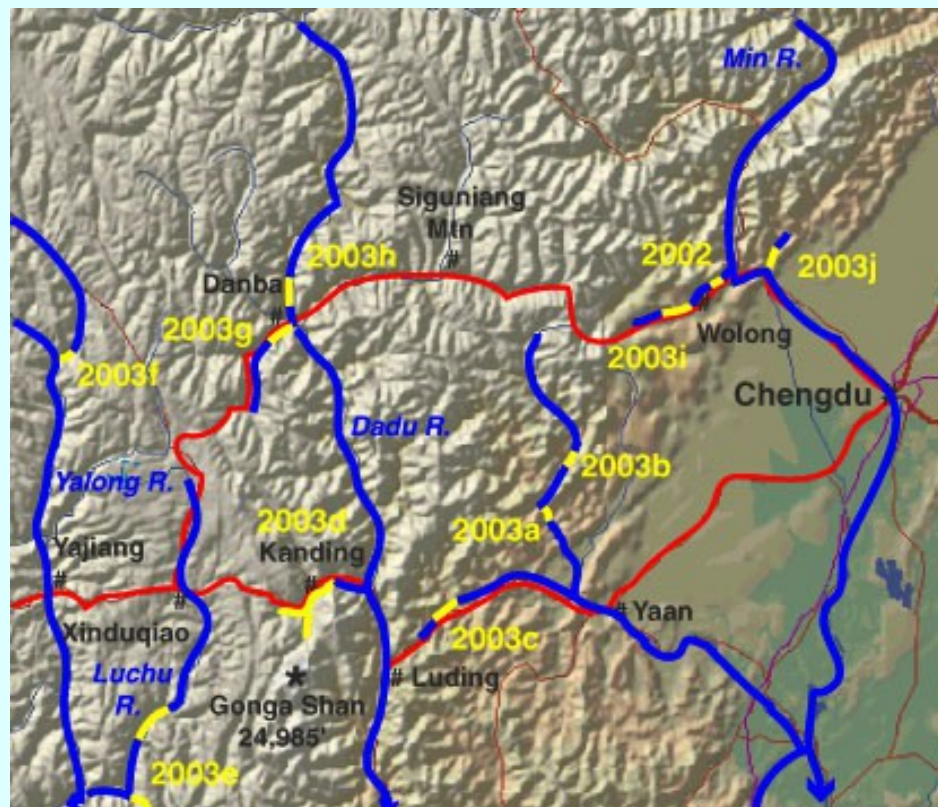


Kayaking in the Gongga Shan Area 2003

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Segments run in yellow by Travis Winn, Clive Williamson and Dan Monskey

Qing Yi Jiang. August 5th

Takeout. Day number one. A whole village stands on the bridge eagerly waiting our arrival at the little blue water tributary where we agreed to meet Li and the rest of land support crew. We shoulder our boats and work our way up through the terraced corn fields to meet the throngs on the bridge. I set down my boat and point up the tributary's small valley to a weathered old man. Mustering up all that I know, I smile a few words. "Piaoliang" "Tai hao le" "Xiexie." (Beautiful! How excellent! Thank you.) It's the extent of my vocabulary now, but fortunately, for this little exchange, it does what I want. His face lights up with laughter. Brzzzzm. We connect. Kayaks, rivers, Americans - hopefully they will always be associated and forever hold a positive place in his heart.

Clive and Dan and I are here as a result of a joint effort between Peter Winn's Shangri-la River Expeditions and Liu Li's Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association in Western China. I'm Pete's son and the one in charge of making sure all involved parties come away happy from this experience so that we can lay the groundwork for future river-related activities in China. With us are Liu Li, Feng Quen, and Ma Jing of Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association, driver Li, Sam, a PhD student from Beijing who's learned about kayaking over the internet and is elementary school buddies with the TV crew, and then the TV crew. Zhang Tong, Gao Chuen, and Qin Ming work for a popular adventure sports channel and will be in charge of video documentation of our expedition. Goal number one for the three of us, well, the eleven of us, is to explore as many rivers as possible in western Sichuan and make two half hour TV presentations on kayaking and what it will mean for China. It's the first time that this part of China has been explored for its class whitewater potential, and the first time that kayaking has been given national media exposure in China.



Feng Quen is a legend in his own right. He has logged as many first descent river miles as anyone in the world, loves rivers as much as anybody I've ever met, and along with Li and Ma Jing is one of the most genuinely honest and friendly human beings I've ever had the pleasure of spending time with. In 1986 he participated in the first descent of the Chang Jiang, the Yangtze River, from source to sea. Of their team, six died. In 1998 he helped lead an all Chinese first descent of the Yarlung Tsangpo from its source to the Great Bend, a 1000 km. Then he and his team of scientists spent 36 days hiking the full length of the Great Bend. Next week, he's launching on a 1000 km first descent of the Han Shui, a large tributary to the Chang Jiang (Yangtze). Next year, he is helping Li start a commercial rafting company in Kanding.

Considering the wild day of whitewater we threw ourselves into today we're all pretty happy to be safe on dry land. The first rapid was tenfold larger than it looked from the road, and being able to hear the boulders roll didn't help anything. While scouting this Tsangpo-ish torrent the realization came to me: not only were we first descending Class 5 in a remote corner of China; we were presenting kayaking to a nation of one billion for the very first time. As the trip progressed we modified our priorities accordingly:

Number 1: Kayaking is fun. Make it look that way! No bad class 5 swims!

Number 2 Teach as many people as possible, and get as much positive, environmentally focused media attention as possible.

Li took care of number 2, introducing us to the head of the tourism bureau in every town and even organizing a kayaking debut in one of the towns along the way. As the trip progressed, we became increasingly aware of the growing outdoor community in China. After many

handshakes, autographs, and excited smiles we realize that China has been looking forward to this for a long time. We are just lucky enough to be the catalysts.

Kanding, Ganzi (Tibetan Minority State w/in Sichuan) August 7, 2003



Clive and Travis signing polaroids.

The story just keeps getting better. In front of Dan and I are about thirty smiling people. The immediate six are beautiful girls, and they're requesting our autographs and email addresses. We don't quite know how to sign autographs, but we give it our best. With the approval and help of the local government and TV station, Li, Ma Jing, and Feng Quen have organized Kanding's first kayaking debut.

To the cheers of a thousand people, under the white cloud and blue sky of Paoma Mountain we paddled Kanding's Zhe Duo He. Monks, old women, and little boys alike waved and shouted and chased us as we tried to go slowly down the blue green torrent they call a river.

Kanding's beautiful monastery offered us welcome peace and quiet that contrasted starkly with the happy chaos we had just experienced downtown. In addition to the incredible history tied to any monastery, I find Buddhism fascinating because it associates so well with running rivers. Once I asked a monk what I could do to learn about and understand Buddhism. He told me simply to "Think Buddha." That is, to be aware and perceptive in my day-to-day lifestyle. I believe the greatest appeal to kayaking for many people is that it requires total and complete awareness. It requires perception of intricate currents and a complete and constant understanding of the way that boat, water, body, and rock interact. In addition, the surroundings of most rivers inspire another sort of awareness - that of natural beauty, of mountain valleys and green hill slopes soaring away to stony crags, of sharp blue sky horizons defining those crags.

After an excellent lunch with representatives from Kanding's tourism board and promises to return and give the governor a raft ride, our merry band of travelers jumped on the bus to work our way further into geographic and ethnographic Tibet. On our way up the pass, we paddled a beautiful section of a pristine steep low volume tributary to the Zhe Duo He. The unanimous conclusion among our group was that Kanding will be a Mecca for whitewater kayakers and Chinese citizens interested in commercial rafting.

As we continued over the pass the geography took another sharp change. Passing Erlang Shan meant a change from the wet semi-tropics of Lushan and Tian Quan to the more temperate shrubbery of Kanding; passing Zhe Duo Shan meant a sharp shift into the endless horizons, blue skies, and treeless, rolling glaciated hills and mountains that seem to associate with classic

geographic Tibet. As we stopped at the pass, the wild flowers and prayer flags of the pass and cool breeze flowing up from Xinduqiao brought with them another welcoming gift, an enormous white vulture, free as the wind, surveying us inquisitively from his solid perch on the thermals. "May we enter?" we ask. Yes, he seems to say, as he finally soars off over the small group of yak hair nomad tents in the distance. "Follow me." Who knew what lay ahead - some vague place named Xinduqiao off down the valley, perhaps, if we were lucky, a view of Gongga Shan, and inevitably, more welcoming, smiling, Chinese and Tibetans.

Dan and Clive eye me quizzically as we roll to a stop in front of what appears to be a Tibetan guest house and monastery. I rub my eyes and look again at the sign hanging on the entry. "Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association," I read slowly. I shrug, "Nope, I didn't know about it. Guess we're staying here tonight." As a beautiful old Tibetan woman grabs our bags, we smile and shake our heads. Li's surprised us once again.

As we sit around and drink yak butter tea inside one of the most intricately colorful rooms I have ever seen in my life, Feng Quen shows us how to make Tibetan tsampa. Mmmm. Barley flour, Yak butter, coarse grain sugar. Dan remarks that it tastes like his favorite kind of cereal. Funny we should taste home out here. I'm thinking that perhaps it would serve as a good Power Bar substitute. One could add fruit and other flavors, sell it at coffee shops (Tibet's in vogue right now, right?)

As the afternoon fades on, flames and smoky tendrils lead on to greater (and lesser) ramblings. It seems, I think, that everything in China is bigger. The mountains are bigger, the rivers are bigger, the open space is bigger, the number of people is bigger, the cities are bigger, the smiles are bigger. Not only this, but the differences are bigger; that between wealth and poverty; that between the blue sky vistas of Tibet and the constant cloudy wet of Chengdu; that between the sky scrapers of Chengdu and the yak hair tents of Zhe Duo Pass. China is a land of extremes, a land where the overwhelming number of yin and yang's add up to a perception of interdependence not found or appreciated in the western world.

I wake up from my reverie as Dan and Clive go up the stairs to hang out their paddling kit on the open deck of the guest house. "Travis! Look at this!" Up the old wooden stair case, past the colorful traditional Tibetan wall paintings, out on the deck to a view of the ancient Stupa and dilapidated truck on the road. TO WHAT!!!!??? A big screen TV with 10-inch speakers, all set inside a top quality suburban American wooden cabinet.

"LIU LI! Talk about extremes! What kind of cultural experience is this, anyway!!! Did you give her this thing as part of the deal to use the guesthouse!?" I shout halfway joking down the stairs. He walks up a bit baffled and assures me that no, he didn't know about this either, but what's the problem? Momentary shock and mock indignation quickly fades to laughter and shaking heads as we sit down with the beautiful old Tibetan woman (who owns the guesthouse) and her family to watch Gao Quen and Qin Ming's footage from the last few days. Dan sits down next her granddaughter who is learning English and we share a picture of Arches National Park, in the USA, with her as everybody else grins in astonishment at our whitewater antics. We go to bed early, sharing the tea room, as in the morning Dan and Clive and the TV crew and I are hiking up to the top of a nearby hill (summit at approx. 14,200 feet) to catch Gongga Shan at day break, before the clouds shroud its summit. Gongga Shan is the highest peak outside of the Himalayas, reaching an altitude of nearly 24,900 feet. In two days we will paddle a river draining its northwestern flank. What can you do? The Chinese government wants a modern Tibet, and in general the youth of Tibet want a modern Tibet. Who's stopping them? This crazy place, of course, is well beyond the influence of westerners who believe that Tibet should stay the way it was...

August 9th. A tributary to the Luchu near Juilong on the western flank of Gongga.

After a day traipsing about along the Yalong Jiang unsuccessfully finding any difficult whitewater, we're happy to be back in Xinduqiao. In general, the difficulty of the whitewater diminishes as one travels west towards the softer rock and the post glaciated region of the Tibetan plateau. We did, however, find some gorgeous steep V-shaped slate canyons full of beautiful trees, interesting Tibetan culture, and commercially raftable class 2-3 whitewater.

Dan's got a bad enough cough that this morning he had to take an injection, so he has decided to take it easy in the guest house. Clive and I will be on our own if we find any whitewater, but at first as we drive down the gravel-filled valley of the Luchu we're a little bit skeptical. After a short stint on a gorgeous section of class two that Li thought might turn to class four or five we give up and drive further downstream.

Paradise. Three miles of nonstop clear water class three to four with some excellent five to kick things off with and beautiful Tibetan girls on the bank to boot. Today's been pretty lazy so far. Gao Quen, Zhang Tong, and Qin Ming have been doing the most work, explaining what a kayak is and having Clive and I introduce the program. Sound easy? Say "Welcome! You're watching Brave Men" in Chinese and then tell me it's easy. Anyway, after spending two or three hours playing with cameras we decide we need some action.

"All right, Clive, what do you think about this rapid?" Sam is dressed up in Tong's TV announcer outfit so that he can ask us questions in English.

"Well, Sam, I mean Tong, this looks pretty challenging, but with the appropriate skill and proper group it should be no problem."

"Yep, oughta be fun. We're a solid team." I chime in. We're next to each other in our boats above a good pitch of easier class five with a bunch of Tibetan onlookers, many of them distractingly beautiful girls, on the bank.



Clive peels out. Boof. Left stroke right stroke punch that hole...oooops ...Clive I told you not to bring a playboat! He's vertical on his stern, and about to fall over and float into a really nasty hole upside down. Whop. Whack. Cartwheel Cartwheel Loop Loop. "Come on Clive, get outta there man, this is what we agreed not to do on camera!" I have time to paddle the rapid, catch the eddy, and wonder whether or not he'll survive the next bit swimming before he finally floats out upside down, hits his roll, and scrapes his way into the eddy. So much for a lazy day.

"So Clive, thanks for the show. You're an awfully good kayaker. Do you do that often?" Sam looks a bit concerned as he said this. I look at Clive with a questioning grin. (Will he say that it was intentional?)

"Well, Sam, to tell you the truth, that is what you're not supposed to do." Clive manages to spit out between heavy breaths, trying to put on his British camera face. We laugh a bit and shake our heads, relieved to be alive and touching solid rock. The girls further up the shore wave and smile at us shyly. They must be happy we're alive too. After some more explanation and some sincere thanks to whoever the local deity is, Clive walks the next rapid, which looks considerably scarier than the first. The final few miles are just nonstop fun as we play our way along to give our Tibetan onlookers a chance to catch up.

August 11th. Danba.

Roll lessons. Once again, two or three hundred people line the banks and the bridges. Feng Quen and Zhang Tong paddle around an eddy at the confluence of the Dajing River and the Yak River. Feng Quen's been waiting for this for years, and Zhang Tong, well, 10 minutes ago he said he wanted to try class three. I don't think he's so sure of that right now. Feng Quen is confident in water. The first thing he does when he gets in is race away and tip over. Seconds later, he pops up swimming with a big grin on his face. We get him back in the boat and he does it again. Zhang Tong follows suit in no time. Now it's my turn to get in and help them with the basics of a roll. Clive demonstrates, and I stand next to the sides of their boats to help them up as we explain that they must use their hips and not their arms get upright. After a few hours of

playing around, my toes are blue and Tong and Feng Quen's lips are blue. Although they're still smiling, we decide to save the final steps for a swimming pool. The crowds have not faded, and Clive and Dan and I realize that maybe we'd better get together a small army of boats and teachers so that we can adequately teach kayaking here.

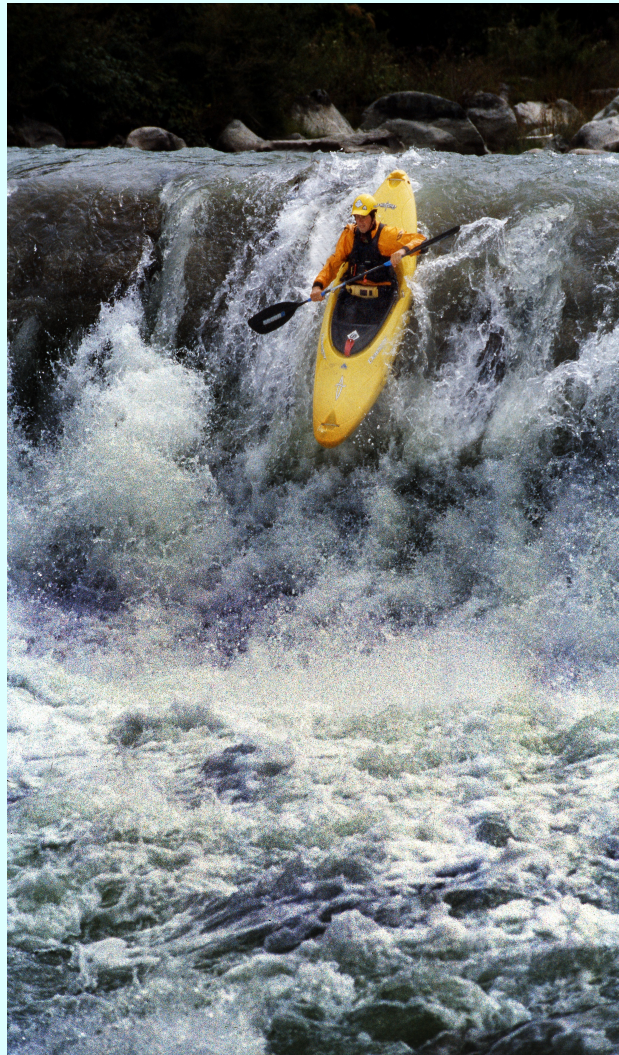


August 12th. Somewhere directly over the center of the earth near the edge of the Tibetan Plateau.

Wow. This adventure hasn't let up yet. Halfway between Danba and Siguniang Shan (the second highest peak outside the Himalayas), we knocked the cap off of the fuel tank going over a rough bit of road. After some quick thinking to save as much fuel as possible and some input from Li, Feng Quen, Clive, and Dan, who are quite experienced with vehicular problems, the driver decides the best option is to find a tow and send a few of us ahead in a taxi. By the wee hours of the morning everybody's in bed in Siguniang Shan's one and only four star hotel and the fuel tank's as good as new. As usual, these guys have pulled it off with style.

Dan's still working on getting better (we think he likes the Chinese company more than our own, but we don't blame him) as Clive and I put on the Wolong. This morning, as we crossed the pass into the headwaters of the Wolong, we move back into the mist and bamboo forests of the more humid Chengdu Basin. The Wolong Valley is home to the world's largest Giant Panda reserve and breeding facility. Because of this, logging is banned completely and human activity is severely restricted, so the river is very pristine. Last year Liu Li took me here to paddle a short section lower down. The Wolong cuts through a series of granitic igneous rocks here, which makes for an excellent Class 4-5 river bed. It looks like fun from the road, but as Clive and I explore it at river level, the horizon lines are big, the slots are narrow, and the holes are

punchy.



Blue water, big smooth black boulders, and banks overhung with bamboo turn this into a whitewater fairy land. The road is far from the river here, so neither of us really knows what to expect around the bend. We work our way slowly, stopping frequently to scout and rest. Each corner brings steep boulder gardens and big holes, which Clive maneuvers expertly in his small kayak. At one point, Clive is ahead in an eddy on the right above a distinct horizon line. He flags me on,"Good to go.

Alright, I'm thinking. It's about time we find something big and clean. I launch off the drop. I scan for an eddy. Ohhhhh no. In front of me is the steepest boulder garden I've seen yet and there's no eddy. Clive must not have been quite able to see around the corner from his vantage in the eddy. Paddle, paddle, make that slot, boof that hole...oops, sideways into a pour-over. My downstream velocity is so high that when I drop into sideways I flip downstream. I roll up stuck sideways. Oh well, at least it's a small hole. Thank god, I'll rest here. Oooh no. Clive's getting pasted upstream. All I can see is the bright yellow tip of his boat pointed skyward. Here we go again. Whack, whop, cartwheel, cartwheel. "Come on Clive, stop playing around."

August 13th. Party on the Hong Kou.

Well, we survived the Wolong yesterday. After being enthralled watching three baby pandas play king of the mountain for about two hours, it occurs to me that searching for world peace is

the wrong approach. Everyone should take a lesson from the panda and search for world play instead, and world peace will follow.

Dan finally got that fire pie he'd been dreaming about for the whole trip, and today he's ready to paddle. We're sitting on the beautiful white granite gravels of the Hong Kou just outside of Dujiangyan City. Qin Ming and Gao Quen have been scratching their heads for days trying to figure out how the heck to make one of their cameras waterproof so that they can put it on the front of the boat. The solution? Condoms and chewing gum!!!! These guys are a crackup. I'm more scared than I've been the whole trip, having a thousand dollar camera perched on the front deck of my boat secured only with packing tape, but they insist, and all goes well.

Lunchtime means more handshakes and smiles and a mock rodeo for the owner of the local rafting company. Dan and I go to town trying to cartwheel our creek boats in a ledge under the bridge, and Clive squirts it up on the eddy line. We seal launch our kayaks off the cliff on the opposite side of the river and I jump off the bridge and swim the bottom of a rapid to show that rivers aren't necessarily scary places. At least two hundred smiling onlookers cheer for us. The warm blue green waters of this place would be wonderful for teaching kayaking.

After lunch, we find out that the rest of the team will be joining us by raft. It's our turn to cheer as our land counterparts splash their way over and around white granite boulders and down blue green chutes. Feng Quen looks right at home, and Ma Jing looks like he could spend days floating down the river. Hopefully both of them will join Li and my family and I as we organize the first Chinese descent of the American Grand Canyon next year. Then, we will spend days doing this. As Dan and Clive and I stop on the bank to wait for our friends a whole group of girls walk down to the water's edge. "English?" I ask hopefully, feeling ashamed and foolish for not speaking Chinese.

"Yi dian dian." A little. Hmmm, that's okay. The next thing she says: "Lets go dancing. Come on." She grabs my hand. Ohhhh man. I look at Dan and Clive. They'll wait for me.

"I'll come back next week?" "Please?" She smiles. I'm not sure she understands. Now normally I'm not too much on dancing but when a gorgeous Chinese girl walks straight up, grabs my hand, and insists, well, then it's a different story.

August 14th. Tin Tin Cafe, downtown Chengdu

Sichuan is a province famous for spicy food, beautiful girls, beautiful mountains and rivers and minority people, peaches, and for having a relaxed atmosphere. In the coming weeks, I will come to feel more at home here than I do in most, if not all, of the United States. Dan, Clive and I, by the nature of what we are sharing, have been welcomed here with special care. Right now, we are scribbling away our thoughts on China and rivers and whitewater so that the owner of the restaurant can hang them from the ceiling. Tin Tin is owned by one of Feng Quen's comrades from the Yarlung Tsangpo trip, and as he looks at the pictures from our trip it seems as if he can barely contain his excitement. On the wall hang stunning pictures of various mountain climbing and rafting expeditions around China.

I scribble something along the lines of: "May the Chinese become the best and happiest kayakers in the world and may their rivers flow freely." On each of the toes of the foot that I am writing on, I write the name of a major Chinese river. Yarlung Tsangpo. Chang Jiang. Huang He. Lancang Jiang. Dadu He. To name a few. It's true. One of our goals here, as much as anything, is to cultivate a love for wilderness in its natural state, and eventually to show that a free flowing river can be economically and socially preferable to a river inundated by a dam. As

Americans, we know what it's like to have our national treasures drowned, and we know that rarely does economic merit justify this sacrilege. Rarely is there any economic merit that could not have been gained through another more ecologically and socially sustainable way. Perhaps it will take ten years, perhaps twenty, but eventually the Chinese will learn from our mistakes and figure out a positive alternative to building dams. In the meantime, the best approach is to have a ball teaching as many people to paddle and to get on the river as possible and see where it takes us.



美国皮划艇手西岭冲浪

昨日，西岭雪山西岭河里有一群划着皮划艇的人激流冲浪，他们中有一个金发碧眼的人格外引人注目。经打听得知，他是来自美国的优秀激流皮划艇选手 Travis。Travis 激动地表示，四川丰富的自然资源，非常适合发展激流皮划艇运动。他将留在四川，为中美激流皮划艇运动的交流牵线搭桥。

见到 Travis 前，不少人说他是世界上最优秀的职业激流皮划艇运动员之一，曾经参加过全美青年锦标赛并获得季军，如果他参加奥运会皮划艇比赛一定成绩不错。但 Travis 表示，比起参加国际大赛，他更愿意到世界各地去寻求不同河道带给他的不同感受。

“我要留在四川，我要到四川大

学去学中文。”喜欢满世界走的 Travis 表示，未来几年里他要留在四川。昨日，Travis 刚从大巴车上走下来，就操着普通话“你好”和大家打招呼。据说，这句中文是 Travis 到四川后学的第一句，他一看到大伙就不停地说“你好”。

记者 王蓉 实习生 程婧
摄影 郑许巧

Xiao Li and Travis Winn

Shortly after we picked up Clive from the airport on the evening of August 4th, Liu Li took us to an outdoor shop and climbing wall partly owned by Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association. Along with about twenty other willing, able, and excited potential kayaking students we met a woman named Xiao Li, who is on the Olympic Flatwater Kayak team and who is in charge of developing whitewater teams in China. This immediate meeting between Shangri La River Expeditions, Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association, and Xiao Li, combined with the suggestion that so many Chengdu youth would like to start kayaking began to signify to me that we really are part of something new, and that we really are the perfect team to make whitewater kayaking and rafting happen in China. Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association has the ability to organize everything from clubs to expeditions to youth outings in China. My father and I's Shangri La River Expeditions has the ability to mobilize kayakers in the United States. Xiao Li will have the resources to teach people. Between us and other teams like ours, with the help of people like Dan and Clive and Tong and Gao Quen and Qin Ming, kayaking and rafting will become part of China's claim to a very incredible natural and cultural

world.

In the following weeks, I had the pleasure of teaching kayaking to Li's son, Ma, Feng Quen, Xiao Li, and the manager of the outdoor shop. I discovered soon that with a few tips, they'd be teaching just as well as I. I also worked in the office, organizing another expedition, and spent many hours talking about future river activities in China with Li and Ma and other people interested in rivers. In the past, Sichuan Scientific Explorations and Shangri La River Expeditions have worked together to run river expeditions on the Kyi Chi near Lhasa and the Nu Jiang (Salween) in northern Tibet. We also ran a section of the Yarlung Tsangpo that Feng Quen explored in 1998.

If this expedition is any representation of what the future has to bring, Shangri La River Expeditions and Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association will have a very strong relationship for many years to come. Next year we hope to organize a Chinese Expedition to raft the Grand Canyon in Arizona, to lead kayaking expeditions in Sichuan and Guizhou, to organize a Chinese-American rafting expedition on the Mekong in Tibet, and most importantly, to continue to teach the Chinese how to paddle, provide them with equipment, and get out on the river with them.



Sichuan Scientific Exploration Association banner.