CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Haircut a la Hainan. Cave centipede of Hainan. Li minority weaver of Hainan. Tea flower of Taiwan’s Ali Shan.

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VOLUME 14 NO.1 SPRING 2012

The new year would promise more results, which we would bring to you in upcoming newsletters and reports.

Sea Turtles.
study conservation efforts from a distant continent, as we share a worldwide concern in the protection of the

in the deepest of forests, some of these animals are rarely seen, let alone photographed. We crossed oceans to

We made groundbreaking study of wildlife, using technology once not available to us. Defying darkness, and

of pride. It also takes us to the little-known underground world with new discoveries we made inside caves.

Hainan, both off shore islands of China, one with a new project about to begin and the other an ongoing project

This newsletter brings our readers to many places, even outside the periphery of China. We visited Taiwan and

and more exploration with a much younger and stronger team, while celebrating a quarter century of work

results. More forgiveness may have to be begged for, in time.

I also preach another line. “It’s easier to ask for forgiveness than permission.” Often than not, our results would

vindicate our not first asking for permission. By then the “forgiveness” is only symbolic, and usually we are

rewarded with accolade. With such conviction, I have led CERS for its first 25 years. Now we embark on new

and more exploration with a much younger and stronger team, while celebrating a quarter century of work

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This newsletter brings our readers to many places, even outside the periphery of China. We visited Taiwan and Hainan, both off shore islands of China, one with a new project to begin and the other an ongoing project of pride. It also takes us to the little-known underground world with new discoveries we made inside caves. We made groundbreaking study of wildlife, using technology once not available to us. Defying darkness, and of pride. It also takes us to the little-known underground world with new discoveries we made inside caves. Hainan, both off shore islands of China, one with a new project about to begin and the other an ongoing project.

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A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS’ FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

EXPLORERS
China Exploration and research society

Wong How Man
Hong Kong
February 2012

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PAGE 2 CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
An Da-ming’s face has a shiny copper-tone to it, just like his cousin An Xiao-ming, whom we called by his nickname Anmo. Whether such tan skin came from long exposure of working under the sun or was their natural complexion I could not tell. Strangely, both men’s wives have much fairer skin though they too share their load of chores in the field. For Shu-yun, wife of the former, it is their tea farm, whereas for Hui-ling, Anmo’s wife, their field of crops and vegetable. The men’s features are more robust, with eyes sunken below the brows, high nose lines and cheek bones.

Both are of the Tsou minority of Ali Shan, deep inside the mountains of Taiwan. The Tsou has a population of barely 5000 individuals and are indigenous to the island. Under

by Wong How Man
Ali Shan, Taiwan – December 9, 2011

Top: An Da-ming preparing tea while Anmo and wife looks on.
Bottom: Anmo in national costume with traditional bow and arrows.
the Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945, followed by over half a century of the Nationalist rule, many of the traditions and customs of the Tsou people were eclipsed. First to go was the old tradition of head hunting by the Tsou, once a proud occupation of the Tsou warriors against intruders or when faced with outside threats. Dutch and Portuguese explorers and early settlers described such “barbaric” and horrifying behaviors in their encounters with the Tsou.

Today while recounting such acts by his ancestors, Anmor spoke with no sign of inhibition or regrets. Instead I could almost sense an air of pride in his tone.

Momentarily, Da-ming squinted, his face showing all the lines over his nose and forehead. He began shaking his head slowly from side to side. I balked with disappointment as I measured his facial expression. He was pouring hot water over a tiny pot of tea we had brought from Hainan Island for him to try. Da-ming is the perfect person to test and judge this tea from the wild tea trees growing along foothill of the Wu Zhi Shan Mountains of central Hainan. After all, he is known as a local tea connoisseur with the superior tea from his farm winning many accolades in very highly regarded yearly contests in Taiwan. Behind him, hanging high up the walls, were several large wooden award plaques for Best in Show or First Prize distinctions. Against the wall on the ground were numerous more similar inscribed tablets.

“You must not simmer this tea too long, as it will taste bitter,” the consummate of tea tried to be diplomatic. I sensed that he didn’t like the flavor as he spit out the remaining tea in his mouth into a nearby ceramic pot. So much for comparing one aspect of Hainan with that of Taiwan.

Today Dabang, a small town of maybe 500 or some inhabitants, is the center of Tsou activities and administration. Deep inside the hills and valleys of Dabang, Anmo told me some stories regarding the Tsou. “As fierce warriors, we used to kill everyone who came near us. Hunting for enemy’s heads was a sign of heroism and bravery,” said Anmo. “Legend has it that we killed so many that heaven put a spell on the number of Tsou people prohibiting us from exceeding 10,000 so that we would not decimate the rest of the population,” he added.
Anmo’s account of the monkey roaming around Ali Shan has another origin. “There used to be lots and lots of monkeys in the mountains around Ali Shan. When the Tsou people went off into the field to farm, large groups of monkeys would raid their homes, eating everything and making a mess of the place. One day, the Tsou decided to take revenge and make an end to this nuisance. They intentionally left out some strong liquor they made from rice. The monkeys came again, leaving behind a rampage while drinking all the wine. Intoxicated and drunk, they were lying around all over the place as the Tsou people came home. The Tsou killed them off in droves, one by one until they were all dead,” Anmo told of the horror killing and decimation of the monkeys.

“One female monkey, deadly drunk ended up sleeping inside a rolled up straw mat and survived the massacre. When she woke up and saw all her companions killed, she quickly sneaked away. This single surviving monkey was already pregnant and later gave birth to a family of monkeys, thus providing a reprieve for today’s remaining group. But today there are again more monkeys than us Tsou,” Anmo noted as he finished the story. “Many such legends were handed down to us by our village elders,” said Anmo.

As Anmo was speaking, his wife Hui-ling suddenly bent her head sideways as if listening to something in the jungle. “Hear that?” she asked. “That is the sound of a Hui Su, or flying squirrel, gliding from one tree to another with a swishing noise,” she pointed out to us. “They come out after dark, like the many bats around here,” she noted with a smile.

As we walked out into the night, I saw two fireflies dancing in the distance. I hurried over and using my hat, caught one to have a closer look. Anmo came up to me, took the firefly and turned it around. Seeing two fluorescent glows on its tail, he said, “This is a male as females only have one light.” During this time of year when the weather turns cooler there are few fireflies. But during the summer, Anmo assured me that the night sky is filled with them like dancing stars.

The next morning, I was wakened early by the single cockatoo Anmo kept among his half...
dozen hens. After a simple breakfast of home-made glutinous rice wrapped in banana leaf, Anmo took me on a walk around his farm property. Tea, vegetable, fruit trees and some tomato grown on trees, called “mato”, are the main crop. As we walked he occasionally used his long knife to cut off bushes along the path.

At one spot, he pointed out a bamboo cross on the ground. “This is to signify a nearby wild beehive that belongs to me,” said Anmo. “The first person to spot a hive marks the area like this, and others respect that as his property,” added Anmo. Honey from such bees is considered of superior quality to domestic bee honey. At a low lying tree, Anmo climbed up and took down from a branch an abandoned hive. Breaking it into two halves, he showed me the interior of the hive. The wild bees construct their hives with tree bark and inside are many levels of loft-like structures built with beeswax. “Elders told us that if a hive is high on a tree, that area is better protected and unlikely to be hit by storm. Whereas lower hives means the site may be more exposed to wind and typhoons,” he explained some of the wisdom of older folks gathered from long experience.

At home, Anmo showed me a few Tsou artifacts he has collected over the years. Of particular interest and pride to him is a set of bow and arrows. Outside his modest house, he demonstrated his archery skills by targeting a bull’s-eye made from straw. He also showed me a long bamboo stick with a string attached. At the end of the string is a wooden piece. Swinging ➔
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
it creates a high pitch swishing sound that scares away birds flocking their rice field during harvest season.

There are a few boars which live and roam around the area. Traditionally Tsou people hunt these wild pigs. Anmo showed me how a harpoon like spear can be used to hunt boars. The sharp metal piece has reversed spikes to stay inside the animal once the penetration is successful. A steel wire keeps the spearhead from the pole made from hard wood so as to obstruct the animal from getting away when caught in between forest trees. A hunter would keep long lines of boar jawbones and skulls of other prey in their house to display their bravery.

Today only a local Tsou collector, Wang Yong Hua, still has a large collection of Tsou artifacts, the most impressive being a crossbow-like ground trap to hunt wild game. The nose flute, like those used in Hainan Island by the Li People, can no longer be found. The Tsou however uses them as a pair, playing them with both nostrils, unlike the Li who use a single bamboo on one side of the nose as flute.

Shi Kwong-jiang, better known as Ah Jiang, worked in Taipei at a sailboat and speedboat company as a woodwork carpenter. In 1996, he returned home after a big storm hit his village. Trying to rebuild his home, he made use of his skills and turned a dilapidated site into a very creative home, making use of a lot of logs and trunks in the forest. Today his home has been turned into a hostel with several small stone and wood houses. On any weekend, folks from the city come here to enjoy the fresh mountain air and quiet ambience of Ali Shan.

Chatting over a fireplace emitting sweet fragrance of the “Niu Jiang” wood, Ah Jiang proudly told me about his creation and the next small house he plans to build with a loft to hold up to seven guests. We discussed the unique language of the Tsuo, which is not the same as any of the other seven indigenous tribes of Taiwan. “The only strange thing is that we all use the word Bidu for the numerical word seven. That is the only common word, even the same is used among some dialects in the Philippines and Indonesia I was told,” said Jiang.

Anmo, our guide and host, is extremely proud of
his Tsou heritage. After retiring from military service where he served on the island of Jinmen opposite Xiamen of the mainland, he came home to Dabang to build a new life. Two years ago, he married Hui-ling and together they tried to make their farm into a unique home, reviving some of the tradition and customs of the Tsou. “My dream is to construct ancient thatch-roofed houses and offer those as lodges to outside visitors to relive the style of our glorious days,” said Anmo with a smile of confidence. “For now, I am learning as much as I can from the elders, the stories, the ancient practices, and their way of life,” said Anmo.

Finally I could not help and asked him, “So are you going to knock out two teeth next to your front teeth, just as the Tsou men and women used to do a couple generations ago?” Both Anmo and his wife Hui-ling looked at me and shook their heads wildly, “No, no, no way. I don’t think I would go that far back,” they answered simultaneously with a big smile on their faces.

As I left Ali Shan and headed down toward the plain, I saw countless busloads of Mainland tourists along the way. Since the easing of cross-strait travel a couple years ago, there are thousands of tourists arriving every day, and Ali Shan seems to be a must-go place. As I have just visited Hainan before coming to Taiwan, suddenly a strange thought flashed by my mind. Had Chiang Kai-shek in 1949 chosen to retreat to Hainan instead of Taiwan, the scenario would be totally different today. Taiwan would likely be liberated by the Communist early on. Today the Taiwanese would become part of the flock of Mainland tourists visiting Hainan. That indeed would be a reverse of fortune. For that alone, perhaps Taiwanese should have something to be thankful for.
WUZHISHAN: A BIOLOGIST’S MAD SCRAMBLE UP HAINAN’S HIGHEST PEAK

by Dr. Paul Buzzard
MAIN: Pine in the mist near the summit of Wuzhishan in Hainan.
INSET: Look-out from Wuzhishan into distant hills.
According to legend, the celestial emperor asked the Buddha for help to deal with the indomitable Monkey King. The Buddha subsequently imprisoned the Monkey King under a great mountain known as Wu Zhi Shan (Five Fingers Mountain). The tenacious Monkey King survived the enormous weight and pressure, and five hundred years later, he was rescued by the Tang Monk, Xuan Zang. The Buddha then chose the Monkey King to accompany the Monk to the West. It seems that the Wuzhishan ordeal was a test for the Monkey King to prove he was a suitable companion for the Monk…

Recently, I tested myself on a hike up my own Wuzhishan, one of China’s most famous mountains and the highest peak (1,876 m asl) in Hainan’s mountainous center which contrasts with the lower lying northern regions and the lovely southern beaches of Sanya. The hike was indeed challenging and climbed more than 1km in elevation over a straight line distance of about 2km. The ascent does not take advantage of any switchbacks, instead one is usually scrambling up stairs formed by tree roots or even up steel ladders. Unfortunately, I got a late start and with darkness and clouds rolling in I had to turn back before reaching the highest peak. Nevertheless, I made it to a rock outcrop at 1770m asl at one of the fingers perhaps and was treated to stunning views of the valleys below from above the clouds.

Despite the difficulty of the hike it was encouraging to see so many young Chinese tourists making the trek. The tourists were primarily from Haikou and Sanya in Hainan and had come in part to experience the rainforest of the Wuzhishan National Reserve which is advertised as one of the few remaining natural rainforests on earth. Technically, this is true and it is a lush, lovely rainforest with many trees festooned with lianas and epiphytes. The steep mountain sides, however, result in a much shorter canopy than the rainforests I am familiar with in Central America, Africa, and Australia. Nevertheless, I heard some great birds and there is fantastic bird watching to be had if one has more time to make sightings. In fact, a particularly boisterous flock I heard likely consisted of parrots or parakeets. I also heard other charismatic species like pigeons and cuckoos.

I did not see any mammals or direct tracks/scat but I did see game trails and/or hunting trails that occasionally crossed the main route. According to local informants, muntjacs or barking deer, wild pigs, and macaques abound in the forest. I was also told that Eld’s deer were present, which if true would be particularly interesting. The Eld’s deer was recently declared extinct in the wild in China and existing only in fenced reserves in western Hainan. If Eld’s deer have been reintroduced to the Wuzhishan Nature Reserve, this would be a topic worthy of future research.

Wuzhishan nature reserve has many similarities with Bawangling, the nature reserve just to the north of the CERS site at Hong Shui village. Both reserves have extraordinary bird life as well as mammal fauna such as wild pigs, muntjas, and macaques. The forests of the two reserves are also largely similar but because of the higher elevation at Wuzhishan this area has less pine trees and more bamboo than in Bawangling.

The primary difference between the two reserves is the presence of Hainan gibbons in Bawangling. Hainan gibbons are the most endangered apes in the world and Bawangling was established primarily for their protection. Another big difference is that there seems to be a lot more eco-tourism development at Wuzhishan compared to Bawangling. In addition to climbs up Wuzhishan mountain, tourists also have the opportunity to raft down the Wuzhishan canyon, and many tourists have capitalized on this opportunity as suggested by the many pictures on the walls at the Wuzhishan reserve office.

Hopefully in the future Hainan gibbon observations can be encouraged at Bawangling to enhance ecotourism. If this was the case, another potential attraction for Bawangling could be the CERS site at Hong Shui village which has its own nice nature trails and Li minority museum exhibits. In this way Hong Shui and Bawangling together with Wuzhishan can serve as a nice stop before or after and as an interesting contrast to the beaches of Sanya. I’m sure even the monkey king needed this after his time at Wuzhishan.
CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Forest canopy to tropical trees. Labyrinth of roots in the tropical jungle. Dr Buzzard ready for quick march up mountain. Red and Blue berries in the shadow of the jungle.
It was Xiao Cao my driver who first noticed the blood on the ground. Then Xavier, our filmmaker, also saw it as it was bright and fresh. Neither said a word as it seemed rude at first meeting to ask an old lady where the blood was coming from. After all, we had just been invited inside her very tiny home, no more than six square meters, barely fitting a bed with little space to spare. Even the rock she worships had to be placed high up on a corner altar.

Crammed as we were, I sat on her bed and began showing her a video taken in 1984. It was of a lady singing in Li costume at a young man with a turban. It had taken us some effort, asking many people along the road, to find this tiny house near Shuimen Village. The older lady, Wang Guichun is now 72 years of age, with a full head of white hair. She was the woman featured singing on my film, also known locally as the best weaver of Li costume. Momentarily I raised my right leg over my left knee to cradle my IPad. Suddenly I saw a gush of blood coming out from below my jeans. As I was wearing no socks, I could see the stream of blood from my ankle down to my foot. Some was already dried and staining my trekking shoes on the inside.

"Ma Huang," said Wang without a thought. Leech indeed it was. It must have satiated itself feasting on my blood and dropped off when fully bloated. I stopped the video and used my camera to take a picture of my wound. This is certainly worthy of being put on record. In almost forty years of exploring China’s wilderness region, including many times in and out of jungles, I have seen colleagues, friends, student interns, all carrying bloodstains or scars of the leech bite. I have bragged of not having been bitten by a leech once. Now I can suddenly brag about being a proud member of the Leeched Club. As a Cantonese saying goes, “You have today,” meaning “finally it is your turn”.

Earlier this afternoon, my team and I were hiking up the Wu Zhi Shan, or Five Fingers Mountain. It is the highest peak in Hainan Island, rising to a height of
1876 meters. I was hoping to set up some baseline for comparing Hainan with Taiwan, thus using the highest peaks of both islands for comparison. But we started off too late and the guide told us there was no chance of getting to the top and getting back the same evening. Reluctantly we turned back after a fifth of the way. I however urged Dr Paul Buzzard, our Field Biologist and a strong hiker, to continue.

Earlier while hiking, I even joked about these “Ma Huangs” by saying that if you have not been bitten by one, you cannot be considered having been to Hainan. So my prophecy was self-fulfilled. As the hike was relatively gradual and easy, Xiao Cao and Berry charged ahead while some of us, including Eufang, Zhang Fan and Xavier, lingered behind. I was enjoying some of the wild berries, both blue and red, along the path. Other trees, rising to incredible heights with many types of vines and rattans attached, were other spectacles. Various orchids and parasite plants hung on to a forest cover of taller trees. Though it was in the afternoon, many birds seemed awaken from their naps, chirping and singing everywhere inside the dense forest.

I told Eufung and Xavier who were not familiar with Ma Huang that such little beasts usually would miss the first couple fast hikers as they moved along the route. But by the time they sensed humans in the vicinity and tried to locate them to get closer, the first wave of hikers would have passed. Those coming from behind, especially the stop and go types, would be just in time and ripe for the leeches. Once attached to its victim, the leech first injects an anesthetic to numb the person so they don’t even feel the attachment or penetration through the skin. Next it infuses a chemical akin to heparin into the blood stream to avoid the blood from clotting, allowing them to suck on it continuously.

Maybe those inflicted by such a bite would have the pleasure of not having to worry of any clot to their coronary arteries for one day. Little did I know I would be the recipient of such a treatment. Since ancient days, both in
Egypt and China, these little leeches are also considered little treasures. They were used therapeutically for blood letting. New and modern usages are being studied in today’s medical laboratories. If this turns out to be another venture for capital gain, perhaps some day people will search the jungle for such small treasures, or even breed them in captivity.

Besides leeches, other wild animals abound here. The story about the monkey is well told through the mythical legend of Pilgrimage to the West, when the Monkey King was trapped by the Buddha’s palm which was transformed into the gigantic Five Fingers Mountain. Nearby are also barking deer, boars and an abundance of snakes. Among forest products are the wild tea trees, producing some superior tealeaves. After school, young children climb high onto the trees to pick on the new budding leaves. For about an ounce of tea, they are given Renminbi Three Yuan.

In the eastern foothills of Wu Zhi Shan is Lo Mi Village, situated at the end of a newly paved road. The mountain streams merge to become a clear running river of size. The Li villagers here are farmers, growing some rice, sugarcane, rubber, betel nut and banana. From the hills, they also collect forest products like wild vegetables and wild honey. Another major occupation is raising silkworms. While winter is out of season for silk production, nearby Jajiuyuen Village has one family still raising a last round of silkworms before closing out the season. An entire house is set aside for the worms, which are fed locally grown mulberry leaf. It is from here that the five peaks of the Wu Zhi Shan can be viewed clearly.

The Li’s silk weaving and embroidery were considered of such excellent quality that legend has it that Huang Daopu, a lady weaver from near Shanghai, came here during the Song Dynasty and learned the skill which was later transferred to Hangzhou and Suzhou, with the two cities becoming the most famous embroidery capitals of China. During the Japanese occupation from 1939 to 1945, silk produced in Hainan was the main source for fishing nets and lines exported to Japan.
Today both the traditional songs of Wang Guichun as well as the embroidery of the Li people are eclipsing fast. Within another generation, all we will be able to hear or see may well be in the video I recorded in 1984. It will however be complemented by a set of old costumes I collected on this trip, a wonderful piece of weaving and embroidery art passed down from Guichun’s mother to her. Neither will leave Hainan now, as they will take up home among our exhibit at Hong Shui Village where CERS has successfully restored almost twenty thatch-roofed houses of the Li People. Perhaps future generation of the Li will find this last remnant of their tradition of value, when none can be seen or found anymore.
Visit to Jiangchang Underground Palace, Hainan
by Zhang Fan
MAIN AND INSET: Cave features inside underground palace of Hainan.
Just as we were all waiting outside the Dayan Village government office at 9:00 am, feeling confused, up came our guide appointed by the village party chair; “Hello there!” He was a middle-aged man dressed in pre-revolution military camouflage. I was struck by his friendly greeting, not because of his accent, but because of the strong smell of alcohol coming from him. “Really?! Are you kidding me?!” I thought. Exploring the world with CERS in the past 25 years, I have met many heavy drinkers, but I have never had a guide who arrived already drunk! How Man and I were dumbfounded by the scene. I was not hiding my disapproval as my colleague Wang Jian asked about him. The guide observed our discomfort, and said “My name is Han Haiqing. I had a couple of drinks, but am not drunk. Don’t worry. I will take you to the Underground Palace.’ “The Underground Palace,” as is referred to by the locals, is where we were planning to conduct a spelunking expedition. It is located in the Wang Xia County of Chang Jiang, Hainan Province. For the past 4 years, CERS has been working on a conservation project in the same county in a traditional Li village, Hong Shui. During past expeditions, we explored a nearby cave named “The Emperor’s Cave.” Local villagers also told us about the “Underground Palace,” saying it is beautiful, and rarely visited by people. Now that we are again in the Hong Shui village for our CERS project, we want to survey the ‘Underground Palace’ in neighboring Da Yan Village.

Looking at the guide’s camouflage clothes, I guessed he was a forest ranger with good knowledge of the local trails, because this is usually how Chinese forest rangers dress. These forests are part of the Ba Wang Ling National Nature Reserve, so it made sense that Han Haiqing is a staff member. However, the strong smell of alcohol did not ease my hesitation to follow his guidance. We really did not, however, have any other choice. November is the busiest season for farmers on Hainan Island, so it is difficult to find an adult guide in the village. Plus, the village party chair highly recommended this man for his knowledge of the trails. We had to stick with him.

Da Yan village and the CERS’ project site in Hong Shui Village both belong to Wang Xia County. The two villages are about 6 km apart as the crow flies. The country road connecting Da Yan village to the Underground Palace is about 10 km. Not only is it narrow and winding, but also very bumpy. When we were 4 km away from the cave, we found out the road ahead was blocked by a landslide. Together with the guide and my colleagues Wang Jiang
and A-Su, I continued walking to the Underground Palace, leaving our car on the side of the road, while How Man and the rest of the crew took the other car back to our base in Hong Shui Village.

I had the spelunking equipment on my back, feeling uneasy following our guide. Han Haiqing still smelled like alcohol, but walked fast without any hesitation at intersections. The rest of us had to make an effort to catch up with him. He started chatting with us while walking through the trails that he knew like the back of his hand. It turned out that last night he got up in the middle of the night to harvest rubber in the rubber tree forest, and did not come home until the sun came up. He was having a couple of drinks to relax himself before going back to bed when the village party chair called. He said that another villager led a group of researchers to the cave not long ago, but the trails are too confusing. That group came back without even seeing the entrance of the cave. He emphasized the fact that he was not drunk, and that he would take us to the cave. I then understood why the locals start drinking so early, but still could not fully relax. Drunkards always claim to be sober. We shall see this time.

In the dense tropical rainforest, our so-called trail was just a footpath. If one did not follow the person ahead, one would immediately get lost. After trekking for some time through the forest, I noticed under the piles of rotten leaves that the rocks were no longer granite or shale. Instead, I saw limestone. Later, I saw many stone flutes sprouting from the ground, a typical Karst features. I had a feeling that we were getting close to the cave. Finally, at 2 in the afternoon, we reached an area with giant rocks. Our guide pointed at the base of the rocks and told us that was the entrance to the Underground Palace, and now that his job was done, he wanted to head home. I was glad that we had him as our guide. Without him, we would not have made it to the cave. I thought it would be late by the time we got out of the cave anyway, and out of appreciation, I took out all the food and water we brought with us and shared with him. I did not forget to tease him a little before he headed home: “Too bad we didn’t bring any wine.”

Sitting outside the entrance to the cave, I took out my GPS device: N 19°01'21.0", E 109°10'10.8", 540m above the sea level.

We got out the equipment from our heavy packs and began our descent. The entrance part of the Underground Palace was a tunnel almost vertical to the ground. The opening was in the shape of an ellipse in the ground, 5m wide and 3m deep. From the opening downward, there were four levels into the cave. Every level was about 5 to 10m deep. The first three levels were not very spacious, each about 4 to 8m in width and 5 to 10m in height. Caves with this leveled structure indicate that this area experienced uplift intermittently during the Himalayan Plate Movement. No matter how winding the ancient development history of this cave was, a spelunker’s job was to get to the end of the cave. We found ladders made with tree branches and vines between each level of the cave, which meant a number of locals had entered this cave already. Thanks to the ladders, we quickly reached the third level of the cave without having to repel down a rope. ▶
Under the high-powered flashlight, I realized the last level was a huge hall. We actually stood at the center of the hall. Looking around, this hall was 40 to 50 m wide, 120 m long, and the tallest part was about 30 m high. From this level to the bottom of the hall was about 10 m, too tall to trust the rotting ladders built by local explorers. We tied our rope to a stalagmite, and repelled down to the floor of the hall.

I looked around the hall of the cave, and was stunned by the walls. The walls were covered with striped marble. It looked like a giant Chinese water color painting: all the rare beauty of Mother Nature was well interpreted in the painting. I was at a loss for words to describe this gorgeous painting, and could not believe that everything in front of me was a work of Nature. The twisting stripe patterns were formed when the geological structure was under great pressure during metamorphism.

Many rocks on the floor came from the ceiling when part of it collapsed; indicating the hall went through tremendous rock tumbling when it first formed. In the main hall, there were many tall columns and speleothems. In a side tunnel, we found some unusual calcite crystal flowers and curling stones. These calcium carbonate sediments formed slowly after the cave rose from an underground water system. It was as if the cave experienced an unsettling adolescence, and then entered a peaceful and stable maturity.

Just as I was pondering this metaphor of my life, I was called by A-Su about a “strange cave animal.” I hurried to find out that it was a big creature with countless feet. The body of this cave animal was about 10 cm long. Together with its feet, it was almost the same size as an adult’s hand. It was a Great Cave Centipede, which is in the Myriapod family of arthropods. Just like regular centipedes, it had 15 limbs, and two legs attached to each body segment. However, the feet of this cave centipede were much longer than regular centipedes, and the last pair of feet was longer than all the others. While erect, the centipede looked like a monster standing on scaffolding. A-Su crawled onto a rock to get a better look. I asked him to catch it and put it in our special sample bottle. He was concerned that it would bite, since he had never seen a centipede this big before. I gave him my
On the way out, we saw many bats resting in the cave. 2011-12 is recognized by United Nation Environmental Program as the Year of the Bat. Unfortunately, among 155 bat species in China, many are threatened, but none have made it to the National Key Protected Animal List. It is very unfair for bats, which play a crucial role in the ecosystem.

Along the way out of the cave, I noticed the cave wall and stalagmites were marked with phrases like ‘XXX, I love you!’ I wondered, in a day when people are calling for bio-diversity conservation, why cave and cave biology is rarely noted by the society.

Walking on the trail back to the car, I called How Man for an update, and decided that I want to share the story of the Great Cave Centipede with the middle school students from Hong Kong who make great 3D animation films. The image of this monster predator living in a cave has almost all the characteristics a Hollywood movie star requires. We can hope that featuring it in a 3D animation film will help raise awareness among people about cave ecosystems and the wonders that they hold.

caving gloves and reassured him; “This kind of centipede is very well-behaved.” A-Su acted very bravely, and caught the animal. After he had sealed the bottle with the creature inside, I grinned and told him that the Great Cave Centipede is actually far less innocent than I suggested. It bites when attacked, and hunts for small insects, a typical predator in the cave ecosystem.

I carefully examined this ferocious-looking predator, imagining how it got to be the top of the food chain in the cave system. The Great Cave Centipede has a pair of mandibles, which can eject poison when hunting. Also, the 15 pairs of feet help when running on the surface of rocks. Little animals really have no chance against this cave centipede.

Many cave animals lose their vision because it is of no use when living in the cave, and the Great Cave Centipede is no exception. Its compound eyes have become a decoration. To survive in such an environment, the Great Cave Centipede must possess its own unique skills. What could it be? Can it detect ultra-sound waves, or faint odors? More investigation is needed. It could also be a ‘Low Carbon Living Model,’ because it has a very slow metabolism, consumes little, and lives a long life. On a funny note, this invertebrate with low fertility is portrayed as a “pervert” in many Chinese folk tales. Maybe it is because of its evil look.

Checking my watch, I realized it was 7pm already. We spent 5 hours in the cave without mapping the hall. Considering it may take another 5 hours to map the cave and a few more looking for the way back in the forest, we decided to come back to the cave another time and complete the mapping. How Man and the rest of our team were waiting at the Hong Shui village and must had been worried. Just before heading out, I took a look at my thermometer: 22.3°.
When I arrived in Hongshui village, I was surprised to see all the artifacts already collected and traditional houses already built... So where should I start? What is the most important thing to do first? Many questions appeared in my head. After I learned what the aim of this project is, I realized that an exhibition in this environment (temperature, humidity, people involved ...) needs to be set up with precaution. The environment dictates that we have to focus on the artifacts’ preservation.

I already worked in projects where the local conditions are different than what I faced in school, museums or cultural institutions. Nevertheless, Hainan and Hongshui Village are my first contact with Chinese heritage and the Chinese perception. Heritage is a notion that is very hard to define. Before my arrival, I read a lot about Chinese cultural policy, but that does not give the local sense or their perception of heritage. Usually people who write this kind of policy never go into a little village to feel the difference between a national institution and a local view.

When I first arrived in the CERS team, I had not idea what I should do and what the structure of the project is. I decided, however, to start with the artifact collection, to go through it all to define what each artifact is, in what conditions they are in, etc. The quality and the safety of the exhibits depend on it. Most important for me at this moment is to keep in mind the local conditions and CERS’s capacities: given the limited budget, limited furniture, and the limited cultural knowledge of the team; I have’ to focus on what I can do to help, in line with the...
local conditions and the local team. In spite of my previous experience, all of them were different, and it is never easy! Here, the norms are not sufficient.

Then starts a dance with toothbrush and white vinegar... I can see many heads peeking through the doorway observing what we are doing with artifacts. Some of them ask to know why we scratch the artifacts with a toothbrush! They never saw that before. I understand it is difficult for a novice to feel and understand the conservation concept. As for the inhabitants, because they are using these kinds of objects for daily-life, they cannot imagine that we want to display or preserve them. Some of them want to help us, and they volunteer to dunk artifacts in water to wash them. I run to stop them, explaining to them that it is not a good way, that if you put an artifact in water and afterwards store it in, in few months destructive moisture will appear. This is why we have to use vinegar and store them in a dry condition.

Sadly, we observe that many artifacts, including some of those that are in the oldest inventory list from 2009, are already destroyed because they were stored on the floor or outside without any protection. The fun part is to show to the team and inhabitants the difference between artifacts before and after we’ve cleaned them. Some of them think that it is not appropriate because, at the end of cleaning, the artifacts look too new. Conservation and preservation are very difficult because it is important to make clear the difference between keeping the evidence of past use and removing bad degradation from dust, moisture, etc....

Additionally, we need to create files to register all the collected items, their condition, their history and where they are to be displayed or stored. For each artifact from this collection we need to record their history and all other information, like details of what needs to be done for their preservation and conservation. My goal is to find a practical method for inventory, which is simple to use. It should be intuitive. I always keep in mind that people who are supposed to use these files do not know the standard methods of cultural institution registration.

When I first confronted the CERS team with all this, they misunderstood. They did not really see the value of my work, so I had back up and show them what impacts the environment can have on an artifact collection. I showed them many pictures to help them understand the effects of bad storage or bad exhibit installations on artifacts. I spent one week cleaning all the artifacts but I spent two weeks explaining why it is so important to do it.

Near the end of our stay, the CERS drivers brought me to town to a lighting shop: “Show us what you want for the exhibition.” In fact, this shop was a shop with light fixtures for homes; a floor lamp, a children’s lamp with a yellow rabbit, and a big spotlight for lighting a cave. I had to explain that we cannot use a children’s desktop light for an exhibition. Conservation is not just about cleaning, protecting and storing artefacts. It is also about finding the best way to display them. In my opinion, this was my main contribution while in Hainan for CERS.

In the work of cultural conservation, it is important to respect local people’s opinions. At first, the villagers were not concerned with the artifacts’ conservation. I cannot criticize them. They are totally unfamiliar with the concept of heritage, and do not know that their cultural heritage can be a foundation for their economic development. Perhaps it can be our role to teach them why they should take care of their culture and these traditional objects. If they can understand and learn to appreciate their own culture and customs, perhaps together we can prevent it from all quickly disappearing in the face of the pressures from modern life.

To my mind, this is the most interesting part of this project. It could even be the goal of the next CERS mission...
So went the catchphrase of the old television show that used hidden cameras to catch the reactions of unsuspecting people in unnatural or odd situations so hilarity could follow. Today, hidden cameras can also be used to take pictures and catch unsuspecting wildlife in natural situations for science. Camera traps have been used for a variety of animal species all over the world are being used now for the musk deer project to help CERS study this highly endangered and secretive species at Baimaxueshan Nature Reserve and other areas of northwest Yunnan.

Camera-trapping has been around for over a century when the first flashlight camera was triggered by trips wires in 1906 by George Shiras III. Then in the late twenties, two other men, F.M. Chapman and F.W. Champion, were using pressure plates to activate their cameras. National Geographic magazine published many photographs from the work of these early pioneers. Through the years camera traps have evolved from using “active” film cameras with flashes to “passive” digital cameras with led lights that are much less disruptive and much more cost effective. You no longer have to worry about changing film or losing film and cameras to harsh weather. Now, hundreds of pictures can be taken at 1-60 second intervals, even videos can be recorded before the digital memory is exhausted.

To use camera traps, one can either hide the cameras on game trails where animals are expected to pass by or one can randomly stratify the cameras over an area for an unbiased assessment of the animals present. Then, anytime an animal walks by the camera within 10-15m its heat or motion sets off the camera, which takes a photo, and the animal is “captured.” In addition to taking nice photos of wildlife in natural situations these cameras can also supply a variety of meaningful data.

First, sometimes you simply want to know if an animal is present. Many animals are so rare and/or secretive that it is virtually impossible to observe them in the wild on hikes and the tracks they leave behind can be inconclusive. The pictures, though, from camera traps can provide a direct record of the animal species
present. Second, robust estimates of population densities can be obtained especially for animal species which can be individually identified like tigers and jaguars. Once an animal is “captured” in a photograph, it is individually identified by stripes or spots and “marked.” One can then estimate how many total individuals are in the area depending on how many different individuals are captured in photos before the marked individual is “recaptured.” Even for species like musk deer where individual identification is more difficult, recent models allow population densities to be determined if enough photograph captures can be obtained and data are available on group size and home range size.

Because the cameras are located in different places with different habitat characteristics like elevation, tree cover, and distance to water; the photographs can also provide information on niche use by different species. This information can be valuable in determining what habitat aspects are most important for different species which in turn can be used to set up effective nature reserves. Finally, the cameras can even provide meaningful data on animal activity patterns and social behavior. For example, because the pictures are taken with date and time stamps, you can determine when and how quickly the animals pass by the cameras which allows us to infer how the animals move around the environment. As for social behavior insights, recent pictures from Baimaxueshan showed a musk deer female smelling a dung pile which musk deer bucks use to mark territories and indicating the start of rut. The pictures also showed a pair of Asiatic wild dogs, or dholes, traveling together; in India dholes typically hunt in packs of 3-5 individuals so maybe the pair of dholes indicates a lower density of dholes at Baimaxueshan compared to other areas or that hunting in smaller packs is more optimal in alpine areas like Baimaxueshan.

In the future, camera traps can not only help us learn about musk deer and other wildlife, but also help with their protection. The nature reserve staff at Baimaxueshan is very interested in employing the cameras at some of the points where poachers enter the forest to assist with law enforcement. So hopefully in the future, poachers can be apprehended with the phrase: “smile, you’ve been caught on candid camera!”
MEMORIES OF AN OLD PILOT

and gift of a Dunhuang painting

by Wong How Man

October 4/5 - International Dateline over the Pacific

It was 1942 and I flew the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang from Chungking to Lanzhou to inspect the region,” began Moon Chin. “We later took off again on a flight around Kokonor, now called Qinghai Lake. Chiang Kai-shek wanted to see the lake and the island on it. Later we landed in Xining and he stopped there for a day to inspect the troops,” recounted Moon.

“We also flew over Jiuquan where they have the oil fields. At that time, they had no storage tanks to put the crude oil in, so they dug up big square holes on the ground and pumped the oil into it. We could see it from the sky. During the flight, the Generalissimo often came up to the cockpit and took up the seat next to me to have a better view. We chatted casually and during that time he also gave a name to my newly adopted baby daughter,” Moon added.

“Later Madame took off in a second plane to go to Dihwa, called Urumqi today, while the Generalissimo and I waited in Jiayuguan at the end of the Great Wall,” added Moon with a tone of calmness as we sat in his home above the San Francisco Airport. He was recounting his ancient days of flying during the War, and this account was about his days with Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Soong Mei-ling. Now at 98, Moon has outlived all of them and is still full of memories of those early days. In his head, those by-gone days are just as vivid as yesterday.

Moon mentioned that before the all-out War with Japan started in 1937, he occasionally made forays into Xian, the stronghold of the Young Marshall Zhang Xueliang where the communists were holed up in the nearby pot-marked hills of Yenan just to its north. “Before, Zhang had several planes, a Boeing 247, a Ford Tri-motor, and others,” Moon seems to know all the details about aviation during that era.

At the end of the War, Moon’s fortune changed. From being Assistant Operations Manager for the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), the number three position in the company, he joined Central Air Transport Corporation (CATC), and later ran a fledgling airline with over a hundred planes. At the time, CATC was formed during the War through the disbanding of Eurasian Airlines, a former joint venture between the Chinese government and the German Lufthansa.

CATC was a shell company left with no airplanes. “We first bought from India eleven C-47s, and later an additional nine C-46 from Shanghai. Soon another opportunity arose as the Americans were rushing to leave China. “There was this military base outside Shanghai and they were to turn it back over to the Chinese government within a short time. A call for tender was
issued for someone to purchase everything inside
the base, airplanes, bombers, cargo planes, spare
parts, equipment, even the metallic runway,”
Moon explained his new found opportunity.

“There were in all over 160 airplanes, mostly
C47 and C46, but also eleven B-25 were included
with the bomb bay converted into a 12-passenger
plane, and the runway was very crucial. At the
time even Lung Hwa Airport in Shanghai only
had dirt runway for taking off and landing,” Moon
continued. We submitted our bid at half a million
US Dollars, and we won. Later I found out we
were the only bidder as no one else knew how to
operate these airplanes,” Moon talked casually
about his new forte.

Little known to others was that Moon had already
pre-sold five of the C47s for 150,000 before he
entered the bid. “Soon we were consolidating these
airplanes, some working, some defective, into our
own operating commercial fleet for passenger
service,” said Moon with a smile of confidence.
Thus the Central Air Transport Company (CATC)
Moon joined came back into service.

“I remember our first charter service. Some guy came
up to me and said he wanted a run between Kunming
and Shanghai fast. He asked how much I would
charge. I didn’t think he was serious and just came
up with a figure of 30,000 Dollars. Surprisingly he
agreed. So he paid and we took a C-47 Cargo plane
which we converted to hold 28-seat passengers and
did that one run. 30,000 was about the cost of one
used airplane at the time, so it was very profitable,”
said Moon. “Later I ran into the same guy again
and he laughed at me, saying that he made a profit
of 4,000 Dollars for brokering the deal with that
one time charter,” Moon said. These were the real
dealmakers in those heady days as US4000 could
have bought one a small apartment in Shanghai.

In 1949, he purchased in one breathe six of the latest
Convair 240 airplanes in the US. During those days, that was the newest and
most sophisticated airplane with a pressurized cabin. “I was in the US and
we were prepared to pay US 300,000 per plane with order of two airplanes.
But the prices suddenly went up to 360,000. So we kept negotiating for the
original price. They came back and said if you buy six, we’ll give you the old
price. I made up my mind and took six, without knowing where the money
was coming from. But you only need to pay a deposit first,” Moon revealed
with delight the early chances that he took.

His business acumen turned out a winning bid again and the new airplanes
were the difference between his services against those of his rivals. With
the exception of one new Convair which defected with a C-47 to the newly
founded PRC in October 1949, the remaining aircrafts began serving various
routes that CATC was flying to along the rim of China.

Such entrepreneurship later brought Moon to continue with his air service
when he evacuated to Hong Kong with his airline after 1949. He later also
founded Fu Shing Airlines in Taiwan in 1951 with the purchase of two BPY
amphibian planes which he intended to fly under charter into more remote
parts of China to pull people out of the country. But it turned out Chennault’s
CAT, which was secretly sold to the CIA, beat them to it with their own
BPYs.

He recounted another buying and selling transaction during his days in
Shanghai. It was 1946 after the War when Moon had already set up his

LEFT TO RIGHT: Lanzhou in 1942. Jiayuguan end of the Great Wall in 1942. Moon Chin with his Dunhuang Flying Figure.
own air service company. “I liked this villa house on Kan Ping Road. It was all tree-lined and within easy access to Lung Hwa Airport. Just one turn and a straight road would take me directly to the Airfield,” Moon told me of this new deal.

“The house used to belong to Mayor Wu before the War. He had it built for his concubine and it was very well constructed as all the contractors contributed their services for free,” Moon talked with the same slight smile always on his face. “They wanted 200 gold bars and I talked them down to 185 bars. In those days, each bar was worth ten taels or about 13 ounces, I cannot recall exactly, and each ounce was just under 100 US Dollars, the total was a large sum equivalent to about USD 240,000 in those days,” Moon told me the cost of the house.

“When the communists took over Shanghai, we had to leave and I never returned for over 50 years. Now it is hard to get it back. I have gone to look at it and we’ve been trying. But the government has been using it all these years with many families living in it. Today it is turned into also housing the Shanghai Communist Party Historical Archive Library. Recently they said I may get a fraction of its four million Dollar worth. But they also said they don’t have the money to repay me at the moment,” Moon said with a rare resigned tone.

“At the time I bought this house, I had this small apartment in the French Concession. It was a two-storied building and I had the downstairs with a garden. One of my radio operators wanted to buy it and we agreed on a price of 5,500 US Dollars. We called that key money in those days. So I turned over the key but later on he said he didn’t have the money. So as payment he brought over this painting and gave it to me, saying that it should be worth at least that amount. As I could not get back the apartment, I had no choice but to keep that painting. It is this one that has been hanging on the wall for years. I don’t know how he acquired it. I think his wife was in buying and selling art. But this one is from the walls of the Dunhuang caves,” Moon began describing the painting of a graceful Flying Figure on his wall.

“The colors have never changed. It is still the same as when I received it. I have moved it from Shanghai to Guangzhou when Shanghai fell in 1949. Then later it was moved to Hong Kong with me, then Taiwan, and now to California. I have had it with me for over 60 years,” Moon said. “It was taken apart only once, when I was living in Taiwan, for reframing. Ever since, it’s remained the same. The painting is on plaster like a fresco. That is why it is so heavy. We have to make sure it is reinforced in the back otherwise it may crack,” Moon told me about the caution they took to secure it during the framing process.
I knew Dunhuang well, ever since my first trip there in 1979. I have written articles on the grottoes of Dunhuang in Asia Magazine of the Asia Society early on, and also for the Reader’s Digest in Chinese. I also wrote about other nearby Buddhist cave art of Gansu in the Architectural Digest. Later in the 1990s, I even had an operation base at the Dunhuang Silkroad Hotel, owned by a good friend Peter Wong of Hong Kong. From there we launch many expeditions into China’s northwest region. During those years, I visited the Dunhuang grottoes many times.

Here I recalled a phone conversation I had with Moon back in June this year. He calls me occasionally not knowing where I might be at. “Hey, where are you?” shouted the voice from the other end. “I am in Dunhuang, getting ready to go to the Salween River source,” I answered with enthusiasm as Moon always seemed to brighten my day with his calls. “You remember Dunhuang? Same place where the picture on your wall is from,” I shouted back. I tend to talk loudly whenever I feel the other party is far away, a habit I developed since the early days of making long distance calls from lousy land-line services in remote China.

“Yeah, that painting. You want it? I’ll give it to you. But you have to come and get it,” shouted Moon on the other end. “But that is very valuable,” I balked at his sudden remark with awe. “Yeah, you want it, you come get it,” he said simply but reassuringly. I didn’t know he meant it, but I’d been for the last few years making his home my habitual stop and stayed with Moon to hear all the stories of old, an era that totally fascinates me. So on my current trip on a speaking circuit to the East Coast, I stopped again and stayed with Moon.

In short, on the day I drove his Mercedes S600 to Sacramento for dinner with my sister, he had his two lady helpers and his nephew measure the framed painting and went to the nearby U-Haul store to purchase a carton box with Styrofoam corners for it. He also personally supervised his helper cut up a protective wooden board to secure the back. When I got back to his home, I saw the next morning that all devices were ready for packing the painting to go away.

While interviewing Moon on video about other subjects, I further asked Moon whether he was sure he wanted to part with such a treasured object. His reply, “I have to give it to someone, right? I want to give it to you.” So with little fanfare, this priceless art piece has suddenly become my most valued possession. Over the years, Moon had told me much about his history in China. Later he gave me his valued black and white negatives to testify and complement those stories he told me. Now with one stroke of generosity, he has stretched that story all the way back two thousand years with this precious gift of a Dunhuang painting.

I looked up to the now empty space on the wall and asked Moon, “Don’t you feel you’re missing that painting now? It is probably worth more than a house.” He looked at me with the same kindly smile and didn’t bother to give me an answer. A shrewd businessman all his life, he must know what he is investing in, I hope. “Well, let’s just leave this alone and focus on our trip to Burma next year,” I too turned my attention to the days ahead. We have agreed to go together to Burma next spring. By then Moon will turn 99, just in time to revisit and commemorate his first flight there as a pilot seventy years ago, in December of 1941.

After that, I must think hard where to take him next, when he turns 100, still with the golden spirit of a young pilot. Perhaps back to Tai Shan of Guangdong, where Moon was born, a century ago!
The beautiful young lady at the beach waved for me to come closer. I had heard about the fame of Brazilian beach combers, be it men picking up women or being picked up, but this encounter is more serious. She is staff at Project Tamar, a conservation effort devoted to saving the sea turtles of the Brazilian coast.

With crisp English, Liliana pointed out to me a tiny dead turtle in the sand pit. “Here is where a fox has dug up a nest of the turtles,” she said while looking at the scattered soft egg shells around the pit. Just minutes ago, I was carefully combing three freshly dug up pits, thinking those cracked soft shells must be from hatched egg, exposed on the sand while the baby turtles found their way to the surface. My romantic view of nature was short-lived. The food chain of our physical world is a bit more brutal. With it, my image of a beautiful fox was turned into an ugly scavenger devouring tiny newborn baby turtles.

Only thirty years ago, man was not only part of, but on the top of that food chain. Along almost 7,500 kilometers of Brazilian coast, people hunted and ate the meat, collected the eggs, and sold the shells and leather of these giant sea turtles, until finally they realized it was no longer sustainable. That was after they have decimated what was once millions of these prehistoric (up to 150 million years ago) amphibian reptiles. All of a sudden, there was a worldwide call, to Brazil in particular, to save the endangered sea turtles. Today, it is perhaps the single most publicized protected wildlife species in all of Brazil, especially along the long coastline of the country. Man has taken himself out of that food chain, and become a more worthy custodian of our fragile planet.

Exactly thirty years ago, the project started with government initiative and support. Soon it gained momentum with more corporate and private funding. It also caught the imagination of a generation of young Brazilians, something that boosted the pride of a nation never so bent on preserving an important natural heritage of the country. Soon T-shirts and hats of sea turtles could be seen everywhere, perhaps second only to soccer jersey with Brazilian colors. Besides soccer greats like Pele and Grand Prix champion Senna, the Sea Turtle can well become a mascot of the country.

For days since I arrived at my friend’s beach home here in Salvador along the northeastern coast of Brazil, I have been pacing the sandy beach looking for turtles. I got up and went out to the beach every morning at 6 am for sunrise. As these few months, from September to March, is the season when the turtles
come on shore to lay eggs, before tiny turtles are hatched and returned to the sea, 45 days after the eggs are laid. Brazil hosts five of the seven sea turtle species in the world, with the Leatherback turtles growing to sizes of 700 kilos in weight and living to 70 years of age.

But so far, I have only seen giant tracks left on the sand, apparently footprints of these mother turtles coming to shore or leaving after laying their eggs. The newborns are supposed to come to the surface at night and wade their way to the sea, obviously an adaptation to nature so as not to run into predators. The fox must have learned the tricks too, coming out at night. In fact, where the staff of Project Tamar has put some long white sticks to identify areas of turtle nests, the cunning fox may have learned to also identify where it should look.

Some nests, at times with up to 120 eggs, are considered too close to the water, and were relocated by the project staff further up the beach to ensure higher rate of survival. That was what Liliana was doing at 7am in the morning as she gestured to me to come observe. With every new nest she dug into the sand to deposit a hundred or so eggs, she took a GPS reading and marked it on her notepad. Later I was to also visit their Center at Praia do Forte with display of live turtles in man-made pools.

My days in Salvador are necessarily long. We have just passed the summer solstice in the southern hemisphere, with the sun rising at 6am and setting at 7pm. It is made even longer with the slow and relaxed pace at the beach. Jetting in made the contrast even greater. I arrived at Salvador with my friends Judith and Wim from New York in a Gulfstream IV private jet.

In days past, the journey took much longer. Slaves from the west coast of Africa used to come in huge numbers crowded into the hold of wooden ships. Many were lost to the sea during storms and torturous weather. In all, over four million slaves came to Brazil. More than half of them landed in Salvador, the old capital of the Portuguese colonial days. Today descendents of these African slaves brought by the Portuguese and Spanish over four centuries ago now comprise over 65% of the three million population of Salvador.

Not unlike non-endemic and invasive species to a land, perhaps it is only a matter of time when the return of the Sea Turtle here in Brazil will populate the rest of our ocean planet. Some of the species here are common to those in Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Vietnam. One beach in Hong Kong’s Lamma Island is known to be an occasional nesting ground of the sea turtle.

After watching on the beach here in Salvador a few newborn turtles wading toward the ocean, I was told that a tagged turtle first released along the coast of Brazil showed up three years later in the net of local fishermen in the Azores, an archipelago of islands in the far away Atlantic almost 6,500 kilometers away. That ought to put Cousteau and the Calypso to task. After all, the turtle did it all with one tank of gas!

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Workers sorting turtle eggs from its nest. Newly hatched sea turtle readying for the long journey and crawling to finally reaching the ocean.
CERS IN THE FIELD

Clockwise from top:
CERS team dining at Hong Shui Village in Hainan.
CERS IN THE MEDIA

- CCTV completed and aired three-half-hour documentaries on CERS’ work at the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve. For 2012 they would expand their coverage to three more full-hour episodes, ultimately making a twelve-part series. The first episode on the Burmese Cat is being made in the spring of 2012.

- BO, a popular lifestyle magazine in China, continues their twice a month reporting on CERS adventures and projects.

- Hello Magazine website of the UK carried a Land Rover montage piece, featuring How Man on his adventures as part of an exhibit at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

- Animation films created by students of Yung Yau College received several international Awards.
Ms Dora Wu again made a significant donation in support of our project in Hainan island for the year 2012. This followed her visit at Hong Shui Village where CERS is restoring up to 20 thatch-roofed houses.

Mr Robert Kwan of Singapore joins CERS as our new patron.

Shun Hing supported with numerous Panasonic products to How Man’s photographic studio at Cape D’Aguilar in Hong Kong.

Land Rover provided two vehicles for our winter expedition, used under extreme weather condition to the northernmost region of China, to study the last Ewenki Reindeer herders.

Coca-Cola continues to supply our China bases with beverage and a new cooler to the Hok Tsui/Cape D’Aguilar studio.

CDL Group continues their funding support and complimentary stay at their Millennium hotels.

John Lloyd of Land Rover 4x4 Experience spoke on behalf of CERS at the RGS exhibition, introducing our work to those who attended the opening.

Shanghai Tang custom-made knitted sweat shirts for CERS 25th Anniversary.

3M Hong Kong donate & install the filter system in CERS Research Centre.

3M Taiwan special made Thinsulate hats with CERS label for expeditions.

We thank Nury Vittachi for serving as Master of Ceremonies for our annual dinner, and the following companies for providing special gifts for the evening: Coca-Cola China, William E. Connor & Associates, Cultures by Toni P Ltd, Esquel Group, Omega, Ponti Trading Ltd, Toppan Vite Limited, Tiffany & Co., UBS AG, Yen Sheng Factory Limited, Mr Billy Yung. We also thank all the individuals who helped or volunteered during the evening.

Ms Dora Wu again made a significant donation in support of our project in Hainan island for the year 2012. This followed her visit at Hong Shui Village where CERS is restoring up to 20 thatch-roofed houses.

Overseas

- Ingrid Ehrenberg & Joe Chan
- Eric Chen
- Don Conlan
- Scott & Signe Cook
- Judith-Ann Corrente
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