

# NORTH DISTRICT: BEATING THE DRUM

Home Affairs Department



Lau Shui Heung Reservoir

**T**HE most noticeable changes in Hong Kong's demographics during the next 20 years are bound to be in the North District - Sheung Shui, Fanling, Ta Kwu Ling and Sha Tau Kok - adjoining the Mainland.

With intensive studies underway to improve infrastructural links between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta, and developers pushing the Government to



open up the Frontier Closed Area, government agencies and local 'Tongs' are ensuring the natural heritage is being preserved. For the New Territories, particularly the North

District, form the very soul of the origins of Hong Kong. Many temples and villages date back to the 16th century and generations from the "Five Great Clans" - the Tangs, Pangs, Lius, Haus and Mans - still maintain family traditions.

The North District, with an area of about 14,000 hectares and a

population of about 300,000, is the second largest administrative district in Hong Kong. Over 50 per cent of its population live in public housing estates and Home Ownership Scheme flats in the new towns of Sheung Shui and Fanling while about 52,000 local inhabitants live in the 111 villages in the district.

The district has already seen rapid sustainable development in recent years. Large commercial blocks and residential estates have been built in the major towns, once linked directly by Tai Po Road or the old Castle Peak road, but now by slip roads off a new super highway. And numerous recreational and community facilities have been established by the Government to serve the growing communities. The place, which was once remote and covered mainly with farmland, is now crowded with skyscrapers, an amalgamation of traditional and modern styles. It is a flourishing new district with numerous rural scenic spots featuring walled villages and temples being maintained to preserve history.

### BORDER CONGESTION

As North District borders on Shenzhen, the majority of cross-border travellers and cargo transporters pass

through the district to the Mainland. Last year, more than 104 million passengers were processed by Immigration officers at various border check-points. Of these, some 89.5 million passengers were processed at Lo Wu, 12.5 million at Lok Ma Chau, 1.2 million at Sha Tau Kok, and 1 million at Man Kam To.

The Kowloon-Canton Railway has long been a major mode of transport for the cross-border travellers between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. The concession to build the KCR was made in 1898 between the British/Chinese Corporation and the Qing Government. In 1910 the Hong Kong section started operation between Kowloon and Fanling and the Chinese operation between Shenzhen (Shum Chun) and Guangzhou (Canton) started one year



Lo Wai

later. A 11.67 km line from Fanling to Sha Tau Kok was opened in April 1912, but was discontinued 16 years later to make way for a freeway linking the two townships. To relieve the congestion at the Lo Wu footbridge, a short term, \$2.4 million improvement project was completed just prior to the Lunar New Year rush earlier this year. To further ease the Lo Wu traffic and to serve the future Kwu Tung North New Development Area, the Government is considering the final details of constructing a Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau Spur Line.

### SHEUNG SHUI TO LOK MA CHAU SPUR LINE

The Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) announced a tunnel approach to build the 7.4 km Spur Line in September 2001, targeted for completion in mid-2007. KCRC pointed out that the new approach could avoid Long Valley, a farming area of high ecological value. The 4.3 km tunnel from north of Sheung Shui to Chau Tau requires less land resumption and enables the intermediate station at Kwu Tung to be built underground, which is compatible with the proposed green town development there. The 3.1 km northern section of the spur line from Chau Tau to Lok Ma Chau Terminal will be on a viaduct to facilitate a connection with the bridge link across the Shenzhen (Shum Chun) River and the Huanggang Terminal.

### TRAINING THE RIVERS

Flooding is a serious problem in the North District, affecting farmers and residents in this rural area for many years. The major rivers meander through the lowlands,

causing the wash to accumulate on the riverbed and, owing to the shallow capacity of the riverbed, flooding usually occurs after heavy rain.

To tackle the flooding problem, various departments are actively working on major river training works. At present, the river training project in Area 30B, Lower River Indus and River Beas have been completed. The remaining works of the Upper River Indus are scheduled for completion in early 2004. The river training works will not only alleviate the present flooding problems but also provide opportunities for future development in the district.

### THE CITIES

Towards the end of the Yuan dynasty (c. 1368), the Liu clan - one of the "Five Great Clans" - came from Fujian to settle in the southern part of Guangdong. Their descendants later spread to Wang Mei Shan, Ling Ha, Siu Lam, Sheung Yue, Fuk Tin and Sheung Shui. When it came to the seventh generation, the chief of the clan believed the clan would prosper if they lived together and found a place with very good 'fung shui'. There they dug a moat and built a walled village overlooking the Ng Tung Ho (River Indus) and called it "Sheung Shui (village above the water)", even though it was colloquially known for many years as Sheung Yue City because it was near Sheung Yue Ho (River Beas).

It was said that in Tai Ling Shan there was a cliff as white as face powder and the people living nearby called it "Fan Pak Ling" (powder cliff hill). Villages sprang up in the area and later the name was shortened to Fanling.

During early Qing dynasty, a high official visited the bay of Tai Pang Wan (Starling Inlet) in southern Guangdong. Folklore has it that when he saw the clear blue sea and glittering sand, he chanted "Up rose the sun from the edge of the sand, High hung the moon above the water at the far end." Thereafter, the

villagers called the place "Sha (sand) Tau (edge) Kok (far end)".

In days long gone (Qing dynasty), villages in the New Territories were under constant attack by bandits north of the Shenzhen River. To defend themselves, the inhabitants of one particular village made a huge drum so when invaders came within sight they vigorously beat the drum to alert all villagers to fight off the impending raiders. The village became known as "Ta Kwu (beating the drum) Ling".

### TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

The North District is one of the regions where traditional rural features of the New Territories are best conserved and many typical Chinese buildings with a long history are preserved. And the countryside offers splendid vistas from the Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trails, Lau Shui Heung Reservoir and Shek Wu Hui (Old Market), to name a few.

### LUNG YEUK TAU HERITAGE TRAIL

Located at the northeast of Luen Wo Hui in Fanling, the Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail is the second of its kind established by the Government in the New Territories, being officially opened in December 1999. Along the trail are many traditional Chinese buildings and structures, such as the Tang Chung Ling Ancestral Hall and the Tin Hau Kung. Their walls and gates, and even the houses in some of the walled villages such as Lo Wai and San Wai, still retain their original appearance and bear testimony to the historical and social development of the area over the past centuries.

The name Lung Yeuk Tau (commonly known as Lung Ka Tau) was derived from a nearby mountain range, Lung Yeuk Ling (Mountain of





San Hong Street in Shek Wu Hui

the Leaping Dragon). The Tangs in Lung Yeuk Tau - another of the "Five Great Clans" - who originated from Jishui of Jiangxi province have the strongest claim to the royal descent among their fellow clansmen for they are the descendants of the eldest son of the princess of the Song dynasty (1127-1279). When the princess took refuge to the south, she married Tang Wai-kip of Kam Tin. The eldest son of the royal couple moved to Lung Yeuk Tau at the end of the Yuan dynasty.

#### LAU SHUI HEUNG RESERVOIR/ HOK TAU RESERVOIR

The Lau Shui Heung reservoir is on the northeast of Lung Shan near Lau Shui Heung Village. There are a number of barbecue sites on the eastern and northern parts of the reservoir, and on the southern part, there is a camping site where facilities, including barbecue pits and picnic tables are provided. A five-kilometre long Lau Shui Heung Family Trail also starts at the reservoir. The entire journey takes about two hours.



Featuring beautiful and tranquil scenery, the reservoir is a favourite spot for outings and picnics. Situated on the southeast of Lau Shui

Heung Reservoir is Hok Tau Reservoir, another well-known hiking spot in the North District.

#### SHEK WU HUI (OLD MARKET)

Bounded by Lung Sum Avenue, San Fung Avenue and Jockey Club Road, the Shek Wu Hui Old Market was already a major market and the centre of business activities of Sheung Shui in the 1930s. Most of the buildings in the Market were built after 1955 and 1956, the years when two huge fires raged through the area. Today, Shek Wu Hui is a thriving marketplace where an atmosphere of old days trading still prevails.

#### NORTH DISTRICT ACTIVITIES

There are also a variety of great events of the North District with strong local characteristics, which attract more than a hundred thousand spectators each year. These include the North District Flower, Bird, Insect and Fish Show, the North District Beat Drug and Fight Crime Variety Show and the Tin Hau Festival.

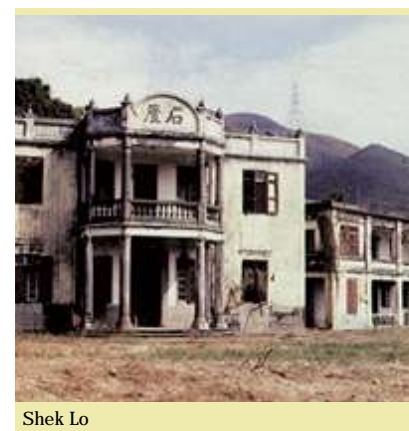
The North District Flower, Bird, Insect and Fish Show is an annual major event sponsored by the North District Council. The show, first organised 22 years ago, has become a very special and representative activity of the North District. It is held during the Christmas holiday at the Fanling Playground and offers the public a delightful holiday entertainment.

Every year the show attracts tens of thousand of spectators. The organising body hopes that the show will arouse an interest in planting, fish rearing and bird watching among the public to enhance healthy living and protection of the natural environment.

Over the years, the North District Council has been in support of activities related to the prevention and eradication of crime. One of these activities, sponsored by the Council, is the North District Beat Drug and Fight Crime Variety Show, which is organised to deliver fight crime messages to the various strata of society. The show is held annually at the Fanling Playground and broadcast live by RTHK (the show will also be broadcast live by TVB this year). Every year, famous artists are invited to perform in the show. Through their singing and dancing, the theme of fight crime and beat drug abuse is promulgated. This spectacular variety show is popular with locals as well as those from other districts, and has become a major annual event of the district.

#### NORTH DISTRICT COUNCIL

The North District Council (formerly known as the North District Board) was established in 1982 and has since made great contributions to help the Government implement the District Administration Scheme. The current North District Council comprises 16 elected members, four ex-officio members and five appointed members. The logo of the North District Council is derived from the Chinese character meaning "North", which signifies the North District.



Shek Lo