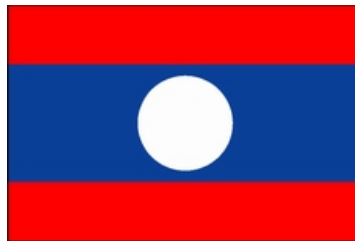




**Log of S/V *High Drama***  
**No.22 Laos & Cambodia**  
**December, 2003**



**Lao People's Democratic Republic**

**Sabai dee!**

**Sosidi!**

**That's "Hello!"** in Laotian and Khmer, with deference given for the spelling.

Please join us while we leave *High Drama* and travel inland to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. This Log covers only Laos and Cambodia. Viet Nam will be cover in a subsequent Log. Viewing this log is not for the faint at heart.

As we sailed through the South Pacific we developed an interest in the Marine Corps and Naval battles in the area in World War II. The sacrifices of our parents' generation rang through as we sailed in Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and as we sailed up the Coral Sea off Australia to Papua New Guinea. In this and the next Log we travel to Southeast Asia: Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam, places where members of our generation fought and died.

We enjoyed historical areas and areas developed for tourism in each country. Before going, however, we read several books for an update on what happened after United States forces left in 1973. We were shocked to learn that people in these countries are still dying as a consequence of our military action there more than thirty years ago. Landmines still restrict travel in Laos and Cambodia. Unexploded bombs and still toxic levels of dioxin from Agent Orange persist in Viet Nam. UXO still inflicts casualties on farmers and children. Make sure that you read past the travelogue sections.

The more we travel, the more we miss family and friends. We certainly enjoy hearing from you under any circumstances. Because of persistent spam we have taken our email addresses off the site, but please contact the web master if you would like our address.

## **Laos: Lan Xang land of “a million elephants.”**

Four nearly 400 years the kingdom of Lan Xang reigned over the area now called Laos. Our first stop was Laung Prabang, Laos, seat of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Lan Xang kingdom of “a million elephants.” The Royal Palace Museum, the converted palace of the last Laotian monarch who was ousted by the communist Pathet Lao in 1975, houses ancient art. The Royal Temple and Royal Theater occupy the same grounds.



The Royal Palace Museum



The Royal Temple



"Nagas" or dragons guarding the Royal Temple



Ann taunting the nagas.



Dancers at the Royal Theater



A shy "apsara" or dancer

In Luang Prabang we sampled our first of many wats or temples, the most significant in the area being Wat Xieng Thong.



Wat Xieng Thong

Luang Prabang boasts a thriving artistic community and the arrival of tourists to the area has produced quite a few excellent restaurants. The heritage of French cuisine remains strong! Local artists working in silver, wood, and textiles produce wonderful crafts. We especially enjoyed OckPopTok textiles. See [www.ockpoptok.com](http://www.ockpoptok.com).



Silversmith

Luang Prabang, situated on the Mekong River, afforded a river boat trip to a cave with 5,000 Buddha's and included stops at villages along the shore, each of which had a specialty ranging from hand made paper lanterns to home made whiskey.



A Mekong riverboat: Low freeboard and overloaded.



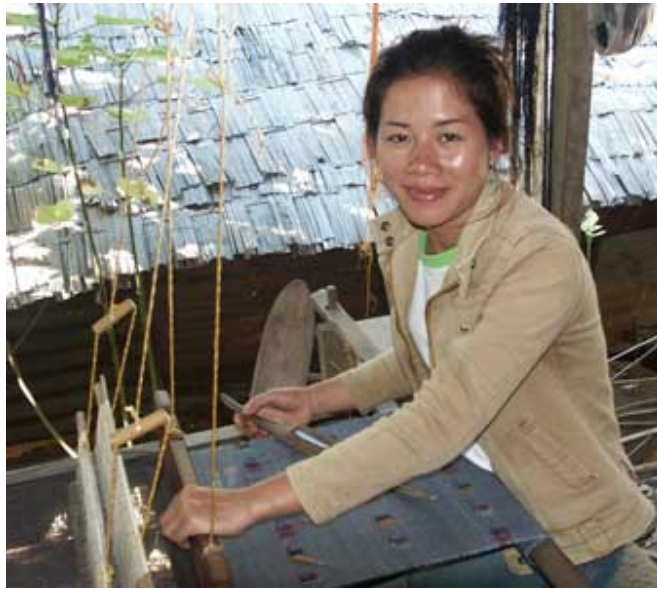
Parking outside the cave of 5,000 Buddha's



A few of the 5,000 Buddha's



Our guide displaying home made whisky.



Weaver



Rice paper lanterns



Mekong River



Mekong River



Fishing on the Mekong



Boys in jockey shorts flying kites in Luang Prabang



Woman sewing at street market



Laotian women working on street construction, laughing at fat guy in shorts with camera.



Every non-Muslim country, no matter how small or poor has a brewery.

## Unexploded Ordinance in Laos

In 1960 President Eisenhower told incoming President John Kennedy that Laos was “the key to the entire area of Southeast Asia.” Our zeal to not “lose” Laos to communist control produced CIA involvement as early as the 1950s shortly after Laos gained independence from France. The Ho Chi Min Trail ran through Laos. Commencing in 1964 in an effort to stop men and supplies from reaching South Viet Nam the United States dropped 2,000,000 tons of bombs on this country of only 5,000,000 people. Not only did “saturation” or “carpet-bombing” fail to stop the Pathet Lao, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong forces from moving men and war material south down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, but also we failed to achieve the goal of not “losing” Laos to communism. In 1975, the Communist Pathet Lao took control of the government of Laos and remains in power today.

In the three decades since the United States stopped bombing in 1973 more than 12,000 people, many of them children, have been killed or injured in Laos by unexploded ordnance. Most of these deaths were caused by “bombies,” small tennis-ball sized anti-personnel devices, dropped in large casings called cluster bombs. An estimated 90 million “bombies” were dropped on Laos. With an average 10 -30 percent that failed to detonate still on the ground, they make this country one of the most heavily ordnance–contaminated places in the world.

According to the **U.S. State Department Travel Advisory for Laos**, “More than 500,000 tons of unexploded ordnance left over from the Vietnam War causes about 120 casualties per year in Laos. Savannakhet,...and Luang Prabang Provinces ... are severely contaminated by unexploded bombs...U.S. citizens traveling in any part of Laos should never pick up any unknown metal object and should avoid traveling off of well-used roads, tracks, and paths.”

Although we did not travel in areas laden with unexploded ordnance, we periodically saw local victims.

## Cambodia



Seim Reap, the modern city near the ancient cities containing the temples of Ankgor Wat and Anchor Thom was our first stop in Cambodia. Built in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century by Suryarvarman II to honor himself and Hindu god Vishnu, Angkor Wat remains in excellent condition. Because Suryarvarman II honored Vishnu it represented a major change from the Buddhist tradition. Angkor Wat marked the zenith of Khmer power in Southeast Asia. These ancient ruins were awe inspiring and truly warrant their World Heritage Site classification.



Angkor Wat

The outer halls are decorated with bas relief history of Suryarvarman II and the mythology of Hinduism.



Suryarvarman II vanquishing his enemies



Vishnu presiding over a tug of war between good and evil



The forces of good...



The forces of evil...or maybe good? Difficult to tell!



Women who cheated were dealt with harshly in those days.



Angkor Thom, another Royal City is adjacent to Angkor Wat. The city is struggling against the jungle now. Apsaras, or heavenly nymphs, or heavenly dancers, are by far the most frequent characters in the bas relief in all of the temples. These characters always have an inscrutable smile. Angkor Thom, built 400 years after Angkor Wat, represented the beginning of the end the end of the great Khmer dynasties. The Lokeshvara, the figures of the Buddha Lord of the World face all four directions from numerous towers in Angkor Thom.



Angkor Thom



Apsara



Lokesvara



Trees work their slow destruction at the Ta Prohm Temple. Inscriptions in the temple state that 80,000 people maintained the temple grounds supervised by 2700 officials. Six hundred apsaras or professional dancers also lived there.



Ann and **Lokesavara**

## The Landmine Museum

In addition to the breathtaking ancient sites at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom we visited a humble Land Mine Museum just outside of Seim Reap. The former Khmer Rouge conscript who set up this roadside museum has dedicated his life to raising awareness of the problems of mines and other unexploded bombs for the farmers in Cambodia.\*\*\*\* As in Laos, many Cambodians each year are injured by the problems of “UXO” or unexploded ordinance. Visit the Land Mine Museum. [www.landmine-museum.com](http://www.landmine-museum.com)



From the **US State Dept Warning to Travelers**: "Cambodia remains one of the world's most heavily landmined countries, with an estimated four to six million UXOs dotted around the countryside waiting to be detonated." "UXO" means unexploded ordnance and includes bombs that did not detonate as well as landmines.

## Dr. Beat Richner

On Saturday nights in Siem Reap Swiss doctor “Beat” Richner (“Beatocello”) gives cello concerts to raise funds for his three first world quality hospitals that supply free medical care to Cambodian children. The doctor dedicated his life to helping the children of Cambodia at a time and place no one else would. Richner first came to Cambodia shortly before the Khmer Rouge came to power. Of course, he could not stay under the Pol Pot regime. He returned and through mostly Swiss contributions he has built three hospitals. Beat successfully treats such chronic illnesses as TB, not usually touched by other world health groups. He solicits donations at the concert. He takes either money or blood. His facility is a “must see” in Siem Reap. See [www.beatocello.com](http://www.beatocello.com)



A constant stream of mothers and kids pour through the hospital gates each day.



One of many rice paddies between Siem Reap and Phnom Penh.

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia.**

The capital city of Phnom Penh presents stark contrasts. The Royal Palace and National Museum provided insight into the glory of old Khmer rulers while visits to the Tuol Sleng Prison Museum and Killing Fields at Choeng Ek depicted the inhumanity of the Khmer Rouge Regime between 1975 and 1979.



The communist government does not allow visitors inside the Royal Palace.



Palace guards and nagas' (serpents') tails



The National Wat (Temple)



Our tour guide and travel arranger, Andrea, took us to the Foreign Correspondents' Club which had a delightful view of the Mekong River.

Andrea also took us to two marvelous places in Phnom Penh. The first, Friends Restaurant, established to keep kids off the streets and provide some useful job training. The food and service were superb!



The servers managed bigger smiles than the silly looking customers!

The second place Andrea showed us was a dance school for children in an orphanage. The school, appropriately called The Apsara Arts Association hosted exams the day we stopped by.



Apsaras in training



A little guy looks on with admiration

## Reminders of the Khmer Rouge Regime

The Khmer Rouge toppled the US supported Lon Nol regime on April 17, 1975. Under Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge established one of the most murderous regimes of the last century. Researched estimates of the total number of Cambodian people killed by the Communists range from 750,000 to 3,000,000. Many of us first heard about the horrors in Cambodia in the movie, *The Killing Fields* (1984) which portrayed the story of New York Times journalist Sydney Schanberg and his driver Dith Pran in the years after the fall of Cambodia to the Khmer Rouge.

According to the Dith Pran Holocaust Awareness Project:

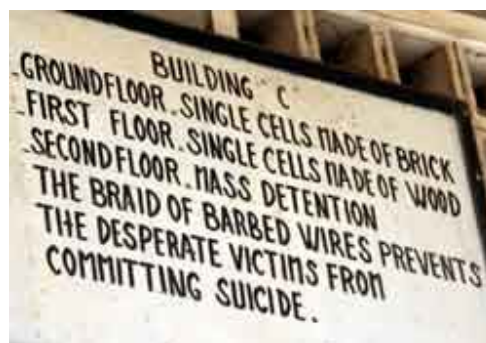
The Khmer Rouge turned Cambodia to year zero. They banned all institutions, including stores, banks, hospitals, schools, religion, and the family. Everyone was forced to work 12 - 14 hours a day, every day. Children were separated from their parents to work in mobile groups or as soldiers. People were fed one watery bowl of soup with a few grains of rice thrown in. Babies, children, adults and the elderly were killed everywhere. The Khmer Rouge killed people if they didn't like them, if didn't work hard enough, if they were educated, if they came from different ethnic groups, or if they showed sympathy when their family members were taken away to be killed. All were killed without reason. Everyone had to pledge total allegiance to Angka, the Khmer Rouge government. It was a campaign based on instilling constant fear and keeping their victims off balance. See <http://www.dithpran.org/>

### Tuol Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh

Tuol Sleng Prison, a converted high school, saw 16,000 people pass through its doors, of which only 7 survived. Most, if not, all died after severe torture. Tuol Sleng was a security prison where the typical prisoner arrived, was photographed, and then was tortured. The administrators kept records of the prisoners that included not only pictures but confessions. Most prisoners did not stay longer than 4 months at Tuol Sleng before being taken to the Killing Fields at Choeng.



Classrooms converted into detention cells



# THE SECURITY OF REGULATION

- 1- You must answer accordingly to my question-Don't turn them away .
- 2- Don't try to hide the facts by making pretexts this and that  
You are strictly prohibited to contest me .
- 3- Don't be a fool for you are a chap who dare to thwart the  
revolution .
- 4- You must immediately answer my questions without wasting  
time to reflect .
- 5- Don't tell me either about your immoralities or the essence of  
the revolution.
- 6- While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all.
- 7- Do nothing, sit still and wait for my orders . If there is no  
order , keep quiet . When I ask you to do something , you  
must do it right away without protesting
- 8- Don't make pretext about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide  
your secret or traitor.
- 9- if you don't follow all the above rules , you shall get many  
many lashes of electric wire .
- 10- if you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get  
either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge .



When the Vietnamese took Phnom Penh in 1979 they found 14 prisoners dead in the interrogation cells.



**THE GALLOWS**  
This pole with cables attached to it had been used for the student to conduct their exercise. The Khmer rouge utilized this place as interrogation room. The interrogators tied both hands of the prisoners to the back by a rope and lift the prisoners upside down. They did like this until the prisoners lost consciousness. Then they dipped the prisoner's head into a jar of smelly, filthy water, which they normally used as fertilizer for the crops in the terrace outside. By doing so, the victims quickly regain consciousness, and that the interrogators could continued their interrogation.

One of a great many methods of torture.



Pictures of hundreds of prisoners haunting the interrogation rooms.



Children carried arms for the Khmer Rouge but were not spared at Tuol Sleng Prison.



## The Killing Fields at Choeung Ek

After interrogation and torture at Tuol Sleng people were driven in trucks to Choeung Ek where they were forced to dig a large hole. They stood next to the hole. They were clubbed on the back of the head and rolled into the mass grave.



One of 129 mass graves at this site. The Choeung Ek site represents just one of 348 sites throughout Cambodia containing more than 19,500 mass graves from that era.



As one walks on the path clothes and bone fragments are still eerily in view.



## The Memorial Stupa

The remains of 8995 people have been exhumed and their skulls arranged by sex and age in the memorial stupa.



The Memorial Stupa



Females, age 19-20



that with a Chinese motorbike you always have to carry a passenger: your mechanic. Most people pile the whole family and often cargo on these bikes. I did see one bike with 6 people on it but was not quick enough to snap a picture. Seeing this many people on one motorbike would drive some lawyers nuts.



Three people per bike are not uncommon.



Four is easy when two are small.



Five is nap time.



Southeast Asia

## Conclusion

Our heart felt thanks to Andrea and Brandon Ross whose infectious enthusiasm initially inspired us to travel in Southeast Asia. Their enthusiasm was infectious. Between the time we first met them and talked about this trip and our subsequent visit to Cambodia they got married, set up a Bed and Breakfast, and a travel company in Seim Reap. We strongly endorse their services. See <http://www.journeys-within.com>.

Thanks for stopping by the **Log of High Drama**. The boat is located in Phuket, Thailand while we travel inland in Southeast Asia. The next Log will cover inland travel in Viet Nam. We always enjoy comments and criticism of our website. Please fell free to email us at svhighdrama at yahoo.com.

Jeff & Ann Brooke  
**S/V High Drama**

Bibliography:

**Another Quiet American**, Brett Dakin (2002), **Cambodia: Report from a Stricken Land** (1998), Henry Kamm, **Vietnam, Now: A Reporter Returns** (2001), David Lamb, and **The Quiet American** (1954), Graham Greene. **CHILDREN OF CAMBODIA'S KILLING FIELDS: Memoirs by Survivors** Dith Pran (1997), **Survivor of the Killing Fields** by Haing S. Ngor

Dakin volunteered to work in Laos after graduation from Princeton University. He describes working for the Laotian government in the department responsible for developing tourism. Kamm is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist for the *New York Times* who has covered Cambodia since 1969 and gives an insightful analysis, including personal interviews with current players such as Hun Sen, the current Communist Prime Minister, and King Sihanouk. David Lamb covered the Vietnam War (a

misnomer he points out, because the war encompassed Laos and Cambodia as well) for UPI and returned 30 years later to set up the Hanoi Bureau for the *Los Angeles Times*. Haing S. Ngor was a doctor and actor who won an Academy Award in the movie *The Killing Fields* where he portrayed journalist Dith Pran. Ngor survived imprisonment by the Khmer Rouge by hiding the fact he was a physician, only to be shot to death outside his apartment in Los Angeles by members of a gang.