



# KEP GARDENS NEWSLETTER

August 2012

Hi Everyone,

Nice to have some cooler weather although I must admit it can get pretty sticky between showers when the sun comes out. Not a lot of rain. A few downpours and the dam filled up pretty quickly during one of them but otherwise only the odd shower. A bit concerning for the rice farmers as they need lots of water. We planted double the amount of rice this year but we have the dam to keep the water up to it and just hope for large downpours to refill it. Still a couple of more months to go so let's hope the season runs true to form.

A lot has been going on during the last couple of months. We needed to assess where we are going and the best way to get there so a month ago we invited a couple of people who have lived here a long time and have experience of the realities of life in Cambodia as well as a couple of Cambodian people to a meeting. The 6 of us shared lots of ideas which are realistically achievable. Andrew and I are gradually working our way through them and we meet again in September to fine tune the ideas and make decisions. Good to get opinions from outside. Sometimes you get so bogged down in the day-to-day challenges you can't see the wood for the trees and need help to clear all the junk away so you can take a straight path to the end.

English school wise the exams and break up parties took up all the last week of August. I have been busy preparing four different exams for the different classes, certificates of attendance etc. A couple of them shouldn't really have exams as such because they are too young but "it isn't a proper school if you don't have exams" so exams it is. Also starting to organize class lists for next year (starting October) to see how many new students we can take but still keep the numbers at a manageable level. I was thinking about break up parties and what we could do that was different but didn't cost too much money. This was challenging to say the least because of the numbers involved! We ended up doing the usual running races, sack races, three legged races etc. and had lots of junk food and soft drinks which

they don't get very often so it is a treat for them. The younger and older students love the races and have lots of fun, laughter and big smiley faces everywhere. I didn't have any help this year so there was just me and 50 odd young ones so unfortunately I completely forgot to take photos until everyone had left and I found the camera on the table!! Took a couple of the older students at night though as not quite so hectic.



Not all the Upper class attended as it was a Chinese religious day honouring ancestors called Ghost Day and some local Khmer families have the odd Chinese descendant

We have some students who have been at Kep Gardens for 4 or 5 years and who are in Years 10, 11 or 12 this coming school year. For the Year 12 students we are going to help them pass by providing extra private classes in Chemistry,

Physics, Mathematics and Biology. If they are successful we will sponsor them to further studies of their choice. The two girls in Year 12 this year have always wanted to be nurses but were resigned to the fact that it was never going to happen.



Savry comes from a family of 6 girls. Her father is a moto dup with no stable income so there is no way her family could support her through the 3 years of nursing training. She lives a long way away from Kep Gardens and rides a bike to English class having to go home by herself in the dark along isolated dirt tracks to her village. Such is her dedication to learning.



Sreyleap comes from a family of 5 children. Her father is in the army and in his spare time sells ice-cream from a bicycle with a big esky on the back in order to earn an extra income. She has a fair distance to come to Kep Gardens and walks to school. One of the others drops her off at the market and she walks the rest of the way home

by herself in the dark. She attended 97% of classes this year so is also dedicated to learning.

We had a meeting with the girls and their parents explaining the commitment that both the girls and their families needed for them to be successful. The parents have agreed to release them from some of their home duties to give them extra time for study and not to marry them off before they have completed their nursing studies and worked for a few years afterwards.

This is very similar to the way we sponsored the 4 hospitality students to a school in Siem Reap.



Sreyleap made this for me as an end-of-year gift. So much patience and work involved. It's beautiful.

Primary schools were closed recently because of a hand, foot and mouth disease outbreak. The Education Department approached us but we decided to continue classes and reinforce our cleanliness lessons and provide written information in Khmer to the families about the disease and how families can help to prevent its spread. One of the many things we talked about was not sharing toothbrushes, drinking cups etc. To our delight the next day a boy came to school, took an empty plastic water bottle out of the bin, cleaned it and filled it up with water and put it on his desk. We used him as an example to all the others of how proud we were of him because he had listened and thought about what he could do to help himself not get sick. The next day most of the class did the same. Not so much now because the weather is cooler but once it starts to warm up we must remind them again.

Thanks to help from George from America, the container with all the library books, teaching resources and other bits and pieces donated by people in Australia has finally arrived. So to all those people, thank you. We are sure you are



pleased to hear that your donations will finally be put to use. Thank you to Laurie from the Salvation Army, Gail from Mission Australia and their volunteers who helped pack the container and Andrew's brother Tony who transported the goods to Stirling for packing.



We were very excited but I must admit that by 4.00 am in the morning the excitement had waned slightly. Believe it or not they delivered the container at 9.00 pm at night and expected it emptied immediately. We had 10 men already lined up to help. They did a great job. Usually by 9.00 pm they are in bed asleep or getting ready to go to bed but they had 5½ hours of very hard work as many of the boxes were very heavy. Also, the container truck didn't come down the track to Kep Gardens but stayed on the village road so we had to load and unload twice, (once with one light hooked up to a battery) once onto the tractor trailer, tuk tuk and hand held cart and then offload a second time. It hadn't rained for quite a few days but this night it decided to rain so we all got wet as did a few cardboard boxes which then fell to pieces. We finished at 2.30 am. Then the guys all had something to eat and a few glasses of rice wine to relax. They looked very tired. 4.00 am was enough for me but I heard them all pack up not long after.

*Our web site is being updated. A very big thank you to Reuben and Braden for all the time they have put in and help they have given us.*

*Also a big thank you to Bruce and Roz for ensuring that the website continues from year to year.*



Most of the goods were stacked in the school shed out of the rain but Monday morning at 8.00 am it had to be empty for the exams so all day Saturday and Sunday were spent moving it all again, storing it away. Three of us did this so it took the whole 2 days. It's all done now but not much point unpacking it yet until we have the library and schoolhouse to put it in. But at least it is here and our personal effects also arrived with it. So we can slowly unpack these couple of boxes.



grade Chinese made. They are very cheap because people can't afford too much money but they break within a short time of use and it's very hard to do a 1<sup>st</sup> class job with them. So Andrew and his guys had a lovely day yesterday sorting through them all, getting their site tools all together. "What's this, what do you use this for" was heard all day as they came across things they had never seen before. It was a good day.



Two of the merry band of men, Mr Huch and Sopheak

Mission Australia packed school desks and chairs, toys and many other things to fill up the container. It was like Christmas!

Andrew and his merry band of men have been very busy lately with their maintenance work. Word is getting around that they know what they are doing and do a good job with a guarantee even (unheard of in this country). A lot of the work is in Kampot and Andrew usually stays overnight as it is very tiring travelling backwards and forwards especially with the road as it is at the moment. Whole sections of the road are washed out. So some much needed income is starting to trickle back into Kep Gardens. They have a few jobs lined up in Kep which is good as not so much travelling carting tools backwards and forwards. They have put on an apprentice. A young lad with very little schooling and looking at a future of being a cow boy all his life but he wants to learn to "fix" things and "make" things so let's see how he turns out. His father is good with his hands so let's see if it runs in the family.

One very good thing about the container arriving is that Andrew packed most of his tools so now they will have some good quality equipment to work with. Most of the tools here are 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>

We are talking with a large worldwide NGO who is running a pilot programme in Cambodia for hospitality training. They operate and are successful in 7 other 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries and are trialing their project in the Kep/Kampot area. They approached us to be involved, Andrew has been to a meeting in Phnom Penh and they are coming out to our "office" on Saturday to get down to the nitty gritty about just what our involvement may be.

Another project we are getting involved in is permaculture. A family member who has been to Kep Gardens advised us about a small grant from Australia which we applied for. The people are very interested in helping us to run the workshops we applied for but we need the backup of an organization in Australia. Wendy is a member of the Permaculture SA and is following up on this for us. Meanwhile we have met a retired agronomist who is living in Cambodia for 1 year and is interested in doing some research and running the seminars voluntarily for us. Hopefully, this project will come together with help from people who know what they are talking about and the villagers will reap some benefit.



We are practicing permaculture ourselves in small ways. We have dug trenches across the orchard and filled them with green waste and we add food scraps so have permanent composting going into the soil to feed the fruit trees.



We have also had a meeting with an NGO from Holland, Be More. Be More is a Dutch NGO that supports local projects throughout four countries in Africa and two in Asia: Cambodia and Indonesia, through the help of volunteers. The aim of the organization is to set up partnerships with local projects and support them by placing well prepared and enthusiastic (full time) volunteers for a minimum of four weeks at the project at hand. Another goal is to increase the sustainability of projects by supporting them with advice and to facilitate a network of their partners to exchange experience and knowledge. They have been situated in Siem Reap where there are many organizations providing volunteers. The Siem Reap area is very poor and they rightly deserve all the help they can get. Be More decided to move to another area where there is very little help, if any, available and have chosen Kampot to set up their organization. One of the guest houses told them about us and they checked us out on our website. Hopefully we will

be able to work with them and have a regular flow of volunteers to help ease the load, especially when the new school house is built as we will need to be assured of a teacher for a whole year if we are to start new classes. I was concerned that not having accommodation would be a problem for the immediate future but they pay accommodation and travelling expenses so a local motodup would also benefit by having regular bookings. I hope it works out as the more people working together the better to achieve worthwhile, lasting results.

Kep Children has been established as an Association to help children in schooling. It will soon be registered under the French Law Act 1901. They had the idea of wanting to write an informal "charter" with local Associations to secure the humanitarian environment in Kep and its region. They have approached us to see if we are interested in being involved. A great idea I think if only for all the local organizations working with Cambodian children in Kep to get together occasionally to exchange ideas and work together. After all, we all have the same goal – to help the kids in Kep.

So much to do and only two of us! Cambodian people are being trained but this all takes time. Meanwhile extra bits and pieces keep cropping up which we don't want to miss out on so we just have to find the time and resources.

A month or so ago the local elections occurred in the village. This is the same as our local council elections but instead of voting for an independent person, the people standing are actually members of various political parties. Typical of all politics throughout the world, the village road was graded just before the election - hadn't been done in the 4 years I have lived here. Next year is the Federal election and the village road is supposed to be bituminized – if they had elections every year heaps would be done.

We were invited to a community meeting for people living close to the mountains (hills) advising people that this is a National Park and they mustn't chop the trees down or else there will be no rain and therefore no rice. Telling people that tourists complain that Kep is too expensive and not to charge too much for transport and things they sell. All sorts of other bits and pieces – a giving of information to the people as no one gets to see a newspaper or hear much about Kep on the TV if they have one. Interesting really how underdeveloped countries inform the people of what's going on. Most of the



time we wouldn't have a clue out in the village. I sometimes think though that ignorance is bliss, a much less complicated life – don't have to worry about what you don't know about!!

One disappointing thing happened recently. Our generator was stolen during the night. The police are on to it but as with all robberies they need a bit of luck to catch the culprits. The same night various other pieces of equipment were stolen around the market area. Rumour has it that it was a Vietnamese operation (border only 45 kms away) but most people get lost coming to Kep Gardens so I don't know how complete strangers managed to find their way here in the pitch black and find the generator!! Police are on to it and have interviewed us and the staff but who knows if we ever get it back. Meanwhile we have a smaller generator for construction work on site but this runs on petrol and is a lot more expensive to run. It is not really made to run for long stretches every night and is not coping very well but it has got us to the end of the school year for the evening class so for that we can be thankful.

Please have a look at the Kep Gardens Facebook page. We have downloaded 5 videos of interviews with students at Kep Gardens, one with her mother. Heaps of thanks to Jo and Stu for taping these interviews and having them translated. They volunteered a lot of their time for this project. Many thanks to Reuben and his friend for editing the videos and putting them on Youtube. They will also go onto our website. The videos will give you a clearer understanding of the type of help that we provide to the community. Facebook says that we need 30 "likes" to be able to see more information from our page so please click on "like" so we can see whatever it is they are offering!!

Our footy team did well this year so we are off to Kampot on Saturday to watch their first finals game. **Go the Crows!!** One thing I do miss is the footy.



Fishing in the dam



Hope all is well with you all.  
Cheers, Janine and Andrew