

Tour Report China

»Winter Steam«

19. - 27. January 2019



What was most noticeable? The publicly celebrated suppression of the Uighur. While the extinction of Uighur identity has been very subtly done in recent years (prohibition of Qur'an, and refusal of Uighur students to go to university), the brutal power of the Han-Chinese state apparatus is now unveiled: every restaurant, every hotel has a security gate like at airports, lots of shops, banks, offices have car barriers in front of their doors, petrol stations have been upgraded to high-security zones with barbed wire, vehicle barriers, and armed guards, and as we follow the tales of our Uighur guide, individual repression is becoming worse: children and teachers are fined (3,000 - 5,000 Yuan) when speaking Uighur in the school, in the largest Uighur library in Urumqi 60% of the Uighur books disappeared overnight, and about 10% of the Uighur population has been imprisoned in retention camps to study the wisdom of Chairman Xi's essays.

Also, the Chinese secret service did everything to show clearly who is master in the house: on two days our tour bus was chased by a black VW Passat - no matter where we went, the Passat was always there. We could go where we wanted to, take pictures of what we wanted (as long as it was railroading related), and nobody cared if we pushed into areas that had been strictly forbidden for years. The secret service just wanted to know where we were ... it got quite absurd when the secret service had no time or desire to follow us: then a Han Chinese woman from our hotel was obliged to ride in our bus and brief the secret service in hourly intervals where we were right now.

Unfortunately we left the hotel in the mornings latest at 06:00, without breakfast! For Chinese of course a sacrilege,

not to have a proper breakfast - and so we were already at the Erjing mine photting, when the lady woke up and looked for us ... We didn't have to start the day without breakfast, though - it was delivered directly on the spot.

Not fun was our experience with a Chinese SWAT unit, which invaded our hotel, because someone from our group had taken a picture of the main street in Sandaoling. Photographing railway: yes. Everything else: no.

In terms of railway photography, we saw these class JS locomotives: 8190, 8197, 8225, 8053, 8077, 8195, 8314. There was an late evening sighting out of the bus (8081), as well as the individual sighting of 8089. At the locomotive grave yard, a lot of shunting took place and 8076 was pulled into the repair shop on 24. January.





The first train of the day-shift accelerates a heavy load of coal.

Regarding the open pit mine, 3 locomotives were in operation, the Nanzhan station and the overland route to Erjing and Yijing also served by 3 rostered locos. The mine in Yijing started operations again and is served several times a day from Erjing. It is a quite common sight now to find two JS at



A fully loaded coal train passes the temporarily suspended excavator „421“

the same time at Erjing, giving the branch line a lot of train movements!

JS 8190 operated tender-first when we arrived at the pit the first day, a sight we had not experienced for many years. Of course, that was not great for photography, and when the loco was still running »in the false way« the next day, we politely asked the dispatcher if they could turn the locomotive. About noon, the locomotive was then send on the triangle track and pleased us for the rest of the time then again running with smoke box ahead!

Conspicuous were the sometimes long loading times of the trains: while we had already taken into account the the loading by a single small excavator would take ages, we were surprised to learn how often the »Blue Tower«, the bunker loading facility, had technical problems. This led to long breaks, which were then followed by trains running almost every 15-20 minutes, when the loader was running faultlessly again, and one train after the other could be loaded! Sometimes unloading did also not work the way we expected it – even at this end of the line, delays were normal.

At the end, even railfans are humans: we tend to forget the negative aspects of life and just remember the good times. And we had plenty of good times at Sandaoling! Our group members were enjoying themselves, we were free to wander around at the mine, could follow the official tour program or do our own stuff. Gigabytes of photo and videos were produced, we ate very well in Chinese and Uighur restaurants, had a great local guide and busdriver, our hotel was well heated, hot water for a shower available 24/7 – and Sandaoling is the last place on earth where you can find »real« steam in larger numbers and with a day&night operation. It is not a shiny place, it is dirty, sometimes loud: but it is »real«!

Will we experience steam again in Sandaoling next year? On the spot, we were told that the summer of 2020 will be the end of the opencast mine, that is at least the official plan. Possible dates ranged from June to September 2020, so for an all-time winter tour to Sandaoling there would still be time in January 2020! We are thinking of 7. - 18. January 2020 ...