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Host: Welcome to *GlobeTrek*. Today our guest is Todd Warren. He just returned from a bicycle trip in China. Welcome Todd.

Traveler Todd Warren: Thanks for having me.

Host: So, Todd, what made you decide on a bicycle trip?

Warren: A book called *Across Asia on a Bicycle*. It's the story of two American students who traveled across Central Asia in 1890. The book focuses on their journey from Beijing to Istanbul. I got inspired, and decided to try to ride on the Silk Road.

Host: How far did you get?

Warren: Only a small section. I started in Xi'an and rode west for two weeks. Not easy riding through the desert. I definitely got some sense of the challenges Silk Road traders faced. Oh, and, I found out it should be called the Silk Roads.

Host: What do you mean?

Warren: It wasn't one road. It was actually a large network of routes between China and Europe.

Host: Really? I always thought of it as one busy road full of traders with silk and spices.

Warren: Me, too. It's interesting. Even back then traders had a global economy just like we're in today.

Host: Well, sure, in some ways, but, come on, it was a lot more dangerous then ... a lot bigger risks than today.

Warren: I don't agree. Nowadays, it's just the risks are different. The Internet is a new kind of Silk Road—a vast network where businesses trade goods and services.

Host: Hm, that's an interesting comparison. Any plans to go back to China?

Warren: Oh, definitely. There's lots to explore.

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Speaker: Good morning. In today's lecture, I'm going to present a little background leading up to the Silk Road, starting in the year 330 BCE. By the way, B-C-E stands for Before the Common Era. OK, so, in 330 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered a large area, the area that is roughly Iran, Syria, and Iraq today. There were some trade routes already there. But he wanted to develop more, and he did so. But not for long. Because in 325 BCE, the Romans attacked Alexander the Great, and won. So, it was in 325 BCE that the Romans took control of that region. Like Alexander, they, too, wanted to develop more trade routes. Why? In order

to get luxury goods such as silk, spices, and gold. And by about 100 BCE, trading with China had begun, so the Romans were getting what they wanted ...

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Professor Martin Sera: E01 Today we're going to continue with a discussion of the Silk Road, one of the most historically important trade routes in the world. Now, as you know, the Silk Road was a major trade route between Europe and western China for about 1,500 years. It was used from about 100 BCE until about 1400 CE. There had been some trade across Central Asia before that, but it wasn't until about 100 BCE that trade between Europe and China increased significantly. **(COACHING TIP 1) E02** So, we're going to look at how the Silk Road developed. First, I want to mention three dynasties in China that were in power at significant points in the Silk Road's history. *Dynasty* here means "a group of rulers or a family with political control." First, the Han Dynasty. They ruled from 206 BCE to 220 CE, approximately when the Silk Road started. Second is the Tang Dynasty, in power from 618 to 907—the peak period of the Silk Road. And third, the Ming Dynasty. In 1368 they took control and soon thereafter the use of the Silk Road basically ended. Now this is just a quick overview, so I'll go into more detail about these three groups later. **(COACHING TIP 2) E03** Now most people say "the Silk Road," but it wasn't only one route. It was a network of routes between China and the Mediterranean Sea. The routes from China all started in Xi'an. That's spelled "X-i-apostrophe-a-n." I actually lived in Xi'an a few years back when I was working in China. And from Xi'an I traveled way out into western China just to get a sense of what the Silk Road was really like. It wasn't an easy place to travel, but traders did it for many years. Now, going forward, you should know that Xi'an was actually called Chang'an during the time of the Silk Road. **E04** So, from Chang'an, the route went west until traders reached the Taklamakan Desert. To avoid it, some routes went south through Dunhuang, and some went north through the Gobi Desert and over into Central Asia. **(COACHING TIP 3) E05** The routes all reconnected further west, though, and eventually they led to some big trade centers in Europe in Rome and what is now called Istanbul in Turkey. There are different estimates about how long the Silk Road was altogether. We're going to go with about 5,000 miles—or 8,000 kilometers. **E05** So, what do you think was the main reason the Silk Road developed? Well, the short answer is that people in Europe wanted goods from China, and people in China wanted goods from Europe. I'll focus now on

the west end of the route, in Europe. And then we'll go to the east end, in China. On the west end, at the Mediterranean Sea, were the Romans. By about 100 BCE, the Romans had learned about luxury goods from China—silk in particular, which was very popular in Rome then. So, the Romans started building roads to the east so they could get luxury goods from China. Meanwhile, from the east end in China, the Han Dynasty was in power. **E06** We have to review a little history at this point: The Han Dynasty ruled, ruled China from 206 BCE to 220 CE, as I mentioned. And Chang'an was the capital. But because China was so big, it was very difficult to defend, especially against the Mongol invaders from the north. So in 138 BCE, Emperor Wudi, that's W-u-d-i, sent a group out to western China to recruit fighters for the conflict with the Mongol invaders. The group's leader was captured. And when he returned a decade later, he told the emperor about a type of big, strong horse in western China. The Han Dynasty decided to make a big push west to get these horses in order to make the Han army stronger. **E07** So, you see, in about 100 BCE, the Romans and the Chinese were pushing east and west, respectively, and thus the Silk Road developed. **E08** According to historical records, the Romans didn't go all the way to China, and the Chinese traders didn't go all the way to Europe. Instead, many of the traders were from Central Asia. The traders mostly went short distances in caravans, and bought and sold goods along the way. Europe wanted silk, spices, and furs, and other goods from China. China wanted horses, initially. But later it wanted goods from Europe like gold and glass. **E09** And traders exchanged both goods and information. For example, there were trade secrets, like where to get the best silk and where the best routes were. The Silk Road was very difficult to travel, and traders tried alternate routes mainly to avoid two things: bad weather and bad people. There were many robbers who tried to steal the traders' silk and other goods. Traders also wanted to avoid towns that forced them to pay a fee when passing through. **E10** The peak period for the Silk Road was in the 600s during the Tang Dynasty. Chang'an was very big and very prosperous then. About 2 million people lived there, including 8,000 foreigners from many places including what is today Iran, Turkey, Japan, and Korea. By the early 900s, the Tang Dynasty lost power, and trade on the Silk Road declined sharply because there was fighting and it became much too dangerous for the traders. **E11** By about 1400, trade on the Silk Road basically stopped. There were two main reasons: One, in 1368, the Ming Dynasty took control, and they didn't want any contact with foreigners. And two, European traders began to prefer ships, which were faster and safer than the Silk Road. **E12** So, to wrap up: The Silk Road developed because people in one part of the world wanted something from another part of the world. In recent years, people have talked about globalization as creating new silk roads. We'll take up this idea next time, OK? **(COACHING TIP 4)**

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- 4 The routes all reconnected further west, though, and eventually they led to some big trade centers in Europe in Rome and what is now called Istanbul in Turkey.
- 5 And when he returned a decade later, he told the emperor about a type of big, strong horse in western China.
- 6 So, you see, in about 100 BCE, the Romans and the Chinese were pushing east and west, respectively, and thus the Silk Road developed.
- 7 For example, there were trade secrets, like where to get the best silk and where the best routes were.
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Molly: I'd heard of the Silk Road before, but I had no idea it was so complicated! I mean, my notes look like a page from a math book!

Rob: Right.

Alana: Oh, mine, too. So, can we go over some of these dates? I mean, I think I got the general idea—that China wanted goods from Europe, and Europe wanted goods from China, and therefore the Silk Road was developed. Right?

Rob: Right. I have that the route was used from about 100 BCE to 1400 CE.

Molly: So it was in use for about 1,500 years, and it was about 5,000 miles long altogether, right?

Alana: Oh yeah, yeah. So, do you guys think the Silk Road is famous because of the goods traded? Or is it historic because of the cultural exchange that happened?

Rob: The Romans wanted luxury items from China, right? Especially the silk.

Alana: Uh-huh.

Rob: So essentially it was about trade, right?

Molly: Well, yeah, I mean, that’s factually correct. But I think something deeper was going on, you know? I mean—cultures were mixing.

Ayman: Oh, yeah, like Central Asian traders. They had a very important job, like being a “middleman.”

Alana: Yeah, exactly. Without them, the whole exchange of goods wouldn’t have happened.

Rob: But it was probably a pretty dangerous job, too. I mean, if you think about it, they had to go out and communicate with people from different cultures with different languages, and had to exchange goods with them. I mean, that must have been pretty risky.

Alana: Kind of like businesspeople today—trying to make money and survive.

Molly: Yeah, I guess not that much has changed in the past 2,000 years!