

The Opening of Hong Kong for the Preaching of the Gospel

Take the Peak Tram (or Bus 15 from Central MTR) to the Peak. It lets you out into the Peak Tower shopping center. Go up one level, and walk outside to the area between the Peak Tower and the Peak Galleria shopping centers where there is an old green trolley car on display. Turn right, cross the street to the old stone restaurant called "The Peak Lookout" and take the road that starts just on the right side of the restaurant. Walk about 200 yards until you see a small waterfall on the right side of the path (about a 10 minute walk). Stop there briefly and read the following history of the dedication of Hong Kong for the preaching of the gospel.

In 1949, President George Albert Smith commissioned Apostle Matthew Cowley to bless the land of Hong Kong to the preaching of the gospel, even though all of China was dedicated in 1921 by David O. McKay, an apostle at the time. A new mission had been formed with Hilton Robertson as the mission president and Henry Aki as a counselor. Elder Cowley, President Robertson, Brother Aki, and their wives, along with Brother Aki's mother, went to the peak for this event. In a moment, you can walk to the exact spot where the dedication occurred and read some journal entries about the event, but this is how the exact spot was discovered.

W. Brent Hardy served as a missionary in Hong Kong during the 50s. He was told that the prayer to open Hong Kong occurred around the waterfall area. He returned to Hong Kong in 1968 to be the mission president. Groups would gather each year to commemorate this event, but when the groups got too large to meet near the waterfall, they started meeting on top of the peak, and as time went on, the actual location became largely unknown.

In 1999, President Hardy returned as the second temple president. Donald R. Hinton was mission president at the time. He would take his missionaries to the waterfall for a memorial service each year, as this was believed by President Hardy to be the location of the site where the prayer was given.

After returning home from being temple president, President Hardy received an interesting letter from Truman Madsen. In the early 70s, while President Hardy was mission president, he had escorted Truman Madsen, who was on an Asian tour representing the General Sunday School Board. When Brother Madsen returned home, he gave a report of his Asian tour to a literary group, which Matthew Cowley's wife was a member of. She subsequently wrote him a thank note, sharing some additional memories of the earlier event. Brother Madsen filed her letter away. Nearly thirty years later, he rediscovered it and sent it to President Hardy, stating the following:

"After you 'baptized us into China' in the early 70s I spoke to a literary group and gave my impressions of the trip and the spirit that went with it. Sister Elva Cowley was present. This week I found this letter from her in my files. It should be in yours . . .

She said, "We held our meeting and when it was finished, the seven of us with tears in our eyes stood speechless for a few moments. The spirit was overwhelming. Then President Robertson took his pocket knife and scribbled on a large rock "July 14, 1949." Matthew said he knew that the day would come when there would be a great mission among the Oriental peoples, and even a Temple of the Lord someday."



In late June and early July 1949, Elder Matthew Cowley and his wife, Elva (top right), sailed to Hong Kong with newly called mission president Hilton A. Robertson (seated far left) and his wife, Hazel (center of back row). Henry Wong Aki, counselor in the mission presidency, his wife Sai Lang (behind him), and Carolyn Robertson completed the mission group. The others pictured were LDS members in the employ of the USS President Cleveland.

President Hardy e-mailed a copy of the letter to President Hinton, saying *"how exciting that they scratched (not exactly environmentally correct) the date of the dedication into the rock. It should be able to really nail it down"* (Apr 25, 2002).

That launched a long search. The Hinton's went immediately to the Peak and searched around the waterfall but found no graffiti on the rock at all. Then they went to the top of the Peak, because from her description that sounded like where it had taken place, but they could not find anything. Six hours later they e-mailed President Hardy again and asked if he had any other ideas of where they could look. He said, *"I don't think you should take your eye off the waterfall. It is still the right place. . . . It would have been a faint inscription and maybe doesn't exist today but worth a look."* Sister Cowley's description didn't fit the waterfall spot exactly.

They went and looked around the waterfall again but to no avail. *"However, with every new group we took up the peak, we would look for the date, sometimes telling them about it in hopes they would see what we did not."* They did this for about nine months and then had the following experience with one of their groups: After conversing at the waterfall and as the missionaries were taking pictures, President and Sister Hinton walked slowly down the trail. He used his mobile to make a phone call. *"Ada turned and as she was just casually looking at the rock in front of her, she noticed that something was inscribed on the rock and her first thought was 'Well, there is some graffiti.' Then she realized that what she was looking at was three boxes, the first with the number 7, the second or middle with the number 14, and the third with the number 49. The spot is about 75 yards from the waterfall."* They took some pictures and then cautiously e-mailed President Hardy wondering if someone else had scratched it since it didn't say "July 14" and this was a deeper etching than just a scratching. President Hardy responded, *"You are far too calm about this! Or, I guess I could never be a good scientist. I would be hoopin' and hollerin'! We are very excited about this find. I appreciate your objectivity in looking at the alternatives but feel that there is no question about it. . . . Can you get a higher resolution and send to us?"*

To find the etching in the rock, walk about 75 yards further down the trail until you get to a very prominent jutting out of the rocky hillside directly opposite a scenic overlook. Look for a large white scratch in the rock at about shoulder level and the etching is right there. If you have gone to the charcoal colored speckled flat wall you have gone too far.

Here is the journal entry of Matthew Cowley:

We went up on what is known as the 'Peak', the highest eminence overlooking the beautiful city of Hong Kong and onto the mainland of China and there we officially opened the mission by a brief service, each of us praying in turn. I will never forget the prayer of Brother Henry Aki, who, as he stood there, facing his homeland with its 465 million inhabitants, poured out his soul to God that he might be the means of bringing salvation to his kindred people. What great odds, brothers and sisters, one man holding the Priesthood of God among four hundred and sixty-five million of his race! I was never so impressed with the preciousness of the Priesthood of God as I was when the dear Chinese brother, who felt the burden that was upon him, implored God to bring salvation to his people.

At the October 1951 General Conference, Brother Aki said:

When we were up to the Peak of Hong Kong we could look on the other side to China proper and on this side we could look into the Hong Kong Bay. We went there with Brother Cowley to dedicate the land for the opening of the mission. While we were there Brother Cowley called each one of us to take turn [s] in praying and I shed tears facing my ancestors, my great-grandfather and my forefathers, that I, the only one having the privilege to hold the Priesthood, had come up to the land of China, to spread this Gospel of Jesus Christ among the people.

The mission president, Hilton A. Robertson's journal entry for 14 July 1949 says:

Another outstanding day in the mission. We went to Hong Kong and to the Peak south side where prayers were offered by Brother Aki and myself and then Apostle Matthew Cowley prayed officially opening the mission. It was an inspirational hour of worship and thanksgiving to God, our Father in Heaven, for our safe arrival and for the blessings of employment in His Kingdom among the people of the most populous nation so overridden by so many calamities of nature and man.

[For a copy of the full story, e-mail Susan Bishop at: lowbishop2000@yahoo.com]