

Ancient



A MIDSUMMER'S DAWN ILLUMINATES
A PRECIPITOUSLY STEEP SECTION OF
GREAT WALL NEAR BEIJING.

Wonder, Modern

Challenge

**BUILT TO DEFEND CHINA CENTURIES
AGO, THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA NOW FINDS
ITSELF IN NEED OF PROTECTION**

In the early 1580s, an illustrated manuscript was delivered to the Antwerp atelier of renowned cartographer Abraham Ortelius. According to the manuscript's purveyor, Arius Montanus, a Benedictine monk and one of the cartographer's most trusted informants, the document had come from Luiz Jorge de Barbuda, a brother in the Society of Jesus and a prominent Portuguese geographer. On a chart, Barbuda had summarized various discoveries and observations made by Jesuit missionaries in the Far East since the establishment of Portugal's colony at Macao in 1550. Ortelius included a copy of the chart—the first map of China ever published in the Western world—in his 1584 edition of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (*Theatre of the Whole World*). Perhaps more important, the illustration provided the West with its first glimpse at what was destined to become one of the world's most famous monuments—the Great Wall of China. Alongside the rendering of the Great Wall was a brief inscription: *Murus quadringentarum leucarum, inter montium crepidines a rege Chine contra Tartarorum ab hac parte eruptiones, extractus* (A wall of 400 leagues, between the banks of the hills, built by the King of China against the breaking in of the Tartars on this side).

With a purported length of approximately 1,200 English miles, some regarded the Great Wall depicted on Ortelius' map as fanciful as the grotesque sea monsters guarding the deep. Nevertheless, the Great Wall would become a standard cartographic element, appearing on numerous

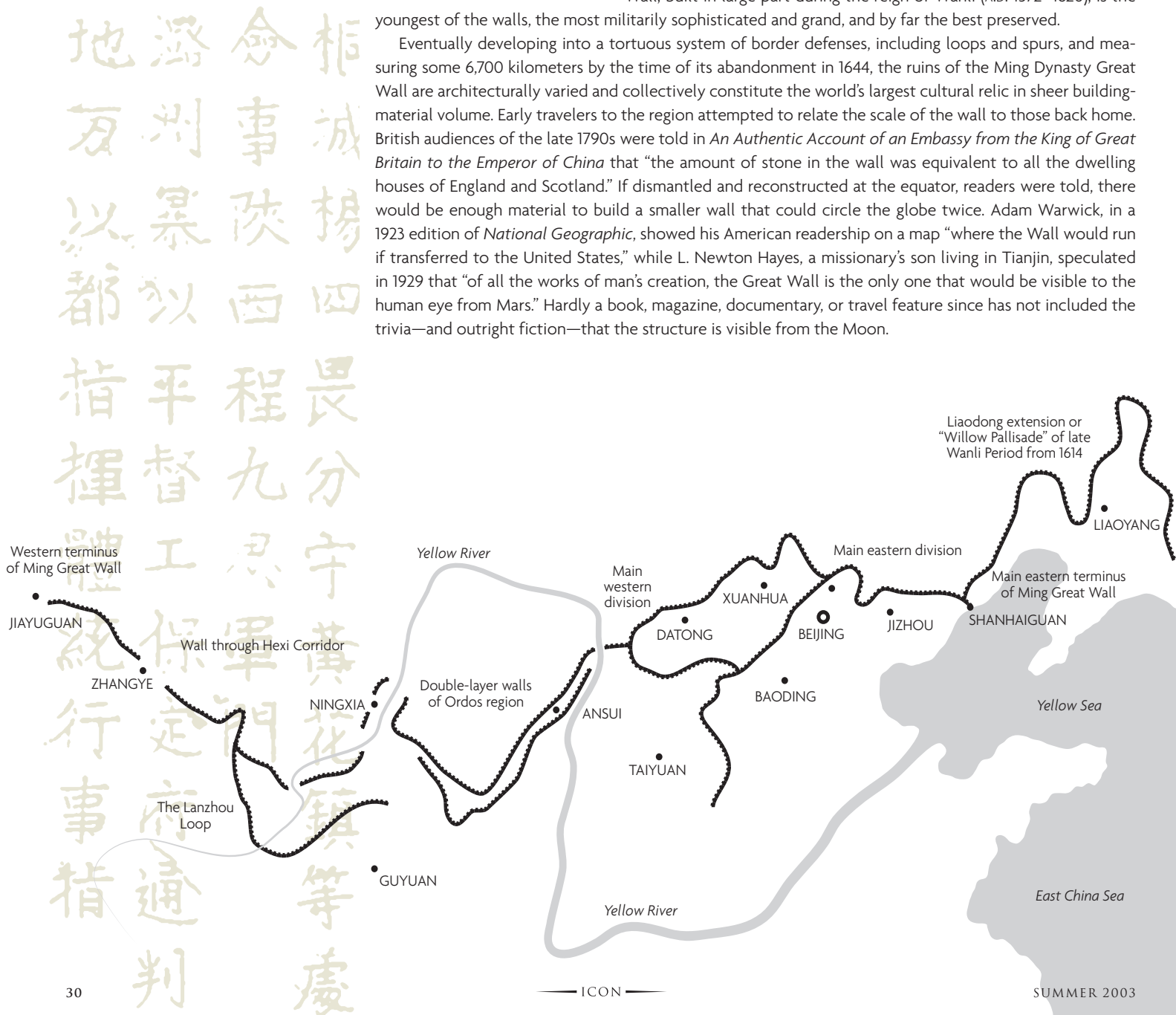
text and photographs by WILLIAM LINDSAY



maps, including one published in 1590 by Venetian Giacomo Gastaldi, which illustrated the route taken by Sir Francis Drake during his 1577 circumnavigation. For the cartographic community, the Great Wall of China was neither building nor landmark, but an integral part of Earth's geography.

Built during the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368–1644), the Great Wall of China depicted on the maps was the last in a succession of defensive walls raised to protect the country's northern frontier from nomadic attack. At least 16 Great Walls were built between the fifth century B.C. and the sixteenth century A.D.; collectively, they stretched an estimated 50,000 kilometers across the Chinese landscape, most of them taking different routes from their predecessors. Five of the walls were known as wan li chang cheng (walls of boundless length) due to their enormous scale. Of these, the Qin Dynasty (221–207 B.C.) Wall is the oldest; the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) Wall, which runs some 7,200 kilometers, the longest. The Liao and Jin Great Walls, built during the tenth and twelfth centuries, were, ironically, the work of the very invaders China's emperors worked so hard to keep out. The Ming Wall, built in large part during the reign of Wanli (A.D. 1572–1620), is the youngest of the walls, the most militarily sophisticated and grand, and by far the best preserved.

Eventually developing into a tortuous system of border defenses, including loops and spurs, and measuring some 6,700 kilometers by the time of its abandonment in 1644, the ruins of the Ming Dynasty Great Wall are architecturally varied and collectively constitute the world's largest cultural relic in sheer building-material volume. Early travelers to the region attempted to relate the scale of the wall to those back home. British audiences of the late 1790s were told in *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* that "the amount of stone in the wall was equivalent to all the dwelling houses of England and Scotland." If dismantled and reconstructed at the equator, readers were told, there would be enough material to build a smaller wall that could circle the globe twice. Adam Warwick, in a 1923 edition of *National Geographic*, showed his American readership on a map "where the Wall would run if transferred to the United States," while L. Newton Hayes, a missionary's son living in Tianjin, speculated in 1929 that "of all the works of man's creation, the Great Wall is the only one that would be visible to the human eye from Mars." Hardly a book, magazine, documentary, or travel feature since has not included the trivia—and outright fiction—that the structure is visible from the Moon.





Architecturally, the Ming Wall contains a number of structural elements, linked physically or lying in relatively close proximity to the wall. In desert areas the wall was made of rammed earth; only in mountain regions was it made of quarried stone and brick. Aside from the wall itself, the most common architectural elements are beacon towers, used for signaling, storage, shelter, and withstanding siege in the event of attack. Most towers were square or rectangular in plan, a few circular or ovoid. The more important towers had large central chambers to accommodate section commanders, while less important ones were simple networks of interlocking arched corridors. Most towers were two-story structures with flat roofs, but a few had apex-roofs, as evidenced by occasional room walls and roof tiles. More elaborate roofs had ridge ends and roof guardians, and rare field evidence shows that some roofed structures even had decorative tile ends bearing monster faces. Many towers contained engraved tablets recording visits of military officials and other visiting dignitaries. Along the wall, many gates were built to accommodate the passage of people and water, and grand fortresses were constructed at the most vulnerable locations. The best examples of these are the terminal fortresses of Jiayuguan, at the western end of the Ming Wall, and Shanhaiguan, at the eastern end of the wall's main line. Jiayuguan is located on the desert escarpment between two mountain ranges, while Shanhaiguan occupies the narrow band of coastal plain between the Yellow Sea and mountains.



IN 1584, ABRAHAM ORTELIUS PUBLISHED THE FIRST MAP OF CHINA IN THE WEST, FACING PAGE, WHICH INCLUDED A DEPICTION OF THE GREAT WALL. SINCE ITS ABANDONMENT, THE ONCE-PAVED WALL HAS PROVEN AN IDEAL HOST FOR EXUBERANT VEGETATION, ABOVE. A WATCHTOWER, LEFT, AND THE FORTRESS AT JIAYUGUAN, BELOW, WHICH MARKS THE MING WALL'S WESTERN TERMINUS.



Having defended China for more than two millennia, the last of the Great Walls, like its predecessors, was eventually abandoned, this time in the wake of the Manchu invasion of 1644. Today, 359 years since construction ceased, the Great Wall is a mere shadow of its former self. Over the centuries, various forces, both natural and man-made, have conspired to alter, damage, and destroy it, leaving an estimated 4,500 kilometers—or two-thirds—of its original structure standing. What remains of the wall presents one of the world's great conservation challenges.

As soon as the Ming Dynasty collapsed, the military looted the wall for the best pickings, removing wooden doors and shutters of towers, fine carvings, and engraved slabs of stone. Nature, too, has done its part. Winds have deposited sand on the pavement of the wall. Bird droppings containing seed soon colonized the pavement with plants—weeds at first, then bushes and small trees. Roots have loosened masonry, and once-a-century earthquakes have struck and toppled sections of the wall. Arches have weakened and collapsed, and towers have cracked. Winter freeze-thaw cycles have gradually forced slabs of rock apart. Summer rains have washed away loose mortar. A wilderness wall, or wild wall, has evolved.

To protect something fully, one must first define its boundaries. It is important to understand that the wall and its surroundings are archaeologically inseparable, united in a consanguineous relationship. The land beside the wall and in view of the wall is where stones were quarried, where bricks were baked, where clay was dug, where trees were felled to fuel kilns, and where the wall builders lived and worked. In essence, the wall is a reflection of the very land from which it was created.

Following the abandonment of the Ming Wall, it is quite likely that many of those who built, guarded, and maintained it remained, living in its shadow as ordinary farmers. It also follows that the modern inhabitants of wall-side villages are descendants of the ancient wall builders. Sometimes this can be verified: for example, bricks sometimes bear cartouches that record the provincial military construction unit, and these often match with the location of villagers' ancestral homes.

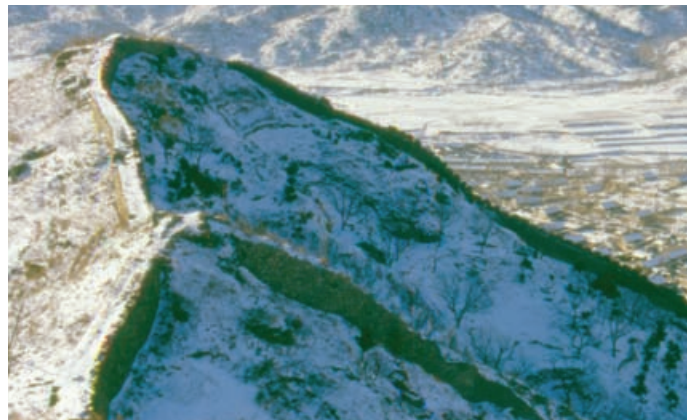
In mountain areas, village buildings themselves might also be considered part of the landscape, as many were wrought of material removed from the wall during the destructive revolutionary campaigns of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1959) and Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when Chairman Mao Zedong urged



A SECTION OF WALL COMPOSED OF RAMMED EARTH RUNS THROUGH THE DESERT IN THE PROVINCE OF NINGXIA, ABOVE. WATCHTOWERS, FACING PAGE, PUNCTUATE A VAST STRETCH OF THE GREAT WALL NEAR BEIJING.



OVER THE CENTURIES, THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA HAS SUFFERED NOT ONLY THE EFFECTS OF OLD AGE BUT OF VANDALISM, LEFT, AND ENCROACHING DEVELOPMENT, BELOW. PHOTOGRAPHS AT RIGHT DEPICT THE SAME STRETCH OF THE WALL IN 1908, TOP, AND 1987, BOTTOM. THE TOWER WAS HARVESTED FOR BUILDING MATERIALS MOST LIKELY DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION.





濟州暴烈平督工保定府
 會事陝西程九忍軍門
 桐城揚四畏分守黃花鎮
 岳庸昌平

people to “let the past serve the present” and “smash the four olds by sweeping away the dust of all the old ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the exploiting classes.”

The Great Wall is therefore a rich cultural tapestry that encompasses not only the varied architectural remains, but also the local people who have inherited tales and legends relating to the wall from older generations. So distinct and striking is this landscape that perhaps it deserves a name to reflect its significance. “Wallscape” would seem appropriate.

The concept of a wallscape can best be appreciated by viewing a section of the original Great Wall in comparison to a section whose space has been invaded by modern construction. From enjoying the former we realize that the majesty of the Great Wall has two components: the ancient building and the natural backdrop. Once the wall’s surroundings are violated by modern intrusions, the majesty of the view is diminished. In addition to the degenerative problems of old age, the wall is under constant attack by man. Vast sections of the wild wall close to Beijing, that only a few years ago were out of reach, suddenly have become more accessible. Cars got cheaper, suburban roads improved, and local townships, eager to get a piece of Great Wall tourism for themselves, even erected road signs to point the way to drivers. This new popularity of the Great Wall prompted local farmers, township officials, and county entrepreneurs to jump on the bandwagon and try their hands at shadow-of-the-wall tourism. Exploiting the absence of a single specific law to protect the unique wall—as an all-encompassing cultural landscape—crass commercialism has sprung up beside, or even upon, the wall in many places. Picnic rubbish has been wantonly discarded, people have scrawled on the 500-year-old bricks, and encroaching development has resulted in a group of ugly, bright buildings that seem alien—modern intrusions on this ancient landscape.

In February 2002, when American president George W. Bush visited the Great Wall at Badaling, he said: “The wall’s the same, the country’s changed a lot.” Bush had been to China when his father, the former president, was stationed in Beijing as U.S. ambassador in the 1980s. Had the president wanted to comment accurately on the state of the Great Wall, he would have been correct if he had said: “The wall’s not the same, because the country has changed a lot.”

As China continues to record massive





FACING PAGE: THE INTERIOR OF A WATCHTOWER, TOP, ONCE SERVED AS A HOME FOR SENTRIES. A RARE ROUND TOWER, BOTTOM, THOUGHT TO BE A DESIGN EXPERIMENT MAY HAVE PROVIDED A BETTER VIEW. ONE OF THE OLDEST-KNOWN PORTIONS OF THE GREAT WALL, BUILT IN CA. 300 B.C. NEAR THE MONGOLIAN BORDER, ABOVE, WAS INCORPORATED INTO WALLS OF THE QIN AND HAN DYNASTIES. VARIOUS DECORATIVE ELEMENTS, INCLUDING ROOF TILES WITH MONSTER FACES, WERE FOUND IN RUBBLE ON THE UPPER STORY OF A MING DYNASTY WATCHTOWER IN HEBEI PROVINCE.

economic growth, which in turn is changing lifestyles, the Great Wall takes on added importance by offering preservationists a new horizon in their seemingly futile quest to tackle conservation of the world's largest cultural relic in the world's most populous country and most rapidly booming economy.

Until recently, plans to protect the wall had not matched these massive social changes. China has adhered to the maxim of the late paramount leader Deng Xiaoping: "Love China, rebuild the Great Wall," uttered in the wake of Mao-sanctioned destruction of things historical, including the Great Wall. Nationwide, a dozen or so sections of wall have been patriotically reconstructed for mass tourism. For almost 20 years this approach has defined Great Wall conservation.

For the past three years, International Friends of the Great Wall, working in collaboration with the Beijing Bureau for Cultural Relics, UNESCO's Beijing Office, and the World Monuments Fund, has spearheaded a program to create awareness of the problems afflicting the wall via the domestic and international press and media, and piloted a stewardship field program. Inclusion of the Great Wall Cultural Landscape in the Beijing Region on WMF's 2002 list of the *100 Most Endangered Sites* has highlighted the plight of the Great Wall so that its conservation might find a place on China's cultural relics protection agenda. Partly as a result of these efforts, Great Wall conservation moves into the modern era this Summer, as the Beijing Municipal Government introduces the first generic cultural relics protection laws aimed at combatting the destruction—physical and spiritual—of the wall, albeit only in the Beijing area. The leasing of land to developers adjacent to the wall will be banned, people will be prohibited from accessing certain fragile sections, and buildings causing "visual pollution" will be razed to preserve China's Great Wallscape. ■