

## Wielding the Sabre

It was with great excitement that the Cambridge contingent arrived at the Sabre Set workshop, held the weekend 20-21 November 1999. Some 50 people took part, and it seemed incredible that everyone would actually all be able to learn simultaneously without causing injury to each other! Fortunately the



ears etc, were easily laid to rest. Nonetheless, not being used to wielding such weapons, the newcomers were cautious at first before relaxing and (literally!) getting into the swing of things.

The workshop was led by Sean Dennison, assisted by various people who had previously learned the set from Sean in Canada. Having others in the group who knew the set helped enormously since it meant that the corners were covered and whichever way one turned there was always someone to follow. Paul and Dawn helped out with demonstrating the moves. It was particularly good (as in the *Women and Tai Chi* workshop) to have the female perspective and role model.

The experience of being a complete beginner again was a strange feeling and rekindled lots of memories of first Tai Chi classes. Everyone found himself or herself reiterating the all too familiar comments such as "I'm never going to learn all this...!". For anyone instructing (or about to begin instructing) going back to being a beginner again was certainly a useful experience.

sabres were not real, so any initial fears of decapitation or loss of

Handling the sabre felt clumsy at first but began to feel more natural the more time progressed. Throughout the weekend, breaks were kept to a minimum with everyone using the time to practise the sequences previously taught in a desperate bid to ingrain them into memory. Memorisation was made more difficult by the fact that the moves had no names, aside from the memorable *Raccoon Jumps to Catch Butterfly*. Other anchor points were moves similar to those of the Tai Chi set namely *Stork Cools Wings*, *Repulse Monkey*, *Parting Wild Horse's Mane* and the *Punch Tiger* sequence.

The weekend included discussion of the health benefits of the sabre set and how it helped to develop one's normal Tai Chi. Certainly, this was exemplified by the experiences of one member who had personally achieved great improvement in his health recovery by regularly practising the Sabre Set in addition to Tai Chi. Indeed, many of us noticed at the end of the workshop that our normal Tai Chi set felt very different. Using the sabre seemed to work more on the spine, and generally seemed to help with sitting and extending.

The workshop raised £4,900 for the Florida building fund and the person who made the wooden sabres and sold them to members as a fundraising venture, raised £345 for kitchen modifications. All in all, it was an excellent workshop and more than lived up to expectations - roll on Sabre Set III! ■ Kathryn Beckett

Thanks to everyone who has contributed articles and photos to this third issue. We hope you find it interesting. **Please bear in mind when reading this newsletter that the opinions expressed are those of the contributors and are not necessarily Taoist Tai Chi Society policy.**

If you have something to say about Tai Chi, or anything related to it, then please set pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, and send it in - not forgetting an illustrative photograph!

Contact Sam on 01223 504746 (email: sam.masters@dial.pipex.com) if you have something to contribute.

## New moves

What is it they say, moving house is the next most stressful thing after divorce and death? I moved house a few months ago, and prior to the move I usually managed to get to two, sometimes three Tai Chi classes a week. I really appreciated the support from the group members in the run up to 'D' Day, or should I say 'M' Day. If things were getting too much, I knew that taking myself off to a Tai Chi class would help in more ways than one.

Once we had moved into the new house, friends and family began sending us New

Home cards but one day an envelope arrived addressed simply "Cathy Riethoff, Just moved into the House next to the Plough, Fen Ditton". We were amazed that it reached us, but it was from my Tai Chi class! I had talked to them about the location of the new house but not yet given the full address. Well done to the Post Office and thanks to my Tai Chi group.

Life is gradually beginning to take on an air of normality again, and I hope I can continue to work on my inner strength as well as my physical well being. ■ Cathy Riethoff



## Charity donations

- The St Johns class in Cambridge donated £51 tea money to *Children's Promise*
- Stamford have raised £100 for the *Salvation Army*
- This year, Suffolk Branch as a whole donated £826.50 direct to other charities



The Taoist Tai Chi Society of Great Britain is a registered charity dedicated to making the health benefits of practicing Taoist Tai Chi available to all who wish to experience them. Registered Charity No: 1053425

## Colorado revisited

This time Susanna and I spent our holiday staying with Seth in the Rockies. What made the deepest impression was our visit to Mesa Verde, with its prehistoric cliff dwellings of the Puebloan people. Some 1000 years ago, people here built dwellings into the rock to which the only access was by climbing the sheer rock-face. The reason these dwellings were built may have been that they offered protection against weather and marauders, and had a water supply from seepage through the rocks into the caves. The little fellow you see above can be seen all over the area, I think it is a sort of mascot for Colorado. The figure above is found in rock carvings dating well before the Puebloan and



and then a set. Next some practice moves which in the case of one class was *Push Hands*, then finishing with a set. You may not be aware of this, but even though moves taught are the same throughout the world of Taoist Tai Chi, the way details of the moves are carried out can vary slightly from country to country. So it was a pleasant surprise to find how similar our Tai Chi moves were, in fact it was as if we had learned from the same instructor.

During break our instructor, Theresa, asked if we would talk about the UK society.

I gave history snippets, location of classes, membership and instructors numbers, future plans regarding buildings and a bit about development elsewhere in Europe. Theresa told us that the only building in the US owned by the Society is the one in Denver, and that a second building is being planned for Tallahassee, Florida, so classes are now busy fund-raising throughout the US.

We discovered that the number of members in the US is about the



► Push Hands in Colorado - the same as they are here!

is also found much later in various Native American tribes who refer to the flute-player as *Kokopelli*. The rock carving depicts a hunchback and is viewed as a fertility symbol carrying seeds on his back. However the figure you see above is a rather embellished version.

On two occasions we found time to attend Tai Chi classes. The Society owns a building in the centre of Denver, but the classes we attended were in one of the suburbs. This hall is hired and used solely by the Taoist Tai Chi Society with several classes every day of the week. The classes follow the same pattern as in UK, with warm up exercises

same as in the UK. That must have been the only thing we came across that was the same size there as here! What was particularly nice was the way in which the Society's members made us feel welcome.

After Tai Chi, Seth took us to 'Wok and Roll', a Japanese take-away with rather nice (and healthy) food. This is Seth's Friday night routine - first Tai Chi, then 'Wok and Roll' - not a bad set up.

I had better leave some space for others and may tell more tales some other time on how to pan for gold, looking for bears and mountain lions, our encounter with Buffalo Bill at the look-out mountain, surprise meetings with two big snakes, and lots of other goodies. ■ Tormod Holt

## How Tai Chi helped improve my health

Four years ago I came down with Polymyalgia Rheumatica, PMR for short. This is an auto-immune disease which affects the muscles, particularly those of the limbs and can last for two to three years or maybe longer in some cases. With PMR, walking is painful and slow, and sitting for any period of time results in stiffening of the hips and thigh muscles. Sleep is disturbed as the body surface can be tender and any lump in the bed or fold in the sheet feels like a boulder. Normal activities, such as bending to low cupboards, getting in and out of the bath, hanging out washing, are all slow, painful and difficult activities. I had a fear of falling over because I knew I didn't have the strength in my arms or legs to get up again. I was given cortisoids to repress the symptoms which helped combat the stiffness, but I still lacked flexibility, strength and stamina. In a nutshell, I felt old before my time.

After nearly three years on the cortisoids, I felt that I was ready to come off them and with the hospital consultant's blessing I did this at the end of March 1999. April was a very painful and difficult month to get through while adjusting to the cessation of the cortisoids, but at the beginning of May, on the advice of my son, I joined a beginners Tai Chi class in St Ives and haven't looked back.

At the first demonstration, I knew this was the exercise programme for me. The movements were relaxed, controlled and formed a continuous sequence that appeared to affect every part of the body.

It was also a pleasure to watch the set being performed.

At the beginning the exercises were painful and I found it impossible to stretch out my arms fully, but after a few weeks with daily Tai Chi exercises this improved. At times it was difficult to match the stamina of the others, but as we progressed through the set, I found it easier to keep up. While learning the set, I would practice at least once a day what we had learned and I gradually became stronger and fitter. Going up and downstairs is definitely easier than it used to be and my general fitness has improved. I can bend, and kneel, which comes in handy when doing housework, and I can now actually sit on the floor and get up again with relative ease. I feel younger, fitter and more positive about things thanks to the Tai Chi exercises and look forward to the Monday night classes.

I have been to one Intensive at the centre in Colchester and found it very interesting and helpful, though hard work, and am now looking forward to the Suffolk workshop in August. ■ Aileen Jedlica



## ★ REMEMBER ★

The Suffolk workshop takes place on the 5th-6th August 2000. Venue details will follow shortly, so watch this space and get your bookings in early for the nearest workshop to you!

# the Workshop experience

*If you've been thinking about attending a workshop but haven't yet taken the plunge, then have a look at these experiences to help you make up your mind...*

## Basildon

**A** workshop over the weekend? Well, that's what I first thought when I signed up. Do I really want to do this and strain my body to the limit when I could indeed be lazing till late in the morning on Saturday and Sunday? But I guess the taste of two intensives which I had attended in the previous weeks made me very curious. I had to see what the next level of Tai Chi instruction was like. This workshop was taken by Andrew Kirby and Mike Usher, the only two qualified workshop instructors in the UK, and Robin, who came in from Holland to help out with the workshop as well.

Anyway, I was picked up at about 8.30am on Saturday, 27th November by Susanna, who already had Tormod and Alain comfortable in the back seat, and we arrived in Essex about an hour later. I was very surprised to learn that there were 148 participants attending this workshop, but the hall was easily big enough for the group. We started off, after a sip of warm tea, with an introductory talk by Andrew Kirby, who

explained a little about the aims and principles of the society. Later on, he made us do a set and picked up on *Brush Knees* and showed us the finer aspects of the movements. Actually, we were doing brush knees the whole day, although it was amazing that every single point that was brought up seemed entirely new. In fact, I was sitting next to Alain whilst Mike was explaining and demonstrating the continuity of the twist step, and I remember both of us shaking our heads and half laughing in disbelief at the grace and 'perfection' of his Tai Chi. Let's see if I can remember any of the other points brought up, yes: flex the foot, spread the arms wide, drop elbows and twist from the hips, stretch the spine and continuous dan yu-like up and down motion. (Susanna said this would be helpful!)

The second day, we were slightly wiser, and so left 15 minutes later, much to my delight. We arrived just on time and started off doing two sets in a row. This time, Andrew picked on *Parting Wild Horses Mane*, which

was a good one I think, because there were so many points to put across. However, there were more speeches today, as Steve, the National Committee Chairman, said his piece about the society, as well as some other talks, most notably one explaining the purchase of premises in Cardiff to be converted into a Tai Chi centre.

We ended the day doing a few *tor yus*, *dan yus* and *push hands* – for those who don't know, these are moves where your feet stay rooted to the ground but every other part of your body somehow remains moving, and working hard too! ■ *Boon Lin*

## and...

**L**ast November I attended a two day Taoist Tai Chi workshop with Susanna, Tormod and Boon. The workshop was taken by Andrew Kirby and Mike Usher. About 150 people from all over the UK came along. There were even some visitors from abroad. People tend to travel a long way to attend workshops like these... and I can

understand this, as I found the experience very beneficial.

The weekly beginners classes teaches us the set but this is only an *introduction* to Tai Chi. I feel that there is much more to discover. At the workshop the instructors didn't introduce us to new moves but we explored a more in-depth way of performing the existing set. As a result of attending such workshops and intensives you can learn to use the body in a more effective and natural manner. This is achieved by using it as a whole and not as though the different parts of your body are unconnected.

We also learnt more about the organisation and its work. The National Committee decided to go ahead with the South Wales branch proposition to buy a large building which will be used in the future as a venue for workshops.

Meeting other members who had come from all over the place made me realise that we are part of a much larger organisation than practicing Tai Chi in a class on a weekly basis might make you think. ■ *Alain Navarre*

## Cardiff

*It was my first workshop and the largest set that I have taken part in. Also, the introduction of internal focus through the second foundation exercise was inspiring.*

■ *Simon Brierley, Cambridge*

► An informal practice session on Saturday evening – Tai Chi set, Special Needs set and Sword set (right). No matter if you forgot yours... Darren improvises with a broom while Stuart brandishes his imagination (below)



*It was fun seeing the new centre at Newport. Lovely view from the top, and plenty of space for a set up there for when the sun comes out.*

■ *Ian Jedlica, St Ives*

*Hard work and very friendly. I learnt a tremendous amount from listening and watching others. It didn't matter what level of Tai Chi you had achieved, you were given confidence and a lot of help. On Saturday evening my legs ached and I was very tired, both from exercise and concentration. I did make a resolution to practice when I got home, but... perhaps I need to go to another workshop!*

■ *Zena Coles, Stamford*

*We were very surprised and pleased at the turnout from our area at the Cardiff workshop – nine people came from Cambridge, four from Huntingdon and four from Stamford. Kathryn even came all the way from France.*

*One of the enjoyable side-effects of a workshop is the opportunity to catch up with people we don't usually get to see. And we did a lot of that.*

*The workshop was very well organised and prompted us into thinking about the Suffolk workshop on 5th–6th August. The Welsh hospitality was wonderful and will be an inspiration to us.*

■ *Tormod Holt and Suanna Wreth, Cambridge*



## Holland

**T**he Dutch workshop was held on the 18th–20th of February, in De Buitenjan, Veldhoven. 62 people attended, which was, almost, the biggest workshop there so far. Holland had a good turnout and there were also 20 people from the UK and a few from Belgium and Germany. On the Friday, after we had all told our little adventures on how we got to the place, the sports hall was opened and the Tai Chi began.

Phillipe Gagnon from Canada, who has been doing Tai Chi for 25 years, wasted no time in giving corrections, sometimes helping someone for half an hour or more. And it was amazing to see Phillipe and Andrew Kirby doing *Push Hands* together – I've never seen Andrew take so many notes before!

Phillipe's main core of instructing seemed to be to try and get us to make the moves of the set flow together as one move. Hopefully we came close to achieving that goal by the end of the weekend.

In rest periods, we heard about Holland's tax problem, and Germany's future plans, including more classes and a weekend long intensive. Phillipe also talked about how Tai Chi never stopped while you were with Master Moy, whether walking down the street or sitting on a bus. Taoist Tai Chi can be seen as a never-ending exercise, continuing on into your everyday life.

Every workshop is worth going to for the sheer knowledge and instruction alone, and this workshop was no different, perhaps the best I've been to for a while. But then again, Barcelona beckons... ■ *Ian Jedlica*



► The impressive accommodation block for the Prague workshop (above)...

## Prague

**A**pproximately 400 people attended the Prague workshop with over 15 nationalities represented. The instructors were Mike Gates the European Rep, Sean Dennison, Chris Lewis, Andrew Kirby and Robin Goose, as well as Spanish and Czech instructors and interpreters.

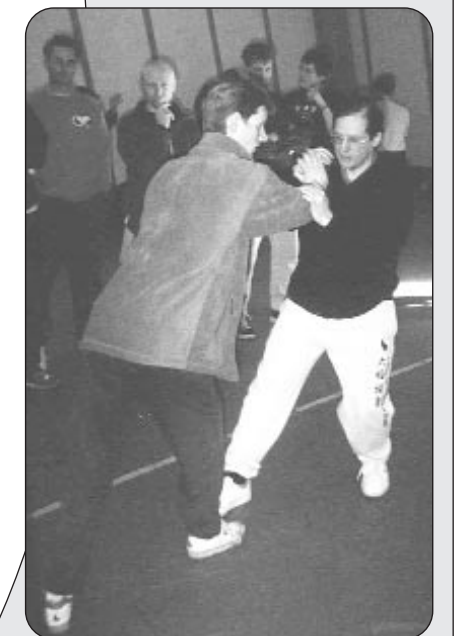
The coach journey was very long and arduous, with plenty of Tai Chi practised going but very little on the way back. We arrived at 1.30pm on the Friday and Nick

went off to find the gym while the coach had to park some distance away. When Nick returned, it was a question of follow or get lost – I tripped over a broken kerb stone and sliced the top of my finger. I arrived at the gym more by luck than judgement, with a bleeding finger, a headache and feeling very tired.

We were greeted by a very pleasant young girl offering us refreshments, but there was no time for that as the coach had to be emptied, then tables and chairs had to be off-loaded from a lorry to use in the gym. Whilst doing this, I noticed a line of people walking across the park and realised I should be going with them to the lodgings.

First impressions of the lodging house were awesome – a massive building with a huge door, wide stone staircases and corridors with

...about 400 people from all over the world practising Taoist Tai Chi together



► Phillipe Gagnon (right) and Robin Goose demonstrating *Push Hands*

■ *Val Dark*