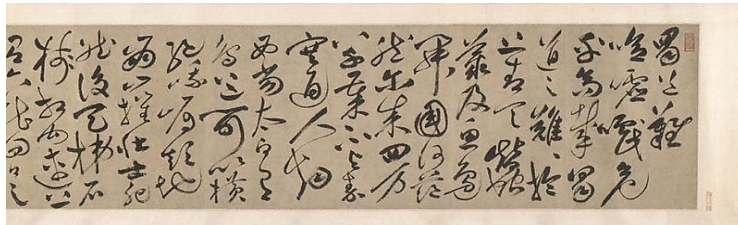
Flemish SME's propelled into the world: it happens. In 2012 VYNCKE Energietechniek celebrates its 100 years: in four generations from flax worker to global solutions partner for renewable energy. One dream and one large family of 250 enthusiastic Vynckeniers. Dirk Vyncke and Bob Elsen who celebrates 30 years of Joker Tourism, join forces. Convinced entrepreneurs, friends and sponsors jump on the cart. The caravan sets out.

## Organization

LOGISTICS: JOKER NV ([www.joker.be](http://www.joker.be)) & ' TOUR DE FORCE ' (Duncan Milligan, [www.tourdeforceuk.com](http://www.tourdeforceuk.com))  
CONCEPT: Living Stone Centre for Intercultural Entrepreneurship, [www.lscope.com](http://www.lscope.com).  
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REGISTRATION: 15 February publication (incl. cost breakdown), 1 March 2012: closing.

## Partners

 <b>VYNCKE</b> VYNCKE ENERGIETECHNIEK	 法蘭德斯 中國商會 FLANDERS-CHINA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE VLAAMS-CHINESE KAMER VAN KOOPHANDEL	 <b>Vlaams          netwerk van          ondernemingen</b>
		
	 <b>somati</b> protecting today's future	 <b>het Ondernemersplatform</b>
		



### *The Road to Shu is Hard*

Tang dynasty poem written by Li Bai (李白)

*Ah! It's fearsome--oh! It's high!  
 The Road to Shu is hard, harder than  
 climbing to the sky.  
 The Kings Can Cong and Yu Fu  
 Founded long ago the land of Shu  
 Then for forty-eight thousand years  
 nothing linked it to Qin frontiers.  
 White Star Peak blocked the western way.  
 A bird tried to cut across Mount Emei--  
 And only when the earth shook, hills collapsed,  
 and brave men died  
 did cliff roads and sky-ladders join it to the outside*

噫吁戲危乎高哉  
 蜀道之難難於上青天  
 蠶叢乃魚鳧  
 爾來四萬八千歲  
 不興秦塞通人煙  
 西當太白有鳥道  
 可以橫絕峨眉巔  
 地崩山摧壯士死  
 然後天梯石棧相鉤連

