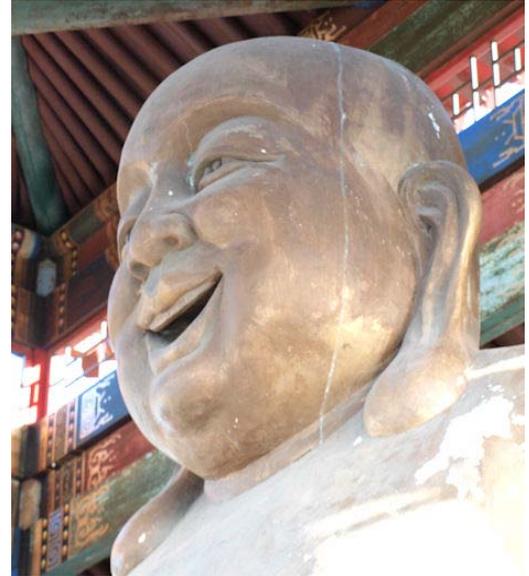


As from 100 Beach way  
Moss beach, CA, 94038  
9/28/09



Dear Friends

I was staying at the Hotel Ji Xian in Huairou, China. It is in the hills about 70 km from Beijing and quite isolated: there is only the road down, and a path up to a sequence of little pavilions, and a trail leading to a Laughing Buddha, and another path down.

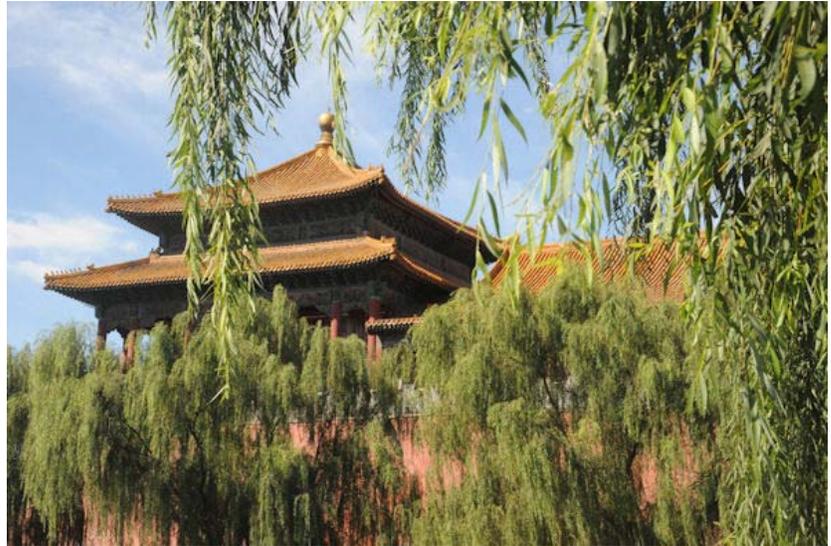
There is something strange about the “hotel”. The ceilings are too high, the chandeliers too heavy, the pillars in the fronts of each ‘villa’, where we sleep, too pretentious. It reminded me of the old USSR, except that here everything works. It was no surprise to hear that it was, and to some extent still is, a vacation resort for party cadres. But now, it is money that rules, and running it as a hotel makes money.

I have given 3 hours of lectures plus tutoring in the evening, at the ‘Fourth International Linear Collider School’. Students and lecturers are chosen from all parts of the world, and the school moves between Europe, the US and Asia in turn. The ‘Muon Collider’ on which I lecture is not a ‘Linear Collider’, but rather a possible alternative or later follow up. It is remarkable, and pleasing, that this should be included.

Saturday was a day off and they took us, in the morning, into Beijing. We had to be out of the city center in the afternoon because there was to be a curfew. No cars or visitors allowed there while they practiced for the 60th national day parade on October First. The center is being closed every Saturday afternoon for a month. Can you imagine that in any other city? Mao still looks down on the square and thousands of soldiers were already arriving in tourist buses and marching in a strangely unthreatening way.

I went again to see the 'Forbidden City' of the Emperors. I love the play of the ornate tile roofs, brightly colored ceilings and great copper bowls, once filled with water to douse the ever threatening hazard of fires. Because of fire, what we see today is not actually so old. The whole City has been destroyed many times.

In the afternoon we were taken to our local section (Mutianyu) of the Great Wall. I have loved the city of York's wall, and visited Hadrian's, but I always wanted to see the "Ten Thousand Mile Wall", as the Chinese call it (though their "mile" must be a little short). Here, it was about 30



ft. high. It had parapets on both sides with gaps and holes for firing and dropping rocks or boiling water on attackers. Guard towers, of one or two stories, stood every 1000 ft or so. Following the volcanic mountains, it is mostly stepped steeply up and down, sometimes at even more than 45 degrees, which felt scary. Even I was thankful for the hand rails provided here tourists.

It's early foundations were laid 200 BC, part of smaller walls that surrounded Princedoms. What we were seeing now, besides the recent "renovations", were about 400 years ago (Ming). The last dynasty of the Moguls that had breached it left it to decay. An odd thing: there was no way that horses or carts could move along it, not only because of the steepness, but because at each guard tower, one must go through low doorways, and sometimes even up one story by a spiral staircase. If one part of the wall was attacked, it would be very hard to bring reinforcements to that point.

On the internet I had found: 'Watch the sunset from the Great Wall of China, have supper in a farmhouse, spend the night in a tent on the Wall and hike next day along the wall to the next village'. So on Sunday afternoon I was picked up by a shiny black car driven by a sour and aggressive driver, and welcomed by Frank, my (sort of) English speaking Chinese guide, whom I loved. He was 26 and hoping to get a scholarship to visit the US in the fall. I was 26 when I first arrived. I had not intended to stay – nor does he. He just wants to improve his English so he can earn more than the 30 \$ a day he gets now. Perhaps he will meet a nice American girl. Who knows?

We drove out to a more distant part of the wall (Jinshanling), about 150 km, of often rough road, north of Beijing. It was a one lane village with a handful of open fronted shops offering minimal tourist stuff. But there were no tourists and nobody tried to sell us anything. Children played, old men chatted and Mrs. Wang, who would serve us dinner later, was sitting on a stool, sewing on an embroidered slipper. It was very poor, but real. We walked up to the wall and, as advertised, watched the setting sun's yellow light picking out its meanders, as it climbed each hill and dropped down beyond it. It



was quiet and beautiful, with only a few Chinese photographers appreciating it as I was.



As the light faded, we headed down to the “dinner in a farm house” - in fact one of the stores with its minimal wares and one table to eat at. My guide and I were now joined by an American father and 20 year old daughter, their lady guide, Mr. Wang, the owner, and a couple of other men whose function I did not figure. We sat around the plastic covered table in the harsh light of a



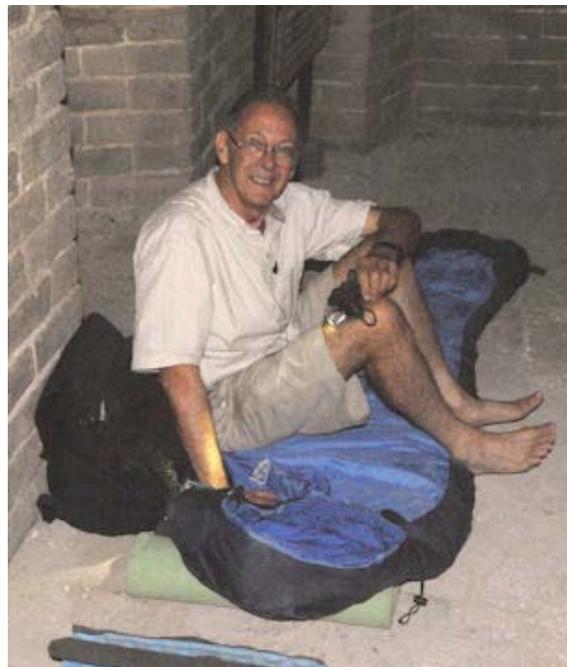
single fluorescent tube. Yet the atmosphere was lovely, and the food, served by Mrs. Wang, was fantastic - better than most US Chinese restaurants - and there was much friendly chattering, most of which I could not follow.

At about 9.00 pm, we three tourists and our two guides set off again, with minimal flashlights, back up to the wall: about 30 minutes away. There, in a roofless guard tower we waited, and nothing happened. There were sleeping bags and pads in a heap, but no tents, and there was no move to set anything up for the night. We took a few flash photographs of each other, chatted, and exchanged email addresses. The guides came and went, but would tell us nothing. There was a growing unease. Then, around 11.00, three police, or guards, or whatever they were, arrived and engaged in an endless argument with our guides. Finally, at 11.30, we were told that we

would not be allowed to camp there. It was, we were told, because of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary on October 1; “security is tight”. It did not make a lot of sense, but if you can close an entire city center, stopping us camping on the wall was perhaps ‘reasonable’.

We were given two options: go back to the village and sleep in a flea-infested hotel (it had looked flea-infested anyway), or continue on along the wall for six towers (about a mile), in the pitch dark, till we would have left the area of control by these police, but not yet be in the area of control of the next authority – a ‘no man’s land’. The Californians were in no fit condition to go on, and, very pissed, went back to the village, where they dug out their sleeping driver – at said flea infested hotel – and got him to drive them back to Beijing, where, we heard later, they got in at 3.00 am. Meanwhile, my guide and I, happy to be rid of them, grabbed our sleeping bags and pads, and set off to find the no man’s land – to be identified by an “iron ladder”. But it was past midnight and we were tired. Seeing the police’s lights getting ever more distant, we quit at the next tower with a roof, laid out our pads, got into our sleeping bags and went to a good sleep.

The morning was misty and quiet. Not much of a sunrise, but beautiful. Mr. Wang found us and brought coffee, muesli and milk (the only western breakfast in two weeks). We ate and drank on the roof of the guard house and were profoundly happy. Even Mr. Wang was smiling.



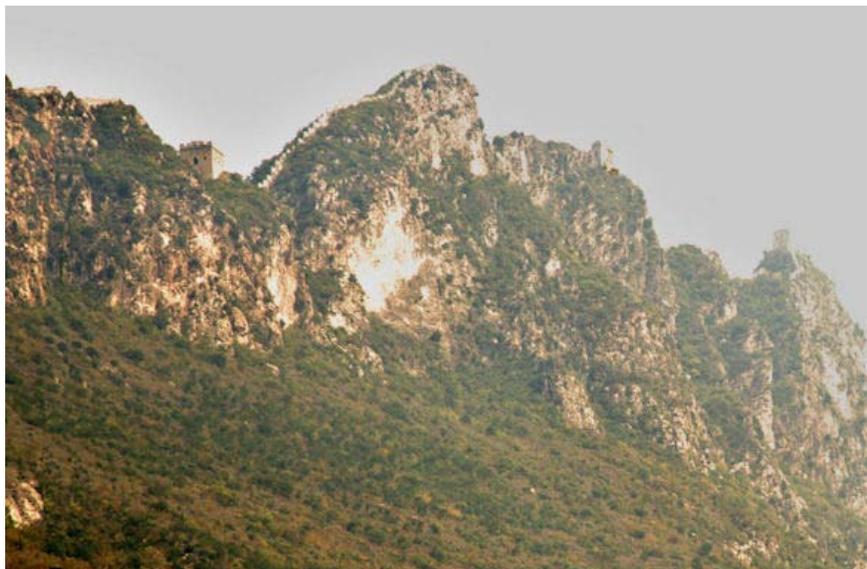
The hike, about 7 miles, consisted of more steps going up and down, often on loose bricks and rubble, with 30 foot drops on both sides and no parapets. I was glad we had not done much of it in the dark. I was very happy.

As we came deeper into the next 'authority' (Simatai), tourists appeared and the Wall regained parapets and footing. Our final descent was down a "zip line": in a parachute harness attached to a pulley on a steel cable. Yes, it was touristy, but I loved it anyway. Didn't we all dream of doing that?

I went back again yesterday, to continue on the wall up to near Beijing Point where, on a clear day, one is supposed to be able to see Beijing. Being hot

and muggy, we could barely see the wall that we had come down on Monday, but it was worth it to see the wall near the point: climbing steeply, with a sheer cliff on one side and steep mountain scrub on the other. I would have continued despite the "forbidden" signs, but there was security there and it would have compromised Frank.

I realize now that there was something else I could not do with Frank beside me: photograph the poverty. Central Beijing is almost modern. The expressways are fully modern, and the Olympic stadium futuristic. Around our hotel, and in the Huairou, it is gritty but functional: like Eastern Europe. But out at Jinshanling, further from the city, there was poverty. On lesser roads there were old three wheel sputtering diesel trucks, outnumbered by dilapidated tricycles, donkey carts, and men pushing Chinese barrows, to then sit all day by the main road trying to sell their few fruit to cars that would rarely stop. In the villages, there was the smell of open toilets without water. This would have been like India, but the massive long distance trucks rumbling on the



main road spoke of China's industry; the shiny black cars speeding and honking spoke of China's wealthy few, and high over the valley the nearly completed Expressway screamed of the new China with money and power. The contrast of riches and poverty is shocking, and Frank and other Chinese tell me that the gulf between rich and poor is growing. There may be tens of millions of middle class, but there are more than a billion poor. It is a "problem for the government". The poor have no outlet. They are not allowed to move to a city. They cannot vote. The judicial system has no juries, and judges are appointed by the party officials who are profiting most from the development. There are more riots than are reported, one hears. The Indians at our school expressed envy at the Chinese economic miracle, and complained at how hard and slow it was, in India, to build anything when everything depends on courts and party politics. They should be glad.

Love Robert

