

233 Portobello Road
RD2
Dunedin 9077
New Zealand

+64-3-454 3574
+64-27-226 1844
truffle@ihug.co.nz
www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz

Dear Friends, Family and Colleagues

25 December 2016

Vicky is now 40, Richard two years behind her, and Robin, the baby, is 34. (Where did the time go?) So I think they are now old enough to write their own Christmas letters to their families and friends. However, if you want to know what they are up to just re-read last year's Christmas letter. However, there is certainly space for a photo of two of the grandchildren. These two are Tyler and Albie (Katie and Richard's). Tyler has just started his introduction to school and Albie is 2. I couldn't get a photo of 7 year old Bobby (Vicky's son) in time for this year's letter.

I spent half this year in New Zealand and half overseas but the best bits were a lovely February with Wei Ping in New Zealand and 4½ months in China. I first went to China with my friend and colleague Wang Yun back in 1999 (I think) but it was not until 2010 that I was invited to visit Tibet. It was then that I met Wei Ping and fell head over heels - something which is not supposed to happen to an old fellow. Over the next few years Wei Ping and I grabbed every opportunity we could to be together and were in contact daily after Wei Ping introduced me to QQ and We Chat. Then in 2014 I spent the first of three 3 month annual visits to Lhasa courtesy of the Tibetan Government and the Tibet Academy for Agriculture and Animal Science, TAAAS for short.

It is delightful working in TAAAS, an organisation with 500+ well trained staff with an excellent management, a well-defined purpose for being (applied science, which I am all in favour of), and generally sufficient funding. That plus living in Tibet where the scenery is best described to another Kiwi as Central Otago on steroids, being surrounded by a history spanning 5000+ years, and warm friendly people, makes my time in Tibet a reward in itself. Officially I am working on the cultivation of macro-mushrooms including the Tibetan delicacy *ser sha* and mycorrhizal mushrooms like truffles. But I also found time to work on the cultivation of morels (Wei Ping's latest success), some work on mycorrhizas in forestry, and a few scientific papers. I also made some suggestions on how Tibetan horticulture, agriculture and forestry might be improved. If these changes come to fruition it could transform Tibetan agriculture and would be an enormous thrill.



Soon after I arrived in Lhasa this year Wei Ping told me that I had been nominated for a "People's Republic of China Friendship Award" (Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Youyì Jiǎng; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friendship_Award_\(China\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friendship_Award_(China))). I had no idea what it was but thought it was nice that our work was being thought of. However, I got just a bit excited when word came a couple of months later that I was to actually receive one of 50 awarded this year out of 600,000 foreign experts who are working in China. That I was to join only a dozen Kiwis who had received one since 1991, the ceremony was to be held in the Zhongnanhai (the Chinese equivalent of U.S. The White House) followed by the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square, and the pleasure it gave to our Tibet based friends and colleagues, all added to the anticipation.

When the days finally arrived at the end of September, it made the loss of 11 kg over the first 3 weeks of arriving in Tibet this year, regular migraines, the need for an oxygen bottle next to our bed, and a few other problems linked to living at 3650 metres (about the height of New Zealand's highest mountain) seem trivial. There were real thrills when my PhD was conferred, bigger still when we harvested the first Southern Hemisphere cultivated truffle back in 1993, and again when I was awarded a Royal Society of New Zealand medal, but these didn't come close to those few days in Beijing.

The week started when two friends took us to one of the most expensive restaurants in Beijing where the food, the wine, the company and the conversation were delightful. The next day we had lunch with Prof. Hugh Blair and his wife Alana, the other Kiwi recipient this year, and the staff of the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing. Then on the third day we joined the other awardees and went to the Zhongnanhai where our awards were conferred by Ma Kai, the deputy Premier (<http://english.cri.cn/12394/2016/09/29/4081s941576.htm>). The highlight of the following day was a visit to the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square. I know it seems a bit silly but I loved the way the Beijing rush hour traffic suddenly disappeared when our buses approached the Great Hall. It reminded me of a conference I attended in Chuxiong, Yunnan, more than a decade ago. We had to drive from our hotel to the conference centre a kilometre or two away. A policeman stood on every intersection and all the traffic and pedestrians had been stopped. As we passed, the policemen saluted.

Inside the Great Hall we were addressed by Premier Li Keqiang (next page <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ap6stSp4w9A> <http://english.cctv.com/2016/10/01/VIDETym7ykSWjN61HAUe1cTy161001.shtml>). His apparent off-the-cuff 20 minute speech was well balanced and beautifully delivered. What an orator! It was nice that he singled me out as someone working in a difficult environment - it is a bit of a challenge. Next was a banquet in the Great Hall to celebrate China's National Day. The

food was excellent, the wines of good quality, and the people who sat at our table made the evening go very well. As a little girl from Ge Er Mu (almost the back of beyond), Wei Ping never expected such treatment nor to touch the door of the Great Hall of the People, let alone go inside and have dinner in the presence of the Premier and President. And to enter the Zhongnanhai was the stuff of dreams. She couldn't take the smile off her face for the week we were in Beijing. We think her father would have been delighted to see his daughter in such company and we have given face to the family.

Working at 3650 metres in Lhasa can have a negative effect on your health and ailments such as a swollen heart can affect life expectancy. This applies to both the Tibetan and Han people and is despite the Tibetan gene which gives Tibetans a distinct advantage at high altitude. Because of this Wei Ping was allowed to retire after 25 years' service. She had worked for 28 but pressure of work was starting to take its toll so she decided it was time to make the move and retired to Chengdu a few weeks ago.

I miss Lhasa so it is really good that both of us have been asked to go back and spend a month in TAAAS next year and hopefully beyond.



Ian, Wei Ping, David Evans (Deputy Head of Mission in the New Zealand Embassy), Alana and Hugh Blair. President Xi, Premier Li Keqiang and the rest of the cabinet were in front of the flags.

The rest of the year seems tame in comparison. However, there were other bits that were delightful and occasionally very exciting. This year we decided that I needed to see where some of our trees were to be planted, so in July we drove east on a 600 km journey (one way) to Bomi via Linzhi (= Nyingchi) and the small town Yi Gong. Currently there are only 200 km of motorway with some really challenging bits in between, so the journey took us 22 hours - one way. It had been raining for a week before we left so the rivers were raging torrents. Hopefully, the next time we go to Bomi the new 4 lane motorway which tunnels through the mountains will be open. The most poignant place was just outside of Yi Gong where in 2000 a massive 300-million cubic meter mud and rock landslide dammed the Yi Gong River and created a lake that drowned Yi Gong. Eventually the water broke through the dam and a wall of water travelled down the river and wiped out three Indian villages more than 1000 km away. You can see the two sides of the landslide in the photo. There are lots of web pages that talk about it: <http://www.earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IOTD/view.php?id=78293> <http://visibleearth.nasa.gov/view.php?id=78293> and <http://www.atmos.albany.edu/geology/webpages/yigong3m.html>

There were several reasons for making the journey to Bomi other than checking our trees in the plantations. One was to collect wild mushrooms for the national database. The weather was certainly ideal for mushrooms! In the middle of the next page is our mushroom hunting party in Yi Gong. I will not give the names of all of the people but on the left of Wei Ping (in a yellow coat) is Dawa and in the middle his wife Diyang (in the white coat) who are amongst our closest friends. To the left of Diyang is our unflappable driver, another Dawa, and to the right in a red top is Li Li who was Wei Ping's second in command. Of the 11 in our party 7 are Tibetan which is about the ratio in TAAAS.



Well, I have run out of words but still have another 30 gigabytes of photographs of Tibet so here are three more. If I get some time to myself before the end of the year I will also put some photos on our webpage that is tacked on the end of my companies' web site: <http://www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz/page15.html>



Barkhor Square, Lhasa



A train from Golmud to Lhasa
which at its highest point is
5200 metres above sea level



Linzhi

With Very Best Wishes for the Festive Season and the European and Asian New Years

Jan and Wei Ping