

# hawk eye

AN UNCONVENTIONAL TRAVELER // BY MEGAN SMITH-HARRIS

DARYL HAWK, a long-term Wilton resident and photographer, likes to be behind the wheel of his 185-horsepower Sea Ray, enjoys the Zen of rock gardening, and mentors young photographers. He also has an alter-ego: explorer. Hawk, a respected, long-standing member of the Explorers Club, possesses an unquenchable thirst for travel to some of the most remote areas on our planet.

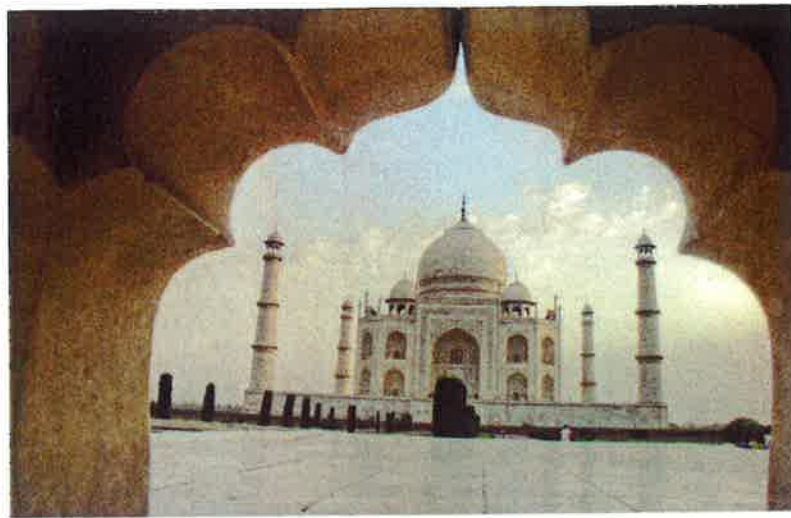
Born into a family of world travelers and gifted amateur photographers, he comes by his wanderlust honestly. He was inspired by both his grandfather's travel slide shows and by *National Geographic*.

Daryl received his first camera—a Polaroid—at age 13. When he saw the image of his family emerge onto the chemically

coated paper, he was hooked. His parents gave him a Nikon as a college graduation gift, and the self-taught photographer forged ahead from there. "I have always loved the concept of preserving time," he says with a smile.

Last spring, after ten years of careful planning and research, Hawk fulfilled his dream of travelling to Ladakh in northern India and making a high-altitude, 3,200-mile journey across the country, including a treacherous drive across the Khardung-La Pass. At 18,380 feet, it is the highest, and, arguably, the most dangerous motorable road in the world. Not a trip most of us would choose but for Hawk, it was a calling. "I felt it was my destiny."

Because of snow and treacherous conditions, the pass is typically accessible from May through September, but because



Hawk's business is most active in the spring and summer, he opted to travel in April. "I took a risk going in then, but it paid off because it was off-season. I had most places completely to myself."

Hawk flew from New York to New Delhi. "It was my first time in India and I was overwhelmed by the crowds and the color, the hustle and bustle," he says. "I try to look at life up close and tell a story with my photographs, to give the viewer a visual and emotional experience." The marketplace was an inspirational location. "There were snake charmers, monkeys, and people selling their wares. The light was magical."

He then traveled to Rajasthan where he spent time with the Drokpas Tribe who are unique in appearance and cultural traditions, in that they permit public displays of affection and wife-swapping. Next, Hawk went to Agra to experience the majesty of the Taj Mahal.

Hawk's much-anticipated next stop was Leh, the capital of Ladakh, but it took three attempted flights before that leg of his journey truly began. The first flight was cancelled because of bad weather, the second was aborted a few miles out of Leh because of severe fog, but the third time he got lucky.

**A DREAM REALIZED**  
 Explorer/photographer Daryl Hawk fulfilled his dream to travel to Ladakh. Hawk pictured at the Khardung-La Pass, a Hindu priest in New Delhi, the Taj Mahal in Agra.

Hawk admits that he used to be a film purist who scoffed at digital photography. But when faced with visiting environments in India where temperatures would fluctuate wildly and negatively affect the quality of his images, he was compelled to reconsider his bias.

He has since become a fan of digital cameras particularly in low-light situations. Traditional film would not have allowed him to capture the sacred interiors of ancient monasteries in Ladakh using natural light. Hawk also discovered the added public-relations benefit of being able to show locals his photos along the way, which proved to be an effective icebreaker.

"Photography is loved by everyone in the world," says Hawk. "Even though I only speak English, I have discovered that visual images are a universal language that all people understand. It wins them over. I also smile a lot and give out baseball cards which are always a hit."

Hawk documented his three-and-a-half-week journey with photos, video, and filmed interviews. He traveled with a tape recorder in his vest pocket, and shot from dawn to dusk. In the evenings, he transcribed the interviews with a view to including them in a potential television series. The show, currently in development, is

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More than 250 people took part in our Fake Ad Contest in the Nov/Dec issue. Congratulations to everyone who picked *Jack It Up*. The winner, selected randomly from a list of all those who entered and provided the correct answer, is **Susan Barnett of Wilton**. Winner receives a gift certificate to an area business.



## Jack It Up

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aptly named, "Daryl Hawk's Distant Journeys," and will chronicle his travels to some of the most remote places in the world. The goal is to share the beauty of the natural landscapes and the cultures of indigenous peoples.

Hawk emphasizes that none of his travels would be possible without the full support of his wife Heidi. "I deeply appreciate Heidi's love and her encouragement of my career. When I'm away she runs the house and takes care of the kids and my business. It's a lot of work."

When Hawk finally made it to Ladakh, a mountainous country in the northern region of Kashmir that runs southeast to the border of Tibet, a threatening military presence was visible on both sides of the border. However, Ladakh has a stable government, a population of 30,000 and is one of the last true Buddhist kingdoms in the world. Once there, he explored every monastery, toured a local wool factory, and stayed overnight with Nomads. He also negotiated a rare, private, one-hour audience with the King of Ladakh.

Hawk found the trip utterly exhilarating. "I enjoy challenging myself spiritually and mentally." Recently, he did a presentation about Ladakh at the Consulate of India in New York. Afterwards, the Indian Ambassador personally invited Hawk to speak at the United Nations this spring about his experiences.

His next trip? Yunnan, China, in April. Situated between Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Tibet, Yunnan has perhaps the highest concentration of ethnic tribes of any place in the world. Says Hawk, "I want to get there before it changes too much." ■