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Secrets of SICHUAN

A Journey to Jiuzhaigou

May 14-29, 2011

NEW ENGLAND WILD FLOWER SOCIETY
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www.newenglandwild.org • phone 508-877-7630
with the Wellesley College Friends of Horticulture



*Join us! As we discover
the Secrets of Sichuan
May 14-29, 2011*



**NEW ENGLAND
WILD FLOWER SOCIETY**

with the



*Wellesley College
Friends of Horticulture*

Dear Members and Friends:

We invite you to join the New England Wild Flower Society and Wellesley College Friends of Horticulture for a memorable adventure in **Sichuan Province, China**, in May 2011. This unique expedition to explore the flora, fauna, and culture of Sichuan will be led by **Ted Elliman**, leader of NEWFS botanical forays to China for many years.

The rhododendron will be in flower during our visit! This is good news because China, a global center of diversity for many plant groups, supports more than 400 endemic species of rhododendron. Most of these grow in the Hengduan Mountain region where we'll spend most of our time. We may not see them all, but if this is your first trip to southwest China, you will probably see more than you ever have before.

Wild mountain nature reserves are the focus of our journey. Natural areas on the itinerary include: **Emei Shan**, a revered and sacred 10,000-foot mountain with spectacular flora; **Tangjiahe Nature Reserve**, with dense broadleaved forests and a rich bird fauna; and **Wanglang Nature Reserve**, where subalpine conifer forests of spruce, larch and juniper grow up through understories of tall rhododendron and a sparkling array of forest wildflowers. Here in Wanglang, at 11,000 feet elevation, the high elevation wildflowers will be blooming at and above timberline. Tangjiahe and Wanglang are also home to wild populations of giant panda.

A major highlight of our Sichuan program will be a two-day visit to **Jiuzhaigou National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of incomparable beauty that is another great place to view and photograph spring wildflowers. Jiuzhaigou is a valley complex of crystalline lakes and streams, connected by a superbly designed network of boardwalk trails. Accessible parts of Jiuzhaigou range in elevation from 7,000 to 11,000 feet, and it is an ideal place to explore on foot.

Frequent shuttle buses provide ready access to the boardwalk trails.

Sichuan also has an exceptionally rich cultural heritage. A lush, subtropical basin encircled by steep mountains, Sichuan has been famously hard to reach. As the Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai wrote: "Travelling the road to Sichuan is harder than climbing to the sky!" Taoism was born here, and, 1,200 years ago, Sichuan was a major center of Buddhist learning, a tradition that endures even today in beautiful rock sculpture and ancient forest temples. At **Leshan**, a seated Buddha image 200 feet tall, carved from red sandstone, overlooks an auspicious river confluence. The landscapes and people of Sichuan inspired both Li Bai and Dufu, two of China's most revered classical poets.

Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province has an exceptionally long record of human habitation. Recent excavations have uncovered artifacts of bronze, pottery and jade from a time, more than 3,500 years ago, when local people cultivated rice and co-existed with elephants. At the **Sanxingdui** museum we will see metallic trees, golden birds, and bug-eyed bronze masks which fascinate archaeologists and visitors alike.

Today, as Sichuan booms, even cosmopolitan Chengdu keeps its links to the past through tranquil tea gardens, traditional opera performances, and a delicious cuisine based on fish, an amazing array of vegetables, and herbs like the famed Sichuan pepper (*Zanthoxylum*) that grow in the surrounding mountains.

We hope you will be able to join us as we explore the Secrets of Sichuan.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Drexler,
Education Director
New England Wild Flower Society

Gail Kahn,
Administrative Manager
Wellesley College Friends of Horticulture



ITINERARY

Days 1/2 New York to Hong Kong

Expedition members depart New York's JFK International Airport for Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific Airways. (San Francisco or Los Angeles flights are also available.) Cross International Date Line en route. (Meals aloft)

Day 3 Hong Kong & Chengdu

Arrive Hong Kong and take a connecting flight to Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province. Meet your tour leaders and transfer to *Tianfu Hotel* (2 nights). Enjoy a late afternoon walk in Chengdu, followed by a welcome dinner and a brief overview of our coming program to the mountains of Sichuan.

Day 4 Chengdu

Today, we will explore Chengdu with emphasis on the cultural heritage of the Sichuan Basin. Chengdu has one of the longest histories of continuous human habitation of any city in the world. People have been settled in this productive, river-watered basin for more than 4,000 years. In the morning we'll visit the new Sichuan Provincial Museum and a thatched cottage that commemorates the residence of Dufu, one of China's most famous poets who lived in Chengdu during the Tang Dynasty more than 1,200 years ago. The thatched cottage, set in a beautifully landscaped garden, lies adjacent to a restored, semi-wild wetland area near the center of Chengdu. In the afternoon we'll visit Wuhou Temple with classic architecture, tranquil surroundings, and a nearby traditionally restored market street.

Day 5 Chengdu to Ya'an & Bifengxia Pandas

This morning we'll drive to Ya'an, at the mouth of a river valley that drains high mountains to the west. Nearby is the Panda Center at Bifengxia, an important conservation facility with a resident population of giant pandas that were bred on site. It also accommodates the



rescued and captive-bred pandas whose original home at Wolong Panda Reserve was damaged in the 2008 earthquake. Altogether, there are more than 70 animals. We'll see these pandas—including some juveniles—in large, naturalistic enclosures, and learn about the breeding program. (A fee which supports their conservation work is charged by the center for everyone who wants to photograph the pandas.) If time permits, we'll continue a short distance up-valley to stroll in the old town of Shangli where traditional rural homes are set amidst green hills. *Ya'an Hotel*

Day 6 Ya'an to Leshan Giant Buddha & Emei Mountain

Morning drive to Leshan, about two hours. Leshan is the site of a huge, 8th Century seated-Buddha image that was carved into red sandstone near the confluence of two of Sichuan's numerous rivers. En route, we will pause in a scenic valley called Jiajiang. After lunch at Leshan we will continue on to our hotel in dense forest at the foot of Emei Mountain, one of China's revered sacred mountains. *Hongzhu (Red Bamboo) Hotel, Emei Shan* (2 nights)

Day 7 Emei Shan

We will enjoy a full day of exploration on the flanks of Mt. Emei, where there is much to see of both natural and cultural significance. Forests range from subtropical broadleaved to subalpine conifer, with numerous rhododendron species blooming amidst granite outcrops near the summit. A series of beautifully decorated, ancient forest temples ascends the mountain and lends to the mountain slope a contemplative atmosphere. The iconic Fuhu (Crouching Tiger) Temple, located near our hotel, is one of the best. Access to Emei's 10,000 foot summit

LEADERSHIP

Leading this expedition is **Ted Elliman**, a popular leader of several NEWFS China Expeditions. Ted is an ecologist with an M.S. from the Yale School of Forestry and Environment. Ted has a long association with conservation and education in China. He first went to Kunming to work at the Chinese Academy of Sciences on a variety of ecological issues from rare plants to reforestation in critical mountain habitats. Ted was formally the Director of Education and has been the Vegetation Management Coordinator of the New England Wild Flower Society. He supervises the Society's programs for controlling invasive species in the northeast and on the Society's sanctuaries. Ted looks forward to returning to China and sharing the delights of China with you.

is by road and cable car. At the top, we will encounter a variety of montane wildflowers and (weather permitting) spectacular views out over the clouds.

Day 8 Emei Mountain to Sanxingdui

Today we will drive north through the agricultural heartland of the Sichuan Basin, passing the outskirts of Chengdu to the town of Guanghan. The nearby Sanxingdui archaeological site has gained much renown throughout the world as the center of a prehistoric culture with a sophisticated bronze technology. These people shared the Sichuan Basin with elephants and rhinoceros 3,500 years ago. The bronze masks, golden bird images and jade artifacts which they crafted and buried in the sacrificial pits of Sanxingdui are enigmatic and unique. *Guanghan Hotel*

Day 9 Sanxingdui to Tangjiahe Nature Reserve

Today, we'll leave the Sichuan Basin, and ascend gradually through the Fujiang river valley and into the foothills of the Minshan range. Much of this area has been restored since the 2008 earthquake, but some evidence remains. A scenic climb up a tributary valley, past fields of mustard and cabbage, will take us to Tangjiahe, a nature reserve designated for endangered mammals, as well as rare pheasants and other wildlife. The temperate conifer forests in this valley are intact and support a high diversity of wild plants including stands of redbud, which may be in bloom. *Tangjiahe Lodge (2 nights)*

Day 10 Tangjiahe Nature Reserve

Tangjiahe, in the eastern Minshan mountain range, includes forested valleys encircled by high peaks. Much of the accessible part of the reserve is located at the biologically diverse middle elevations (4,000-6,000 feet) where the forest is surprisingly intact. The reserve supports populations of takin (a relative of the musk ox), giant pandas, a couple of monkey species, more than 200 bird species, and 3,000 plant species. While we may not see the rare, large mammals in such a remote and densely forested enclave, we will certainly have an opportunity for good birding and seeing many plants in bloom. Today, we will explore the reserve on walks of varying lengths to accommodate group members.

Day 11 To Wanglang Nature Reserve, via Pingwu and Baima Valley

From Tangjiahe, we'll continue up the Fujiang River, passing the historic Chinese town of Pingwu. Gaining elevation throughout the day, we'll stop in the ethnic minority township of Baima for a barbecue lunch. Here the local people consider themselves similar to, but culturally distinct from, the more prevalent Tibetan groups who live nearby. Up the hill is our destination, a mountain lodge in Wanglang Nature Reserve.

Wanglang, with its subalpine forest of conifer and birch, is very scenic and ecologically distinct from Tangjiahe. Trees characteristic of these upper elevations include

spruce, fir, juniper, and larch with an understory of rhododendron and arrow bamboo. At this elevation (10,000-11,000 feet), it will still be early spring. The rhododendron will be flowering, and if we are fortunate, we will encounter such early season wildflowers as Primula, Anemone, Gentiana and the beautiful buttercup *Oxygraphis glacialis*. We have afternoon and morning excursions planned to Wanglang's high meadow areas, Dawuodang or Zhugengcha. *Wanglang 'Eco-Lodge'*

Day 12 Wanglang to Jiuzhaigou

Today we will cross a 12,000 foot pass to Jiuzhaigou, one of China's most spectacular national parks, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site of global significance. With crystal clear streams, broad waterfalls, and travertine shoals, the landscape of Jiuzhaigou is the natural embodiment of a Chinese garden. It qualifies botanically as well, with diverse forest types of mixed conifers and broadleaved hardwoods over a diverse understory that includes Berberis, Clematis, Hydrangea, Rhododendron, and many members of the rose family. Wildflowers include columbine, lark's-spur, jack-in-the-pulpit, peony, ginseng, meadow-rue, wild peony, *Mecanopsis* poppies, and a variety of early-blooming gentians. *Jiuzhaigou Hotel. (3 nights)*

Days 13/14 Jiuzhaigou National Park

A system of shuttle buses that move frequently among designated stops, and well-graded wooden boardwalks makes Jiuzhaigou a great place to explore on foot. The two main valleys in the upper catchment area offer plenty to see during our two-day visit. At the top of one valley is a stand of primary forest; at the other is a large glacial lake. In the evening, we may attend a cultural performance inspired (rather loosely) by the traditions of the local Tibetan people.

Day 15 Jiuzhaigou to Chengdu

Our morning transfer from the national park to the Jiuzhaigou Airport may proceed at a leisurely pace to allow ample time for photography and wildflower stops. En route, we'll cross a high pass with a distinctive alpine wetland that supports Himalayan meadow wildflowers like *Androsace* and *Pedicularis* (lousewort), another plant genus with its center of diversity in this part of China. We may also see yaks (or yak-cattle hybrids) grazing in these upland meadows. Afternoon flight to Chengdu. *Tianfu Hotel (1 night)*. Enjoy an evening performance of the Sichuan Opera.

Day 16 Chengdu to Hong Kong & New York

Depart for Hong Kong on Dragon Air and connect with the return flight on Cathay Pacific Airways to New York, arriving the same day.



COSTS & CONDITIONS

Trip Fee: \$3,945 per person twin share (plus air fare of \$1,195 + tax from New York to Chengdu, China, round trip).

Questions:

Please call **Renee Apostolou, Betchart Expeditions Inc.**, telephone (800) 252-4910 or (408) 252-4910.

Expedition Fee Includes: Land transport, airport transfers, accommodations; all meals in Sichuan; in-tour flight; group entrance fees; baggage handling, leadership, administration.

Expedition Fee Does Not Include: International air fare (quoted separately); baggage handling in remote areas; China visa fee; personal items such as laundry, phone calls, alcoholic beverages, sodas, snacks, personal insurance; foreign airport departure taxes.

What to Expect: This expedition is planned for travelers who would enjoy exploring the natural and cultural heritage of areas in Sichuan Province little visited by westerners. See some of the most scenic areas in China, with 15,000-foot peaks, including two or more reserves for the giant panda and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and remote mountain villages. Leading the expedition will be an excellent American biologist who is conversant in Chinese. The group will travel 4 to 5 hours by motorcoach on each of several days. On traveling days, we will take time for both planned and spontaneous stops to discover the plants of Sichuan, to walk, photograph, and meet local people. Participants should be prepared to actively explore on foot at a leisurely pace. Food will include a varied Sichuan menu.

Weather is pleasant, with midday temperatures in the 60's to 70's in the mountains, and some rain. It can be hot and muggy in Chengdu (90's), and cool in the mountains. Elevations will range from the Chengdu lowlands to 11,000 feet at one pass in the Minshan Mountains. Most time will be spent between 5,000-8,000 feet. This expedition will be a tremendous experience for travelers with an appetite for adventure who would enjoy a chance to explore biologically rich, scenic places in remote parts of Sichuan Province. (No smoking in vehicles, during lectures, or meals, please.)

Air Fare & Airline Ticketing: Air fare quoted is based on a special fare with Cathay Pacific and Dragon Airlines. All air bookings will be handled by Betchart Expeditions Inc. Phone Renee at (800) 252-4910. AIR FARES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Accommodations: We will occupy first class hotels and lodges. We may have share bathrooms at the lodges in two parks. Expect a good bed, showers, mostly Western but some Asian style toilets, and carefully prepared food. Single accommodations are available in most locations for a supplement of \$595.

Reservations, Deposits & Payments:

To reserve a space on this expedition, please mail your deposit check for \$500 per person with the completed reservation form to: **Sichuan Expedition, Betchart Expeditions Inc., 17050 Montebello Road, Cupertino, CA 95014-5435.** Balance of land fee is due 60 days before departure.

Cancellations & Refunds: The initial deposit is refundable up to 60 days before departure less a handling fee of \$100 per person. There is no refund after the 60-day period unless your place is resold, then only the \$100 per person handling fee is withheld. There are no refunds for unused meals or other expedition features.

RESPONSIBILITY

Betchart Expeditions Inc., New England Wild Flower Society, and Wellesley College Friends of Horticulture act only as agents for the passenger with respect to transportation and hotels, and exercise every care possible. However, we can assume no liability for injury, damage, delay, loss, accident or irregularity in connection with the services of any airplane, ship, motorcoach, or any other conveyance used in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. We cannot accept any responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, acts of God, or other causes beyond our control. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. We reserve the right to substitute another leader of similar expertise or to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case the entire payment will be refunded with no further obligation on our part. The right is also reserved to decline to accept or retain any person as a member of the tour. No refund will be made for the unused portion of any tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The price of the program is based on current tariffs and rates, and is subject to change. Any tariff, exchange rate, or fuel increases will be passed on to participants. Baggage is carried at the owner's risk entirely. It is understood that the air ticket when issued shall constitute the sole contract between the passenger and the airline concerned. The airlines concerned are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their plane or conveyance.

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Illustrations and map by April Milne

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RESERVATIONS

#1185

Yes! I/we want to join the **Secrets of Sichuan Expedition, May 14-29, 2011**, offered by **New England Wild Flower Society & Wellesley College Friends of Horticulture**. Please reserve ___ space(s). As a deposit, I/we enclose a check for \$ _____ (\$500 per person) payable to Betchart Expeditions Inc. Trust Account.

Name(s) _____ Age _____

_____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: Home (____) _____

Work (____) _____

Email: _____

Membership: ___ NEWFS ___ Friends of Horticulture

Accommodations Preference:

___ Twin ___ Single ___ Nonsmoker ___ Smoker

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

**Please Mail To: Sichuan Expedition 2011
Betchart Expeditions Inc.
17050 Montebello Road
Cupertino, CA 95014-5435**