

Rewi Alley Youth Tour, 2017

Five diary entries and a trip summary from delegate Brooke Rosa Maddison



20/7/17 - Xi'an

We arrived in Xi'an yesterday. We have done so much travelling since we arrived in China on the 17th. That was three days ago! So far, we have been to Shanghai and Wuhan and now we are visiting our third city, Xi'an. It's been incredible so far and passed extremely quickly but we have visited some pretty cool places and learned a lot about Alley's legacy. We have been on two high-speed trains travelling at speeds up to 300km/h!! We have also visited places where Alley has left his mark and we have walked in his footsteps, which is a pretty neat experience as well as very interesting. This man knew some pretty important people and families including Soong Ching Ling's family that seems quite impressive to me, especially for a foreigner in China during the early days.



It has been great to learn some Mandarin. So far, I know the numbers, some colours, place names, some foods and have a Chinese name!! I love the challenge of learning a new language and hope to continue to learn Chinese somehow. It is a little difficult in New Zealand to learn the language as there are no available Mandarin/Chinese classes in my school. However, I will keep an open mind and make the most of any opportunities that will help me to improve my Chinese.

It was an early start this morning. Our first stop was the Terracotta Warriors because we couldn't visit Xi'an without stopping to have a peek at this epic tourist attraction. It was absolutely amazing and I would definitely recommend going. I think China has some amazing history including fascinating stories and beautiful ancient relics. The Terracotta Warriors were just another example for me of China's rich history and they told another fascinating story of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang Di. It was a great experience for me and one that I will never forget. I think that after reflecting on this trip, the visit to the Terracotta Warriors was one of my most memorable events.

After lunch we took the bus to visit a retired Cave Factory near Baoji. It was extremely hot here, the place was like a sun-trap, and then they made us take a big group photo which always takes at least 15 mins to organise! Well I'm pretty sure I almost died of heat stroke. But I think it was all worth it, because the caves were amazing and beautifully cool inside which was a huge bonus. We met a whole group of people who all held so much respect for Rewi Alley and his work. We also met a man involved in the Gung Ho movement, who was a dedicated researcher of the work and legacy of Rewi Alley. He shared with us the caves and a story that the building of the caves project was supported by Rewi Alley in the Second World War [[Second Sino-Japanese War](#)], when the Japanese were bombing China. Alley helped with the designs and plans for the caves. These consisted of many tunnels built to house a textiles factory which produced clothing for the soldiers at war. The cave was built to protect the business from the bombings. It was really interesting to venture into the caves and be told about their history. I would imagine this was a very large operation during this time as the caves would have been expensive to build.

The caves stretched over vast distances, I cannot begin to imagine how many people the production line employed and how busy it would have been to have the tunnels filled with machinery and equipment for the manufacturing of the various goods being produced. We learned that working conditions were tough (well this might be a bit of an understatement) but with the help of the Gung Ho movement, Alley managed to fight for the rights of the workers and get their shift hours reduced. What also amazes me is the labour force that China had and probably still has. It must have been an epic job to build all those tunnels during a time when the world was lacking in technology, yet we learned that it didn't take that long at all to build the caves and get the factory running again.

It amazes me how fast China manages to build things and change the environment: a few weeks ago there was a park and now in its place stands a 30-storey building! It's crazy how fast things change. In NZ it would take at least a year, whereas in China it takes just a few weeks.

Overall the cave factory was very interesting to visit and was a good learning experience for me. For dinner we visited an old folks home. The residents were all extremely happy to see us - it was quite heart-warming. However, it did get a little too much, when we walked through the doors and were swamped by a crowd of people wanting to shake our hands and take pictures. I felt I had done nothing to be given such attention, no act of kindness or thoughtful deed that these people knew about anyway. It was a little too much for me. But I continued to smile and hope that I had made these people happy by just meeting them. The food we were served for dinner at the small charity restaurant on the premises was beautiful! It was all fruit and vegetables but it was seriously delicious!!! After dinner we continued on our journey after singing some songs as a thank you to the cooks and giving them our warmest thanks. We jumped back in the bus and took a scenic route over the Qin Ling Mountains to Baoji, where we stayed the night. Before bed a small group of us took a stroll along the water front. Thank goodness it was cooler here! The lights from the city were beautiful, but unfortunately the river was not flowing freely, Baoji must be undergoing some

renovations, who knows. In the next few weeks there might be a giant fountain in the middle of the flowing river, just more evidence to me of China's dynamic industrial projects.



21/7/17

This morning we travelled back over the mountains to Fengxian where we spent a few more hours walking in the footsteps of Rewi Alley and George Hogg. We visited a place where the pair called home from 1938-1944. It was a quaint little place, small and basic, but with everything you would need. The two also set up a school nearby and were involved with the rest home we visited yesterday. I enjoyed visiting this historic site and taking pictures. The setting was very peaceful and it genuinely seemed like a pleasant place to live. While we were there we also signed a book to say that we had been there. Next we visited a remembrance hall where the Rewi Alley story decorated the walls. It's amazing to see the respect some Chinese have for this man. Alley had an invincible passion for China and the Chinese. I am beginning to see that now. He also had an incredible work ethic and a strong drive. He did so many things to help China and her people. He was so selfless. These qualities are why I admire Alley and I think these values are valuable and would benefit me in my own life. There are definite lessons we can learn from Alley and his life. Next we visited the former residence of the Gung Ho Primary School (1939-1945) that Alley and Hogg were involved with during their time in Fengxian. The Gung Ho movement was similar to a charity group, performing acts, such as setting up co-operatives and associated schools to benefit the people of China during the war with the Japanese. It was inspiring to see that groups like this were dedicated to performing acts that would benefit the people during such hard times. After this it was back on the bus to begin our travel to Shandan. Before we left we bought some peaches, and let me just say, they were delicious!!! We arrived in Shandan in the late evening, checked into our hotel and, after dinner, we practically went straight to sleep. So tired!!!!



22/7/17

Shandan was like Alley's second home according to these people. This morning we visited a museum full of so many cultural relics donated to the city by Alley before he died. On the premises there was also a library where Alley had donated many books that he owned. The place was full of many treasures. Apparently they were all very valuable! I can understand now that Alley must have loved and trusted this place and the people to leave all his treasures here. Some of the pieces of art donated by Rewi were beautiful. This place reminded me of the true generosity Alley possessed. We then visited the gravesite of Rewi Alley and George Hogg. It was nice to see them remembered together side by side. The sight was very extravagant, almost fit for a king. It showed me the true extent of the respect and love the people of Shandan have for these two men. In some ways it makes me proud to be a Kiwi and to know that I grew up in the same country as such a celebrated and respected man. We showed our respects by performing a song and a small ceremony. It was lovely. After this we journeyed down the road to visit the Bailie School [now a technical college] originally set up as a school by Rewi and Hogg. Hogg was the original headmaster of the school where many orphans were enrolled. One of the teachers on our trip was a lecturer at the university, teaching her students Chinese. It was great to see how proud she was of her school and thankful to Rewi and George. After a filling lunch, we hopped back in the bus and drove out into the countryside to visit a local nature reserve. The scenery was beautiful and I can safely say we walked off our lunch!! Luckily it was mostly downhill but there were a lot of stairs!!! It was definitely worth it though as the forest was so peaceful and beautiful and strolling along beside the river was very lovely. I whole-heartedly enjoyed the walk and dinner afterwards at a small local farmer's restaurant tasted so good.. The food was extremely fresh and some of the dishes were beautiful. It was a really good meal. Had an extremely good sleep!!!!

23/7/17

Starting to get a cold I think, oh dear. At least it's a bit cooler today because it's raining. We went to visit the sleeping Buddha this morning. It was so big!!! We had an English-speaking guide, which was great. We took a tour of some ancient temples and saw the sleeping Buddha statue. It was pretty amazing, though I think I would have enjoyed it more if I weren't feeling so under the weather. I can't remember if we had any other activities today but we did catch a train to Lanzhou in the afternoon. The train rides are good because it gives me time to catch up with my diary and

good teacher and I think our Chinese is improving. It's also great because before the train rides we buy lots of snacks. Its great fun to try all the different and random Chinese snack foods! We arrived in Lanzhou and checked into our hotel. We then went out to eat street food for dinner. This was a great experience and we tried some really delicious food! Finally it's bedtime!



24/7/17

Last night was the worst I had felt with this cold and I had a temperature that reached 39⁰C! But it wasn't too bad and by morning I was feeling a lot better! However, my voice was still not so great and we had to share our speeches today!!!! ☹️. I had the chance to stay in bed this morning which was extremely tempting but I didn't want to miss out on anything and I was feeling a bit better, so I left the hotel with the others in fear of feeling guilty and missing out on the day's activities. We took the bus to Bailie Square. I chose to stay in the bus and take a few more minutes rest. The delegation visited the square, took photos and made their way on foot to visit the Bailie University campus. I joined the tour here and we took a stroll around the university. The campus had many tributes set up in honor of Alley and Hogg, including statues and a small exhibition room. Again I was impressed by the respect shown by the Chinese for these two individuals and also the dedication and perseverance to remember and keep their legacy alive. I feel it's quite embarrassing that a lot of Kiwis have never heard of Rewi Alley, and I think he should be better known in NZ. A good extension of this delegation/ trip would be to visit the places in NZ that are significant to Rewi, including the original farm he bought with a friend after the First World War. I think this would be a good experience to link the two countries together and complete the journey of following in Alley's footsteps, because we have been to so many places in China where Rewi had lived and done great work but the link to his life in NZ is non-existent for me. After our small tour it was time for the closing ceremony. We all prepared speeches and shared them. We also heard from our trip leaders and Chinese students. The feedback from this trip was very positive and it sounded like everyone had had a great time! I know I definitely did!! We also heard from a Canadian man, however I have forgotten what his connection to the group was [[Tim Zachernuk worked with Liu Guozhong on NZCFS project developing co-operatives in NW China](#)] but he was an excellent speaker and made some interesting points on China's reputation in the media. It was very thought provoking. After the meeting we had lunch and held a little party. We students did some singing and played games - it was a good time. After lunch it was time to catch the train from Lanzhou to Beijing. What a ride! I actually enjoyed the train, once we managed to fit our bags on the train and get settled in our bunks.

We made some new friends with our neighbours and shared stories about our different lives. Overall I enjoyed the train ride and the time passed by quite quickly for me. Although I can safely say I will not miss the toilets on that train!!!

For the rest of our time in China we visited Beijing: we went to many tourist attractions, did some shopping and stayed in a beautiful hotel and, most importantly, ate some good food, including Peking duck in Peking - YUM!!! It was an amazing trip and I definitely loved our time in Beijing - being typical tourists. I also think I enjoyed our time in Beijing because we had more free time and we got to sleep in!! Visiting the Great Wall of China was the best tourist attraction in Beijing, in my opinion: it was in such a beautiful setting, but the stairs almost killed me, ha ha ha! But it was definitely worth the struggle- just for the pictures and to say that I climbed the Great Wall.

Summary

This trip was a great experience for me and I am so glad that I went. I have been to China once before, last year in April. However, these two trips just don't compare. I loved both experiences but both trips were extremely different: in April we stayed with home-stays and were based in Nanchang. But this time we travelled so much and met so many different people. Also I enjoyed this trip because I learnt so much about such an important man who I had heard little of. Our trip leader, who went with us last year, often referred to Alley but I never knew who he was or what he had done. After coming on this trip, however, I now know so much more about Alley and the work that he did in China and I feel so privileged because of this. The respect the Chinese have for Alley is something that we Kiwis should adopt. Now that I know more about this man I can communicate my ideas with others and share Alley's history with others, keeping his legacy alive in New Zealand. In NZ there is a society called the New Zealand China Friendship Society [founded by Rewi Alley, among others]. They organized this trip for me and the other six Kiwi students. I hope to keep involved with the society as Rewi Alley is a key model for society and his values and legacy have provided foundations for the society. So now I know more about Rewi Alley I can resonate with the NZCFS ideas and get involved with the society.

There were so many highlights for me on this trip: one major one would be meeting the other students on the trip - Chinese and Kiwis alike. I made so many new friendships that I will cherish and hope to grow them. I love meeting new people and making friendships - I feel it is very valuable. Hopefully I will see the other Kiwi students around the place back in New Zealand, because NZ is such a small place. I loved Beijing and getting the chance to be a real tourist. But I also found the cave factory fascinating!

I don't think I could make any improvements to the trip, apart from reserving more time for sleeping!