

THE ROAD FROM MANDALAY TO YUNNAN & TIBET

Report on the Travellers Club Presentation given by Colin Sale on Sunday 18 May, 2014

Colin experimented with a new style of presentation – he had his slides programmed to appear on the screen for 12 seconds, with most having self-explanatory captions. Although he still spoke about the pictures displayed, this system prevented him from running over-time and he was able to complete the presentation in exactly 60 minutes. The presentation as a whole was very well received by the 30+ people present. The program set out to display what the people on the tour saw and experienced on his 2012 Study Tour of the region, beginning with the journey out of Myanmar on the historic trade route to China from Mandalay.



Manufactured goods from China being exported down the Old Burma Road

Travelling from Mandalay to the border, we saw some of the present-day manufactured goods being exported from China – men bringing out new motor-bikes, by riding one and carrying two others strapped to the backs of them - parts in crates for reassembly later. This old “Burma Road” passed through the former British Hill-station of *Maymyo* (or *Pyin Oo Lwin*) famous for its Botanical Gardens; with a brief stop here, the group was given the opportunity to travel a section of the trade route’s historic railway and experience crossing the famous steel bridge (the *Goitek Viaduct*), built in 1901 over a deep gorge. It was the world's second highest steel bridge in its day, with steel pylons 100 metres high.



Maymyo Botanical gardens and the engineering wonder – the high 113-year-old steel bridge

We were shown where the group entered the Yunnan Province of China through the twin cities of Ruili and Muse. Yunnan has 25 Ethnic Minority Groups – a greater proportion of non-Chinese people than any other province except Tibet; 15 of these are only found here (eg *Bai, Dai, Naxi*), We are first taken through the delightful small historic town of *Heshun*, and then to the sights of the adjacent rebuilt large city of *Tengchung* where 9000 people lost their lives trying to recapture the city from the Japanese in World War II – we see the memorial cemetery with 3,500 graves on a hill built out of the city’s rubble, one of the largest geothermal areas in the country, and a 17th century *Taoist Temple* perched on a mountain-top and reached part-way by cable car.



The historic small town of Heshun.

Spa baths in the geothermal area at Tenchung

On the way to the next main ethnic centre in Yunnan, we see where the tour group crossed two of the world's biggest rivers in deep valleys within the mountains – the Salween and Mekong. In the “Valley of Eternal Spring” on the fertile surrounds of *Lake Erhai* with a population of 3.5 million, almost all *Bai* and *Dai*, we see the picturesque ancient *City of Dali*, inside walls 2km long on each of its 4 sides, with spectacular traditional gates and central bell tower, and with most streets for pedestrians only. We see them joining a Bai family who still use cormorants to help them catch fish in the traditional way on the lake, enjoying lunch in the home of a typical *Bai* family, and exploring the park of the *Three Pagodas* built in the 8th and 9th centuries.



Mekong River flowing through Yunnan

Old Dali City

Cormorant fishing

Three Pagodas Park

Continuing on through Yunnan, we see them exploring the old town of *Xinhua*, home of *Bai* traditional silver craftsmen, and then the ancient *City of Lijiang*, belonging to ethnic *Naxi* or *Nashi*; this is another place for pedestrians only, and we see it with narrow cobbled streets, flowing canals of clear water, stone bridges, and traditional old wooden 2-storey houses with uniformly grey-tiled roofs. In the district, we see group visiting the *Jade Spring Park* (but with dry lakes because of a current drought), the *Nashi Folk Museum*, two traditional mountain villages of the *Nashi*, and the *Jade Mountain National Park* with its 12 peaks over 5,000 metres; it was here that they enjoyed another mountain cable car trip up to alpine meadows and an ancient Buddhist monastery at 3,700 m.



The Silver town, Xinhua.



Old Lijiang.



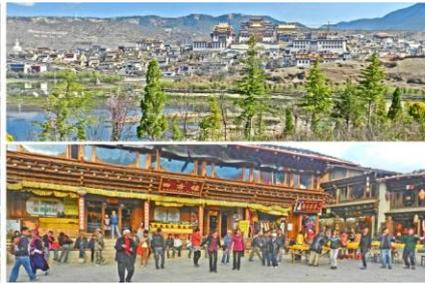
Jade Mountain National Park with its ancient Buddhist monastery.

Further north from Lijiang, we saw where the group came to the third of the three great rivers in Yunnan, the Yangtze, and where it makes a famous “bend”, changing from flowing south like the other two rivers, to flowing east to the Pacific. This bend was made famous by Mao Zedong’s *Red Army’s Long March* of 1933-35; here in just one night in October 1934, the local people ferried 18,000 troops across the river at its easiest crossing point. Following the Yangtze down-stream, they viewed the narrowing of the river’s valley to become the famous *Tiger-Leaping Gorge* in which the river becomes a set of raging rapids. Climbing over more mountains, they reached the last of the centres visited in Yunnan – *Dzhongdian* which had its name officially changed in 2002 to *Shangri-la*. Here, the predominant ethnic group is Tibetan, and its huge *Songzanlin Buddhist Monastery* looks like a close relative of Lhasa’s *Potala Palace*. Besides viewing

where the group explored the Monastery and the quaint narrow streets of the Old City, we see where they enjoyed *Pudacua National Park* and the grassland basins grazing yaks in the surroundings.



Yangtze River in its Tiger Leaping Gorge



Shangri-la's Songzanlin Buddhist Monastery and Old City Square



Grassland basin grazing yaks in Pudacua National Park

From Lijiang they had a spectacular flight to Lhasa, the centre of Tibet. Besides being shown the sights of that city - the Palace, Jokhang Temple, the markets of the Bakhor, two important Monasteries, and the Summer Palace in particular, we also travel with the group on a spectacular journey along the upper Brahmaputra River and over two mountain passes to the cities of Gyantze and Shigatse to be shown the main sights in those centres. We then see the group on the train journey of 42 hours and 20 minutes, from Lhasa to Beijing (1,972 km), the highest railway in the world (up to 5,072m), the conclusion of the Study Tour.



Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple and Bakhor, Lhasa

Views from the Lhasa-Beijing train