

SNOWLANDS Part 1 Guangzhou - Chengdu. 26/06/14 - 31/07/14

Dogs make absolutely the best and most honourable companions on earth. (Zen Chinese Zodiac)

Slept all the way. I paid \$6.50 for an un-drinkable coffee, then \$8.50 for a cup I was determined to drink. The airport is gob smacking. They have it sorted. My flights tick over like the proverbial Chinese watch. I feel the ratio of Indigenous to Aussie has broadened somewhat. I'm shrinking rapidly in an ocean of people. Thought India was bursting at the seams, hello Chengdu. Third biggest city.

I can see where the world's resources are going. Massive new infrastructure and building shadowing what's left of the old. It is clean and planned and almost pretty through the thick smog, and all made in China.

There's electric powered scooters everywhere. Silent and hazardous for pedestrians.

The Shufeng Hotel on Wuhouci Main Street. Cracked and old but makes up for it with the nice touches, like a card on the bed wishing me a pleasant sleep. On the back it instructs DO NOT SMOKE IN BED. See! The little things.



Target food, famished. Eat at a family 'do' open street restaurant. Fish sauce noodles, beans, chilli roast spuds and a two hander BIG mug of beer, from the tap. Total 19 yuan. (\$3.20). Then a creamy chocolate sundae. Need to fatten up for the journey ahead.

Meet the new tour group. Smaller as some have pulled out and a good vibe. They need sleep so I explore.

Get a haircut and shave, carried out with absolute precision. The shampoo basin area doubles as kitchen and dining room. I walk to a park filled with Gingkgo trees. Gingkgo Park of course. I buy nuts and apples and walk along The Fu River to a shaded landing. A local man offers me water and we shell and eat nuts.



Shooting the breeze on The Fu. It's 33° but haven't noticed. There are the forgotten here too. I hand over my water to a beggar and then later, see him with a wad of cash. Anyhoo!

On board with the group we have Namgyal (Geshe Sonam's brother), and Namgyal's daughter Shoyang, who has returned from English study in Beijing. Quickly down to 2 lanes and climbing slowly. Mountains, huge dammed rivers through thick forest. A pity the smog is heavier. Beautifully haunting Chinese ballads playing

on the radio adds to the authentic experience. The road disappears into potholes and landslides as we catch up to the traffic.

Three or four hours now - says Tashi our driver. He's doing his best overtaking on every corner and dodging others doing the same. It's a long day and lots of fun with winding roads, tunnels and small villages and near misses.

Kangding Ballard County is nestled in a valley split by a fierce water channel and sheer walls of granite.



Spectacular! Here too the development is booming. The locals are welcoming and very interested in these strange looking travellers. The many controlled water channels feed the hydro electric systems. (2600M).

The hotel has an hourly rate and includes accessories of a dubious nature. No mini bar but 2 minute noodles. Yay!

I eat breakfast with Namgyal and another. It's communal eating at every table in the street. Rice porridge, dumplings and boiled egg of unknown origin. I try to pay but it's Namgyal's shout. It's hustle bustle at the table with many now eating.

We begin our climb and climb to the clouds. The terrain changes to limestone

hills. Roaming yaks graze between the occasional Tibetan prayer flags.



Stop at the first Khanzhe-Duo pass and try yak kebabs on the roadside. Excellent! (4670M). The hills green with scattered nomads tents and herds. The Tibetan horsemen, horses saddled and strapped, are seen moving their herds of yak across the valley's. Stop at Lu Huo and enjoy boiled Yak, noodles and chillies for lunch (3250M).



Impeccable timing we discover a traditional horse race on the plateau of the Gong Ka La Mountains about to begin. Unable to get a bet on, so we follow in the bus.

Might pass on the next Yak dish though. Nice part of the world here and quiet.

Ganzi/Garze is a small city. (3400M). I'm a little dizzy and bloody nosed as expected. Namgyal is putting the group up with assorted members of family. Comfortable in the heart of Ganzi. I take off for the hills and fields of barley with a sprinkling of farmers' traditional tents. I don't stay long at the stupa as I'm being eyed by a

bull. He shapes up seriously, snorting and stamping hooves. The rope between his freedom and my safety offers little comfort. The locals are engaging but don't get far passed "hello". In search of dinner we are refused service several times before success. This chef invites me to the kitchen to inspect the contents of the fridge. Settle for fresh peas, onion, rice and warm Snow Beer. My room is lit by the disco style advertising from across the street. I sleep anyway.

Rice porridge, apricots, bananas and roof yoga before walking to Namgyal Temple. I'm followed by kids with infectious laughter. Finding the river takes me via downtown and there is heaps of development in progress. I sit at the only turd free area and watch ducks feeding and fish jumping. Lovely!

The Chinese Degonbu Hans Gonpa is only 1000 years old so a nice place to sit and meditate. The prayer wheels squeak as many circumambulate reciting their mantras. Remember I must purchase a yak beanie.

