

For Immediate Release

BARKERVILLE delegates welcomed home by Approved Destination Status

BARKERVILLE, BC, December 9, 2009 – The Canadian Tourism Commission's recent announcement that Canada has been granted Approved Destination Status by the People's Republic of China was a remarkable "welcome home" gift for a team of Barkerville delegates returning from Guangdong Province.

Judy Campbell, Barkerville's Chief Executive Officer, and William G. Quackenbush, Barkerville's curator, joined Canadian Senator Lillian (Quan) Dyck and Overseas Exchange Association of Guangdong Province director Lily Chow in Guangdong this past November, as part of an eleven day research expedition aimed at better understanding Barkerville's extraordinary collection of Chinese archival records, photographs, and artifacts - many of which were brought to British Columbia by early immigrants from Guangdong Province.

"The people of Guangdong Province still feel incredibly connected to those ancestors who left China in the late-19th and early-20th centuries," said Campbell upon her return to Barkerville.

"The money these 'Overseas Chinese' sent back to their families resulted in significant economic and social development at home, contributing to the creation of schools, hospitals, bridges, and other important community infrastructure."

According to Barkerville's curator, Bill Quackenbush, many 21st century Chinese families possess a sincere desire to know more about the life and times of those ancestors who made the long and often arduous journey to the Cariboo goldfields more than a hundred years ago - what types of jobs they had, how they lived, what their lives were like.

"The more we learn about the historical migration of people from Guangdong Province to British Columbia, the more we realize the extent and the significance of the Chinese collections at Barkerville," said Quackenbush. "We have many artifacts that are not commonly found in China today – buildings, images, and archival material - telling stories that have been lost on the other side of the Pacific."

This growing interest from modern Chinese travelers looking to reconnect with their 'Overseas Chinese' roots makes Barkerville an invaluable asset to British Columbia's further development as Canada's Pacific Gateway.

"Guangdong Province – B.C.'s 'sister' province - is very interested in Barkerville," said Judy Campbell. "And officials there are very pleased with the job we have done in preserving and interpreting the history of Canada's Chinese immigrants."

"As such, Barkerville is poised to play an important role in any future trade, investment, and tourism opportunities that arise from Canada's new agreement with China on Approved Destination Status."

Prior to this crucial ADS development, marketing organizations like the Canadian Tourism Commission were unable to promote directly to Chinese consumers. Now that Approved Destination Status has been awarded, the CTC is seeking to implement a robust action plan to leverage the growing interest of Chinese travelers to Canada, many of whom are eager to know more about Barkerville's Guangdong connection.

"This agreement represents great potential for the visitor economy and future growth of the industry," said Michele McKenzie, CTC's President and Chief Executive Officer, of the ADS

announcement. "The Canadian Tourism Commission will take full advantage of this agreement and begin marketing business and leisure travel opportunities to the Chinese people."

"ADS opens a very big door," she concluded. "We look forward to mobilizing quickly to take advantage of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games and promoting Canada's image throughout this massive market."

Through the support of Overseas Exchange Association of Guangdong Province director Lily Chow, some of the CTC's goals are already being met.

Ms. Chow, a retired school teacher from Prince George who now lives in Victoria, has previously assisted the City of Prince George with a number of its own trade missions to China. A former director-at-large with the Barkerville Heritage Trust, Lily was instrumental in bringing a delegation from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office to Barkerville in 2006. She was also a driving force behind Barkerville's recent reciprocal visit to Guangzhou, Kaiping, Jaingmen and Taishan.

"We can't thank Lily enough for convincing us to take this trip," said Judy Campbell. "In order for Barkerville to further develop its relationship with China, we needed to return the visit we received from Chinese officials in 2006... but in these times of fiscal restraint, it seemed like a challenging ambition to realize."

"Because of Lily, and because of the incredible generosity of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, the trip cost us very little - less, in fact, than some of our in-province trips to attend conferences and meetings."

According to Tourism BC's latest profile of the Chinese travel market, visits to Canada by Chinese citizens in 2008 were up 8.6 percent from the year before. In 2007, 159,927 Chinese travelers visited Canada, of whom 99,405 entered directly through British Columbia, accounting for 62.2% of Canada's Chinese market. Chinese travelers had the highest average length of stay in Canada, at 28 nights, and spent an average of \$1,648.51 each – more than visitors from any other country.

A recent survey by the Conference Board of Canada suggests ADS will boost the yearly rate of travel to Canada from China by up to 50 percent by 2015.

"Now that the City of Prince George is looking at new markets for its International Airport, Barkerville's Chinese history can be an important resource," said Campbell. "And as Northern British Columbia looks to China for new trade and investment opportunities, our connection to Guangdong Province will be a significant asset."

As a result of Barkerville's historic trek to China, curator Bill Quackenbush has been asked to write an article for the academic Journal of Overseas Chinese Research. Barkerville has also been invited to mount a traveling exhibit concerning the Chinese experience in the Cariboo for Barkerville's 150th anniversary in 2012. Two venues for this exhibit have already been secured - the Overseas Chinese Research Centre at Wuyi University, and the Guangdong Museum of Overseas Chinese in Guangzhou - and Campbell expects the exhibit will visit several other locations, including Hong Kong, Taishan and Kaiping. In addition, the Guangdong Museum has expressed interest in a permanent installation about Barkerville. Barkerville has, in return, offered to host student researchers from China wishing to study Barkerville's history.

"Barkerville's Chee Kung Tong building, which was designated a National Historic Site of Canada this past summer, has historical and political significance in China," said Bill Quackenbush. "We may, therefore, be eligible for UNESCO World Heritage Site status."

A proposal is also being developed for a research project that would identify the home villages of some of Barkerville's Chinese citizens, and take copies of historical photographs to those villages for identification purposes, and to potentially locate any extant archival material.

"These activities will raise Barkerville's profile in China, and among the many Chinese from overseas who visit these museums," said Campbell. "We believe that in the long term this will result in increased visitation to Barkerville."

"Now that Canada has received Approved Destination Status, we expect many new tours to British Columbia will include Barkerville on their itinerary," she added. "More research will reveal more about the significance of the Barkerville collections, and the possibility of World Heritage status for all or part of Barkerville's Chinatown may soon become a reality."

"This will significantly increase Barkerville's access to funding, and increase its desirability as an international tourism destination," concluded Campbell. "All in all, the trip was a worthwhile investment."

And thanks to the Canadian Tourism Commission's new ADS announcement, the investment already seems to be showing a healthy return.

For a detailed, first-hand account of Barkerville's historic trek to China, please visit the historic site's new blog at: www.barkerville.wordpress.com.

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ABOUT BARKERVILLE HISTORIC TOWN

BARKERVILLE HISTORIC TOWN is the largest historic site in Western North America (www.barkerville.ca). Barkerville is provincially, nationally and internationally recognized for its historic significance associated with its place in western Canada's gold rush era and the role the gold rush played in BC joining Canada. Barkerville is widely known as a "must see" for travel itineraries in western Canada. The historic town is also a significant contributor to the Cariboo regional economy and is widely regarded as a unique component of the regional identity.

The Barkerville Heritage Trust, as Barkerville's operating and managing partner, works in conjunction with the Province of British Columbia, the owner and statutory guardian of Barkerville's heritage resources, to ensure that Barkerville is efficiently managed, entertaining and educational to visitors, and financially stable as the premier heritage resource and tourism attraction for the Cariboo. The ultimate aim is to maintain and enhance Barkerville's position as a nationally significant heritage resource and tourism attraction for British Columbia and Canada.

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