

Do donkey work to enjoy nature

Rucksack travellers take a different path to our groups

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

If you type "donkey" in Chinese characters on the Internet's www.google.com search engine, most of the results you get suggest nothing about the domestic ass.

Instead, the sites relate to a cute nickname for a certain group of people who are keen on hard and risky hiking.

Disassociating themselves from common tourists who join tour parties to enjoy fancy delicacies and five-star hotels during their travels, the "donkeys," along with just a few friends, enjoy trekking on unbeaten paths, eating instant food and spending nights in sleeping bags.

In Chinese, *luyou* (travel) sounds the same as "donkey friends."

Just as domestic tourism is booming, the "donkey" group in China — also known as "rucksack travellers" — is also growing fast in recent years, especially in large cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. The increasing number of their professional Chinese websites is testimonial to the group's expansion.

No one knows where the name of the "donkey" came from but the participants do not seem to mind being called "donkeys." Most of them think the name is cool and accurate.

"Because the hard, strong, adamant spirit of the donkey is similar to ours," explained Yang Bo, a mountain and ski lover, known as "Jiang Yu'er" on the Net within the group.

"Sometimes it is this kind of spirit that saves our lives in hopeless situations."

Book bar
Yang is well-known among the "donkeys" because he is the owner of the first and the only bar for rucksack travellers in Beijing.

Yang said "donkeys" had a common hobby: They love to share their wonderful and extraordinary travelling experience with friends. But the only place they could choose before were restaurants, which didn't suit their taste.

So, with a simple plan to build a home for "donkeys," Yang and several other "donkeys" raised funds by themselves and opened the bar at a small and quiet street around the back of the National Library of China in Haidian District of northwestern Beijing last May.

Beyond their expectations, the bar has quickly become the most popular place for rucksack travellers, and even fans from other provinces drop in during their business trips to Beijing.

By taking the name "Travel and Photo Book Bar," Yang said he wants to highlight the bar's theme of travel, photography and exploration.

The walls are specially decorated with beautiful scenic pictures taken by "donkeys." Dozens of types of travelling magazines and hundreds of books about professional travel and exploration fill up the bookshelves.

In addition, the bar has also served as a venue for regular slide-show lectures made by professional and famous explorers, travelling photographers, rock climbers, mountaineers and skiers in the country. Professional mountaineers who once were consultants for the Hollywood film "Vertical Limit" were among the visitors to the bar.

The lectures, about 30 so far, have proven to be very popular among the local "donkeys."

"The bar gets over-crowded during lectures," said Yang. "People even sit on the floor for three hours to listen to them."

Yang said the Internet has been a great help in publicizing the lectures, with many people visiting the bar's main page "www.travel-photograph.com" for information and to register at the bar via e-mail.

About 1,800 rucksack travellers in Beijing have signed up to join the bar's growing fan base. "But the actual number of 'donkeys' surely exceeds this number in Beijing," Yang said.

Being donkeys
Browsing through the registration details reveals most travellers are aged 20 to 30 and work in such fields as IT, finance and securities to be able to afford expensive equipment essential for their hobby, such as professional climbing boots and tents.

Yang said, to be fully equipped, mountaineers will pay about 10,000 yuan (US\$1204.8).

"It is not a small amount for people whose monthly income is under 2,000 yuan (US\$240)," Yang said.

Some "donkeys" even quit their jobs just to travel for one or two months, then find another job when they return.

Take Yang as an example. Before opening the book bar, he worked as a network manager at Peking University Founder Group Corporation for two years.

He spent all his holidays travelling. He even asked for sick leave to accomplish his travelling plan.

Travelling helped him find his real interest, he said, so that he didn't have to stare at the computer and stay in an office all day long. In the end, he quit his job and went to Southwest China's Sichuan Province for more than a month.

Yang admitted working is also important to travellers because they need money to continue travelling.

"People will think I am crazy to quit my job just because I love travelling but I think people will do better if they find their real interests."

Yang's monthly income mostly comes from his photos

and articles he sells from his trips. Although an amateur in this field, Yang's photos and articles are now popular in magazines and travelling books because the places he has been to are new to most people.

Travel pyramid
Yang believes different levels of travellers construct a pyramid, and only the people on the pinnacle taste the pure beauty of nature.

"Travelling with commercial tour groups is just a generalized tour," Yang said. "Their travels often ruin the natural scenery. The real traveller will choose a place that is nearly untouched or hard to get to, because they can enjoy the picture most people have no chance of seeing."

"Look at these words," said Yang, pointing to a shabby manuscript tour map on which

what drove Yang "donkey," Liu Yu off on the path.

Their basic task was to walk and climb numerous metres with their 30-kilogram rucksack on the backs.

It turned out that suffering from all the warnings mentioned above was not the only difficulty they met during their eight-day trek. Tiredness, hunger, no fire to cook, sleeping in cow sheds, losing their way, slipping on the edge of cliffs.... Trip a high risk adventure.

"But when your eyes are filled with pure scenery of mountains, when your ears are filled with the music of brooks and waterfalls, you will feel every difficulty is worthwhile," Yang said.

As far as his trip is concerned, Yang is concerned, but any money he earns from his photos and articles will be used to buy a computer, which he will use to edit his photos and write articles.

However, his next plan is not about how to improve the management of the bar but how to organize a travellers' club.

"Unlike tourist organizations, our club will offer free services to 'donkey' groups," Yang said. "People who join will only pay for the travelling cost."

He said at least three basic qualifications are needed to be a real mountaineer or explorer: First is to have a strong mind; second a tough body, and third profession knowledge.

Many people in big cities regard travelling as a fashion in holidays. But for rucksack travellers, for mountaineers and explorers, travelling is their way of life.

No matter which side people choose, travelling is always a good way to be at one with nature, and a good way to get close to the nature of humans, Yang concluded.



Backpack pack: "Donkey" group members used to hike alone join a rare collective excursion to the Haituo Mountains in Hebei Province.

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Home to share: Travel and Photo Bar, the venue for the "donkeys" in Beijing.

TODAY'S RADIO

- FM 87.6 MHz (all stereo)
10:00 About Beijing
13:30 Korean Hit
16:30 Music on-line
17:00 Entertainment Today
21:00 Liyuan Theatre
FM 97.4 (all stereo)
08:30 Music World
13:00 Pop Concert
14:00 Hello Taxi
16:30 Review of Old Albums
18:00 New Sound of Modern City
20:30 BBC Pop Music
FM 90.0 MHz (all stereo)
08:00 Chinese Billboard
12:00 Conversation
15:00 Peking Opera excerpts
16:00 Literature Cafe
16:30 Popular CD
18:00 Chinese folk music
20:00 Into Music
AM 603 kHz
10:00 Community & Life
12:00 Legal Times
18:00 Travel Guide
20:10 English pop songs

TODAY'S TELEVISION

- CCTV-1 Channel 2
19:00 News; Weather
19:55 Science Review
20:05 Serial: Brother (1)
22:00 World Report
CCTV-2 Channel 8
19:35 Financial Report
20:00 Life
21:00 Earth Stories
21:25 Economy 30 Minutes
CCTV-3 Channel 15
19:30 Symphony World
20:33 Performance Arena
23:13 Concert Hall
CCTV-4 Channel 32
08:00 News 60 Minutes
10:35 Oriental Home
11:20 Traveller
13:30 Art Gallery
18:30 Focus Today
19:30 Chinese Art
21:00 China News
CCTV-6 Channel 18
08:31 Chinese movie
12:14 Documentary: Sound of Music
12:53 British movie
18:37 Movie Stars
19:45 Chinese movie
21:48 Film Market
22:10 Japanese movie
CCTV-8 Channel 29
11:05 Animal World
18:10 Children's Theatre
19:00 Around the World
21:48 Jiayi Drama
23:38 French serial
CCTV-9
08:15 After School Chinese
19:00 World Wide Watch
20:00 Culture Express
23:00 Sports Scene
BTV-1 Channel 6
09:38 Serial: Nothing in the Mirror (19, 20)
11:30 Beijing Express
17:25 Stock Market
18:30 News; Weather
19:53 20-part serial: Defendant (1)
21:45 Focus Today
22:36 Hello the World
BTV-2 Channel 21
13:08 Current Popularity
18:20 Chinese Top Music
19:38 Drama
21:48 Live Now
BTV-3 Channel 27
15:55 Beijing Suburb
17:00 Impression
18:00 Animation World
18:30 Modern English
19:30 Science and Technology
20:05 Knowledge is Power
BTV-4 Channel 17
09:18 Movie: Legend of the Fall
16:55 US drama: X Files (3)
18:00 630 Theatre
18:35 Art Life
19:10 Entertainment Live
19:45 Prime Time Theatre: The End (13, 14)

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

Before we have looked at third-hand strategy, now I wish to highlight one more critical play that isn't well-known below the expert ranks. Look at the North and East hands. Against three no-trump, your partner, West, leads a fourth-highest diamond four. After declarer calls for dummy's six, what would you do?

Whatever East plays, South wins with his jack, crosses to the dummy in spades, and takes the losing club finesse. What should West do next? You and I can see that if West cashes the diamond ace, declarer's king drops, and West can cash three more diamond tricks to defeat the contract. But what if South started with K-J-5 or K-J-3 of diamonds, and East has the heart ace? Then cashing the diamond ace would be fatal to the defence. Instead, West would have to shift to the heart nine, putting East on lead for a diamond return through declarer. How does West know the layout? The answer is that if third hand does not have a card higher than the eight, he should not automatically play third hand high; instead, he should give count. So, with two cards, he plays the higher, but with three, as here, he drops the lowest. At trick one, East should play the diamond three.

If East has a singleton diamond, the contract is probably laydown, so West should assume his partner has a triplet and cash the diamond ace when in with the club king. Are you worried that South might win a cheap first trick? Maybe he will, but it won't make any difference in the long run. Get out a deck and try it yourself to see.

Bridge hand diagram showing North, South, West, and East hands with cards and suits. Dealer: South. Vulnerable: East-West. Opening lead: ♠ 4.

CROSSWORD (No 6602)

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Across clues include: 1 Status, 4 Elegant, 8 Rocket part, 12 Merchandise ID, 13 Bad-mannered, 14 Contented murmurs, 15 Achieved, 17 Natural resources, 18 Fates, 19 Bed of coal, 21 Unseal, to a poet, 23 Thin, 27 Piercing, 30 Sour, as cream, 33 — Claire, WI, 34 Put up pictures, 35 Derisive laugh, 36 Use a parachute, 37 Dow Jones fig. out, 38 Gaze dreamily, 39 Run in neutral, 40 Bookish types, 42 Approves, 44 Gawk at, 47 Boom-box issue, 51 Pack away, 54 Climbed out, 56 Bleached-out, 57 Where hackles rise, 58 Web-surfers' suffix, 59 Skater's leap time, 60 — citizenship expert, 61 Kungfu Bruce —, 26 Gift-giving time, 27 Tatar laugh, 28 Roof overhang, 29 Bridge bldr., 31 Thai language, 32 Speed skater Apollo, 36 Plains grazer, 38 Chow mein additive, 41 Wooden rod, 43 Pay homage, 45 Make shore, 46 Genesis hunter, 48 Much-admired one, 49 Desiccated, 50 Perimeter, 51 Health club by add-on, 52 Price add-on, 53 Bullring cheer, 55 Balance-sheet guru.

Solution to No 6602 crossword puzzle. Across words: STATUS, ELEGANT, ROCKET PART, MERCHANDISE ID, BAD-MANNERED, CONTENTED MUMURS, ACHIEVED, NATURAL RESOURCES, FATES, BED OF COAL, UNSEAL, TO A POET, THIN, PIERCING, SOUR, AS CREAM, CLAIRE, WI, PUT UP PICTURES, DERISIVE LAUGH, USE A PARACHUTE, DOW JONES FIG. OUT, GAZE DREAMILY, RUN IN NEUTRAL, BOOKISH TYPES, APPROVES, GAWK AT, BOOM-BOX ISSUE, PACK AWAY, CLIMBED OUT, BLEACHED-OUT, WHERE HACKLES RISE, WEB-SURFERS' SUFFIX, SKATER'S LEAP TIME, CITIZENSHIP EXPERT, KUNGFU BRUCE, GIFT-GIVING TIME, TATAR LAUGH, ROOF OVERHANG, BRIDGE BLDG., THAI LANGUAGE, SPEED SKATER APOLLO, PLAINS GRAZER, CHOW MEIN ADDITIVE, WOODEN ROD, PAY HOMAGE, MAKE SHORE, GENESIS HUNTER, MUCH-ADMIRED ONE, DESICCATED, PERIMETER, HEALTH CLUB BY ADD-ON, PRICE ADD-ON, BULLRING CHEER, BALANCE-SHEET GURU.

WHAT'S ON

Kung Fu Show
The 90-minute performance displays dazzling skills of mysterious Chinese kung fu in a hero-plus-beauty story. Fifty kung fu masters amaze the audience with bare-handed practice, one-to-one competing and weapons practice.
Time/dates: 19:30, nightly
Venue: Xin Rong Theatre (16 Baizhifang Road, Xuanwu District)
Presented by Beijing Detian Shunyi Culture Development Co., Ltd.
Tel: 8354-0774, 8354-0775

STAGE
Keep it in the air: The Chaoyang Theatre in central Beijing presents acrobatics year round.
Top acrobatic artists invited from all over the country perform for Chinese and foreign tourists. The programme features trick cycling, leaping through hoops and Chinese magic tricks. Some of the artists have won prizes in international competitions.
Time: 7:15 pm, daily
Place: 36, Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District
Tel: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

Joyful jugglers: The China Acrobatic Troupe stages a nightly variety show at the Tiandi Theatre, where the seemingly impossible is made real.
Spinning plates, juggling umbrellas, contortionists and acrobats fill the air. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the star-studded cast will amaze.
Time: 7:15 pm, daily
Place: 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Chaoyang

Grandpa Dog, a peasant who has gone through all kinds of hardships but never stops dreaming of owning a piece of land.

The play was staged over 200 times between 1986 and 1995. Now it will be played by a new generation of actors.
Time: 7:15 pm until June 2
Place: Capital Theatre
Tel: 6524-9847, 6525-0996

Spanish flavour: The Spanish National Ballet Group will visit Beijing and present two shows at Tianqiao Theatre. The performance features a combination of classical and modern ballet and the essence of Spanish culture. The group's artistic director Nacho Duato has won numerous international awards.
Time: 7:30 pm, May 31, June 1
Place: Tianqiao Theatre
Tel: 6524-9847, 6525-0996

This sporting life: The Beijing People's Art Theatre stages again its recent creation — "The Club," an original script by Australian playwright David Williamson. Debuted in 1977, the play is the best-known theatrical representation of Australian sporting culture. The author wanted to find out what is happening to sport in the crossover era between loyalty to the club, and loyalty to the almighty dollar. Chinese directors and actors discovered that the play has much in common with today's Chinese sports culture.
Time: 7:15 pm until June 2

Place: small playhouse
People's Art Theatre
Tel: 6525-0123

Opera excerpt
The Liyuan Theatre presents 15 original Peking Opera excerpts specially packaged for foreign audiences in the original style. The theatre re-creates the ambience of old up Ming-style taboos to sample performances. With an interpretation in English, the performances are from the Beijing Peking Opera Theatre.
Time: 7:30 pm, daily
Place: Qianmen Hotel Xuanwu District
Tel: 6301-6688 ext 87

Hair raiser: Movies from "The White-haired Girl," Chinese opera, will be heard during phony orchestra and Ballet.
Produced by the Institute of Arts, the first Western-style opera in modern China. It is a descriptive music country folk melody.
Time: 7:30 pm, May 30
Place: Poly Theatre
Tel: 6500-1188 ext 56

Kids' stuff: To celebrate China Philharmonic Orchestra's 50th anniversary, the orchestra will give a concert, featuring such pieces as "Chinese Children's Suites," Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite" and "Swan Lake Suite," as well as Greig's "Peer Gynt Suite," and Dukas' "L'Apprenti Sorcier."
Time: 7:30 pm, June 1
Place: Poly Theatre
Tel: 6500-1188 ext 5176

Oil paintings: Famed artist Yin Kun will hold a solo exhibition at the eastern hall of Wanfung Art Gallery. On display are his 30 new works, including "Fireworks," "Catching Fish" and "To Love Myself." The series of "Fireworks" reflects the artist's perspective of 2001, a memorable and inspiring year for most Chinese people. The second series focuses on the contradictory psychology of ordinary people. "To Love Myself" is Yin's self-probe into an emotional world.
Time: 9 am-5 pm, June 1-10
Place: 136, Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District
Tel: 6523-3320

Female artist: Around 80 oil paintings, ink paintings and sketches by Chinese artist Pan Yuliang (1895-1977) are on display at the Nationalities' Cultural Palace in Beijing. Upon her death, Pan bequeathed more than 4,000 works of art to China, which she created during her years in Paris.
Time: 9 am-4:30 pm until June 4
Place: Nationalities' Cultural Palace, 49 Fuxingmen Nei Dajie
Tel: 6601-6806