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

CHINA EXPLORERS

CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOLUME 2 NO. 4 SPRING 1999

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COVER: The Jade Dragon Mountain of Lijiang in its morning glory. *See pages 14-15, A royal mountain pilgrimage.*
LEFT: A child peeks out from a truck in Luang Prabang, the ancient capital of Laos.

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President's Message

CERS's longtime friends and supporters will be familiar with this tale. But it must be told once again. In 1987, soon after CERS was founded in Los Angeles, I got a call from my good friend Prof. James Lee at Caltech. He introduced me to Dr. William Bleisch. Bill had degrees from Harvard and Rockefeller University and was doing postdoctorate work in biology at the institute. Bill had just received a grant from the Durfee Foundation to study the endangered Black Gibbons of Yunnan. He was looking for an avenue that would allow him to collaborate on his study and acquire permission to conduct field work. CERS' connections in Yunnan and our logistics support satisfied his needs. Together with researcher Chen Nan of the Kunming Institute of Zoology, we departed for the hills of Wuliang Shan and Ai Liao Shan in southern Yunnan. At the time, my work focused on the indigenous hill tribes such as the Hani, Jino and Dai people. Bill's focus was on the gibbons and their habitat within the forest.

I left Bill and Chen Nan to their study in the forest and proceeded to move from village to village, collecting data about hunting habits and material culture related to the gibbons. This included information about local medicinal use of animal parts as well as legends and beliefs related to these animals. We agreed that we would exchange notes at the end of our trip.

In short, our separate results opened each other's eyes to the interdependency of the two disciplines. It opened a totally new path for CERS, to merge our pioneering work on cultural heritage with that of natural heritage. We soon began to see the huge benefits and overwhelming advantages of the interdisciplinary approach to both research and implementation of our projects.

Indeed, Dr. Pamela Logan, who headed our project on Tibetan monasteries, came to me through the same Caltech connection as a recipient of the Durfee Grant. A rocket scientist, she turned to administering our culture-conservation project. Both Bill and Pam became involved with CERS and established their new careers in China. Since that short trip in 1987, Bill has worked in China on and off for almost 12 years, including a two-year stint as Resident Advisor for China's Forest Ministry. He now lives in Beijing. In January, Bill joined CERS as a new member of our Board. We heartily welcome his continued and expanded contributions to our Society.

Wong How Man
President, CERS

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General Jack Young - A 1920's naturalist

Wong How Man
February, 1999
Hong Kong

ABOVE: Mount Gongga, the general's former favorite hunting grounds.
LEFT: A young Jack Young with his climbing team, having just bagged two Blue Sheep.

The frail, old man sitting in his hotel suite at the Kowloon YMCA still commands respect: Jack Young was honorably discharged with the rank of a Brigadier General in the U.S. Army—and a Major General in the Nationalist Army of China.

During the Second World War, he acted as Military Aide to General Marshall. Today one can still sense his pride as he mentions the role that he played more than half a century ago. Born in Honolulu to a Chinese family, Jack spent some of his early years in China. As a young boy in high school, he participated in demonstrations against foreign aggression in China and worked at a newspaper in Hankow started by American women.

Jack's father, a supporter of Dr. Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary efforts, helped manage the funds Dr. Sun raised. Jack's ancestral home in Zhongshan, Guangdong Province, is adjacent to a house Dr. Sun rented from them. The early revolutionaries would converge at Jack's house before using a tunnel to access Dr. Sun's house for secret meetings, conspiring to overthrow the Manchu government.

Jack went to New York University at the age of 17. Before he could finish college, the Chinese Ministry recommended him as an interpreter for the expedition of the Roosevelt brothers in 1929. Theodore and Kermit were children of U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. The President was known to be an avid big-game hunter and a pioneer in conservation. So were his sons. The main goal of the expedition was to bring back specimens of the giant panda.

The Roosevelts had this to say about their first impression of Jack: "He was a slight, nice looking boy about 20 years old. We closed with him at once and sent him to Chicago, where the Museum (Field Museum of Natural History) gave him an intensive course in skinning ▶

birds and small mammals."

That training put Jack in good stead throughout his early career in China. In time, he became known for his work on Chinese pheasants, and he collected innumerable specimens of birds and mammals for the Chicago Field Museum and the Museum of Natural History in New York.

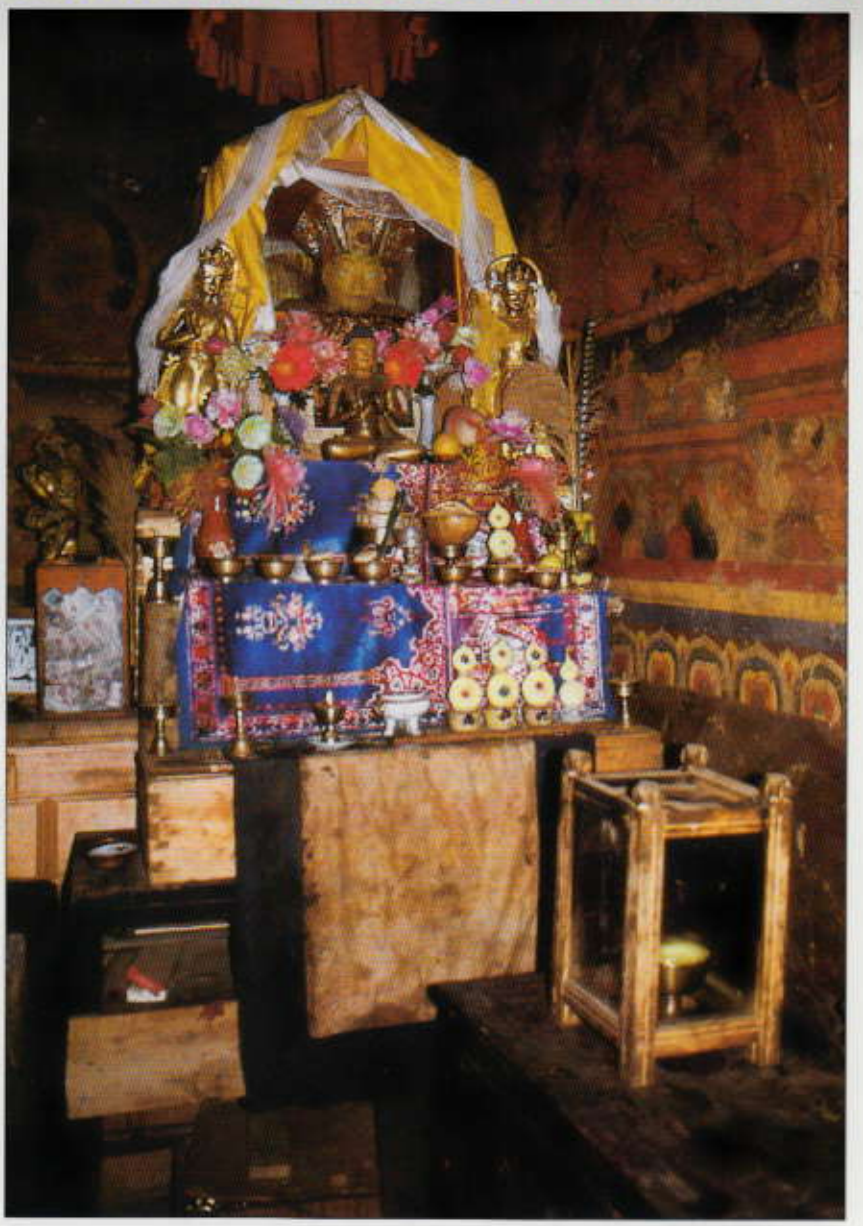
As a game hunter and later a military officer, Jack developed a great respect for rifles. In his hunting notes of a trip in 1932 to Mount Gongga in western Sichuan, he casually described the use of at least four different rifles, each with varying caliber ammunition, for the different sizes of animals to be hunted. The 1929 expedition of which Jack was a member also succeeded in putting the first mountaineering team on the summit of the 7,556-meter Mount Gongga.

However, Jack's crowning success occurred during the Roosevelt Expedition when the team brought back to America the first giant panda specimen. At the time, conservation was not in vogue, and trophy hunting, especially for display at a natural-history museum, was considered a heroic and honorable pursuit. Jack is accountable for some rare habitat groups of animals in the Field Museum — as well as the bullet holes in their taxidermic remains.

Jack's younger brother, Quentin, was instrumental in guiding a team to trap the first live giant panda for a zoo in America. Their success was based largely on Jack's experience in the region. The panda's arrival captured the nation's attention.

When Jack realized that I was one of the very few individuals who had retraced his steps on Mount Gongga, his face lit up. We talked about the monastery at the foot of the glacier. The young reincarnated lama that he saw in 1932 was long dead and embalmed in a glass case when I visited almost 60 years later. We also discussed the behavior of animals in his once favorite hunting grounds.

Before I rose to leave, I asked Jack to sign a book about the 1932 expedition. His inscription "B/G Jack J. Young" became very shaky. I could not help but recall the moment when the same fingers must have pulled firmly on the trigger of his rifle. Today, when asked how he felt while shooting the giant panda, Jack seemed to show some remorse. With a quiet voice he said, "They are so mild and so tender." ■



TOP: The embalmed body of the Rinpoche (reincarnated lama) at Gongga Monastery.
ABOVE: Tibetan hunters of Mt. Gonnga with the skinned head and paws of a Black Bear.

The camel messenger

At first, you could hardly spot the rider nestled between the two hairy humps of his mount. He was wearing an army-surplus great coat of the same colour as the camel's hair, and the earflaps of his thick hat were pulled down over his ears to nearly cover his face. As the great beast trotted along, lifting each oversized floppy foot in turn, the rider seemed to flow along with the movement as if he had been born on camel back. A second camel followed behind, and the thin rope attached to its nose ring was barely visible.

Our wildlife surveys were nearly through for the day, and although we still wanted to collect plant samples, I was eager to meet the rider. I suggested that we could ask him whether he had seen any wildlife on the road ahead, and this convinced the others that it was worth our while. As our cars approached, the rider stopped his camel and stared at us uncertainly. When our driver Suliman greeted him in Uygur, he descended.

He was on his way from the village of Karchuka near the Qinghai border to the town of Earthen House to stock up on supplies. We were staying at Earthen House—a small and remote town—so I could hardly imagine how isolated Karchuka must be.

Although the sun was beating down, the wind raced down the valley, pinching every bit of exposed skin. Last night the temperature was minus 20.5 degrees Celsius and the temperature had not climbed above freezing all day today. "Cold?" we asked him. Cold, of course, he answered, but if he felt too cold, he would walk for awhile until warmed, then ride again. He had seen no antelopes on the road behind, in fact, no wildlife at all, and so we said our goodbyes. He coaxed his recalcitrant mount back down into a kneeling stance with a gentle clucking. With a sudden leap that would have made Errol Flynn proud, the rider was back in the makeshift saddle, a quilt draped between the humps. Just as quickly, he was up and away at a jolting trot.

That evening, we saw him again when he came in to the Protection Office at Earthen House to make a report. The story he told shocked us all. During the month and half since November, he had seen more than 30 cars of poachers pass his home. In caravans of three or four cars each, they had openly shot Tibetan antelope, or Chiru, right up to and inside the nature reserve itself, then had headed across the river, perhaps to better hunting in the south of the reserve, or to the more remote Kekexili area. I can only imagine what suspicions he must have had about us when we had first met on the road.

Later in the night, both Xi Zhinong and I had restless dreams of action. No doubt Xiao Xi dreamed of ambushing poachers with night-vision scopes and a well-equipped battalion of Hummers. I dreamed of leading a surprise attack of crack camel ▶

Dr. William V. Bleisch
December 21, 1998
Arjin Shan, Xinjiang Province

TOP: The camel messenger from Karchuka with his two camels.
ABOVE: Remains of Tibetan antelopes—clear evidence of poaching activities.

cavalry. We would descend on the villains silently in the first light of dawn while they slept. We would pull up their tent pegs, trapping them beneath the heavy canvas and striking terror into their hearts.

The reserve staff were a bit more practical. They knew that they had no jurisdiction outside of the reserve boundary, and no influence across the provincial border in Qinghai. Although a team was sent out to check on the current situation, both the policeman and protection station ranger seemed sceptical that they could do much, armed with only a police-issue revolver and the station's single-bolt-action rifle. Zhang Huibin, the Vice-Director of the nature reserve, explained that the best course of action would be to file an official report by radio with the reserve headquarters, which they could relay to the Xinjiang office of the Environmental Protection Bureau. There was the hope that official channels would run their course.

With the price of a single Chiru pelt as high as 500-600 renminbi (S60-S72), it was not surprising that outlaws from Qinghai and Gansu were willing to face the dangers of the remote plateau, and the less risky danger of a three- to seven-year prison sentence. Even honest officials might be excused if they felt Chiru poaching could be the start of new economic development for their remote communities—not appreciating that it actually represented the road to extinction for the Chiru, and an end to such possibilities.

Under the circumstances, the best that the 29 staff of the Arjin Mountain reserve could do was to continue harassing the poachers, and to mount a monitoring program to document the continued decline of the Chiru population and alert government to the deteriorating situation. This should prompt the central and provincial governments to continue and expand their campaign against Chiru poaching. Coordinating between agencies to improve law enforcement and rooting out corruption that could make wildlife poaching easier will also help.

The solution must also focus outside China. There is an urgent need to increase awareness of the irreversible impacts of the trade in shahtoosh shawls, which are made from the fine wool that is plucked from the hides of slaughtered Chiru. An effective publicity campaign should not only stop conscientious consumers from buying the shawls, but also spur on an international crackdown on unscrupulous merchants who smuggle shahtoosh and lie to their customers about its origins. ■

● *CERS is working to help save the Chiru by providing the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve with much needed equipment and staff training in monitoring and research techniques. CERS has also provided information, photographs and videos to the media in China, Hong Kong and internationally to increase awareness of the impact of the shahtoosh trade.*

Was this carcass of a male antelope the work of poachers—or other natural predators?

Laos—through the back door

Wong How Man
February 19, 1999
Mengla, Yunnan Province

China's border is generally perceived as well defined—and guarded. During the Chinese New Year period, our group traveled along China's southern frontiers, studying the transborder areas between Vietnam, Laos and Burma. On February 18, the third day of the New Year, our route in southern Yunnan province brought us to within 10 kilometres of the border with Laos. At an obscure junction called Mannai, we stopped and asked how to travel to the border. Locals told us that we first had to procure a border pass from the police station about 16 kilometres away.

I decided that there was little chance such a pass would be issued for me and proceeded to turn into the small road leading towards the border. At the time, I thought I would be happy just to get a glimpse of the country from afar, knowing the hills in the distance were Laos.

We drove for eight kilometres on this dirt road and the terrain grew rougher and rougher. We spotted some sugarcane fields and tea plantations along the way. At one

NEXT PAGE, TOP: Billboards trumpet the famous Beer Lao. CENTER: A small village in Laos, across the border from China. BOTTOM: A traditional Lao wedding—with CERS staff in attendance.

point, we passed what seemed to be a military outpost, but there was no sentry nor roadblock in sight. At the eight-and-a-half-kilometre point, we came across a school, with a sign saying "Mapal Upper Village."

We drove through some twists and turns. Beyond a ridge, the "road" started descending through a bushy area. There couldn't have been much traffic here lately, since fallen branches scratched the sides of our new vehicle. Next we came across what seemed like a dilapidated wooden gate, the kind of gate one would find on a cattle range, perhaps. But there was no fence nor real gate to it, only two poles with holes showing where once a gate must have been. We drove past the "gate" for another kilometer.

At a last turn, we suddenly came in front of a village on an open ridge with maybe 20-odd houses. A couple of dozen villagers in Yao nationality costume were hanging around in small groups. Thinking this must be the last border village on China's side, we drove up to a group assembled in front of a brick house."Where is the Cun Gong Suo (Village Office)?" asked Zhang Fan. "What Cun Gong Suo? This is Laos," came the answer from a Yao man.

To say we were shocked was an understatement. How could we have gone into Laos without passing through any checkpoint, guardpost or customs house? Not even a line of demarcation had indicated to us that we were at the border crossing. But the confirmation came quickly. The tricolor Laos national flag flew from a tall pole. There could be no mistake that we had inadvertently penetrated into Laos through a back door.

With notebook in hand, I was yearning to make some inquiries as part of my border study. But Zhang Fan urged me to turn back at once, reminding me that if we were detained, it could quickly escalate into a border incident with diplomatic consequences. We could easily have our new four-wheel-drive van confiscated as it is a coveted luxury in such inhospitable terrain. Reluctantly, I retraced our route back. As I drove past the wooden "gate," I knew I had just slipped through, once again, the back door between China and Laos.

Laos—through the

If the capital of Vientiane is considered the front door to Laos, then the Laos' border with China can be considered the back door. Only three days apart, crossed from China into Laos through an obscure back door without any formalities. Indeed there was not even any demarcation between the two countries at my point of crossing. However, processing the paperwork required to cross legally this time took us all day.

Team member Zhang Fan dropped a few names of friends at the Provincial Tourism Bureau and the local tourism bureau at Mengla assisted us wholeheartedly in getting registered with the police as temporary residents of the city. Such permits are usually given to undesirable characters as a means of controlling the flow of drifters. But in this case, it gave us the much needed official recognition of a semi-local so we could process other paperwork.

Resident booklets in hand, we went to the Border Control Office. Just one look from the officer and he knew these "drifters" came with class. I was listed as a Professor, Zhang Fan as a Deputy Director of an Institute and Wu Yianfei as a researcher. There were many forms to fill out including some for the car we were to drive into Laos. The official made a few sarcastic remarks about our drifter status. I was unusually quiet as I listened to his wisecracks.

At the border, the duty officer smiled knowingly and reminded me that no Hong Kong compatriots are supposed to cross the border. They all seemed to know my true identity despite the paperwork indicating otherwise. This could not have been the first time such fictitious means were used for border-crossing purposes. I managed to smile back with an innocent look on my face.

Though the border officially closes at 6:00 p.m., by the time we were in Laos at 5:00, everyone had already left for home. Luckily, home is only down the street. So we managed to scramble and herd the immigration, customs and transport-control officers back to their office to finish processing our paperwork. When I saw one of the officers was wearing a T-shirt and flip-flops, I did not know whether to feel relaxed or alarmed.

Huge bundles of money changed hands when we paid the officials. Each renminbi equals 650 Laos kip, the local currency, so we had to carry hundreds of thousands of bills in huge bundles as we traveled. Since gasoline costs about half the price in Laos as in China, we quickly filled our tanks and many bundles changed hands.

Northern Laos is mountainous and extensively forested. So-called paved roads are extremely rough, with many potholes. Only small sections are truly paved, having recently been worked on by Chinese labour teams. The 80-kilometer drive into the provincial capital of Mansai

back door (Part II)

took four hours. Many villages of the hill tribes appeared along our route. None had electricity. As we passed a county town, only three houses were lit with florescent lights, probably from small home-based generators. The rest of the houses were dimly lit with candles. At Mansai, there were no street lamps, but some florescent lights in homes and shops. We checked into the biggest hotel in town at $15 per night. More bundles of money changed hands.

Laos must be a very safe place as some shops left their merchandise out in the open through the night with no one to guard it. The most popular sign, posted everywhere, on walls, shops and vehicles, is that of Bear Lao, a local brew. I quickly adopted this Laos phrase, which is phonetically similar to "Bier nou" in Chinese, meaning "Stop fooling around!" I regularly pointed the sign out to my team.

The next morning, we drove for 220 kilometres into the ancient Laos capital of Luang Prabang. It is situated at the bank of the Mekong River. Even during low-water season, the Mekong is more than 200 meters wide. I recalled the small stream near its source high on the Tibetan plateau. While I have crossed the Mekong upriver dozens of times, this was the first time I saw it so far south.

Luang Prabang has preserved much of its ancient character and culture. In 1996, UNESCO designated it a World Heritage Site. The Laotians took great pride in this honour and built more houses in traditional style. Within a few years, the city became a major tourist destination with guesthouses, restaurants and shops everywhere. Traffic is a quaint mish-mash of vintage Willy Jeeps of the '40s, Fords and Renaults of the '50s, and Land Rovers and Toyotas of the '60s through the '90s. But the tuktuks, much like the motortricycles of Bangkok, are the main means of transport.

We stayed at the Hotel Sovrannaphoum, formerly a private villa of the prince. The ambience is no doubt colonial, with old furniture and plenty of teak wood. The bar is even decked out with an antique Victor phonograph and a bayonet matchlock rifle from the Napoleon era.

We spent a good part of the next day attending a traditional Lao wedding. The bride Lam Salmei, aged 30, and the groom Tao Sipan, aged 40, live by the bank of the Mekong. Married at a later age, Tao was able to save up $20,000 to build a new house for his bride. The traditional ceremony took two hours and many relatives and friends attended the feast afterwards. The party was held in the street as nearby roads were blocked off for the joyous event.

Two old and torn parachutes served as a canopy over the party. How ironic it is that such war souvenirs of the country's recent past should now provide shade for a happy gathering of the peace-loving Lao people. ■

MAIN PICTURE: Extensive terraced fields of Yuanyang near the border with Laos in southern Yunnan

Bridging two frontier towns

Wong How Man
February 14, 1999
Hekou, Yunnan Province

Only 20 years ago, the Vietnamese border town of Laojie was a bombed-out city of rubble. What little heavy shelling had not destroyed was quickly taken out by the first wave of infantrymen of the People's Liberation Army. Soon after the Vietnam War ended in 1976, the friendship between Vietnam and China turned sour and the seasoned North Vietnamese army became progressively more adventurous. For more than a year before 1979, Chinese who had lived in Vietnam for generations were driven back into China. Those who remained were persecuted.

The subsequent war between the two communist nations lasted from 1979 to 1984. Laojie, Vietnam, is just across the river from Hekou in Yunnan province. When war broke out, Laojie became one of the first cities to be overrun.

Only when relations between the two countries improved in the early 1990s did rebuilding of the city commence. Today, the only sign of the war is the towering remains of the Catholic Church of the French colonial era. Heavily damaged by artillery fire, the main church structure is totally gone. Surrounding the church is a marketplace, which now serves more or less as the commercial center of Laojie.

We were here as part of a transborder study CERS is conducting along China's inland frontiers. It was two days before Chinese New Year and everyone was scurrying about doing their last-minute shopping. Renminbi is just as welcome as the "Tun" of Vietnam. We hired a horse carriage for three hours at the rate of 10 renminbi ($1.21) per hour.

As we rode along the streets and boulevards, we could see many homes and shops with the national flag hanging outside. Some sport pictures of Ho Chi Minh hanging inside their main rooms. Though the two cities sit across from each other on the river, Laojie's architecture is totally different from that of Hekou. Tall wooden doors and windows adorn the front of its houses. Some have a facade running along the balconies and verandahs. This contrasts with the architecture on the Chinese side which retains little of its past identity and has no outstanding character.

TOP: A Vietnamese woman grinds pepper in Laojie's marketplace. BOTTOM: A mixed-style new house in the center of Laojie.

While Hekou provides far more consumer and household goods, Laojie retains more of its cultural and natural heritage. Even the forests on the Vietnamese side are far better preserved than those on the Chinese side, where hills have been all but cleared to make way for farms and rubber plantations. No doubt the Chinese feel a greater economic security, but the Vietnamese are proud of their cultural and natural wealth.

Hekou's many medicinal shops display mainly snake wine; Laojie's traditional herb stores feature dried lizards and seahorses. I am struck by the many shops that sell dried fish, squids, seashells and other products of the ocean.

Outside the market center, a group of men and a few women gather around a cart. On it is a miniature, Roman-style coliseum. About 20 numbers are assigned to the arched openings along the edge. A guinea pig is released at "center court" as a man spins the arched wall. People at ringside begin clipping money bills to the numbered arches. When at last the guinea pig enters one of the numbered arches, the man stops the spinning wall and collects the money attached to all the losing numbers while repaying the winner, if there was one. Much money changes hands in a matter of a few minutes.

As the only two decent restaurants were closed for the New Year and the offerings from street stalls looked unpalatable, we crossed over the bridge back into Hekou. At our hotel, the Railway International Hotel, the first floor is taken up by a restaurant and a game room. The second floor is "Xi Jiao Cheng," or Feet Washing City, a massage parlour. Yunnan men must boast the cleanest feet in all of China as these parlours are plentiful from Kunming to even distant towns like Hekou. At a nearby hotel, a multi-storey banner advertises a 50% discount for massages during the daytime hours of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Each floor of our hotel is decked out with a gambling parlour as an attraction — or distraction — for the guests returning to their rooms. A statue with incense and a red light burning on a small altar guard each parlour's door. Such icons supposedly protect the parlour from unfriendly visitors, righteous or evil.

As I stroll the streets of Hekou, I have a dawning realization: In 1993, there was a rampant trade in wildlife, and exotic food appeared on restaurant menus. But that has disappeared. Regarding the peace and prosperity between the two national borders, it seems perhaps that people are finally learning to live in harmony with their neighbors, human and otherwise. ■

TOP: Snake wine of unknown vintage at Hekou, a Chinese town on the border with Vietnam. ABOVE: A street scene in downtown Laojie, Vietnam.

The Harem master's dilemma

Dr. William B. Bleisch
January, 1999
Arjin Shan, Xinjiang Province

It's December 2, and we're all worried that we're late. It took five days of rough travel across the Taklimakan desert and the Altun Mountains to get here, to Yishakipati and the rutting grounds of the Tibetan Antelope, or Chiru. At least this is where the rutting grounds used to be. The sight of a large herd of Wild Yak on the other side of the river, at least 168 in all, greets us again this morning. If there are still Wild Yak so near, perhaps the poachers have not disturbed the Chiru rutting grounds nearby, so close to the protection station.

Today, we set off from Yishakipati, which means Earthen House in the Uygur language. It is a small cluster of earthen houses on the edge of a frozen lake, and the site of one of the Protection Stations of the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve. Just 30 minutes from the station, and I see my first male Chiru in full breeding uniform. He is impressive indeed, with his jet-black face. Matching black on the forward half of his legs remind me of a cavalry-officer's uniform. His long, ebony horns sweep up from his head, turning gracefully forward at the tips to a sharp point. Setting off the black of his face and horns, his neck is nearly white, as is his tail, but the rest of the body is a coffee cream. He is a striking contrast to the drab, doe-eyed females we have seen. ▶

It is clear that the rut has already begun. Several males accompany small groups of females. We are excited, and disturbed, for the numbers of animals is far too few. During surveys in 1987 and 1988, hundreds of animals were seen on this site. Now we find dozens—only 65 within my rough transact count. There cannot be many more than that, since the view is good across this wide flat valley, hemmed in by steep slopes to the north, and mountainlike sand dunes to the south.

On the morning of December 8, the white vintage Nissan jeep will not start. The new green four-wheel-drive pickup, purchased with CERS help, had already gone back to Earthen House to load the storage tank with gas. And so today we are stuck at camp in Kardun. We faced a cold morning on this, our fifth day here. As usual, it was below minus 20 degrees Celsius again last night, and it had only warmed to minus 4 degrees by 10:30, an hour and a half after sunrise.

I finally got out the big double mountain boots to warm my toes, then climbed up the cliff to see what was in the aerie in the rocks above camp. We have seen ravens and buzzards perching on those crags over the last few days, but there is no sign of a nest in rocks, just the tell-tale white stains on the cliff below.

A large herd of Wild Ass are foraging close to camp this morning, making a long single file that stretches from horizon to horizon. As I watch them through the spotting scope, a sassy Hume's Ground Jay bird makes a visit, hopping almost up on top of my boots. The sassy arrogance of its long, bounding hops and the curiosity with which it plunges its long bill into the ground gives away his jaybird nature.

On December 11, it's not so cold, and all six of us squeeze into the green pickup and have an exciting six hours of observation of Chiru on the rutting grounds. Our previous encounters have been disappointing, for the Chiru are not in the numbers in which they were found 10 years before. Other areas to the west reportedly now have no Chiru at all. But here, in this remote area, we seem to have found a concentration of animals that provides a glimpse of the spectacle of the Chiru rut. We have seen at least 100 animals here, and I estimate that there may be as many as 400 in the area.

A harem-holder may keep temporary control of as many as 11 females, which he herds relentlessly, keeping them in tight formation.

Mating has apparently not yet begun, but the Chiru are already in mixed-sexed groups, each with several females and a single male harem-holder. Other bachelors chase and display nearby, and often rush in to challenge a harem-holder or scatter his females. A harem-holder may keep temporary control of as many as 11 females, which he herds relentlessly, keeping them in tight formation. If a female strays too far from the group, the male will rush for her and chase her back into the cluster. At times these chases seem to be in earnest, with the male sprinting ahead to actively block the female's path of escape. However, more often now, nearing the peak of the rut, the chases seem almost ritualized. If the female were in earnest, she could easily escape, and some females do. But more often than not, the male makes a tight hairpin turn while the female makes a wider turn outside him. It's almost as if the female is simply testing the male's continuing resolve to keep her close.

Herding his females is not the harem-holder's only task. He also keeps ever watchful of approaching rivals. If one strays too close, he will light out at a run, often chasing the rival at high speed for hundreds of meters. We have seen high-speed chases that lasted for almost a kilometer. On occasion, the male may even lower his head while still at a run, tilting his rapier-like horns in position to deal a potentially serious injury to the pursued. We have never observed that "the blood flows freely" as described by Rawling in

1905 and Prejevalsky in 1876. Perhaps poaching has reduced the density of Chiru to the point that clashes are not of such intensity and earnestness as in the past. However, we did find one apparently healthy male, with a full stomach, that had died of unknown causes. His carcass was providing a feast for birds and several wolves. Perhaps he had succumbed to wounds inflicted by another male, or perhaps he was killed by the abundant wolves, here seen in a pack of 10 at least.

Harem-holders have no easy time of it. They seem to face a constantly recurring dilemma. Whenever a rival male, by accident or by design, strays close to his precious harem, the harem-holder seems obliged to give chase and drive the intruder away. At the same time, the females in the harem have the annoying habit of wandering off if the harem master does not regularly herd them back into a tight cluster. For most of the day, these harassed sultans have little rest, and rarely even decrease their vigilance to snatch a bite to eat. At times, they look as if they are at a loss over what to do first, standing halfway between a rival and their harem, alternately glaring at the approaching rival, then nervously glancing back over their shoulders at the fickle harem.

If at times the harem-holder seems like a jealous Lothario with too many fickle mistresses, at other times, he looks positively regal. When chasing a rival, he may stretch out in a full gallop, racing across the rough ground at astounding speeds. When it seems that both pursued and pursuer must be running as fast as they can go, the pursuer may put on a burst of speed, kicking up a cloud of dust and forcing his rival to do the same. Having taken care of the intruder, the harem holder will turn back to his harem, bellowing as he approaches, then herding the females back into formation at a run. Then, he may prance and goose-step into the middle of the harem, presumably to elicit their admiration, and arousal. These stiff and formal movements display to full effect his jet-black face and legs, white neck and tail, and half-meter long horns.

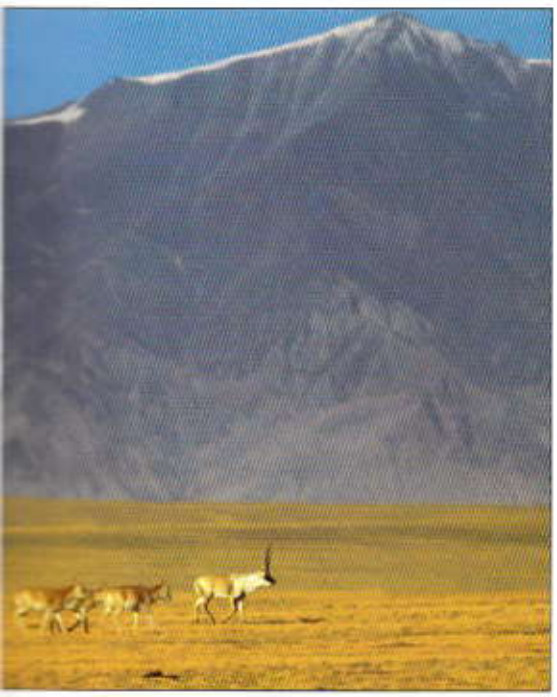
On December 12—my birthday!—it's biting cold again in the morning, after a light snow last night. But it's a clear morning. Our host Memukuban already has a sheep-pellet fire blazing in the oil-drum stove and the kettle is on in the cosy, subterranean kitchen. The sun is not up and a sliver of a moon is still visible, but the glow from the east already fills the sky at 8:30, Beijing time. To be fair to us sleepy heads, that is 6:30 local sun time. Beijing seems very far away.

This afternoon, I got just the birthday present I hoped for! Today we all saw a male cover a female. In fact, he performed for us several times, even in front of the cameras. We observed several harem-holders today, but only one among them seemed to have receptive females. He spent a great deal of time attending to them, prancing in a strange hopping gait, goosestepping towards a female from behind with his hindquarters lowered. He would then single out a female and spend a quiet moment behind her, kicking the air between her hind legs, perhaps even resting his head on her flanks. Then he would suddenly rise up on his hind legs to mount. After a few moments, the entire ritual would begin again.

As we were leaving the rutting grounds for the day, two males in a group of nine locked horns and grappled vigorously for several seconds. This was the first time we have seen such vigorous sparring. Despite their long horns, they did not wrestle in a contest of strength like elk, but butted almost like goats, repeatedly separating and butting again.

In all today, we had a full three hours of focal observations, scan sampling and ad-lib notes on the rutting behavior of the Chiru. As we drove back to our camp, I fell into a reverie of gratitude at having had the privilege of seeing these sights. I only hope that the poaching can be stopped, so that this is not the last breeding season for these regal animals. ■

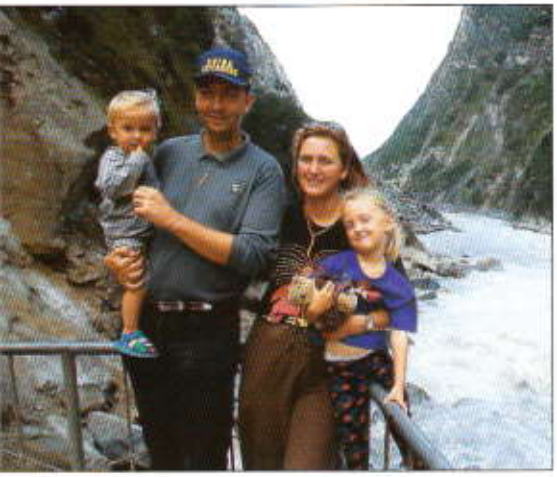
● *The CERS study and protection of the Tibetan Antelope is a project supported by the Kadoorie Charitable Foundations, the Hongkong Bank Foundation and Shell China.*



FAR LEFT: A harem master mounts one of his partners as the rest of the harem looks on.

CENTRE: A harem-holder keeps close tabs on his coveted females.

LEFT: The male antelope takes on a striking black face as the mating season draws near.



RIGHT:
Zhongdian's Xongjan Ling Monastery caught in early morning light

A royal mountain pilgrimage

Wong How Man
January 30, 1999
Lijiang, Yunnan Province

To the townfolk of Lijiang, Karl and Francesca's entourage looked quite ordinary. But the two young children? They were considered most extraordinary. The boy, barely 18 months old, and the girl, aged 4 years, are star attractions to everyone. The boy has just started to walk, stumbling around with a big smile on his face. The girl, sitting on the front steps of the hotel, is hugging a teddy bear and is curious about everything around her. Some villagers comment on the parents' courage, others the foolishness, of venturing so far with their children. Indeed, foreigners simply do not travel into the outback with infants.

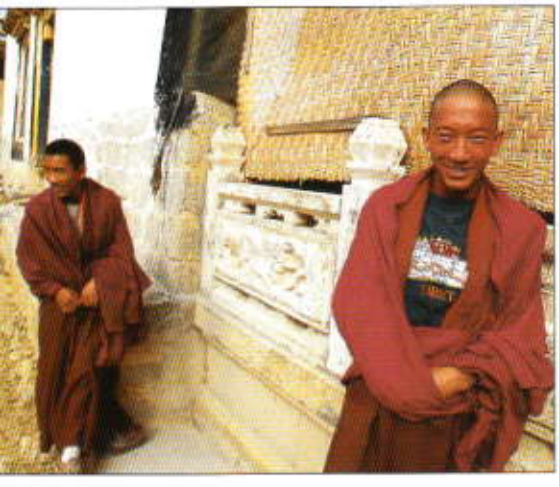
Karl and Francesca are no ordinary travelers in this distant land. Neither are their children, Eleanore and Ferdinand. The von Habsburgs are descendants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Karl is the Archduke and oldest grandson of its last Emperor. His wife, the Archduchess, is the daughter of Baron Thyssen of German steel fame, a renowned art collector. They are here as CERS' guests, visiting northwestern Yunnan.

We stayed an extra day at Lijiang waiting for our lost luggage to arrive. Although an earthquake struck here in 1996, the buildings have been carefully reconstructed in their original style. The cobblestone alleys are lined with shops and eateries. Melted snow from nearby Jade Dragon Mountain is channeled into town, creating a beautiful network of canals. Behind doors with standing screens are hidden garden courtyards of the Naxi, a minority of about a quarter million people. Today, Lijiang is a major tourist attraction, especially after its recent designation as a United Nations Heritage Site.

The following day, we took a long drive to Zhongdian, the first Tibetan settlement on the edge of the plateau. At 3,200 meters elevation, it is sometimes considered the foothill of the Himalayas. We were guests in the home of the local Jiangke Rinpoche, a high reincarnated lama.

Jiangke's Tibetan-style home is comfortable and his household most hospitable—with the exception of the mastiff guarding his front yard. Each time we pass by, he snarls at us. When I have to brush my teeth at the water tap in the yard, I come too close for comfort to this fierce beast. Though he is on a chain, I brush up as fast as I can.

During the day, the Jiangke Rinpoche led us on visit of his monastery. Xongjan Ling, or Guihua Monastery, is one of the most important religious institutions in the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau. It was first constructed in 1679 during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama. In the Qing Dynasty, the Seventh Dalai spent several years here in exile from the turmoil of Tibet. At its height, it boasted over 1,200 lamas and



TOP:
The von Habsburg family visits Tiger Leaping Gorge
ABOVE:
Tibetan monks sport a Potala T-shirt at Xongjan Ling Monastery

student monks. We observed religious activities and the rebuilding of some structures destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

The next morning was overcast. But we had plans to photograph the monastery. So we hiked out in darkness before sunrise. Standing on a hill adjacent to the massive monastery, we waited for the sky to clear. At about 7:00, rays of bright sun punched a few holes through the heavy grey sky. A particularly auspicious ray struck the golden roofs of the monastery in its path, bringing them to sparkling life.

After a three-day excursion on the plateau, we headed back towards Lijiang. Along the way, our team hiked down the Tiger Leaping Gorge. The upper Yangtze here makes a dramatic 210-meter drop in a series of rapids over just 17 kilometers.

With young Ferdinand strapped to his back, Karl hiked down the long steps leading to the riverbank. Local tourists marveled at the parents traveling with their young children. They dished out praise and lectures on child care. But the thunder of the water soon drowned out their words. We were safely back in Lijiang that evening.

At 5:00 in the morning, we left the hotel in the cold pre-dawn air and began driving out of town. Twenty kilometers later, we arrived at the foot of the Jade Dragon Mountain. Using flashlights to light our path, we began climbing a nearby hill. We soon lost our trail, though, and began to follow Karl as he broke a new path through the bushes.

We reached the top of a ridge a half-hour later. There, we had a view of the snow peaks in front of us. When the first light kissed the top of Peak Shanzidou at 5,596 meters, I took in a long breath and let out a sigh of contentment.

As the sunlight seeped into the valley, we began our journey home. I paused to look back at the Jade Dragon's fast-receding shadow, comparing it with the shadow Karl's six-foot, three-inch frame cast onto our path. An heir to the once powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire, he now holds an elected seat within the European Parliament. Perhaps the spirit of the mountain would be pleased to know that a family with an Imperial heritage had just made a pilgrimage to the Jade Dragon Mountain. ■

NEWS NEWS NEWS

Hongkong Bank Corner

It all started in 1993 when the *South China Morning Post* published a full-page story on CERS and our work at the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve. Anthony Russell, then CEO of Hongkong Bank China Services, contacted Wong How Man to offer some assistance. That led to two years of support from the Bank's China Services Department.

In 1995, Richard Hale, the CEO for Hongkong Bank in Singapore, visited our Black-necked Crane site in Kunming, Yunnan province. Afterwards, the bank's Singapore division made a major donation to help support that particular project.

In 1996, the Hongkong Bank printed a China calendar using photographs from CERS, helping to further publicize our work in China.

In 1997, John Strickland, Chairman of the Hongkong Bank, generously allowed Wong How Man to use his unique personal library of books on Central Asia and Tibet for research purposes.

In 1998, through the support of Mr. Strickland, Vincent Cheng and Eddie Wang, CERS successfully secured funding from the Hongkong Bank Foundation to support our project at the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve.

Richard Hale, seated at the right, joins CERS in the field. Seated at the left is Gordon Duggan, former British High Commissioner in Singapore.

CERS would like to thank the Hongkong Bank for its valuable ongoing support which enables us to pursue key conservation and education programs in China.

CERS IN THE NEWS

■ A film featuring CERS won an award at the 41st New York Festival for TV Programming. The half-hour film produced by RTHK for its "Hong Kong Connection" program was shown in prime time. It highlights CERS' conservation project at the Moso matrilineal community in northwestern Yunnan.

■ CERS is collaborating with Hong Kong's Ocean Park to produce a set of portraits of the newly arrived giant pandas, An An and Jia Jia. Wong How Man has offered to capture close-up images of these cuddly creatures through the year 2000.

■ Daniel Ng hosted a dinner for 12 international members of the Young Presidents Organization (YPO) at CERS village at Tai Tam. The Mandarin Hotel catered the event, shuttling the entire banquet by boat across the bay. Patrick Siewert, the president of Kodak and a CERS supporter, was among the guests.

■ CERS and the Royal Geographic Society's Hong Kong chapter co-hosted their annual joint lecture on March 16. Wong How Man spoke on the history of exploration in Tibet, recent discoveries by CERS, and the threats facing the endangered Tibetan Antelope.

■ CERS delivered popular lectures to the following groups:

- the Young Presidents Organization (YPO) international gathering in Hong Kong, March 20-26
- the Hong Kong chapter of the Women in Publishing Society (WIPS) at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, February 3
- IBM in Cairns, Australia, May 11.

■ CERS donated money for the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve to enable the purchase of two four-wheel-drive vehicles, for our joint conservation project.

■ Xi Zinong, a CERS-sponsored Shell scholar, has been nominated for a Goldman Award. The award is a prestigious and coveted prize that recognize outstanding achievement in protecting the environment.

THANK YOU THANK YOU

- Francesca von Habsburg joined hands with Swiss bank UBS in supporting culture conservation in the world. Her foundation, ARCH—for Art Restoration for Cultural Heritage—announced it will support CERS' three-year project to research and conserve the mysterious hanging coffins of the Bo people in Southern China.

- William Connor II continues his third year of support of CERS by making a significant cash donation to the society.

A VERY SPECIAL THANKS and farewell to John Farrell

Wong How Man, on behalf of CERS, extends a heart-felt thank you to John Farrell, President of Coca-Cola China, for his years of support and service on CERS Board of Directors. John was relocated to London in June and will be missed by everyone at CERS, including our field staff. John had joined us twice on expeditions.

- Kwek Leng Joo of City Developments Ltd. in Singapore made a personal donation to CERS' Western Tibet Expedition in 1999.

- Andrew Yao continued his annual support of CERS' Small Grants Program and other CERS activities.

- Shinlee Foundation and Eric Chen of Taiwan continued their long years of support in funding CERS expeditions.

- *Rhythms Monthly* magazine of Taiwan became a co-sponsor of CERS' Western Tibet Expedition.

Available NOW: A Chronicle of Exploration

CERS has launched 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, among its ethnic minorities and its wildlife. 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

■ CERS' efforts to protect the endangered Tibetan Antelope—or "chiru"—from poachers eager to kill it and weave the fine hair from its throat into expensive shahtoosh shawls have won unprecedented media attention, especially from broadcasters. Our message has been aired on most major networks and regional television channels, including CNN, BBC, ABC, CNBC, Discovery News, StarTV, CCTV Beijing, U.K. Channel 5, RTHK and ATV in Hong Kong. *The details follow:*

- CCTV aired a one-minute segment on Jan. 18, and a 10-minute spot on Jan. 26, on Tibetan Antelope poaching.

- ATV, aired 11 minutes on Jan. 18 and Jan. 23, on Tibetan Antelope and the shahtoosh connection.

- RTHK's half-hour program "Common Sense" on Feb. 8 featured the mating and calving behavior of Tibetan Antelope.

- The *South China Morning Post*'s Jan. 9th edition featured one and a quarter pages on the antelope.

- *South China Morning Post* columnist Nury Vittachi put Wong How Man in the spotlight in his April 11th dining-out column.

- The *Ming Pao Daily*'s Jan. 17th issue included a full-page story on Wong's exploration and conservation career.

- On April 11, StarTV ran a 10-minute spot on the antelope's plight.

- Channel 5 ran a half-hour program on May 24 featuring the antelope and the shahtoosh trade.

■ Since its launch 10 months ago, Taiwan's *Rhythms Monthly* has published at least one major story on CERS in each issue. In January, it featured the preservation efforts at Tumu Monastery; in February, it carried a story about CERS exploration near the Yunnan/Tibet border; March focused on CERS' Lijiang encounter; April covered the Tribal War and Tibetan architecture; and May centred on CERS' winter antelope study.

■ *Geographic Knowledge*, published in Beijing, featured two stories in March written by CERS members, one on caving by Zhang Fan and another on Tibet's remotest corner by Wong How Man.

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