

# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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## The Saga of China Caravan #6 (Part 2) (as seen from the Caboose)

This month we continue along with WBCCI members Richard and Nancy Roeser #23556 as they complete the “trailer” portion of China Caravan C6, as recorded in Nancy’s diary.

10/10/1986 – Friday – Putien to Fuzhou

Almost 4 hours to go 61 miles. Traffic got heavy as we approached Fuzhou which is understandable since it is the capital for Fujian Province. In the afternoon we visited a lacquerware factory where we bought a box, napkin rings and chopsticks. We then visited a cork picture factory. Back to the trailer for dinner: ham and instant mashed potatoes. Never thought anything could taste as good as those instant potatoes did.

10/11/1986 – Saturday – Fuzhou

Drove to Drum Mountain to an old Buddhist Monastery. The temple was built about 500 B.C. There are rocks on Drum Mountain where people have carved initials and poems. Some inscriptions are 1000s of years old.

Our guide told us that during the time of the Red Guard (1966-76), monks were sent to work on farms and the monastery ceased to exist as such. He is now 30, but at 19 he was sent by the Red Guards to work in a very poor section of China. It was backbreaking work from sunup to sundown. When the Red Guard reign was over, some monks couldn’t return to the monastery because they had eaten meat or fish or had married. He also told us that in the 1940s life expectancy was 35-40, but is now 66 for men and 68 for women.



Nancy & Rich during the Caravan Banquet

After Drum Mountain, we drove to a stone, ivory, and longan tree carving factory. The products were very elaborate, but we didn’t buy anything.

10/12/1986 – Sunday – Fuzhou to Nanping

It took 10 hours to go 156 miles because we encountered many road obstacles, including drying rice; a road washout; and piles of tree stumps, logs, wood shavings, rocks, sand, and garden soil;

wrecked vehicles, water buffalo, pigs, chickens, and children playing. It was a beautiful, but tedious, ride thru the mountains. Traffic was light. Switchbacks were numerous. Bamboo trees dotted many a slope. The scenery reminded me of British Columbia and Alaska, but painfully manicured to produce rice and other crops. We were lucky to be seeing the rice harvest, but unlucky because most of the rice was drying on flat straw mats on the road. We are camped high on a hill overlooking Nanping and the river.

10/13/1986 – Monday – Nanping

Today we drove to a small village where we walked thru rice paddies to



Mountain Road in China

an uphill stone path. After an hour we came to two high arched stone bridges over a stream gorge that were built over 1200 years ago. We continued climbing and finally came to a lovely temple in a spectacular mountain setting. We were welcomed with firecrackers and hot tea – a beautiful touch! We rested in the coolness of the temple and had a vegetarian lunch. Our return walk went much quicker downhill.

**10/14/1986 – Tuesday – Nanping to Wuyi**

We were up at 5:00am for a boat trip down the Min River, but the river is too low due to a 3-month drought. We decided to head to the Wuyi Mountains a day early. The 108-mile drive was peaceful. Not much traffic, few road obstacles, and fine scenery. The road followed a tributary of the Min River. The leaves of some trees are turning yellow and remind me of fall in New England although the temperature is much hotter. We played cards in the evening.

**10/15/1986 – Wednesday – Wuyi Mountains**

We explored Heavenly Tour (Tianyou) Peak, a park in the Wuyi Mountains revered in China for its beauty. Rich and I climbed the steep 400 (or was it 900?) step stairway cut into the stone to the peak. 10 of our group made it.

Even with all the stresses, lack of accurate information, change of plans at the last minute, etc., we are thoroughly enjoying this trip. We continue to marvel at a people who, in comparison to U.S. standards, have so little, but are extremely hard working and happy. We wish the U.S. could have such strong family units with the joy this brings. We also wish we could relax as much in the U.S. about crime as we do here.

We feel very safe from muggers, etc. It's almost non-existent. We've only encountered a panhandler once or twice.

After lunch we went to a 2500-acre Oolong Tea Plantation. Most of the processed tea is exported, 80% to Japan and the rest to various countries around the world, including the USA. How the tea is processed is kept a secret so that the Chinese can stay competitive in the marketplace, so we couldn't see anything but the tea bushes – processing and adding aromatics was out! Tea is picked in the spring season, so that was out too.

**10/16/1986 – Thursday – Wuyi Mountains**

A bus took us to a small village for a bamboo raft trip. There was much confusion and loading and unloading of passengers. The eventual story was that some Chinese VIPs had paid more than us so they got the first rafts. And this in supposedly equalitarian China! One learns patience, humility, and flexibility in China. Anyway, very shortly we



Porta Potti Parade

were underway floating down the Nine Twist Stream sitting in bamboo armchairs on bamboo rafts. Two men used poles to direct the rafts downstream.

**10/17/1986 – Friday – Wuyi Mountains**

During the night we had a wee rainstorm. It was the first patter of raindrops this trip and the first sunless morning in 4 weeks! Our guide says the lack of rain is very unusual. Today is free time, "gas up", "Porta Potti Parade". Our Airstreams are each equipped with a Porta Potti rather than a traditional holding tank, a good idea because China has no RV dump stations.

After lunch Rich and I walked about ½ mile to see a bridge being built "by hand". Then we visited a paper making operation with Al and Mildred Frosch. Bamboo is ground by stone hammers run by eccentric wheels. The pulp is put in bins where a worker dips a screen, pulls it out, empties the screen and repeats the steps. Following this we visited a business where people were weaving baskets out of bamboo strips.

Back at camp, our guide changed the tires on our trailer from 4 ply to 10 ply in anticipation of rough roads tomorrow.

**10/18/1986 – Saturday – Wuyi to Gutian**

We left Wuyi in a hard rain that soon stopped. We drove along a river, crossed over a bridge and picked up a dirt road out of town. Around and around the mountains we went, up and down into valleys and along streams. We were in the misty clouds at one point. We arrived in Gutian after a 137-mile drive. Very tired at the end of a long, hard ride. Tomorrow is our last trailer driving day. Thank heavens!

**10/19/1986 – Sunday – Gutian to Fuzhou**

Left town and climbed into the mountains, round and round, up and down we go. At one point we hit very dense fog. We inched along keeping the lights of the trailer in front of us in view. In a rocky construction zone two trailers had flats. The rest of the trip was eventless. In total, Rich drove 1500 miles with no accidents, though



Fixing a flat in the Fog

some near misses! He deserves a medal! No one would ever believe the trauma of driving a trailer over Chinese roads.

**10/20/1986 – Monday – Fuzhou**

A cloudy, humid, breezy day, but no stagnant air like last time we were in Fuzhou. The air pollution really got to me then.

We drove to the zoo for an interesting panda performance. The panda played basketball, balanced and caught rings, rode a bike, etc. Back home for lunch, suitcase packing, and trailer clean-up. 39 primary (grades 1-5) children came to camp to entertain us with singing, dancing, and musical instrument playing. After they entertained us, we sang “Old McDonald’s Farm” and “Jingle Bells” to them. The children then divided into 10 groups and each couple took a group thru their trailer where balloons, candy, and favors were given out. Our group was a 7-year-old girl, two 10-year-old girls, and a 10-year-old boy. After taking the kids thru the trailer, they were excited to talk to their friends in another Suburban over the CB radio in our Suburban!



The Children that visited the Roeser’s Trailer

After a Chinese dinner at a hotel we were invited by one of our guides to visit his in-law’s apartment. It was on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, reachable only by stairs and had a sitting room, kitchen, cooking room, and 3 bedrooms. I saw a small refrigerator, black & white 15” TV and a portable stereo radio. The windows had no screens and mosquito netting hung over the beds. The sitting room furniture was bamboo and beds were fiber mats on wood frames. The bedrooms and sitting room had linoleum on the floor. The rest was concrete.

Our guide told us there is an electricity shortage – 2 days a week there is no electricity from 7am – 6pm. He also said that Chinese who work as English-speaking guides are the best paid workers in China.

**10/21/1986 – Tuesday – Fuzhou**

Cleared out of the trailer and into an “OK” hotel. Then we had a bus tour that stopped at an open-air market overlooked by a huge statue of Chairman Mao. Our guide said, “What irony, Mao was very opposed to capitalism and here many years later it flourishes at his feet.”

According to our guide some marriages are arranged in the cities. Dowries are paid in rural areas, but not urban areas. One child per

couple means free medical care and low tuition for primary and middle school. More than 1 child means no free medical, higher fees for school, and a “fine”. Universities are free. Primary teachers are the lowest paid, university professors the highest. There is compulsory education in the cities (in Fujian Province), but not in rural areas. There aren’t many schools in rural areas because the distances are great, and teachers don’t want to work in remote areas. No opium smoking because it would probably

bring a life sentence in prison. Goods in the “free market” supposedly come mostly from Taiwan and Hong Kong, “exchanged” on fishing vessels.

Back to the hotel for our banquet. The Banyan City Restaurant was almost dark when we arrived, a consequence of power rationing, but three Coleman lanterns lit our way. A bit of information: All Chinese banquets are 12 courses. The last one is something sweet – a sweet soup.

**10/22/1986 – Wednesday – Fuzhou to Shanghai**

A morning bus tour visited a park where 32 boys were practicing Kung Fu. Caught another bus to the Fuzhou Airport for our flight to Shanghai. Boarded at 2:00pm and by 3:15pm we were on the ground in Shanghai. Now here’s a city I could love. Cool weather, clean, very western, cosmopolitan. The Queen of England visited Shanghai a few days ago, so we think the city of 12 million has been “spruced up” for her.

This concludes the “trailing” portion of the Roeser’s China Caravan, though they did continue on to see other parts of China by train and plane before returning home. If you enjoyed reading about their trip to China, please drop a line to Rich and Nancy and tell them so. They’ll appreciate it.

**Another China Caravan Correction:**

In the June 2018 article, current members #13255 Wes and Annette King were accidentally not listed as China Caravan participants because they were inadvertently left out of the 2018 Membership Directory. Wes and Annette were the leaders for China Caravan C8 and are still active in the Washington Unit! Together with the correction in the last issue, this brings the total number of current member China Caravan participants to 6!