

## Combined Probus Club of Wheelers Hill

### WENDY WU MAGNIFICENT CHINA TRIP 23 August 2010 to 12 September 2010

#### Monday, 23 August 2010 Melbourne to Beijing

Commentary: Wendy Wu Itinerary Notes, Robin Bray, Lynn Carter.  
Photographs: Barbara Matthews, Russell Cooper, Pam Cotton, Robin Bray

Our trip commenced at 7.45AM in Melbourne, flying Qantas via Sydney to Hong Kong where we transferred to a Dragonair flight to Beijing, arriving at 10.30PM (China time), a very long and tiring day. Upon arrival in Beijing we were met by our National Escort, Frank and local coach driver and transferred to our hotel, the Jiangxi Grand Hotel, for the next 4 nights.

#### Tuesday, 24 August 2010

##### Beijing – Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square & The Forbidden City

This morning we visited the 15th Century Temple of Heaven (Tiantan). The temple is a perfect example of Ming architecture, set in a 267 hectare park with four gates, one at each of the four points of the compass. Groups of local people gather here every day to sing folk songs, practice tai chi, sword dance, play kick shuttlecock, chess or just gossip.



The Temple of Heaven, Beijing.



Julie, Helen and Rosemary at the Temple.

This afternoon we walked through the expanse of Tiananmen Square, which was built on Mao Zedong's orders and said to have the capacity to hold over 1 million people.



Wandering through Tiananmen Square.



Margaret, Julie and Rosemary on the only seat in the Square.



After a group photo stop we passed Chairman Mao's Mausoleum before entering through the outer gates to the Imperial Forbidden City.



Inside the Forbidden City.



Exhausted, Rene and Margaret resting in the shade.



John and Colin resting.

It was the sacred centre of the empire for 500 years and home to the Ming and Qing Dynasties. We walked through the royal complex from the south gate at Tiananmen (Gate of Heavenly Peace), exiting through the north gate at Shenwumen (Gate of Divine Might), exploring the outer court and private residences and courtyards within. It was a very hot day and walking through this vast historical site was very draining!

**Wednesday, 25 August 2010**

**Beijing – The Great Wall and a visit to the Old Hutong**

An oft-quoted saying in Beijing goes "you have not been to China until you have climbed the Great Wall". So this morning we rose early to visit this world famous attraction. Built over 2000 years ago, it stretches all the way from the Shanhaiguan Pass on the east coast to the Gobi Desert in the west; more than 5,000km away. Upon reaching Badaling we climbed a very steep section of the wall admiring the panoramic views and reflected on the enormity of the material and labour required for its construction. It is estimated that a million people were used at different stages during the construction periods and that thousands died building it. Some of us were feeling very fit and managed to get high up on the wall.



Barry, Helen, Rosemary, Barbara, Margaret at the bottom. Julie, Margaret and Pam half-way stop.



Ros taking it slowly up the steep stairway. Barry and Margaret lost in the crowd on the way up!



Julie, Julie, Pat, Shirley and Margaret at the top! Rosemary, Rainie, Helen, Tom and Rene relaxing. Most of us made it up to the first major tower, and a few went on to the next. We were so exhausted we enjoyed a drink and ice cream in the shade when we got back down to the bus park.

After lunch we visited a Jade Factory and marveled at the skill of the local jade sculptors.



In the afternoon we enjoyed a rickshaw ride through the old hutong areas, where our guide explained the subtleties of traditional Chinese architecture, the influence of Feng Shui and of the sense of community found in this kind of housing.



Rosemary and Robin settle into their rickshaw.

Margaret and Barry relaxing at 10kph.

The Mongol rulers of Beijing established this style; hutong was their word for the narrow alleys between the houses. In recent times the hutong suburbs were threatening to disappear but are now the subject of fierce debate between the developers and those who would like to preserve both the architecture and the residents' way of life. We were privileged to visit the home of a local family who had been evicted during the cultural revolution in the 1960's only to return over a generation later to re-start their family life in their ancestral home.



Listening to the history of the Hutong.

Barbara and Russell in the Hutong private home.

After dinner at a restaurant in lovely gardens by a lake, some of us went to see an optional Kung Fu Legends Show.

**Thursday, 26 August 2010**  
**Beijing - Summer Palace**

In the morning we drove to the Summer Palace of the last two dynasties in China; the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The site has long been a royal garden and summer retreat for the members of the Emperors family and their courtesans. The most notorious patron of the Summer Palace was Empress Dowager Cixi - popularly known in China as the 'dragon lady' for her corruption, old age and audacity to rule like a man. Cixi infamously took money which was raised to construct a modern navy and used this to embellish and enlarge her favourite playground.



Group photo at the Summer Palace. Ros photographing the wonderful sculptures at the Palace.

The lovely Kunming Lake occupies three quarters of the summer palace gardens area, making this palace a charming spot to explore. It is a very popular sit for locals to visit in their 1000's and the world's longest covered walkway is an impressive structure. In the afternoon we headed to the Silk Markets where we indulged in a little shopping for the many bargains to be had at the bustling outdoor stalls manned by overly exuberant stall holders. Then we drove to view the Olympic Games site.



The magnificent Summer Palace. Robin, Margaret, Helen, David and Rene resting in the shade.

In the evening we sampled the most renowned local delicacy, Peking Duck and other exotic Chinese dishes. Then it was off to an exciting acrobatic spectacular including a breathtaking five man motor-bike `Sphere of Death` show – fantastic!!



The Chef preparing to serve the Peking Duck.



Rosemary and Margaret tucking in!

**Friday, 27 August 2010**  
**Beijing to Xian**

This morning we transferred to Beijing's domestic airport to board our flight to China's old capital, Xian. Upon arrival we drove by coach into Xian to climb and inspect the ancient 500 year old city wall that has remained intact. We then checked into the Heizee Hotel for the next two nights.

Xian is located on the banks of the Yellow River and has a history dating back to 1000BC. The city served as the capital for thirteen Chinese dynasties. Xian was also the starting point of the Silk Road, a caravan trading route which carried not only silks, ceramics and spices but also led to an exchange of cultures, technologies and ideas. Buddhism, brought from India during the Tang Dynasty (612 to 907AD) was perhaps one of the most influential of those to travel along the long road to Xian.

After lunch we visited the Xian Art, Ceramics & Lacquer Exhibition Centre.



Pat and Julie looking at some ceramic art.



Rosemary and a statue of General Guan Yu.

In the evening we enjoyed a sumptuous regional specialty, a Shui Jiao dumpling banquet where all dumplings are fashioned into the shape of the dumplings' fillings. We then sat back to be entertained by the wonderful `Traditional Tang Music and Dance Show` .



Enjoying the dumpling banquet in Xian.



The masterpiece dumplings – a local specialty.



Section of the spectacular Traditional Tang Music and Dance Show.

**Saturday, 28 Aug 2010**

**Xian - Terracotta Warriors**

In the morning we visited a pottery and ceramics factory where replicas of the Warriors and Horses and other beautiful ornaments are mass produced.



Lynn trying out the General's uniform. Lynn, Rene, David and Rod watching the artist at work.

It was then on to see the real thing, Xian's famous, UNESCO listed Terracotta Warriors and Horses. The Terracotta Warriors are one of the most significant archaeological discoveries of the 20th Century. An enormous museum has been created comprising several huge buildings erected directly over the diggings where visitors can readily view this incredible historical find.





John photographing the warriors.



Helen, Shirley, Pat, Julie and Rosemary in the gift shop.

In 221BC, after defeating all his enemy states, the leader of the Qin state declared himself Emperor Qin Shi Huang (the word 'China' is actually derived from his name). Thousands of workers worked for more than a decade to create the life sized army designed to protect the Emperor after death. Over 7,000 pottery soldiers, horses, chariots, and even weapons have been unearthed from these pits.

Later in the day we visited a local village where local farmers place their corn and rice harvest out on the concrete roadways to dry.

Afterwards back in Xian we visited the Little Wild Goose Pagoda and gardens and watched a demonstration of Chinese script writing. Frank, our national guide, took us through the finer skills of this ancient language.



Walking through the Little Wild Goose Pagoda gardens.



Frank teaching us about Chinese script

We then visited the lively Muslim Quarter, Mosque and explored the many narrow laneways and interesting Islamic food markets. Then on to a Theatre buffet dinner.

**Sunday, 29 August 2010**  
**Xian to Yangtze River**

In the morning we visited the renowned Shaanxi Provincial Museum where thousands of priceless cultural relics are on display. We transferred to the airport for our flight to Wuhan and transferred by coach (4-5 hours) to the city of Yichang, where we boarded our Yangtze River Cruise vessel `The Victoria 3` for the next 4 nights. We were officially welcomed aboard by the Captain at dinner.



One of the Yangtze River tourist vessels. Helen, Barbara, John, Pat and Rene with a welcoming drink.

**Monday, 30 August 2010 – Thursday, 2 September 2010**  
**Yangtze River Cruise**

Over the next 3 relaxing days we explored the wondrous landscape and life along the Yangtze River. We started by visiting the massive Three Gorges Dam still under construction before returning to our vessel to continue on our journey upstream via the five huge locks on the dam.



Ros inspecting the vastness of the Three Gorges Dam. Shirley, Julie, Rene and Rosemary at the lookout.



David, Barry and Lynn posing with the book sculpture. At the bottom of the five locks.

We sailed through Xiling Gorge once the most treacherous stretch of the Yangtze now tamed by the new dam. Further upstream we reached the larger Wu Gorge and then finally sailed through the narrow and, arguably, most dramatic Qutang Gorge. The Yangtze is a very busy working river with boats and barges of all sizes plying goods up and down its length.



Along the way we took the opportunity to enjoy some shore excursions to explore the sites and history of this magnificent waterway. We took a side trip to hop into small 'pea pod' boats at the Shennong Stream to see the cut stone of the 'trackers path' high on the sheer walls and experience the history of the 'trackers', the men who dragged enormous junk ships up the Yangtze for centuries. These men must be the fittest men in the world. They kept paddling and towing the craft nonstop the whole time we were there.



On the way to Shennong Stream.



Barbara, Russell and Colin looking for the 'hanging coffin'.



The Shennong Stream boatmen in full swing.



Enjoying the boat ride up the gorge.

At Fengdu we visited the City of the Dead high above the Liaoyang Temple.



Jenny, Barry, Marilyn and Colin arriving at Fengdu Marilyn and Colin counting steps crossing the bridge.

Here we complied with local custom of crossing the stone bridge in front of the temple by counting our steps.



The Sitting Buddha of the Liaoyang Temple.



Barbara is intrigued by what she found at the top.

It was extremely hot and humid so most adopted the easier return route to the river via the chair lift rather than the steep 500 step stairs and sloping pathway.



Rene and Margaret happy not to walk down the steps.



Our kareoke Yangtze spectacular `Mamma Mia` .

For our last evening on board the Victoria 3 river boat we took part in the `Passenger Spectacular Show` presenting our special kareoke version of `Mamma Mia` ! (David has the DVD if you want to watch it!) The Captain bid us all farewell at dinner that evening.

**Thursday, 2 September 2010**  
**Chongqing to Chengdu**

This morning we disembarked in Chongqing. Perched on the steep hills overlooking the confluence of the Jialing and the Yangtze Rivers, Chongqing is the chief industrial centre of south-west China. Now the city is being reshaped by another curve of the river's history, as the Three Gorges Dam Project has lifted the level of water in the Yangtze so that larger sea-going vessels can sail all the way upriver to Chongqing.

From Chongqing we travelled to Chengdu and checked into the Sichuan Hotel.

Our evening's feast was a traditional Sichuan Banquet followed by the Fire-Eating and fascinating Changing Faces Mask show.

**Friday, 3 September 2010**  
**Chengdu - Leshan**

In the morning we visited one of the most spectacular and memorable sites of Sichuan - the Giant Buddha of Leshan (meaning Le Mountain). After driving an hour and a half, past the town of Leshan, we reached the confluence of the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi Rivers, where the tallest Buddha statue in the world sits carved into the side of the mountain. Local history tells us that the river here was once treacherous, with a whirlpool that overturned so many boats and drowned so many fishermen that they suspected a demon lurked under the water, where the rivers met. So above this point, the locals carved the enormous statue of Buddha to pray to him to placate the whirlpool. Whether due to Buddha's pleasure or the fact that the locals threw tonnes of rock into the river below the statue as they carved, the river is nowadays calm. We took a ferry ride to view this remarkable site.



Rosemary and Margaret viewing the stone Buddha.



The giant stone Buddha of Leshan.

After lunch at a hotel in Leshan we drove to Huang Long, a restored historic old town, for a walk around and `ice cream`, and then returned to Chengdu for our overnight stay.



Marrilyn, Barbara and Russell watching the noodle maker. Resting with an icecream under the tree.

**Saturday, 4 September 2010**  
**Chengdu to Guilin**

In the morning we visited the famous Panda Reserve, situated 10km outside of the city. The Reserve includes a protected wilderness and breeding area, as well as a museum and research facility.



What perfect timing for photos, lots of pandas about!

Up close and active, a terrific opportunity.

We toured the grounds and saw some of the animals up close. We were very fortunate to see three baby pandas, only just born, in the nursery. Unfortunately we were not allowed to take photos of these.



He's just too cute resting in the tree!

Rosemary, Barbara and John delighted by the pandas.

After a visit to the panda museum and gift shop we visited the Shu Brocade silk factory for lunch and tour.



Learning about the silkworm and its handiwork.



Watching weaving of silk on the loom.

From there we visited the Old Town area for an early dinner and look around before going to the airport for

our 8PM flight to Guilin.



Pat, Julie and Helen comparing their market buys.



Shirley's impressed with Tom's caricature.

Upon arrival in Guilin we transferred to the Guilin Universal Hotel. Guilin was founded in the Qin Dynasty and with the building of the Ling Canal became a major trading town. Nowadays it is renowned for the beauty of the unique mountains which fringe this small city.

**Sunday, 5 September 2010**  
**Li River and Yangshuo**

Today we took overnight bags and travelled to the town of Yangshuo by cruising down the Li River. Our boat journey took us past tranquil farming and fishing scenes as well as picturesque villages. The main attraction however is the stunning limestone karsts that tower above the river creating a magical landscape of mountains and water. The unique and natural beauty of this region has for centuries been an inspiration to Chinese artists and poets alike.



Congregating on the viewing deck for sight-seeing.



Shirley, Julie and Jenny taking in the amazing karsts.



Cormorant fishing on the Li River.



View down the Li River of the mountains.



This famous view of the mountain range and Li River is depicted on the Chinese ¥20 yuan bank note. The local sellers are surprisingly very enterprising, appearing when least expected. This one climbed on board from his bamboo craft and tried selling through the window to Ros and Lorraine.



Barry and Barbara.



Rosemary watching out for traders.



Lynette and Ros are surprised!

Yangshuo is set in the lush green rice paddies of southern China and surrounded by meandering river ways and limestone peaks, providing an interesting contrast to the big Chinese cities we had just travelled from. We checked into the New Century Hotel and spent the afternoon walking the cobblestone streets and shopping at the street markets. Street market peddlers were everywhere. Many bargains were to be had.

After dinner and birthday celebration for Margaret and Barbara in the hotel we experienced the marvelous sound and light show with a cast of approx. 600 locals and which is played out on the river with the illuminated spectacular mountains as a backdrop.



Frank presents Barbara and Margaret with their cake.



Street peddlers gathered wherever we went.

**Monday, 6 September 2010**  
**Yangshuo to Guilin**

This morning we visited a nearby farmer's home and rice paddy field. Then on to the Reed Flute Caves and Mt. Deicai. The dramatic limestone caves are so named because of clumps of slender reed formations which the locals used to make musical instruments. The caves were used during the 1930's as an air raid shelter. We then returned to Guilin and checked back into our hotel. At night we watched cormorant fishing on the river.

**Tuesday, 7 September 2010**  
**Guilin to Shanghai - Suzhou**

This morning boarded our flight to Shanghai. Upon arrival in Shanghai we transferred to the charming city of Suzhou, known as the 'Venice of the East'. The development currently underway in Shanghai has to be seen to be believed. Tower cranes and piling rigs around the skyline. After a 1.5hr trip we checked into the New Century Hotel, and after dinner wandered around the city mall.

**Wednesday, 8 September 2010**  
**Suzhou to Shanghai**

Acclaimed throughout Chinese history as one of the most cultured cities in the land, the completion of the Grand Canal (from Beijing to Shanghai) during the 12th Century meant a boom for the trade of silk and timbers through Suzhou and a reputation for silk weaving. The prosperity attracted scholars and artists, many of whom built their own residences here - exquisite landscaped gardens that are celebrated for their use of space and proportion. This morning we visited the Master of the Nets Garden with Ming style furnishings and architecture then we viewed the delicate art of double sided embroidery, learnt about the process of silk extraction and spinning at a local spinning mill.



David and Lynette having a rest in the garden.



Crossing the bridge attracted the goldfish.



Frank telling us about the Gardens and architecture.



Rosemary in the view of the guardian `Dragon` .



John, Barbara, Margaret and Lynette resting.



Watching the silk cocoon washing and spinning.

Later we enjoyed a cruise on a working section of the one thousand year old Grand Canal and then after lunch visited the Humble Administrators Garden.



View under a bridge on the Grand Canal.



David and Jenny and Pam waving `Ahoy` from the ferry boat.



Probus passengers on the ferry boat on the Grand Canal.



View on the Grand Canal, Suzhou.

We then returned to Shanghai and checked into the Ramada Zhabei Hotel.

Once known as the "Pearl of the Orient", Shanghai today has emerged again as one of Asia's most influential cities. Before the communists arrived in 1949, Shanghai was a city of European-style mansions and the most important trading port in Asia. Communism brought about radical reconstruction of society, silencing all western and outside influences in its path. During the height of the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai became a city of hatred and spite as families and friends turned on each other - a story famously recounted in Nien Chang's 'Life and Death in Shanghai'. These days it is a buzzing contemporary metropolis with history, style and vibrancy.

**Thursday, 9 September 2010**  
**Shanghai**

This morning our sightseeing begins at the historical riverfront area known as the Bund. Recognised as Shanghai's former 'Wall Street', the Bund is home to an impressive collection of buildings, from the early trade houses of the 1850s to the glamorous Art Deco modernism of the 1920's.



View of the modern face of Shanghai seen from the Bund.



Viewing the city sights from the Bund in the sunshine.



Pam, Shirley, Rosemary and Julie posing.



View from the top of the Jin Mao Building.



The Great Nanpu Bridge and spiral approach ramp.

We then crossed the river to the Pudong side for lunch on a floating restaurant with beautiful views across the river. After lunch we visited the 88 storey Jin Mao building for a 45 second lift to the viewing area, great weather, great views. Later we bussed out to the Maglev Fast Train for a 7 minute ride (430 km/hr) to the airport and back (whew!!!). Afterwards, a visit to see the fine arts at the Shanghai Museum was worthwhile.

For dinner we experienced a Mongolian Hot Pot Restaurant. This was very different to the standard Chinese banquet to which we had become accustomed, having to cook the meal ourselves on the table!



A Mongolian Hot Pot setting – a challenge.



Rene and Lynette pondering how to cook the meal!

After dinner we drove back to the waterfront for an evening Huangpu River Cruise to see the city lights.



The Old City lit up.



The modern Pudong side district lights.

**Friday, 10 September 2010**  
**Shanghai**

In the morning we took a relaxing walk through moon gates and latticed pavilions in the peaceful Yu Garden. From here we walked to the Old Town (Yuan Bazaar) where very busy and crowded cobbled streets are lined with traditional shops selling herbal medicines, handicrafts, Chinese tea and a variety of tantalizing snacks. For lunch we dined at a Mongolian BBQ restaurant. It was fascinating watching the skillful Chinese chefs cooking/tossing/turning/plating the hot food.



Mongolian BBQ cooking



Watching the chefs in their kitchen.

After lunch we drove to Xintiandi, situated within the former French concession zone. Xintiandi was a dilapidated strip of 'shikumen' buildings until a decade ago, when the film star Jackie Chan purchased and restored them. Like the 'hutong' areas of Beijing, the 'shikumen' is a style of housing unique to this city, being designed for the many Chinese workers flooding the city in the early 1900s. The buildings are a cross between the English terrace and the traditional Chinese courtyard houses. It has become very popular place for Chinese 'yuppies' to reside. This evening was our 'farewell' dinner. It was hard to believe that we had finally come to the end of our 3 week trip to China.



Our evening dinner at the `10000 Happiness Restaurant` was our farewell celebration.

**Saturday, 11 September 2010**  
**Depart Shanghai - Home**

We enjoyed the morning at our leisure wandering the local streets around the hotel. The hotel graciously provided a delicious roast dinner for us for lunch. What a very pleasant surprise and very much appreciated by all. We then transferred to the Pudong international airport for our homeward flight via Sydney and arrived home in Melbourne around midday Sunday morning on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

What a fantastic experience we have had in China thanks to Wendy Wu Tours and in particular our Chinese national guide, Frank. We cannot speak more highly of him. He attended to all our needs and ran the tour without one hitch all with a wonderful sense of humour. (Remember the colossal traffic jam in Chengdu where a taxi driver, who was parked blocking the road and cleaning his teeth, gave our driver a classic `thumbs up`! Frank said he was `saying hello`!) Nothing was too much trouble for him. Thank you Frank. Good luck to you in the future and `come on down to Oz` to visit sometime.



Frank wishing to be a `master coach captain`



Frank and the Olympic mascot `Haibao`

**A Few Other Photos of Interest:**

Our local tour and business' guides and street market peddlers made local city tours very interesting.



Mark `the banker` in Beijing.



Guide in The Shu Brocade silk factory in Chengdu.



Typical friendly waitresses.



Our singing guide at Shennong Stream.

A few of the locals too:



Locals liked photographing us or with us.



Sometimes the peddlers got a bit too pushy!



~ Babies and kids ~ are always cute and charming!



All hands to the lawn mower.



Working bicycles are still very prevalent.

Some funny signs seen:





And only very occasionally some of us got a little bit tired, pleasant dreams!



Wherever we went, our cameras were always ready.

WENDY WU TOURS MAGNIFICENT CHINA TOUR

## The Trip of a Lifetime.

A very special thank you also to Maureen and Barbara for planning our trip away.