

Adventure Series

Adventures in China

**Lost on Emei Shan
Return to Ningbo
West Lake, Guilin**



John Rasmussen

Cobblestone Press

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Disclaimer

This e-book reflects the personal experiences of the author and information provided by other publications or sources as described herein.

If you have questions about travel in China consult with your travel agent and the Chinese Embassy or Consulate for passport and visa requirements.

Information regarding country-specific requirements and recommendations are available through the *Travel Medicine Advisor*© by AHC Media; the World Health Organization publication “International Travel and Health”.

Any travel itinerary described in this e-book is subject to risks which require the reader to prepare for adventure, which is her or his sole responsibility.

**Cobblestone Press LLC
P. O. Box 131525
Ann Arbor, MI 48113**

First Edition, September 2010

ISBN Pending

CobblestonePress@aol.com

**Cover photo
Dragon boats at Hangzhou (West Lake)
Photos by the author**

Dedication

This e-book is dedicated to my friends who helped me to reach out and connect with people on my journey in China.

Qi Li-Jian, China Shandong Tourism Corporation, England-North America Department, Peoples Republic of China. With his help I begin my solo journey from Shanghai to Guilin, Yangshou, Ningbo and Hangzhou (West Lake).

Chang Xiao Ti taught me Chinese Poetry on the train from Shanghai to Guilin. With her help, “time after time” I could read a beautiful poem in Mandarin, “Chūn lái le.”

Ren Ji Ye helped arrange my ferry travel to Putou Shan. As an English speaking radio operator he helped make my trip from Ningbo to the island of Putou Shan enjoyable.

Rui-Chang Jing tried to teach me Mandarin prior to my travel to China. A library program student and graduate of Eastern Michigan University we share tea when we meet.

Yimei (Amy) Ai continues to connect my wife and I with her friends to share time together in Seattle and in Ann Arbor.

Lou (Wen-lu) Yan retired as an English professor at Tianjin TV & Broadcasting University to move with wife Nancy to Ann Arbor to open a store in Huron Towers where we met and talked.

Samuel C. C. Ting and I met as students at the University of Michigan. I was best man at his wedding to Kay and met his two daughters when he returned for an honorary degree. Sam returned to Ann Arbor for his son’s 2010 graduation. Since our university days back in 1957 we remain friends.

Preface

*An experienced traveler does not need
a packaged tour to go places safely.*

John Heider, *The Tao of Leadership*

This e-book introduces the reader to a visit to China to hike Mount Emei Shan and visit a village where the Dawn Redwood was rediscovered in 1948.

Come and connect with people and fellow travelers. The journey, not the destination makes a fulfilling life by connecting with fellow travelers on their journeys.

- Learn Chinese poetry on the overnight train to Guilin
- Share music with a Shanghai Symphony oboe player
- Tai Chi in a Park by the Wang Hu Hotel in Hangzhou

Step back in time, 20 years, 2,000 years and back to the time dinosaurs roamed and giant trees thrived in remote mountain valleys which are now rural China.

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Chapter 1: Shanghai to Guilin

The Train

I travel by overnight train “soft sleeper” from Shanghai to Guilin. On the train I met an oboe player from the Shanghai Symphony.

We talk about classical music and Aaron Copeland’s music. Upon return to San Francisco I sent a tape of Appalachian Spring.

The cassette tape features Aaron Copeland conducting Copeland. He appreciates the tape and invites me to Shanghai my next trip.

While riding overnight trains I have many interesting experiences. I travel soft sleeper and return hard sleeper or hard seat.

When not busy working, the conductor taught me Chinese poetry. I return the favor by teaching English to her in the train corridor.

Guilin

Arriving in Guilin I am surprised at the size of the city. Sidewalk vendors set up tables with fresh fish and veggies.

I select a fish and soon it is prepared before my eyes. A person could not have fresher fish than at a side walk café.

As Guilin was crowded I decide to move on to Yangshou. The popular Li River boats travel from Guilin to Yangshou.

As it was already evening I decide to take the local bus. Arriving in Yangshou I found lodging with a balcony view.

Yangshou

Yangshou is a village south of the City of Guilin on the Li River. The Li (Green River) is known for mystical hills of karst formations.

At one time long ago these karst hills were formed under the sea. The mystical landscape appears today as if we are under the sea.

Traveling by riverboat is the scenic way to travel to Yangshou. You can see more by boat and meet or talk with fellow travelers.

When riverboats dock at Yangsho artist vendors set up stalls. I walk over to the river to people watch and shop the market.

In the evening I venture out to a café with outdoor seating. Candle light was more than atmosphere, it was light to see.

Meeting a fellow traveler we share stories of Yangshou. We can hear the sounds of Shanghai bicycle bells ringing.

Three wheel tricycle drivers with packages blow their horns. Tomorrow I will rent a bicycle to see as much as I can see.

Some prefer the highway to Yangshou, but I like the riverboats. I want to return to Yangshou and take some time to meditate.

Chapter 2: West Lake

West Lake is a destination for Chinese tourists at Hangzhou. It is a beautiful place with colorful Dragon Boats on the lake.

First Visit

I first time I came to Hangzhou we stayed at the Wang Hu Hotel. The food is good here especially the rice porridge for breakfast. Wang Hu Hotel is near a music shop and not far from the lake.

In early morning light I join Tai Chi in the park near the lake. Joining Chinese Tai Chi practitioners gives me lessons in form. As it is a little dark I do not stand out when I miss part of a form.

After breakfast I join up with my fellow international hikers. A dragon boat tour on the lake docks to let us walk the island. Returning to shore we walk, shop and dine at the Wang Hu hotel.

Early the next morning I jog around West Lake before breakfast. After breakfast we board the bus and travel on to the next city. I like the Sierra Club International Hikes. I want to hike more.

Chapter 3: Return to West Lake

Second Visit

When hiking friends board a bus to return home, I stayed. I plan to return to Hangzhou and West Lake, which I did.

This time I travel by train, by bus and ride on a bicycle. I like to bike the countryside on the far side of the lake.

The guesthouse where I stay is in a converted house. Four men and a lady traveler share a rather large room.

We each have a bed, which is comfortable for one person. The accommodations are somewhat similar to a youth hostel.

I can recommend a guesthouse as an alternative to hotels. The accommodations can be Spartan, but the price is fair.

One Speed Bike

Bicycles are provided for use by guest house visitors. I soon learn it was a one speed bike, so I went slow.

During the day I tour around the far side of West Lake. For lunch I choose a Buddhist lunch from my guidebook.

Buddhist temples serve tasty and healthy vegetarian foods. Each person to his or her own choice, I say, good choice.

When I return to China again, I plan to return to West Lake. There is so much more to see by bicycle than on a bus ride.

Chapter 4: Soup and a Movie

Ningbo is a friendly coastal city south of Shanghai.
While buses or ferries are choices, I travel by train.

Ningbo's Asia Garden Hotel is a traveler's oasis.
I prefer the Chinese restaurant over Western food.

Egg Corn Soup

My favorite soup is egg corn chowder.
The assistant manager introduces me
to the chef. "She She," I thank him.

His technique taught me to stir eggs.
Before serving he adds the fresh corn.
It tastes like fresh corn on the cob soup.

This bowl of soup is a complete meal.

The Cinema

One night I venture out to the cinema.
I couldn't read the movie poster outside.
First came an educational children's show.

Next a tribute to the coastal city of Ningbo
The main feature was a pleasant surprise-
Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn.

They spoke perfect Chinese of course.

Chapter 5: School Visits

School Visit No. 1

We visit Bashu elementary school.
The prearranged visit was a show.

The students recite their lessons.
They march in formation outside.

The children seem very happy.
Teachers are glad to have visitors.

Children learn over 4,000 characters.
English classes begin in the fifth year.

School Visit No. 2

I chose to visit a middle school.
The principal welcomes my visit.

Chan Chung is the English teacher.
She has taught English for 18 years.

I am asked to make a student award.
I said to “Aim High” and “Do Your Best!”

Students and I spoke outside after class.
We all benefit from friendly interactions.

Chapter 6: Three Wheel Bike

I start to walk to the ferry dock.
I'm going to the Putou Shan ferry.

The dock is further than I thought.
So, I hail a passing bicycle taxi.

I climb in the back bed of the bike.
It is a three-wheeled bike like truck.

He could carry boxes to the dock.
He could carry food to the market.

He could carry me to the ferry docks.
Facing backwards I trust the driver.

He pedals hard on his one speed bike.
He brought me safely to the ferry dock.

Alas, I found I had missed the ferry.
No problem. I will find a place to stay.

Chapter 7: Looking for Hotel

The first hotel I try was for Chinese only.
I understand. Tourists have special hotels.

I walk the darkening streets of Ningbo.
I see a tall building. Could it be a hotel?

Going down a narrow lane I come to a street.
The tall building is either an office or a hotel.

When I go inside I know it is the right place.
One problem, I think the price is too much.

I start to leave. A different person approaches.
Yes, the hotel can offer a lower price after all.

The air-conditioned room and bath has a shower.
In the hallway by my door stood room service.

I order tea and that was just enough for me.
Chinese hotels know how to care for visitors.

Chapter 8: Ferry to Putou Shan

The next day I plan to travel to Putou Shan¹.
Putou Shan is on an island off Ningbo's coast.
As I missed yesterday's ferry I chose to go today.

With an expired ticket I can not board the ferry.
I go to the ferry office to explain my problem.
As the ferry is sold out I can't board the ferry.

I wait and watch people boarding the ferry.
Then an officer invites me to come aboard.
I learn that he wants to practice his English.

Lunch with the Kitchen Crew

I am led by my friend to the ferryboat's kitchen.
Here I stay for lunch and I eat with the crew.
I read a pocket book; while they do their work.

As I was a "stow-a-way" I could not go on deck.
I wave to my friend who knew my predicament.
He took a risk to invite me and I am very grateful.

Return to Ningbo by Ferry

Passengers from Putou Shan board the ferry.
Soon the ferry is under way back to Ningbo.
Again I travel with the kitchen crew below deck.

No windows down here, but food is very good.

¹ The island is home to one of China's five sacred mountains.

Chapter 9: The Dawn Redwood

“Finding a living dawn redwood is at least as remarkable as discovering a living dinosaur,” Ralph Chaney in 1948.

William Gittlen tells the story of the dawn redwood, which lived in the “age of the dinosaurs.” He first saw a cluster of trees, a “Dinosaur Forest,” near his home in San Francisco’s East Bay.²

I first experienced dawn redwood trees planted near where I lived in Ann Arbor. I am intrigued by the soft green foliage in spring, golden fall colors and the bare branches in winter.

Dawn redwood trees thrived during the age of dinosaurs. How could dawn redwood trees survive the ice age? It is believed “dinosaur trees” survived by dropping needles and seed cones³.

Going to China with a group of international Sierra Club hikers we saw an ancient dawn redwood 41 years after it was rediscovered in a remote mountain village in China in 1948.

Gittlen reports of the 1948 visit of Chaney and Silverman, “Almost the entire town came out to the great tree with them.” We also experience many villagers coming out to meet us.

While one tree remains in the village (Mo-tao-chi) some 4,000 are reported growing in protected valleys in Sichuan province.⁴ When dawn redwoods go bare in winter they are just asleep.

² William Gittlen, *Discovered Alive, The Story of the Chinese Redwood*

³ Dawn redwoods survived in a diverse forest climate rather than in groves.

⁴ While “long thought to be extinct” the dawn redwood (*meta sequoia*) is a testimony that conservation of endangered tree species is essential.

Chapter 10: Lost on Mount Emei Shan

Hikers from New Jersey, Oregon, Michigan and California flew to China with a guide to join with Chinese guides to hike to two mountains, Tiantai Shan and Emei Shan.

“Shan” is mountain in Chinese.
Young and old climb Emei Shan.
Emei Shan is a sacred mountain⁵.

Stone steps make easy hiking. A few bring walking sticks.
A temple near the crest is our destination. I am ready.

Chinese breakfast of rice porridge offers sustainable energy.
No coffee, no American breakfast. My anticipation is high.

This hike is one of the reasons I decided to come to China.
Another reason I came is to see the Dawn Redwood trees.

Along the way there are many experiences to brighten each day
beyond getting to a destination. The journey is my destination.

To some it seems hotel to Mount Emei Shan is a long bus ride.
I take time to sit and talk with different members of our group.

When we arrive to begin hiking it is comfortably cool in shade.
This is just a day hike so many hikers carry little in day packs.

⁵ There are five sacred mountains in China.

Lost on China's Mount Emei Shan

Upon arriving at Emei Shan we learn snow is at the peak.
A vote is taken. Do we still want to hike to the summit?

Who would rather go around and down the other side?
The group votes not to hike to the summit of Emei Shan.

I am disappointed. On the brighter side I have more time
to explore instead of pushing on to reach the summit.

For me, the lack of motivation to reach the summit set in.
After a day on the mountain hikers spread out along the trail.

Some hike ahead. Some stay behind. I stop to enjoy vistas,
streams and mountain views as they appear along the trail.

Houses perch along the mountain side trail. Wisps of wood
smoke rise from kitchen cooking fires from the valley below.

Then my two companions notice we can not see our group.

The trail is narrow. It is now descending.
It is not the main trail. It is now getting dark.

We are on the other side of the mountain, but not on the trail.

Lost on China's Mount Emei Shan

It is really getting dark on the trail.
But, I could smell the aroma of cooking.
I stop in front of hillside farm house.

“Nee how,” I say. (hello). I’m lost.

I ask directions to Emei Shan hotel
I point first up and then down the trail.
He says, little and points down the trail.

Soon I come to a split in the trail.
The main trail goes straight ahead.
A side trail goes down the mountain.

This is where we lost the trail.
I head down the narrow side trail
to where my friends are waiting.

“I found the main trail! It is not far”.

I do not want to discourage my friends.
Hand in hand. we slowly go up the trail.
Finally, we reach the main wide trail.

We walk quietly down the main trail.
Without flashlights we walk in the dark
We listen to the sound of our footsteps.

Crunch, Crunch, Crunch.

Lost on China's Mount Emei Shan

We are happy. We are on our way down.
We continue to a mountain side village.
We are on the side of Mount Emei Shan.

We are glad to see the village people.
Here and there we see a car or truck.
No buses and no taxis are in sight.

In the village I found a man with a van.
The van owner agrees to give us a ride.
We pay our fare to the driver in yuan.

As we drive another rider sits in a back seat.
Angry words from driver to rider grew loud.
Suddenly the van stops. We are nowhere.

The driver orders the young man out of the van.
The rider pleads to stay. We are in the country.
The driver is firm. The rider leaves in dark of night.

We are very quiet. We do not know our way.
We trust the driver to take us to our hotel.
With confidence in our decision, we let go of fear.

We are safely on our way back to our hotel.
When we arrive at the Emei Shan hotel we
are warmly greeted by guides and hikers.

We learn they planned to search for us tomorrow.
No search party needed. We are safe and sound.
We missed supper, but we have had an adventure⁶.

⁶ After returning to home a letter from Richard Cellarius of the Sierra Club appointing the author to the Mountaineering Committee of the Sierra Club.

Three Poems

Upon returning home from China
I began to reconnect with friends.

Relationships were lost while away
and new relationships blossomed.

The following poems reflect my
reaching out to my friends.

To My Friend

Time, time, time moves so slow.
I want to know, I want to know.

How due beginnings begin?
I express my interest again.

Three calls 'til I reach a voice.
I hear a voice, it's a machine.

To leave a message I stumble.
I will call you back tomorrow.

Expectations are met or not met.
I have not even a moment to fret.

How many times can it be ringing
no person or machine is bringing

Joy, joy joy to my spirit for it's a
live voice that touches my mind.

June 9, 1989

Reaching Out

Reaching out I try to be
who I am whatever is me.

The risk of touching the mind
with thoughts and words is kind.

A connection of spirits entwined.
There is no finer feeling inside.

I experience the present and seek
to focus clearly on what it is I seek.

Two Spirits

Two spirits met and entwined
Together with others we dined.

Two conversations unfolded.
One for table talk, the other foretold.

Relationships past and present
Begin with living now in the present

With eye contact like gypsies
we are not yuppies or hippies.

Direct, deep and exciting, alive!
Where inside do I feel good vibes?

Who is this who dances 'til dawn?
Is this a goddess, love or a dream?

June 1, 1989

Suggested Reading

William Gittlen, *Discovered Alive, The Story of the Chinese Redwood*, Pierside Publications, Frankfort, Michigan, 1998.

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Modaoqi, the village of the Dawn Redwood, near Wanxian

In *Discovered Alive, The Story of the Chinese Redwood*, William Gittlen tells of a tree, which lived in the “age of the dinosaurs.”

He first experienced a cluster of planted trees, a “Dinosaur Forest,” near San Francisco’s East Bay which drew him to research discovery of dawn redwoods and join ranks with Chinese scholars.

“Finding a living dawn redwood is at least as remarkable as discovering a living dinosaur,” wrote Ralph Chaney in 1948.

I first experienced dawn redwood trees near where I lived in Ann Arbor. Intrigued by soft green foliage in spring, golden fall colors and bare branches in winter I learned dawn redwood trees thrived during the age of dinosaurs. How did the dawn redwood trees survive the ice age?

In Cobblestone Press Adventures Series John Rasmussen tells of trees surviving diverse forest climates in China and Brazil’s Amazon forest.