

TRAVEL LUST

DECEMBER

Vol.2 No.6

2024

A picture taken during the cruise from Flam to Gudvangen, Norway, when I travelled by road for 23 days through Scandinavia, covering more than 6500 kms. The tour was organized by Adventures Overland, New Delhi, India.

Articles on this epic adventure in future issues



*Wishing Our Readers A Merry Christmas
&
A Happy New Year 2025*

TRAVEL LUST

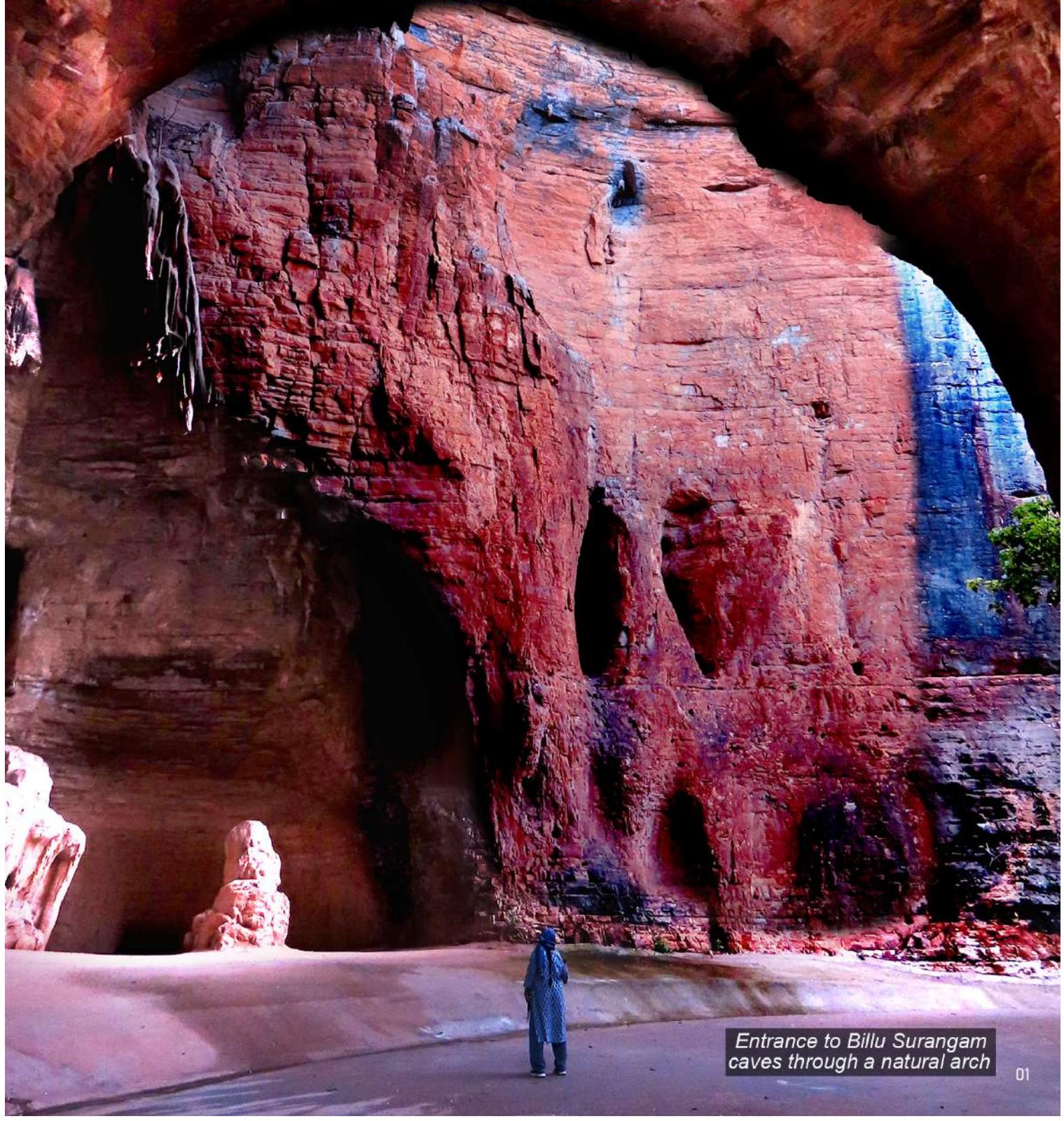
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AN EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY, BILLU SURANGAM CAVES

Text and photos by Abbas Tyabji



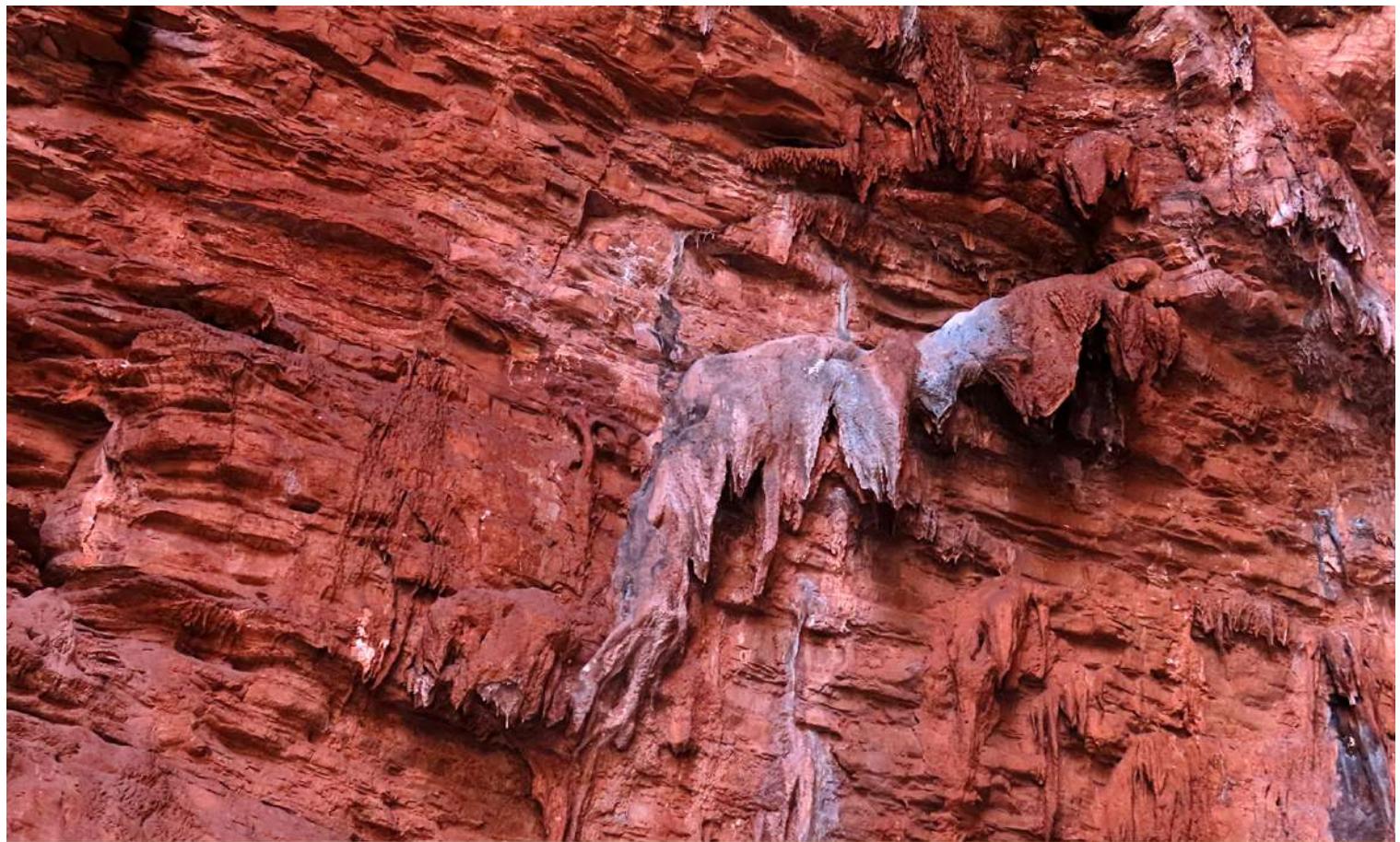
Entrance to Billu Surangam caves through a natural arch



A grand view of the caves

02

03



Peculiar rock formations. The photo at bottom left has a formation that resembles a moose head



I was researching for new places to visit during our tour to Orvakallu Rock Garden, 250Kms from Hyderabad and I chanced upon a place called Billu Surangam. I asked a Telugu speaking friend what this meant and he told me it translated to caves/tunnels. All the information on this was in Telugu, so I had to get a gist of the information, again from my friend.

So after hearing that these caves had many natural arches and tunnels darting off in various directions, I decided to add this to my itinerary. After a wonderful trip to Orvakallu Rock Garden, we drove to Betamcharla, famous for coloured limestone tiles which have been used in house construction for decades. Turning off from the Betamcharla town, we took a winding hilly, forested road towards Billu Surangam, finding that fortunately, the road had been paved almost all through.

We were astonished by the yawning cave entrance cut into the rocky hillside and arches cut into the winding path by erosion, that led us to some fantastic rock formations, one of them exactly resembling an elephant trunk. We were fascinated, awestruck by the amazing formations, tunnels and arches that faced us.

As we were winding our way through the maze of caves, arches and tunnels, we found a person scrutinizing the cave structures and seemed a little knowledgeable about them. So I introduced myself and he said his name was Mr Ramayya, who had done considerable research on these caves. So fortunate.

The Billa Surgam, or Billu Surangam caves are situated about 10kms from the town of Betamcherla and are named through a combination of the Telugu billam and the Sanskrit suranga, both meaning 'cave'.

The complex lies on the southern edge of a valley that is located on the eastern side of a low area of the Eastern Ghats. The caves are karst formations within bluish-grey fine-grained Narji limestone, part of the Cuddapah Basin, he told us



The vast and high cave formations are amazing



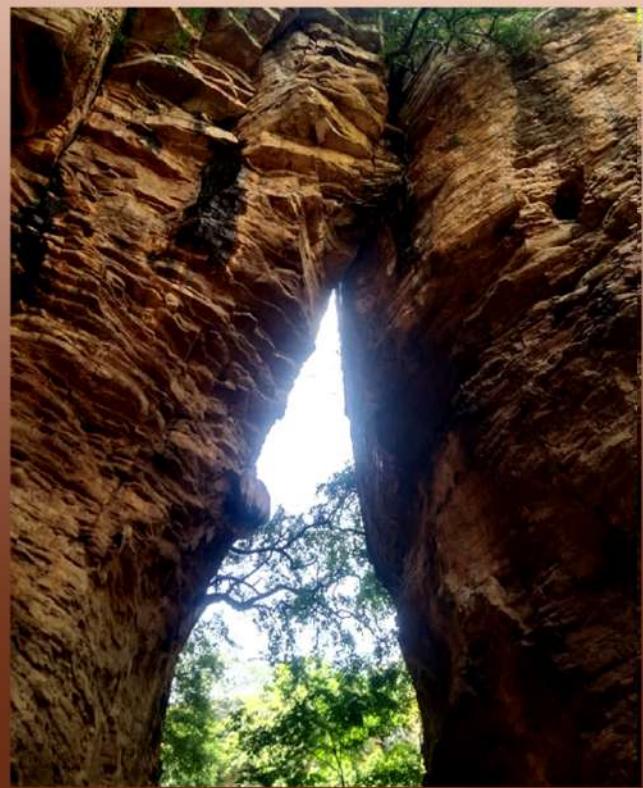
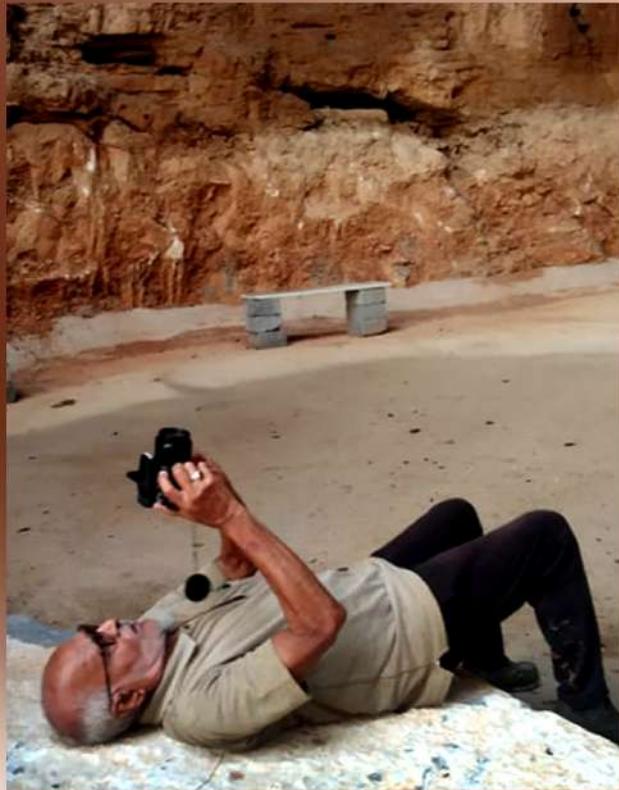
While walking through the caves, you can admire some really peculiar formations



A natural opening in the caves. Compare the size of the caves with a person standing under the opening



My picture taken while photographing the opening in the roof of the caves, a triangular shape in the caves and gigantic teeth formations



A huge elephant trunk and a skeleton like shape are among the strange formations that grace the caves



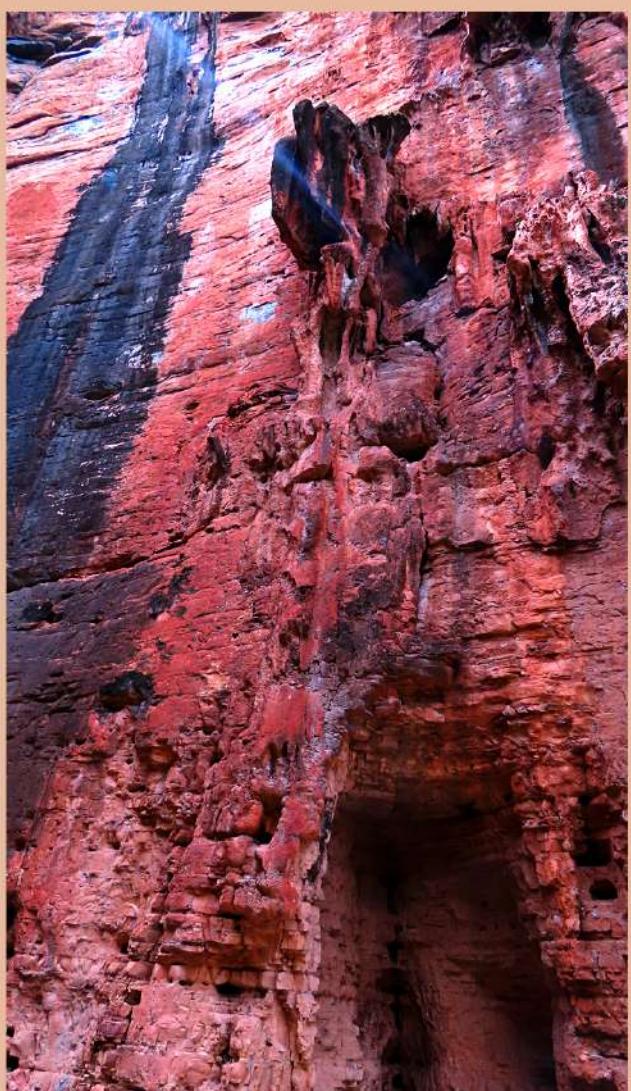
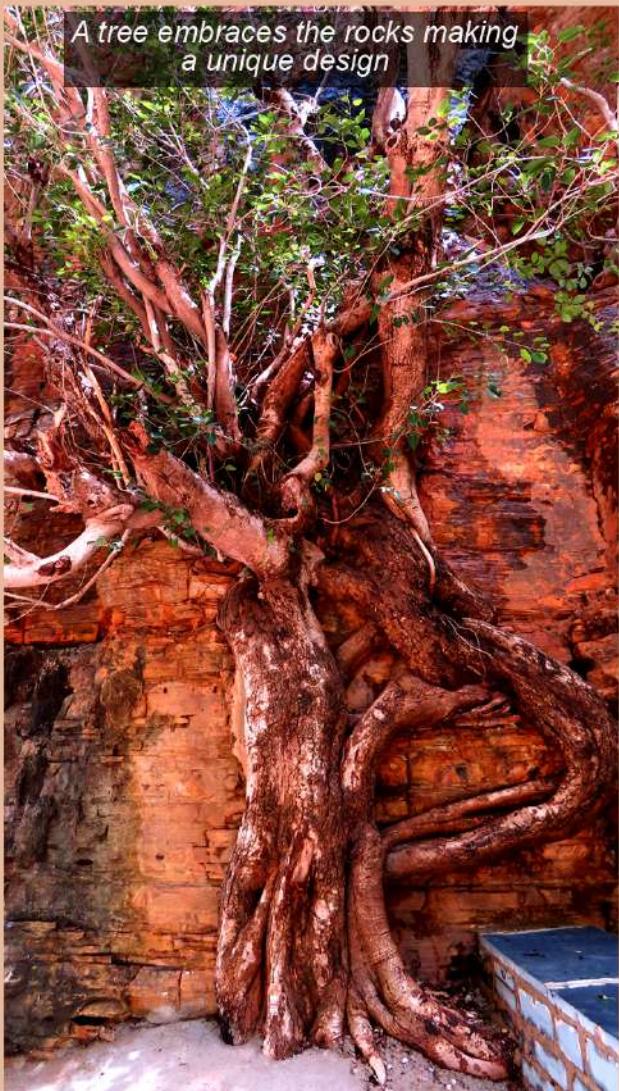
It is comprised of sedimentary and igneous rocks of the Cuddapah and Kurnool Super Groups. These include sandstones, shales, and quartzites, which are visible in exposures and on tracks leading to the caves, as well as on the surrounding land surfaces. He informed us that the caves were discovered by a Britisher, Robert Bruce Foote in the 19th century, after which a team from Karnataka, Oxford and Cambridge helped to place it in the Upper Paleolithic era. He also told us the names of the various parts of the cave system, the largest being the Cathedral cave. Incompletely explored passageways extend into the rock from the interior of several of these caves, with other chambers located along these passages. All the caves have large entrances relative to the size of the main chambers, he told us.

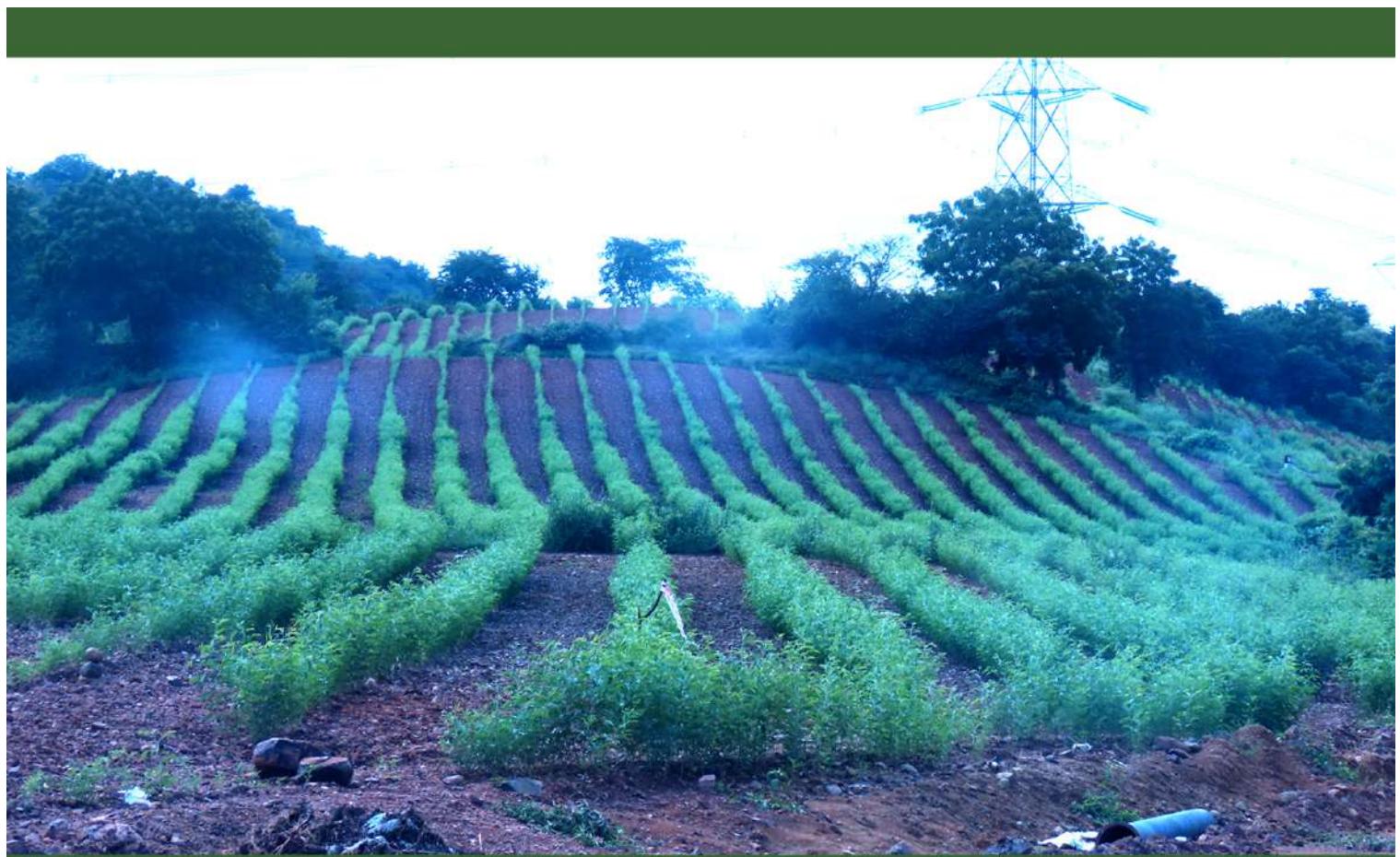


A colourful "mural" formation

One of the colourful arches one passes under

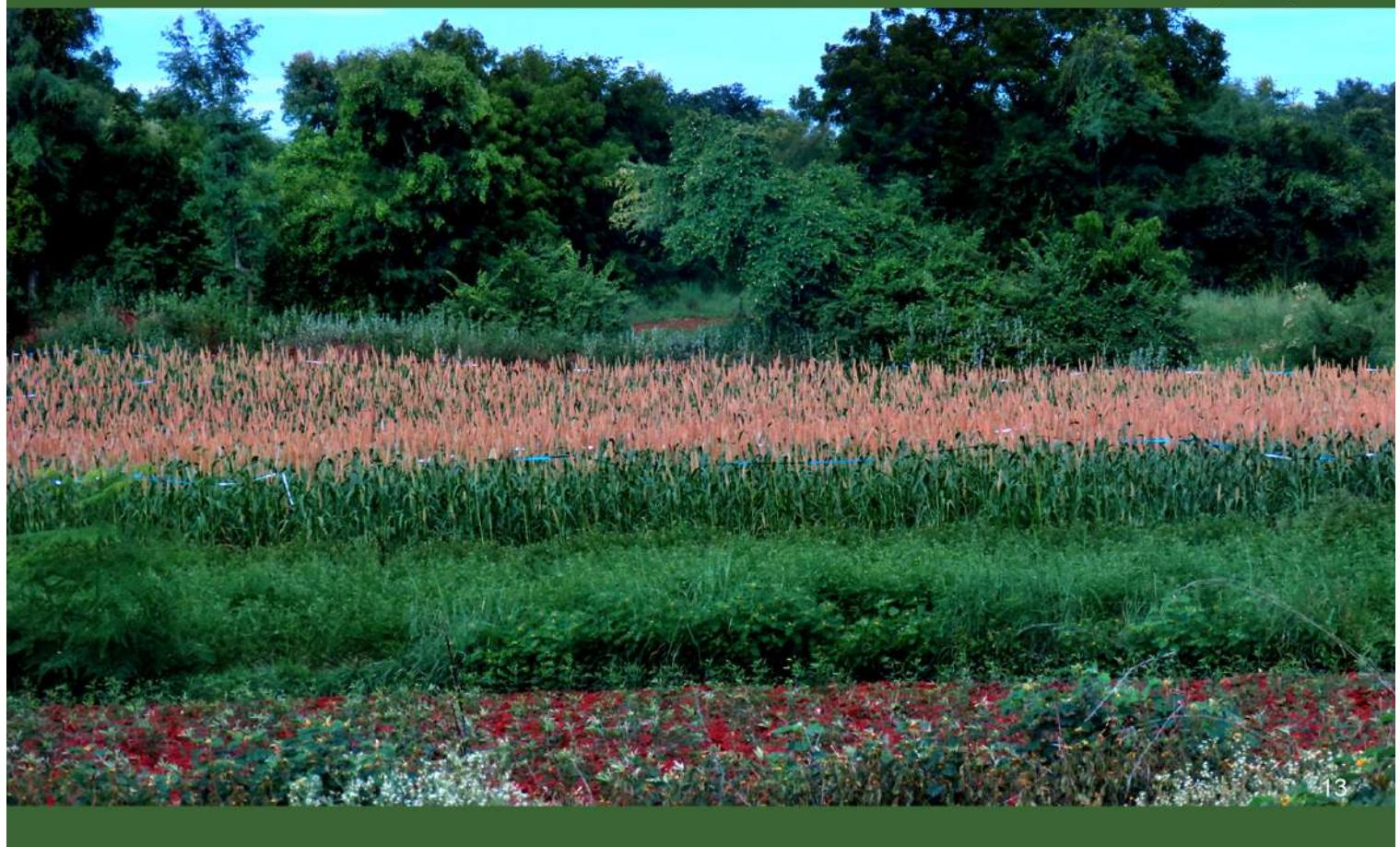






Fields climbing the hillside we passed enroute to the caves

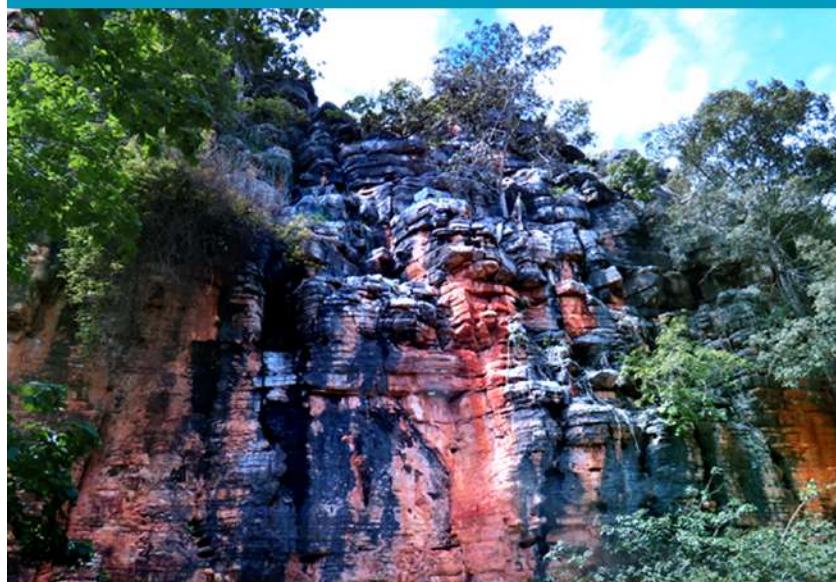
Millet fields ripening



*Colourful Betamcharcharla tiles and colourful rocks
will keep you spellbound during your drive*



The Billa Surgam gorge is up to 30 m deep, and has at its base a meandering seasonal watercourse marked at present by large rolled cobbles and boulders. Occasional rock arches span the gorge up to 20 m above the base, remnants of a roof that would have once covered the whole cave system. Upper portions of the gorge walls are in places rounded and smoothed, marking the likely location of former sinkholes and indicating that the original roof of the complex has collapsed in stages.



Prior to roof collapse the stream that currently passes through the complex would have run across the top of the caves, with simultaneous dissolution of the underlying limestone deposits. The connected galleries have widened over time through lateral corrosion, Mr.Ramayya explained



VINTAGE LADAKH

Text and Photos by Abbas Tyabji



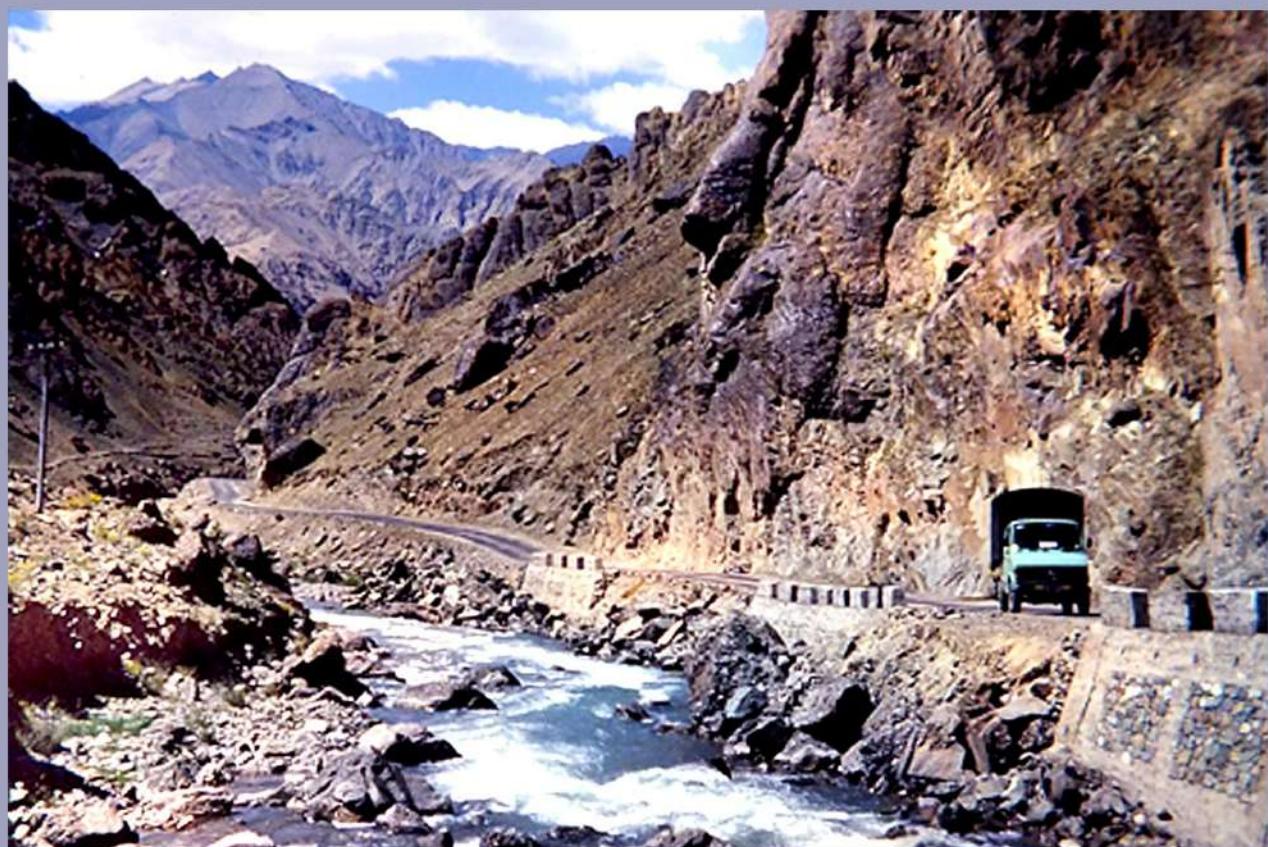
A stunning view of Lamayuru and its moonscape at sunrise



Monasteries perched on hillsides are scattered all across Ladakh

The Indus at Leh



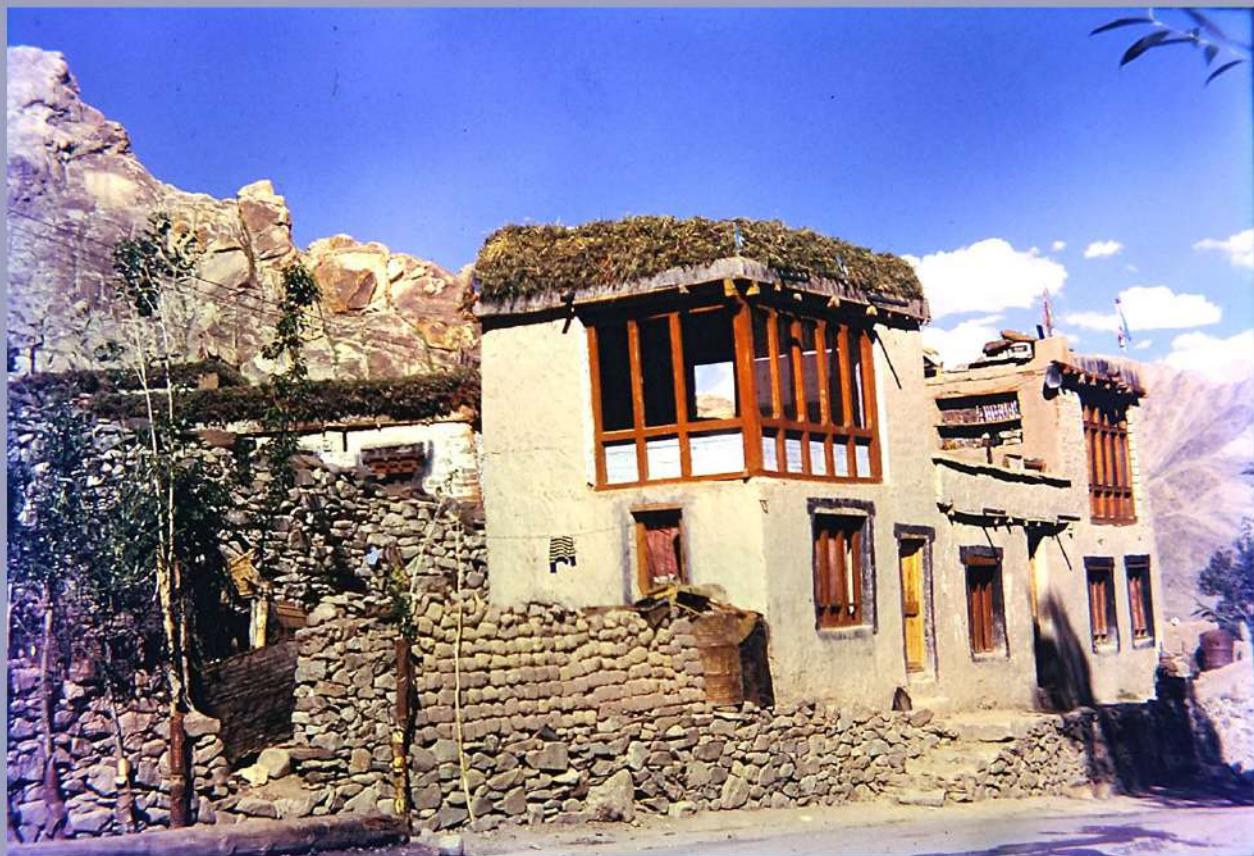
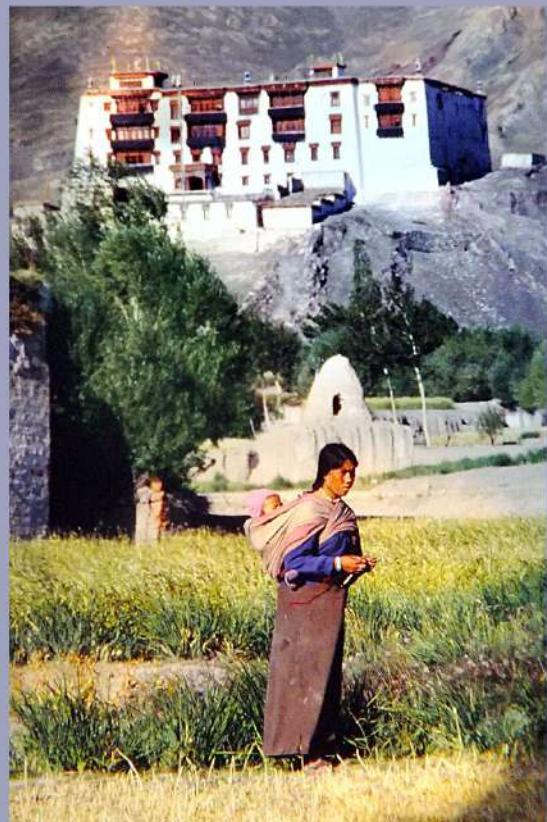
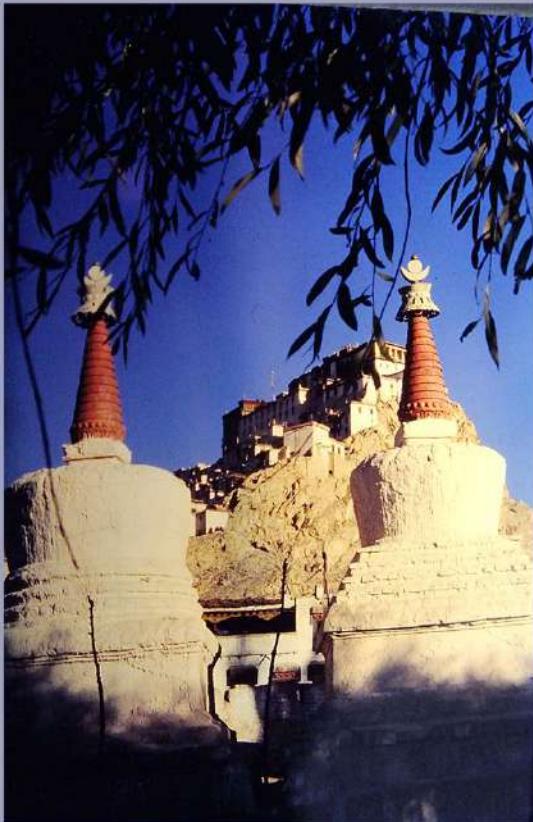


A Tata 407 truck in which we travelled to Ladakh seen with the Indus flowing by

A farmer in his field with a yak

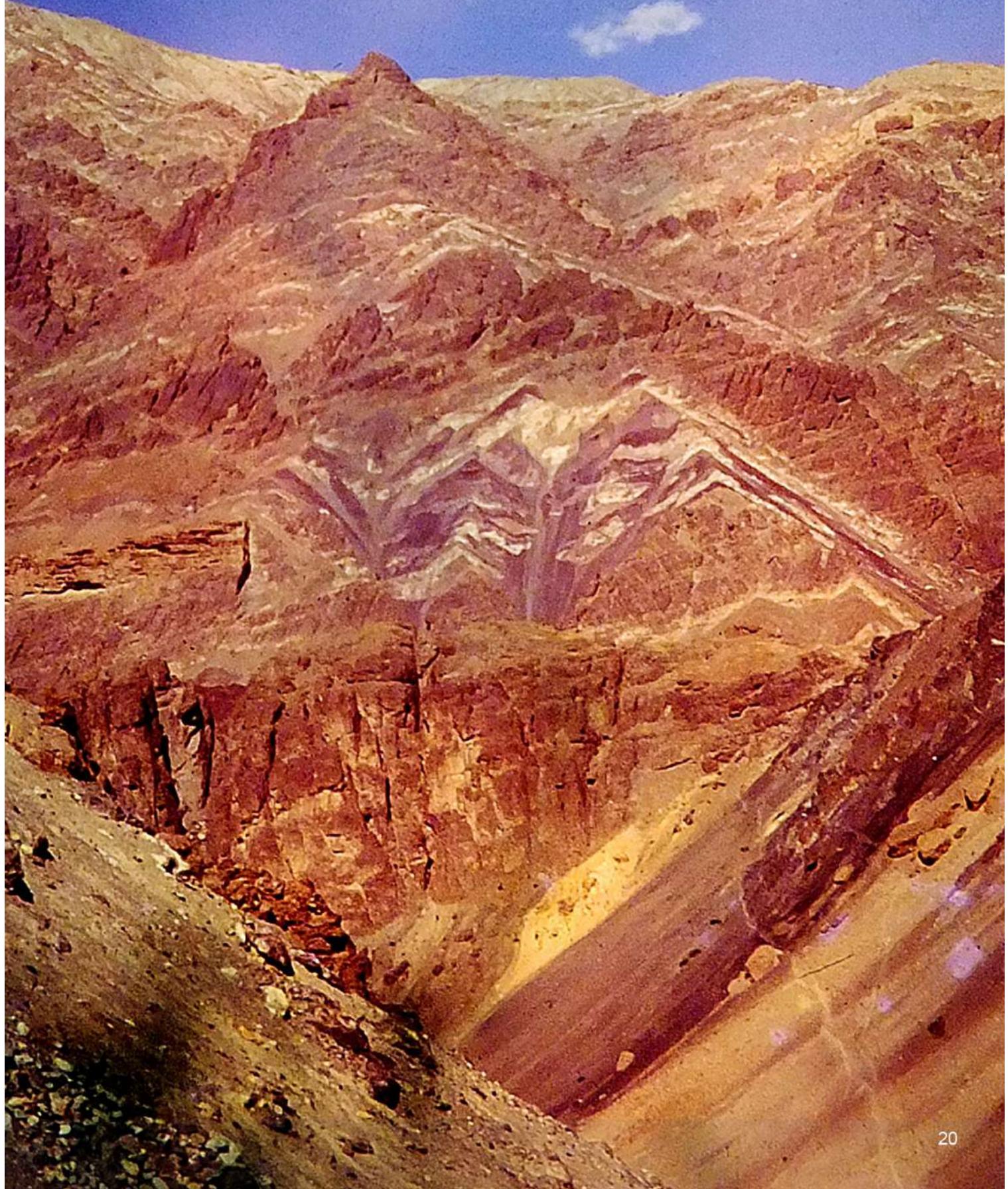


The Spitok monastery near Leh (left) a Ladakhi woman with a massive monastery in background

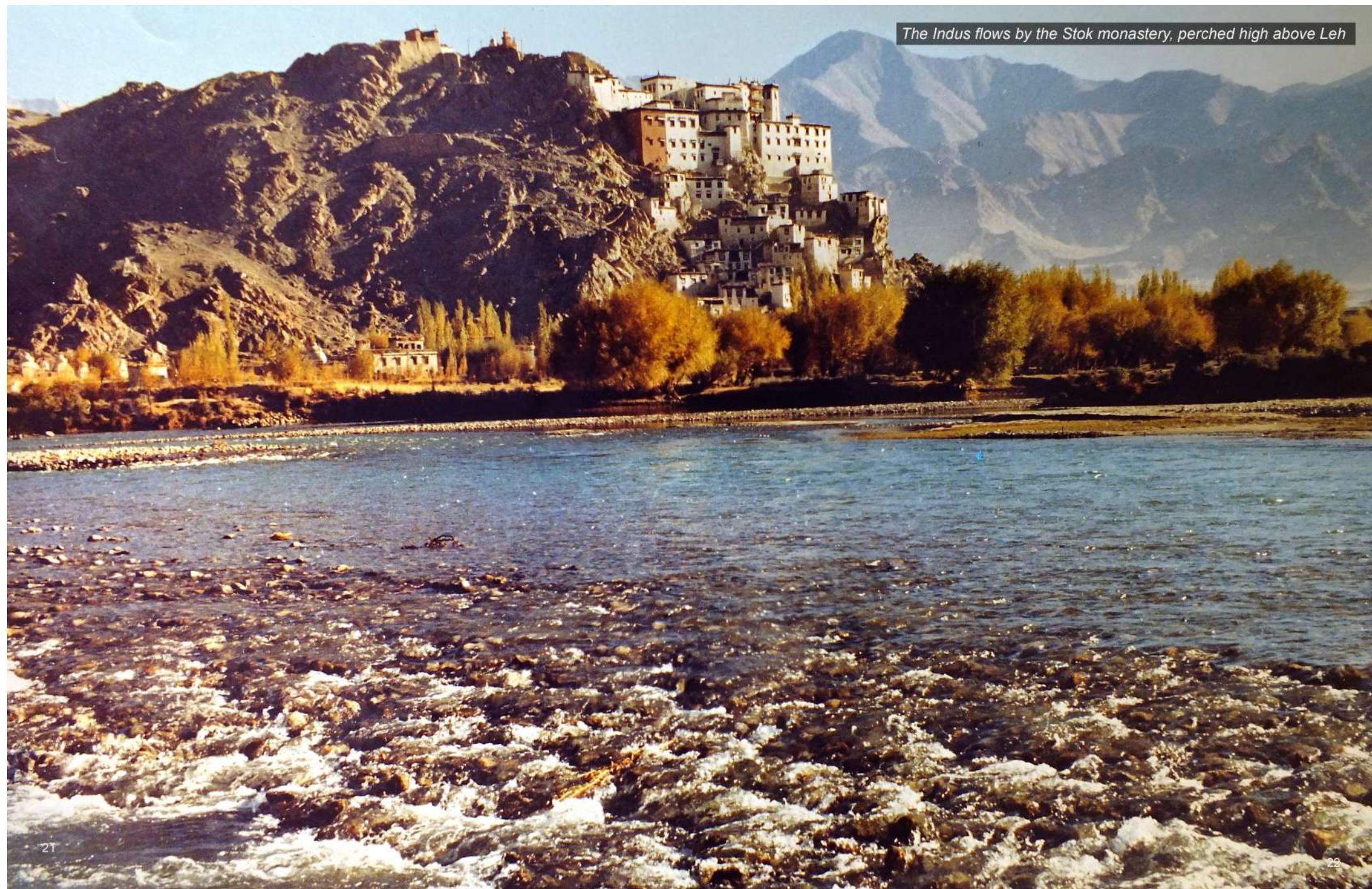


A typical dwelling in Ladakh

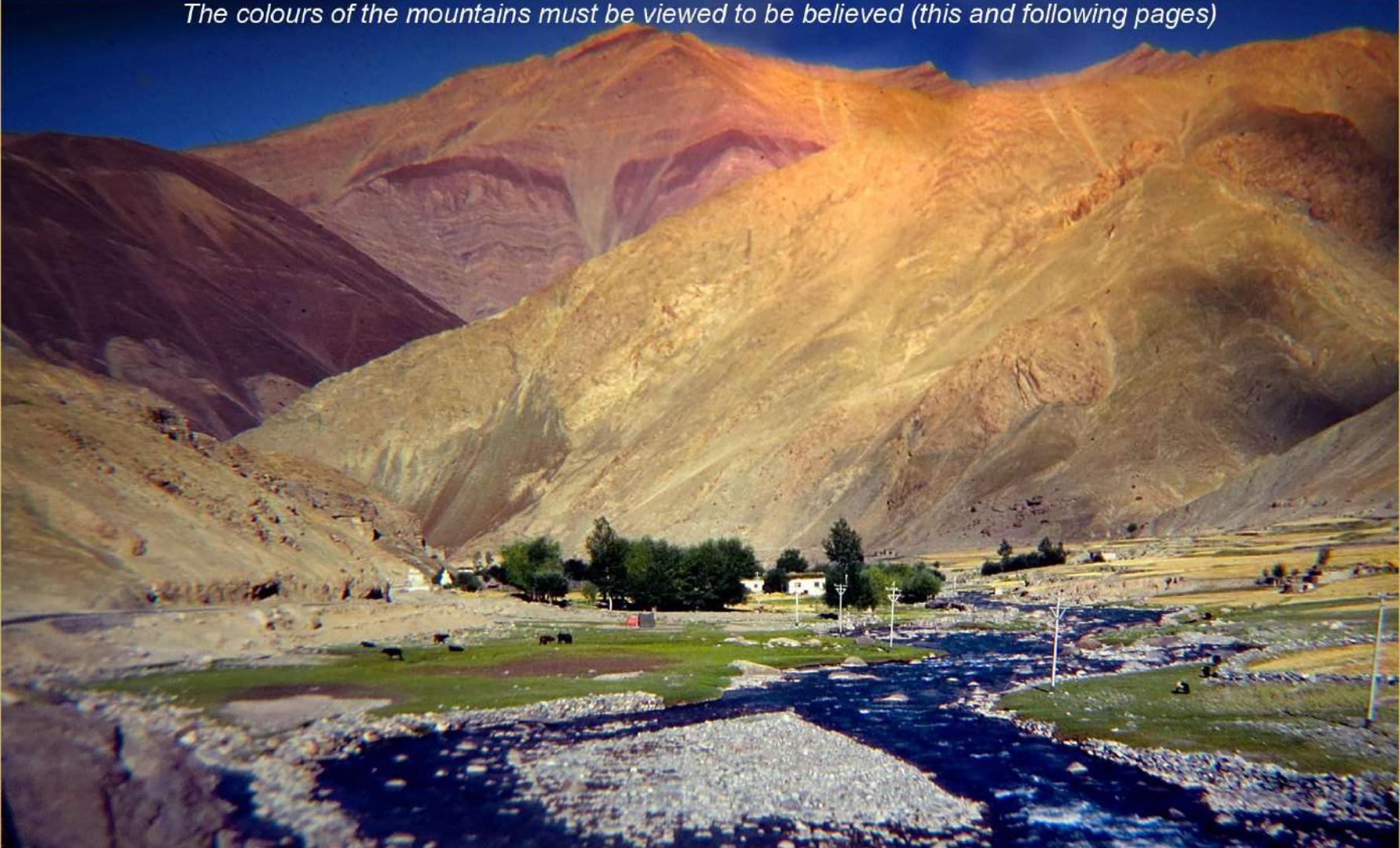
The absolutely unbelievable landscape one passes between Zojila pass and Kargil



The Indus flows by the Stok monastery, perched high above Leh



The colours of the mountains must be viewed to be believed (this and following pages)



I have just located some slides connected with my earlier trips to Ladakh, which I did when I was Head of Publications Division, of then TELCO (now TATA MOTORS). These trips were connected with Photographic Assignments for our magazines and other publicity. The first one was in the 1970s, when we took a 4 x 4 Tata bus specially built to traverse the very rough, rocky terrain of the Khardungla pass, highest road in the world (18900 feet). The second trip in mid 80s was when we took a Tata 407 mini truck to Ladakh from Srinagar, over the then dreaded Zojila pass.

This was the first time that such a vehicle had reached Ladakh and it created a big buzz amidst the transport fraternity in Leh. Many of the natural scenes will probably match what you will see even today, but the populated areas like Leh have undergone total transformation.

These are just to give an idea to newcomers as to what splendid vistas you can enjoy during your Ladakh trip. Unfortunately, at that time, we could not cross into Nubra valley or visit the stunning Pangong lake, which are now part of any Ladakh itinerary.



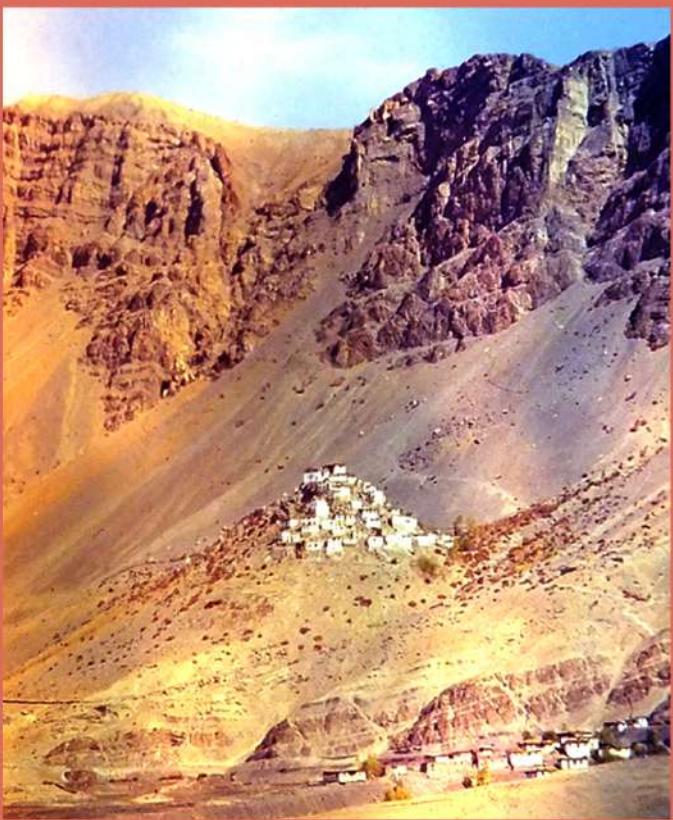
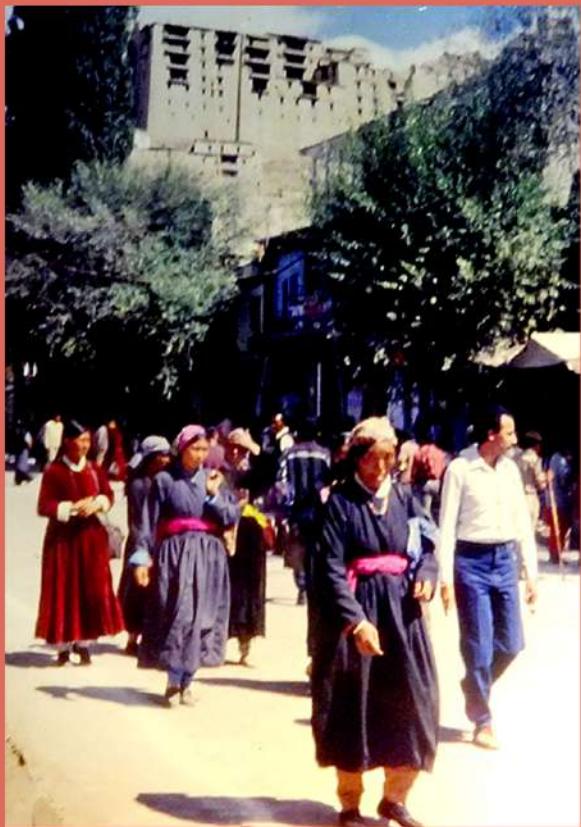




A picturesque landscape near Sonamarg



Typically dressed Ladakhis



A festival in progress and an isolated monastery



The location of the Lamayuru monastery perched on a mountain, surrounded by peculiar rock formations, is out of this world.

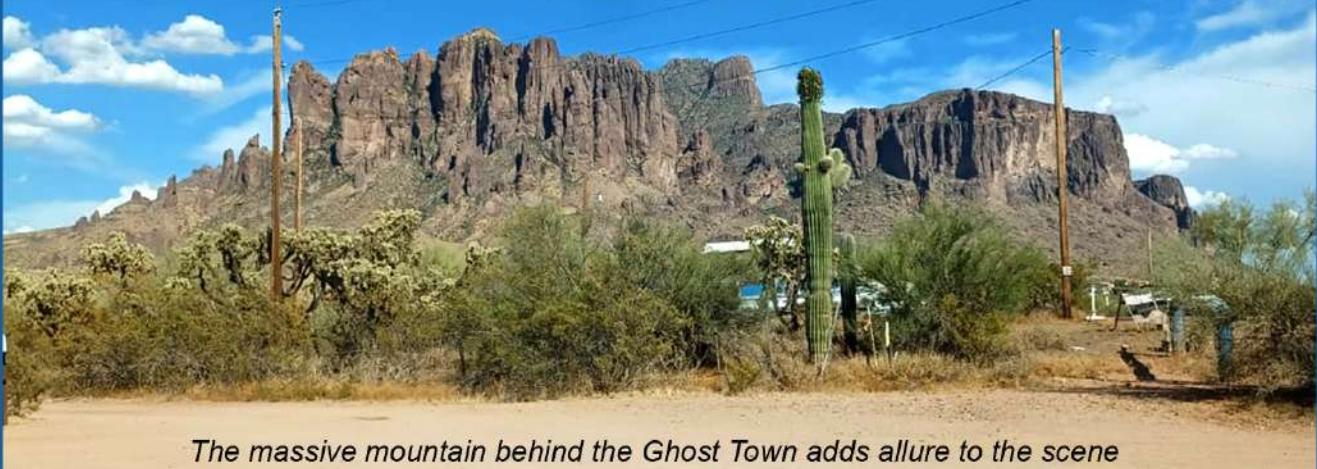


Another view of the valley and moonscape around Lamayuru monastery
which demands a minimum overnight stay to enjoy the surroundings



Goldfield Ghost Town

Pics by Md Imran and Ali Amir

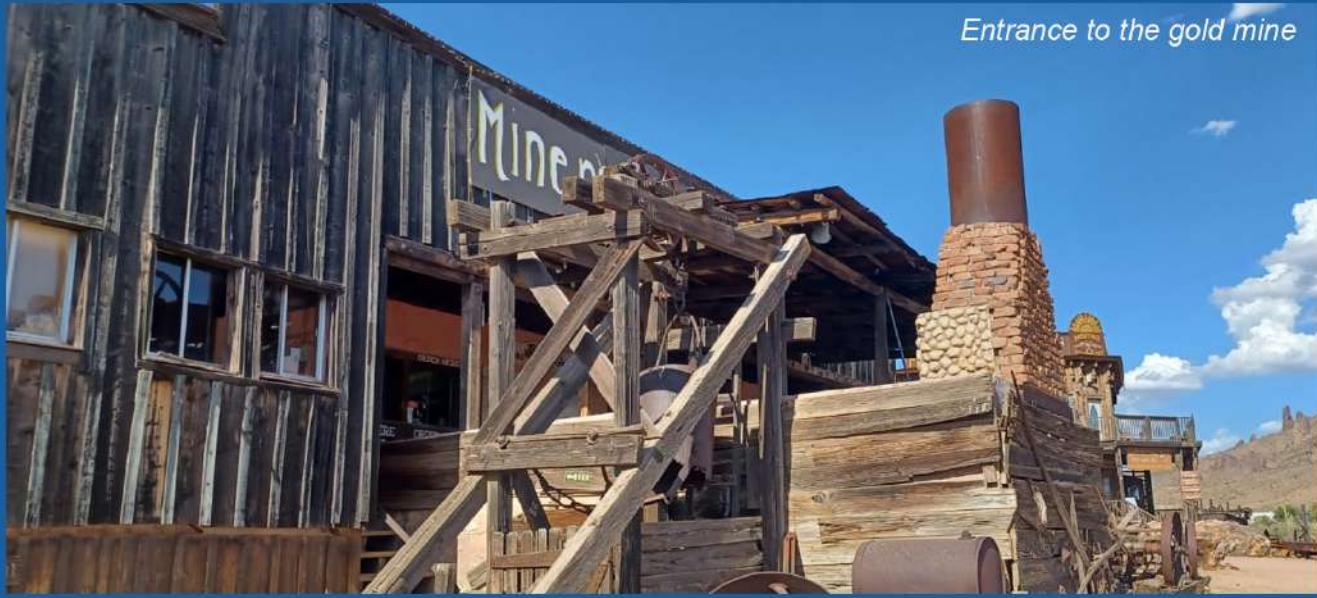


The massive mountain behind the Ghost Town adds allure to the scene

The railway station



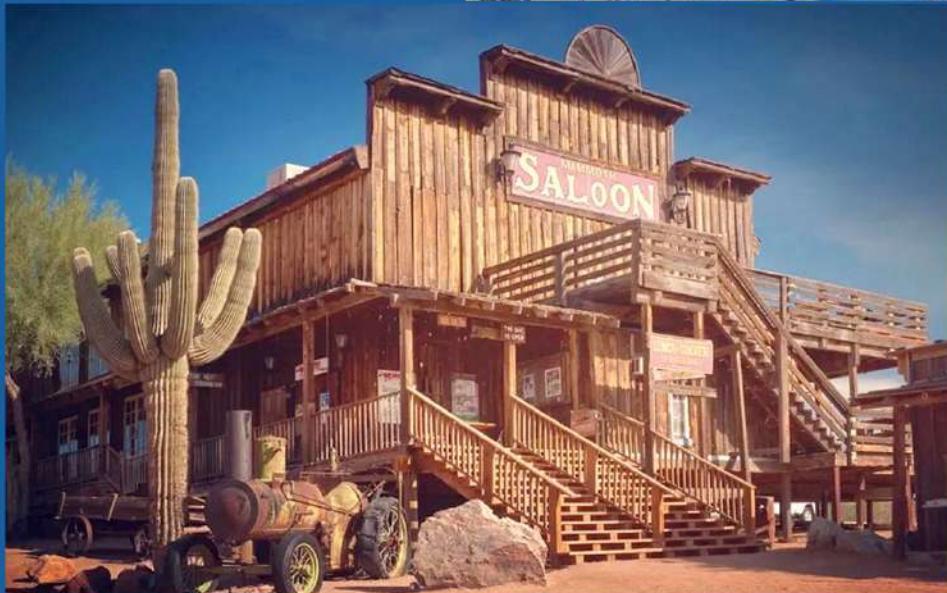
Entrance to the gold mine



One of the hidden gems of Arizona is the Goldfield Ghost Town. Walk down Main Street, explore the many shops and historic buildings. Tour the historic Mammoth Gold Mine and visit the Goldfield Museum. Pan for gold then take a ride on Arizona's only narrow gauge train. You'll also get to witness an old west gun fight performed by the famous Goldfield Gunfighters! Spend a fun filled day, rich in wild west history!



The stores in the town and two more views of the gold mining areas



Back in the 1890's Goldfield boasted saloons, a boarding house, general store, blacksmith shop, brewery, meat market and a school house. Just when it looked like the town would outgrow Mesa, the vein faulted, the grade of ore dropped and the town died a slow painful death.

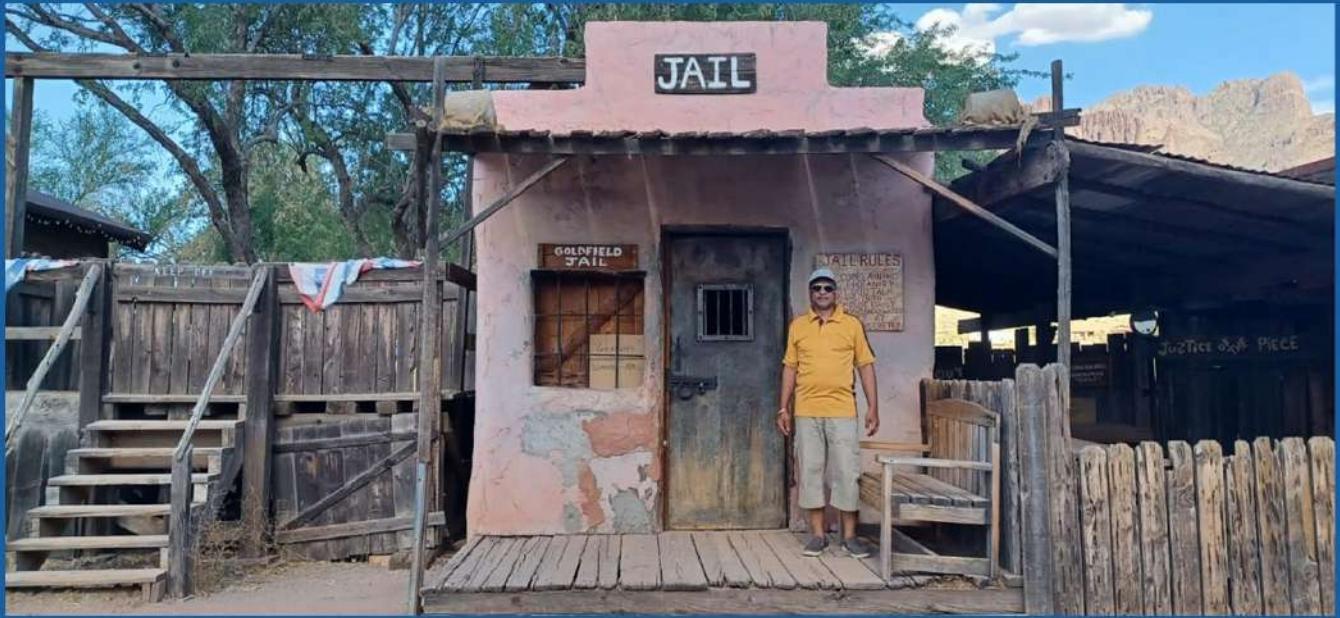
After several unsuccessful attempts to reopen the mines, the town did come to life again from 1910 on and off until 1926.

After more than 115 years, travellers from all over the world still visit this goldmining town located on the historic Apache Trail and enjoy the excitement and grandeur of Arizona's wild west!



A wooden church stands proudly in the middle of the town





Imran, who visited the mine with his family and shared the photos, at the entrance to the jail, with gallows seen on left, and with a huge cactus (Saguaro) which is a typical plant in the Arizona desert. At bottom right is another view of the gold mine



ABOUT THE EDITOR

Abbas A, Tyabji is a Hyderabad, India, based photo journalist, who left Tata Motors, one of the largest auto makers in India after heading the Publications Division of the Company over a career spanning nearly 3 decades.

During his tenure he travelled all over India and to neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Mauritius and the Middle East on photo journalistic assignments. His articles, pictures and photo features appeared not only in the Company publications but in national and international magazines.

He was invited by the then People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (S Yemen) to photograph the natural and man made wonders of that ancient land and prepare publicity material for their govt. The effort was appreciated by Govt officials and even India's Ambassador to S Yemen wrote an appreciation letter to Tatas on his efforts.

He is the recipient of over 50 national and international awards including:

The President of India's Award for Excellence in Designing and Printing on TWO OCCASIONS

Best Feature Writer Award from the Association of Business Communicators of India 4 times

Best Photo Feature Award from the Association of Business Communicators of India 5 times

The internationally circulated magazine "Bus Ride" from the US found his pictures so exceptional that they selected 2 for the First Place Award in their 1989 Worldwide photo competition, the only time in their history that two pictures were given this honour.

Almost half a dozen of his pictures appeared in Japanese calendars and dozens have graced Indian calendars.

He has also published a book on Hyderabad, for which the text, photography and design was done by him.

For his photo journalistic achievements he has found mention in "Who's Who of India", and "Reference Asia".

He also operates guided, customised tours from Hyderabad and is listed in LONELY PLANET as a Tour Guide.

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Abbas Tyabji receiving the President of India Award for Excellence in Designing and Printing from then President of India Dr. N. Sanjeeva Reddy