

YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, AUGUST 2012

2011 Spring Unprocessed Tea, Northern Taiwan

Imagine a winding trail through some ancient forest. You can only see ahead and behind, as large banks rise up from the sides of the worn path. Oaks and maples lean up overhead, dappling the trail with sunlight that looks like a map of the stars cast across the ground ahead. Perhaps the leaves are changing, and their reds and yellows fill the world with more color than you know what to do with. Of course, you'll want to take your time—breathe in the fresh, untainted air and find great joy in the simple act of walking. Eventually, you come to a clearing with some rock terraces crafted so long ago that no one knows who made them. In seven neat rows rising up the mountainside you see rows of ancient tea trees, each about your own height. The morning is slipping away, so you get started: you collect leaves, gently pinching the juicy bud sets with your thumb and index finger and placing them into the bamboo basket you've brought. You wipe the sweat from your forehead, smiling up at the sky. This is good work... And when your basket is full, you climb down and spread out a blanket at the other end of the clearing where the sun shines brightest. You enjoy some food in the shade as your tea dries. Later that afternoon, you will collect the brittle brown leaves and take them back home to be roasted gently over a fire and finish the drying...

Try to carry the spirit and power of your vision into your tea room with this month's tea and you'll understand why this is one of our all time favorite teas here at the Tea Sage Hut. Sit and imagine those ancient days, as they are still here with us—steeping after steeping. Quiet your mind as you use your hand to scatter these leaves into a bowl, and meditate while you wait for your water to boil. The quiet stillness in this tea is deep and loud. It reminds you of our place within the natural cycles and helps cool the summer heat. Sit with it. It won't give up on you, not even hours later when it seems an eternity has passed...

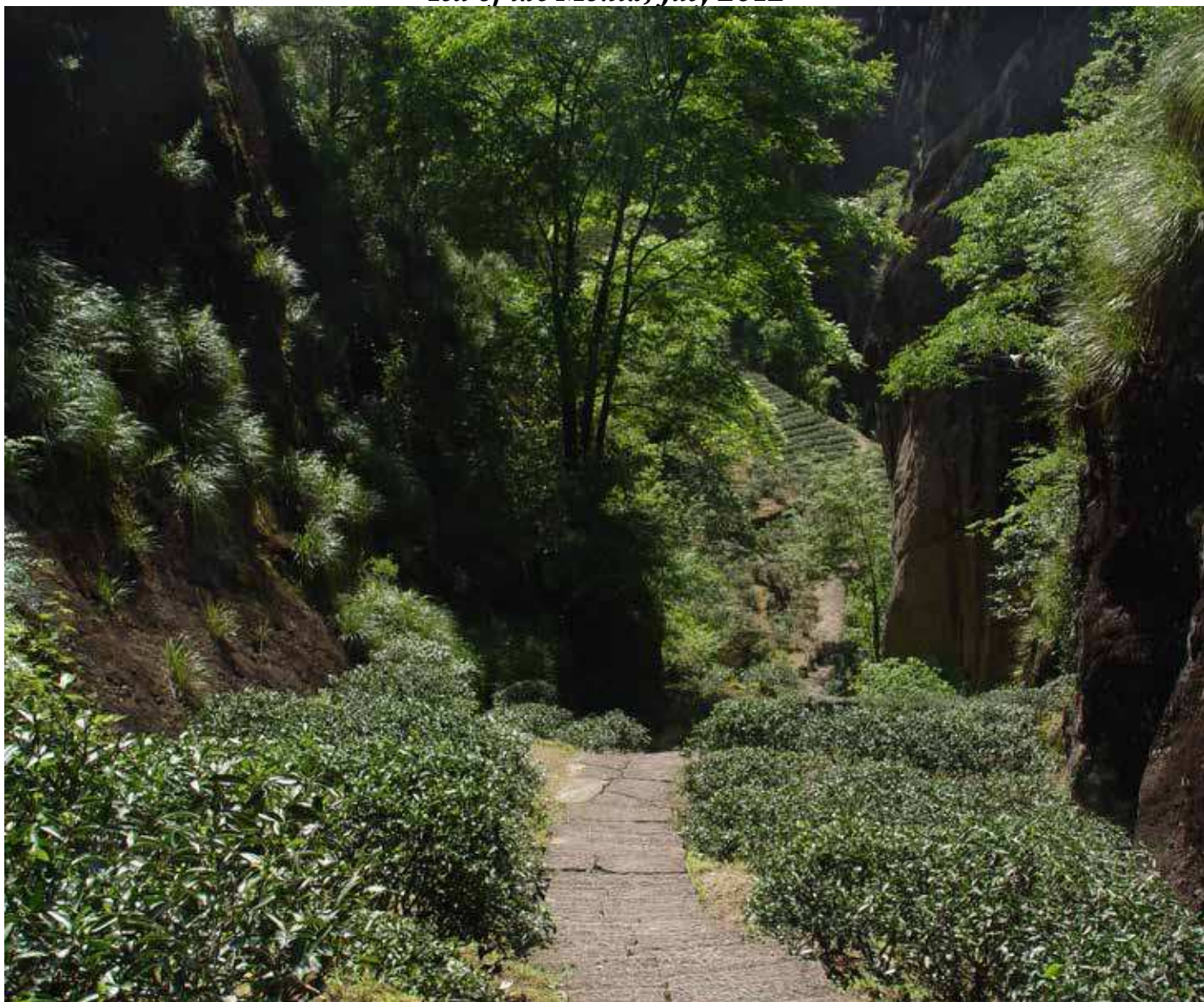
This month's tea is about as close to the most ancient days of tea brewing as we in this modern time can find. It is a completely unprocessed tea. You could say it is a white tea, and may notice some whitish hairs on a few of the buds in the bag. But it really isn't even that. It is tea without the human refinement—without any ado. It was harvested from completely wild bushes in the north of Taiwan, which are all fifty to a hundred years old. The tea was most simply picked and then sun dried. There was no human processing to speak of, only leaves.

Our tea ancestors first started boiling tea and then processing it because the cell walls of plants are thick and strong. In order to get to the juice in the cells, they need to be broken down. This is why less processed teas, like Green and White Teas, for example, produce such a delicate, pale liquor. This tea is even lighter. The liquor is so light and flowery that if you approach it with anything but the quietest of minds, its essence will pass you by like a warm summer breeze.

There is something magical in drinking the simplest of teas. When we begin our tea journey, it is important to get in touch with tea as medicine. So much of tea is refined and stimulates us with amazing flavors and aromas. But tea was medicine for thousands of years before it was flavor. And it has so much healing power. It aligns us with Nature. For that reason, it is often nice to start one's tea journey by removing as much of the human element from the tea experience as possible; and learn to communicate with the spirit of this plant. That is why we often spend time teaching people to brew tea simply and without artifice: leaves in a bowl. And if you are a more seasoned tea drinker, there is still great power in returning to the simplest of all tea. And there isn't a more suitable tea for this than one which is completely unprocessed.

Tea speaks to us; we have receptors in our bodies and souls for it. It speaks of its origins and aligns us with Nature, especially living tea. Our intellectual selves always want to know a tea's human story: where it came from, who made it and how. But the drinking of it is more direct, and if you are paying attention you will see where it is from. Countless times, we have seen masters just smell a tea and know the region, mountain and even season it was harvested in. In our workshops, we have also witnessed more intuitive people describe in incredibly accurate detail the home of a particular tea without knowing anything about it, or tea in general for that matter. Tea gives its essence to us. It "wants" to be human, for lack of a better word. It evolved toward us, to meet us. One proof of this is that tea trees thrive when they are picked by humans, growing more and more vibrant crowns in response to human pruning (not over-harvesting, of course). Another is the way it communicates to our bodies and rests us in our hearts.

The universe only looks ordered through human eyes. The boundaries and categories we make aren't real; they are conceptual. This tea will soon be a part of you—what was "other" outside of you will be inside. And the forest it came from is also a part of the



tea, as are the water, sunshine and moonshine. Drink it all in. Set down the concepts, which serve a purpose but are often our masters. Use the mind as a tool, rather than being used by it.

There is no way to under or over-brew this tea. You can't add too many or too few leaves. It can be steeped and steeped all throughout an afternoon and, amazingly, still shine on. There is also no right or wrong water temperature. This tea can be brewed with hot or cooler water to produce different brews. It also compliments morning and evening sessions both. But you will have to quit it long before it quits you. The flavor is delicate, though the leaves are so robust. It has an uplifting Qi that lightens your soul from its terrestrial cage.

If you are going to share this tea with a friend or loved one, why not fill a single bowl with leaves and pass it around? There is deep connection in sharing a single bowl. And great connection in the presence and stillness you can share together. Let the medicine communicate an intention and you will find healing in your session.

Here are quite literally some forest leaves to scatter in your bowl. Let's drink them together, all of us. If we find our way up and back down that ancient forest trail, we'll all be better off for the time we've spent there together. We'll all get up from the tea space shifted, moving through our days with a bit of lightness and joy...

** As we mentioned last month, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized.*