



# KEP GARDENS NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2012

Happy New Year to you all. We hope 2012 brings lots of fun, happiness and good health to you and your families.

To the folk who were able to join with us during our Christmas appeal we thank you so very much. We hope you realize how much your donation is appreciated. One name, Vic Teachers is not familiar to us. I would really like his email address so that we can thank him personally so if anyone has this information, please pass it on to us.

Where to start! Christmas was very quiet. We had a boat charter the next day so worked in the morning preparing for that. We had a traditional Christmas lunch at one of the guest houses and as usual, after eating too much passed out for a couple of hours to sleep it off. Hope your Christmas was a bit more exciting than ours!

Just before Christmas, Nieu's sister was married at the fishing village. It was a good party and we caught up with lots of people that we met when we first came to Cambodia.



**HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT THE KEP GARDENS FACEBOOK PAGE?**

**LOOK AT TRIP ADVISOR ASIA/KAMPOT/MV KEP GARDENS TO READ REVIEWS OF OUR CRUISES.**



Talking of Nieu's family. As I had a couple of weeks off from school I took Nieu, her father and one other staff member to Phnom Penh early in the New Year for medical checks. It turned out that Nieu's father did not have to have his leg cut off at the knee. It was an ecoli germ and they taught him how to dress it every two days and gave him tablets to take. Just as well he told the clinic at Kep that they couldn't chop his leg off as he would be minus a leg for no reason! We came back loaded up with benadine, dressings, tablets etc. I saw him the other day and it is healing really well. Considering the whole bottom of his leg at the front was one big sore I suppose it will take awhile to totally heal but it is looking good. He took two courses of the tablets but I might get another lot for him to take to make sure the germ has been killed dead.

Sokhim, one of our staff, needed vitamins. I think his diet during his life of little food and nutrient has left him very skinny, not a lot of energy, always tired. I took him to Phnom Penh as earlier a local doctor had said it was low sugar and I wanted to make sure he didn't have diabetes.

Our geese have turned out to be 1 gander and 3 geese. We thought we had 2 of each but no worries. They had 4 goslings but one died. They are now sitting on another 14 eggs so we'll see how many are hatched. They haven't reached full maturity yet so maybe that's why the eggs aren't all fertilized. Newsflash: 6 goslings now hatched of the 14 eggs.



We also have over 150 chickens, all varying ages and sizes. The geese and chickens wander all over the paddocks each day and the geese keep control of the chicken house at night.

The boat is not going as well as we had hoped. The tourist numbers are down this year, probably due to the economic situation around the world. It is also difficult to get 10 people together on one day because of the short term transition nature of the tourists who visit the towns of Kampot and Kep where our boat operates so we have not had many lunch or dinner cruises. We have done a few charters and dinner cruises for tourist companies but that is all.

Everybody really enjoys the trips, the food and the scenery and we have a few good reviews on Trip Advisor. We try to have a singer on board for the dinner cruises to add a bit of atmosphere if one of the local Kampot muscos is available.



So this attempt to earn income for the project has not been terribly successful so far. It's all back in the melting pot at the moment while we consider our options.

The mobile phone is the only form of communication available to most people in the country. It is interesting to see how they use the SMS to get a message across to people. They send messages about condom use but one of the messages particularly caught my attention: Message from the Ministry of Information - "Let's send your children to school not to the working place".

The Buddhist Library in Kampot, supported by an Australian, funded the mobile dental clinic to visit local primary schools in Kep. They came and visited Kep Gardens and included our students in the project.



For 4 weeks we have been brushing teeth every day before class using the age old baking soda as a substitute for toothpaste. The Russian students we have said they also used this when they were children in the Ukraine. This week we ferried 5 students at a time in the tuk tuk to Okrasa Primary School morning and afternoon for check ups and treatment if required. Great excitement in the camp! Fancy being excited going to the dentist!! although I suspect some of the excitement was due to the tuk tuk ride.



They get shy in front of the camera so not smiling so much when the photo was taken.

Off they went with big smiles and even though many had teeth pulled and most had some sort of repair work (their words) they came back happy and still smiling. Except for one little boy who had a particularly hard time with his tooth that they pulled out. I almost cried with him and a couple of students the next day wouldn't go to the dentist. Don't blame them myself. Hopefully we can work with this organization again in the future and we thank them very much for including us in their project. Simply by our existence we get some things done for the children even though it is not what our project is particularly involved in.

A lady from Sweden who lives in Australia for a few months every year came to stay recently for 4 weeks. She had visited last year briefly and returned to volunteer. The day she arrived was very eventful for her. The door of the bus wouldn't open so she had to climb out of a window at the back to get out! Then we put her on a moto to get to Kep Gardens. She had never been on a motor bike in her life (she is 70). Now, of course she is a seasoned passenger on a moto. Maybe she'll take up motor bike riding when she gets home!!!



Off to the beauty salon

Thank you Ulla for your enormous contribution to the students. Ulla took the 6 youngest every afternoon to help them learn to write and help them complete worksheets which they rarely are able to do. I can't spend much individual time with them as if I do the rest of the class run riot. Cambodian students are not the typical Asian students that are deadly serious about their studies. Education is important to them and they want to learn but their main purpose of life is to have fun so if they can combine the two, all the better. The biggest contribution Ulla made was speaking with the upper students in pairs. They have very little opportunity to speak English freely and express themselves in English. Most came away with the belief that they can speak English and be understood. Their self confidence soared and they lost their shyness to speak. Great experience for them.

We paid a visit to the local beauty salon one day for the obligatory manicure, pedicure, hair wash, face cleaning etc. all for the handsome price of \$5. I just had my hair cut.



My local beauty parlour

We have recently been involved in getting a young Cambodian girl back from Thailand where she was taken to be sold. I'll spare you all the details but suffice to say that she is back with her family and is now safe. To those who contribute to our project I would like you to know that your donations don't only go towards Kep Gardens' main projects but also to helping various families in crisis that come to us for help. Because we are part of the community we hear of things on a daily basis. Naturally we cannot help everyone but we do as much as we can.

**ABOUT TO START BUILDING A NEW WEB PAGE . THE OLD ONE IS STILL FUNCTIONING SO TAKE A LOOK AT OUR FUNDRAISING FOCUS PAGE.**

Andrew turned 60 in January. As it was a working day and night, couldn't plan anything special but Nieu and I baked a packet cake the day before. An excuse for a cake really. No icing, the stove not level so a bit higher on one side but hey, at least we all acknowledged his special day although at 7.00 in the morning being confronted with a cake, candles and singing is probably not the best way to start the day.



We have had two lots of Australian visitors lately who came laden with goodies for the children. Marbles, skipping ropes, coloured pencils, books, balls, bicycle pump, many different bits and pieces, all of which have been gratefully received and given the children lots of fun. We received screwdrivers and vegetable seeds. Andrew was ecstatic when he saw the screwdrivers (??!!) and next week we will plant the seeds in the seedling house and look forward to some different fresh veggies in the not too distant future. Thank you to Deb Bailey and partner and Donna and Michael Tasker for their kind gifts. The girls were very happy as they now have marbles to play with, previously the boys' domain. One little boy couldn't skip but persevered and persevered over several days in the hot sun until finally he cracked it and the smile on his face was a site to see, bucked teeth and all. He's the one in the third picture.



The kids love the long rope as Cambodian people are big on doing things together so they love the fact that a group of them can share the same game. I taught them tunnel ball and unders and overs the other day with the balls. Chaos but huge competition. The dual UNO cards were a big hit with the older students so much so that at 8.00 pm I couldn't get them to go home. I was starving and tired after a long hot day but had to

wait until all games were finished and a winner declared!!



Funny weather at the moment, it is almost like the rainy season has started very early. Instead of stinking hot days, cooler nights and very dry, some days have been cooler and we have had quite a lot of rain lot in the afternoons and evenings. Good for the garden.

Thanks to Kate and Wayne from Western Australia, Kep Gardens has been accepted as part of BHPBilliton's match giving programme. Any funds they raise for Kep Gardens, BHPBilliton donates the same amount. A big thank you to the people at BHP for liking chocolate so much. Kampot pepper is on the way for all you gourmet cooks at BHP. During French colonization, no respectable French chef would use anything else but Kampot pepper. It was the best in the world and the plantations are gradually coming back to life. We are looking at packaging and posting pepper to people who may like to sell it as a fundraiser for Kep Gardens. We are also looking at growing pepper ourselves to sell as an income earner for Kep Gardens and a community project, employing the local village people to harvest, package etc. Long term project as I think it takes a couple of years before you actually get any pepper off the trees.

Our gathering of signatures for the million and one approvals we need is slow progress but I can see a chink of light at the end of the tunnel. The most important one, the change to the hard title needs only one more signature, the Provincial Governor. Once this is done our other approvals eg building, road signs, school etc should all be signed quite quickly or so they say. We might treat ourselves to a night in Phnom Penh to celebrate after 31/2 years of patiently waiting. But I mustn't speak too soon or I might jinx the whole process.

The video of interviews with students and their families is half finished. We have a copy of the interviews but it is not cut and edited yet. Haven't seen it as we are having trouble downloading it but thanks heaps Jo and Stu. We look forward to seeing the finished product. They are on their honeymoon at present and hopefully will pop in on their way home.

Workcover is moving into Cambodia. I attended a seminar one day explaining the system and a Government official visited this morning for us to register as a participant. It is a start in the right direction protecting the workers from having to pay medical bills themselves for accidents that may happen at work. Be interesting to see how it works in reality.

Funny story the other day. Mr Hutch is a casual worker at Kep Gardens. Andrew and Mr Hutch work together when anything is being built here or on any maintenance jobs Andrew may do outside. A friend had rung him asking him to go for a drink after work. Off he went (Mr Hutch likes a beer). A couple of days later the police contacted him and the man's wife had complained to the police that Mr Hutch was leading her husband astray so they fined him \$20. A nice little revenue earner!!

Hope all is well with you and your families and thank you again for your interest in our project.

Cheers,  
Janine and Andrew