

REPORT ON APRIL 2007 OUTING TO INTERESTING SITES IN TAI PO AND TAI PO KAU FOREST

We were 18 keen walkers to brave the heat and humidity on this late April outing. We boarded the bus ahead of time (a first !) and arrived Tai Po old railway station at 10:00 , While the other stations along the Kowloon to canton Railway were built to a standard design, the station at Tai Po Market was built in Chinese style. Construction work was completed in 1913. The external features of the facade, roof and decorations were patterned upon a Chinese structure. Internally, it was designed to function as a railway station. The station was made redundant by a new one in a nearby location in 1983. It was then fully restored and now houses the Hong Kong Railway Museum which was thoroughly explored by the group, before re-boarding the bus to reach, further away on the other side of the Highway, the Wun Yiu Village.

This place is widely known as "Seaside Kiln Capital." Wun Yiu (meaning "the Kiln"), was the largest and most productive pottery centre in Hong Kong since the Ming Dynasty. The clans of Man and Tse moved into the area and brought with them their outstanding pottery-making skills and began manufacturing the blue and white porcelain (1368-1644), thanks to the availability of kaolin from mines in the upper part of the hills around . In 1674 (the 13th year of Kangxi reign of the Qing dynasty) A Ma clan, Hakka people which were originated from Changle county, Guangdong, settled in Tai Po and purchased the kilns from the Man clan . The area was once a center of porcelain industry in the New Territories, pottery made at Wun Yiu were also exported. Because of the competition from good quality and inexpensive porcelain produced by other coastal kilns in Guangdong, the kilns at Wun Yiu finally stopped operating in 1932.

In the remains of the Ancient Kilns which were declared as monument, the relics illustrating the complete process of porcelain production was discovered in the archaeological investigations. These includes china clay quarrying pits, water-mills, animal-driven grinder, clay soaking tanks and dragon kilns. For some reason they all disappeared during the last 30 years, hopefully some of the granite door frame and lintel may have found their ways into museums. Some of us fully equipped, braved the Mosquitos to dig for Ching chards and other souvenir in the hill of broken porcelain

which is the only visible witness of the kilns activity today .

From there a short bus ride brought us to the Tai Po Kau nature reserve and a restfull and leisurely (another first !) Pic Nic by the main steam of the park. Two and half hours and 10 km later after wandering along the Yellow and brown track under shade and escaping a rain storm , we gladly raided a little old man's fridge full of soft drinks, but no beer ! to re-hydrate. And it was only 4:30.

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