



Mutianyu Great Wall

by Robert Watt

# VIEWS OF THE WALL

There is no greater symbol of China than its Great Wall. It snakes physically across the north as a visceral reminder of this ancient power, a long penetrating presence reaching across Asia. It exemplifies China's flair for grand projects and for its people, as numerous and their customs as established, as the stones. A barrier that still embodies suspicions of protectionism, motifs of control and the trope of inscrutability.

Its name 'The Great Wall' is, however, a bit of a misnomer; the name suggests it is one long structure. In reality, it comprises sections of varying styles and designs, with numerous branches, of trenches and natural barriers. Parts built centuries ago have tumbled to ruin, others have been rebuilt, maintained and enhanced, so that no two sections are the same. Thinking of The Great Wall as a single entity ignores its complex reality, like its use as a metaphor, it's a sweeping generalisation.

## Badaling

Probably you've been to Badaling. It's the most popular tourist site for seeing and

walking on the wall. Part of its popularity is its closeness to Beijing and ease of transport, it's also where Mao Zedong famously remarked 'You're not a real man if you haven't climbed the Great Wall. Badaling was the first section of the wall to be restored and it looks new. It's wide and solid, surrounded by large car parks and souvenir stalls. During the national holidays it's rammed with families clambering to get a selfie on its ramparts. Despite all this, it's still impressive; the scale of reconstruction itself a huge achievement. It stretches away into the distance and it's easy to imagine you could walk east to the sea or west to the edge of the empire. Despite the huge numbers of people present at Badaling, a half hour walk in either direction and you are likely to be almost alone to enjoy 4kms of rugged countryside before the walk ends.

## Mutianyu

Mutianyu is another popular site for the wall. It's more out of the way, but can be reached by bus from downtown Beijing. Many people start, or end their hikes at this point and the area is dotted with farmhouses converted

into hotels. Although nowhere near as popular as Badaling it still has the trappings of tourism, but on a smaller scale. Although there is a Subway and a Burger King there are many Chinese restaurants serving reasonable (if slightly pricy) food, some with pleasant outdoor seating areas where you can watch people. You can reach the wall by walking through the woods or take a shuttle bus then a chair lift up to the top.

For the purist traveller, the installation of a modern chairlift may feel like a desecration of a UNESCO heritage site and that using it encourages more unsympathetic development. But to be fair, the walk up to the wall is not particularly interesting, and unless you're very keen on hiking, the time and energy is better spent enjoying the wall, rather than the approach. The chairlift is surprisingly pleasant, swaying over the canopy of trees, silent except for the constant chirp of the cicadas

This section of the wall has been restored too, but more sympathetically than at Badaling. It is the section most likely depicted in pictures and on leaflets. The watch towers



Jiankou Great Wall

and steep pathways against the background bands of inky mountain peaks make great photographs. This is how I always imagined the wall to look.

Walking east from Mutianyu the wall rises in a series of quick and very steep stairs before ending at one of the watchtowers. From the windows you can see how the unrestored wall would look, but sadly can't continue. East the hike is longer, it's possible to walk to Jiankou.

If you hike to Mutianyu from the East or return the same way you can get a toboggan ride down. Again, hardly in keeping with the character or setting of the wall, but really good fun.

## Jiankou

Jiankou is the section titled 'The wild wall'. A segment of wall in the Beijing area that has gone relatively undisturbed since it was built. This is partly due to its remote location, away from the city sprawl and main roads. Getting there is more difficult and requires a car or a couple of bus changes and a local taxi, then some moderate hiking. But it is the most dramatic and original section remaining. It's higher, steeper and more winding than the other sections and at 20kms long is the area for the serious hiker. Despite its remoteness, it is popular with hikers and therefore not immune from drink and food vendors. Unlike

THE WATCH TOWERS AND STEEP PATHWAYS AGAINST THE BACKGROUND BANDS OF INKY MOUNTAIN PEAKS MAKE GREAT PHOTOGRAPHS. THIS IS HOW I ALWAYS IMAGINED THE WALL TO LOOK.



Mutianyu Great Wall Toboggan

## 领略不一样的长城

长城是中华民族的象征，是古代中国用来抵御外来入侵者、显示国威的伟大遗产。但“长城”这个词似乎不太准确，字面上看好像是一面一望无际、单调的围墙，但实际上长城是由很多风格迥异的建筑组成的，有堡垒、天然屏障和不计其数的分支。最古老的部分已经坍塌成废墟，有些地方被重建、加固，所以没有哪两段长城是完全一样的。

八达岭长城是最负盛名的一个景点，离北京城区最近，交通也最便利。毛泽东主席曾经说过这样的名句：不到长城非好汉！八达岭长城是维护和管理得最好的，也是最受游客青睐的，所以每到公共假期，这里都是人山人海，摩肩接踵。但如果你能沿着这段长城走到底，你最终会感受到宁静、原始的乡村风情。

慕田峪长城同样很有名，但是游客人数要比八达岭长城少一些。缆车的设置让人感到是对长城的亵渎，但如果你坚持靠双腿攀爬的话，会发现其实也很乏味，除非你是徒步爱好者。慕田峪长城就是我想念中长城的样子，蜿蜒陡峭的石梯和错落修建的瞭望台非常入画。除了缆车，在下一段长城的时候，你还可以体验一下超级滑梯，坐在一个单人滑板上，顺着金属滑道一路下滑，你不像是在游览长城，倒像是在游乐园里玩耍。

箭扣长城被称为“野长城”，保持着原始的风貌，这是因为它的地理位置更加远离城区，而且交通不便，如果不是自驾，你要在多种交通工具之间来回切换才能到达。总长20公里的箭扣长城是徒步爱好者的乐园，和其他长城比起来，它更高、更陡峭、更蜿蜒，你能体验到从林中攀登的乐趣。

很多徒步者选择慕田峪长城的南端，全程大概4个小时，这段路程有很多起伏的陡坡，被茂密的树丛和灌木包围，路上布满松动的石块。慕田峪北面是最危险的一段路，有些路段只能徒手攀登，恐怕很少有人能走完这段路程，反正我是知难而退了。

秋天到了，长城又是另一番景色了，但每一段长城又会有自己的别样风情。走遍长城是一个大胆的构想，就像你穷其一生也无法完全认识中国。