



HISTORIC SITE. The Juyongguan section of the Great Wall is seen on a trip for journalists covering the 2022 Winter Olympics last month on the outskirts of Beijing. A group of 60 athletes and journalists were given an opportunity to visit a section of the wall, making them among the few Olympic visitors able to experience the real thing. (AP Photo/Chisato Tanaka)

Beijing snapshot: Great Wall, a symbol of China's strength

By Ragan Clark
The Associated Press

JUYONGGUAN, China — Beijing's famous landmarks were, for the most part, outside the Olympic bubble, including the Great Wall, the ultimate symbol of Chinese history and strength.

A group of 60 athletes and journalists were given an opportunity to visit a section of the wall, making them among the few Olympic visitors able to bypass the virtual tours and cardboard cutouts of the wall in the Olympics media center and experience the real thing.

The group climbed the ancient steps of the Juyong Pass, just outside Beijing, a small taste of China outside the bubble that was made possible by closing off a portion during their visit, in keeping with the strict COVID-19 protocols imposed by the government.

Stretching thousands of miles along the

“Close door” — so much more than a button

By Howie Rumberg
The Associated Press

BEIJING — It's only a button. Or is it?

You're fenced off from the people and places that make Beijing, well, Beijing. You're cut off from much of the world by the Great Firewall. You're swabbed and sterilized daily as part of a “zero COVID” policy. Or you're the recipient of a too-enthusiastic pat-down each morning and a cheery, computer-generated thank you every time a scanner records your movements from room to room.

In a world like this, the slightest bit of agency matters.

At an Olympics in a pandemic run by an authoritarian state in a fashion only this authoritarian state could pull off, some stuck in the “closed loop” found it in the elevator.

The “close door” button.

That button in so many elevators around the world that is more source of frustration than hurry-up tool works perfectly here and in many places across Asia.

crests of ridgelines and mountaintops, the wall has stood as a barrier protecting the Chinese capital for more than 2,000 years. It stood through dynasties and discoveries. And now, it has seen two Olympics.

For those lucky enough to get on the bus for the tour, the rough-hewn stone and dramatic vistas offered a stark contrast to the sterilized, modernized version of China that was on display inside the Olympic loop, where robots did everything from dunking fries in oil to scuttling around, collecting trash.

The country is expert in powerful gestures, whether through dazzling displays of light and fireworks during the opening ceremony, or a wall constructed over centuries through the labors of millions. And while cooking robots may be flashy, nothing compares to the grandeur of the Great Wall.

Ragan Clark is a New-York based AP journalist on assignment in Beijing for the Winter Olympics.



CLOSE DOOR. A poster of Bing Dwen Dwen, the Beijing Winter Olympics mascot, is seen last month inside an elevator. At an Olympics in a pandemic run by an authoritarian state in a fashion only this authoritarian state could pull off, some stuck in the “closed loop” found a short escape in the elevator. (AP Photo/Brynn Anderson)

Americans: Think of all the times you press, press, press that button hoping to shave a few seconds off an already dicey arrival time at work, and you end up cursing an inanimate object.

Not in Beijing.

Late for dinner in the restaurant with the plexiglass dividers as thick as hockey boards separating you from your dining companions? A press of the button at least gives that illusion you're doing everything you can to make it.

Feeling rushed to make the bus that will take you to the building about 250 feet

from your hotel that you can't walk to because of the inflexibility of the Olympic “bubble?” The button.

The persistent robot roaming the hotel and spraying a mist — rumored to be some COVID-preventing concoction — coming for the elevator? Press it.

In an everyday world where so much is available at a tap of a button, you forget how satisfying the immediacy of acquiring things is — until that ability is taken from you.

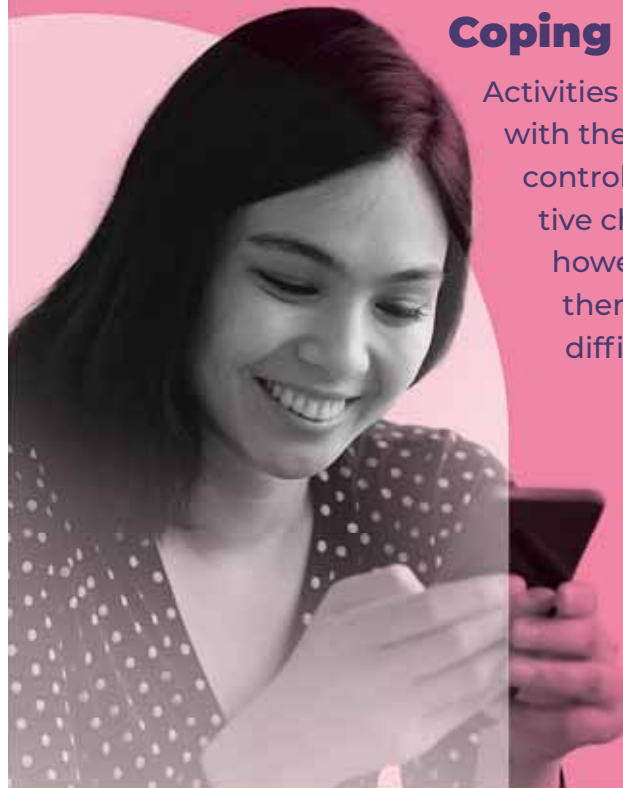
The “close door” button restores that faith, if only for a moment.

Supporting Oregonians

COPING WITH PROBLEM GAMBLING

Coping

Activities that help us cope with the things we can't control are generally positive choices. Sometimes, however, those activities themselves become difficult to control.



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For more information, visit

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