

2009 Tiu Tang Lung Autumn Moonlight Hike

It was Halloween, the 31 October 2009. The night was spooky, shadowy and black... except for the full moon that glowed in the sky above Hong Kong... (and of course, the lights of the traffic, signs, highrises, streetlamps, etc.!)

In Tai Po Uptown Plaza, at 6:30 pm, I fingered the heavy linen tablecloth, and looked around at eight companions dressed in heavy boots and hiking gear, their backpacks and sticks stacked against a nearby wall. We were about to begin a great outdoor adventure by sampling delicious specialties from delicate white plates in a Chinese restaurant. It was such a contrast to Canadian backpacking trips that usually begin before dawn, with a coffee mug in the cup holder of the car. This was very posh, indeed! And what a great way to spend Halloween! Hiking under the moonlight along ancient paths through abandoned villages with the definite possibility of being charged by wild pigs! Exciting!!

Two hours later we descended from Green Minibus 20 C, at the village of Wu Kau Tang and after a brief stop to check out the ‘facilities’ and adjust straps and laces, we started along the paved path that follows a bamboo-lined stream westward. There was no need for the torches we had brought because the moon was so bright. Where foliage blocked the moonlight, amber-coloured streetlamps provided warm, inviting pools of light to guide us. We crossed several granite slab bridges as we followed the stream down the valley.

Our hike began at Wu Kau Tang village (right)



After about 20 minutes, we turned left up to a path of hard-packed dirt, interspersed with stone and cement steps. As we ascended the flanks of Tiu Tang Lung, the path became much steeper, the steps disappeared, and soon we were scrambling upwards alongside a fairly deep erosion channel with loose rocks and rubble adding to the excitement. Henry, Hei Man and Jack followed close on Tracey’s heels. Carina and Cindy climbed with steady determination while Chan Sir kept an eye on Felix and I, giving us sensible, but disappointing advice like: “Don’t sit down to rest because it’s dangerous to your heart when your body is fully loaded” (but what about these wobbly knees that won’t hold my body up!?!). Soon after, I got my second wind and was just starting to feel like a mountain goat when Chan and Felix explained that we were now on the section called “Dead Dog’s Descent”! I was properly impressed and began to look more carefully for handholds and tufts of vegetation to brace my steps.



夜攀 東北仔塔羅 (camping on Tiu Tang Lung) 2009-10-31

At last we topped the shoulder of Tiu Tang

Lung (416 m) and Chan Sir suggested that we could pay our respects to the family grave, since we would be sharing their space. And on this Hallowed Evening, too! How appropriate!

Felix disappeared into the bushes with his camera and tripod and the rest of us walked around, looking at the ground as all good geologists do, until we found suitable tent sites.

When we were all set up, food began to appear and soon a midnight feast was in progress. Biscuits, grapes, Halloween pumpkin muffins, cheese sticks, chocolate and crisp apple-things from Beijing - something for every taste.

We crawled into the tents about 12:30 am. Through the net covering of my bivvy, I could clearly see the moon and I notice that by 3:30 am, it had warmed to a mellow yellow colour and was hanging low over Wu Kau Tang. But it was still so bright that only some of the stars were visible. As Carina wrote: *“the Orion (獵戶座) quite clearly last night at more or less the same direction that you (Felix) took the photo (NE)..... I thought I was able to faintly see the Orion nebula (M42) too just below the belt.....The only other easily recognizable one was Cassiopeia (仙后座) at the NNW direction...”*



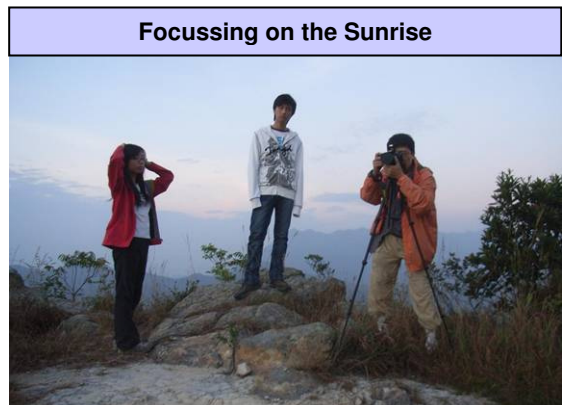
Moonlight Feasting



Sunrise over double Haven

Next morning I was surprised to find that, not only was this a Moonhike, but we were also to witness a beautiful, softly pink and purple Sunrise over Double Haven. We gathered on the rocky outcrop to the east of our campsite with cameras and breakfast fruit, to watch the changing colours on the water of the bay, the hills, the crescent shaped cloud above and the relaxed faces of our companions.

Eventually, at 8:30 we were ready to depart when some very silly person realized her phone was missing! So after a quick search, it was 8:45 that we finally set off to top Tiu Tang Lung. It was an almost vertical climb and we were glad to take a long break there, enjoying the 360 ° panorama. Perhaps it was this scene that inspired Tracey to offer to organize the next hike around Plover Cove over Christmas!



Focussing on the Sunrise

Decamping from Tiu Tang Lung

From there we hiked up and over several hills to the Fire Look out. We passed over only one muddy and wet stream (remember, Cindy?) and through many patches of grass and shrubs, including those of the Myrtaceae-family. This small-leaved woody shrub gives off a refreshing medicinal ti-tree fragrance when the leaves are crushed, and it is a soil indicator plant for lithosol. It thrives in dry, rocky uplands (have I got that right, Tracey?)



Revived by the breezes at the Lookout, we then tackled the ridge walk down to Luk Keng. More shrubs, eroded paths hidden by bracken, grass and tall trees, and lots and lots of hills!! The views of Sha Tau Kok kept us going and at one point we decided to exchange backpacks because “a change is as good as a rest”.

When some got tired or stumbled, others were quick to lend a hand. Tracey provided confident leadership and Chan Sir made sure that the rest of us got through safely. Carina’s delight and Cindy’s absorbed appreciation of the experience made it worthwhile for all of us; the amazing Hei Man & Henry Team had so much energy; and I never heard Jack complain once (at least, not in English!). And of course Felix and I plodded along, looking for every opportunity to stop and photograph something.

When we reached the cafes at Luk Keng, at 12:45, we had hiked a total about 8940 metres, i.e. nearly 9 km, in stages of:
from Car park to Tiu Tang Lung, about 2.7 km
from Tiu Tang Lung to Fire Lookout, about 2.2 km
from Fire Lookout to Luk Keng, about 3.96km

Raynor and his CBR600fs were waiting there and we tucked in to an All Day Breakfast of sausage, eggs and chips. Others went to feast on egg noodles and tofu at Happy Happy BBQ (also known as “Road-Chicken Annie’s Place” after the enthusiastic waitress who often puts herself in danger by dashing out onto the road to call in customers).

So congratulations to us all! It was a challenging hike and we came back safely, happy, with high regard for our own soft, clean beds and dreams of the next adventure....

Thank you to all.....

Janice Shaw



Epilogue:

Jack's school projects were downgraded in favour of a well-deserved kip. Janice's phone turned up and that little mystery will be revealed on the next hike (maybe). Felix inspired us to make a photo record of the adventure with his beautiful images and words. Cindy dried out eventually. And we are all most grateful to Tracey and Sir Chan for their leadership.