

# Defying death along river of no return

Lu Wei makes epic trek up Yangtze to promote public awareness of environmental protection

By YU NAN  
China Daily staff

With a tanned face, shoulder-length hair and strong muscles, Lu Wei looks like a second "Tarzan" emerging from the jungle.

Such a comparison is not too far-fetched since the 38-year-old has just finished a 17-month adventure, following the path of the fast-flowing Yangtze River.

With just a 20-kilogram knapsack on his back, Lu started his hike of the river — the longest in China and the third-longest in the world — on January 10 last year.

Beginning at the mouth of the Yangtze in East China's Shanghai Municipality, Lu trekked 6,400 kilometres which marks the complete length of the river.

He arrived at the snow-capped Geladandong Peak — the origin of the river in the western part of Northwest China's Qinghai Province — on June 26 this year.

Passing through virgin forests, the Gobi Desert, grasslands and snow mountains, Lu walked through 11 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities.

The trip has yielded more than 5,000 pictures and 150,000-word documents containing Lu's thoughts and feelings.

It also brought frost-bitten fingers and toes, and spots of sunburn on his face due to over-exposure in the strong ultraviolet rays of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

In terms of what he lost, Lu stresses 20 kilograms in weight.

The ground-breaking trip brought Lu the name of "Son of the Yangtze River."

"Hero" is another name that people living along the banks of the Yangtze River offered Lu because they saw in him special

qualities that enabled him to survive such an arduous trip.

He was even mistaken by his 11-year-old son for a stranger when he arrived home in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province in early July.

Lu said people looked upon him as crazy before his trek began.

"Honestly, I was not sure whether I could complete the trip before I took the first step," Lu said. "But once you start, you have no choice but to finish."

He said the most frequent question people asked him during the walk was an unsurprising "Why?"

Lu's answer was always firm: "To alert people that our mother river — the Yangtze River — needs to be protected."

### Son of the river

Born in 1963 in Nanjing, Lu grew up on the banks of the Yangtze River. He still has fond memories of playing games with his pals along the riverbank every evening.

"To me, the river is like a real mum who nurtured me and all the people living in Nanjing," Lu said.

Graduating in 1989 after four years of study at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Language of Nanjing University, Lu realized that the Yangtze River also provided cultural richness to the cradle of such ancient cultures as the Ba and the Chu, which were vital parts of the Chinese civilization, as well as natural resources.

But the environmental condition of the river has declined dramatically in recent years and since mass development of the river banks began, Lu said.

According to official statistics, the gross domestic product (GDP) produced by all the re-

gions along the river accounted for more than 40 per cent of China's total in 2000, Lu said.

"But the river is no longer agreeable for swimmers, especially in the middle and lower reaches, and floating rubbish is visible everywhere," Lu said.

He added there was nothing wrong in the 400 million people living along the riverbanks wishing to seek better lives. "But if we only use the river without protecting it, we will suffer and so will our offspring."

In 1998, Lu quit his job at a factory producing electrical appliances and organized an environmental non-government organization (NGO) named "Friends of the Green Environment of Jiangsu," the largest of its kind in the province with about 2,200 volunteers now.

As an environmental volunteer, Lu gained more chances to observe the environmental condition of the river in professional ways.

He frequented neighbouring counties and discovered more and more environmental problems along the riverbanks.

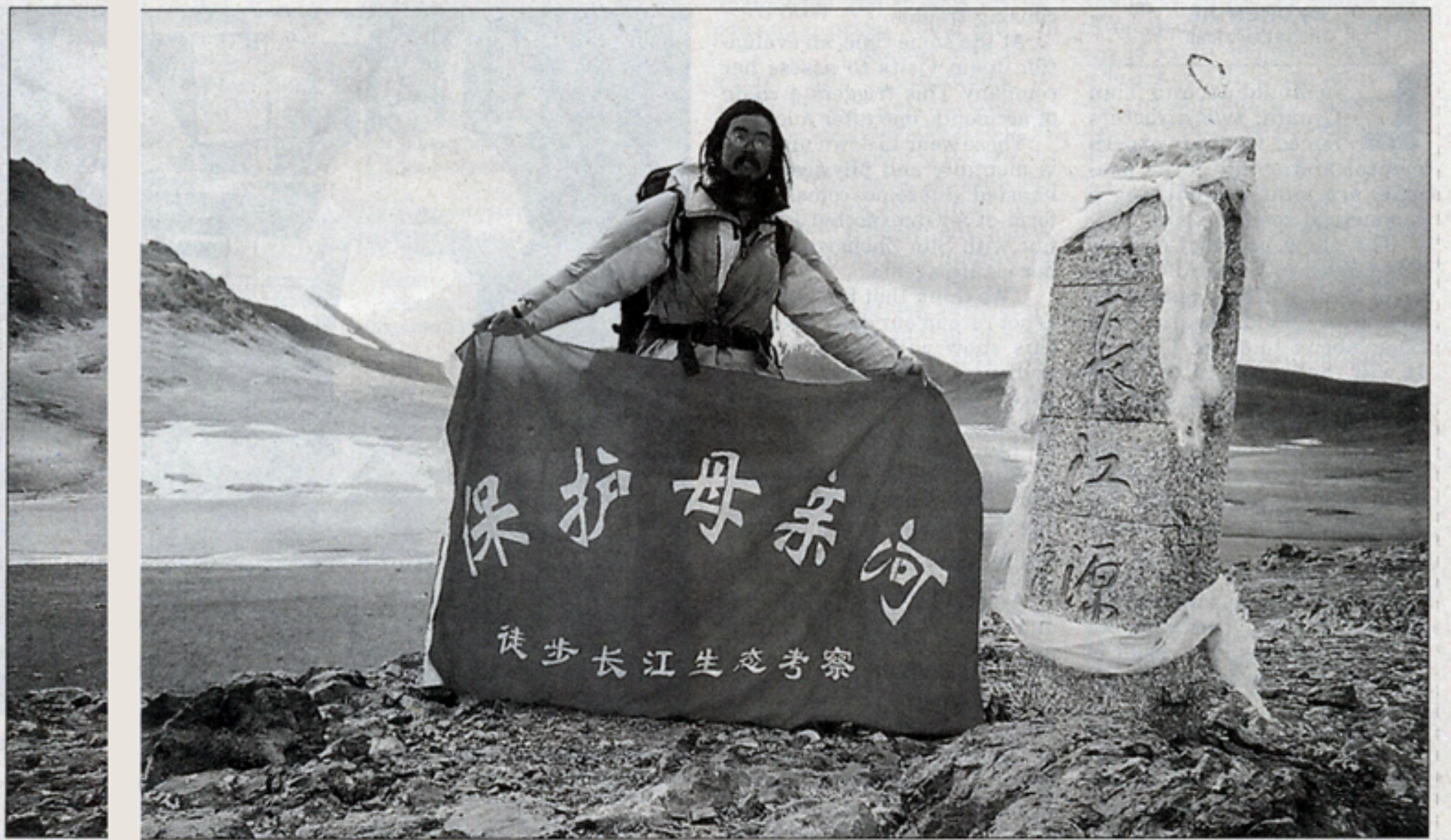
To get an overall and detailed impression of the current condition of the environment along the Yangtze River, Lu made up his mind to walk along the river alone.

"I know, as an individual, I have no ability to mitigate the pollution. Neither can I crack down on illegal activities causing soil erosion.

"But I think the least that I can do is spark people's awareness of environmental protection," said Lu before his departure last January.

### Dangerous trip

After three months of preparation, Lu started his trip from Wusongkou, the mouth of the



Courtesy of Lu Wei

Lu Wei poses in front of a monument at the origin of the Yangtze River in Northwest China's Qinghai Province on June 26.

### End of an

Yangtze River in Shanghai. He then followed the 6,400-kilometre path from the East China Sea to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

No flash light step quiet in his org steps thru (Global Positioning System) receiver. Eating drinking river water when ng in camps, cows and hen night fell, Lu physical tests head

Lu said in and snow were the extra "gifts" offered by heaven but rays on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau caused him to peel. "I pain caused by sweat pe through wounded skin, Climbing r king through fi the Gobi Desert pairs of boots a challenge in hi

Without an nancial aid, t 160,000 yua which was ma ings and donat and relatives.

Lu describe ing similar to i sic "Journey i which Monk 2 Tang Dynasty; went to India treasured Bud

Unlike Xua accompanied b Lu had to face l ably his biggest there was only

to the river are cliffs with weeds, it was easier for me to fall into the torrent."

Lu said he fell into the river four times during the trip. Luckily he survived all of them.

### Ready to die

But twice in the trip he was near despair and close to death. On one occasion, last May, Lu was struggling along a perilous cliff when he suddenly slipped and lost his footing. A small tree stopped him rolling down by hooking one of the thin ribbons of his knapsack.

Later, Lu lost his knapsack and spent a night in minus 20 C temperatures in just his trousers, a thin sweater plus a rain coat. Lu still felt the chill when recalling the experience in the depopulated zone of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

His knapsack was carried by a horse as he walked with a guide

area of several square kilometres, the night became much longer and fearful," recalled Lu.

He was not always alone. Most people living along the riverbanks gave him the thumbs-up to show their respect after learning of his walk.

Some of them even voluntarily walked with him. "A village head named Xie Yumin in Jinyang County of Sichuan Province accompanied me for three days until I left the region," Lu recalled.

To observe the condition of the Yangtze River more precisely and closely, Lu always chose the nearest path to the river, "which meant the danger of death increased," said Lu. "Because most of the paths close

to the river are cliffs with weeds, it was easier for me to fall into the torrent."

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### Long way to walk

Lu described the river he saw as a "wounded mother" after the trip. Sewage and industrial waste were dumped into the river. Heavy farming and logging along the Yangtze has made it the fourth largest sediment carrier in the world.

"Increasing soil erosion in the upper and middle reaches of the river from the mid-20th century has posed a severe threat to China's flood control efforts, shipping industry and the lives of people living nearby," Lu said.

and a local journalist. Lu went ahead on his own and at a faster rate with plans to meet them at a nearby river branch.

But when the sun slowly set and the freezing night came, the others had still not appeared.

Lu knew it was impossible to seek help during the night in such an inhospitable place and he kept moving around the whole night to keep himself warm. All Lu had with him was the GPS receiver.

In deep despair, Lu sent his longitude and latitude back to the organization. "I wanted them to find my body after my death," he said.

Wang Lina, who was in charge of tracing Lu for the organization, described their agony after receiving Lu's last words.

"It was a sleepless night for all of us," she recalled. "No one knew how long he could bear such cold weather without any covers."

But once again, Lu survived. When dawn came, Lu was rescued by a Tibetan family passing by the region.

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Lu said the environmental capacity of the region is already overtaxed by excessive cultivation, deforestation and overgrazing.

"Certain stretches of the river should not be explored," Lu said.

"Although the local government has tried every means to protect the environment — closing down all polluting factories, distributing subsidies to farmers to let them buy and burn coal instead of cutting down trees, planting trees and grass, and buying a special rubbish-collection boat to gather waste from the river water and yachts — the condition of the river is worsening day by day," said Lu.

"There is still a long way to go until the river can recover."

Lu gave about 80 environmental speeches to the public during his trip, and 50 environmental photo exhibitions of Lu were held in the cities, counties and villages he passed by.

Lu expects the 5,000 pictures and 150,000-word documents he has taken and written will be useful to decision-makers mulling over the environmental protection of the river.

For now Lu is concentrating his next adventure: a book of his trip along the Yangtze River.

Lu is one of the 18 members of a Chinese delegation of environmental NGOs to attend the World Summit on Sustainable Development opened yesterday in Johannesburg of South Africa.

"This is a great opportunity to let the world know more about the Chinese environmental protection issues, especially the issues about Yangtze River," said Lu.



Courtesy of Lu Wei

Walk on the wild side: Residents in Southwest China's Chongqing Municipality are attracted to the photo exhibition of Lu Wei's adventure when he arrived at the riverside city in July last year.

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## NOTE

### BEIJING Ensemble

The Oriental Ensemble is presenting a show of traditional Chinese music to be staged at Exhibition Hall T in December.

Founded in 1962, the ensemble's mission is to introduce Chinese music and dance to the present exotic world.

Since China's reform and opening up in the late 1970s, the ensemble has been challenged to produce a new style of music and dance to represent modern China.

Last year, to celebrate its 40th anniversary, the ensemble produced a new show "Blow the Wind" which was performed in Beijing and other parts of the country.

The show was a great success and helped the ensemble to gain a wider reputation.

### SHANGHAI Fashion

Top fashion models, pc stars and show-ties will contribute to a night of fashion, music and

From Xinhua and staff

### MTV-Lycra Fashion Awards

The show will take place on October 19 at Shanghai's Grand Theatre.

Sponsored by MTV China and DuPont Fibers (China) Co Ltd, "MTV-Lycra Fashion Awards" is expected to be the Chinese version of well-known "VH1-Vogue Fashion Awards" held annually in New York.

Among the awards this year: "Sassoon Best Hair Style Star," "Stylish Actor," for Hong Kong and Taiwan; "Stylish Actress," for Chinese mainland; "Stylish Female Singer," for Hong Kong and Taiwan; "Stylish Male Singer," for Hong Kong and Taiwan; "Female Model of the Year;" "Male Model of the Year" and "Li Ning Fashionable Sportsman."

There are three nominees in each category. They were selected by a 15-member committee of top fashion editors, journalists, curators, stylists, designers, photographers and some business luminaries.

Viewers can cast votes online at [www.sina.com](http://www.sina.com) and [www.mtv.com](http://www.mtv.com).

The show will be broadcast on MTV China, China Central TV, Shanghai Oriental TV and Beijing TV. It will reach more than 10

million households.

### HONG KONG Art in households

Exhibitions and various other artistic activities will be held in November throughout Hong Kong to promote local art, and to spread the message "Bring Art Home."

Sponsored by the Art Promotion Office (APO) of Hong Kong's Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) Corp, the Artists in the Neighbourhood Scheme II has entered its second year.

The programme, by taking art from museums to the communities, aims to add colour to city life.

Four artists last year were selected to participate. The programme this year was expanded to 13 artists and art groups, both budding artists and creators from the 1960s.

The artists' diverse forms of expression will give the public a colourful view of Hong Kong's arts scene.

The public can view from now on until next Tuesday the art at the "Artists in the Neighbourhood Scheme II Launching Exhibition" at the Exhibition Galleries of Hong Kong Central Library.

The works will also be displayed in turn in LCSD's cultural venues and MTR's stations.

The artists will participate in various education and other activities, sharing their ideas and experiences with the public.

### HOHHOT Bilingual dictionary

More than 100 specialists are compiling a Chinese-Mongolian dictionary at the Inner Mongolia University.

The dictionary, one of the State's key publications in its 10th Five-Year Plan (2001-05), will contain 300,000 entries and 5 million Chinese characters.

Boligao, a research fellow at the Academy of Social Sciences of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, is the dictionary's chief editor.

The dictionary is scheduled to be published in 2005.

Mongolian studies have gained in popularity worldwide, and experts from more than 80 countries are working within the field, indicate sources from the Centre for Mongolian Studies at the Inner Mongolia University.

An expert suggests the dictionary will help promote Mongolian studies throughout the world.