



Update 34

April 20th, 2007

Bodhi's Bit

So, controversy seems to be a part of what we do – especially when it comes to undermining powerful people. NATR is currently collaborating with the villagers of Tung Nang Dam to build a boundary trail along the seven kilometers of pristine beach that border the village. Most of the land adjacent to the beach is held by outside investors who have plans to build resorts and bungalows. According to Thai law, however, the strip of land just above the high tide line is public property. This has not stopped developers in other areas from building high-walled resorts all the way to the high tide line, effectively cutting off public access. Anticipating this, the villagers of Tung Nang Dam, led by ACE Experts Chim and Noi, have proposed a pathway that will run the length of the beach. This trail will limit development by serving as an officially recognized border between public and private land.

Many of the land owners have agreed to the plan, but some are protesting, and others are working against us behind the scenes. And so, the political intrigue begins... An “associate” of the land owners has threatened one of the villagers. A group of Thai-Chinese business men have bought the services of a local government official, but the villagers are seeking the support of this official's superiors. A gang of locals claiming to know the land owners asked NATR that we make a “contribution” for their help in approving the project. The local mafia boss is one of the land owners, but seems to support the trail because one of his enemies opposes it. The outgoing chief was a big supporter of the project, but the incoming chief may be in cahoots with the developers. And on, and on, and on...



So, who will win? Will good prevail over evil? It's not quite that simple. The boundary trail is important as a project and as symbolic act – the people of Tung Nang Dam are asserting their stewardship of the local environment. As this untouched part of the coast begins to develop in the coming years, Tung Nang Dam will find itself needing to take a stronger role in protecting the natural resources. To do this, the villagers will need the cooperation of at least some of the land owners. The boundary trail needs to set a precedent for local conservation, but without making enemies. Legally, we could start building the trail tomorrow, but this would effectively destroy any potential to cooperate with the land owners in the future.

Under the guidance of Noi and Chim, the project team is taking a methodical approach – first seeking approval from their fellow villagers, then obtaining government support, and now lobbying land owners. Once Noi and Chim have a critical mass of support, they will decide where and when to start building the trail.

For the readers of this update, Noi and Chim's efforts may seem quaint and small scale. Not me, I am humbled and inspired by their courage. They are helping the village take a stand against powerful men, under threat to their own safety, and asserting their community's control over the natural resources they depend on. NATR is honored to be working with Chim and Noi, and assist them in their service to Tung Nang Dam.

Project Reports

Tung Dap Mangrove Restoration – Confrontation!

Villagers of Tung Dap noticed that people had been placing crab traps in their conservation area, and had destroyed three signs. Pin, our village volunteer, organized patrols of the conservation area. She then removed the illegal traps, and had a meeting with local authorities and the offending parties. After discussion, the traps were returned to the offending parties, with an agreement to not use the conservation area again. Villagers feel that the problem was beneficial because it made the conservation area well known, and now more people know not to fish there. Pin also painted 22 more signs and put them up on the route to and on the boundary of the conservation area.

Ban Talae Nok Community Centre – Action Central

Cha has been very busy in Ban Talae Nok recently, with her coordination of the Community Centre – hosting aerobics classes, Community-based Tourism (CBT) trainings, making displays for soaps, batik, and CBT, and hosting community meetings – as well as with the myriad of tourists that have come to her village in the last month. She has overseen the construction of two traditional wooden paddle boats for rowing in the mangroves, informative signs and a guide rope for the nature trail, and has taken responsibility for the tourists' well being while in her village. We are very proud of Cha's hard work this last month. Upcoming activities in the center include English lessons, summer camp for kids, and a waste management project. Through it all, the Soap Group continues to cook up wonderful smelling batches of herbal soap right in the Community Centre itself.



Environmental Education – Seeing the Bigger Picture



NATR's newest project is Youth Education for Sustainable Development. The goal of the project is to inspire students to appreciate nature, learn from their community, and then take action as a team. Too often, youth are taught about the problems that face their communities, but are not empowered to make a difference. NATR will select a group of 40 students from schools in Kuraburi and Suksamran, and take them on several Environmental Education trips. They will then assess their own village, and create a project to address a problem. Through the study of the environment and conservation, this program will allow youth to make a difference in their own community, and understand that things can change for the better.

We are currently seeking funding for this project, so please let us know if you have any ideas. The pilot phase of Youth Education for Sustainable Development will run from May through September, and, we are hoping to continue the program indefinitely, funding notwithstanding. We are currently finishing the activity plan, and meeting with local teachers to generate enthusiasm for the program.

Computers – Winding Down

NATR's last Computer Education Semester began in March. This final term is a General Computer Class for anyone interested in learning about or improving their skills in computers. Word of mouth has been the most successful advertisement for this class, as old students told their friends who told their friends. Because of this, we have about 15 students every Monday to Wednesday from 10am to 3pm. This shows what a good teacher Dear is, because all his old students highly recommended his class and got others to sign up.

One challenge of this course is the different skill level of students. Some have never touched a computer before, and others know how to surf the net and use email. Dear's challenge is to teach them all together without making it too complicated for the beginners, or too boring for the more advanced students. These students are set to graduate in May. Good luck!

Community Training – The Homestay Handbook

We have had a very busy month with visitors flowing into Ban Talae Nok. Accompanying this flow of guests has been a training program designed by NATR to help villagers improve their communication – despite the lack of a common language. After many different types of training, NATR has finally found a method that can be used with any level of experience, and can be tailored to individual personalities and styles. So, if anyone is interested in seeing a copy of our Training Handbook, please let us know.

Based on recent feedback from villagers and guests, the handbook is having remarkable results. New evening activities developed by the homestay group include how to make sticky rice wrapped in banana leaves, and lessons in how to wear a sarong and Muslim headscarf. Congratulations to Maew and Kae for their outstanding work in leading the training.



Community Based Tourism – Andaman Discoveries

A big thank you to all of our visitors over the last few months – the villagers are happy to see that their efforts have been worthwhile, and their confidence is building. The wonderful community-based tourism phrasebook that can be used by both Thai and English speakers to communicate across the language divide is also adding to success of trips. For us here at NATR, seeing the smiles on the faces of villagers and visitors alike confirms that our hard work is paying off.

NATR's sustainable tourism program will only be successful if the villages have a steady stream of guests, so we are making huge marketing efforts to get people to visit. Gather all of your friends together, and come visit us – relax on the beach, cook with your host family, hike in the forest, make handicrafts, and have a great time.

Andaman Discoveries has been featured in a number of recent magazine articles, so if you have a moment, feel free to peruse the press page (www.andamandiscoveries.com/press.html). We now offer short term volunteer programs for tourists who want to have a holiday but also want to 'give something back' to the communities that they visit. Everyone can volunteer and do something worthwhile, even as little as an hour!

Finally, congratulations to Georgie Howells for donating to NATR after being inspired by their time in village. Georgie and her family visited Tung Nang Dam and Ban Talae Nok in December, and upon returning home, she organized a fund raiser with her primary school to help the villages they stayed in. Thank you so much!



Kuraburi Information Centre (KIC)



March's activity with KIC consisted of plaster doll-making and painting with children. Almost 20 children ranging in age of six to twelve years from the Kuraburi area participated in this activity on the 17th of March. The children first painted plaster molds which KIC staff had prepared for them. Once painting was complete, the children wanted to make their own molds. Overall a successful day with lots of fun and laughter.

KIC staff has been working to complete the Municipality Map to distribute to tourists. The map contains interesting places nearby Kuraburi, and is available at the KIC. In order to reach more incoming tourists, the staff will distribute it to local tour agents. NATR is hoping that this method will encourage tourists to visit other interesting spots in Kuraburi before or after their trip to Koh Surin.

KIC has seen an influx of visitors this month due to the availability of books and brochures provided by TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand). This displayed information helped to make the centre more interesting and attractive to the tourists. Some of these tourists have then gone on to visit NATR's homestay villages.

Visitors & Volunteers

A warm welcome to Marion Rimbaud from France. She has come to NATR on an internship for four months to help with our marketing efforts with Andaman Discoveries. Marion is studying International Tourism Management at Avignon University in France, with a focus on Local Sustainable Development and thus brings with her great knowledge and skills in marketing and development for CBT.

Global Vision International visited to discuss possible partnerships in the area of community service and teaching English. We are also in discussion with Plymouth University in regards to community conservation projects.

