

China Narrow Gauge Tour April 2018

The Concept

An all-narrow-gauge visit now that real working standard gauge steam in China is almost over. The narrow gauge lines chosen meet the following criteria; interesting and frequent operations with public access to significant amounts of the total trackage. They were chosen also to illustrate different purposes and loads and to provide a variety of steam, diesel and electric haulage. The chosen lines are:

Jiayang Coal Railway - steam operated passenger and tourist line commonly known as Shibaxi. The days of steam and electric coal trains are over but the C2 0-8-0 locos are worked hard in interesting scenery and the line includes 6 tunnels and one reversal. Access to the whole line except (perhaps) the yard and depot at Shibaxi.



Also included is a visit to the Sanjin mine where 600mm battery electrics are in use.

Blog from 2017 including Shibaxi:

<http://rabylee.uk/chinatourreportMarch2017.html>

Photos of Shibaxi from spring 2017:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/117426803@N02/albums/72157679091060473/with/33099591523/>

2016 Shibaxi Visit:

<http://rabylee.uk/chinareportfeb-mar2016.html> (Day 18 onwards)

This line represents the real steam fix for the trip and we can expect to see several C2 locos in use on the 3 daily passenger trains and various tourist trains while we are there. Jun promises 'Tung trees' in blossom to attract the tourists in April. Tung doesn't seem to have a common English name unless spurge or euphorbia is familiar. In latin, it's Vernicia fordii (formerly Aleurites fordii) and its nuts provide a poisonous oil with properties that protect boat hulls and repel insects.



Coal Railways, Nanpiao - Zhaojiatun is double track overhead electric operation bringing coal downhill from the mine to a transshipment point with the Nanpiao Coal Railway (sg). Apart from the mine, the rest of the track including the transshipment area is accessible. For transshipment, the wagons rest on side supports while the bottoms are opened to release the coal. Sanjiazi is a single track overhead electric line to a spoil tip which may be closed.

<http://rabylee.uk/nanpiao.html>

Jun was there in April and reports: *Nanpiao is good now , Sanjiazi coal mine may close in September or by the end of this year but Zhaojiatun is working well.*



Reed Railway - this line dating back to Japanese colonial days served a paper factory at Jincheng once operated by Oji Paper Company (with headquarters in Tokyo). This factory is now closed but the eastern railway lines to the reed beds are still in use bringing the reeds to a different factory owned by the Shengtai Paper Company. Motive power is diesel. (I visited this system when it served the Jincheng paper factory. Ichiro Junpu visited the new setup in 2017.)



The locos on the new line. © Ichiro Junpu, 2017



A reed train on the move. © Ichiro Junpu, 2017

Salt Railways - I visited two railways west of Pulandian in 2009 - Fuzhouwan and Wudao Salt Railways. Some of the system is accessible by local roads but other parts may only be accessible by walking along the railway track which wasn't a problem.

<http://rabylee.uk/fuzhouwan.html>

Jun refers to them as Erfengchang (No. 2 Factory) and Bafenchang (No. 8 Factory) and visited them in late April 2017. He says:

Dalian Salt Group is really nice place to go: No. 2 and No. 8 factory is working well. No 2 factory has 5 diesel is 247-01, -03, -06, -07, -08

No. 8 factory - due to my time I can not check it out, but I did see about 9 salt hills around a salt pool.



Mengxi Cement Railway - this diesel operated 20 km line transports limestone for a cement plant and operates March - November with a winter closed period. One interesting feature is the decrepit permanent way (engineers') train which can regularly be found out on the line from spring until autumn. This train provides a nice contrast to the smart cement trains. The line runs through interesting grassland scenery with horse to be seen. (I have not visited this line but Jun is in contact with the local guide used by Ichiro Junpu when he visits the line.)



(Wujiu Coal Railway - sg

If the thought of being so close to a remote sg steam operation is too difficult to ignore, there is an option to visit this line at the end of the tour. There is normally 1 SY on standby and it works only when empties and fulls need moving to one mine. Otherwise, all work is diesel.)

An invaluable source for all Chinese narrow gauge lines is <http://www.kii762mm.com> a website by 'Ichiro Junpu' with whom I am in touch. I find it best to view this with the Google Chrome browser with translation from Japanese to English turned on. However, watch out for Chinese place names which will be translated as their Japanese versions which will be completely different from the Chinese transliteration. Example: Mengxi Cement Railway which our Chinese guides would understand is translated as Mengnishi instead of Mengxi. (Explanation Nishi means west in Japanese while Xi is west in Chinese.)

The Itinerary

Part 1

Jiayang Coal Railway, Shibaxi



Day 1 Wednesday 4 April

Around lunchtime on day 1 - arrive Chengdu Airport - meet up - transfer to Sanjin on the Jiayang Coal Railway

(KL 0891 arr. 12:50 (dep Amsterdam 21:15 3 April)

3 April currently has the best ticket price in this post Easter week on this flight.)

Day 2

Tourist Train or lunchtime passenger train to Bagou, Bagou walking tour, walk to Jiaoba to see late afternoon trains

Day 3

Morning passenger to Mifeng reversal station, walk back to Bagou

Day 4

Morning passenger to Sanjin, visit to Sanjin coal mine railway stores area, mine canteen lunch, private transport by road to coal mine back entrance, spoil tipping area (battery electric operation), then Mifeng, Caiziba or Shanrenjiao for afternoon trains on the Jiayang Coal Railway prior to return to Sanjin by car, train or walking.



Day 5

Morning transfer to Mifeng station in the Doctor's car ahead of the first passenger train, breakfast at Mifeng, linesiding either side of Mifeng, car, train or walk back to Sanjin

Day 6

Morning walk, passenger train or public bus to Shibaxi terminus to look at the yard and depot and workshop (if available). Return to Sanjin (walk or bus) to checkout, have lunch and early afternoon transfer to Chengdu

Day 7 10 April

Fly Chengdu - Shenyang to start Part 2. Optionally, end tour in Chengdu (fly home directly or via Beijing or other Chinese hub airport). Transfer to Nanyang.

This visit allows time to walk the whole line (it's 19 km but we'll do it in manageable sections), photograph passenger and tourist trains along the way, travel the whole line behind steam, stay at two lineside locations (Sanjin & Bagou), visit the open air railway museum at Mifeng, the depot and workshop at Shibaxi (subject to access permission being given) and visit the Sanjin coal mine front and back entrances. Provision of a car to visit the back of the coal mine and for early morning transfer to Mifeng (Caiziba or Xianrenjiao) in time to photograph the first train. If the first people to sign up request longer at Shibaxi, the stay may be extended by 1-2 days. However, such a decision needs to be taken early in the tour booking process.

Part 2

Day 7 (joining tour option)

Option to fly Beijing - Shenyang to join up with the tour. Meet group. Transfer to Nanyang.



Day 8

Day at Nanpiao primarily to view the one (possibly 2) ng coal lines which serve the north (and south) branches of this sg coal line. Overnight in the Nanpiao area.

Day 9

Transfer to Linghai and afternoon exploration of the reed railway (if time).



Day 10

Explore the reed railway, overnight Linghai

Day 11

Explore the reed railway, overnight Linghai

Day 12

Transfer to Pulandian. If time, initial exploration of the 2 salt railways west of Pulandian.



Day 13
Explore the 2 salt railways

Day 14
Explore the 2 salt railways.

Day 15 18 April
Day train to Hailar including overnight on the train arriving Day 16
(No suitable flights from Dalian or Sheyang so train seems to be the best option)
Option to leave tour by overnight train from Pulandian to Beijing on Day 14 or transfer to Dalian on Day 15 for flight from Dalian to Beijing or elsewhere.

Part 3

Day 16 19 April
Arrive Hailar
(Option to join tour in Hailar after flying there from Beijing)



Day 17
Explore the Mengxi Cement Railway

Day 18
Explore the Mengxi Cement Railway

Day 19
Explore the Mengxi Cement Railway.

Day 20
Fly to Beijing, overnight near Beijing Airport
(Option to stay an extra day in this area to look in on the sg Wujiu coal mine system with one working SY)

Day 21 24 April
Fly home
(Option to fly back to Beijing)

(Day 22 25 April
Option to fly home - arrive Europe same day)

Notes:

You can sign up for Part 1 Shibaxi, Part 2 Liaoning narrow gauge coal, reed and salt lines, Part 3 Hailar Mengxi Cement Railway or a combination of these. For Part 3, ideally everyone would choose to stay (or not stay) an extra day for Wujiu but it should be possible to arrange to split the group most likely with the group not visit Wujiu returning to Beijing without a guide but met at the airport in Beijing.

The Price The price is based on Yuan 1400 per day for all days that you are with the tour including the first and last day. So, for example, if you wish to join from Day 7 until Day 21 (15 days), the price will be Yuan 21,000. Should you wish to join for the whole tour, I will be able to offer a discount on the daily tour rate. Please ask for details if you are considering that.

Minimum numbers

The minimum number for Part 2 is 6. This is the core of the program and should we not get 6 people, the whole tour probably can't go ahead. Parts 1 and Part 3 can both run with a minimum of 4 people as long as Part 2 has at least 6 people.

Internal Flights are extra

All internal flights Chengdu - Shenyang, Hailar - Beijing (or Beijing - Shenyang or Beijing - Hailar if joining for Part 2 or Part 3) are extra but will be arranged by Jun. The extra price for these flights is the real cost. If the tour runs with low numbers, participants may also be asked to pay a proportion of the airfare for the guide (Alan or Jun) if they need to fly with the group. If we have 6 for each part, the guide's airfare can be covered by the normal tour income.

Book your place

To secure a place on this tour, you need to pay a deposit of £400. This is fully refundable until the tour is declared go. Please email me to confirm the best method (HSBC Bank Account for UK participants, HSBC or PayPal for non-UK participants).

Balance of tour price

You can pay the balance of the tour cost either by bank transfer to Jun (Liu Xue Jun) in China prior to the tour or by taking Yuan cash with you for the start of the tour. The balance will be fixed on 4 February when your deposit will be converted to Chinese Yuan using the rates on Oanda.com and the balance due in Yuan can be confirmed.

Terms & Conditions

This is essentially the small print but I encourage you to read this to understand the thoughts behind these plans.

This tour will be up to the normal 'Linesiding with John' standards and will include single rooms, 3 meals a day, free beer, transport except flights, the services of national and local guides along with my own participation as tour leader.

Prices

Prices are for land arrangements only. We will collect you from the designated airport or other central location, guide you throughout and then make sure you are in position to catch your flight home from a major international airport at the end of the trip. If joining for part 2 or part 3 of the tour, you may need to make some internal flights unaccompanied to join up with the group.

Our local guides can make local arrangements such as hotels and train reservations for you for prior to and after the end of the trip on request. Support will be given and paperwork will be provided to obtain your Chinese visa.

Internal flights are extra on this tour because it is more difficult to absorb internal airfares than overnight sleeper trains in the daily tour budget. If any leg of the tour runs with less than 6 people, those flying may be asked to pay a contribution to the guide's flight costs.

If you join this tour, you accept that:

This tour has been planned based on first-hand observations of these lines by me (John Raby), Jun (Liu Xue Jun) or the Japanese enthusiast 'Ichiro Junpu'. We (expected to be Jun or his colleague Alan and me) will take you to the lines listed above in the anticipation that they will be working and that there will be interesting operations to see from areas accessible to the public. However, you accept that at the time of our visit, the line may not be operating or there may be little to see from public areas.

A note on Deposits and Refunds Your deposit is a guarantee both of your place on the tour and also of your commitment to participate in the tour and to pay the balance of the price of your tour. Should you need to cancel your participation, it's reasonable for you to expect a deposit refund if that decision is made early enough. However, especially if a tour has been declared go with small numbers, one person withdrawing from a tour close to the tour start can push the tour from profit to loss. For that reason, there has to be a point when your deposit becomes non-refundable. I have chosen 2 months out from the start of the tour as that point - 4 February. If you cancel before that point but after the tour has been declared go, your deposit is partially refundable and the level of the refund will depend on any expenses that may have been incurred in China on your behalf. In most cases, you can expect a full refund. In the unlikely event that I have to cancel a tour, your deposit is fully refundable but that, along with any additional money remitted to Jun or me, will be the limit of my liability.

Travel Insurance

You should have travel insurance for this trip and you are strongly recommended to take this out starting from the day you book your place on the tour and certainly by the time you book your flights. If you only take out travel insurance to start from the date the tour starts, you will not be covered in case you need to cancel the tour - say on medical grounds - for expenses incurred before the date your travel insurance

starts which could include your deposit payment, flights, cost of visa, etc. If you need a formal letter from me to make a claim on travel insurance in case of cancellation, I can provide that.

Payment methods

Participants from the UK can pay the deposit by cheque or bank transfer. Those who live outside the UK can make a bank transfer or use PayPal. Both have advantages and disadvantages. Bank transfers are not reversal without the payment of additional fees. Should you withdraw from the tour and need to ask for a refund, there will be bank charges involved (at your expense). The advantage is the possibility of lower costs than PayPal to transfer money based on a service charge not a percentage. PayPal payments are fully refundable/reversible for 60 days. However, the charge for transferring (for example) £400 is based on a percentage not a flat fee and could be £20-£30. Some people have managed to make a PayPal money transfer for which I am not charged a fee. The rules for this are complicated but worth pursuing. I recommend that you discuss the best method for you with me before you go ahead.

Balance of tour price

The balance of the tour price can be paid in cash at the start of the tour or by bank transfer to the local tour organiser or guide.

Should you transfer money to pay the balance of the tour cost, you accept that returning money from tour destinations (rather than the UK) is not an easy matter and someone may have to collect the money in person during the tour to make a repayment should you cancel.

Tour Focus

This is a tour for those interested in still and video lineside photography of real railway operations especially of trains in attractive or unusual scenery. They are not for those primarily interested in riding (although there will be a chance to ride steam-hauled passenger trains at Shibasaki) nor for those who like to see re-creations of how things used to be. Personally I prefer real workings to charters and we do not anticipate any charters on this trip.

Included in the Tour Price

This tour includes travel by train or private bus, single rooms in hotels, 3 meals a day plus beer with meals with bottled drinking water always available and any 'compulsory' tipping.

Included in the tour price:

- Advice and assistance to obtain your visa (if required) and on other matters before the trip starts.
- Three meals a day (but breakfast and lunch may be snacks if necessary to increase the time beside the lines)
- Single rooms (small refund if not available) - requests by friends to share are acceptable and will reduce your tour costs - ask for a quote
- Service of a national guide (with local guides as required)
- Travel by train (including soft or hard sleeper berth) or private bus.
- All non-discretionary tips

Not included

- Discretionary tips for good service (most likely to be given to our bus drivers and guides)
- Phone calls, laundry, snacks between meals

- Personal emergency cover for any eventuality (please make sure you have travel insurance to cover this)
- Air flights to the tour destination, visa, all expenses prior to the start or after the end of the tour
- Internal flights are not covered as they are significantly more expensive than traditional long-distance trains but the flights will be booked for you and the price notified after these tickets have been bought.

Minimum and maximum numbers

Minimum 6 people and (ideally) no more than 10 people maximum. However, we are flexible on this and tours with only 3 participants have run and also slightly more than 10 on occasion. When tours are offered in several parts, it's important that the main part of the tour - in this case Part 2 - the middle part, has enough people. Fewer people are acceptable for Parts 1 and 3.

The reality of going to see real narrow gauge industrial railway operations

We will be visiting real industrial operations. As with any real operation, we could experience days when things don't operate as we would like. Derailments, loco failures, shut downs, safety inspections are just the most obvious examples of things we hope will not happen while we are there (but just might). In signing up for this tour, you accept these possibilities. Should any changes to the itinerary be necessary, we will create the best alternative programme after consultation with the participants.

We could find hotels that have promised single rooms do not have enough rooms for the group or that hard rather than soft class sleepers on overnight trains are all that are available for some or all of the group or that we need to travel by different trains to obtain sleeper berths. We will do what we can to ensure that frustrations and minor discomforts such as these do not happen but we depend on the cooperation of others to ensure that everything goes totally to plan. You sign up for these tours in full knowledge that things don't always go right all the time and accepting that flexibility and compromise may be required by you at times.

If single rooms are not available then the decision on sharing arrangements will be made by the organisers. You agree to accept our decision on this. A refund equal to half the price of a single room per night will be paid to anyone who has to share.

You should have travel/medical insurance to cover you in the event that you are hospitalized or if you should need to be medically evacuated back home. You may also want to cover yourself for missed flights, lost luggage, etc. but medical emergency is the most important item to insure against. The tour organisers will not be able to support you financially should you have a medical emergency and will only be able to support you in other ways so far as successfully running the tour allows.

If you have any existing medical issues that could affect your ability to join or participate fully in the tour, please let me know. Also let me know if you need to consult your doctor before the tour for his/her approval to join the tour. This does not mean that you cannot join the tour but it's something that I need to know about as I plan the tour.

Participants are responsible for moving their own luggage. While our guides are normally willing to help, we don't offer a porter service! This can be especially important at railway stations where there may be a reasonable walk including stairs, rough surfaces and narrow carriage corridors. A key element to this is not to bring a case that is too big nor pack things you don't need. For comfort, I suggest limiting

yourself to 3 bags including a camera case and making one of these a backpack.

To get the best shots, participants should have no problem walking some distance over rough ground or along railway tracks sometimes on the ballast. Our transport will normally park near the railway giving a shot of sorts nearby but the best shots could be some walk away. If you do not feel able to walk (say) 3-5 km at a medium pace, please let me know before or when you sign up.

The hotels will vary from luxury to 1 star but all should provide hot water for baths/showers (although hours for this may be limited) and heating or cooling in the rooms as required by the season.

John Raby
4 October 2017