



NZ China Friendship Soc.
Hibiscus Coast Branch

Friends News

朋友們消息

péng yǒu men xiǎo xī

June 2008



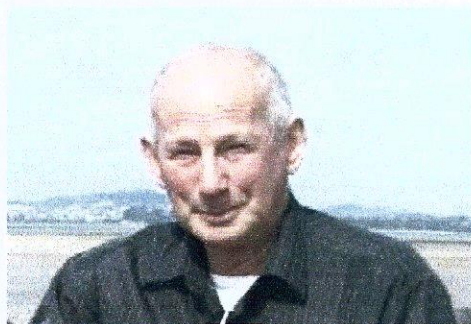
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Erratum:

Please note that in the report on Shane Jones' talk, the name of Rodney Assistant Mayor, John Kirikiri, was misspelt. The editor wishes to apologise for this.

At our last meeting, Thursday, Eric Dittmer gave us a very interesting account of his latest trip to China, 13 April 2008.

The following is Eric's report.



"This trip was to assist a friend of mine to recruit students to study English and Business Studies at his Victoria Institute of New Zealand, in Auckland.

I had a long trip from NZ to Hong Kong, with a 3-hour layover there. I then caught the Dragon Air flight to Beijing followed by a one and a half hour drive to the hotel. By the time I got to bed, I had been on the go for 24 hours so I was pleased to hit the sack even though it was a rough 2-star

hotel.

The next morning I had a slow and cold shower, a quick Chinese breakfast of what I am sure it was last night's leftovers of cold cabbage, greasy onions, and some things that you didn't want to ask what they were! I then spent 8 hours on a slow, hard-seated, and crowded train to [Handan](#). There I met up with the guys who had been in Auckland 3 weeks before looking for a school for their children and also for a house so that one of the parents could live in and look after the children. By this time, I had picked up a head cold and sore throat and felt really awful. I arrived late in the evening at the hotel, and the first seminar that night, with a dribbly runny nose and tickly throat and could not stop coughing

During the next 2 days, we had about 6 seminars at schools and universities and met with the Vice Mayor of Handan. We spoke with him about Handan joining with Rodney District in a Sister City agreement, and we exchanged information on this subject. During my next visit I will progress these talks.

Everywhere we went the locals regarded us as a photo opportunity - I have never before had so many photos taken of me. In fact, I'm beginning to like it! We were also interviewed by CNN TV and both provincial and local newspapers - we made front page & 6 o'clock news. They are also very interested in a Sister City in New Zealand and the people who had been to NZ expressed great interest in buying a house in Auckland.

At every lunch and dinner, we were received as guests and I managed to avoid most of the ~~rice wine~~ (Chinese rice wine) and kampai (the Chinese way of drinking and means 'Bottoms Up'). I stuck to wine and beer and told them I was on antibiotics. Unfortunately, they didn't believe me and tried to pour it down me, but I just told them straight – "no go"!

I think we did very well at the seminars and convinced quite a number to come to New Zealand but apparently the NZ Immigration Service in Beijing is not too helpful. We arranged a meeting with them to persuade them to be a bit more understanding. Four years ago more than 24,000 students came to New Zealand. Last year there were only 5,000. In my opinion, Helen and Winston are not helping the NZ educational economy at all.

Handan is an old city with lots of old, old buildings in poor condition and the pollution must be seen to be believed. It was bloody awful, in fact. It was hard to breathe and made your throat sore and full of phlegm. No wonder they cough and spit - I was doing it too!

You cannot believe the new construction that is going on. Everywhere they are building factories, apartments and housing. We were driving to a seminar late one afternoon and I saw a few blocks of apartments being built. I began to count them - 30 blocks, 6-8 apartments to a floor and 25 storeys high, which amounts to about 4500 apartments. But wait for it... Another 10 kilometres down the road was another development of about 50 blocks, 25-30 storeys high!

When I arrived in Beijing, we landed at the old airport and the plane had to taxi to the new part. It took us more than 30 minutes to get there. Beijing airport is huge. But it is also very efficient and puts Auckland airport to shame. I didn't get any photos but will get them next time.

We went next to another small city for several seminars, and then on to ~~Tianjin~~ - the main port for Beijing and the mid North East. About 12 million people live there it is a big ugly old industrial city with pollution down to 15-20 meters above your head. And it rained the whole time we were there. We received a great response from students and parents at the 5-6 seminars there. We intend to follow up these in the next few days. We also spoke at the Tianjin Normal University, which has just been built and is located outside of the city, about 1 hour away. It is a huge area with its own shops and infrastructure. Its architecture is based on a old Roman theme with huge columns and Stonehenge-type structures everywhere. It can be measured in square kilometres, it would have been at least 5-10 kilometres in each direction. Nobody rode bikes; they used cars and buses because otherwise it would take too long to get around.

We then came to what for me was the most interesting part of the trip and somewhere I have always wanted to go. This was Mongolia [Editor's note: ~~Mongolia~~ is independent from the PRC...] - a place that conjures up Mongolian horses being ridden at breakneck speed by wild-looking tribesmen rounding up sheep and cattle

Unfortunately, it was not quite like that, as we only visited ~~Inner Mongolia~~. However, it was still a very interesting place to go. We left by train from Beijing on a 12-hour train trip. By now, we had got used to travelling by train so had a few of the necessities of life to take with us. We did find, though, that you can buy that awful Chinese Rice Wine on the train. We, however, had something better - some good New Zealand red wine. That kept our spirits up, as it was going to be colder up there (in Inner Mongolia) than in Beijing

The train is divided up into 'hard seats' and 'soft seats'. 'Hard' sleepers housed 6-8 people per unit, and 'soft' sleepers, 4 per unit. It was soft sleeper for us, so it was not a bad journey. I woke at daylight (about 6 a.m.) to watch the countryside and villages go by. For me, as a former farmer, it was a real eye opener. They still plough and cultivate most of the land with a horse or mule, or, if they are lucky, a small garden-type tractor. The land we went through, and that was for more than 3 hours, was flat as far as the eye could see. It appeared to go on for ever, and was completely cultivated with rice and wheat. Around the Beijing area, the crops were about 300mm high and

growing well. However, in Inner Mongolia, because it was so much further north, the spring would be about a month later.

This was a real eye-opener as so much of the work in the fields, such as making border dykes for the rice, was done by hand by a man with a shovel or a hoe. Sometimes you could see at a glance maybe 500 hectares, and there was this one man and his hoe working alone. It must be very demoralising to know that tomorrow, and lots of tomorrows, you will be out there doing that job

Baotou was a fairly modern city with very wide streets and almost no traffic. It was almost freezing when we arrived and we were taken for breakfast. This was actually the best breakfast on the trip - a big bowl of rice porridge covered with lumps of chocolate - a good way to warm up

I had a very interesting morning at a private English Language school, and spent about 2 hours talking with the students and telling them about New Zealand as they know little about it. I had taken a New Zealand flag with me to give away somewhere and so told them that I would give it to the headmaster later that day. As per usual, we went for a banquet dinner and the headmaster reminded me about 6 times “ don’t forget to give your flag ‘ and I did. So they will remember that visit.

During the course of our journey, I was asked many times if could I help them find English teachers to come and help them learn English, so I am starting a project to send teachers and speakers of good English to China. And, yes, they did ask me to stay and teach!

A few days after I arrived home our neighbour asked me if I could pay an account for her at an ANZ bank so I happened to be going past a bank at the far end of Dominion Road and so went in to pay this for her and a young Asian lady served me and a conversation started up to the effect that I had just returned from China. When I told her I had gone as far as Baotou in Mongolia, well, her eyes lit up with disbelief and she questioned me several times as whether I was telling the truth and then she told me that Baotou was her home town and she was so happy to have met someone that had been there. So now I have a new found friend!

The highlight of the trip was our invitation to a Mongolian Traditional Feast. When the feast started and all the entertainers came in playing their music and singing their national songs, and because I was the oldest, and therefore the guest of honour, I was presented with several silk scarves. These were similar to those the Tibetans used to give Sir Ed - it was quite an emotional moment for me.

I was then escorted table by 2 ladies to the head of the table to carve the lamb, which had been brought in on a huge silver platter over a flaming gas fire. I



was presented with a huge bowl (about 1 litre) of Maotai to be drunk, of course all in one go - no sips allowed! After that I was given a huge curved dagger to ceremonially carve the lamb - something I will remember for the rest of my life.

Then it was back to the feasting, singing and dancing, and, of course, many toasts from many happy and interesting people.

After several more seminars, it was another 12-hour train journey back to Tianjin to meet with several agents and to speak to a group of parents about their children coming to study in NZ. One of the disturbing reports I heard, was that much of the negative news, especially related to crimes of rape, murder and the gang problems which happen in NZ, get back to China very quickly with obvious effects.

In counterbalance, and this was something that struck me throughout my journey, was that parents would climb over broken glass to give their children the best education they could possibly afford.

Then it was back to Beijing airport and the flight back to Hong Kong for a short shopping stopover, then the overnight flight back to Auckland.

This journey was very interesting and educational for me. The history of some 5000 years does take a bit to get your head around, and hopefully I can continue my journeys through China.

Report on the NZ – China Friendship Society National Conference, Masterton, Friday 16– Sunday 18 May 2008, by Eric Dittmer.

Clarice and I drove to Masterton on the Friday to attend the conference

I attended the Executive Meeting at 3 pm with approximately 20 other representatives from branches around the country. Eric Livingstone was acting President as Margaret Cooper was still too sick to travel

Items of interest

- ❖ It was decided to 'bring' Branch Presidents to conferences i.e. payment of their subscription out of National budget [There was some discussion as to how many should attend]
- ❖ Report on Chinese Language Foundation
- ❖ The Society Website is to be upgraded
- ❖ Life Membership was awarded to Mary Gray
- ❖ NZ Education Trust [no reports presented]
- ❖ Capitation fee: It was agreed that this be raised to \$6-00 (but will not be due 'til 2010
- ❖ Discussion on National Executive as to how many meetings per year and who should attend and what payments should be made
- ❖ Branch reports to be accepted but not read in full
- ❖ Distinguished Service Award was made to Don Simpson and Ken Blain
- ❖ Tour Report was made in committee [Eric Dittmer, John Meldrum, Tom Mills Trevor Linyard, to report back to next Executive Meeting re. policy for all tours [national & branch]
- ❖ Society gets 5% gross from Tours
- ❖ Charities Commission: We must apply as a Group Registration, i.e. Branches should not apply independently
- ❖ 1 Minutes silence was held for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake
- ❖ An Appeal account is to be opened
- ❖ Suggestion that we hold regional meetings
- ❖ Projects to have more emphasis at conferences
- ❖ Followed by reports from Sally Russell
- ❖ Tour Committee Report. It was agreed that we proceed with the 2008 tour as planned with Tom & John to check out some hotels
- ❖ Doubt as to whether the agent will do 2009 tour, but, if not, Society will do
- ❖ Eric Dittmer has been asked to Guide the 2009 tour
- ❖ Eric was asked that if Hibiscus Coast Branch would put his name forward for the Prominent Persons Tour 2008
- ❖ Hibiscus Coast Branch donated \$100 to the Sichuan Earthquake Appeal
- ❖ Madam Li Xiaolin to be the next President of the Chinese Peoples Friendship Associationn with Foreign Countries [Youxie]
- ❖ Leader of the Liaoning Delegation spoke to the conference as did guest from Changchun
- ❖ Ambassador Zhang Yuanyuan spoke regarding the ties between our 2 countries, and the earthquake
- ❖ George Andrews showed his video and spoke on the making of it [by Maori students' visit to China] – an excellent project
- ❖ George Andrews to investigate the possibility of a Telethon for earthquake victims

It was a very good conference, but we have no qualms that Hibiscus Coast Branch will host an excellent conference in 2009
