

# Peggy and Francis' China Trip Summary

19. August to 26. October 2005



## Background

Ever since we had been visiting the Xinjiang (Uyghur) province and the tibetan town Tongren in Qinghai province in 2001 we have been hoping to undertake an extensive back-packer trip through the 'wild areas' of China. My early retirement in spring 2005 at the age of 60 was to a large extent motivated for enabling this trip while my physical and mental strength would permit such a strenuous venture.

For our convenience we planned the start of the journey in late August to be placed between the receding monsoon towards the South and the approaching cold autumn from the North. We planned the actual 'adventure trip' to take 6 to 7 weeks giving us time to stay at least a couple of weeks in Shanghai with Evelyne before joining Feng Huis's chinese wedding in Beijing on 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

Peggy and I were already experienced China travelers (we knew what to expect) and Peggy's fluency of Mandarin and reading of Chinese writing would of course facilitate travel efficiency, expedient handling of unforeseen and enable effective improvisation.

## A few Facts (Beijing to Shanghai)

- Duration: 42 days / 39 nights in hotels / 3 nights in trains
- Transport: 9700 km / 215h Train: 3300km / 60h                      Bus: 6400km / 155h  
231 km / day or 5h / day  
3600 Yuan = 600 CHF = 400 Euro                      4 cents per km (for 2 people)
- Hotels: 2300 Yuan = 380 CHF = 250 Euro                      6.50 Euro per night (for 2 people)  
Many chinese
- Weather: Generally great to acceptable    only 1 bad day (rain the whole day)  
Temperatures (80%)    a.m: 15-20 / p.m: 20-25 otherwise quite bearable!
- Meals: Usually small 4 table restaurants                      Meals: 10-25Y Beer (07dl): 2-5Y

## Goals and Strategy (Beijing to Shanghai - the Backpackers' Part of the Trip)

- We intended to avoid traveling by air, taxi, organised tours, western style hotels and restaurants if in any way possible. We wanted to travel in daylight as much as possible.
- We wanted to experience high altitudes, see high mountains and wild valleys and also expected to enjoy gentle rural sceneries in (sub-/semi-) tropical areas.

- We strove to submit to the living conditions (e.g. travel, food) of the common people irrespective of their ethnological backgrounds of the many different minorities encountered.
- Starting from Beijing, we wanted to cover the upper parts of the Yellow River and the Yangzi River, then cross over to the west of the Mekong River towards Myanmar before returning east via Guizhou. We validated this plan by means of a detailed itinerary.
- While travelling extensively through Tibetan cultural areas we would avoid entering the Tibet Province illegally in view of our mature age.
- We wanted to travel light in order to be independent from any logistical constraints concerning the luggage: 2 identical (children) 'Rucksacks' 40 x 25 X 20 cm and one cotton bag for the days convenience (wind jacket, snacks, water etc).

### **Results (Beijing to Shanghai - the Backpackers' Part of the Trip)**

We covered the entire itinerary in 6 weeks although we had to go for alternatives in 2 cases due to force majeure (land slides in Qinghai, ship service on lower Yangzi suspended). Actually, in the end we did even more than expected!

Main highlights:

- Ride to Madoi (Qinghai) at 4300m (close to start of Yellow River) and then via Darlag to Aba (Sichuan) fighting for air through Tibetan nomads country side.
- Visit Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong Unesco World Heritage natural parks (millions of Chinese tourists, not our taste at all after simple life in Qinghai).
- Travel through a multitude of endless wild valleys and gorges then reaching Xinduqiao with view to Gongga Shan, 7556m. Whole day walk over a mountain ridge under bluest sky at 4000m.
- From Xinduqiao via Litang (4000m) and Shangri-la (lost Horizon), again through wild valleys, gorges and passes (up to 4900m), eventually reaching the first bend of the Yangzi River (Yunnan).
- A few exciting walks at moderate, almost tropical levels through traditional rural rice farming areas. One adventurous walk crossing the Mekong via a very remote ancient 'tea road'
- Enjoying the unique atmosphere of the Nu Jiang (Salween River) in monsoon tail. Looked like imminent raining all the time but was always sunny where we were.
- Scurry, incredibly green landscapes in southern Guizhou, not yet spoiled by tourism.

Some lasting impressions:

- Being squeezed for many hours between all sorts of people in crowded buses and trains (e.g. 35h sitting from Guiyang to Shanghai) and sharing with them the hardship of long and often very uncomfortable travel conditions (rodeo rides in back of Kamikaze buses).
- Eating at street level every day in small 3 to 4 table places or at market stalls. Often Peggy had to go to look at the supplies and then order the cooking as there was no menu.
- Staying in Han Chinese or even Tibetan guest houses of all kinds often without shower or mostly in simple rooms with common showers and toilets. The beds were usually clean and comfortable.
- Most people were very nice to us; at least after they found out that we are a couple having kids (knowing this from previous experience, we took a family photo along).
- **It was probably the greatest and most intensive trip of our life!** (so far:-)

### **Shanghai and Beijing**

In Shanghai we stayed for 3 weeks in Evelyne's apartment and when not resting our minds, walked almost every day in different areas of bustling Shanghai. We made just a 2 day backpacker excursion to the lower parts of the Yangzi River.

After a night in the 12h non-stop train (soft sleeper) we reached Beijing where we joined a lovely Chinese wedding and spent another few days being nostalgic about previous visits and walking through the remaining hutongs (traditional housing) sadly witnessing their rapid disappearance.

Our 'coolest' adventure in Beijing was a ride in sidecar bikes in a pack of about 15 oldtimer bikes around Forbidden City and over the Tiananmen Square at 21.30.

**Thereafter we were ready to go home!**

### **Acknowledgements**

First of all I wish to express my gratitude to Peggy who has had the patience to take me along and look after me during the whole journey, obtaining accommodation, bus tickets and meals, finding the way, communicating with people etc. Of course I also thank Evelyne who let us stay in her apartment for 3 weeks in Shanghai and who took us along here and there in Shanghai and Beijing and shared her friends with us.

Then I also appreciated the help of family at home, who gave my old mother attention and who were there prepared to provide assistance, if needed during our absence.

# Peggy and Francis' China Trip 2005

## Diary Part A Beijing to Hongyuan (via Xining)

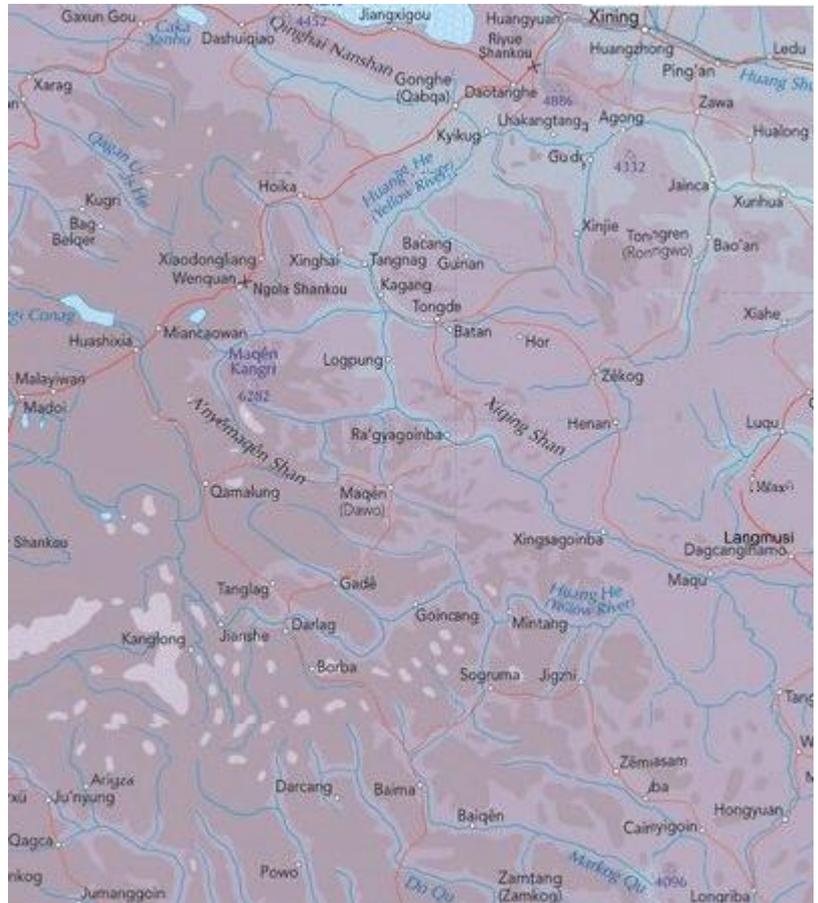
### Approach and Qinghai's Tibetan Plateau

- Tibetan Nomads
- Yaks and Goats
- Endless Plateau, a big Sky
- Lack of Oxygen

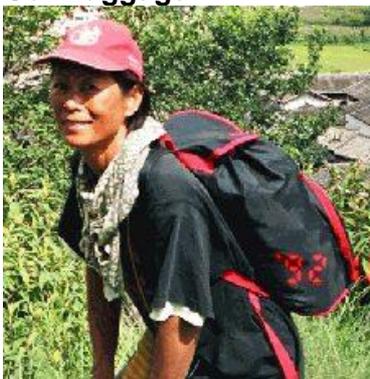
On the Map:  
Xining-Madoi-Huashixia-Darlag-Aba-Hongyuan

Not on the Map:  
Beijing-Yinchuan-Zhongwei-Lanzhou

Overview: refer to map in Summary



### Our Luggage



#### 2 Rucksacks (40x25x20cm) containing:

- shoes (sandals, leather, indoor slippers)
- 2 rain jackets, 2 sweaters, exchange T-shirts and underwear for both
- medicine bag, toilet bag, toilet paper, and make-up bag, hair colour
- clock, umbrella, reserve and sun glasses, torch
- chinese travel guide (1000pages), china atlas
- large tea / soup cup, schnaps bottle 3dl (first brandy then local stuff)
- Nescafe & 40 portions of cream (finished at Mekong), 400 g chocolate
- 1 packet of soup noodles (from Beijing to CH)

Packing time for Peggy: 30 to 60 minutes

#### 1 cotton bag for easy reach and sightseeing, usually containing:

- drinking bottle, under way food
- wind jackets, scarfs, hats



### Diary

19.08. Train **Ipsach** – Geneva – Plane to **Budapest** – Plane to Beijing  
hot At 7.00, just before Morges, our train makes an accident with a pedestrian. After a long uncertain  
humid halt we get to the airport 1 h late but just on time for boarding. Flying Malev to Budapest then Hainan  
Air to Beijing

20.08. Arrive in **Beijing**  
lovely After a minimum comfort flight with Hainan Air (90% chinese passengers) we arrived in Beijing at  
6.00. Youth Hostel at workers stadion has no rooms available so we go to Zhong Long hostel in  
Sunlitung and get a poor room (w. air conditioning and no windows) for 160Y. Then we rush to

railway station to get tickets to Yinchuan (only 'hard seats' available on short term – we are keen to leave asap!). Noodles and Jiause for lunch, then meet Fenghui to leave some luggage at office. Afternoon sleep then evening in cosy Sunlitung and dinner in Zhuojiazhuang (staying 2001 with Evelyne)

21.08. 1 day waiting in **Beijing**

lovely Walking from Sunlitung across Beijing through some Hutongs (traditional chinese quarters with small houses and narrow streets) to the clock & drum towers then to the Watch Tower (picture) to meet Feng Hui and Wenjia (etc) to have a 'modern' chinese dinner (faint flavours). Later at night we all went to the Watch Tower terrace to have a couple of lovely beers.



22.08. Train **Beijing** to Yinchuan

lovely Odysee to change money then bus to West station. Leaving 13.00 for Yinchuan. Peggy and I have hard seats at different windows in a very crowded train. No way to acclimatise to backpacking:-). Exciting raide trough mountain ranges north west of Beijing to Datong.

23.08. Arrive and visit **Yinchuan** (Capital of Ningxia Province)

lovely Arrive in Yinchuan at 08.40 after 19.00h in overcrowded train. Overnight was long as vertually no sleep and I had no one to talk to as Peggy was not beside me. After a 30 min bus ride to old town we get into a good chinese hotel (80Y). Walked around reasonably busy town to 8-corner pagoda and the clock and drum towers (picture). Even Yinchuan has become by now a modern city even with a pedestrian (though boring) shopping street.



In the evening we had an EXCELLENT mongolian hot pot outdoor in a quiet back street. This was one of many hot pots we had during our journey. Hot pots are extremely popular nowadays and are served in great variety regarding material (from yak, donkey, beef, chicken over intestines, mushrooms to vegetables of any kind), the ingredients and sauces, the presentation and way of cooking (gas, coal, pre-cooked).



24.08. Bus **Yinchuan** to **Zhongwei**

lovely Nice 3.5h bus ride along Yellow River (at some distance though) to the small town Zhongwei (200k) with a nice gulou (drum tower) and a great temple for Buddha, Tao and Yue (picture). Zhongwei lies between the Yellow river and the desert. It would be very worthwhile to make a few excursions to desert settlements and temples dug in rocks.



Walked to the brown arm of Yellow River beside an island (picture) and back, 3.5km each way, along a brand-new eight lane road through a big city yet to be built! The Huanghe guest house was fine (70Y). Dinner was not good today (1 of 2 bad meals only, during whole trip), so we had some Erqutou (strong Schnaps).



25.08. Train **Zhongwei** to **Lanzhou** (Capital of Gansu Province)

lovely 5.5h train ride (managed to conquer seats) first high-up along Yellow River (nice views at Sapotou) and then winding through desert, wild hills and small valleys with settlements here and there until we got back to Yellow river at Lanzhou. On the way a student asked where I am from and he did neither understand Switzerland nor Ruishe. When I told him Rolex he brightened up and said that

Einstein had developed his theory in that country. Lanzhou is a huge and modern 4M city, 30km long squeezed between river and mountain chain. We found our hotel (from 2001) near the station again (huge room, clean, 56Y). Then had excellent meal in small family restaurant (**all meals during the trip with beer**). Was so happy that I started chinglish poetry:

I will drink Erqutou  
Until I see er (two) Gulou

But now my cold (from air-conditioning in Beijing) got very bad. Sh..!!!

- 26.08. lovely Bus **Lanzhou to Xining** (Capital of Qinghai Province, 727'000 sqkm, 4.8m inhabitants )  
After some hassle about travel insurance for getting bus ticket, Peggy found out that there is another terminal next-door with better buses, cheaper fare and no trouble with insurances!!

After 3h smooth and quick ride over a new motorway we arrived in Xining West. Without problems we cross by bus to the east of this million city to get to the bus station for the southbound buses (**reminder: during the whole trip, when things were easy, then only because Peggy speaks and reads Chinese**). Now comes the big disappointment: No bus to Magen (landslides after Tongde). So we cannot go to acclimatise at 3200m in monastery of R'agiagoinba on shore of Yellow river). Well so we get tickets to Madoi (4300m) near start of Yellow river and will see later how to continue!?. Being bogged down and impatient, we took a room at the first shabby guest house nearby. It was to be the worst (dirtiest) accommodation of the whole trip! Nevertheless we enjoyed the afternoon strolling through town, passing a great mosque, then getting to one of the most exciting (and yammee) food markets ever seen! Then had an excellent meal nearby (served by a girl with nice eyes). Last and good thing that day: Phone call to Evelyne from 'call agent'. They are to be found in every (even smallest) towns and provide toppest transmission quality!!!!



- 27.08. early rain, grad. clear'g Bus **Xining** (2265m) to **Madoi (4273m!!)**  
After a bad night (scared about going abruptly to high altitudes in poor condition with my bad cold) we got up to see a miserable sky and rain. What a start for the great leap into the real journey!! 500km to Madoi, 13.5h over 4 high passes (up to 4600m) with 250km over dirt road under construction. Now the good news: my cold suddenly stopped as the rain stopped after an hour!!!! And gradually the clouds lifted and eased off and it was fairly nice throughout the day, such that the exciting scenery made us forget that hardship of being in a poor bus over a bumpy road (at least we had good seats). After a couple of hours towards Qinghai Hu(lake) we turned south and there we go over the first pass of the journey right up to 3900m before descending to lunch stop in Ganghe (2700) after which we gradually climbed up to the endless and impressive tibetan plateau reaching a steady 4000m after Hoka. The climax came towards the evening when we suddenly got 2 good glimpses of ice-capped Amnye Magen (Magen Gangri – 6282m) illuminated in the evening sun! Then after a beautiful sunset scenery (continuing at well over 4000m) we enjoyed the most extraordinary night sky with Venus almost blinding and the stars appearing in 3D formation like X-mas decorations. We got to Madoi at 21.45 (more than 2h late – serious gear box problems and overheating) and settled in the only (?) guest house in this very small (obscure) tibetan town. Quite warm welcome, a very simple and clean room with a night pot and coal oven. The young room girl was a genuine tibetan with a typical 'edge nose' laughing at us for panting heavily up the stairs.

- 28.08. clear **Madoi and first Yellow river bridge**  
After a difficult night for both of us: exhaustion from altitude, the rough trip and the continued need to gasp for air we decided to take it easy..... First we had our daily Nescafé with cream (the alu cover was bulging from the underpressure!). The early morning was foggy and cold like Biel in the morning in November. Then when the sun started to penetrate at 10.30 we decided to go for a 'little walk' to the first bridge crossing the Yellow river. After 3 km walking under the bluest sky we realized that the bridge is another 4 km further (mmh, well, well).

We got there picture) and the river was about the size of the Suze (in Biel) or the Sense (Thörishous). In the end we got back after 12km in 4h totally exhausted (like after the 100km race in Biel), So went to eat at 15.00 and started for the room at 16.00. At 19.00 we went to bed. Last action was using the night pot. There is nothing going on in Madoi, but the atmosphere of this high plain with strong tibetan nomads 'flavour', the flags and gompas was very special and left a lasting impression.



- 29.08. Bus **Madoi to Huashixia** (4200m) then to **Darlag** (3968m)

clear  
day,  
wet  
night

Cloudless morning after night 'penible' (again fighting for air, feverish body like after a long distance race). Get bus at 8.00 (only 1 bus a day) to Huashixia to catch bus to Darlag further down the Yellow river (trying to get back to our original itinerary). Were told that we will have to wait there till evening to hop on bus from Xining to Darlag.

After 1.5h through interesting scenery, plain with tibetan tents and yaks, hills and ponds here and there (while chatting with a young tibetan girl studying law in Xining) we reached Huashixia in a wide valley surrounded by beautiful rocky hills. So first thing we walked (with rucksacks) 2km each way up to a small temple (picture) on the slope of one of these hills through a very exciting scenery again under bluest sky. Huashixia is a small town stretched in 2 parts along the main raod. The dirty part is Tibetan. The Han part is much cleaner.



Being very tired we then had a small meal and stayed (interminally bored) in the small restaurant until 19.15 when we managed to hop on bus to Darlag. Unfortunately it was dark after 20.00 but at least we did not mind the starting rain which had stooped by the time we got to soggy and dark Darlag by 22.30. Getting off the bus we felt quite lonely and lost, when suddenly a young tibetan girl-student having been on our bus approached Peggy to ask us to follow her to a guesthouse on the way to her mother's home. Well so we followed her into the dark and it got darker and darker (the grils said, she would be worried on her own) and eventually she then asked us to go with her and stay with her, her sister would surely be happy being an English teacher! Well,well, I was quite surprised that Peggy agreed to follow further as we got off the dark road into the absolutely black night. After 200m holding onto the girl's hands through mud and stooping over whatever, we reached a house (all lights were off). Mum and sister rubbed there eyes and were out of their depth with the 2 foreigners at their door step. Everybody was deeply embarassed, but after a few minutes we agreed (we were dead tired) that we would sleep on the long narrow kitchen-bench in the typical tibetan living / kitchen room. With almost closed eyes I agreed that I would join the sister to visit the school the next morning. Good night (mmh). Had to go to the garden a few times.....

### 30.08. Visit **Darlag** (also a school) and **Yellow River** (again)

First cloudy then lovely Waking at 7.00 when the (english teacher) sister sneaks in and comes to me to review her understanding of the teaching syllabus! The we have tea with the family and leave for school at 8.30. We enter school room with over 40 mostly Tibetan children (13 -16) eying us curiously but having obvioulsy been told beforehand to behave. After Peggy and I had sat down in the midst of the class, the teacher delivered her lesson consisting of spelling and reading a few words like: elephant, girl, boy, hat. After that I (the expert) had to go to the black board and do the same thing again. I don't know if I managed to contribute but the scene left at least a lasting impression on me! After school we went back to the house (picture) to explain to the mother and little sister (picture) that we want to move to the hotel to get a shower and we agreed with little sister to meet again at 13.00 in the hotel.



As they did not turn up by 13.30 (possibly they were offended because we did not stay at their house?) we left to walk on our own to cross the Yellow River and climb up a steep slope to a temple on a hill with tibetan flags and gompa's overlooking the beautiful valley and the river.

We enjoyed the marvellous view and all the beautiful mountain flowers (even alpine Enzian!). On the way down we crossed an alpage with many yaks and I asked Peggy to take off her red hat because the bulls looked terribly frightening..



Darlag is still a small town but several times bigger than Madoi and quite busy. One of the streets features motorbike shops on both sides over a stretch of 250m. Small Motorbikes (75-125cc) are very popular amongst young Tibetans as they can be used everywhere across the roadless grasslands. At 16.00 we had our dinner (Sichuan crispy rice plate) and then went to guest house to get washed (no showers in Darlag).

31.08. Bus **Darlag to Aba** (3260m, Sichuan Province)

Cloudy First good night sleep. Very comfortable room in old grey communist-style guest-house (60Y) with 1 common toilet chinese style (no flushing – close your eyes and nose).

then After long waiting to get tickets to hop on a bus to Chengdu,  
patches we manage to conquer 2 seats. The ride to Aba took 8h and  
rain on offered phantastic sceneries. Several passes over 4000m  
the way (up to 4453 m – like Matterhorn), several impressive tibetan  
temples/ monastries (eg. white Jade Temple), green valleys  
with hundreds of yaks scattered around tibetan tents, view  
over a 100km rough mountain chain resembling a saw.



The biggest surprise was the sudden change towards the end of the ride after crossing over to Sichuan from a Qinghai pasture scenery to a lovely farming scenery. Yaks giving way to crop (eg. barley, beans), tents giving way to clay coloured houses looking like small fortresses scattered all over the wide valley between 3600 and 3300 m with a tributary to the Yangtzi River. Arriving in the evening we had dinner with 2 young ladies from Chengdu and it turned out that one of them lived in Shanghai near Evelyne's home (3km). So we had a chinese SMS exchange with Evelyne with her handy!! Bed time! We had a modern standard room with shower and chinese toilet (50Y) but the water supply was not yet connected..... good night!..

01.09 Visit **Aba** then bus to **Hongyuan** (3400m)

Cloudy Had time to visit Aba as bus to Honyuan (to join our originally  
then planned itinerary to Jiuzhaigou) would only depart at 15.00. So  
patches we walked 3 km to the centre of Aba. We then realised that  
rain on this township (district capital) with 2 huge monastries is half  
the way between Qinghai 'purity' and Han-China standard. We  
greatly enjoyed the visit of a splendid monastery until I was  
(felt) molested by a bunch of young monks (I don't know what  
the Dalai Lama would think about that – he was teaching in  
CH a couple of weeks before) so that we left swiftly.



Aba had also a Internet Office and the girl there seemed quite competent and helped me out of trouble with some chinese menus. We had another good meal (shredded potatoes) and were served in a most friendly manner. In the waiting hall a monk chatted me up. After some time (I was still upset about the morning) I asked him what he is doing all the time. When he told me 'praying and meditation' I asked him if he did not do any 'real work'. Shortly after that he got up and left. After a 2.5h kamikaze ride via a high pass and a 8km very steep muddy 20 hairpin off-road pist (short cut) in a ramshakle bus we reached Hongyuan. We got wet at times because the roof of the bus leaked badly. In tidy Hongyuan we found real civilisation again. Arrived at 17.20 and before 18.00 we had already bought our tickets for onward journey (Zhangla) and moved into a clean guest house (50Y). The the shower (first since Xining!) I then had I would not exchange with any monk's thrill of meditation! Had first time barley wine with the meal as Ersatz for beer (not too bad).

### **Assessment of Part A: Beijing to Hongyuan**

When leaving Aba for Hongyuan, we had concluded our journey's first main part with the objective to experience the high and (fairly untouched) tibetan plateau of Qinghai province. Even being forced to chose the alternative and harder way via Madoi, we were fully satisfied in all respects. We suddenly realised however that we had not taken enough photos because we were too absorbed by the intensive impressions and were possibly too preoccupied with gasping for air during the first few days. We also realised (even more later on) that it would have been great to spent much more time in this region before tourism will spoil the atmosphere in a close future. From Xining to Hongyuan and beyond we did not meet one single foreigner and virtually no Chinese travelers and we appreciated (sometimes reluctantly) to get close (and often rub against) real nomad tibetan men and women in traditional clothing. The trip from Aba to Hongyuan marks the transfer from the high plateau towards the lower level planes and valleys (2000–3700m with passes regularly over 4000m) of the north-western Sichuan province with different by tibetan settlements often penetrated by touristic hotspots (chinese style).

02.09 Continued with **Part B: the Jiuzhaigou/Huanglong Intermezzo**

## Diary Part B Hongyuan to Danba

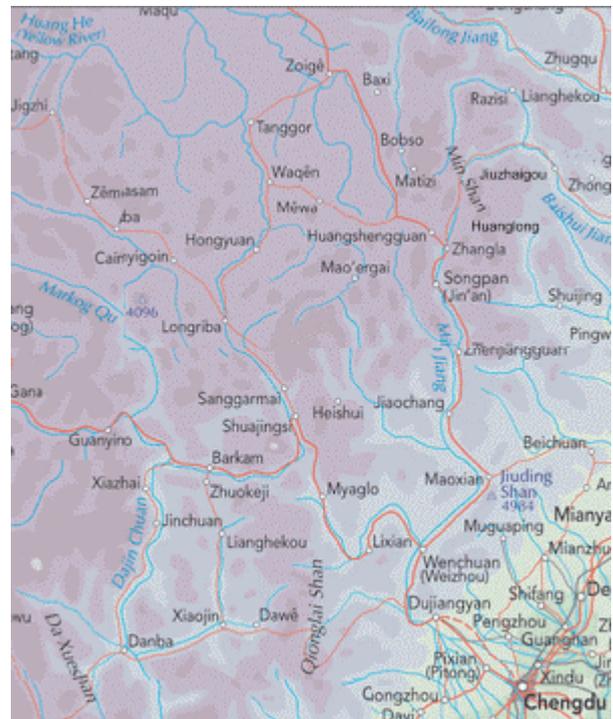
### The Jiuzhaigou/Huanglong Intermezzo

- Huge Wetlands (around 3500m)
- Unesco Natural Heritage Parks
- Chinese Tourism
- Deep wild Valleys and Gorges
- Tibetan-style houses

On the Map:

Hongyuan-Zhangla-Jiuzhaigou-Huanglong-  
Songpan-Wenchuan-Barkam-Danba

Overview: refer to map in Summary



Ever since 1987, when we were in Chengdu, Peggy had wanted to visit **Jiuzhaigou** and **Huanglong** as one of the top Chinese natural wonders. At the time we chose to go to Lhasa instead, which in those early days was also a great experience before it was spoilt by mass tourism. Today these 2 parks have acquired the status of Unesco Natural Heritage Monuments and range amongst the most popular targets of chinese tourism with all that goes with it.

#### Diary

02.09. Bus **Hongyuan** (3400m) via **Zhangla** (3000m) to **Jiuzhaigou Park Entrance** (2000m)  
Cloudy We left Hongyuan at 6.30. The trip started as a fast and pleasant ride along the huge (Zoige-) wetland then at around 3500m (half the size of CH), tributary to the Yellow River. After about 3h we crossed a higher mountain range back to the Yangtzi River side and soon engaged into a stretch of road of the worst kind. 3h for 45km through (still moving) landslides, pot holes and building sites. The slow speed had the advantage that we could see many interesting details, such as a Bernese Oberland style Tibetan village!! At first it looked like Stechelberg and the nearer we got, it looked like old parts of Mürren. Chalets with verandahs, walls nicely decorated sometimes woven like baskets. Later we realised that this style prevails for another 200 km down the Min Jiang valley. Shortly after that we reached Zhangla where I almost got a shock. Zhangla appears as a mixture of Interlaken and Las Vegas with a radical chinese re-design (use all your phantasy to imagine and you only get to 50%) and within 3 minutes after leaving our mud covered bus on the street-side we already managed to hop on a bus from Chengdu to Jiuzhaigou. From Zhangla 100km over a pass in 1h15!! to the entrance of the Jiuzhaigou Park. The entrance terminal to the Jiuzhaigou Park looks like a medium size airport terminal. We got a room in a older hotel (220Y for 3 days, bargained down from 180Y for 1 night) on the slightly less posh eastern side of the park entrance, which however already features a 2km river promenade with souvenir shops and restaurants still 80% closed. Coming straight from the Qinghai high plains, I had a genuine culture shock and wished nothing more than taking the next bus back up there! After a while I reconciled myself with the situation and enjoyed a simple evening meal sitting beside the wild river, only wearing a T-shirt and shorts. The host even gave us some white grapes which had the very peculiar (nice) taste of the red Nostrano grapes in Ticino.

### Jiuzhaigou (Unesco) Park (2000 to 3100m)

This park has been regarded by the Chinese as one of the greatest natural wonders and it is currently one of the most popular targets for Chinese tourists. The park is in a Y-shaped valley of the Min Shan mountains at the edge of the Tibetan plateau. As the name (7 groups area) says, it is inhabited by 7 different Tibetan minority groups which by now have become integrated assets of a 'life open air museum'. Surrounded by mountains over 5000m, the accessible part of the valley stretches for 32 km from Premival Forest to the exit of the park and offers a never ending succession of lakes, waterfalls and wild river scenes in a unlimited versatility. The eastern branch of the Y from Long Lake to Nuorilong measures 14km and is less crowded as it offers less scenic spots. The Y is in fact upside down, as the top of the map points to the south. Most people visit the valley by hopping onto shuttle buses from attraction to attraction and only few will undertake to walk any distance over the wooden pavements preventing people trespassing to the protected natural resorts. In the whole park you will not find one little piece of litter on the floor!



#### 03.09. Visit **Jiuzhaigou** (1<sup>st</sup> day)

Clear, After initial doubts I had to admit that it was worth-while to visit Jiuzhaigou. We were at the ticket office rain at night at 7.10 (I got reduced fee for being over 60) and started the 45 minutes bus ride at 7.20 already. After walking through a beautiful forest with oversized fir trees at 3060m (Premival Forest), we started our long descent over a never-ending cascade of lakes, waterfalls, wild rivers and many magnificent meadows. I had never seen before such a grandiose variety of scenic spots in such concentration. We walked the whole way 33km down over 'plank trails' spending about 10 hours! We were lucky to enjoy great weather until we were sprayed for the last 30 minutes. Although we had to share the valley with ten thousands of tourists (we saw 5 whites) we were lonely walkers for 80% of the time!! As we knew that there is no reasonable food available in the park we had brought with us some excellent dried Yak meat (we had bought in Hongyuan) which we ate with salty biscuits.



#### 04.09. Visit **Jiuzhaigou** (2<sup>nd</sup> day)

Rain Swiss mountain weather and it rained non-stop the whole day! We still did the full program i.e. 'the eastern arm of the Y' starting from Long Lake and got soaked and cold to the bones. The walking path (plank trail) had not been maintained for ages and so we fought with nature, such as landslides, fallen trees and hanging and dripping branches for most of the time. Sometimes it was quite dangerous when we climbed over damaged bridges dangling over precipices. The dessert came 2km before the end, where the path had even been dismantled and we had to fight our way through the bush to the nearby road.



This trail was a disgrace for this prestigious park. Even being very wet and tired we went to visit the Zarusi Temple. Later we had an excellent dinner with plenty of barley wine at a small home cooking place beside the big river.

#### 05.09. Bus via Zhangla to **Huanglong** (3100 – 3600m) then bus again via Zhangla to **Songpan** (2700m)

Cloudy with sunny patches After 3 good nights sleep and a promising sky we head for Huanglong. At first back to Zhangla and then up to a 4500m pass with beautiful view after emerging out of the fog. Huanglong (Yellow Dragon) is a major natural attraction in a side valley with spectacular calcium formations extending over 4 km from 3600m to 3100m. Several hundreds of little ponds with different colours alternate with yellow riverbeds (yellow dragon). The scenery is magnificent with high and wild mountains surrounding the park.



We really enjoyed the walk which was quite easy for us in comparison with most other visitors. The morning in the park was reasonably quiet but by lunch-time the big crowds had arrived. I estimated 200 buses having shed nearly 10'000 chinese tourists on the 4-6km narrow paths, half of them carrying oxygen bottles. At 15.00 we left and crossed back over the pass to Zhangla and then on to Songpan.



Songpan is a small, totally renovated old town within thick walls (20m) dominated by city gate towers and with those dressed up traditional ladies, making it a real tourist trap. Outside the walls there were many of the chalet type houses again which are typical for the entire 300 km long valley.



The ancient bridge was one of the highlights of the day.

In the evening we had dinner with Michael, a Shanghainese. We stayed in a simple room in a simple guest house (30Y).



06.09. Bus **Songpan** via **Wenchuan** (1300m) to **Barkam (Maerkam)** (2700m)

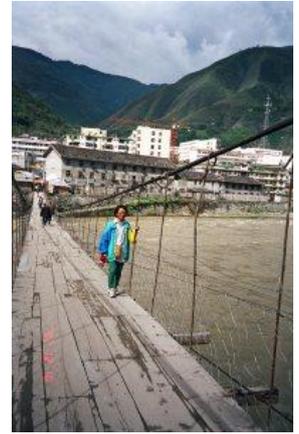
fair What we had expected to be a routine ride of 180km down to Wenchuan in the plain near Chengdu turned out to be a very attractive descent (kamikaze driver) along the impressive and monsoon-swollen Min Jiang River. Very wild sceneries with huge gorges alternating with lovely villages with chalet-type houses of which some walls were woven like baskets or then decorated with paintings or carvings. Shortly before reaching Wenchuan after 4h we passed-by the impressive snow-covered Jiulingshan Mountain (4984m). We had expected to be forced to stay the night but 15 min later (before I realised what Peggy was up to) we already sat on another bus to Barkam (to join our North South itinerary again). It was a 180km drive again over very bad roads on a bumpy bus with a mad driver. As we sat at the very end of the bus, we 'suffered' a real rodeo ride (oh oh, that's when you feel old at 60!). We drove up a very wild valley (again) with totally different houses made of raw stone blocks (like rustici in Ticino) with typically tibetan shapes and decorations. Here and there we also saw those sleek and high towers, typical for that region. Before Barkam we expected to cross another high pass but were surprised to suddenly engulf into a modern and even illuminated 5km tunnel. On the other side we joined the road from Hongyuan to reach Barkam after 4.5h. This was to be the first time, chinese guest houses would not take me in (apparently police regulations?). After long persuasion by Peggy, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place accepted us for one night (50Y). Thus we could avoid paying the manyfold price in a top address hotel. Wherever possible we registered under Peggy's Hongkong ID which in most other places made things easy. Barkam was quite a town giving itself a flavour of a top class holiday resort. But then it took us nearly 2 hours running and cycling to both bus stations at opposite ends of town to find out about buses to Danba. Without Peggy's skills it would have taken us 4 days from Songpan to Danba instead of 2!. After a good dinner we got back in deep darkness.

**Note:** Wenchuan was one of the towns to be very badly hit by the deadly earthquake in 2008

07.09. Bus **Barkam** to **Danba** (1800m)

Nice,  
late  
short  
rain

Today we got up at 4.30 to be on time at the bus station to buy the ticket at 6.00 for the bus leaving at 7.00. In the end the ticket counter opened at 6.40 only but the bus left at 7.00 sharp (Buses usually start exactly on time, but often they then go fishing around town for additional customers). After the hard day yesterday, we intended to take it easy on the 180km to Danba along the impressive Dajin Chuan River, again through a beautiful and often wild valley with tibetan stone houses and millions of pear trees. The pears were ready to be plucked and are extremely juicy, very light and not soggy at all. During the lunch stop at **Jinchuan** we took advantage to cross one of the many hanging bridges in these regions. This one was particularly long and bouncing badly (that was real cool). Then we continued until we were blocked by a rock slide (which was still threatening). After the crew of 2 buses managed to clear a breach with cисels and sledge hammers we managed to continue for another 2km until we got to a much larger slide having washed the road into the river.



There we were told to get off (got refunded 14Y of 120Y) and to continue with mini-vans after 200m 'climbing' over mud and large boulders. 4km further the road had been completely washed away by a side river for 400m, so we had to walk again to take another mini-van for the last 40km to Danba. Both times we went through the full ritual of bargaining which included walking away in-between (Peggy is mastering such situations very well, fortunately). So instead of the expected comfortable 3-4h hours we were 8h on the way but the exciting scenery and the interaction with the other, mostly local passengers made the time pass quickly.

Danba is very special. It is boxed-in between the river and walls of high mountains with gorges at both ends of town, a hole where one hardly sees the sky. So it happened that suddenly a gale came with torrential rain, driving us into the closest eating place and had already passed right after we had ordered what was to be the most awful meal of the trip (one dish was totally inedible) served by the most unfriendly woman.

We stayed the night in a guesthouse (50Y) under a 100m cliff, 30cm from our room's window, 50cm from my head rest. Although Danba is an interesting place with options to visit small traditional tibetan mountain villages (large advertisement pannels!) we looked forward to live the next major highlight of our trip, the Gongga Shan.

### **Assessment of Part B: Hongyuan to Danba – The Jiuzhaigou / Huanglong Intermezzo**

The visit to **Jiuzhaigou / Huanglong** was a 'plug-in' tour to our North / South itinerary, a visit which Peggy had ear-marked for over 20 years. While it was certainly worthwhile to see these 2 chinese touristic hot spots, we were very happy to realise that the route from Hongyuan over Jiuzhaigou via Wenchuan and Barkam was in itself worth the detour!! So we can say that part B represented a great success and not just a transition. Of course the good weather (expect for one day) at the monsoon's tail with much sun and still much water and green contributed significantly!

08.09 Continued with **Part C: Danba via Xinduqiao (Gongga Shan- 7514m) to Zhongdian (Shangri-la)**

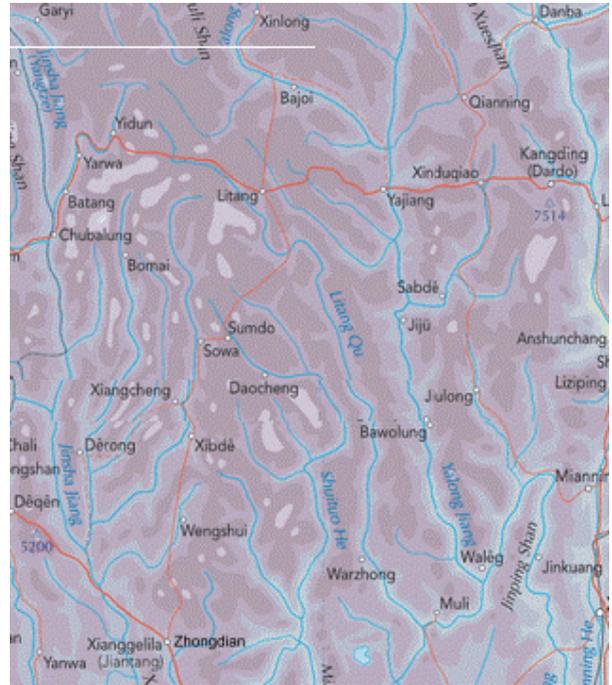
## Diary Part C Danba to Zhongdian (Shangri-la)

### From Sichuan to Yunnan via Gongga Shan (7514m)

- The exciting approach via Tagong
- The Gongga Shan under the low sky
- Wild rides through gorges and greenlands
- The highest city in the world (over 4000m)
- Shangri-la – Lost Horizon?

On the Map:

Danba-Xinduqiao (Gongga Shan 7514m)-Litang-  
Xiangcheng-Derong- Zhongdian (Shangri-La)



Overview: refer to map in Summary

#### Diary

(Continued from **Part B**)

Ever since we saw the impressive Gongga Shan (7514m) in 1987 during the flight to Lhasa I had wished to get close to this mountain some day. This was one of major reason for us to do our North South trip through this region. We had to live with one problem, however: Gongga Shan is very exposed to weather and can therefore not be seen very often. Although Kangding would be closer to Gongga Shan, there is no way you see it from there and so we tried it from less much smaller and less mundane town Xinduqiao.

08.09. Bus from **Danba** (1700m) via **Bamei** (Qianning, 3700m), **Tagong** (3800m) to **Xinduqiao** (3600m) Starting at 7.00 from Danba right into narrow gorge of a side river until, after 60km, we got to a wide valley seeing a impressive snow mountain (probably Tagong Mountain from the back). After crossing a pass well above 4000m we reached after 3h the lost village Bamei with some beautiful houses. Here we were back in the lovely tibetan grass lands again. While waiting for a mini-van to take us to Xinduqiao (apparently there were no more public buses that day) we went to see a small temple under restauration (mostly women workers) and had good fun with the local Lama (abbot).



The 170 km to Xinduqiao we passed-  
by Tagong with a very famous old  
monastery and a nearby tourist town  
which has grown out of nothing within  
just a few years (terrible). We  
stopped beside the new temple  
where one has a beautiful view of the  
nearby snow mountains of which  
Tagong Mountain, around 6000m is  
the most impressive.



We arrived in Xinduqiao at 14.00, hopped off the bus in front of a store combined with a small guest house where we stayed in a simple room with 3 beds for us 2 (30Y). From the street we saw some distant rocky peaks in the direction of Gongga Shan (!!!!), so we immediately walked out of town and climbed up to the next steep grass hill (we had not had anything to eat that day). As was to be feared, Gongga Shan was hiding in its clouds although we waited until 17.00. In the evening we devoured our portion of djiaoze.

09.09. Around **Xinduqiao**, enjoy view of **Gongga Shan** (7514m)

Early fog, Then just blue! When we got up the sky was miserable with low altitude fog. Disappointed, we started a fast walk along the dusty highway in southern direction expecting to get to a well-known temple. But after 4 Km we saw a tiny path through the rocks leading up to a chain of grass hills. Hoping we would get to the sun we climbed up and all of a sudden the sky cleared and we had a splendid view of **Gongga Shan – the climax** of our journey! **That was what we came here for!** We were so excited that we left the temple alone and continued up to the highest of the grassy peaks. The view was exasperating, the flowers (Edelweiss, Enzian and many others) were ravishing, the scents from the herbs were celestial and we felt so fit at nearly 4000m!



We walked up and up and down and up and looked and looked, had picknick (yak meat from Hongyuan, crackers from Zhangla and the most succulent pear from Jinchuan and when at last we got to the best place to get a picture of the whole Gongga Shan chain, the film was finished (sh..!!!). Never mind, the 360 degree view was breath-taking and we were so thankful to be able to live this unique day on top of the world! That day we walked 6 hours at ease.

10.09. Bus **Xinduqiao** to **Litang** (4000m)

Fine with light clouds Got up very early to see Gongga Shan once more before leaving, but it had already hidden itself for most parts. So we hopped on a bus to Litang (200km) at 9.00. Right away we climbed up to a pass of 4450m where we said bye to Gongga Shan again. As we sat once again in the very back we realised on the way down that we had to face another rodeo ride. Indeed, after Yajiang (Agang?) we followed a little river upstream which had caused havoc a few weeks ago and we learned that the road (mostly reduced to a bumpy track over kilometers) had just been opened to trafic a few days ago!



But then as we got to high altitudes again we enjoyed a beautiful ride over several passes (between 4500m and 4700m). Finally we got to Litang on a big green plane surrounded by gentle mountains peaking at 5000m. Litang is a busy, mostly tibetan town with over 40'000 inhabitants. It is supposed to be the biggest town over 4000m. It is famous for its nomads folklore festivities in August. We enjoyed our walk up to the large monastery on a hill in the bright evening sun and then descended through the traditional tibetan quarters with small dirt paths. People were very kind and did not mind us poking our heads through the entrances to see women at work, weaving and embroidering. I would have liked to stay in Litang a bit longer but to do really something worthwhile would take at least a few days. We enjoyed the rather strange guest house (30Y) with the most antique electrical switch for the water heater I have ever seen.



11.09. Bus **Litang** to **Xiangchen** (3200m)

Fine, little cloudy We left Litang with mixed feelings as we felt like heading for home and leaving something precious behind. But then after a short while the scenery got ever so exciting again when we drove up at boulder valley between boulder mountains (with Hare Peak) and then over a boulder plane at 4000m. Then came another thrilling crossing of a high pass followed by a breath-taking descent (sort of a long balcony drive, 1000m above the ground). Suddenly the road was blocked by a landslide which must have happened just before we got there, as we were the only vehicle around.



All men got off the bus to move the rubble, boulders and bushwork aside, while some more stuff poured down. It was very dangerous and only by luck did 2 men not fall down 100m into the river below as they fell on their backs when a branch they had been pulling broke off. By the way, this was the first ride we shared with other westerners ever since we started in Beijing.

Xiangcheng (200km from Litang) is a rather lost small town on the slope of a very deep valley, still far away from major towns but there were quite a few foreigners, who like us, were waiting to continue the next day. Even here there are building sites all over and the big monastery up on the slope dominating the town, had just been restored and is now worth a visit. The guest house was just about ok (30Y).

#### 12.09. Bus **Xiangchen** via **Derong** (2800m) to **Zhongdian (Shangri-La)** (3340m)

Fine Surprise: The bus engulfs into a steep side valley and climbs up a vertiginous slope to a high pass and then a long descent to Derong where Sichuan pokes into Yunnan. Derong looks like an attractive small town embedded in deep valley along a wild torrent which we followed for 50km through an impressive gorge throwing itself abruptly into the Yangzi (her called Jinsha Jiang) dark brown, flowing majestically through a massive rocky bed which we followed very slowly (enjoying the view) for 30km over a very bumpy road. After 300km and 9.5h we reach Zhongdian (Shangri-La). Although still at high altitude one feels like getting to the 'bottom'.



After a long search we find the Barley Bar and the associated guesthouse in the old town where Evelyne had stayed less than a year ago. We feel homely right away in this chalet house with the wooden rooms (90Y for 3 days). The owner-lady remembering Evelyne treats us like old acquaintances. For dinner we had hot pot with donkey, lamb and beef at a rather posh tibetan restaurant topped with a beer at the Barley Bar. That evening I called Gmm in CH and the connection was top quality.



#### 13.09. Visit **Zhongdian (Shangri-La)**

Cloudy at times, light rain at night Laundry morning! Then after a short walk up to a temple overlooking the city and the plane, we went food-shopping at the market with the guest-house girl for Peggy to give European cooking lessons for dinner!!! Had a chat with a young French guy from Annecy who had passed Tongren, Magen, Darlag shortly before us. In the afternoon Peggy started her cooking course and then we had dinner together: cheese on toasts, spaghetti bolognese, steak with mushroom sauce. It all turned out ok but I was not sure if the locals were convinced! After that we went to the main square to see the every evenings' tibetan dances.



About **Shangri-La**: The name comes from the fiction novel 'Lost Horizon', written in the 1930's playing in a totally lost valley somewhere in the Himalaya where people could become several hundred years old. Some tourism marketeers claim that the description of Shangri-La match the region of Zhongdian and Degen and have branded this name for tourism purposes (in Chinese Xianggelila).

Shangri-la has a big new town, a newly renovated small old town and a group of temples which some call 'mini Potala'



#### 14.09. Visit **Zhongdian (Shangri-La)**

Cloudy Lazy morning (first time this trip). After cake-noodle breakfast at (yammie) we walked to the 'mini-Potala' temple. On the way I times, watched a tibetan lady making butter tea and she spontaneously light invited us to join her. She also treated us with excellent tibetan rain at cottage cheese. On the way back from the temple we crossed the market once more and found a small shop with huge barrels selling night good and pure tasting barley schnaps (45 degrees), the half liter for 3Y.



For dinner we had an excellent yak ragout in a simple tibetan place (our 4 tables standard) and then we went for tibetan dancing on the mains square. I enjoyed to dance for half an hour with a arts student from Nanchag and just when our relationship got a bit more intimate mum pulled me out of the circle under the pretext that there would soon be no more warm water for the shower. We did not seem to have the same priorities for once! Anyhow this last evening was a dignified end of our journey through the tibetan cultural area



**Assessment of Part C: Danba to Zhongdian -Sichuan to Yunnan via Gongga Shan (7514m)**

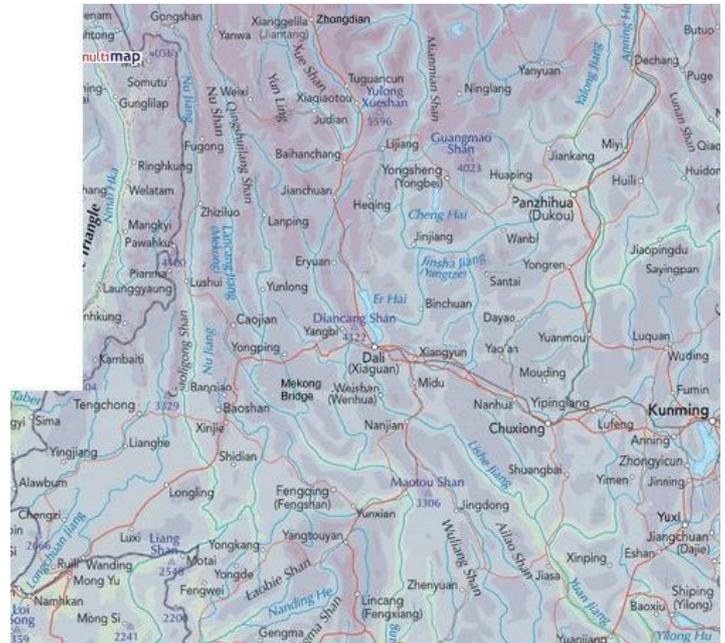
Having followed our planned itineray to Shangri-La, I had the feeling that we had fully achieved our objectives and I was totally satisfied with all the experiences and impressions we had lived so far. Somehow I felt at this point that the rest of the journey to Shanghai may just be a mere addition. If you want to know why it was much more than that, you have to read part D.

15.09 Continued with **Part D: From Shangri-la** in a great south-western loop to **Kunming**

## Peggy and Francis' China Trip 2005

# Diary Part D Shangri-La to Kunming A Loop across the Mekong

- Lovely sight-seeing in Yunnan
- A park with wrinkled rocks and old Buddha sculptures
- An adventurous crossing of the Mekong
- Enjoy the tropical nature at low altitudes
- Interesting minorities at Myanmar's border



On the Map:

Zhongdian (Shangri-La) – Lijiang – Jianchuan - Dali – Mekong (Lancang) River Bridge - Baoshan – Luxi - Ruili – Yingjiang – Baoshan – Kunming

Overview: refer to map in Summary

### Diary

(Continued from **Part C**)

After the mountains Peggy still had this drive to go on doing exciting things, since the Yunnan Province represents probably the most versatile and popular touring area of China. High mountains, deep valleys with upper courses of major rivers, lakes and scurrile land formations, low altitude tropical climate, many different ethnical minorities and traditional cultural and economic border line between China, the Tibet and the Indian Ocean (Tea Road) make Yunnan a paradise for explorations. Unfortunately some of the most popular places have already become nightmares from touristical excesses.

Since we had already seen a lot of mountainous country-side, we chose to drop the options Degen and Lugu Lake for the benefit of a loop across the Mekong and the Nu Jiang (Salween) to the Myanmar border.

#### 15.09. Bus from **Zhongdian (Shangri-La)** via first **Yangzi River Bend** to **Lijiang (2400m)**

Fine Bye Shangri-La, bye Tibet. From a very modern bus terminal we cross the plane in thick autumn fog which gives way to the sun as soon as we get to mountains and wild valleys again until we reach the light Yangzi River at the entrance of the Tiger Leaping Gorge (a very popular tourist destination). We follow clouds the Yangzi up-stream to it's first bend. On the way we see the Jade Dragon (Yulong) Mountain (5600m) from its back.

Reaching the end of the river's bend after 3.5h (140km) we get off and walk 12km along the river's long turn to 'Ziku'. There we err around the bush and small village streets with rather unfriendly people for 1 hour in the humid and hot afternoon to find a good place for a picture. Later we took a mini-van (1.5h/40km) to Lijiang with bad traffic jams when entering the city.

We are shocked to be in a big city again and so we continue right away to the ancient town Shuhe at 4km to the north-west, to stay the night. Another shock: this ancient town is again for the biggest part made of new houses in ancient style but full of modern restaurants and tourist shops and you pay entrance fee of 30Y if getting there before 17.00. We find a small old original guest house (40Y) in the small old part. It was interesting to see locals to wash vegetables and dishes in the fresh-water gutters running beside the narrow streets.



16.09. Visit **Lijiang** then bus to **Jianchuan** and to the close-by **Bao Shan Park**

Fine, later getting cloudy  
Walking from Shuhe to Yuhe Village then nice stroll along the Yuhe river to and trough Lijiang Old Town (another tourist trap). All the way we saw just portions of the Jade Dragon (Yulong) Mountain playing with the surrounding clouds.



At 13.30 we took bus to Jianchuan (2h/75km) then mini-van (1h/30km) to Bao Shan Mountain Park at the foot of an old monastery, carved in a high cliff. We had intended to sleep there and walked up the endless stair. The monastery and its settings (pic to follow) were very impressive but the monk who tried to get us to stay was very unappetising and also a pain in the neck. So we left again, although we did not know where to go to sleep 2.5h before dark and in the middle of nowhere. So we decided to walk further up into the park to another temple under a sky threatening with thunderstorms. It was a fast and lonely walk up and accross the hills to the unknown with beautiful evening views to horizon under scattered thunderstorm clouds all around.

We reached the Bell Temple after 7km in 1h15 at 18.30 and where relieved to see a small guesthouse. After they wanted to charge a horrid 60Y (using our situation) and claimed to have no food available, Peggy sneered at them walked off (here I was convinced that we would pass the night in the bush). After 10 minutes Peggy walked back and after a bit of loud talking we had a room (2 beds and a bare lamp-bulb only) for 40Y and 20 minutes later we had a simple but excellent meal, watching the sunset for 20Y incl. 2 bottles of beer! When it got dark the 2 girls asked us into their living room (we were the only guests) and we had a lovely evening together. What a day!!!



17.09. Visit **Bao Shan Park** then by bus to **Dali (2000m)**

Fine  
At 8.30 we started to the main attraction of the park: a side canon with 'wrinkeled' rocks and a monastery with well maintained 8<sup>th</sup> century Buddha carvings in grottoes mixing Indian, local and Han cultures (no photos allowed). We also saw very beautiful birds (some flashing red). The scenery was so exciting that we did the walk twice!



At 11.00 we got our bags and walked-off to see the rest of the park. But at the first crossing we took the wrong path which led us steeply down to the main valley. So we then walked several km through beautiful fields (mainly rice ready for harvest) and came across a brick burning plant.



Suddenly Peggy realised that there would be a way back into the park to see another rock temple (in the back on the photo) 280 steep steps up (hot and humid afternoon) with more grotoe-carvings! But then at last, after another express walk, we got to a village where we could get a mini-van back to Jianchuan. After 20km we got to a road junction where we saw a bus to Dali; so we hopped off and on and saved 2 h! After crossing endless rice fields we reached Dali Old Town after 3.5h/120km.



In the attractive old town's centre Peggy found a penthouse room with TV and common shower for 25Y! Then we had an excellent meal in a 4 table muslim place (e.g. beef with fresh mushrooms, fish in a very hot soup). Evening laundry on the penthouse terrace. WC had 360 degree round-view!

18.09. Visit **Dali** and **Xiaguan** (new Dali) – **Moon Festival**

Rain here and there

In the morning we took shuttle bus to Xiaguan, a new big city (15km) to inquire about onward bus trip. Then we walk through town to the lake. Did not see much of it, as it was quite gray and rainy at this moment. So we got back to Dali and went to visit the 3 pagodas which are 1000 years old (fee 52Y: p.o.!). The surrounding mountains still peak at 4000m in this area.



Then we much enjoyed to stroll through the busy pedestrian streets of the old town with an exciting pre-August Moon festival atmosphere (like X-mas). Locals were busy to buy food and moon cakes for the festivities. We also bought moon cakes, pigeon eggs and fruit (everything round) and 0.6 l pure and excellent corn schnaps for 1.5Y from a huge barrel. Then we had a speciality: fried milk slice (?) before we had a treat at our moslem place again: sweet peas (Kefen), fresh mushrooms, ngau yuk soup. Before going to sleep we ate (and drank) the goodies we bought, although the moon did not show itself to us on the penthouse.



19.09. Bus **Dali via Xiaguan to Yongpin, then to Tanjang; walk over the Mekong River to Zhuizhai**  
Fine at first, rain before dark Today's program: **The crossing of the Mekong!** Peggy had some vague idea (from a magazine) of an old bridge in a gorge of the Mekong (Lancang). So we went to Xiaguan to take a bus to Yongping (2.5h / 100km). After a long wait we managed to leave by mini-van (DVD screen in sunblind) for a small village (Tanjang) in a lovely side-valley of the Mekong (1h / 50km). There we asked for the bridge, but no one was able to tell us for sure how far it is to walk there and if there is a way to continue on the other side. But at least somebody told us which footpath to follow out of the village into unknown country-side. Leaving at 13.45 we knew that we had 6h until complete darkness and we were confident that we would get somewhere safe by then.

After 1h through lovely farmland and small villages with very neat houses and charming people we got to a steep path (so called mule track) zickzagging up to a pass. Due to some landslides this was quite dangerous and we had to climb over 15-30m deep crevasses and our clothes were yellow from rubbing against perpendicular slopes. Higher up, a crossing water buffalo said hello wagging his tail and sprayed me with dung from top to bottom (sh..!). Just after crossing the pass through a gate (ancient Tea Road) we saw the brown Mekong deep below.



After a steep descent we got to the bridge after 3h walk. The ancient stone bridge had collapsed long ago but there was a narrow hanging bridge enabling us to cross the gorge over the muddy Mekong (that's **me** on top at right pic!). It was a great moment for us to experience this historic Tea Road site which is still totally out of touristic ways. We then followed the steep uphill track on the other side after a passing-by goatherd had told us about a guest house somewhere after the village ahead. Communication was rather difficult since people spoke local dialect or even no chinese at all! Indeed, there was nowhere to stay in the village (people were too shy with me foreigner). After Peggy and I had a tormented half hour (which I better don't describe) we learned that we would have to climb up to the top of the mountain over a steep winding path (mule track) for 2h to get to a guest house, 'somewhere up there'.



It was 18.00 and we had daylight until 19.30!! We walked very quickly and after half hour we luckily caught up with 2 locals going the same way and speaking proper chinese (we were even more relieved as it started to rain badly). They guided us up to the top and then along a muddy track to a 1-street village, Zhuizhai, arriving in the midst of a crowd of children who had apparently never seen a real foreigner! We got there at 19.35, after nearly 6h of fast walking, 1200m uphill and we were exhausted as we hardly had eaten anything that day. 5 min later it was completely dark and we realised that we had narrowly escaped the option of staying out for the night in the rain. We then had dinner, being the only guests of the only eating place. After dinner we were asked to stay and share their moon cakes and some exotic pears. The only guest house was ok (20Y).

20.09. Bus from **Shuilong via Baoshan to Luxi (Mangshi)**

Cloudy, Memorable coffee with the last remaining portion of crème. We took the bus at 8.30. The mud road was then soaked and the bus was skidding a lot when slowly working up to a pass and then round and round over a endless ridge between hills, passing-by lovely small villages and farms. After 1.5h / 45km we got to Baoshan, an important cross-road, where we got a bus to Luxi (Mangshi) right away. After many exciting ups and downs we crossed the large river Nu Jiang River (Salween) and got into a thorough police control. This happened several times on the trip, but Peggy and I were always treated politely. Then the bus climbed and climbed again through a beautiful valley with stepped rice fields everywhere. What a colour mix with the huge bamboos, banana trees and lush bush wilderness! After a high pass we drove over a hilly plateau crossing Langling, renowned for its role during the Long March. After 4.5h /170km we reached Luxi. It was a different world for us. Every street is bordered by palmtree alleys. Right after we arrived we had a pot of Over the Bridge Noodles (popular amongst back packers) and then settled in a simple guest house (30Y). Later we visited a temple of the tai minority and a very busy market and then we had dinner on the pavement: dumpling, fried rice, a large soup bone (kind of Gnagi) and cold beer.



21.09. Bus from **Luxi to Ruili**

Cloudy Gentle bus ride through green countryside to Ruili (2.5h /110km). After settling in a indoor court sunny guesthouse (30Y) and having tried cold noodles in a slimy peanut cream for lunch (ok), we started our over sight-seeing walk in the wrong direction (it was still nice and interesting) and came back after 2h to look us at the (upside-down) map once more and then started again.

Eventually we reached the Friendship bridge over the Longchuan Jiang (tributary to the Irrawadi) leading to Myanmar. 1 km beside the bridge we got to a park with a holy tree and bus loads of chinese tourists looking across the river into forbidden Myanmar (comparable with Lok Ma Chau look-out in Hongkong during the 70's). For dinner we tried the local treat, selecting our plate from 20 different pre-cooked pans (was ok, but not as good and tasty as it looked!). Ruili is a booming border town with a mix of all possible minority people, all waiting for business to start with the border to Myanmar opening any time, hopefully soon.



22.09. Bus from **Ruili to Yingjiang**

Cloudy Slowish drive trough a fertile plane, then up a high pass into the clouds and down again to a wide valley sunny where we reach Yingjiang after 4h /140km. Yingjiang is a very friendly small town with a new guest over us house where we got a very comfortable and luxury room for 50Y.

Then walking out of town to a buddha tower and temple with very friendly people. On the way back we stopped at a small eating place offering a local speciality: cold pink noodles to be eaten by hand with a hot chicken tartar. Before leaving we were invited to (and had to) drink schnapps with a young soldier and his local mates.



The are many huge and beautiful trees everywhere in this region.

23.09 Bus from **Yingjiang via Tengchong to Baoshan**

Cloudy Today's ride to Tengchong (3h/90km) was rather slow again but then it was nice to see a lot of things sunny through villages and fields up the wide, fertile valley. Approaching Tengchong one gets a bit a feeling of over the Massif Central in France. Tengchong is a touristic destination featuring extinguished volcanoes and spa's. We did not like the towns atmosphere too much and so we took another bus on to Baoshan (4h / 150km). It was a spectacular drive over 4 passes and and an exciting 'balcony ride' down to the Nu Jiang River and then over the same bridge again in reverse direction. Baoshan is an important crossing point on a very densely populated plane but it looked a bit poorer than the towns we had visited further south and we had difficulty to find a suitable place to eat well. In the end we decided to eat from a small stall (1 table) at the market and we had a most delicious BBQ meal with all kinds of brochettes (even small potatoes). The lady was so excited about our appetite (22 bochettes), she even gave us a discount. Mum had picked the real runner of the market! The hotel was a bit shabby but so what (30Y)?

24.09 Bus from **Baoshan to Kunming**

Mostly It was an easy comfortable ride to Kunming (7h / 500km) back over the Mekong (motorway this time) sunny and Dali again. Unfortunately the view was obscured for the first 350km by damp double glazed

windows. But we could see that the scenery from Dali to Kunming is also nice with ever changing planes, hills and valleys. Getting into Kunming we were back into a major chinese city and indeed our bus followed a 'double 8' motorway junction before 'landing' in the bus terminal (south of the rail-station). We got a good room in a guest house nearby (40Y) and spent the evening walking through the nearby market (eating a dish of small lake fish made à la Egli Filet) and then having dinner in a simple place.

**Assessment of Part D: Shangri-La to Kunming, a loop across the Mekong**

We were very happy that we had not skipped the Ruili/Myanmar loop, both for the intense impression on us of this exotic region and the 'adventures' engraved for ever into our memories. In fact we thought that we could have easily spent a week longer there, but we felt a bit pressed by time, as we still hoped to meet Evelyne somewhere (e.g. Chengdu) at around the 1st October and we did not want to miss out on seeing a few more things in Guizhou.

Continued with **Part E: From Kunming to Shanghai via surprising Guizhou**

## Diary Part E Kunming to Shanghai

### Beautiful Guizhou

- Kunming and its attractions
- Scurry and beautiful landscapes
- A long and hard train ride



On the Map:

Kunming – Xingyi – Zhenfeng - Guiyang

Overview: refer to map in Summary

### Diary

(Continued from **Part D**)

We decided to stay 3 nights in Kunming to tune our plans for the remaining journey to Shanghai with Evelyne. Unfortunately we had to drop the idea of meeting Evelyne in Wuhan to take the ship on the Yangzi to Shanghai, because the service had been discontinued a few months earlier. We also realised that it would not be easy to travel on 1<sup>st</sup> October and the following week (national holiday), so we agreed to arrive in Shanghai on 1<sup>st</sup> October, which unfortunately shortened our stay in beautiful Guizhou.

#### 25.09. Visit **Kunming** and its **Lake Dian**

cloudy Laundry and finding out about a tour to the nearby attraction Jiu Xian (see 26.09) and the onward journey to Xingyi. Then walk all the way through the centre and find a bus to the lake Dian. We got to a park (20Y) with a renowned pagoda, a dirty river and a luna park but we did not see the lake. Back to the centre and another bus to another park further south-east – another tourist trap and we did not enter this time. So we walked and walked north again trying to get access to the lake somehow. In the end we reached a very nice promenade (hidden from tourists) and enjoyed to stroll along the whole way. That saved our day!



#### 26.09. Visit **Jiu Xian Gorge / Caves** (north-east of Kunming)

cloudy Of course we knew about the so called Stone Forest, the best known late attraction of Yunnan. We still decided to visit the much less famous and rain more quiet Jiu Xian Park thus avoiding the mainstream and so we joined the first and only organised tour (all chinese) of our journey. We left on time at 8.00 and had a nice ride until the bus stopped in front of a tourist jewelry shop and 20 minutes later at another jewelry shop. At 12.00 we reached the park (2.5h net/ 50 km).



In the middle of a rolling hill country-side noone would expect such a spectacular succession of gorges, caves (chinese-style illumination) and waterfalls in unbelievable variety, mostly embedded underground with vaults up to over 60m! At the end after about 2h we took the way back up to the entrance on a chair lift. Here we were guided to a TV room where a video of our visit was played and one had the option to buy a DVD of our visit as a souvenir (we didn't).



This was not the end and the return trip became a nightmare for me, as we still visited a medicine shop (with an endless presentation, which ended only when I just walked out on them and all our Chinese followed!) and stopped a super market such that we got back after 19.00 in heavy rain. Total time 11h = 5h drive + 3h visit in park & lunch + 3h in shops etc). I was mad like hell and it was bye to the expected cosy evening.

27.09. Bus **Kunming** via Fuyuan to **Xingyi** (Guizhou)

cloudy The first part mostly over motorway (200 km) was rather boring but as we approached the border to Guizhou the hills took over and the landscape became very attractive with all the scattered villages and farms and the bus winding through on small roads (another Kamikaze drive). After 7h / 300km we reached Xingyi and were first of all frustrated because the first few guest houses rejected me as a foreigner. At the 4th guesthouse I was very welcome and we had a nice simple room under the roof (30Y). Xingyi is an attractive small town (except for non-stop hooting) on top of a hill with small streets, a nice market and a great oval square. Here everybody stared at me! Had a nice chicken hot pot for dinner! Heard from Evelyne that she had booked a 'cruise' for 2<sup>nd</sup> October assuming we would be back on 1<sup>st</sup> October. Now we knew that we had to rush back to Shanghai with a minimum time left for our program in Guizhou!

28.09. Visit of **Wangfengling Park**, then bus to **Zhenfeng**

cloudy Got local bus to Wangfengling Park. Peggy had known this place from a travel magazine in Hongkong, praising this area for being totally untouched by tourism! ('Denkste') The morning we arrived there was a big crowd of people, a military music and TV expecting a procession of high ranking officials for the inauguration of the park. We got into the park the last day free of charge and walked up a small path into the beautiful bizarre hills (bit like Guilin) for 1.5h and saw how the farmers live between the hills. Unfortunately we had to go back to town to continue the journey. Waiting for the bus we took a stroll on nice promenade along the little river. The bus then left at 14.00 and took us in 3.5h the 130km to Zhenfeng mostly through the countless hills. Had an excellent simple dinner at a small place with the appetising kitchen behind glass windows in the middle of the guests. In the evening we saw a show of the inauguration festivities on TV. Stayed at an older-style guesthouse with a seductive smell in the stair-case from the bakery at the ground floor.



29.09. Walk in lovely **Country-Side** near **Zhenfeng**, then Bus to **Guyang** and start of **Train Ride** to Shanghai

cloudy Started sight-seeing at 7.30 taking a local bus about 11km out of town to follow some vague ideas Peggy had from a magazine in Hongkong. We gave ourselves about 4 hours to see what there is to see! It turned out to be one of the **nicest moments** we spent throughout the whole journey. We walked around and then the whole way back to town through lovely hills (the tits), scurrile rocks ('mini stone forest'), nicest fields in harvesting season and were smiling with the local farmers (since Peggy could not talk with most of them). So we took many pictures trying to take the happiness home!



At 14.00 we took the bus to Guiyang, where we arrived after a pleasant ride (4h/ 285km) most of the way through those hills. From the long-distance bus terminal we crossed the million city of Guiyang to the rail station during evening rush-hour. We were squeezed like sardines while we realised that this place would certainly be worth staying for a day. The station was totally overcrowded and we queued for 45 minutes to get to the ticket-counter (people squeezing from all sides). So Peggy bought 2 of the last no-seat tickets for the 35h ride to Shanghai (crazy thought!)



The train leaving in 45 minutes we just bought a few baodze for dinner and then the train left on time at 20.40 with us standing in a completely packed train! After 5 minutes the train stopped for 1 hour! what a start! We were standing for 3 hours when a young man who we had seen at the departure gate came and asked us to move to his carriage to sit on his and his wife's seats, as they would get off at the next stop, 1h later (they even left some food behind for us, which we were very glad to accept). We were so happy about our luck at that moment, that we did not moan about not getting sleeper-berths for the remaining 30 hours (normally a night mare to sit so long)!!!!

30.09. Sitting in **Train** somewhere between Guyang and Shanghai  
fair At 5.00 we reached Hunan and at 13.00 Gansi. The ride was too strenuous (for the bum) to enjoy the rather dull scenery. So we kept our minds absorbed with watching people traveling in a totally overcrowded train. We hardly lifted our behinds for fear that some smaller bum may squeeze underneath. The people and the train got more and more messy as it was almost impossible to reach the waste bins. Peggy, at one stage in the squeeze dropped a lot of oily fish sauce on her shoes. After some swearing and rubbing them, the shoes were shiny like never before and we all had a good lough. The toilets were always busy but by far no more as filthy as they used to be in earlier days. After a long 20 hours we realized that we still had 14 hours to go!

1.10. Last night on **Train** and then arriving in **Shanghai**, hurra!  
fair

Hanzhou only 2 more hours to go! Just finished the last piece of dark Migros Chocci and now having a nice cup of Nescafe (without cream). At last we arrived in **Shanghai** (1 hour delay) and said bye to our seat neighbours (from Guizhou) who had been so sweet and nice to us. At the station, we were collected (with a big hug) by Evelyne and David and a few minutes later we were **HOME** in Evelyne's lovely apartment on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor.



The rest of the day we were being lazy then we had an excellent hotpot enjoying being together and in good care. I had lost 5 kilo in 6 weeks of backpackers life but **was totally satisfied**.

#### **Assessment of Part E: Kunming via Guizhou to Shanghai**

Kunming was as we had expected mainly a huge city and from a touristic point of view just a major departure point for sight-seeing. Guizhou was a great experience and we are quite sure that we will go back one day and spend another good time (1 to 2 weeks) in this province, mainly known by the chinese for being the most backward. We found it surprising, that we did not feel too saturated after 6 weeks of travel. Perhaps this was due to the fact that we still found the basic life, we looked for all the way, here in the county-side of Guizhou!

Continued with **Part F: Shanghai and Beijing**

## Peggy and Francis' China Trip 2005

### Highlights Part F Shanghai & Beijing

#### City Life and more

- The charming streets of Shanghai
- A Trip to small Towns upon Yangzi
- A Wedding in Beijing
- Of course, eating!



Overview: refer to map in Summary

#### Highlights

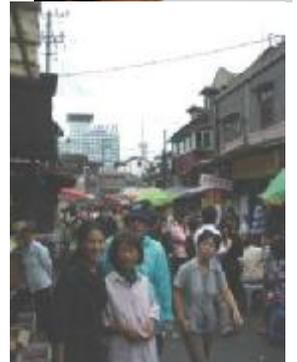
(Continued from **Part E**)

We had arrived very tired but happy from our 6 weeks backpackers trip and although we enjoyed the more leisurely life staying at Evelyne's apartment, we still were hungry for new impressions. In this last part F, I will however only mention and describe a small selection of events and experiences.

02. to 20.10. **Shanghai:** Enjoy just being there!

We were very lucky to stay in Evelyne's apartment and so being able to enjoy everyday chinese life and also share Evelyne's life (like reading Tintin, 'Le Lotus bleu' in Chinese). Almost every day we made big walks to different parts of the large city. From Evelyne's place in Jiangning Road (close to the Yufosi temple) we could walk to almost any area of interest within 1.5h hours (1h to the Bund and the French Concession, 25 min to Nanjing Lu West). Shanghai is relatively new and has no imperial history. The normal streets have mostly undergone a continuous development for the last 100 years.

So everywhere one comes across many interesting buildings of various ages, sizes and styles, shoppings streets, markets, eating places and it is never boring (just beware of bicycles and mopeds driving in any direction even on the pavements) and most places have a charming atmosphere. There are, of course, highways crossing the city but they mostly run overhead and do not disturb sightseeing too badly. Most of the time we ate the food of normal locals at simple places (we are normal simple people too) and we avoided the western fast foods, thriving everywhere. Only once we made an exception and joined Evelyne and her friends for an October Fest package at the Paulaner Bräu with a genuine German dinner and Paulaner Bier a gogo for 300Y each! Sometimes we went food shopping in the nearby markets and supermarkets and then we enjoyed Peggy's home cooking and a glass of chinese red wine of reasonable quality.



One day we went to visit a nearby old water town, Zhujiajiao (40km south-west of Shanghai) with canals like in Venice and aspiring to this image with Rialto-type bridges and gondole (remember: Venice copied China – Marco Polo). Of course, it was a very touristic spot, but so is Venice!



15. / 16.10. Excursion **Yangzi Upstream: Zhenjiang, Yangzhou and Nanjing**



On one of Evelyne's free weekends we took the train 200km up North-West to **Zhenjiang** on the right shore of the Yangzi River. We enjoyed to stroll along the old roads of this old provincial town (Marco Polo apparently stayed there, a while ago). Later we climbed a hill (entrance fee) to look down on the Yangzi River. In the afternoon we took a bus to Yangzhou crossing the Yangzi over a new magnificent motorway bridge (we would have preferred the old ferry, of course).



**Yangzhou**, beside its new part, has a very lovely old town, so lively and natural, that people will not know what you mean, when you ask them for the way to the 'old town'. We enjoyed walking around the busy pedestrian streets in the falling night and then had an excellent local meal in the 'food street'.

Before going to sleep, Evelyne and I had a very enjoyable foot massage (1h) from a very kind lady (10Y). The night we stayed in a 100 year old guest house (60Y for 3beds), everything looking original (old) including the furniture and tapestry. In the morning we walked again along the little streets and enjoyed the variety of local tidbits from the street stalls. The top runner for me was an excellent 'Chinese Pizza' with only chinese toppings (no tomatoes, no cheese).



At about lunch time Peggy and I took the Bus for the 100km to Nanjing, where we arrived over the spectacular double-decker Yangzi bridge. I had insisted to visit Nanjing, because I had been there on business in 1985 and I wanted to see how modern Nanjing looks like at present. Obviously I hardly recognised anything and it took us a long time to find the Jingling Hotel where I had stayed in 1985 and which was the only modern building at the time. In the evening we took the train back to Shanghai and got back home at midnight, where we had excellent fried noodles for supper, just outdoor.



21. to 25.10 **Beijing: joining a Wedding** but not only that!

In the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup> we took the super express train to Beijing. First Class 4-berth cabin including dinner (Spagetti Bolognese) served by 'Train Gourmet' The train was very clean and took only 11h 58 mins for the 1300km and did not stop for one single time!

In Beijing we joined the wedding of one of Evelyne's friends and were particularly moved by the tea serving ceremony, the parents being served the tea by the young wedded, showing due respect. Otherwise we mostly just enjoyed walking around the Hutongs which are traditional quarters of old Beijing with small streets and small houses providing quite primitive accommodation. Understandably these Hutongs are rapidly being razed (a few are converted to tourist attractions) for the benefit of new high rise settlements, which is sad for nostalgic old people (like us). In the evenings we usually had excellent meals; of course we did not miss out on Beijing Duck and hot pots.



One evening Evelyne took us into a park in Forbidden City to meet her bikers club friends. There were about 20 chinese bikers and bikeresses with mostly old-timer motorbikes, who meet there almost every evening the year round. They were so kind to take us in their side-cars (mine was a 1940's BMW) around the Forbidden City and across Tiananmen Square. What an experience! The last acts of the holiday before leaving for home were a visit to Summer Palace and Peggy's purchase of a chinese bicycle (see trip to Holland 2006!). The trip back to CH was routine!



## THE END

26.10 Arriving in **beautiful Switzerland**

With splendid autumn weather we flew over the lakes of Biel – Neuchâtel – Geneva and then by train back to Biel along the same way. Blue lakes, autumnal forests and vineyards and views of the Alps. Switzerland was welcoming us! What a **start to be home again!**