

Travel books

A path to the Orient

Stephen Pritchard finds Claire Scobie's travelogue, *Last Seen in Lhasa*, to be an absorbing and rewarding experience, written in stylish and elegant prose

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Last Seen in Lhasa

by Claire Scobie

Rider £10.99, pp242

On the roof of the world lies the hidden land of Pemako, home to bears, snow leopards and tigers, fire-tailed sunbirds, giant leeches and Buddhist enlightenment. Accessible only on foot, it hides in the misty Himalayas between Tibet and north-east India, 'where ordinary men do not go'.

Journalist Claire Scobie is possibly the only Englishwoman ever to venture into this forbidding terrain. She first glimpsed it on a quest to find a rare red lily. It was a glimpse that was to prove life-changing. After finding the flower, she returned to Tibet later on a double quest - to explore both the unknown landscape of Tibet and the unknown landscape of her soul.

She befriends Ani, a Buddhist nun whose life is a constant search for enlightenment in a culture where freedom of expression is ruthlessly suppressed by the Chinese (whose grip was further strengthened recently with the opening of the awesome Beijing-Lhasa railway). Scobie journeys both geographically and spiritually, recording it all in stylish, elegant prose in this absorbing and rewarding account.