



KEP GARDENS NEWSLETTER

April 2015

Hi Everyone,
Once again, time flies. Holiday time, Kep Gardens is closed for 2 weeks over Khmer New Year. This is our third new year for 2015 so maybe now we can get on with it!! The last 2½ months have been packed with lots of things happening so sit back with a drink or a cup of coffee while I fill you in.

Bore



Lack of water was becoming a real problem. With the increase in volunteers living at Kep Gardens and the large groups camping, there was no way our dam could supply all the water that was needed. Our agricultural projects are on the move as well so more water was needed for these activities. An outfit from another Province was in town with very good equipment so we took the opportunity to drill. We hit water at 31 metres but they kept drilling until 47 to ensure that we still got water late into the dry season.

A **huge** thank you to Melville Senior High School, Mary MacKillop College, Reynella East College, St Bedes College and Long Bay College for their fundraising donations which enabled us to take advantage of the equipment being in the area.

Took 3 classes to Kep Beach on the last day of term. Too hot at the moment to play games outside. A Khmer New Year treat and lots of fun for all. Thanks to Jan, Billy and Sarou for their help playing with the students and head counting amongst the waves.



Large donation of exercise books and pens

Thank you to Fritz and Rose for their donation of 150 exercise books and pens. All the students were very happy when they received a set each.



Library books

Recently I went to Phnom Penh and bought 190 books for the library. About 40 are new copies of Khmer books we had before but all the rest are new Khmer story books. There are over a dozen for teenagers, no pictures, just a novel, love stories for girls and a few war stories for boys. Because of the new books the library is busy every day now which is good to see.

Finally we have finished spending the donation that Veronique, Maarten and friends gave us to establish the library and buy some new Khmer library books. The library is used 4 mornings a

week for the storytelling/playgroup and when we are flush with volunteers it is also used for the reading and conversation programme. So their donation has certainly been put to good use. Thank you very much.



Sports Days

Now we have a mini soccer field and full size volleyball court we have been able to hold sports days competing against other schools or organizations. We have had 3 so far this year but have to stop for a few months as the weather is getting too hot. Our students are very competitive and come Saturday afternoons to practice. We don't win many games but I think the important thing is that they participate although the students are stepping up their practice time as they are keen to get a few wins under their belts.

A big thank you to Alak and Phillipe from the Botanica, a guesthouse situated near Kep Gardens, for their recent donation. This was used to buy 40 teeshirts for our sports teams to wear when representing Kep Gardens. Many of our long term volunteers spend time at The Botanica, using the wi-fi and swimming pool, again thanks to Phillipe and Alak's generosity.

We have some cups left over from a long gone volleyball competition so are throwing some ideas around about a larger community competition with the cups being a perpetual trophy.

World Mapping

World Mapping from The Netherlands have visited Kep Gardens for the last two years but this year they changed the format of their visit. The students camped for 4 days and worked on our water distribution system, digging trenches and laying pipes and testing water flow from the new bore. We are aiming to be able to turn taps on in different sections to water fruit and vegetables, animal shelters or deliver water to bathrooms and toilets and not have to drag heavy hoses around.



We still have more piping to lay to animal shelters, our rice fields and the playground. Many thanks to World Mapping for getting us off to a good start.

Thanks to Mat from Kampot we now have wi-fi at Kep Gardens when the generator is running slowly but surely moving into the 21st century.





A sprinkler !!

Our next step is to install the irrigation piping through the orchard, and vegetable planter boxes as well as install sprinklers throughout the playground to try and keep the grass a bit green during the dry season and to keep the dust down, especially on the soccer field and volleyball court.

Annual Check Ups



The first week in March saw us load up the ramok every morning for 5 days and head off at 7.00am for the Sonja Kill Memorial Hospital for the students' annual health checks. 100 students

were 14 or under but only 95 took the opportunity offered. No big problems this year with only 4 students needing to return to be rechecked.



Loading up to go home.

Workshops from Visiting Doctor



While at the hospital I met Dr James Schmitt, a volunteer from Richmond, Virginia who works at the Veterans Hospital in Richmond. He was in Cambodia for 2 weeks and was happy to come

and talk to the women in our community about women's health. We held two workshops. The one for older women was well attended and covered subjects such as cervical cancer and menopause. The younger group consisted of the girls from Classes 2, 3 and 4 and covered subjects relevant to their age group. Dr James spoke in simple language which helped Kimsy to do a great job translating and getting his message across. The unnecessary and avoidable deaths from cervical cancer due to lack of knowledge is of concern to Dr James. Together we will work on ways to bring this knowledge and the cure to the women in the community through pap smears and vaccinations. Not sure yet how we will do it but we will do it. Never say no when something fairly simple can save many lives, just have to work out the logistics. Isn't that right Dr James?



Students with Learning Difficulties

We have started a new project albeit a very small one. It had come to our notice that some students who had learning difficulties were leaving Khmer school in Year 8 or earlier. We have changed our staffing. Kimsy now is responsible for the big groups who visit, World Challenge and a couple of individual schools as well as taking the storytelling/playgroup in the mornings. One of the students who had left school is now employed at Kep Gardens, learning how to clean properly, Choun is teaching her European cooking and in a short while she will go to Kampot to a friend's restaurant to learn some more cooking. Once she has mastered these skills we will find her a job in a restaurant or guest house. We will then employ another student with learning difficulties and teach them similar skills to enable them to find employment. It is slow going at the moment but with patience we will get there.

We hope you all enjoyed the Easter holidays and didn't eat too much chocolate.

Youth Programme

Sothea has been talking for awhile now about Kep Gardens starting up a youth programme to teach leadership, communication, conflict solving, decision making and responsibility skills to students. He runs a similar programme at his NGO in Phnom Penh and was here recently to talk to Sarak who will run the programme and his helpers Dulalim and Math, all teachers and older students from Class 4. Unfortunately the women we had chosen as leaders have recently left as they are both pregnant and their families will not allow them to come to classes anymore. A little more organization is needed but we are hoping to start on 20th April, when school goes back after the Khmer New Year break. The group will consist of Year 10, 11 and 12 students. I will be following the group's progress with interest.

Agriculture Projects



After many setbacks we are having another go at growing some vegetables. We now have an older couple looking after the garden. Not sure how long they will last but it is better than nobody that we have had for the last year or so. Thanks to Mrs Ling we have brought in some good soil mixed with burnt rice straw, cow poo and sand and have filled two planter boxes. We have

pumpkin, chilli and a few other “things” growing. We also have some seeds growing which will be transplanted soon into the other planter boxes: beetroot, radish and cauliflower. If these are successful we may be able to join with an Australian guy in Kampot who provides the supermarkets in Phnom Penh with organically grown vegetables. He is always looking for places to grow for him. Let’s hope this trial is successful. We just want to grow something and eat it before something else eats it!!



Volunteers

Apart from the large groups, we haven’t had any volunteers so far this year except for Jasmine from Austria. Jasmine was a volunteer physiotherapist at the Sonja Kill Memorial Hospital and came to volunteer at Kep Gardens for her last week in Cambodia. We will miss her as she contributed much to the Kep Gardens community.



Trades Training News

Greetings to you all. This small and seemingly miniscule project operating at a pace less than a snail has now blossomed into a being that requires a substantial amount of management. This translated into Khmer English is “go small to big”. Hopefully the changes implemented will generate opportunities for more people to be trained.

We welcome Mr Pov Sokman to our trades training team to help with our planned expansions. Pov has been a supporter of Kep Gardens since its conception and had a substantial input into its foundations.



Our staff numbers which include “teachers” and students has now risen to 25, having embarked on our first major project in late March this year. This task is the preparation and laying of 460m of

reinforced concrete roadway in Kampot. The most challenging part of this job is that all the work much be done without the use of any heavy plant and equipment as bridge access is limited to 10 tons.



We now have a total of 4 large projects and we take this opportunity to thank our clients for their support.

For your interest, I have taken excerpts from a Journal page written by Denise in September as she was waiting for her plane to fly home.

"Well it's time to go but before I do I must thank you for a wonderful experience. I thought I would share with you the last page of my journal.

*Day 20 - Tuesday September 2nd
Packed and ready to go. Feeling mixed emotions today, glad to leave PP, sad to leave Cambodia but looking forward to seeing family and friends.*

What have I learnt from this experience? So much personal growth I can only try to explain. Confidence to travel alone, make new friends and really appreciate the genuine and small things in life. The pleasure that comes from giving and making a small difference is incomparable.

Cambodia has taught me that pleasure can be found in the most simplest of things. The village people have nothing and yet they are so sabai sabai. Yes, life is very hard for them but amazing how they can move on from the past and still have a positive outlook on life. The sad thing is that development and the western world is slowly but surely changing this and no doubt in a few short years the western influence and social media will take away this beautiful innocence. I love the lack of rules and regulations reminiscent of 30 years ago in Australia. The freedom to use your own common sense and make decisions about safety. Ok, not always good but surprisingly liberating.....

Huge thanks to all the Staff at Kep Gardens; Kimsy, Choun the cook, Mr Chuon the tuk tuk and moto driver, Sopheak, Mr Huch and of course my fabulous hosts Janine and Andrew. Lovely to meet Jill and Greg from Adelaide too.

The amazing students, too many to name but particularly class 1 and class 4. Special thanks to Sarak and Phou Neng and all the others for making me feel so welcome. I hope to stay in touch.

The trips to the market, 3 up on the moto with Choun in Damnuok Changeur (market town) and walks through the village of Kampong Tralach where the little children called out 'Hello, hello, teacher...or Denise'. Their beautiful chorus when asked 'Hello, how are you?' 'I am very well thank you, and you?'

I loved learning to trust people and to speak a few words, and the smile when I made a poor attempt at the pronunciation.

Sure, I missed indoor plumbing, electricity at the snap of a switch and AC, but what the hell they are small sacrifices in comparison.

Cambodia, I will be back.....I promise."
Denise

Thanks to Denise who donated a wide screen digital TV for the classroom we can now hook up to the computer and show things from the net. It might be old fashioned in Australia but here it is the best thing since sliced bread. Thanks Denise. Hopefully we will see you again in August.

Happy Khmer New Year everyone.
Cheers, Janine and Andrew



To all you grandmas out there.