June 24: Great Wall:

... Several of our group disappeared and as we become concerned several others go to find them and they also do not return. Has some ancient Chinese curse on the Great Wall taken our group? No, they have just followed a very narrow and somewhat dangerous path out to the last tower which has not been reconstructed. It is a wonderful view. Now comes our time to leave this place and again we must take to the steps. But most are going down not up. Lillian and I decide to descend by a toboggan ride. It was great fun and within five minutes we were at the bottom of the mountain...

June 28: To Luoyang

... We were all surprised at the elegance of this new train. Through blue laced curtains we watched rice paddies, farmers, courtyards around homes, and even cave dwellings as the sun woke us early across the passing landscape...

June 28: At the Longmen Caves

... These caves are listed as one of the nation's historical monuments. For 500 years figures were carved in different styles, characters, shapes, and some colored. The carvings tell Buddhist stories to encourage people to be more obedient. We are amazed at the 110,000 Buddhist statues! We walked up stairs and examined the organic groupings from the smallest to the "Oriental Venus", the largest sculpture...

July 2: Cave home

... The new part was built in 1990. Two sons got jobs and had the house built. Out back in the side of the hill was the cave house. It had been in the family for several generations. Inside the walls were covered with newspaper and some pictures. One of the pictures was The Last Supper. The cave dwelling looked very comfortable and cool. Inside, was a kang, a heated bed, which uses corn stalks as fuel to heat up the earthen bed...

July 2: Hefei to Taiping

... Driving through the countryside it was interesting to see the change from the northern part of China. I saw villagers checking the nets for fish and shrimp (crawfish). We saw more use of farmland through terracing the land so they could have fields in the hills. The water buffalo working the fields reminded me of a scene from 'Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress'; where one of the characters is having trouble with a water buffalo...

July 4: Sunrise

... I just had a moment on Huang Shan Mountain. It started at 4.25 a.m. Dark, brisk, and not so quiet. Several stars tried to fill the sky and the moon was bright and round just watching over us starting to say goodbye. The climb took about 23 minutes. Up steps and over stones, remnants of yesterday's 'step builders' and the boards they lay after a hard day's work in the mist and rain. We reached our perch, some people peering through trees. Others sit on the side of the mountain looking for the best shot. I hear lovers laugh and watch as they hold hands waiting for the moment. The sky is a bit brighter and I can make out trees jutting out of the mountain in the distance. I take in the sloping trees, mountain peaks floating above the clouds, rocks just placed on the tops of peaks as if God placed them there just for our enjoyment. At 5.08 it was semi, demi, quasi quiet. At 5.09 the vista commanded our attention. The sun started to say good morning and ever so slowly crept above the clouds. The sun was bright, golden, strong and confident that this would be a beautiful day...

July 5: School visit in She Xian

... What a wonderful experience! It was very humbling to reach the top of the stairs of Shexian Middle School and enter the large conference room to thunderous applause from members of the student body who were gathered there. These students were on summer vacation -- they did not have to be there but wanted to be here to meet and speak with us...
July 6: Breakdown by the Xinan River

... News flash: our bus broke down. The able group tried to push the bus to give it a rolling start – no luck. Even Dena’s mechanical advice didn’t help. A fellow bus driver happened by and collected the necessary material to get the bus started and we were on our way ...

July 7: Observations on the bus

... People’s spirits are up. The bus is buzzing literally with laughter, dialogue, and philosophical lectures - at least it sounds that way to me. I close my eyes for a minute and wonder if when I get home I will forget the pointed hat people bending over in the rice paddies, the little girls with flowers in their pony tails, and the working women busy at their sewing machines in the doorways of their homes ...

July 8: Hangzhou

... Our next stop was the dragon well tea plantation. As we overlooked the terraces of tea, our local guide explained the picking process which begins in March and continues for seven months. Because only the small tips of the leaves are harvested, picking must be done by hand. Spring pickings typically yield green tea and the later summer pickings black tea. The green tea is not fermented and the black tea is fermented. We were able to view a portion of the drying process, which is done in a largish vat heated from below ...

July 11: Shanghai

... It is here that we visit the site of the first Congress of the Communist Party of China. We view relics and documents surrounding the events of July 1921. No photos are allowed. I found a stark contrast in the location of this historic worker revolution anti-capitalist movement to the upscale surroundings of the current French Concession Quarter. We participate in another eventful shopping experience at the flea market until 4.30 p.m. We board the bus for a 5 p.m. riverboat cruise of the Huangpu River. We enjoy a front seat view of the magnificent Shanghai skyline. In addition to the early 20th century buildings on the historical Bund, we also snap many photos of awesome high rises of the Pudong area. The Jin Mao Hyatt, Pearl of the Orient TV Tower, the Bank of China. Amazingly, these sites were built in the last decade on farmland. This typifies the rapid rate of change in China ...