

# Arts & Music

A look at the local art scene in SLV



## China through local eyes

by Rachel Wooster

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Rachel Wooster. I am a photographer, writer, college student, godmother, proud Boulder Creek resident, and now a traveler. Earlier this year I took my first trip outside of North America, and traveled to central China. This trip was a lifetime in the making. Growing up our family had foreign exchange students from China and I have always been interested in eastern cultures and religions.

I traveled with my photography professor Kate Jordahl, Oliver Klink, the owner of Incredible Travel Photography, and nine other experienced world travelers. We spent eight wonderful days exploring the Zhangjiajie area of Hunan, China, including Tianmen Mountain and Zhangjiajie National Park. Zhangjiajie is China's first national park established in 1982 and became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1992. A photograph and small article about our trip was featured in the local paper.

The landscape of this region is absolutely breathtaking and these mountains were

the backdrop for the movie Avatar. The area is filled with sandstone pillars which go straight up for thousands of feet.

On Tianmen Mountain the path you walk on is made of concrete and rebar and was constructed onto the side of the mountain. You don't actually walk on the mountain itself, but around the mountain, with nothing below you for thousands of feet. All of this was made by hand and all of the materials were also carried by hand. It is not a hike for the faint of heart! I tried to keep my mind focused on what I was photographing not on what wasn't beneath me. The highlight of Tianmen Mountain is the gateway, which is a natural opening in the mountain.

Zhangjiajie National Park is almost twelve thousand acres and has over 30 million visitors yearly. We were there during their off season and the park was still filled with thousands of people everyday. Each day consisted of waking up around 6am or earlier, walking five to seven miles a day of stairs, taking around one thousand photographs a day, and hopefully going to bed around 10pm. It was an exhausting trip, and completely filled with inspiring cultural and visual

experiences. Even on my last day on top of the mountain I still could not believe sitting there, that it was thousands of feet straight down. There just aren't any mountains like this in North America.

Initially when I returned to the States I wanted to write a travel guide, with maps, photographs, and basic information about the area. The travel guides I purchased for China before I went there only had four pages on Hunan China and they didn't even mention anything about the Zhangjiajie area. The internet isn't much better, there are some pictures and maybe a paragraph or two. Most people who travel to this area either have to have a private guide as we did or do group tours because there is no good guide for Chinese, Japanese, or Korean speakers, which are the three main groups of tourists.

I have found that this same problem exists for Big Basin and many other state parks in the Santa Cruz mountains. I haven't been able to find a good travel guide in print or e-text. The closest I have come is BigBasin.org and it has excellent reference information, but almost no pictures. So I am now embarking on writing travel guides for local locations as well as foreign. This trip really taught me how little public knowledge there is out there about many parks and I am hoping in the coming years to change that. I currently have my Tianmen Mountain portfolio done, and am hoping to have a Big Basin portfolio done by the end of the year. Then the process of writing will begin.

Two of my images are currently on display in the Krause Center for Innovation gallery in Los Altos. It is a group show which ends September 26<sup>th</sup> with a closing reception. This experience has been amazing, but most of all it reminds me of how lucky I am to be living in a redwood forest in such a progressive and inclusive community.

*Santa Cruz Mountain  
Art and Wine Festival*

*August 30-31  
Labor Day Weekend*

*11am-6pm*

*at Garrahan Park  
North Highway 9  
Boulder Creek*

*Food, Wine  
Art & Music*

*Proceeds help fund  
the Art Masterpiece  
Program at Boulder  
Creek Elementary  
School and the  
IOOF scholarship fund*

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*Beneath  
the  
Redwoods*