

FEATURES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2009

13



Intrigue at the Generalissimo's pied-a-terre



PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES AND COURTESY OF TAOYUAN COUNTY TOURISM PROMOTION DEPARTMENT

A secret Chiang Kai-shek-era hideaway has opened to the public for the first time

BY CINDY SUI
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER, TAOYUAN COUNTY

For nearly half a century, a 7-hectare piece of forested property in the mountains of Taoyuan County was off-limits and hidden from the public. But this May, Back Cihu (後慈湖) — which was built in the 1960s to serve as former president Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) secret command center in case of a Chinese Communist invasion — was opened to tourists for the first time.

The park-like environs, located in Dasi Township (大溪鎮) (not to be confused with the township of the same name in Ilan County) behind the already well-known Cihu (慈湖), site of Chiang's mausoleum, are definitely worth a visit, whether or not you are a fan of the dictator.

Scenically, Back Cihu is unique. Its dense forest cover and secluded location, both of which ensured it remained hidden from enemy eyes, make the park one of the most beautiful and calming places you can find just an hour outside of Taipei. Historically, it's a treasure trove, especially for those interested in Chiang-era intrigue.

The Taoyuan County Government officially acquired the property from the Ministry of

Defense in 2007. When Back Cihu opened to the public in May, only 400 tourists were allowed each day. That number rose to 600 in August.

"Since cross-strait relations have been good, we feel it's a good time to open this place up to the public as a tourist attraction," said Hsieh Shyang-ling (謝祥齡), a spokeswoman for the county's Tourism Promotion Department (桃園縣政府觀光行銷處).

To ensure visitors have a worthwhile experience, the tourism department has transformed the buildings into historical or ecological exhibition halls.

One of the most interesting of these halls houses copies of documents that reveal, for the first time, details of Chiang's secret 1960s plan to take back China from the Communists.

Chiang did not want to go down in history as the man who lost China to communism. In the wake of the humiliation of 1949, when his defeated Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) fled to Taiwan, Chiang schemed to launch a counterattack against Mao Zedong (毛澤東).

In the mid-1960s, Chiang thought the time was right. Mao's Great Leap Forward had led to widespread famine in China and the

Communists were on the verge of obtaining a nuclear weapon.

Chiang, however, needed US military support. The US was then embroiled in the Vietnam War, and Chiang offered to aid US war efforts in exchange for American assistance in fighting the Chinese Communists.

Though Washington rejected Chiang's proposal, he nonetheless continued to plan a counteroffensive against China — nicknamed the Guoguang Project (國光計劃).

Recently revealed documents displayed at Back Cihu indicate that the plan involved 26 operations, including military exercises, amphibious landings, raids, and special operations behind enemy lines. Chiang also instructed his son Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) to devise a plan to launch an airborne attack on southern China's Fujian and Guangdong provinces.

Information about Guoguang (National Glory) was highly classified during this period. Soldiers, who could not tell their families what mission they were training for, drew up their wills. In the meantime, Chiang Kai-shek and the generals struggled to determine the most suitable day to deploy their troops.

But unbeknownst to Chiang Kai-shek, China was prepared. On Aug. 6, 1965, in the waters off Dongshan Island near Fujian Province, Chinese forces sunk two Taiwanese naval vessels assigned to transport troops on a reconnaissance mission. Almost all of the approximately 200 servicemen on board were killed.

In November of the same year, another vessel sent to drop off supplies for soldiers stationed on Taiwan's outlying islands, including Wuju Island, was hit by Communists torpedoes, killing some 90 personnel.

These setbacks shocked Chiang Kai-shek, who had not realized the extent to which the Communists' naval capabilities had strengthened. As a result of these military failures and continuing US objections, both of which prevented him from acquiring sophisticated weaponry, Chiang was forced to drastically reduce the scale of his scheme. His eventual decision to abandon the plan in 1972 led him and his son to focus on developing Taiwan's economy instead of on retaking China.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

HISTORY

Cihu (慈湖) and Back Cihu (後慈湖) were part of a mining area in the early 20th century. Many of the mines collapsed because of natural disasters.

Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) accidentally stumbled upon Back Cihu when he was traveling through the area. He immediately took a liking to the place because it reminded him of his hometown in China's Zhejiang Province.

After a local property owner donated 19 hectares of land in Cihu and Back Cihu to the government, Chiang instructed his staff to build a residence there for him and his family. It subsequently served as a vacation getaway for the Chiangs.

The five military offices in Back Cihu were completed in 1964.



HIGHLIGHTS

Chiang's bunker

The 150m-long bomb shelter tunnel in Back Cihu was equipped with all the necessities in the event of a Communist invasion, including a kitchen, offices, telecommunications facilities, power-generating facilities and emergency medical supplies.

The front and back of the tunnel were outfitted with three layers of doors: one to withstand bomb blasts, one to protect against chemical weapons, and one that operates as a typical door for entry and exit.

Nowadays the F-shaped tunnel has been taken over by Formosan leaf-nosed bats.



IF YOU GO

To visit Back Cihu, you must book a space online through the Taoyuan County Government's Web site: www.travel-taoyuan.tycg.gov.tw. Search for "Back Cihu Entry Application"

on the Web site and click on the box. Tourists must join the park's guided tours, which last two to three hours. To protect the area, visitors are prohibited from roaming around on their own, though the tours do allow visitors to linger long enough to drink a cup of coffee in one of the cafes and enjoy the scenery. The number of visitors is restricted to preserve the pristine serenity of the area.

You can drive or take buses to Back Cihu. For directions specific to your starting point, call the Taoyuan County Scenic Area Administration (桃園縣風景區管理所) at (03) 335-9031 or the Taoyuan County tourism department at (03) 332-2101.



ECOLOGICAL TREASURES

A wide variety of trees grow in Back Cihu, including a tree (small-leaf eucalyptus citriodora) locally nicknamed the "Beauty's Legs" (美人腿) due to its smooth, bark-less trunks. The place is also dotted with tiny purple flowers, supposedly capable of relieving itches, and small leaves that ward off mosquitoes.

In addition to its rich flora, the area is home to more than 100 species of butterflies and many types of worms and insects. Visitors can hear the sonorous sounds of these small creatures and also see the twinkle of fireflies on summer nights.

A camera system has been installed inside the bomb shelter tunnel to provide the park with Asia's only real-time observatory of bats. Infrared technology is used to film the bats; the images are shown on a screen in one of the halls. During park opening hours, the nocturnal animals are normally asleep. A female bat, clearly pregnant but still hanging upside down while she slept, was a highlight of a recent screening.

The same hall has a question-and-answer game on a display board that tests people's knowledge of Taiwan's butterflies.



THE FIVE HALLS

Chiang Kai-shek ordered five offices built to house the five branches of government. Some of them now serve as cafes, photo galleries and exhibit halls.

The No. 3 Hall is a remake of Madame Chiang's (Song Mei-ling, 宋美齡) bedroom. She and Chiang slept apart in their later years. A desk is adorned with paper and brushes, as Madame Chiang began studying painting at age 50 and enjoyed Chinese landscape painting. The pieces on display feature words written by Chiang. The hall also contains a remake of Chiang Kai-shek's bedroom, complete with a Bible on his desk, a nod to Chiang's penchant for reading the Bible and writing in his diary.

One of the halls holds the aforementioned Guoguang Project exhibit, which includes photos that show Chiang Kai-shek inspecting military exercises for the project, documents that detail planned military maneuvers and US opposition to the plan, and a model of one of the naval vessels sunk by the Chinese Communists.

Several of the halls display photos of the Chiangs that differ from the serious images usually presented to the public. Many of the photos are of the Chiangs' family life, including the time they spent in Cihu and Back Cihu.



CIHU SCULPTURE MEMORIAL PARK (慈湖雕塑紀念公園)

This outdoor exhibit is located in Cihu, not Back Cihu. With a total of 152 bronze sculptures placed on a large lawn, it is one of the most distinctive areas of the park. All of the sculptures are of Chiang Kai-shek, except one, which depicts Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國).

Many of the sculptures were created in honor of Chiang Kai-shek after his death in 1975 and were placed in schools and government offices. During former president Chen Shui-bian's (陳水扁) years in power, however, efforts to diminish the legacy and adulation of Chiang led many local offices to get rid of the statues.

Given that Chiang's mausoleum is in the park, the Taoyuan County Government, which also operates Cihu, began collecting all of these "reject" statues in 2000, with the goal of providing a safe haven for them. "Back then, the DPP encouraged people to knock down the statues. We encouraged people to give them to us. We weren't thinking about politics, just preserving history and culture," said Hsieh Shyang-ling (謝祥齡), a spokeswoman for the county's Tourism Promotion Department (桃園縣政府觀光行銷處).

The tallest statue is 7m high and was donated by the Kaohsiung City Government. All of the statues are at least 170cm tall, as it was standard practice to make all full-body statues of Chiang Kai-shek, who was 169.7cm, at least as tall as he was.

Some show the Generalissimo wearing his military uniform, while others show him seated or riding a horse.

