

China to mark 140th anniversary of giant panda 'discovery'

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A panda cub plays at the Giant Panda Breeding Centre in Chengdu in May 2009. China is to retrace the steps of the French missionary who made giant pandas known to the West to mark the 140th anniversary of their discovery by the outside world, state media said Tuesday.

China is to retrace the steps of the French missionary who made giant pandas known to the West to mark the 140th anniversary of their discovery by the outside world, state media said Tuesday.

Pandas were virtually unknown outside [China](#) until 1869 when Pere Jean Pierre Armand David described one which had been shot by hunters in Ya'an, Sichuan province, triggering more than a century of untiring fascination with the black and white bears.

Panda enthusiasts can join a 350-kilometre (220-mile) hike from the

Sichuan capital Chengdu to Ya'an to follow in the footsteps of the Catholic missionary and naturalist to educate people about the endangered animals and their protection, Ya'an tourism official Li Yamei told Xinhua news agency.

The group would depart on August 15 and was expected to arrive at the giant panda research centre in Ya'an on August 25.

The pandas were moved there temporarily while a new breeding centre is built after the main Wolong research centre was largely destroyed in last year's Sichuan earthquake, Xinhua said.

A festival featuring more than 40 films on pandas and other wildlife would also open on August 19 in Ya'an as part of the anniversary activities.

There are about 1,590 [pandas](#) living in the wild around the country, mostly in Sichuan and the northern Shaanxi and northwestern Gansu provinces. A total of 180 have being bred in captivity, Xinhua reported.

Besides introducing the [giant panda](#) to the outside world, Pere David also found the deer species named after him, which now only exists in captivity.

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