

60-year-old protects Great Wall, pens essays

Sixty-year-old Gao Zhengqing has been patrolling a 30-kilometer section of the Great Wall for three years and has written 50,000 words, with a monthly salary of 300 yuan (\$45).

Gao lives in Xujiawan village, Pianguan county, North China's Shanxi province. Less than one kilometer away from the Ming Great Wall, the mountain-surrounded village is now home to less than 20 people, with many young people having left to work in cities.

Pianguan county is known as the "museum of the Great Wall". Along the over-fifty-kilometer-long wall, there are more than 300 beacon towers. One of the beacons called Jiuyaoshidong was the most functional military fortress along the historic site during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1911).

The once well-conserved wall was his only "playmate" when Gao was a kid, but it has been severely damaged due to both natural and human factors over the past 50 years. The loss of his childhood companion made Gao realize the necessity of protecting the Great Wall.

Gao became a Great Wall protector in September 2014, becoming one of the six in the county. Riding his motorbike, Gao patrols from Mendaogou, North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, to Baiyangling, North China's Shanxi province, every day from 8:00 am to midnight.

Besides, Gao also uses his pen to safeguard the Great Wall. Gao started to read about the wall in 1983. So far, he has finished around 50,000 words, and some of his essays have been published in magazines including China Great Wall Museum.

"I don't protect the Great Wall for money. I do it because I really love it," said Gao, who earns a monthly salary of 300 yuan (\$45). "The Great Wall is a rare treasure for the Chinese nation. It is also the soul of our nation. To protect it is to protect the history of our nation."

Gao's action is the epitome of the official protection. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage and Shanxi provincial government have invested over 74 million yuan in conservation planning, putting up protective signs, and repairing critical sections. In total, 127 full-time protectors are employed, and 94 sections are designated as conservation areas by the provincial government.