

Tour of Chinese Cave Tires Nixon

FEB 27 1976

Kweilin, China

Richard Nixon returned "exhausted" from a hike through underground caves yesterday but hit his stride later at a banquet, saying that of all the cities he has visited around the world there is "not one more beautiful than Kweilin."

The 63-year-old former president hiked for more than a quarter of a mile in a spectacular cavern of stalactites and stalagmites known as Reed Flute Caves. Chinese hid in the caves from the Japanese during World War II.

Mr. Nixon returned to town "exhausted," according to his medical corpsman, Robert Dunn, who trailed him with a resuscitator and a supply of oxygen.

Dunn took the former president's blood pressure four times during the day. It rose "within normal limits" as a result of the cave walk, he said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nixon ignored reporters' questions about criticism of his China trip by other Republicans at home, and a spokesman indicated he would continue to remain silent about it.

"It would be stupid for him to say anything," said John Brennan, an assistant.

Some of President Ford's campaign aides contend that Mr. Nixon's trip cut the vote for Mr. Ford in the New Hampshire primary. Senator Barry Goldwater, a long-time Nixon ally, said he didn't agree with that but that Mr. Nixon could do the United States a favor by staying in China.

Brennan also said Mr. Nixon tried to pay for a ten-course banquet he gave for the Chinese in

Peking Wednesday night but the Chinese insisted it wasn't necessary.

Western sources estimated that the cost of the banquet, for 300 guests in Peking's Great Hall of People, was between \$3000 and \$5000.

A Chinese official, asked who paid for the dinner, said, "I don't know the answers to your questions. If I am a man's guest for dinner why should I find out who paid for it or how much it cost."

Associated Press