

Monastery hopping around Aba (8/11/2007-8/12/2007)

It took me two days to reach Aba from the Lama's house, more because of bus connections than distance. Aba is situated in a wide valley and is home to numerous monasteries. You could spend weeks visiting every monastery in the area, I made it to three. There is a Bon (the pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion) monastery in the area that I wanted to visit but this is where being off the beaten track and not having sufficient information is a problem. I couldn't find it, and people I asked didn't know or didn't understand me, probably both.

Close to the center of town, Gerdeng is the largest monastery in the area, and on the afternoon of my arrival I strolled over to check it out. I encountered some very friendly monks in one of the courtyards and I ended up spending most of the afternoon hanging out with them taking pictures and drinking tea. At the end of the day I headed to the opposite end of town to check out a monastery devoted to the Red Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The following day I had an ambitious plan of hitching my way out to Gomar monastery about 20 km out of town and then hiking over to a couple of monasteries in a nearby valley. As I walked past Gerdeng monastery in the morning I got taken in by a monk who showed me his quarters and gave me a white silk scarf and took me on a walk out to the Sky burial site, no burial was going on. So I ended up spending the morning with him and didn't make it out to Gomar until the afternoon. Gomar was a beautiful monastery, although like most monasteries in Tibet had been recently rebuilt after being destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. I also had the fortune of catching the trumpeters on the roof calling the monks to the main hall for a session of chanting. I listened to the monks chant and then decided to call it a day and find a ride back to town. I was a little nervous about getting stuck out there, especially as the weather worsened, but I only had to wait about 15 minutes before a car gave me a lift back to town.



Main hall at Gerdeng Monastery, Aba.



Some of the monks I was hanging out with at Gerdeng Monastery, Aba.



Young monk Gerdeng Monastery, Aba.



Monks at Gerdeng Monastery, Aba.



Young monk, Gerdeng Monastery, Aba.



Young monks playing on a makeshift teeter-totter at Gerdeng Monastery, Aba.



Old monk entering the main hall at Gerdeng Monastery, Aba.



Skull decoration on the roof of a red hat sect monastery in Aba.



Main hall of a red hat sect monastery, Aba.



Landscape around Aba.



Prayer flags at sky burial ground, Aba.



Monk chanting at sky burial ground, Aba.



Me wearing the white scarf and a red sash given to me by the monk I was with at sky burial ground, Aba.



Horse scratching its ear in front of the Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



Abbot at Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



Monks playing trumpets to call the monks to the main hall, Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



Monks playing trumpets to call the monks to the main hall, Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



Trumpets used to call the monks to the main hall, Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



View from the stupa at Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



Monks exiting the main hall after chanting, Gomar Monastery, near Aba.



Prayer flags near Aba.