

**Hong Kong Natural History Society: Sunday 20 January 2019**  
**Hike from Tai Tan to Pak Tam Chung.**  
**Report by Peter Stuckey**

For the first hike of the New Year the 13 participant Members of the Society were blessed with a partially clouded, sunny day and moderate humidity - altogether delightful weather for hiking. Maureen, the Outing Organizer, had arranged a minibus and a permit to go through the barrier at Pak Tam Chung and to take us to Tai Tan. This is a small coastal village about 1 km north of Wong Shek Pier. It is on the regular 94 and 96 R regular bus routes from Saikung. Maureen noted the hike is one of her favourites, and with good reason for its variety of habitats, shaded woodland at the beginning and end of the hike, fine views over High Island, and its moderate challenges.



At the entrance to the village there is, as we would expect for a typical village in rural southern China, a bamboo cluster and some banyan trees alongside a small shrine. What is perhaps less expected is the attractive and relatively unspoilt stream running in pristine condition into the sea at the Ko Tong Hau inlet of Long Harbour. Further up the stream we saw many small fish.

After a short walk along paved roads we turned up onto the Tai Tan Country Trail which follows through woodland adjacent to a stream up to the Hoi Ha Road. Maureen was feeling kind and allowed us an early drinks stop here before, refreshed, we followed down the road briefly and then turned right, off the road, onto the Cheung Sheung Trail, another pleasantly shaded, gently ascending, woodland walk. Along this route we were rewarded by a splendid display of several Chinese new Year Flowers (*Enkianthus quinqueflorus*) in full bloom. There were five flowers in most of the clusters of the waxy pink bell-like flowers hanging at the end of the branches but sometimes six or seven so we questioned perhaps whether the “*quinqueflorus*” part relates to the five petals in each flower or to the five flowers in each cluster. The shrub is protected by law.



Soon we arrived at the Hui Lam Store on the Cheung Sheung Plateau. What many of us agreed is the best Dao Fu Fa is sold here with ginger syrup, and most of the group enriched their lunch with a bowl. Grazing placidly alongside hikers and campers were several cows which Maureen pointed out were Brahmini cows, identifiable by the hump in their necks. The cross breeding had made earlier generations of these cows stronger for their tasks as plough animals, before they had been released and became feral.



At the store a tall Camellia shrub was in glorious bloom. We left Cheung Sheung on the Maclehoose trail, (Section 3), and continued our gentle ascent to Wa Mei Shan at 391m. The route now offered fine views out to sea and over High Island.



Along the route we met a helpful teacher from the Independent Schools Foundation, ISF Academy, leading a group on the HK Award for Young People, AYP, program, (the successor to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme). He pointed out to us a *Gelsemium Elegans* (Heartbreak grass, Duan Chang Cao). This twining vine is one of the most seriously poisonous plants in Hong Kong. According to myth, it was by eating its yellow flower that Shen Nong, the famed “father of Chinese herbal medicine”, died as the poison acted so quickly he had no time to swallow the antidote.

The gritty path led us downhill past some flowering violets and a fine stand of eucalyptus trees to a vegetable farm, well protected by dogs, and then alongside a stream valley cluttered with a tangle of rattan branches.



Chung had acted admirably as a sweeper and by 4 pm had us all back safely at Pak Tam Chung, agreeably tired, and happy to let the coach take us comfortably back to Central by 5 pm.