

from our viewpoint...

Road improvement decision up to you

Have you voted?
Election day has arrived for the city-county road rebuilding program, and we urge you to exercise your right and vote.

The single polling place at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall, 824 Main, will from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Voting for the 1-cent sales tax will allow the city and county to begin work on nearly \$13 million of street and road reconstruction. Voting against the tax will leave the city and county searching for other ways to pay for these projects.

We supported the special sales tax in 1998 to seal old U.S. 24 across the county, and we support the present plan.

For more than two years, the city commission has been looking for a way to repair major streets. For that same time, the county commissioners have been looking for ways to upgrade and maintain old U.S. 24 and the section of Eighth west of K-27.

Neither the city nor the county can afford to pay for these projects within its budget. Both are limited in how to raise money to pay for such expensive road work.

When the two commissions met in May, the enormity of the projects brought the members to the conclusion that a 1-cent sales tax would be the best way to get the projects done.

The roads in the project are major entrances to Goodland, and have needed rebuilding for years. We drove all the streets and roads on the list, and agree they need to be fixed. It's been eight years since the county started on U.S. 24 under the old project, and traffic and weather have worn that surface out.

No one likes to pay higher taxes, but if the sales tax is defeated, the city and county will go back to looking for a way to fix the roads. The only options then will be to leave them as they are — and endure even more bump and bounces — or to raise the property tax to pay for them over a longer period.

This sales tax plan will be a lot less painful.

There are more projects for the city and county than can be done with the \$12.8 million, but this a most ambitious joint effort. The state has thrown in an \$800,000 economic development grant to help with County Road 14 out by Northern Sun and the new Goodland Energy Center.

Passing the sales tax is the fairest way to get this large a job done.

Anyone who supports the plan needs to make sure they vote today. The whole process could fail if good people don't take the time to vote.

It is easy to be against something, and those people surely will to vote.

Dale Schields said at the Kiwanis Club meeting on Feb. 28, he's seen with previous bond efforts that while everyone said they were in favor, many did not go vote, and the questions lost by narrow margins.

Every vote does count. This is a very short one-question ballot that will take just a few seconds to mark either a Yes or a No. We hope you will support the joint city-county road improvement program by making it a Yes vote today. — *Tom Betz*

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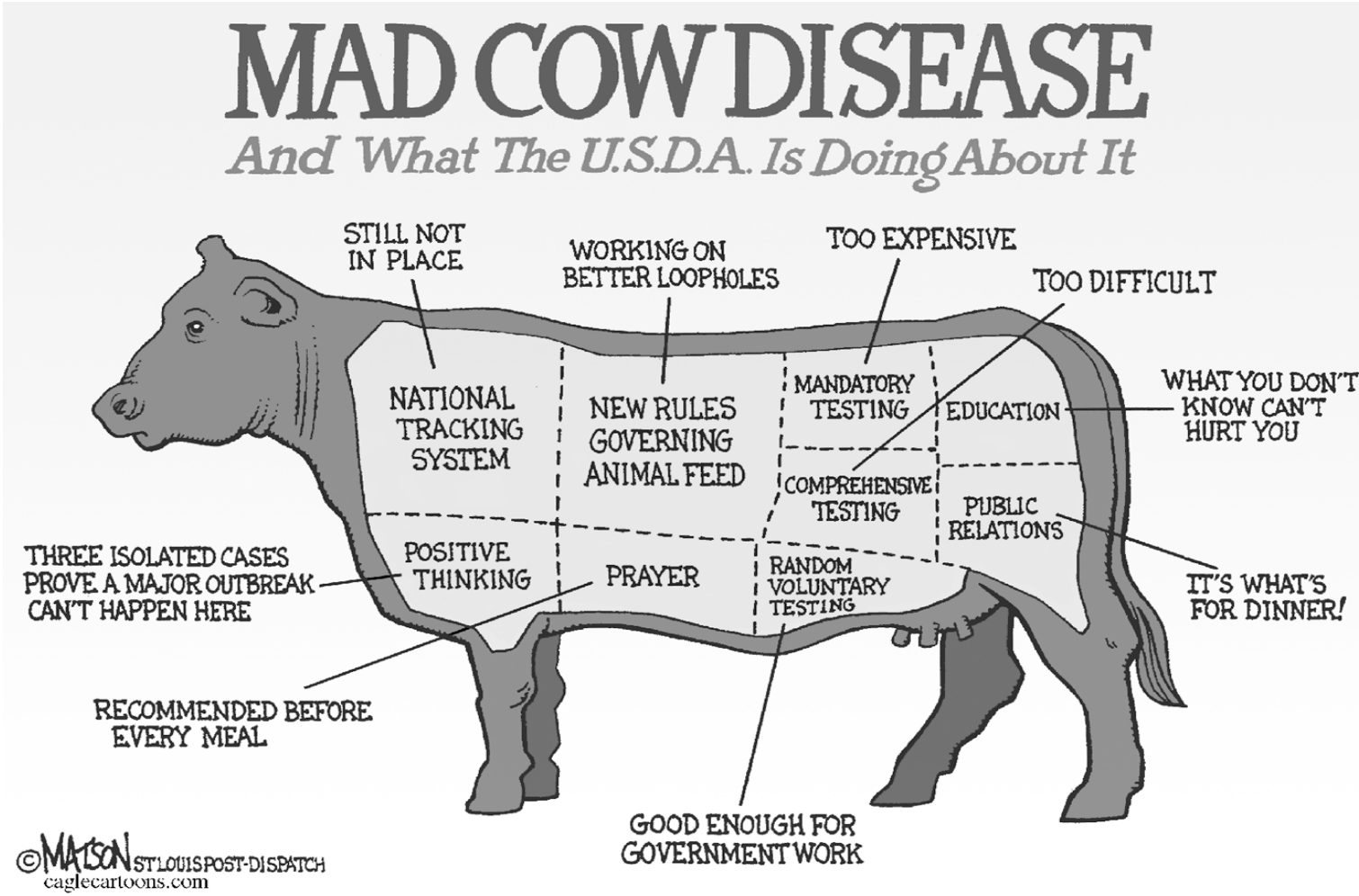
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Train travel an adventure in China

Introduction
Darin and Kati (Amos) Curts are serving as WorldTeach volunteers in the People's Republic of China. WorldTeach, affiliated with Harvard University, has an agreement with the Hunan Provincial Department of Education and Foreign Affairs to place volunteer English teachers throughout the province. Darin and Kati are teaching in at Yueyang Ba Zhong (Yueyang #8 Middle School) for one year. March, 2006

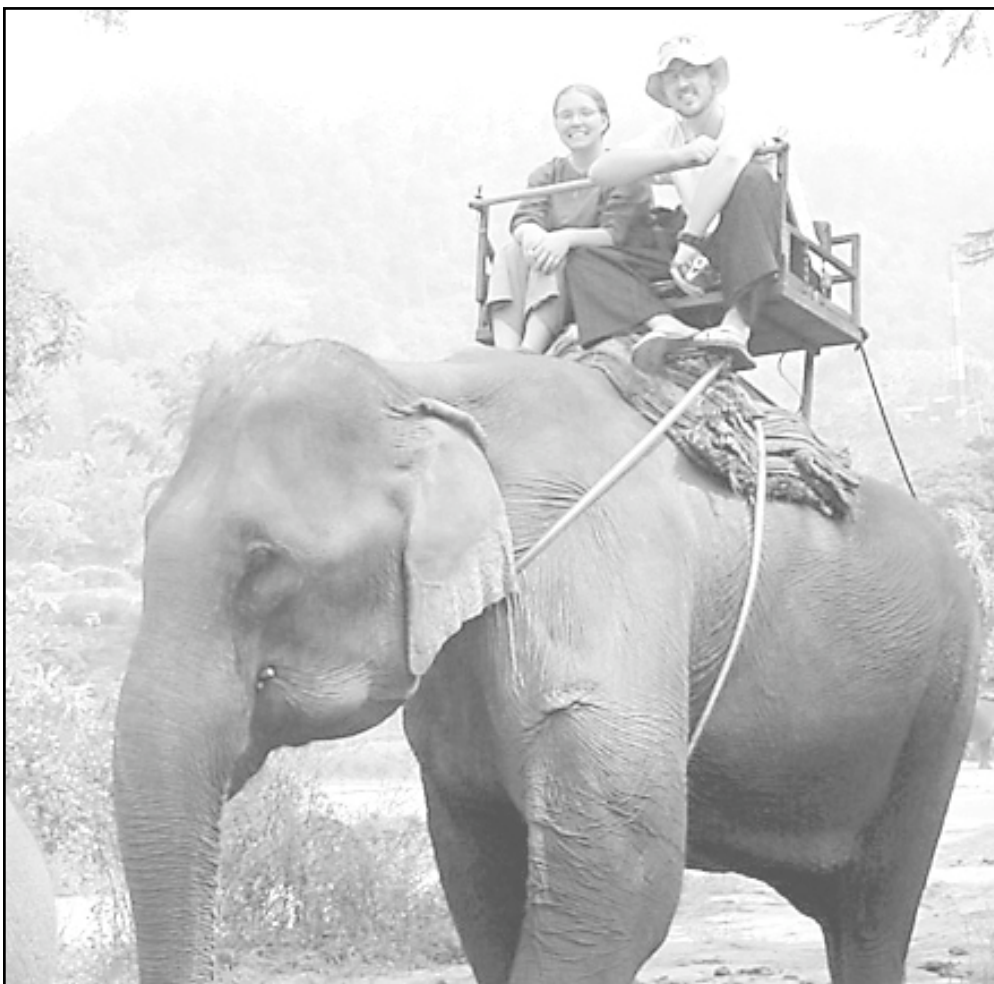
Hello again,
We've been busy trying to make good on our New Year's resolution to travel more and make the most of the remainder of our time here in China. One of the more fascinating aspects of traveling has been the plethora of transportation we have encountered.

Walking is not at all uncommon. We can go days without the use of wheels or an engine since everything we need for daily living can be found within our two-block neighborhood. If we visit friends throughout the city or have a craving for KFC, we hop a bus (13 cents) or hail a taxi (50 cents-\$1). Motorcycles offer a cheaper taxi service, bargaining for a price beforehand, but are also much more dangerous. The most interesting and exciting part of driving within the city is that there are no apparent rules. Lanes are ignored and speed limits are not of particular concern.

When leaving the city, there are many options. Major cities have airports and flights are significantly cheaper than in the U.S., but much more expensive relative to China's options. They are still the quickest way to cross the country.

Our nearest airport is in Changsha, and a flight to Beijing takes two hours and costs around \$125, plus an airport tax of \$6. If traveling within the county, short-haul buses make trips to nearby villages for about 75 cents. Long-distance buses can be pricey, but are quicker than trains. A trip to nearby Changsha can take around an hour and cost \$9. They are comfortable and passengers are guaranteed a seat.

When we go to Changsha, we generally take the highly popular, extremely cheap, and painfully uncomfortable train. The China Railway System is the people's choice for distance transportation. If tickets are purchased the maximum six days in advance, a ticket may be printed with a seat number, but if bought the day of (like ours many times are), the tickets will only say the train number and time of departure. Since there is no limit to the number of tickets that can be sold for a train, they are almost always overcrowded.



Darin and Kati Curts on a jungle elephant ride during trip to Northern Thailand.

If we don't have a seat, we can sometimes get to the train far enough ahead of time to claim an empty seat and hope that no one bears a ticket with that seat number. Other times, we are forced to stand in the aisles for the entire trip. The worst, however, is when the aisles are full and we are forced to stand in the small space between the cars or next to the toilet. Since we are usually returning from an exhausting day or weekend, we put our bags on the floor to sit on while we read or listen to music.

We witnessed the most extreme case of overcrowded trains as we were trying to leave for the Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival. As we stood on the platform and waited for the train to arrive, we saw hundreds of others waiting with us. The train pulled in and everyone anticipated the doors opening, but three minutes passed before we saw an arm reach for the door and pull violently until it opened against the force of bodies. The conductor stepped off the train and pushed our crowd out of the way so that passengers could exit. Two people got

off, throwing their bags out the window before squeezing through the crowd. Two men from our group climbed passed the screaming conductor just before the train left again. We returned our unused tickets and took a bus.

So why would anyone go through such misery for an hour and a half trip? A train ticket to Changsha is only \$1.50 (compare to \$11 for a bus). An overnight train to Shenzhen costs about \$22.50 (compare to \$100 by air). In the States, we once crammed nine people (and luggage) into a minivan for a seven-hour trip because it was cheaper than flying. Traveling in China is no different than anywhere else in the world when you factor in money.

We're just glad we have options.
Travel on!
Darin and Kati Curts

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