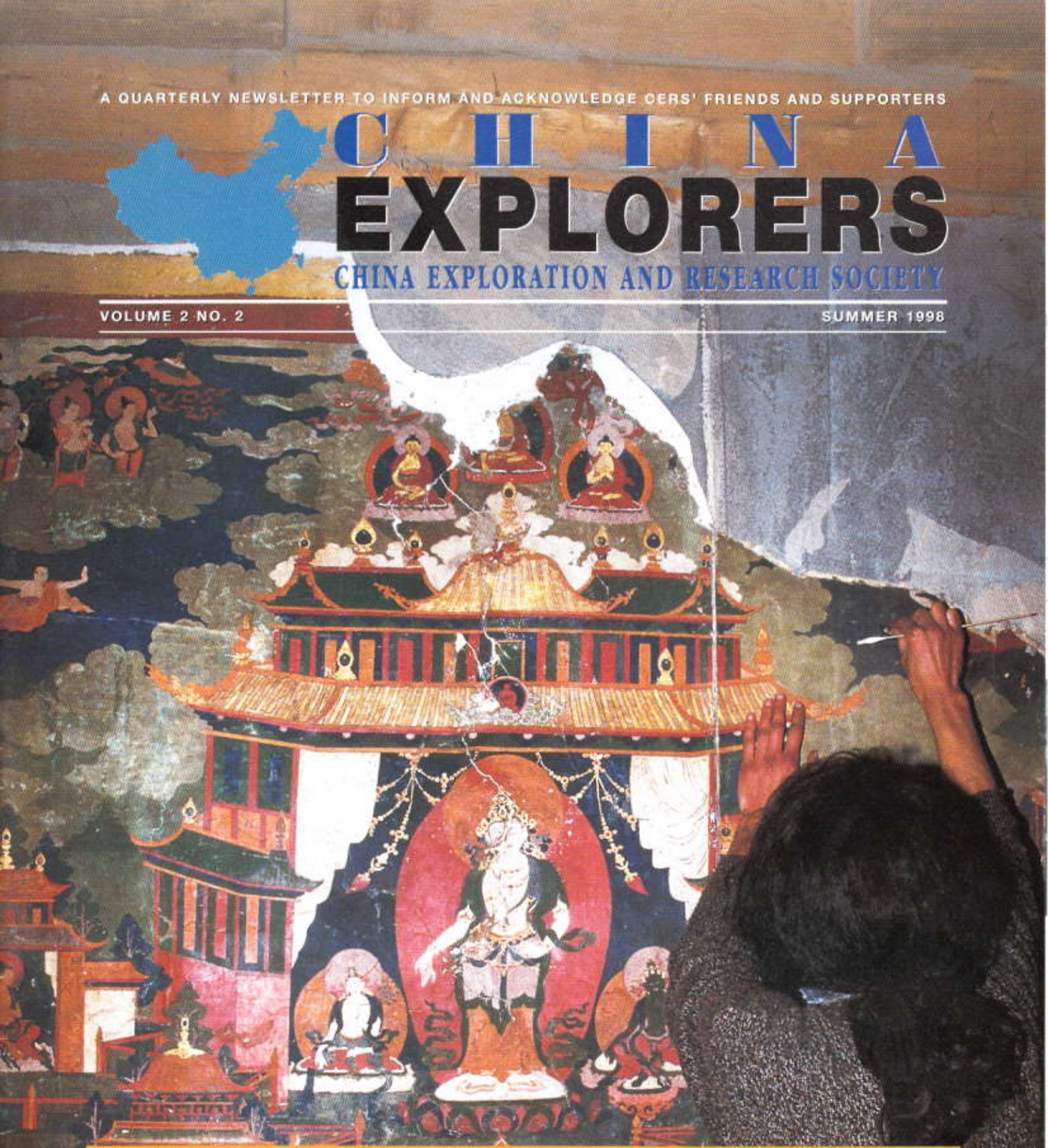
A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS' FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

# CHINA EXPLORERS

## CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOLUME 2 NO. 2 SUMMER 1998



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CAO ZHONGYU, Logistics Support

**CERS Office Staff:**
BERRY SIN, Office Manager
KATHY YOUNG, Public Relations
INGRID EHRENBERG, Marketing

**Editor:**
CATHY HILBORN (FENG)
(852) 2508-4436; fax (852) 2503-1530;
e-mail <cathy.hilborn@feer.com>

**Design Director:**
ANNIE HUTCHISON, Design & Illustration
Phone/fax (852) 2982-0268;
e-mail <annieh@netvigator.com>

**Color Separation:**
Ocean Graphic Company Ltd.
Shaukeiwan, Hong Kong, (852) 2560-2299, (852) 2560-3622; fax (852) 2560-2359

**Printer:**
KENNETH CHUNG, Managing Director, Everbest Printing Co. Ltd., Yau Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong, (852) 2727-4433

**HOW TO REACH CERS:**
Unit 8, 23/F SouthMark,
Tower B, 11 Yip Hing Street,
Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong.
(852) 2555-7776; fax (852) 2555-2661
e-mail: cers@asiaonline.net
CERS TAI TAM RESEARCH CENTER:
(852) 2809-4181; fax (852) 2809-2909

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## President's Message

I'm no investor, but I used to joke that I follow the stock market—just to know whom I should approach for sponsorship and when. If the market is a good indicator, though, I have little to look forward to these days. With the Asian economic downturn, funding for non-governmental organizations like CERS is becoming more scarce.

The number of potential sponsors is shrinking, and existing ones are growing more selective in what and who they want to support. Under these circumstances, I am particularly grateful that CERS has recently won support from the Kadoorie Charitable Foundations, the Hongkong Bank Foundation, City Developments Limited of Singapore and ongoing sponsorship from Shell China. Their funding is a vote of confidence.

CERS has always been proud of being a lean and mean organization. Other than myself, the group has only one full-time staff member in Hong Kong. We count on a corps of dedicated volunteers with various expertise, assisting us as the need for their skills arise. The rest of our team is in China, attending to the many projects the society undertakes. CERS hires experts under contract, commensurate with the requirements of each specific project. Despite our small size, though, we produce no small results.

Sponsors and potential sponsors often ask me how "big" our annual budget is. When I tell them, they often ask, "In U.S. dollars?" I answer quietly, but with pride, "No, just Hong Kong dollars." They are surprised that CERS is able to conduct so much work with such meager funds. Indeed, many people wonder how we pay for such a glossy, professional newsletter. However, CERS does not pay a cent for it: It owes a lot to our friendly volunteer editor, designer, color separator and printer.

Some may ask how CERS achieved so much attention, attracting regular media coverage from such well-known broadcasters as CNN, Discovery Channel, BBC, CCTV and RTHK. I'd like to think it is my charisma, but it is not. I have to attribute CERS' success to the team's sense of commitment to our mission, our fast reaction to a situation of need, our dedication to each project once we commit, and the passion and sensitivity with which we conduct our work.

Indeed, I believe that CERS will continue to thrive, despite the temporary setback in the Asian economy. I'd like to thank all our friends and supporters, whether they provide funding, in-kind support, service or volunteer work, who continue to assist us in these difficult times.

*Wong How Man*
*President*

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# A walk among the antelopes

Expeditions seldom go exactly according to plan, and this one was no exception. The nature reserve's Beijing Jeep broke a rear axle our first day out. Although our Defenders have proven far more reliable, after three days of bone-jolting cross-country driving, the front shocks on CERS car No. 1 were shot, and it could only limp along. The nearest spare parts were in Hong Kong. Down to one and a half functioning vehicles, we were forced to cut short our planned surveys. Even so, we still accomplished many of our goals—if only by the skin of our teeth.

One of our main objectives was to learn how many female Chiru, or Tibetan Antelope, converge each year on the calving grounds in the west of Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve. After our first night of snow, we took advantage of clearing weather to carry out all-important counts to the north and west of our camp. A quick search of the northern area revealed few antelope. In fact, much of the area seemed to be a dry, sandy wasteland of dunes with scattered green patches of sedges. Although the sedges looked like pleasant sandy meadows of grass, the blades were so sharp they could pierce pants cuffs. Early explorers of the high plateau reported that these sedges are so unpalatable that horses will starve if given nothing else, and even camels avoid eating them.

If the north had no antelope, this was both a relief, and a disappointment. It meant that most of the calving females were to the south, where we had already carried out extensive surveys. But it also meant that the total population of this migrating herd was that much smaller.

We still needed to carry out surveys on the very edge of the reserve. But our journey to the west was cut short when we ran up against the swollen Aruk River. It had been a mere trickle that we had crossed several times before. Now, swollen by melting snows, it seemed like a torrential monster just waiting to suck in car tires. We climbed down out of the car and walked up and down the bank, trying to gauge the depth of the water and the stability of the gravel. After a half hour of pacing, which finally degenerated into a stone-skipping competition, it seemed we had all silently agreed that there was no way to get the car across safely. ▶

**Dr. William B. Bleisch**
***July 7, 1998***
***Arjin Shan, Xinjiang Province***

**Remote campsite: To traverse the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve, CERS must haul in 150-kilogram drums of gasoline.**

**Wong How Man cradles an infant antelope that the team mistakenly thought had been abandoned. It returned to Mom—after a free lunch, courtesy of CERS.**

"We'll have to try again tomorrow," I said.

"But the weather may change."

"You're right, it has to be done today," and I was already shouldering my camera and binoculars.

"But how are you going to get there?"

"Like this," I called back, already ankle deep in the river. As the cold water filled my boots, I wondered if I had made a rash decision, but it was too late to turn back. "Meet you here at six."

Once across the river, it seemed I had made the right choice. A young antelope leapt out from behind a mound just ahead. But the next gully was a disappointment, and I could see nothing again as I climbed the next ridge and descended into a third wide valley. I trudged along, gasping for breath in the rare air at 4,600 meters elevation. Lost in thought, I noticed that there at my feet were piles of antelope scat, and tracks seemed to be running in every direction. I looked up to see three young antelope staring at me, 300 hundred meters away. They did not run, perhaps curious to see what this strange creature was, patterned in a motley of earth tones, somewhat like a Wild Ass, but with only two legs, and puffing oddly as it slowly climbed the ridge.

I may have seemed clumsy and slow to these wild denizens of the high plateau, but it was liberating to be out of the car among the animals, and my heart raced with sheer joy. The next gully had only two young antelope, but the wind was in my favor, and I stalked one of them to within 100 meters. Climbing another ridge to the west, I found nine more antelope and some oddly-shaped rock outcrops.

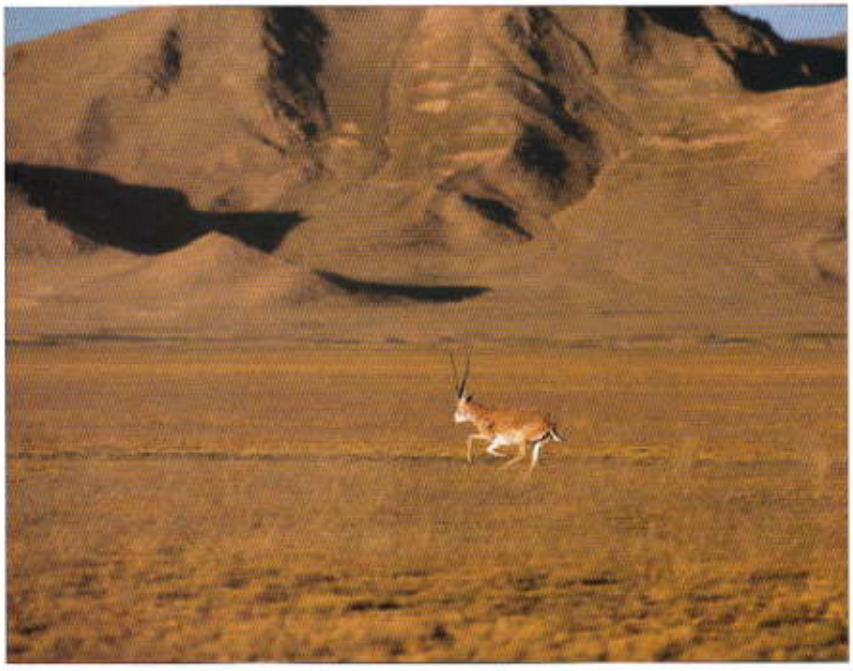
As I continued climbing west, these outcrops became more numerous and resolved into many parallel shelves of dark slate, standing nearly straight up out of the surrounding sand and gravel. No car could get into this labyrinth, with these sharp barriers blocking every path. This was a true "natural reserve".

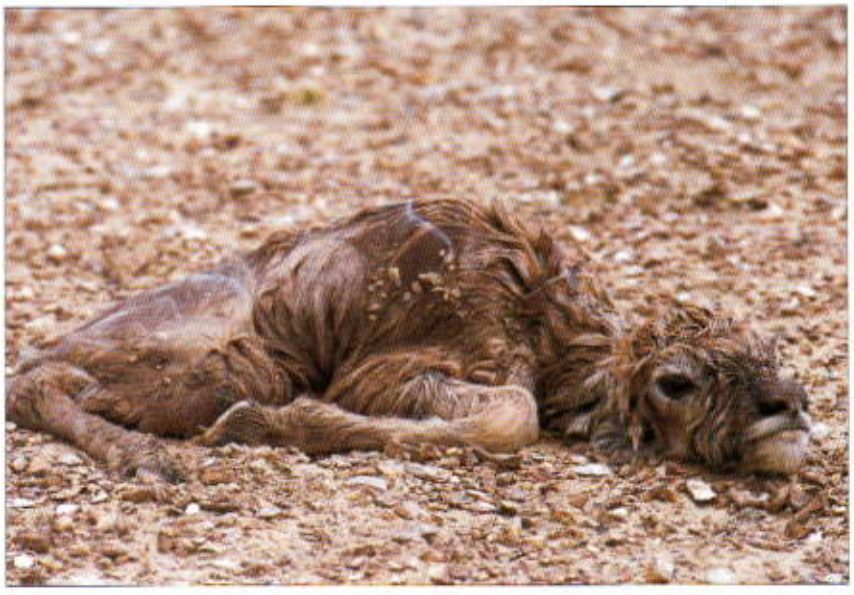
It was time to start back, but the next ridge seemed so close. I rushed ahead, startling a rabbit, and nearly stepping on a tiny bleached skull and leg bones. Perhaps an unlucky relative, killed by a lynx, whose scat lays nearby.

I peered over the top of the next sharp ridge, discovering a herd of 14 female antelope. I crouched among the rocks, the wind in my face, and although I was less than 50 yards away, they seemed oblivious to my presence. They rested and grazed peacefully, and an infant toddled up out of hiding to sidle up alongside its mother. Beyond in the distance, at least 70 more antelope foraged and rested, scattered across a vast basin dappled with sun and shade, a peaceful refuge hemmed in by high peaks.

The wind picked up, the clouds turned dark, and I suddenly realized the time. I started back nearly at a run, but it was already a half-hour past our appointed meeting time. Worse yet, from the ridge top I could see our car, halfway across the river, and stuck. They must have gotten worried and were on their way to attempt a rescue. When we finally met, it was 7:30 p.m. and the rest of the team was understandably furious.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" But it was hard to sound sincere. In fact, I was elated, and far from sorry, about my walk among the antelope. ■





**The male Tibetan Antelope (top) sports long, twin-prong horns, useful during the rut season when males establish dominance for the right to mate. Still wet with natal fluid, a newborn antelope rests at its birth site.**

● *Dr. Bleisch is a wildlife biologist who has been involved with CERS since 1987. With degrees from Harvard and Rockefeller University and post-doctorate from Caltech, Bill has worked as a field biologist in China for more than a decade. His most recent posting was as Resident Advisor for China's Forest Ministry in Beijing, before joining CERS again in our three-year project at the Arjin reserve.*

# Sacred birth, violent death

by Wong How Man
*June 30, 1998*
*Arjin Shan, Xinjiang Province*

**Wong How Man makes friends with a young antelope that had been "parked" by its mother before she went off to graze. To the field team's surprise—and delight—she later returned to reclaim her offspring.**

The breeding ground of theTibetan Antelope is one of the best-kept secrets in the natural world. It has defied discovery even by the most dedicated field biologists and experienced explorers. Accounts throughout the last century or so had been scanty and at best circumstantial. Others had reported on the migration of pregnant females higher and higher, until they shook loose their stalkers and disappeared deep into the mountains of the Tibetan plateau.

In his two recent books on mammals of the Tibetan plateau, Dr. George Schaller devoted much description to the Tibetan antelope. Although he dedicated more than a decade to studying this animal, this celebrated scientist did not uncover even one definitive calving site. The scientific world knew only that large herds of female antelope converged, migrated and gave birth in a few secluded and secret spots.

In 1993, Zhang Huibin, a biologist and CERS associate at the Arjin (Altun) Mountain Nature Reserve told me that the previous summer his party had come across an antelope giving birth at the western extreme border of the reserve. Later he showed me a picture of the newborn antelope, still wet with natal fluid, struggling to rise to its feet for the first time. The suggestion that Zhang had come close to a calving ground was exciting news, even for a seasoned explorer. I was determined to go and explore this distant corner where Xinjiang, Tibet and Qinghai merge.

We know that antelope give birth in late June to early July. So 12 of us, including two staff from the Arjin reserve, set out from CERS Dunhuang Conservation Center on June 21. On June 25, we arrived at the reserve's western perimeter, bordering the Changtang wilderness region of Tibet. Nearby, the snow peak of Mount Muztag rises to 7,723 meters.

We traversed hundreds of kilometers, through snow, hail and rain. It was somewhat mystifying that the western part of the reserve attracts almost no wildlife, whereas the eastern section supports large herds of plateau ungulates. But we saw many fresh tracks, identified as those of antelope herds. We surmised that a huge migration must have just passed through.

On the fifth day of travel, we arrived at a huge plain, about 4,600 meters in elevation, cradled among mountains and hills north of Mount Muztag. In the valley, ▶

*CERS study of the Tibetan Antelope is part of a long-term project in collaboration with the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve. The present work is supported by the Kadoorie Charitable Foundations, the Hongkong Bank Foundation, and Shell China.*

we saw herds of Tibetan antelopes off in the distance. Some were forming long single files, marching westward, while other herds grazed along the foothills. Within minutes, though, we spotted black ravens and vultures circling. We raced towards a flock of ravens feeding on the ground.

Alas, the poachers had gotten here first. They, too, had discovered the breeding ground, butchered these endangered antelope and left carnage in their wake. Scattered across the plain were the bloody carcasses of six female antelopes stripped of their precious hides—an easy meal for scavengers. Each kill represented two deaths: Next to each dead antelope was the tiny body of a fetus.

Usually antelopes are extremely fleet-footed, achieving speeds of up to 60 kilometers an hour. It seems the poachers conducted their massacre at night, when the animals would be apt to freeze in the bright headlights instead of running. With such tactics, these illegal hunters can leisurely shoot down entire herds. In the last few years, such practices in the winter had decimated many of the reserve's antelope herds, except those in a few secluded enclaves.

Why the wholesale massacre? These animals are sought after not for their meat but for their fine wool, known as "shahtoosh". Finer than cashmere, it is woven into shawls that sell in the world's leading boutiques for up to US$8,000 apiece. It takes the wool from about four endangered antelope to make a single shawl.

**A rare bearded vulture takes flight...**
**...while shahtoosh-seeking poachers leave behind dozens of skinned female antelope carcasses—and their full-term fetuses.**

We spent the next two days seeking out the remaining antelope. There were literally thousands, several hundreds in each hidden valley. We were successful in observing, filming and photographing the final leg of migration to the calving grounds. There we documented the birth process, and the first few days of raising of the newborns. We even nursed a baby that we thought had been abandoned by its mother. However, we soon discovered a unique antelope behavior: Antelopes "park" their babies, then go off to graze, returning later to retrieve their offspring. Indeed, two desperate mothers raced down a precipitous hillside to a riverbed to escort their two infants to "safety" when our filming party encroached to within 20 meters of them. The mother of the "abandoned" calf likewise returned to reclaim it.

Over the two days, we came across seven grisly carnage scenes totaling more than 70 antelope carcasses. We collected more than 20 rounds of spent ammunition, so we knew a chance encounter with these poachers would put us in danger, too. We can only hope that our presence will act as a deterrent to their activities. After all, from a distance, our seven-tent entourage looked rather formidable. Still, I promised our reserve colleagues that CERS will try to gather the necessary resources and funding to prevent the 1999 breeding season from deteriorating into another bleeding season.

Having been a photojournalist for the National Geographic for many years, I understand the power of photography. I vowed to bring home both the pictures of the magnificent live antelope and the gruesome images of the remains of slaughtered pregnant females and full-term fetuses the poachers had left in their wake.

These photographs will not only bear testimony to the antelopes' plight. They may also send a chill up the spines of the beautiful people who seek to wrap themselves in fine "shahtoosh". Each time they reach for their luxurious shawls, they should remember the image of the slaughter which preceded its manufacture. Perhaps these pictures will help to alter the antelope's destiny which is very bleak indeed. ■

# The gods will sleep well tonight

**Wong How Man**
*August 14, 1998*
*Tumu, Sichuan Province*

**The mountain ranges of Ganzi prefecture (left) are picturesque—but they can also be threatening.**

*CERS welcomes financial support of this project to save Tumu monastery. If you would like to help, please call our Hong Kong office at 2555-7776.*

"I constantly lose sleep during the night in the rainy season when I hear, or seem to hear, mud and rock crashing down on my house," Qimei confided to me in 1997. Real or imagined, the situation was tense at Tumu monastery, an ancient Tibetan institution famed for its medical teaching and situated on a remote hillside in western Sichuan.

A small landslide which started 100 years ago directly behind the monastery had just become active again. Like a sleepy volcano gradually waking up, the crater was growing larger each year, hauling down tons of debris as the rain lashed the plateau each summer. At the rate it was growing, the mudslide threatened to sweep away the monastery, together with its well-preserved murals.

Qimei is a Tibetan doctor just over 70 years of age, leading the monastery as its head abbot. His superior, Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, left Tumu 40 years ago and now resides in Washington as a Special Envoy for the Dalai Lama. Lodi and I had met in Hong Kong, to discuss what measures to take to alleviate the threat to his monastery. Despite the monks' rounds of prayers and a wall of prayer flags across the mud path, heaven could not wait. Another rainy season was just around the corner.

With limited resources but unlimited ambitions, we embarked for Tumu in mid-April, ahead of the ravaging rainy season. Our aim was to do as much as we could to control the landslide until a more permanent solution could be found. The previous winter, we had commissioned an engineering study by a joint group of mudslide experts from Yunnan and Sichuan. They prescribed a million-dollar remedy—that far exceeded our means.

As our team prepared to organize local labor and material, rumors of the million-dollar solution reared their ugly heads. Details of the experts' report had swept the village, and everyone thought we had arrived with loads of money—at least half a million dollars—and prices for everything we needed suddenly shot up like a rocket. We wasted precious time explaining how little funding we actually had to pay for the project.

Over the next month, planning, organizing, hiring, purchasing, transporting, and negotiating were the order of the day. We were operating in a purely Tibetan area, with not one Han person in sight and, therefore, with no interpreter. Our frustrations mounted. Cement had to be trucked in from the Tibetan town of Ganzi, almost 100 kilometers away, through a forestry road with a snowbound 4,000-meter pass. But, we reminded ourselves, had the monastery been more accessible, it would probably have been destroyed in the Cultural Revolution.

Our project entailed building a dam at the mouth of the mudslide, four meters high and 12 meters long, and a retaining wall, two meters high and 69 meters long. This meant building a 480-meter-long dirt road halfway up the hill, and laying 800 meters of water pipes—all under challenging, high-altitude conditions.

Meanwhile, our project manager, Huang Chuxing, had been keeping a secret. He returned to Kunming a month after the project's completion, triumphant though many kilos lighter in weight. There, he headed straight to the hospital—to witness the delivery of his first child.

CERS thanks our field workers, and their spouses, for their sacrifices and dedication to protecting our common natural and cultural heritage. The gods at Tumu should sleep well tonight. So should Huang's baby. ■

**Dr. Pamela Logan**
***May 1, 1998***
***Baiya, Dege, Sichuan Province***

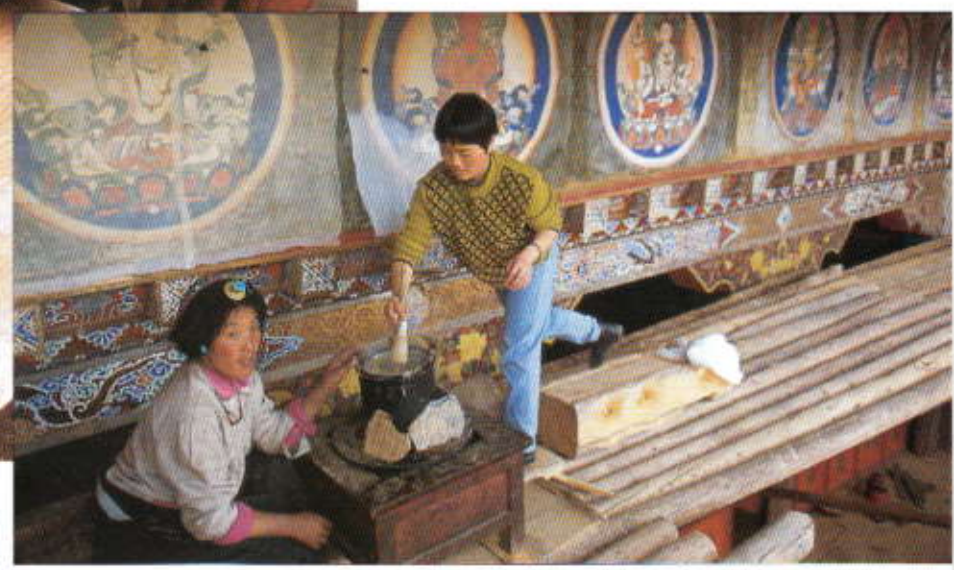
# Return of the god

I sat high up on a scaffolding admiring a Tibetan Buddhist mural, which had just been unrolled and stapled to the east wall of Baiya Monastery's atrium. No longer a gauze-swathed patient lying on an operating table, the mural was standing on its feet again, in all its colorful glory. It was a great feeling.

That was a day of successes. First, our five apprentices had detached some endangered paintings at Palpung Monastery at a blitzkrieg pace. I arrived from my audience with the Ugyen Rinpoche only just in time to see the last mural peeled from the wall and everyone raise their hands in a victory salute. Yahoo! We did it!

The work at Palpung had been an unplanned extra: These were eight round paintings, each about a meter in diameter, made by the previous incarnation of the Situ Rinpoche some 50 or 60 years ago on the very summit of Palpung's awesome temple. The roof of that chamber had been slowly sliding earthward over the seven years I had been coming here; a big piece of it collapsed in 1997. The murals were doomed, and engineer Xiong Xiong told me that if they could not be detached now, they would certainly be lost for all time. Luckily, our work at Baiya was going well enough that we could spare the time, people and materials to send a small team out to Palpung to attend to this emergency.

Led by American conservator Karen Yager, ably assisted by chief apprentice



# s' portraits

Deshi Yangjin and four other students, in four and a half days they managed to detach Situ Rinpoche's murals. Our rescue came not a moment too soon. Even as the final painting was being carried downstairs, Xiong Xiong's carpenters were building a protective covering for the gigantic Maitreya statue below, in preparation for demolition of the damaged roof. Now the paintings will wait in storage until building repairs are complete and a team can come back out to return the paintings to their proper places.

Finished at Palpung, we sped back to Baiya Monastery to re-join the main contingent of the conservation team. Donatella Zari, now a Tibet veteran finishing up her third tour of duty at Baiya, was getting ready for the final step. Those familiar with the project will know that the murals at Baiya were detached two years ago so the walls and roof of the monastery could be repaired without inflicting further damage on the artwork. The purpose of this mission was to complete the last, climactic steps of the conservation process. During the last three weeks, Donatella and three other conservators had mounted the detached murals on a cloth and fiberglass backing, and painstakingly removed the cloth facings which had been protecting the colors throughout the procedure. I arrived just as they were preparing to carry the re-assembled and rolled-up painting into the temple. ▶

**DONATELLA ZARI, a mural expert from Italy, leads apprentices in removing a gluey gauze from the age-old mural's surface. (Pamela Logan stands to her right.)**

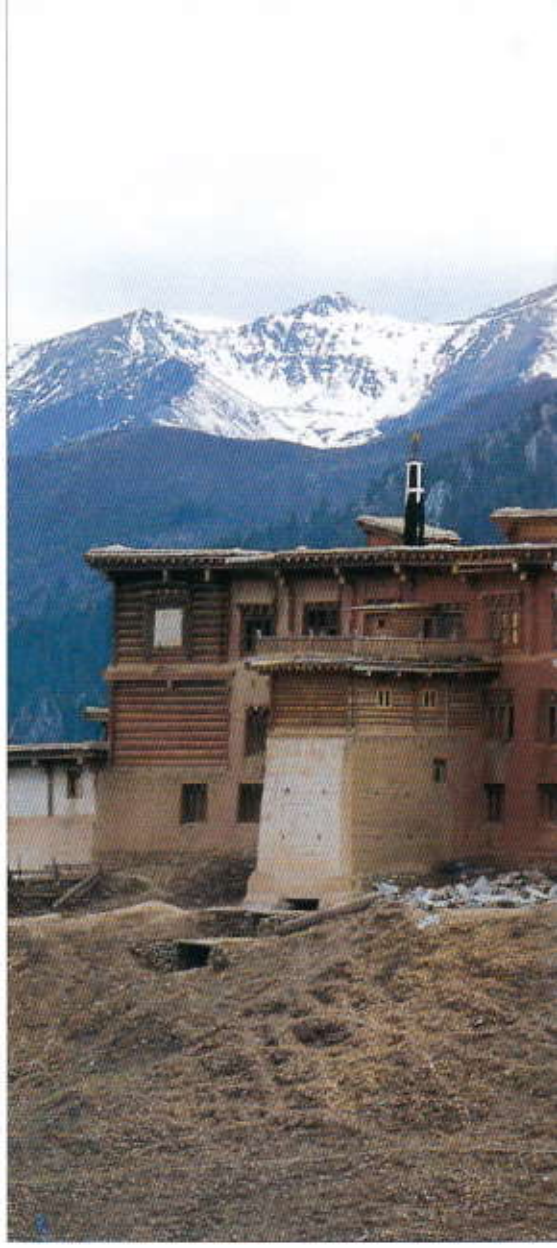
**WONG HOW MAN (top) gets a lesson in applying pasta-like hot paper pulp to remove the protective gauze from the preserved mural.**

**HEAD APPRENCTICE Deshi Yangjin applies glue to the spectacular circular murals from the roof of Palpung.**

Everyone had gathered: conservators, students, interpreters, monks, support staff, and half a dozen painters and carpenters who had been working elsewhere in the monastery. As the huge roll was being hoisted and navigated through the narrow, crooked corridor, they were all shouting instructions to each other in various languages. "A little higher...Mind the corner!...More tape over here, please...Tsering, you hold it...Get out of the way!" The gaggle of chattering people followed the roll as it wended its way down the hall, around the corner, through a skylight, and into the temple. They carried it to the far corner and stood it on end.

Then, amid shouts and arguments and laughter and many hands helping, they unrolled it, aligning the mural to the baseboard of the new wall. I was busy taking pictures when Donatella berated me, "I don't need photographs, I need more people!" So I ran across to the courtyard and summoned what few souls were left. We all took places in a long line against the wall, pressing the mural against the wood as it was slowly unrolled. And what a motley lineup it was: monks, students, foreign experts, carpenters, painters, and even a cook or two stood shoulder to shoulder, working together to hold the mural in place.

The students began stapling the edges while Dona and the other conservators inspected the mural for areas of delamination, which they will forestall by injecting glue beneath the pigment. I sat admiring the artwork in all its glory, remembering how it looked three years ago when the clay underneath was buckling, and I brought Donatella here for the first time... We've come a long way since then. The work at Baiya is finished, but I look forward to bringing my now-seasoned team to other monasteries, to save what we can of western Sichuan's ancient Tibetan art. ■



# Intrigues of exploration and conservation

**Wong How Man**
***May 6, 1998***
***Dunhuang, Gansu Province***

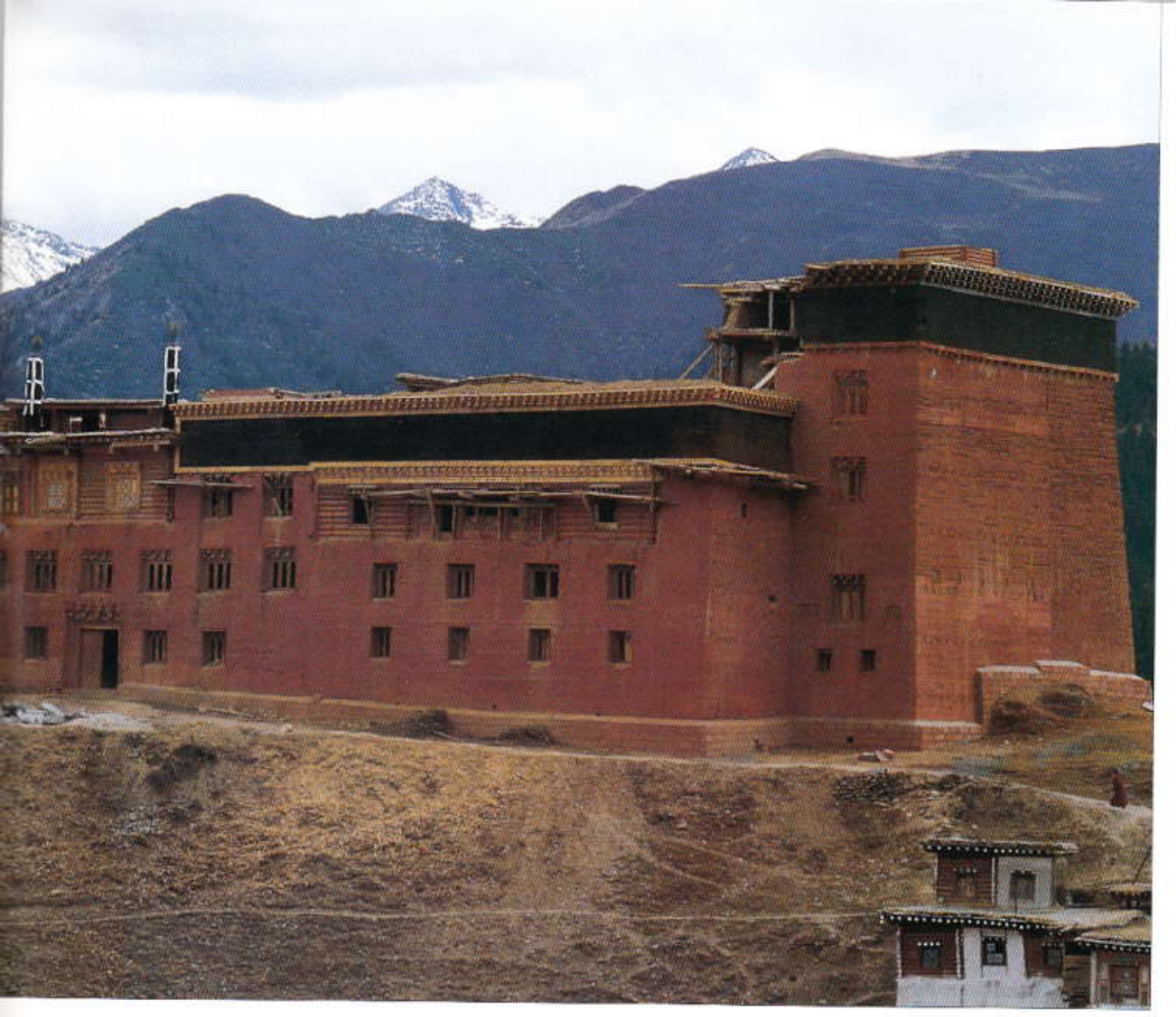
After six days of driving to rendezvous with our CERS mural conservation team, my first sight of Pamela Logan was quite shocking. As we drove the last 100 meters toward Baiya monastery, I watched Pam rush out the front door—her forehead bleeding profusely. Our arrival so excited her that she had rushed through the monastery, forgetting to duck her head through low-hanging doorways!

Despite being called her mentor and teacher, I did not expect Pam, a Karate instructor, to kowtow with such vigor in greeting me, I joked. As I attended to her wound with some Yunnan Magic White Powder, I mused that after managing the monastery restoration project since 1994, she should be able to run through the place blindfolded.

It was almost dark and I made haste to introduce my team to those who had been hard at work for the last month at the monastery. They included Donatella, an expert in mural restoration from Italy who had come to Baiya three seasons in a row, and several of her expat assistants. There were also three young Tibetan apprentices from nearby towns.

The following morning, I observed Dona's team stripping one of the last murals from its protective glue gauze. These murals had been removed from the monastery's cracked and damaged walls last year and put into storage. They were now being prepared to be remounted on the newly repaired walls. The process was fascinating to watch.

I was amazed by Dona's expertise at work as she gave orders, with the aid of many hand gestures, to the apprentices. With the mural laid across two stools, she applied heated paper pulp to the surface gauze and soon the pressed pulp began to resemble fine Italian pasta. I joked with her that with a stretch of imagination, she could be making pizza or lasagna with an assortment of toppings. She did not seem



**The imposing Palpung Monastery (top) sports new repairs to its roof. In contrast, Tumu monastery (below) and its murals are intact—but threatened by a landslide.**

amused as her entire focus was now on the murals and her staff.

Stripping a mural from its gauze requires an extremely stringent procedure. A separate team stood by with huge containers of water that were heated and put into large plastic bags. These were applied like a layer of gelatin on top of the mural, to melt the gluey surface of the gauze before its final removal. Peeling off the gauze was another slow and intricate process, using innumerable heated sponges to absorb the dissolved glue.

As the gauze was stripped away, the mural returned to life, its vibrant mineral pigments shining as if it was painted just yesterday. The cinnabar red, indigo blue and golden etchings defied their vintage age of almost 300 years.

That afternoon, I visited Palpung monastery, now only an hour away by car. During my last visit in 1991, when I had conceived the project, it took us half a day on horseback through a winter snowstorm to get there. The downside was that it was a recently opened forestry road that enabled the drive. It makes it easy for hurried loggers with unscrupulous chainsaws to knock down surrounding trees. However, Chinese Premier Zhu Ronji recently visited Sichuan where he took notice of the relentless logging. He ordered a halt to all cutting along the Yangtze drainage area by July 1.

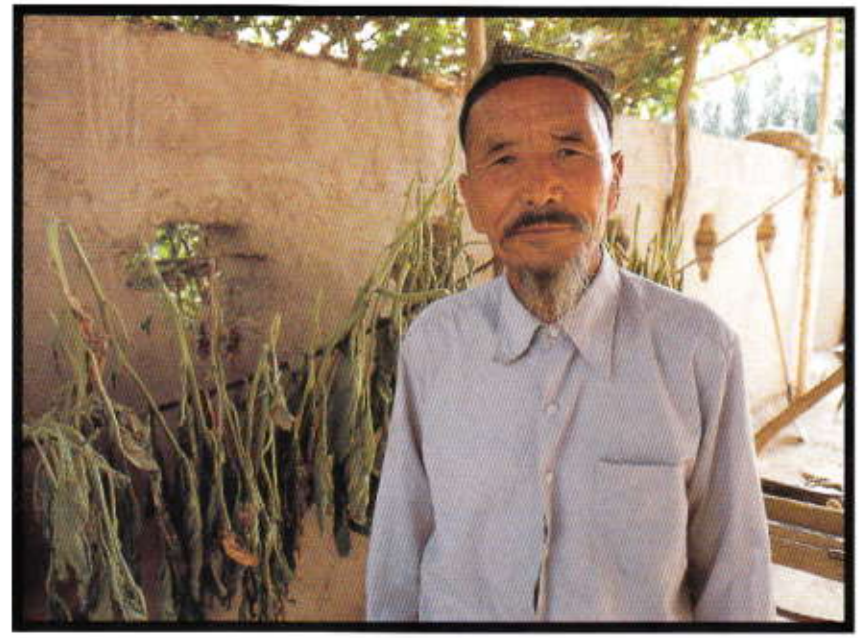
A day earlier, my team caught glimpses of a large clan of monkeys moving across a hillock in neighboring Baiyu County—at an elevation of 3,875 meters. Only the golden monkeys are known to reside at such altitudes. These were obviously not golden monkeys, though, and could be a new discovery. After two hours searching the fir forest, we were able to film only three of them from a great distance. We left with a keen intent to return some day for more intensive study.

An expedition is never complete ▶

without obstacles. On this trip, we developed an electrical problem with one of our six-year-old Land Rovers. Three days into the trip, the starter switch gave out. Xiao Chao improvised, adding an additional switch on the side with a part borrowed from a Beijing jeep. From then on, we used our original key to unlock the steering wheel while starting the car with a secondary switch. An electrical short soon developed, rendering the new switch useless. Next we bypassed the switch and hotwired the car, the way car thieves do. But the internal security system cut off the fuel pump. The ingenious Xiao Chao performed another surgical bypass to trick the system and finally we were cruising again. These escapades occurred at about 11 p.m.—in a blinding snow blizzard as we scaled the 5,000-meter-high Baiyanhar Shan, a mountain divide between the Yangtze and Yellow River headwaters in Qinghai Province. That night, we drove into the wee hours just to cross the pass as we knew heavy snow could close the road for days to come. By 2 a.m., we had safely descended to 4,000 meters and decided to sleep in our cars.

CERS' two Land Rovers have delivered six years of dedicated service across some of the most rugged terrain on earth. While I have sentimental feelings for them, their mechanical soundness now leaves much to be desired. Under normal use, I have no reservations that they could serve as workhorses for decades. But exploration is extremely demanding work. My goal will be to replace them before I turn 50 next year—the same year that China celebrates its 50th anniversary. This will also mark the 25th year of my exploration work in a country that I love. ■

# Camels in the wild



**Wong How Man**
***May 11, 1998***
***Dunhuang, Gansu Province***

**One of the last remaining Lop people at Miran, along the edge of the Lop Desert. Yardan (above) is a unique geological feature of this desert, where the few remaining Wild Camels roam.**

Within the last two years, there has been an upsurge of international interest in the Wild Bactrian Camels of western China. This sudden awareness has to be attributed to the concerted efforts of John Hare and his Chinese colleagues working in Xinjiang's Lop Nor area. He has put forward a proposal for another wild camel reserve.

The wild camels' plight has not gone unheeded in China's great northwest. Indeed, the Altun Mountain Nature Reserve (of which I serve as Chief Advisor) manages another national-level wild camel reserve in eastern Xinjiang, adjacent to John's study site. A second wild camel reserve, administrated at the provincial level in Gansu, is situated slightly to the east, at Aksay Kazak Autonomous County, where CERS has been directing research since 1995.

Ananba is a district located at the far western border of Aksay County. Beyond is Ruoqiang and the Lop Nor region of Xinjiang. The original assessment of the wild camel population at Ananba was conducted in 1975. Subsequently, their total number was established at 75 heads. (In China, camels are counted in "humps" denomination, but the twin-hump camels make counting a bit ambiguous!) A second survey in 1991 by the county forestry bureau reported more than 200 heads; the largest herd sighted had 43 camels. Of these, more than 20 were adult females, with over a dozen young camels.

At county level, five staff were assigned to the reserve at a nearby outpost. Their

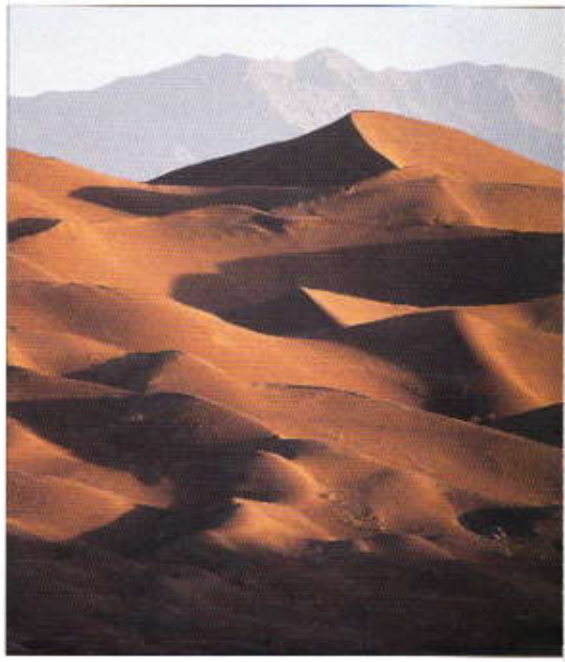
annual operating fund is 30,000 renminbi, plus the provision of four horses and five camels for transportation. Ananba, in effect, has become the most accessible wild camel study site. Over the years, it has provided many live specimens for scientific research and for zoos in China. To date, of 17 wild camels captured in Aksay, four are in Xian, two in Urumqi, four in Lanzhou, and seven at the Wildlife Conservation Center at Wuwei, Gansu Province.

At present, the biggest threat to the wild camels of Aksay is the degeneration of the species in the wild. A secondary threat lies in their shrinking habitat, due to the development of mining and expansion of domestic camel herding activities in the area. Ananba is administered by Tunji Village. Here, three nomad families headed by their chief, Harpusali, make their living by raising domestic camels. They have more than 100 adult females in their joint herd. A couple of years ago, during the winter mating season, three wild camels intruded into the domestic herds and fierce mating battles ensued.

The domestic males are no match for their stronger, wild counterparts who quickly established dominance. The following spring, more than 40 offspring were born. But these young camels were extremely difficult to tame, according to Harpusali, and the families could not successfully shear their wool. The nomads consider the incident an impediment to their economy.

Another threat to the wild camels is Ananba's extreme climate, which makes it difficult for the camels to secure sufficient drinking water. They are also hunted by wolves. Each year, the reserve staff report that wolves and human poachers are responsible for about 15 wild camel deaths. The most serious incident involved the death of 11 camels by a pack of five wolves—who usually kill more than they need to eat. This was a significant blow given the camels' already low head-count.

This winter, CERS intends to study the present situation, to provide advice and funding to further this important conservation work. Perhaps, through coordination and collaboration with Chinese and foreign conservation groups such as the National Environmental Protection Agency in Beijing, WWF and the Wild Camel Foundation, we can forge a viable plan to ensure the future survival of the wild camels in Aksay. ■

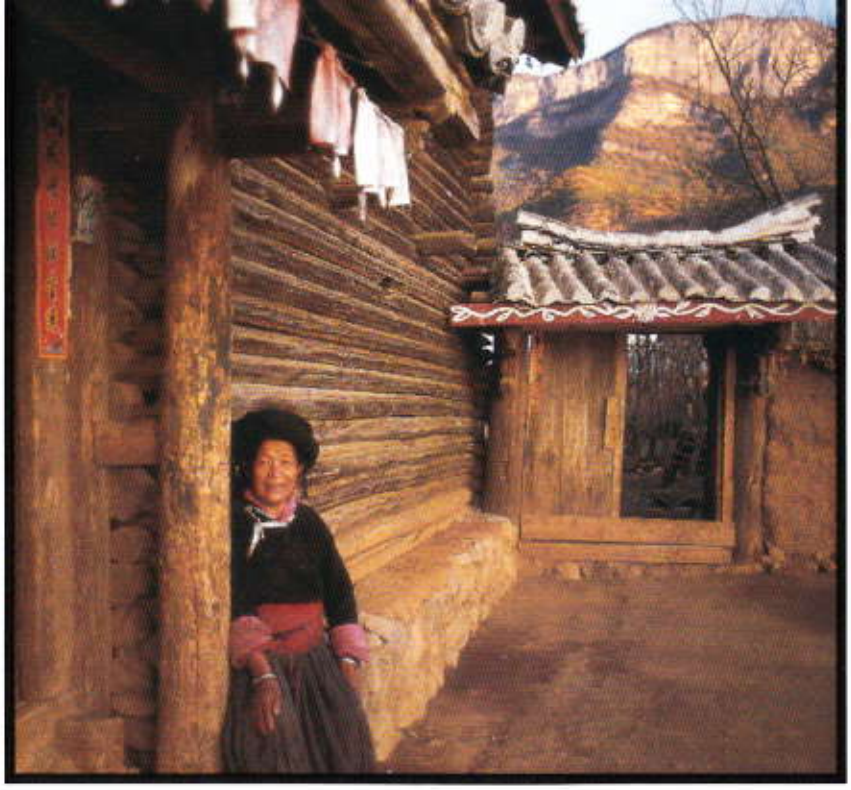


**A lone bactrian camel makes its home along the Silk Road.**

**The desert terrain of Aksay, also home to Wild Camels.**

**Wong How Man, with Chen Xiaoping**
***August 25, 1998***
***Hong Kong,***
***Luguhu, Yunnan Province***

# Eulogy of a Moso woman warrior



On July 29, seven CERS staff and associates rushed from Kunming to the matrilineal village of Luguhu, the site of a CERS project two days away in northwest Yunnan. Ja-ama, the matriarch of the Larke family with whom we have collaborated since 1995, had just passed away.

Ja-ama's mother, Larke Darxima, had been born in 1890. After giving birth to nine sons, she finally had a daughter, Ja-ama, in 1936. As a matrilineal society, this only daughter became a natural heir to the Larke lineage. From 1951 to 1977, Ja-ama herself had 10 children, three boys and seven girls. As Ja-ama grew older, the responsibility of maintaining the household fell on the most capable fourth daughter, Liujinma ("Six Catties Horse"). Still, Ja-ama continued to have the final say in important decisions.

I had interviewed Ja-ama in 1981 when I first visited Luguhu, and CERS began our study of her people, the Moso, in 1994. In May 1995, witnessing the disintegration of traditional culture among the Moso due to the rise in tourism, CERS tried to convince the families of Lige Peninsula to collaborate on a culture/nature conservation project. Just as we were giving up hope, Ja-ama agreed to use her home as a model for architectural preservation. CERS has since helped to pay for additional homes and animal quarters in the vicinity.

While others in nearby villages were rebuilding their traditional houses into large pseudo-Moso motels, the Larke family became close allies of CERS and set the tone for other households to follow. Today, the five traditional houses on the peninsula have become the most-visited tourist site in the region. They also constitute a favored setting for many films and documentaries about the Moso.

Earlier this year, the village was finally connected up to electricity lines; before that, CERS' small power generator had been the sole source of electricity for lighting. Our group had also donated the first tractor, which helped transport villagers to the town of Yongning 10 kilometers away on market days. After John Farrell, the president of Coca-Cola China and a CERS director, accompanied me to the site, he arranged to have a primary school built nearby.

CERS converted one room in Ja-ama's house into a mini-museum of Moso artifacts. They include many daily utensils, hunting gear, crossbows, matchlock guns, costumes, art objects and religious and ritualistic objects. Most have disappeared from daily use and public view.

CERS paid for the collection, and trained one of Ja-ama's sons, Darxi, to control their inventory. We even copied pictures of the region from early *National Geographic* magazines and left them on display in this room. From these pictures, Darxi was able to reassemble two partial sets of ancient Moso armor. One was made of stiff and heavy wild-boar hide, the other of domestic pigskin. Warriors wore the armor at Ja-ama's funeral.

Ja-ama suffered a stroke in the evening of July 14 and passed away soon after. According to her children, Ja-ama seemed to recognize that her death was near about 10 days earlier. She suddenly insisted that all her children stop their other activities to concentrate on finishing the new house that would accommodate CERS staff.

When news of Ja-ama's death reached us in Hong Kong, we asked our Kunming staff to help in the funeral proceedings. A traditional Moso funeral is expensive, so many families had simplified the process to lessen the cost. But the Larke family felt it important that such a tradition be maintained and documented. CERS thus gave its full financial support and sent the Kunming team to film the process.

While we mourn Ja-ama's passing, we hope her daughters and their children will follow her lead in actively preserving Moso culture. The passing of each matriarch may bring us closer to the disappearance of age-old traditions. CERS pays tribute to Ja-ama, and condolence to her daughters, by continuing to work towards preserving her people's heritage. ■

**Ja-ama is pictured above, seated in front of her home in January.**

■ CERS pays tribute to Dr. Tsiang Yien-si who passed away recently in Taiwan. Dr. Tsiang, who was Secretary General under former president Chiang Ching-kuo and later Lee Teng-hui, was instrumental in bringing CERS work to the awareness of Taiwan. Dr. Tsiang invited Wong How Man to give his first lecture in Taiwan, on a visit in 1989. Many key Taiwan corporations and individuals became CERS supporters after Dr. Tsiang introduced them to the society's work. He will be sadly missed and fondly remembered.

■ More than 300 Chinese geographers converged at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for a three-day conference.

Afterward, nine noted geographers who are affiliated with CERS, including two academicians, visited CERS Tai Tam Research Center (pictured above). The prospect of future collaboration projects was discussed, and CERS was asked to become contribute to the Beijing publication, *Geographic Knowledge*.

■ County chiefs of Aksay Kazak Autonomous County and Subei Mongol Autonomous County, both in Gansu Province, visited CERS Tai Tam Center during a trip to Hong Kong.

■ Mr. Hans Michael Jebsen, Chairman of WWF Hong Kong and Jebsen & Co. Ltd., visited the CERS project site in the Khartan Valley of the Qilian mountain range in northwest China. With an entourage of 10 guests, CERS' base camp with nine tents resembled a small village in the wilderness.

■ Mr. Kwek Leng Joo of City Developments Limited (CDL) in Singapore hosted a lunch for Wong How Man at the Tower Club in Singapore in July. Mr. Connal Rankin, CEO of Hongkong Bank, Mr. Ho Kwon-Ping, Chairman of Singapore Power, and Mr. Richard Hale also attended. During his visit to the island state, Wong How Man addressed a meeting of the local Young Presidents' Organization.

■ The Baiya Rinpoche, the head of Baiya Monastery where CERS has been conducting Tibetan mural restoration, also visited CERS Tai Tam Research Center during his recent visit to Hong Kong.

■ CERS welcomes several new colleagues. Dr. William Bleisch will direct future CERS biology programs. With degrees from Harvard, Rockefeller and Caltech, Bill has more than 10 years of field experience in China. His last posting was as Resident Advisor for Beijing's Forest Ministry. Xi Zhinong, formerly with CCTV in Beijing, will be CERS TV/documentary specialist. Xi, a long-time CERS associate through the Shell Centenary Scholarship Program, was featured in a *Newsweek* cover story on conservation in China as well as in a profile in the *Far Eastern Economic REVIEW*. Mr. Wu Yianfei, formerly with the Yunnan Design Institute, has joined CERS under contract, to manage field projects.

■ Wong How Man delivered several lectures in Hong Kong: "Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve" to Rotary Kowloon on April 2 at the Peninsula Hotel; "Exploration & Conservation" to the Hong Kong Association of University Women on June 6 at the Marriott Hotel; "Imaging & Conservation" at the Kodak Management Meeting on August 7 at the Excelsior Hotel; and "Tibet: Between Facts and Fiction" to the Young Entrepreneurs' Organization on August 11 at the Shangri-La Hotel.

■ A piece of CERS history now lies at the bottom of the bay of Tai Tam, in front of the research center: the 25-horsepower Mariner outboard motor that has served the society since Wong's 1985 Yangtze expedition. While crossing the bay in CERS Boston Whaler in a rainstorm, Wong took a sharp turn to avoid a floating log. The boat spun out of control—and the motor went for a dive to its final resting place.

## Kodak Corner

The relationship between Wong How Man and Kodak dates back to his early days as an explorer. As a young journalism graduate, Wong did not realize that he was about to embark on a career of documenting changes in China–with his camera, using Kodak film.

Wong first visited China more than 25 years ago. He shot his first slide in 1974, as he crossed the footbridge from Hong Kong into Shenzhen, then a tiny border village. The frame on that Kodachrome slide was marked A1. Since then, Wong has captured more than 80,000 images on slides on countless trips into the Mainland. (The frame on the last slide from the last roll of film he shot in July of this year is marked BP036.)

Kodak has always served Wong well, from his days at the National Geographic to the foundation of the China Exploration and Research Society in Los Angeles and its relocation to Hong Kong. Patrick Siewert, the former Chairman of Kodak China, enthusiastically helped CERS. Although he has been promoted to President of Kodak Professional Worldwide, CERS still can rely on his support. His successor, David Swift, has been equally keen, and provided us with an opportunity to address his management team. Wong shared with them CERS' experiences and commitment to exploration and conservation work in China.

CERS is grateful to Kodak for its years of valuable support. The company has generously provided film, processing services, enlargements and an array of equipment, from scanners to the latest digital camera. CERS is honored that its photographs now adorn the reception area of the Kodak head office in Hong Kong (pictured above). We are also pleased that Kodak will feature CERS' photographs in its 1999 calendar. The company's support of CERS is crucial in delivering our vivid images and messages to the world.

# THANK YOU THANK YOU

- City Developments Limited (CDL) continued its annual sponsorship of CERS. This Singapore company will also publish a 1999 calendar featuring Wong How Man's photography. CDL's managing director, Mr. Kwek Leng Joo, also made a personal pledge to underwrite one CERS project.

- The Kadoorie Charitable Foundations donated a Magellan satellite phone for CERS to use in the field.

- Sony has provided CERS with additional equipment, including several digital cameras, a high-power spotting scope adapted for video use, and two IBM Thinkpad computers.

- Bushnell has donated two additional laser Range Finders for CERS biologists to use in the field.

- IBM has given CERS an additional Thinkpad computer.

- Kodak has donated a projector and a digital camera. The company will also help promote CERS in its 1999 calendar.

- The Grand Hyatt Taipei offered complimentary stays to CERS during our lecture trip and other events.

- Green Island Cement has provided 70 bags of cement for ongoing construction and renovation work at CERS Tai Tam Research Center.

- Several companies and individuals have already donated prizes for our annual dinner, to be held on Friday, October 9. We are grateful for their support, and will acknowledge all of our sponsors in the next issue.

## Available NOW: A Special New Book!

CERS is releasing Wong How Man's spectacular new book, *From Manchuria To Tibet*. This large volume presents photographs that chronicle a quarter century of Wong's exploration in China. Francesca von Habsburg, the Archduchess of Austria, provides the Foreword to this book.

More than 260 magnificent photographs, with extended captions, tell the tales of Wong's expeditions—and highlight the changes that have occurred in remote China, to its ethnic minorities and its wildlife.

A wonderful gift for the upcoming festive season, the book costs HK$500—or HK$800 for copies autographed by Wong. All proceeds support CERS activities in the field.

Call 2555-7776 to order your copies today!

## CERS' MISSION:

*To **EXPLORE** remote regions of China, conduct multi-disciplinary **RESEARCH**, implement nature and culture conservation projects, and **DISSEMINATE** results through education and popular channels.*

## CERS IN THE MEDIA

- Discovery Channel filmed two profile features with Wong How Man. They will be aired beginning in October as repeated spots on the channel.

- On August 1, Discovery Channel Asia also aired two features about CERS' project at the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve.

- CNN International aired an interview with Wong How Man on July 18, featuring the recent poaching activities that are decimating herds of endangered Tibetan Antelope.

- CNN International also interviewed Dr. Pamela Logan on CERS' monastery restoration project in early June.

- BBC aired a special half-hour program on the shahtoosh trade and the Tibetan Antelope on August 27. CERS provided footage from the field.

- *The Independent* of the U.K. printed a front-page story on the Tibetan Antelope, quoting data collected by CERS in the field.

- CERS field reports on the antelopes have been extensively excerpted for publication by the India Conservation Society, the *Tibetan Environment & Development News*, and two books written by Dr. George Schaller.

- *Wen Wei Po* of Hong Kong published an extensive interview with Wong How Man on April 26.

- *Hong Kong Tatler* published a cover story in August on CERS' many sponsors and executives who visited our project sites.

- *China Times*, Taiwan's leading Chinese newspaper, printed an April 2 story highlighting CERS' activities.

- CERS contributed a 20-page article to the premier issue of *Rhythm*, a Taiwan magazine started by the respected Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-chi Foundation, which has more than 4 million members. The second issue included an article written by CERS volunteer Dawn Lam on the Tibetan Antelope.

- Huang Chuxing, a CERS researcher in Kunming, contributed a two-part story to *Traveler*, a popular magazine published in Beijing.

- Han Lianxian, a CERS biologist based in Kunming, contributed a cover story to the *Chinese National Geographic* published in Beijing, on CERS Khartan Valley wildlife project.

The production of *China Explorers* is made possible through the generous contribution of Everbest Printing and Ocean Graphics.