

Ganzi to Kanding: An ill-fated journey (7/30/2007)

A log of our “eventful” journey from Ganzi to Kanding. The times are approximate to the best of my recollections but the events are real and unembellished.

July 30, 2007

- 6:00 am Wake up say goodbye to the Brits we had been traveling with for the last couple days. A fairly innocuous beginning to what would turn out to be a very long day.
- 6:40 am I double check the tickets and realize I have made an incredibly stupid mistake, thinking that the date 7 30 was the departure time when in fact the bus was scheduled to leave at 6:10 am.
- 6:43 am We rushed down to the bus station and stared at a empty lot.
- 6:50 am Since Josh is short on time we decide to hire a minivan to for the 12 hour journey from Ganzi to Kanding for about \$100.
- 7:15 am We leave Ganzi in our chartered minivan.
- 7:28 am The driver pulls out a pouch containing a brown powder which he snorts up his nose. He offers me some and conveys that it keeps him awake while driving, always a good thing, but on the other hand a driver hopped up on some unknown undoubtedly less than legal foreign substance is not necessary a good thing. By the way I politely declined his offer. Next time I hire a car perhaps I should have the driver pee in a cup.
- 8:15 am We pass an overturned truck on the pass out of Ganzi, an inauspicious start to the day.
- 9:15 am We arrive in the next major town of Luhou. At this point the driver decides he wants to pass us on two another minibus with 6 passengers already in it. In my broken Chinese I say we’ll go in the other bus but then we pay one eighth of the price we agreed to. He didn’t go for this and after a couple attempts to pass us on he finally said he would take just the two us.
- 9:50 am After almost 45 minutes of negotiation we were back on the road. As we approached police van along the side of the road outside of the driver had us roll up the semi-tinted windows and once we passed the police without incident he became noticeably more relaxed and jovial. I’m not sure if he was worried about the brown powder or some other illicit activity and I didn’t try to find out.
- 11:55 am Our happy driver treats us lunch and motions that we should all get hookers in Kanding.
- 1:30 pm A large number of vehicles are stopped along side the road and we pull over with them. It turns out that an SUV has tumbled off the road. Men were carrying three badly injured semiconscious men up to the road from the overturned vehicle. The forth member of the car was a woman who had a slight wound on here head but was clearly in shock. One of the men had a taken a hard blow to the head and his face was covered in blood. It was the first time I had been on the site of an accident and I was not really sure what I could do to help. I thought of getting my first aid kit but nothing I had was going to do anything to help these guys. Since we were traveling in the least crowded vehicle they asked if they could use are minibus to

transport the injured which I of course replied, yes, or rather “hao” (good) since there is no word for “yes” in Chinese. Two of the victims were laid along the seats in our minibus and we were ushered into a SUV that turned out to be a police or government vehicle of some sort. It had a siren and the driver used it as he spread down the road passing all manner of vehicles in his way. I hoped he knew what he was doing but it was still a little unnerving, especially given what we had just witnessed. We stopped in the next town and waited for our driver over a second lunch courtesy of our government hosts.

- 2:40 pm We were reunited with our driver and transferred our stuff back into our original minibus, that is, all but my fleece, which in the confusion got left in the back seat of the government vehicle. I would have been less upset about it if I had lost it before going through Southeast Asia but after dragging for 5 months through tropical climates only to lose it two weeks into the portion of my trip where I would really need it just added to the frustration of the day.
- 4:25 pm As if the day wasn't long enough about three and a half hours to our destination traffic ground to a halt as the road was blocked ahead and we pulled up behind line of waiting cars. I wasn't sure what the delay was but I was told we could continue on our ill-fated journey at 6:00 pm.
- 5:40 pm Well the good news was we didn't have to wait until six to get moving again. What caused the delay was somewhat of a mystery although it appeared that it was just another case of poorly planned Chinese road construction. While you have to be impressed by the number of roads the Chinese have built in the last few years, their method of construction in which roads are reduced to one lane without possibility of passing for 20 km stretches leads to a great deal of chaos on the road and more than a few delays.
- 9:00 pm We finally roll into our destination of Kanding almost 14 hours from when our odyssey began. Although we did beat the bus we were supposed to be on, passing it on the 4700 m pass, just before Kanding; a small consolation for an ill-fated day.
- 9:30 pm We showed up at our chosen hostel only to be told there were no more rooms but our luck began to turn as we began to walk away we were informed that they did have a room since someone who had booked never showed up.
- 9:50 pm We had a beer and enjoyed the end of a very long day. Hoping that tomorrow's journey back to Chengdu would be much less eventful. It was.

Although I didn't take any pictures of the accident for obvious reasons here are a few pictures from along the way:



**Stupa heading out of
Ganzi.**



**Overturned truck on the
pass heading out of
Ganzi, an inauspicious
start to the day.**



Top of the pass heading out of Ganzi. Tibetans are throwing paper with scripture on them into the air.



Tagong with good weather as we drove through on our way to Kanding.