

Chapter IV

Last Day in Fu-Shan Story of the Cameras Back to the Leader

Our last day at the Fu-Shan Research station. We gathered up the light traps, cleaned up the sickly little pan traps (one actually caught a stag beetle!), took down the hanging dog trap, cleaned up our rooms, packed, and got ready to leave. They were nice enough to let us borrow any equipment we might need for the next station. There



Our fantastic abode

is a chance that our bag is waiting for us at the hotel in Taipei, complete with hanging blacklight traps and FITs, but it's rather remote. So we borrowed the monster extension cord, one hanging blacklight, and the curved machete that Matt used to pull down the ant nest. I got some parting photos of the place we were staying, and lunch.



Lunch

A couple things I should mention before we leave this place. First, when we first got here they gave us all vests, with something, presumably "researcher" written on the back in Chinese. This is nice, because I currently have 3 collecting permits in my wallet and don't really feel the need to carry around any more. Also, there are no ticks nor are there chiggers here. They do, however, have terrestrial leaches. Leaches are invertebrates and can shrink and stretch however they like, so an individual is somewhere in the neighborhood of a half inch to 4 inches

long. Leaches are nice in that they don't carry diseases that affect humans. They also tend to get in and get out quickly, you never feel them. When they bite they secrete an anticoagulant, so when they drop off you keep bleeding for a while. The only evidence that you were got is blood running down your leg.

We loaded our bags and equipment into the back of an almost flat bed truck and hoped it wouldn't fly out. The trip back through Taipei took us back through tunnels, although while I only remember going through two on the way here, we went through at least a half dozen this time. Several times a woman's voice would boom through the



Lunch in action

tunnels and over the radio. The volume and the echo, along with the feminine quality of the voice made you want to do whatever she was telling you to do, partially because you were scared of being hit by a bolt of lightening, and partially because you wanted to make her happy in hopes she would look favorably upon you.

Apparently she was directing traffic. Cameras were linked to a command center where she monitored the flow of traffic, watching for accidents and stupidity. But also she would give general orders, everyone needs to speed up 10 kilometers per hour, or everyone needs to slow down 5 kph.

While we're headed back to Taipei let me tell you the saga of the camera, which I eluded to a while back. I bought an Olympus C5050 just before I left for Thailand back in 2003. I wanted to update that by getting something bigger, better, and above all faster. I have also wanted, for at least 10 years when I saw a photo display in National Geographic magazine, a fisheye lense. These are lenses like door peepholes that give you a 180 degree view. Some people don't like them because there is a lot of "distortion" the further you get from the center, but I love them. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote that she hated to wear her bonnet because it made her feel closed in. She liked to throw it off and run through the prairie. Conventional lenses make me feel closed in, too. You have to take a short hike to get far enough away to capture any kind of idea of the look or feel of a place. For portraits a "flat lense" is great, but I want to see everything.

My friend Brad had just purchased a new digital Canon Rebel and loved it. He let me hold it and I loved it. It turned on instantly, it took pictures as fast as you clicked the button, and at 8 megapixles you could print a photo quality poster from the pictures

you took with it. And best of all, canon makes a readably available lense called the "Canon EF 15mm f/2.8 Fisheye Lens." Everywhere I looked this was described as a "Full 180° Fisheye Lense." So I got the camera, a zoom lense, and the fisheye. It was an obscene amount to money, but if taken care of the lenses would last forever, the camera was a really good deal and I was leaving for the Smokies and REALLY wanted some wide angle photos of the old growth forest. Not to mention Taiwan.

I was like a giddy school girl. Of course I wanted them to ship the camera to the school and the company couldn't accept my debit card because the address associated with the card did not match the school's address. Turns out the bank lost my address months ago, which explains why I hadn't been getting any statements. So after calling the bank and confirming that they had lost my address I then had to walk to a physical bank and set up an permanent address, so that I could walk back to a phone and call the bank to set up a temporary shipping address. Only then would the camera seller ship. This isn't in any way an omen of things to come, this is standard business in the world of Mike.

I got the package about three days before we left for the Smokies, played with the camera, laughing, clapping, giggling all the time. Finally I got the fisheye lense out of its special packaging. Wow was it heavy, even the lense cap was metal. I carefully put it on my camera. This was it, I'd waited years for this. I knew that when I looked through that view finder I would see a circle with my lap at the bottom and the ceiling directly above my head on the top. I knew this because I had bought a "Full 180° Fisheye Lense."

Slowly I put the view finder to my eye as I pointed the camera across the room. You know what's coming, don't you. The image I got was a rectangle. It really wasn't that much wider than the photos I used to take with my Olympus and an extension .45x wide angle lense. Yes, this "Full 180° Fisheye Lense" was a full 180° from corner to corner, NOT all the way around in a circle! Its my own fault, you see my whole life I've only known circular fisheye pictures, and never known the angle of a lense given as corner to corner, nor could I ever image anyone ever saying that a lense which gives a rectangular photo is a "Full 180° Fisheye Lense." So I should have never presumed that I was getting what was being described. I'm young, I'm stupid.

Needless to say I was also upset. Upset to the point of wishing every sort of pestilence on anyone having to do with Canon, lenses, advertising, society in general, and damn near everything and everyone else. Luckily the company would take back the lense and refund my money, minus a restocking fee, or course.

This leaves me solvent, but with no lense. Is there a real, true, full, circular 180° Fisheye Lense available to fit a Canon mount? Of course! Its made by Sigma. We live in the internet age, I've bought products from England and Australia and had then delivered the next week. New or used, everything is available on the internet! About 12 hours of searching later I discover that a Sigma Fisheye that will fit on a Canon is

certainly NOT available. Want the same lense that only fits a Pentax? Sure we have those. Want one for a Nikon? We'll send you two! Need one for a Canon? Oh, so sorry, those are on permanent backorder. Any used ones? Oh my no.

I have the uncanny ability to desire products that are not made because no one wants them, and never available used because those who have them will never give them up except in death, whereby the product is immediately snatched away by one of the hungry thousands that desperately wants it. This is the only way you could possibly explain the actions of the manufacturers and consumers. Orwell called it Doublethink.

After I got back from the Smokies I only had 9 days before I left for here. There is one final option for a real, true, full, circular 180° Fisheye Lense. Its made by a company in Belarus that used to make optics for the Soviet Military. Its called a Peleng and there is one available on Ebay. The only draw back is that it is entirely manual. The camera doesn't even know is has a lense on it, so you have to fiddle with stuff to get good pictures. My lense came from Belarus a few days before I left for here. I was happy again.

Do I get circular photos? No. But almost. One more obstacle set in my way. The lense makes a 35 mm diameter circle of light, as it should. But the sensor on my camera is only 21mm wide. So I get a circle with the top, bottom, and side chopped off. Its much better than the Canon Lie Lense, but not what I was really after even yet. I'll just have to wait, but in the mean time I'm loving what I have right now.

So I'm carrying two cameras with me, my old Olympus that is wonderful at close ups and low light, and my Canon that captures area and action.

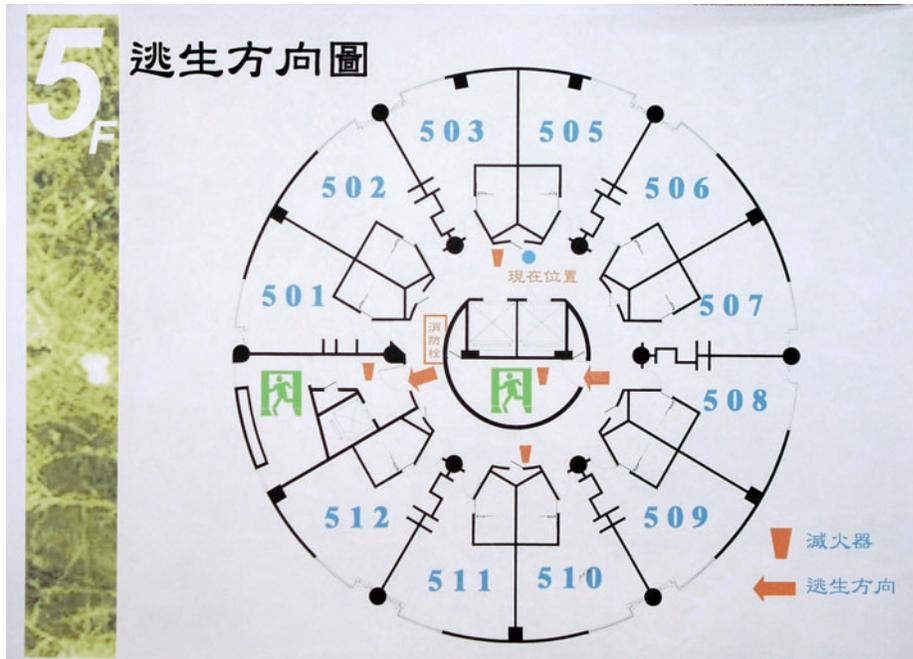
We got to Taipei just in time for traffic. Although, there is heavy traffic just about any time here. Not being used to the scooters, I got a picture to show the throng we

were in. There is a box painted in the intersection in front of stop lights about a car length deep that is reserved for scooters. So when you approach a red light you stop about a car length back, and scooters file through the traffic, slowly congregating at the front until you get



Scooters, scooters all around and not a bit of space

a green. The odd thing is the symbol painted in the box to denote scooter drivers. Its not a profile of a person on a scooter like we would have, but a stylized image meant to symbolize a head on view of a person riding a scooter.



Floor plan and escape route of a circular hotel

We made it back to the Leader Hotel. We're staying the night and heading to another research station in the south tomorrow. We got checked in, everyone on the 5th floor. Unfortunately our key (really a card) didn't work. And the management couldn't get the door unlocked either. So we ended up moving to the 7th floor. Oh well.

After showers we headed to the Ponderosa Steak House immediately next to the hotel. Apparently there are hunter/gatherer cultures that have two words for hungry, one is general absence of food hungry, the other is hungry for protein. It had been a harrowing week on the diet front and many of us wanted some sort of giant piece of meat. Matt got ribs, Erin and I got a steak. Chris got a steak but no salad bar. Victoria would ferry bits of bread to him. It was possibly the worst steak I have ever eaten. I don't know where you go on the cow to get meat like that, but I think you would have to work hard at it. Luckily they had a ripping chicken thing on the salad bar and Matt and I put a dent in the dragon fruit stocks. This is wonderful fruit from cacti. Its bright red on the outside, with a bright green inner liner and a pure white central pulp dotted with tiny black seeds. It has a very soft slightly sweet flavor, and is perhaps the lightest food I have ever eaten. It seems like you could eat 20 of them and not get full.