

## VIII REPATRIATION

*December 3, 1994*

The bus to Shimian is soon fully packed with standing passengers, large sacks of produce, and several chickens as it travels southward along the highway that parallels the Dadu River. Two young and very attractive Chinese women board the bus and acquaint themselves with Foster. They are just returning from the Hailuoguo “glacier forest” on the east side of Gongga Shan, where a large ice fall and glacier are developed with tourist trails and holiday cabins. In poor English, their tourist literature states that the glacier has surged nearly four miles into the forest over the past 1600 years.

As the bus passes the Tianwan bridge, the Americans note where they crossed the Dadu River two weeks ago to now link the entire trip into a loop around the Great Snowy Mountains.

It is an approximate four hour ride from Luding to Shimian. Upon their return, they walk over to the cafe where they imbibed beers two weeks ago and order more to help Downs revive his constitution. The two ladies Foster met on the bus enter the cafe and join the Americans for conversation and refreshments.

Lingyan Hu, a banker, and Ying Chen, a nurse, from the Kunming region of Yunnan Province, are on holiday enjoying the mountain region of Sichuan as tourists. The current economic conditions that allow the general Chinese populace to engage in tourism must be a first in the history of their civilization. The nurse complains that they are sore from two days of horseback riding. Downs sympathizes and would like to kiss their bruises to make them feel better, but prudently refrains from making the offer.

Ms. Chen is quite aware of the degree of her physical attraction and maintains a countenance which acknowledges the fact, while her compatriot, Ms. Hu, is more affable and jovial. They propose that they accompany the two hikers to the Wusihe train station since it is also their destination for the day, and they are making a subsequent trip to Chengdu.

The four purchase some oranges at the market prior to boarding a bus eastward for the three and a half hour ride to Wusihe Station. There is a half hour layover in Hanyuan.

The return ride to the train station in the company of the attractive young women is pleasant and uneventful. Upon arrival, the hikers immediately

attend the train station ticket window, which consists of an eight-inch square hole in the wood plank wall within a fully packed waiting room, but the office is still closed.

One can imagine the pandemonium when the ticket window finally opens. As it is only 6:30 pm and the train is due to arrive at 8:30 pm, they exit the station to dine at one of the local establishments where they again meet Ms. Hu and Chen for dinner.

The two ladies are very particular about what they will eat, and meticulously inspect the proprietor's cooking utensils, burners, and foodstuffs. They then dictate to the cook precisely what dishes will be served and the manner in which they shall be prepared, while inspecting the cook's hands for cleanliness. The cook looks in bewilderment to the proprietor.

The walls of the restaurant are adorned with black and white poster photographs of American starlets: Lauren Bacall, Ingrid Bergman, and Marilyn Monroe. Inquiring to Ms. Chen whether she can recognize any, and she surprisingly identifies “Manluo.” The result of the ladies' culinary efforts is a very nice meal of three large dishes with rice and beverages, consumed in their charming company.

At 8:00 pm the Americans bid farewell to the ladies whose train north to Chengdu does not arrive until midnight. They enter a now completely empty waiting room to find the ticket window still shut. (Where did all the people vanish to?) Five minutes prior to the train arrival the ticket window snaps open to inform the foreigners that no, a first or second-class ticket cannot be provided to them, for the available seating is unknown. The ticket attendant recommends that the Americans purchase tickets on the train.

Upon the train's arrival, the two hikers attempt to board, but are retained by the conductress who insists upon receiving their tickets. After informing her that they intend to purchase first-class tickets which the station would not sell, the conductress permits them access to the train and instructs them to see the head conductor further toward the rear, who will provide them a sleeping berth if space is available.

Foster remains with the packs while Downs begins his search through the train, which is completely packed back in the third class hard seats, with aisles choked full of people and produce. Families even occupy the cold hinged metal floor space between cars.

The head conductor and his assistant are finally located in the dining car where they tally the day's receipts. Upon meeting them, the American explains his dilemma.

The conductors ask him numerous personal questions such as where he learned his Chinese, where he's been travelling, where he lives (Do they also want to know his shoe size?), and then informs him that because he is a foreigner, the price of a first-class ticket will be twice that for a Chinese.

The foreigner replies that he understands it is not their personal policy but a federal one, and he would gladly pay the inflated price.

The assistant and the conductor confide among themselves before stating something to the effect of simply selling the American the berths at a Chinese price, since he's obviously been in the country long enough to be considered a foreign national. (Not again.) They provide the American pair with first-class tickets for Y350.00 (or the equivalent price that was paid to the truck driver).

The conductress leads the Americans to the last available first class berth, and upon opening the door reveals John Lind, a working colleague and friend of Foster's from Boulder who just happens to be traveling around China with his wife.

This is the final irony. Lind, an aerodynamicist, is assisting the Hong Kong government with their plans to construct a new airport as Hong Kong becomes a member of the People's Republic of China in 1997. It is an ambitious and farfetched design which will require many billions of dollars.

Conversation lasts until 10:30. The hikers are on schedule to Kunming and Hong Kong where they plan to do some Christmas shopping prior to their departure to the United States. As with the entire trip, everything is working, if not smoothly, then at least punctually.

#### **December 4:**

The Linds disembark the train silently at 6:00 am, and by 8:00 am the hikers are up drinking tea and coffee, while reading and appreciating the scenery to the gentle sway of the train.

Toward early afternoon the railway breaks out of steep canyons and tunnels to traverse wider basins, and the scenery reveals well-exposed sediments worth working paleontologically. Finally, there are rocks to seriously note and evaluate.

For the most part they are undoubtedly dinosaur red-beds although some may represent sediments of

the post-dinosaur extinction. On the trip north, two weeks ago, this leg was concealed by the night, but now a genuinely huge basin is being traversed from the north, containing sediments that are not the more well-consolidated dinosaur red-beds but consist of tan and buff colored sandstones and silts capped by loess. This is certainly significant, and probably indicates Late Tertiary basin fill that entombs the evolutionary record of the modernizing fauna during the period of the Himalayan uplift.

The train slows to stop at a major station: "Yuanmou."

Never mind. The politics regarding this paleontologically famous locality are horrendous. The American Museum of Natural History initially collected fossil mammals here in the late 1920's during their legendary Central Asiatic Expeditions, which currently continues with expeditions to Mongolia.

In 1965 Pleistocene "Yuanmou Man" was discovered and later, in 1986, underlying the younger rocks at seven to nine million years, isolated teeth of hominoids, or proto-humans, were discovered. The Chinese federal Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology in Peking is currently working here with the Yunnan Provincial Museum in a delicate balance of research and cooperation to unravel the secrets of the fauna. Other organizations, including museums at Yale, Harvard, and Berkeley have either unsuccessfully attempted, or judiciously declined the invitation to work here.

Just as field work on human ancestry is conducted everywhere, here it is also politically cut-throat. Globally, fortunes and fame have been made studying human ancestors while others' scientific careers have been destroyed. The greed resulting from both the fame and riches associated with the discovery of fossil humans is only matched by the belligerence of creationists who deny their legitimacy. (In addition to denying the legitimacy of the entire concept of evolution, geologic, or cosmologic history, and the fact that dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago, unless one considers birds as remnant dinosaurs, which many vertebrate paleontologists do today.)

Creationists believe that dinosaurs coexisted with man until the Great Flood, and they simply missed the boat. Furthermore, they do not acknowledge an ancient age for the Earth. The "Journal for Creationist Research" is a mockery of the scientific method.

Louis Jacobs lives in Dallas Texas, proximal to the center for creationist research. In his book "Quest for the African Dinosaurs,"[16] he does not go so far as to accurately identify creationists as a confederacy of congenital idiots, although he does describe their reprehensible tactics and methods vis à vis legitimate paleontological research.

Fundamentalist Christians are not alone in their proselytization of ignorance and intolerance as these are taken a step further in Saudi Arabia, where model globes of the Earth are banned because the Mullahs of the country have proclaimed the Earth flat.

Indeed, the presence and influence of creationists and other ignoramuses in the world's educational and political systems (as one has even been elected a U.S. president) appears to defy Darwin's theory of natural selection itself. By now, it would seem that Nature would have disposed of associations such as telephone sanitizers and creationists by providing a mechanism to export them to another planet.

The Theory of Evolution, the creationists claim, is no more than a theory. It should also be noted that gravity itself is also no more than a theory.\* Creationists require a reeducation into the validity of empirical fact, natural law, theory, hypothesis, observation, and the faith in legend. One does not supplant the other.

Contrary to the beliefs of religious fundamentalists, conflict between a belief in god and evolution or cosmology is nonexistent. Some so-called religious leaders state that "science is now the official religion of the State." This is absurdity. Albert Einstein ("God does not play dice with the world.") did not have a conflict between religion and science, nor did Charles Darwin himself, who began his career as a divinity student.

To some cosmologists and paleontologists, physics and evolution are merely God's mechanical and biological software packages. The recent emphasis on nonlinear dynamics, or "Chaos Theory" confirms a structured design in nearly all things physical and behavioral. And as to the creationist claim that the earth and cosmos are only 4,000

years old, undoubtedly, the creationists are wrong and the Buddhists' explanation is more plausible. Their claim is that the entire cosmos is an illusion. (An illusion with an eleven billion year history built into it.)

Perhaps this illusion was evoked even more recently than 4,000 years ago and was envisioned with human history built into it as well, or, taken to the extreme, the universe is as old as the individual who perceives it. These endless discussions will continue as they have throughout human history. As long as people don't take them too seriously, they will remain an entertaining diversion.

The train will be arriving in Kunming soon. A shower will be appreciated (if hot water is available). The journey through southwest China has been enlightening. Not a single homeless person was noted during the entire trip in China. Although poverty is still present, people are certainly not starving and education is being provided to all who expend the effort to obtain one. New hospitals and medical care are expanding throughout the rural areas. Indeed, there appears to be a general happiness infiltrating the entire population, but this is an observation restricted to the countryside for in densely populated cities there is a higher crime rate, more animosity, and less general esprit d'corps.

Nevertheless, compared to the social conditions 50 years ago, the country is a utopia. It is quite evident that China will be a major social and economic influence in the twenty-first century.

\* Although gravity was an integral factor in the development of calculus by Isaac Newton, who designated it a "law," and it is also a major component of the Unified Field Theory, most individuals are unaware that among the four immutable forces in nature: Strong Force, Weak Force, Electromagnetism, and Gravity, the latter is not scientifically quantified. Although there is no one who denies its existence, physicists simply cannot empirically define it and continue to search for the elusive "graviton." Consequently, its most accurate definition to date lies within the Theory of Relativity. Gravity, therefore, is technically a theory.