

FEATURE

Recollections of Guling 2011

By Rodger Winn

Guling is a little village at the top of the Lushan Mountain up the Yangtze River from Nanjing. Back in 1948, when I was an 11 year old kid, my father was a missionary and we lived in Nanjing. If you read the guide books about China, Nanjing is one of three cities along the Yangtze that they describe as “ovens” (think Houston in August) so many missionary families in those days spent their summers in Guling.

There was no road to the top of the hill and everything had to be carried to the village up a 12 km trail. It is called the 1000 Steps Trail, but the “1000 steps” is just a euphemism for “a large number,” more than anyone wants to count.

In 1948 this trail was the only way from the Yangtze River up to Guling and the villas where many of the missionaries spent their summers. The summer we were there my father walked up those stairs, but I was carried up these steps in a sedan chair, as were my brother and sister and mother.

The re-opening of the Kuling (Same as Guling) American School in July of 2011 was the opportunity I needed to get back to Guling and a chance to study Chinese for a month. The school and our dorm building were a pleasant 20 minute walk from the Guling village shopping area. Or, you could walk a short distance and take the bus. Myrla and I usually walked up to the village to get some exercise, bought some fruit, and then rode the bus back. Some of the 600 western style villas built for the missionaries are along the way, including Pearl Buck’s house and Meilu Villa,



the 1000 Steps Trail

the summer home of Chang Kai Shek which was later taken over by Mao Zedong.

In and around the Guling village are a number of gardens and lakes to visit, and a handful of scenic views to enjoy with fairly easy hikes. My favorite was the Daoist Immortal’s Cave.

There are also a couple of challenging hikes for those so inclined. One is to take a 45 minute taxi ride from the village down the hill to the starting point of the “1000 steps” trail and then to walk it back up to the village. When my wife and I visited Guling and Nanjing in 2003, 55 years after I had left China, I vowed that someday I would come back and walk up these steps. I finally did it, with Xavier, the music professor from Geneva. It felt as though I had completed a long awaited pilgrimage.

The other substantial hike is to the Three Cascades Waterfall. This hike consists of 1239 steps down to the bottom of the falls and then 1239 steps back up to the top. (I counted the steps this time.) I did this hike with Dave, who is 76 years old and who can do more chin ups than I can.

The other burning desire I had was to ride the “maglev” from the Shanghai city center to the airport. It is the first, and the only, magnetic levitation train in the world. I had ridden an experimental magnetic levitation train in 1996 when my wife and I took our sons to Expo ’96 in Vancouver, Canada, but in 2003 the Shanghai maglev was still being tested. We could only watch it as it zipped by on the way to the airport. So, this trip allowed me the chance to ride the

maglev, and I have now finally satisfied that objective, too. FYI, it is a little scary to zip along at 431 km/hr (286 mph) on an elevated track with no side railings, but I had to do it.

I have now been to China six times, lived there three times, and can rest in peace if I never make it there again. But I'd go again!

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Rodger Winn lived with his missionary parents in China from 1938-41 and 1947-48, and was forced to evacuate both times. They were evacuated from the Philippines by submarine in 1944. He was an engineer in a steel mill, oil exploration, aerospace, and was a high tech engineering salesman for 26 years. He lived two years in Bolivia and two years in Iran, and has visited over 50 countries. He toured China with his wife in '03 and '08, and taught Business English in the MBA program at Xiamen University during the '07-'08 school year.