

**December 2018
Sandaoling Winter Visit II**

The Vision for December 2018?



Sandaoling - a JS hauls a coal train of 13 wagons including a guard's signalling compartment on the back of the rear wagon climbs out of the open cast pit on Christmas Day 2017. Photo by Jun (Liu Xue Jun).

Are you ready for China in winter one last time? Are you interested in some great steam effects at the world's last great standard gauge real working steam location?

Sandaoling - the last major Chinese (and World) standard gauge steam location

A week at Sandaoling is the core of this program. Days will be short and cold but there will be night shots to work on - shorter days means that night shots can be had at less antisocial hours (before or after dinner) and there is a better chance of good sparks without too much inducement! I expect temperatures to be below freezing at night and possibly +1 or 2 degrees max in the daytime at this time of year. Snow is possible at this time of year in Sandaoling but is unpredictable.

See:

<https://www.worldweatheronline.com/hami-weather-averages/xinjiang/cn.aspx>

Sandaoling is now the only major standard gauge steam railway operation left in China. Up to 10 JS locos may be in use on the two separate systems serving

the open cast and the deep coal mines.



Seen from the rim of the pit, a coal train starts the climb out of the pit. Steam from a second loco can be seen in the distance near the Blue Loader. Photo by Jun (Liu Xue Jun).

Itinerary

8 December Arrive in Beijing, option to visit the Beijing Railway Museum in the afternoon (or as a group decide prior to the tour start on another destination), overnight hotel near Beijing Airport.

9 December Early morning flight Beijing - Hami, transfer to Sandaoling by tour bus, part day at Sandaoling

10 - 15 December

Six full days at Sandaoling

16 December Morning at Sandaoling, early lunch, transfer to Hami Airport, fly Hami - Beijing, overnight near Beijing Airport

17 December Breakfast and airport transfer, tour ends



Sandaoling - fireworks coming out of the pit. Photo by Jun (Liu Xue Jun).

Flexibility

You can join and leave the tour in Beijing or at Hami or Sandaoling. Should you wish to travel to Hami from Beijing (or vice versa) by overnight sleeper train, this can be arranged. Should you wish to extend your stay in Sandaoling by arriving earlier or leaving later, this can probably also be arranged as Jun expects to take up residence in Sandaoling for the season again this winter (as he did last winter) and he will look after you.

This tour will run with eight to twelve people. With less than eight, the tour may still run but a surcharge may be necessary.

The Price The program of 6 full days and 2 part days at Sandaoling (total 10 days Beijing - Beijing 8 - 17 December) is priced at Yuan 14,000.

The internal flights Beijing - Hami, Hami - Beijing are extra but will be arranged by Jun. The extra price for these flights is the real cost plus a proportion of the airfare for the guide (Alan or Jun) if they need to fly to Hami to guide you.



Coal train approaching Ba-erzhan on 19 December 2017. Photo by Jun (Liu Xue Jun).

Book your place

You can book a place on this tour by paying a deposit of £400. This is fully refundable until we have 8 people signed up or until a decision is made that the tour can run with less people. In either case, the deposit becomes non-refundable 2 months prior to the start of the tour on 8 October unless the sign up period needs to be extended to sign up sufficient numbers.

Deposits

Please email me to confirm the best method (HSBC Bank Account for UK participants, HSBC or PayPal for non-UK participants). A deposit of £400 secures your place.

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 8 October when your deposit will be converted to Chinese Yuan using the rates on Oanda.com

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 - 8 October. If you cancel after the tour has been declared go (expected to be 8 October), your deposit will become un-refundable unless we can find someone to take your place. In the unlikely event that I have to cancel a tour, your deposit is full refundable along with any additional money you have transferred to me or Jun but that will be the limit of my liability.



Photo by Jun (Liu Xue Jun) 25 December 2017.

Travel Insurance

You are strongly recommended to take out travel insurance 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.

Notes

This tour will be up to the normal 'Linesiding with John' standards and will include single rooms, 3 meals a day, free beer, transport, the services of national and local guides.

I intend to participate in this tour as tour leader providing there are eight or more people signed up. Should the tour run with less than eight, guides Jun and Alan are very competent and do not require my presence to give you a great Sandaoling experience.

Support will be given and paperwork will be provided to obtain your Chinese visa.

It is difficult to absorb internal airfares in a normal daily tour budget. So, internal airfares are extra including a contribution to our guide's air fares (with 8 participants, each will pay 1/8th of his fare). A visit to the workshop at Sandaoling is extra (as usual) as would a visit to the strategic reserve (but note this has not been on offer in recent years).

Although now smaller and cheaper, there is no place for drones on this tour as these are likely to annoy the other participants and may also cause problems with security at any level from mine to Chinese state level.

I'm aware of 4 other surviving standard gauge steam operations in China
The other steam locations we will not currently be visiting are:

Wujiu - a long way to go and every chance that you will find a loco in steam but with nothing to do. A charter may be possible here.



SY 1134 in steam at Wujiu in 20 April 2018 awaiting empty wagons from China Rail. Taken on my spring 2018 narrow gauge tour when the cement plant at

Mengxi near Hailar had broken down, the narrow gauge railway wasn't working and we needed a Plan B.

Jiutai - also remote from other steam lines and with a good chance of nothing happening and probably no charter option. Last reported working in November 2016. At long last, first hand confirmation that working steam continues. Peter Haworth visited on 26 November 2017 and reports that SY1407 made a trip to the exchange sidings from the mine and returned about an hour later with three empties. <http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Fushun - frustrating little access to what could be an interesting operation with as many as 2 SYs in steam. There seems to be a blanket ban on steel works visits with little chance of any change and without more access, it's just not worth it. Last reported 13 January 2017

At Fushun 2 SYs were in steam, but during our stay they had no work. The workers were kind but the manager and police were so nervous because of the flood damage, or maybe because of fears that foreign visitors are trying to find evidence of steel over-production. Taking pictures at the steam stabling point was strictly prohibited but tolerated from the road and level crossings. I suggest not to go to Fushun now. The electric lines were busy, including a train carrying dynamite and the steam crane with a DF5.

<http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Tianjin - a good chance of nothing happening at this factory shunt. A visitor on 13 December found SY1524 in seemingly derelict condition but operations continuing in the hands of SY1007, possibly a candidate as the oldest SY in regular use. Work for the day was over by 13.30.

<http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Two other locations (Diaobingshan on the Tiefu Railway where they organise a steam festival every January but which has no regular working steam) and Pingzhuang (where steam may or may not resume work if the mines reopen but given the long wait probably won't) should also be noted.

Narrow Gauge Steam

Shibanxi, - now has one steam-outline diesel which is normally on the front of steam tourist trains for the chimney first uphill section Mifeng to Xianrenjiao when the line is busy or can substitute for steam on the passenger train when traffic is light. This is close to being the final straw although rumours locally that 2 more diesels are on order would certainly make a visit unrewarding if true unless one plans to arrange special steam charters..

<http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Other narrow gauge locations are not currently running regular steam although charters may be possible at Huanan, Yujian and Xinglongzhen. If attractive, I plan to cover these operations on future China narrow gauge tours. China Narrow Gauge II hopes to visit Yujian.



The diesel pretender at Xianrenjiao where having piloted a tourist train from Mifeng, it was being taken off. They sneak it on the train at Mifeng once the tourists have re-boarded and sneak it off again before Xianrenjiao station with the most tourists unaware that they have had diesel haulage! 6 April 2018

Should anything disastrous happen at Sandaoling, all of these places will be re-evaluated as possible alternative locations and preferences will be discussed.

John Raby
7 August 2018