

Hong Meigui Houping Expeditions

Information for Members

November 29, 2007

1 Summary - Read this if you read nothing else. .

- **Money** : Make sure you withdraw the RMB from a Bank of China ATM in Chongqing or Wulong. **YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GET RMB AFTER YOU LEAVE WULONG.** Let me repeat that: it's definitely 100 % certian, no matter what you've read elsewhere, that you cannot use any foreign credit cards or atm cards or traveller's cheques or currency, etc. in the whole Houping area.
- **Budget** : 50-70 RMB per day for kitty (food, accommodation, cave food), 200-400 RMB for round-trip transport Chongqing airport to Wulong. 50 GBP for equipment fee.
- **Accommodation** : EWD: Bring a sleeping bag and roll mat.
- **Food** : The food is not good for vegetarians.
- **Visa** : Get a tourist visa (this does not apply to Hoffman expeditions). Don't mention caving. List Chongqing, Yangshuo, Kunming, Chengdu as destinations.
- **Medical** : You need innoculations, but no malaria tablets. We have a first aid kit. Tell us if you have food or drug allergies or any medical conditions.
- **Lights** : Bring electric lights. Carbide and flatpacks are not available. 220V and 110V mains is available for charging.
- **Clothing** : Caves are 13-16°C and some are wet. Wetsuits likely needed.
- **Other equipment** : Bring a camera, gps, or laptop (and any download cables) if you have one. Tell us what you're bringing.
- **Group equipment** : The expedition has drills, rope, survey instruments, etc.

2 Objectives

2.1 Surveying and Documentation

In all our exploration, we aim to document our exploration and the caves themselves. This includes writing up trips in the logbook, writing cave descriptions, drawing rigging diagrams, taking photographs (and cataloging them), and of course creating a good survey. All expedition members are expected to put in a fair share of effort towards this. As a general rule if you explore a passage, it's your responsibility to document it before you return home - past experience shows that even people with the best intentions rarely draw up surveys after they've gone home.

3 Overview of Houping

Houping is a mountainous karst region of Chongqing Municipality in south-western China. When we say "Houping", we actually mean the whole of north-western Wulong county, which includes several towns and villages which have housed expeditions: HP: Houping, EWD: Er Wang Dong village, JL: Jielong, TZ: Tongzi, HL: Huolu.

3.1 Prices

Living in the Houping area is cheap. Some example prices from the past few years:

- **Accommodation** : EWD:5, TZ:15 Yuan/person/night
- **Cooked food** : EWD:5 TZ:5-10 Yuan/person/meal
- **Beer** : 2-3 Yuan/bottle (about a pint)
- **Internet** : 3 Yuan/hour (may not be available)

Based on previous years' spending, you should expect to spend around 50-70 RMB yuan per day on kitty expenses (see below).

3.2 Weather

The weather can be quite variable. In late December there may be light snow on the ground.

3.3 Food

EWD: We'll almost certainly be staying at Mr. Wang's place, and he'll provide farm fare for us. The food is plain and repetitive - mostly rice, potatoes, and pig fat.

Everywhere but EWD: We'll eat at small local restaurants. Expect noodles for breakfast. Dinner will usually be rice with a number of vegetable and meat dishes.

Caving food provided as part of the expedition includes snickers bars, dried pineapple, peanuts, dried beef, compressed biscuits, and chocolate wafers. For underground camping we have dehydrated meals. For the surface we have coffee, tea, milk powder, and tang (orange, pineapple, grape, etc.) All of the above is included in kitty. Kitty will also include bottled water (except EWD) and 2 or 3 meals per day cooked by locals. You'll be able to buy local beer through the expedition for 2Y a bottle. If you want special food, you're best off buying it at the Carrefour in Chongqing which carries some western products. In HP, TZ, JL, HL (not EWD) you can buy grape juice drink, cola drink, and salty snacks.

VEGGIES: It's pretty much impossible to get totally vegetarian food as the locals really can't comprehend the idea. It should be possible to get dishes cooked without meat in them (rather than meat dishes with the meat picked out), but due to local cooking methods small scraps of meat may be present from dishes previously prepared in the same wok. Vegetarians are advised to bring dietary supplements.

3.4 Accommodation

JL/TZ/HP/HL: Accommodation will be in a concrete guesthouse with semi-private bunk rooms (2-4 people per room), a common room, and an equipment room. Mattresses and bedding will be provided. Hot showers and laundry facilities (not JL/HL) will probably be available. (Note: showers may be limited/unavailable if there is a drought.) Personal space in the bunk rooms may be limited, so please be considerate to others. Rooms will probably not be heated (electric blankets may be available).

EWD: Accommodation will be in an un-insulated wooded farmhouse. The locals have requested that men and women sleep on different floors. You will need a warm sleeping bag and a rollmat. There is no plumbing, no showers, etc. The toilet consists of two planks over a pungent pit. All drinking water must be filtered (bring a filter if you have one, and let Erin know about it). You will need a headtorch for going to the toilet at night. There is no insulation or heat, so the farmhouse is very cold - bring gloves, several layers of warm surface clothing, thick socks, a warm hat, etc. Surgical gloves are useful for typing in the cold.

We have **mains electricity** (220v) which is fairly reliable (EWD: it may be turned off during the day), and we have a voltage regulator which outputs both **220v and 110v**. We have blocks of **sockets** which will accept just about any shape plug you can imagine - no-one has yet managed to bring a plug that doesn't fit. We hope to have dial-up **internet access** (3 yuan/hour). We have a large collection of **music**, but please bring your own to add to the collection. We can play a wide variety of formats (mp3, ogg, m4a, flac and wma certainly work, and probably several others) Bring headphones if you'll want to listen to music in the bunk room.

4 Caving Kit

4.1 Lights

It is **NOT POSSIBLE TO BUY CARBIDE IN WULONG**, so leave your carbide lights at home. Bring an **ELECTRIC LIGHT**. Caving trips may be fairly long (last year's longest day-trip was 22-and-a-half hours long). Some leads may require camping underground. You'll need reliable and long-lasting electric lights. I use an array of LEDs which I can run from a variety of different sorts of battery, with a Princeton-tec Impact torch bungied to the side of my helmet as a backup. You will also need a separate light for reading instruments and setting stations while surveying.

Hong Meigui has plenty of **rechargeable AA and AAA batteries** which may be borrowed, as well as AA primary cells which may be bought at cost. We don't have any flatpacks, C-cells, D-cells, or 9V batteries and they're not available in China. Contact if you will need large numbers of AA cells and we will make sure there are sufficient available.

Charging lights: the voltage regulator outputs reliable 200V and 110V suitable for charging most battery packs.

Please use **RECHARGEABLE** batteries (or plan to take your spent batteries home with you), as we don't have an environmentally-friendly way to dispose of used batteries in the expedition area.

4.2 Survey Kit

We have several sets of survey instruments and tape measures. The compasses are mostly Silva Type 80s, which we have found to be almost indestructable. They are prismatic instruments, which take a little getting used to and some people do not like them. If you would prefer to use your own instruments, please bring them.

We sketch to scale on metric-gridded paper. If you are particularly attached to a certain style of survey paper, feel free to bring your own as long as it is metric and can be hole-punched and filed with the rest of the survey notes.

Bring a station light. It's useful to have a small light to hold on survey stations to aid sighting and sketching - in awkward spots it's much easier than trying to get your helmet light on station.

4.3 Clothes

The caves are 13-16 degrees Celsius (a bit warmer than in the UK, but not much). Some leads are wet. I find that I'm OK wearing a thin polartec fleece under a lightweight cordura oversuit or cotton boildersuit, but I know that at least one person prefers to wear

a TSA suit with a thick fleece suit underneath - I would roast in that. If you want to bring lots of thermals, I suggest bringing several thin layers so that you can take layers off if you find the caves too warm.

WETSUITS will be needed for the swimming and deep wading sections of JL, HP, EWD, etc.. I picked up a cheap 3mm wetsuit in Hong Kong that seems to do the job.

Hong Meigui has buoyancy aids, so you don't need to bring your own.

4.4 SRT Kit

Expect to pass rebelayes and use 9mm rope. Bring a steel braking karabiner (the ropes are often thin and muddy). HMG uses thru-bolts, so everyone is expected to bring an 13mm spanner (wrench) and carry it on all trips involving SRT.

4.5 Rigging Kit

We have a large stock of rigging kit, including drills, hangers, thru-bolts, spits, spit drivers, Roc-Peckers, hammers, tape slings, krabs and rope protectors. You should not need to bring any of those things yourself, unless you particularly want to use your own bolt driver or hammer, for example.

4.6 Bags and Containers

We have tackle sacks (cave packs) for use underground so you don't need to bring your own.

Do bring a rucksack (backpack) suitable for the occasional 1-2 hour hike with caving equipment plus some rigging gear.

We have several tacklesack-sized Ortlieb heavy-duty drybags for transporting kit which needs to be kept dry. To maximise the life of drybags, they must be transported inside tacklesacks, and care should be taken not to put anything pointed (like drill bits or pencils) or with sharp corners into the drybag without careful padding. If you have your own drybag, or other preferred container for keeping your kit dry, please bring it.

Bring a small nalgene or ziplock bags to keep small personal items dry (ie. cave food, personal underground first aid kit). Nalgenes and ziplocks are not commonly available in China.

5 Surface Kit

5.1 Clothing

For winter expeditions, bring multiple warm layers. See the accommodation section for info regarding laundry availability. There is usually no way to dry clothing.

For summer expeditions, be aware that Chinese farmers dress conservatively (they rarely, if ever wear shorts, and I've never seen a bare midriff). Please respect local sensibilities.

You will need boots suitable for 1-2 hr, potentially muddy surface hikes carrying your caving kit plus group rigging kit.

5.2 Bedding

See the accommodation section. For summer expeditions: you may want a mosquito net.

5.3 Toiletries

Sunscreen and dental floss are not widely available in China. Other common toiletry items (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, lotion, etc.) can be bought most places (excluding EWD). The tap water is not potable. Do not rinse your toothbrush with it. A good hand lotion such as E45 is recommended for winter expeditions.

There are no ticks or poison ivy, but cave entrances sometimes have nettles. For summer expeditions: The mosquitoes are fierce. Bring deet and you may want a mosquito net.

5.4 Personal items

Maxipads are generally available (excluding EWD). If you need tampons, bring your own. The Carrefour in Chongqing carries OB, but tampons are not available in Wulong.

If you need condoms, bring your own. Be aware that there are fake Durex on the Chinese market. Please respect local sensibilities (ie. we've been asked to stay in single-sex accommodation in EWD, so be discrete!)

Yeast infections/UTI's are sometimes a problem because it's hard to stay clean on expedition. There are a few courses of antifungals/antibiotics in the first aid, but if you know you're prone to get that sort of thing, bring your own meds.

6 Money

You can NOT get money out in Houping, and it is not possible to change money in Wulong. You will need to get Chinese currency in Chongqing or from the ATM in Wulong.

Travellers' Cheques in China can be a pain in the backside, and are not recommended.

If you've got a cirrus (ATM) card or similar, you can get money from cash points belonging to the Bank of China in Chongqing. Usually you get a reasonably good exchange rate doing this, but you need to watch out for transaction charges - ask your bank what they charge. **YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GET RMB AFTER YOU LEAVE CHONGQING/WULONG.**

Kitty will most likely be around 50-70 Yuan per day, which covers accommodation, food, transportation of club equipment, and a few other bits and pieces. Some of this will be covered by grant income the expedition has received. You will also need money for your personal transport to and from Wulong (200-400Y) and any luxury items you wish to buy (Dove chocolate, cola, etc.)

Beer is **not** a kitty expense. The expedition buys crates of beer and you'll be charged for the number of bottles you drink.

You will also need to make a contribution of £50 towards equipment, payable as 770 Yuan in China.

In October 2007, 1USD = 7.7RMB, 1 GBP = 15.3RMB. See <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic> for the current exchange rate.

1 RMB = 1 renminbi = 1 yuan = 1 CNY = 1 kuai (like USD, dollar, buck, etc. there are several ways to refer to the currency in China.)

7 Getting to Wulong

See [hanzi-chongqing-wulong.pdf](#) for handy phrases for getting from Chongqing to Wulong.

8 Miscellaneous stuff

8.1 Rescue

There is no cave rescue service in China, and any rescue from depth is likely to be extremely slow if possible at all. The best course of action is to try very hard not to

need rescuing!

In case of the worst eventuality, please enter details of your next-of-kin in the log-book when you arrive on the expedition.

8.2 Phrasebooks

Get hold of a phrasebook and bring it along; it will help no-end on your journey, especially if things don't go smoothly, and it will also help you to be self-sufficient in the expedition area so you can do your own thing and not always have to bother people to translate for you.

There is a phrasesheet available for download. (Note - this phrasesheet could be improved, so if you have any suggestions email us.)

8.3 Library

We have a small library of paperbacks of varying merit; it would be appreciated if you brought a couple of books of your own to add to the collection. If you prefer to read in a language other than english, you'll need to bring your own books to read. This will help stop people from going insane in between caving trips - other than caving there's not much to do in the expedition area.

8.4 GPS

If you have your own GPS unit, please bring it along. All known entrances in the expedition area have been GPS located, so having your own GPS will help you identify old caves if you go for a walk around on the surface and to record the locations of any new caves you find. Please make sure your GPS unit is set to WGS84 datum, UTM co-ordinates and metric units. If you have a cable to connect your GPS to a PC, please bring it and any necessary drivers.

8.5 Laptops

If you have your own laptop, please bring it along. It is highly recommended that you buy a plastic keyboard cover to minimize the dust that gets into your laptop (this is particularly true for EWD). It is useful to have at least 3-4 laptops so we can stay on top of the data entry. The expedition will use survex for data processing and a html form/spreadsheet for entering cave and photo information. We will have a printer and scanner, so contact Erin for details of the drivers.

8.6 Cameras

If you have a digital camera, please bring the download cable and any drivers required. If your camera stores its images in a proprietary format, please bring software

than can convert the images to jpegs. We will download the photos to a laptop on a regular basis and then burn photo dvd's for everyone to share at the end of the expedition. Let Erin know if you're bringing a camera for underground use. If there aren't enough cameras, we'll look into getting disposable cameras for documentation purposes.

You will need to bring your own flashguns, flashbulbs, slave units, and waterproof cases. Erin has a tripod which is available for use. We have a few spare firefly batteries for emergencies.

8.7 Talking Points

For a richer experience when interacting with the locals, you may want to bring the following: a few business cards, some small-denomination examples of your local currency (Chinese people are always curious to see foreign money), a few photos of your family and home.