

## The Deeds of Mr. Steeds

When journalist and high-tech explorer Oliver Steeds isn't traipsing through jungles (most recently in New Guinea), he calls Beijing his "second home." He now has two China projects in the works: a series of six documentaries on China by local directors (to be broadcast in the next few months), and an expedition with Digital Explorer ([www.digitalexplorer.co.uk](http://www.digitalexplorer.co.uk)), in which youths from a London suburb work with Beijing middle-school students on a field-based sustainability project, all to be shared online. *that's Beijing* spoke to Oliver about Beijing, his adventures, and his intimate experiences with gourds in New Guinea.

**that's Beijing:** What constitutes an "adventure?"

**Oliver Steeds:** An adventure is simply a cock-up, getting lost, a journey into the unknown. It's the unexpected, going beyond what you're used to.

**that's:** One of your first adventures was traveling from Mongolia to Xanadu in Inner Mongolia. How did that go?

**OS:** Sadly everything went wrong – we had a horse kidnapped, we were temporarily held hostage by some thugs in a ghost town on the edge of the Gobi, ended up having to walk over 1,200km across the Gobi desert ... suffered chronic food and water shortages, were arrested and imprisoned by the Mongolian military ... and towards the end of the desert ordeal we found out our guide was on the run for multiple murders ... [But] it all went pretty smoothly on the Chinese side.

**that's:** What was your most recent adventure?

**OS:** My most recent adventure was living with a tribe in West Papua for nearly four months called the Mek, making a series for Discovery Channel that will be airing in China soon ... They were fascinating to live with – everything seemed to happen



when we were there, including a death, a couple of births, a fire that ripped through half the village, a famine, witches flying around apparently drinking people's blood – you just couldn't have made it up. And yes, they did wear penis gourds – whilst some people would pay good money to put their family jewels in a hollowed-out vegetable, it was something I was not entirely comfortable with ... but I did as my hosts requested it.

**that's:** What's your relationship with Beijing?

**OS:** I first came to Beijing as a backpacker in the mid-nineties and swore I'd never return. I came back a couple of years later to study Mandarin at the People's University. Since then I keep coming back for more, working in different disguises. In many ways my relationship to Beijing is a bit like a crack habit, or the relationship with my ex ... I can't quite kick the habit despite knowing she wasn't good for me ... but still, whilst there, I love it and can't get enough! *Michaela Kabat*

For more information on Oliver and his projects, see [www.oliversteeds.com](http://www.oliversteeds.com) and [www.digitalexplorer.co.uk](http://www.digitalexplorer.co.uk).

## LEXICON

### 氧化碳排放



**yǎnghuà tàn páifàng** : Carbon Exhaust

Government vans monitoring **yǎnghuà tàn páifàng** hit the street this month, using laser technology to measure the carbon levels in the exhaust from passing vehicles. The laser takes less than a second to measure exhaust, and a camera snaps an image of the license plate of any offending vehicle. Drivers of vehicles surpassing legal limits for **yǎnghuà tàn páifàng** will be fined RMB 100. Xinhua reports that there are three vans in operation, with plans for 19 more to hit the streets in the next year.

*Michaela Kabat*

## FYI

### Panda Car

In a poll conducted by the World Wildlife Fund a few years back to determine the "World's Cutest Animal," online voters chose that symbol of Chinese pride: the panda. Banking on this natural human affinity, the Chinese automaker Geely unveiled its new "Panda" mini-coupe at the Beijing International Autofair held late last month. Painted the snowy white of tufted panda fur, the round-edged headlights of the Panda sink into oversized black "eye" sockets and its grill has the distinct blunt-edged triangle shape of a flat, wet panda nose. Geely promises the auto on display will be available in time for the Olympics. One of 20 models the company showed at the fair, the car is priced as low as RMB 30,000, setting it on track to compete with the ubiquitous CheryQQ.

The first independent auto manufacturer in the PRC, Geely was also the first Chinese manufacturer to display at the North American Auto Show, setting up a booth last year in Detroit. With plans to export cars to the US by 2008 and Europe by 2009, Geely is just one of China's manufacturers that last year pushed the country's automotive industry to outpace Germany and become the world's third largest.

Last year in China, 4.7 million cars were sold – an increase of 23.4 percent from 2006 – making it the world's second largest car market. In the US, 16.2 million vehicles were sold last year, but even this market is expected to be surpassed by China's by 2017. Still, China's manufacturers have long been criticized by the West for cribbing successful designs – Mercedes-Benz, manufacturer of the shoebox-like "smart car," lashed out at China's eerily similar Shuanghuan "Noble," while BMW got in a tiff over the China-made "CEO" that resembled its X5 SUV. Such criticisms can't easily be made of the Panda coupe. It's copied straight from nature – as dolorous and awkward as one of those lumbering, huggable bears.

*Adriane Quinlan*



PHOTO: COURTESY OF OLIVER STEEDS