

Report on HKNHS hike from Ng Fai Tin to Po Toi O and Christmas Lunch

11th December 2016

It was about 10:45am when the 22 members on our bus were able to rendezvous with other members who had made their own way to the small pagoda in the car park at Ng Fai Tin. In all, 26 members were to enjoy a wonderful day.

Our leader briefed us thoroughly on the pleasures and possible pitfalls which lay ahead and, under blue skies with just a hint of Hong Kong winter chill, we set off along the High Junk Peak Country Trail. Initially, we were faced with a rather steep ascent with many steps and this was an ideal way to get the muscles working and drive away any earlier chills. The path rose through wooded terrain but as we climbed the vegetation thinned and we were able to take in views over the Port Shelter towards Sai Kung. After these exertions, we reached Sheung Yeung Shan where we rested and recharged our batteries over a welcome drink.



The trail approaching Ha Yeung Shan



The Happy Christmas hikers

We now continued past Ha Yeung Shan towards Ha Shan Tuk. The trail became a little easier and passed through a landscape of more open brush and grassland with rocky outcrops, occasional blossoms and wildflowers and extensive views to both sides. To the West lay Junk Bay and the urban conurbation of Tseung Kwan O, with Lei Yue Mun and Hong Kong Island in the distance. To the East was Clear Water Bay, the Ninepin Islands and a tantalizing view of the village of Po Toi O to where we were heading for lunch.

The trail now followed a descent to Ha Shan Tuk where members were asked to make a choice between two alternative routes to complete the hike. Those braver souls could follow the tougher route involving the ascent of Tin Ha Shan whilst older (or lazier!) members could opt for the easier descent to the Tai Au Mun road.

Members would then rejoin each other at the Tin Hau Temple on the waterfront at Tai Miu Au.

Whilst ten members enjoyed an easy descent with views over Clear Water bay, sixteen members decided to follow the tougher Tin Ha Shan route which involved a climb of some 200m. The steep ascent and descent were facilitated by stone steps which, in spite of the dry conditions, needed careful negotiation. The group remained on the country trail which skirts the actual peak of Tin ha Shan, but there were no protests about this slight detour as rather an onerous ascent was avoided. Once again, the contrasting views of Hong Kong were evident with man-made developments to the West and natural beauty to the East. As members continued their ascent this contrast was brought into even sharper focus with the emergence of the vast Tseung Kwan O landfill project to the West. This made compelling viewing but, from a natural history perspective, it also appeared very provocative. However, on reaching the top of the ascent members were presented with something much more pleasing to the eye. With excellent visibility on the day, Tin Ha Shan was an excellent vantage point from which to enjoy the stunning archipelagic panorama of Hong Kong to the East. It was a good time to reflect on the volcanic heritage of this spectacular place.



West over the Tseung Kwan O landfill



East to Clear Water Bay and beyond

It is believed that this entire landscape, with its rocky islands and surrounding hills, is the caldera formed as a result of a massive volcanic eruption about 140 million years ago. So much material was ejected during this event that the entire base of the volcano collapsed and a series of peaks were formed in the surrounding area. In spite of the weathering and erosion over the millions of years since the eruption, the outline of the caldera can still be seen today.

Reassembling at the Tin Hau Temple gave members a good opportunity to explore this important landmark. There are many such temples in Hong Kong but this is one of the oldest, largest and most important examples. Although it has been rebuilt several times, it is understood to have been built originally in the 13th Century by Fujianese salt traders and seamen in order to thank Tin Hau for saving them from severe storms. It is an important venue each year for the celebration of the Tin Hau Festival in Hong Kong when the statue of Tin Hau is paraded at the site. The temple occupies a spectacular location on the edge of Joss House Bay and this was a wonderful place for members to wind down after the exertions of the day.



Clear Water Bay



Tin Hau Temple at Joss House Bay

But there were still more pleasures to come as members were to enjoy a pre-Christmas lunch together. Thus, a short walk brought us to the lovely village of Po Toi O where tables had been booked in the Seafood Island Restaurant. Drinks, good seafood, and conversation with friends, completed an excellent day and thanks are certainly due to Malcolm and Ming for making all this possible.

Stewart Traynor.

22nd December 2016.

Photographs courtesy of Natural History Society members