



**Jin Shiming, 60, who has hiked more than 80,000 km across the country over the past seven years, explores Chongqing municipality in June.**

GAN XIAYI / FOR CHINA DAILY

# CHASING HIS DREAM, STEP BY STEP

A former coal miner who has been hiking across China since he retired in 2005 has further travel plans. **Xu Wei** learns more in Chongqing.

**S**ince Jin Shiming retired from his job in 2005 working down a coal mine, he has been hiking across the country. The 60-year-old from Fukang city, the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, has traveled to 1,947 counties, districts and county-level cities and hiked more than 80,000 km, as of July this year. "It has been, so far, the most meaningful part of my life," Jin says. "I have managed to travel to the northern and southern frontiers of the country, to numerous rivers and mountains."

Jin was motivated to walk across the country after hearing about a French marathon runner who ran from Paris to China in the 1980s.

"I was thinking if he could do that, I could possibly do something similar someday."

He was also inspired by Yu Chunshun, the explorer and travel writer who hiked to 23 provinces in the 1980s and 1990s.

Yu died in Lop Nur in Xinjiang in 1996 and Jin says: "It is a great pity that I cannot produce good travel writing like he did. But still, I want to continue in his footsteps."

Meanwhile, his love for sports and years of exercise have kept him healthy and he is able to walk long distances.

Jin was born in Baoji, Shaanxi province, to a doctor's family in 1952 and as a boy, dreamed of becoming an athlete.

However, he was forced to give up his dream when both his parents died during the "cultural revolution" (1966-76), and he left his hometown for Xinjiang when he was 17 to work at a coal mine.

Though unable to play basketball or volleyball as he used to, he has maintained his habit of running on a daily basis for 50 years.

Jin worked underground in the coal mine for 18 years, which makes him appreciate life all the more now.

"I worked eight hours underground every day without the guarantee of security or even fresh air. The difficulties I face right now are nothing in comparison."

As soon as he retired in 2005, Jin decided to start his hiking trip in August, with two friends from Bukang. They first went to Lhasa, the Tibet autonomous region, intending to go to Beijing for the 2008 Olympic Games after that.

"It was a historic event and we wanted to be part of it."

They all made it to Lhasa, but then his friends gave up due to ill-

ness. But Jin was motivated to go further after he saw pilgrims on their hands and knees on a pilgrimage to Lhasa.

"I realized it was the power of faith. I was motivated by them."

Jin continued his journey and arrived in Beijing in 2006.

During his stay in Beijing, he met sport officials and reporters, who encouraged him to continue his hike.

"They told me to continue as long as I was in good health."

He traveled through bustling cities and sleepy towns, slept in lumberjacks' wood cabins and road maintenance workers' lodgings.

The most difficult parts of his journey were in Tibet and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions.

"It took three or four days to go from one town to another and it was not easy to find accommodation," he says.

One of his most cherished memories was spending Spring Festival in Gutian county, Fujian province, where members of the mountaineering society treated him like family.

"They told me that travelers all over the world belong to the same family. I will never forget their kindness."

Of all the places he visited, he was most impressed by the scenery in Lijiang and Shangri-La, Yunnan province.

"With the blue sky and white clouds and the snow-capped mountains, it was like a fairyland," Jin says, adding the living costs there were low.

Jin would hike southward in the winter and north in the summer to avoid inclement weather, but occasionally he was stranded in heavy downpours with nowhere to shelter.

Each time he arrived at a new place, he would go to the local sport authority or federation of trade unions to obtain a seal.

"The seal is a token that I have been to the place and a souvenir."

Food, Jin says, was the only necessity: "You can ask people for water, but not for food. It is a matter of dignity."

Jin cherished three things most in his backpack: the signatures he got from the national basketball and volleyball teams, the seals he has obtained from local sport authorities, and the photos he took along the way.

Those who met Jin on his travels were impressed by his perseverance and good health.

"To me, his stamina is beyond his age," says Tian Jianxin, a hiker in Chongqing municipality, who met Jin when he visited the municipality in June.

Tian says he and two other hikers accompanied Jin to obtain seals from sport authorities in two Chongqing districts and were worn out after a trip of 30 km. But Jin was full of stamina, he says.

Tian says they offered Jin a ride in their car, but he refused.

"I would ask people for a ride when it was raining heavily, but certainly not in this case," Jin comments.

Now, Jin says, he plans to rest for three years after concluding some trips to some counties he hasn't visited.

After that he will start hiking again, to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

"I need to save money as I hear costs there are high."

"I am the kind of person who looks for a good beginning and a good end. I will not give up easily on things I have decided on," he says.

"When I look at the photos I've taken and the signatures and seals I've got along the way, I feel a sense of accomplishment."

"It feels like getting closer to a dream, step by step."

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## 'Dawn Footstep' says it's morning and time to run

By **AN BALJIE** in Jiaozuo, Henan  
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Li Xiaoshuan's alarm clock rings at 8 pm. He switches it off and dials three phone numbers — one to Canada and the other two in the United States. Then he hangs up before anyone answers the phone.

"It's about 6 am in the US and Canada now and it's time for my friends there to get up for their morning exercises," Li says.

He is not a hotel attendant, but he has been providing such "morning call" services to tens of thousands of people since 2007.

"The idea of waking up others began on April 16, 2007. A netizen asked me to wake him up after he read online that I have been doing morning jogs for about seven years," Li says. "I accepted his request and then, it dawned on me that I could 'morning call' as many people as possible."

He has since been called "Dawn Footstep".

Li, 43, says he has been jogging every morning since 2001 to cure his insom-

nia caused by work pressure. He shared his morning jog experiences on some online forums to encourage others to lead a healthier lifestyle.

After receiving the first request to wake up a netizen, Li publicized his mobile phone number on an online forum and promised to wake up those who sent him a text message request.

"I posted this message: Don't oversleep. Get up and run. I will wake you up if you send me a text message," says the civil servant, attached to the Jiaozuo forestry bureau in Henan province.

To his surprise, he received more than 50 text messages the next day.

Keeping to his promise, Li called the message senders, all of whom were strangers, at about 5:30 am the day after.

"Waking up others in the morning is like a 'gentle harassment,'" Li says. "Some may feel uncomfortable in the beginning especially those who are used to sleeping in but in long term, it is good for their health."

More netizens started embracing Li's idea and he won much praise



**Li Xiaoshuan (second right) and other joggers join the Thousands in Healthy Run event on May 19 in Jiaozuo, Henan province.**

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online for his dedication in waking them up every day.

Encouraged by the positive response, and to reach out further, he

promoted his ideas through Internet messaging tools such as QQ, a free instant messaging computer program in China, and more online forums.

Over the years, not only did Li receive more wake-up call requests from within China, there were also residents living in countries such as the United States, Singapore, Germany and Australia, who asked for his service.

But, Li soon found it overwhelming to make hundreds of phone calls every day, and decided to recruit volunteers to share his responsibilities. He posted his recruitment advertisement online and was heartened when scores came forward. As of mid-July, Li says he has about 10,000 volunteers nationwide.

These volunteers, each with about 10 to 15 phone numbers, make their calls between 5:30 am and 6 am every morning. They hang up the phone before the calls are answered to save on both time and telecommunication expenses.

Xiao Yu, a 27-year-old blind man in Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, became a "dawn messenger" in November 2010 after he heard a radio report about Li's endeavor.

"Waking up others in the morning has given me a sense of self-ful-

fillment," Xiao says. "My 'receivers' always send me greetings during Spring Festival and other holidays."

To publicize their services, Li and other "dawn messengers" have organized teams to participate in nationwide marathons.

Li's efforts to promote morning jogs have even won the support of the Henan government, which named one of the city's newly-built parks "Dawn Footstep Park" in November 2011.

Zhao Jianjun, vice-mayor of Jiaozuo city, says "Dawn Footstep" has become a brand name associated with the city.

To date, the group boasts of more than 250,000 members worldwide.

"China ranked top with the highest number of gold medals during the Olympics in 2008, but that doesn't mean that Chinese people have better physical health compared to others," Li says. "I will continue with my gentle harassment to wake up as many people as possible to promote a healthier lifestyle."

Qi Xin contributed to this story.