

# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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## The Saga of China Caravan #6 (as seen from the Caboose)

This month we have an opportunity to get firsthand impressions of a historic caravan. WBCCI members Richard and Nancy Roeser #23556 are allowing us to publish excerpts from Nancy's diary (with photos by Rich) during the "trailer" part of China Caravan C6. The guides were in front in rig #11, and the 10 club member rigs traveled in sequence #1 thru #10, with the Roesers in rig #10 (a.k.a. the "caboose"). Take it away, Nancy:



Nancy & Rich during the Caravan Banquet

### 9/28/1986 – Sunday – Hong Kong to Guangzhou

Left the hotel in a taxi with hand luggage, 8 trailer tires, and Pat, our guide. Boarded a hovercraft for the trip to Guangzhou. During lunch in Guangzhou, Rich took a group picture of the waitresses, but then all wanted an individual one. We finished a roll of Polaroid film! After lunch we visited a Jade sculpturing factory. Each person carves with a diamond blade and uses water to cool the work. They work 6 days a week. From the Jade Factory, we went by bus to the Chen Clan Temple, which is now a museum. All the Buddhist statues have been removed, but there is a lot of art work in the temple. Finally, we checked into the Garden Hotel, one of the most modern and beautiful in the city.

### 9/29/1986 – Monday – Guangzhou

On our 8:00am bus ride to the license testing area we had our first view of the countryside. We saw fish ponds, rice fields, orchards (bananas, pineapple, mangoes, oranges and lemons) and vegetables. The roads are very narrow and full of potholes, and are used by an unbelievable number of walkers, bicycles,



A View from the Caboose

motorcycles, and trucks. We saw very few personal cars, mostly taxis.

The license written test was read to us by our leader with a consensus on which answer to write. Then each person took their turn driving one of our Suburban and Airstream rigs. The road-testing area is unbelievable, a maze of roads, hills, left turns, and right turns being used by student drivers, mostly truck drivers. I was nervous about driving because of the

narrow roads, but luckily didn't encounter any cycles, walkers, or other traffic. I think we all passed with flying colors.

When done, a bus took us to the hotel where the rest of the rigs were parked. Along the way we encountered a huge traffic jam: many and varied vehicles and people everywhere! We even saw a man on a bike carrying a huge live pig on a rear carrier. Arrived at the rigs but the guides with the keys were nowhere to be seen. Opted to have dinner in the hotel. Finally, into the rigs by 10:30pm totally exhausted.

### 9/30/1986 – Tuesday – Guangzhou to Huizhou

Had peanut butter and jelly for breakfast because I don't yet know where everything is in the trailer. We drove about ½ hour when we encountered an accident. During the wait, some teenagers came over and I gave them "I ❤️ N.Y." buttons. That was a mistake because then the whole world came over. People are very friendly, but it's not easy to communicate.

An hour or so later we were back on the

road, and after about 100 miles in total, we ended up at a famous scenic spot in Huizhou on West Lake. We got boiled water to drink at a hotel. The guides took some of us to town to shop and interpret the cost. I enjoyed talking with our local guide who resented having a college education majoring in English and being forced to return to Huizhou where there was no opportunity to practice his education. Luckily, the city was opened to foreigners one year ago and he can now use his English a little bit.

**10/1/1986 – Wednesday – Huizhou to Haifeng**

Early start through the narrow streets of town and out into the countryside. It was a hot and rough 89 miles and we parked behind a hotel and didn't unhitch. Rich cashed travelers checks at a bank that uses abacuses. Rode with another couple to a fishing village and this showed us the China I had expected – unskilled laborers, poor housing, and washboard dirt roads. Glimpses of life included girls using a mallet to crush big stones into little pieces, hand digging ditches, etc. At the fishing village we saw fleets of fishing boats as well as many, many sampans. Back at the trailer, we pigged out on good 'ol USA macaroni & cheese and tasteless local apples.

**10/2/1986 – Thursday – Haifeng to Shantou**

110 miles to go today. In a village along the way one of the rigs hit a man in the street. It was scary. Many angry faces at the window – I really don't blame them! We sat in the hot car with the doors locked! We finally got the interpreters to come back and help work out the details of the accident and we were sent to join the front of the caravan and have lunch. I couldn't get used to Chinese faces peering in the screen door watching us eat lunch.

Not too long after getting back on the road we had to stop because trailer #6 had a drooping awning on his trailer caused by passing a bamboo cart a little too close. Dozens of Chinese men came over to the car to smile and stare at us. I still can't get used to being the center of attention. The prize sight of the day: a man on a bicycle carrying on his back rack a beautiful red two-seater sofa!

After the awning was fixed, we caught up with the pack who were proceeding across the water on a ferry! After the ferry, we were escorted thru town by the police. We zigged



Nancy Roesser inside their China Clipper

and zagged through narrow streets teeming with people and bicycles. Finally, we parked, unhitched and went to a handicraft exhibit, where I bought 2 crocheted pillow shams and a porcelain chicken.

**10/3/1986 – Friday – Shantou to Zhangzhou**

About 140 miles to go today. We were 20 miles out when rig #1 hit a boy on a bike tossing him, his bike, and wares into

a pond. We were stopped 2 hours trying to iron out the damages with the police. Rich conducted a roadside Chinese-English lesson while we waited. Finally, because rig #1 recorded what happened on videotape, he only had to pay for three chickens that drowned.

When a traffic accident occurs in China, everyone and everything comes to a halt on the road. Road traffic includes walkers that carry all sorts of things including two baskets on the ends of a pole; bundles of straw, pine needles, or twigs; hoes, dippers (to take water out of the canals to irrigate), cane cutters, or log prongs. Then there are carts pushed by men or women (wheel barrel style); bicycles with baskets on each side or with a large pig, chicken, goose, in a basket on the rear carrier; bicycles with people riding forward of the handlebars, riding sidesaddle, or on the rear carrier. There are also tractors, small 3-wheeled vehicles, water buffalo, gaggles of geese, small vans, medium-size busses, and larger trucks.

China is a panorama of people – very happy, smiling, friendly, and waving. The countryside is manicured. Everything usable is used. Pine forests are bereft of their needled floor because the needles are carefully gathered up and used for fuel. Every arable spot is used to produce food.

After this accident, we proceeded forward inch by inch as traffic passed within millimeters of each other. Once past the monumental traffic jam we were out in the country with less traffic. When we crossed into Fujian Province the scenery was beautiful, red clay and pine – a little like Utah. The afternoon was spent in valleys and climbing mountainous passes. The countryside is poorer, drier, and less populated than what we came thru in Guangdong Province. We parked at 5pm and walked to see a cotton painting factory where we bought a panda picture.

**10/4/1986 – Saturday – Zhangzhou to Xiamen**

2 hours to drive 41 miles today. The road to Xiamen was not too busy, but we had fast



Workers along a Chinese Road

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overtaking traffic as well as fast approaching traffic. Everyone sighed with relief that it was a short driving day to be followed by a 3 day stay. We are parked high on a hill top. We drove to a seacoast fortress that looks out over the Formosan Channel to Matsu Island and then to a Buddhist Temple.

**10/5/1986 – Sunday – Xiamen, Fujian Province**

Took a ferry to Gulangyu Island. It was a crush of people! We were all very anxious about the apparent boat overload. Bars contain the passengers so that if the ferry sinks there is no obvious escape route. Luckily the ride lasted only 5 minutes. We meandered with the guide all over the island. No cars, trucks, or bikes allowed, so the walk was pleasant. The island was at one time a western enclave populated by English and Dutch. One building is a memorial to a famous Chinaman who marshalled forces on the island to recapture Taiwan from the Dutch in the 1600s.

**10/6/1986 – Monday – Xiamen, Fujian Province**

We toured Xiamen's Botanical Gardens that contain over 4000 different plants and then visited a Buddhist Temple where a service was going on. The chanting was beautiful. Home for lunch and then off to Jimei Village. Its founder was an industrialist in Singapore before returning to Jimei to build its schools and Turtle Gardens. He is buried in a turtle shaped tomb there.

**10/7/1986 – Tuesday – Xiamen to Quanzhou**

Almost 4 hours to travel 65 miles today. We saw a red coffin (empty) being hauled on the road by 2 bicycles – one carrying the bottom, one carrying the top. During a city tour of Quanzhou we learned it is famous for puppets and is 1 of 24 historical cities in China and 1 of the 4 largest ports in the world. Marco Polo visited Quanzhou. The 5-story East (Zhenguo) Pagoda was originally built of wood in 865 and rebuilt in

brick in 1227. We climbed to the top of the Pagoda to view the city. There is a 1000-year-old Mulberry Tree in the garden alongside the Pagoda. We drove to a restaurant on a bridge for supper. It was our first truly Chinese restaurant and the ambiance was awful. It was an old place with worn dishes and chopsticks and only a small rice bowl, no plates. We didn't enjoy it very much, but we were all glad we had the experience. The group gave us a lovely anniversary card and sang "Happy Anniversary" to us. Then they tapped their glasses, so we had to kiss.

**10/8/1986 – Wednesday – Quanzhou to Putien**

Today we are married 31 years. Who would have believed 31 years ago that we'd be celebrating an anniversary in China? After 55 miles we arrived in Putien having visited a stone carving factory along the way. At the factory, young children as well as adults were chiseling, cutting, and polishing stone. We are parked by a Buddhist Temple. In the afternoon we visited a middle school. 50% of its students go on to college, with many studying in western countries.

**10/9/1986 – Thursday – Putien**

Today we visited an eel farm that sells eels to Japan and Hong Kong. We also visited the lovely Chinese mansion of a Chinaman who owns a tailoring business in Singapore. Then back to the trailers for lunch. It is cool in the mornings and evenings, but the days are hot. The local kids are beginning to get on our nerves, peeking in windows, pressing on our screen door, and ringing the doorbell. We have to close the door and pull in the windows, otherwise the screens get broken.



700 Year-Old East Pagoda

In the afternoon we visited a straw weaving factory where they were making Xmas decorations. At night we went to the opera – the costumes and music were beautiful. The ambiance was terrible. The building was concrete with wooden seats. People chatted constantly, smoked, cleared their noses and throats, and spit on the floor.

To be continued next month.

**China Caravan Correction:**

In the June 2018 article, current member #3980 Dorthea Thoman was accidentally not listed as a participant of one of the China Caravans. She and husband Byron were on China Caravan C5 in 1986 under WBCCI #9465. This brings the total number of current member China Caravan participants to 4.