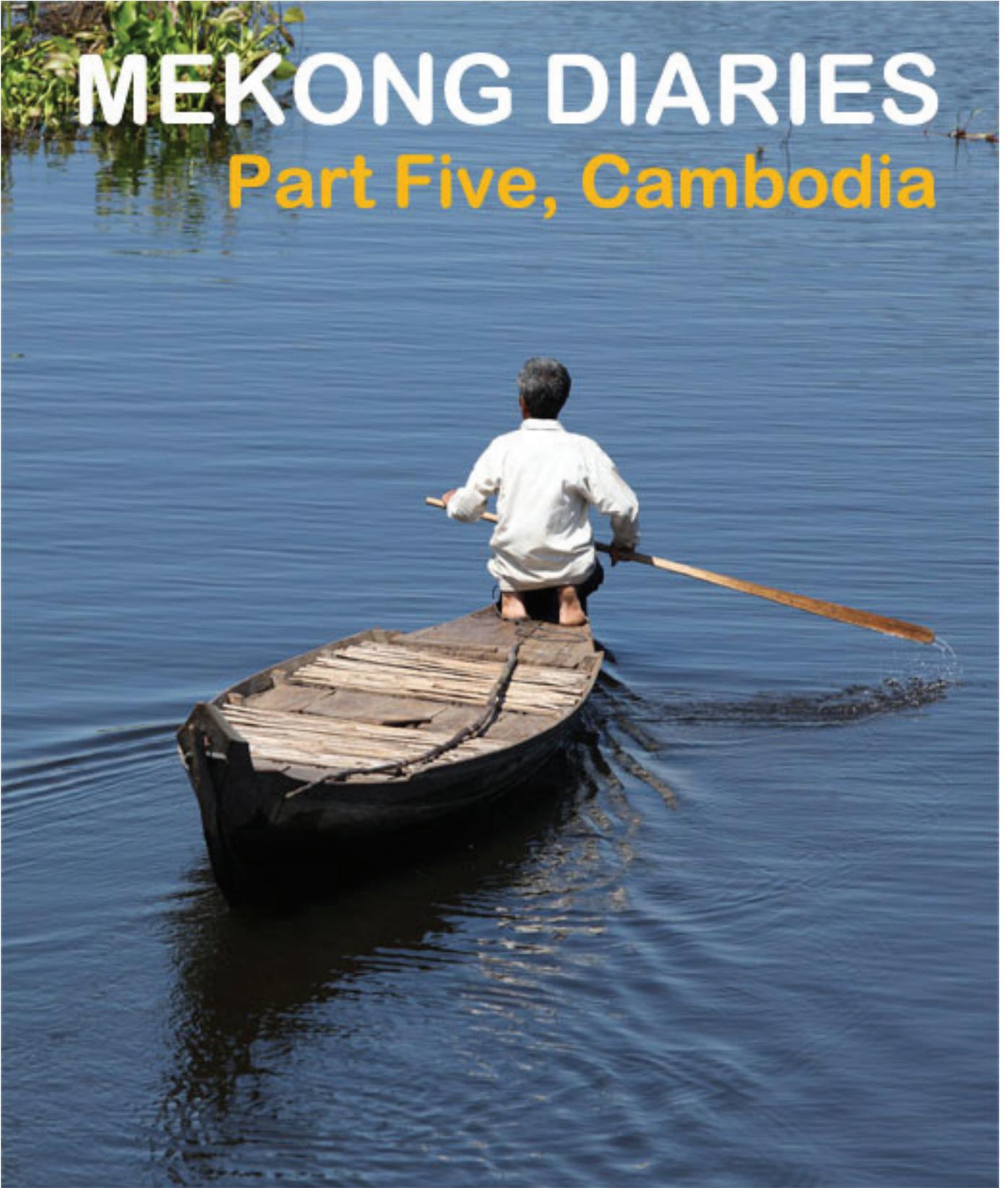


# MEKONG DIARIES

## Part Five, Cambodia



## Days 51-52 – Entering Cambodia

For U.S. \$5 a head we leave Don Sadam Island and the Four Thousand Islands behind, traveling first by boat, then by minibus on a bad road, and finally in a big bus on a sealed road, to make the three-hour trip to Stung Treng in northern Cambodia. On the way, we pass a large freshwater stingray gasping for breath on the back of a pickup truck among sacks of iced fish.

On the Laotian side of the border, guards stationed inside old train carriages and engrossed in card games manage to extract a few final dollars from us for completely spurious reasons. Then, after a short hot walk along a nondescript road between toll gates, we fall into the arms of the Cambodian authorities, who have also invented excuses to charge each new arrival a few extra dollars.

Arriving in Stung Treng, a small town beside the Mekong, we hire the only moto-driver we can find to ferry ourselves and our stuff to a riverside guesthouse restaurant where we sit down to eat and await the arrival of our next interview subject, Ian Baird.

Ian has worked on the Mekong in Cambodia and Laos for around 30 years, in that time becoming widely recognized as an expert on the subsistence peoples in the region and their links to the natural wealth of the river. Our interview with Ian is excellent.

Then we discover that we have no way of getting money, as our cards are not recognized anywhere in town. A moment's panic is fixed with a few phone calls to friends, who agree to lend us funds for the next leg of our journey, and who will be waiting in the town of Ban Lung, Ratanakiri Province, when we arrive. A bus arrives to pick us up, and we pile in, looking forward to the cold beers we know will be waiting with our friends.

By the time we arrive, it is already 8:00 or 9:00 p.m., and after finding rooms we meet the local crowd of development workers at the local drinking hole, Adams. Not all development work, it seems, is about staying sober.

The next day, we have breakfast with our RFA contacts Ratha and Yuthnea and with Meach Mean, the head of the local river advocacy group, The Three Rivers Protection Network. Our goal is to cover the aftermath of the tragic floods that devastated villages along the Sesan River in August this year. The Sesan and its sister river, the Sre Pok, make up 30 percent of the flow of the Mekong once it reaches Cambodia. Together, they constitute the river's largest tributary in the Lower Mekong Basin.

The flood of 2009 is widely reported to have been amplified by a middle-of-the-night release of water from Vietnamese dams just 70 km across the border. The result for indigenous villages inside Cambodia was a sudden wall of water that washed away people's lives, homes, cattle, and crops.

We organize motorbikes and scooters and leave Ban Lung around 9:00 a.m., following Ratha and Yutana on their own bike toward O'Yadow, the Cambodian district closest to the Vietnamese border. A couple of hours later we stop with a sore saddle in the district center to buy some noodles, cigarettes, and biscuits to give to the villagers we will meet. The family we plan to interview lost their father, their house, their farm, and all their belongings, so our small gifts are intended as repayment for the time they would otherwise be spending working out what to eat for dinner.

As we drive toward the village, the roads turn from two lanes and surfaced to cattle paths winding down steep hills. When we arrive, we immediately notice that every house left standing has a water-mark high up on its walls. The villagers are sitting around the well, waiting for us. We meet the woman who lost her husband. She is sitting with her children—two teenage girls and one boy.

The woman tells us that her husband was washed away in the flood when he went to try to find their motor so that he could use the boat to help save people and possessions. His body was found a

day or so later. Her first thought was how she would provide for her family without her husband, since he was the source of all their income.

But this was only one of the many ways that the flood devastated people's lives.



*A villager guides his boat, one of the few to survive the wall of water, trees and mud that struck his community in the darkness.*

Catching a boat across the river to a small village of indigenous Jarai people, we see clear signs of the flood's ferocity: sunken boats left to rot in the river, and barren and dismembered trees—some with damage 30 or more feet above the ground, which is itself at least 10 feet higher than the level of the river. We try to imagine what it was like when this flood surge struck sleeping villages without warning in the middle of the night.

The commune chief accompanies us, and asks us to take note of the river's level now so that we can compare it when we return. He explains that water rises and falls every day as the dams withhold and release water to meet the demand for electricity in the cities of Vietnam. This alone has impacted the flood and migration cycles of the fisheries in a river that once flowed clear and clean, but now inspires fear and inflicts skin disease.

When we arrive in the village, we are met by a group of men and immediately find house after house that was damaged by the flood. Some are stained but standing, others have lost boards and beams, while others have been reduced to piles of timber and bamboo. We interview three men who are sitting on the ruins of their house. They explain, as people who have lived on this river for their entire lives, that they have no doubt the dam caused this flood—just as it has caused the fouled water and loss of fish in what was once their beloved river.

These are indigenous people whose inhabitation of the mountainous Ratanakiri region stretches

back beyond written record. But now that this river has been turned into an outlet for Vietnamese dams, they are afraid of it, and are powerless against the powerful dam owners and against government hydropower strategies. They tell us that they intend to retreat upland to be safe from further floods. The village chief takes us on a tour of his small, devastated village, pointing to the four or five-meter high-water mark on the side of one house set back from the river.

In the decade since the building of the dam, the Sesan of their ancestors has turned brown and dangerous, and the fish have faded away. These people have received no compensation from the cascade of dams located just 70 km upstream. They were not even warned when the dam managers decided to release a wall of water.

As we ride back to Ban Lung in the darkness, our eyes fill with bugs and dust and our bodies are jolted numb on the roads. We make plans for a trip in the morning to Andon Meas, where we hope to talk with the district governor.

## **Day 53-54 – Flood Damage**

Today becomes an unexpected mental health day when our plans fall through due to our own disorganization. We've been working seven-day weeks without a break, and a Sunday morning in bed now feels awfully right.

Once the heat of the day burns off, we venture out to meet Meach Mean of the Three Rivers Protection Network near a lake in Ban Lung town. We move to the manicured grounds of Terre Rouge, Red Earth, for an interview and then, just a few steps farther along, retire to a pool and its charming bar to complete our observance of a day of rest.

Monday morning's breakfast is a 6:00 a.m. meeting at the most popular breakfast restaurant in town. Here, development workers, missionaries, and military and government personnel mingle with ordinary Cambodians traveling to and from the far corners of Ratanakiri. All of this traffic is tied to the region's natural resources—wood, minerals, land, and exotic animals—that still exist for the taking, resulting in a Wild West atmosphere and in the rampant dispossession of the seven different indigenous peoples who are the traditional inhabitants of this mountainous land.

Over a bowl of pork kuey teow, noodle soup, bai sach chrouk, and rice and pork, we meet the governor of Andong Meas, who then heads out to the district ahead of us. An hour out of town later on our bikes, we turn off to the right of our previous journey to O'Yadow, heading away from Vietnam on a thin line of gravel and dried clay and raising long red trails of dust in the still early-morning light.

When we arrive at the district town center, it is still cool, and after a short wait the governor arrives, parking in the front yard of the local police chief's house. The town of Andong Meas is visibly poorer than O'Yadow, which has paved two-lane roads with street lights. Andong Meas on the other hand is loose jumble of wooden huts along a narrow dirt track.

The governor acts as our guide as we walk down the main street and points out watermarks where the flood reached above the eaves of houses hundreds of meters from the river. In other places, the homes of the poor simply collapsed in the flood. In some cases, entire houses were lifted from their blocks and floated away.

At the end of the main street, we reach a point where a bridge used to span the mouth of a small creek flowing into the Sesan River. Made from tree trunks and from steel girders as thick as a man's waist, the structure had been twisted flat against the opposite bank of the creek, with bent steel and tons of solid wood thrown around as if in a giant game of Jenga. On the other side of the creek, a wooden home rests in a clump of trees, still abandoned as the problem of getting it back across the creek has foiled reconstruction efforts.



*The Andong Meas district governor in front of his devastated district offices. Important documents and equipment were ruined and scattered in the floods. He explains he may have no choice but to relocate all villages as there is very limited government assistance.*

Crossing a temporary floating bridge, we follow the governor past an avenue of abandoned houses, the headquarters of development agencies, and even the offices of the ruling Cambodian People's Party. At the gate to the governor's own offices, a sign hangs suspended by one post six meters above the ground and is twisted 90 degrees to face the yard, where desks and files of paper and folders litter the grass.

Sitting at one end of the devastated offices, we interview the governor, spending an hour with him as he tells us how the villagers can expect no compensation either from the Cambodian government or from the Vietnamese dam managers. He confirms that the flood's severity and destructiveness were due to the dams, and that no warning had been given before the water's release.

He also confirms that the Sesan 2 Dam, planned for the juncture of the Sesan and Mekong Rivers, will almost definitely go ahead, displacing thousands of the people already harmed by the upstream dams, and that again there will be no real compensation.

Returning with the governor to the police chief's house, we pick up our bikes to continue to follow the trail of destruction without the governor. Just a few minutes away we find the frame of a two-story house that has been ripped from its footings, stripped of all its floors and walls, and turned onto its roof. We interview the villagers and learn that in this small village alone 14 houses were destroyed, with one man saying that his house had simply disappeared.

A girl then takes us to her family's farm, where their crops of rice and vegetables were destroyed.

This will be the lasting cost of the flood. There are now tens of thousands of people in Ratanakiri who have lost their rice crops, as the flood hit just before the harvest. This means they will have a food deficit for the next year, impacting nutrition and the capacity of families to support their children's education and leading to economic hardships and desperate conditions for a long time to come. And all of this was brought upon a group of indigenous people who are already impoverished and struggling against land grabs, corruption, and injustice.

We drive back to Ban Lung and stop at the Boeung Kak Lake, a deep blue and almost perfectly circular volcanic crater lake. Later, over dinner with Ratha and Yuthnea, we are full of questions for these two remarkable journalists who are working in a country where it is not wise to confront the truth if this troubles the powerful. Yuthnea served his apprenticeship as a journalist working for Ratha, spending years reporting on Hun Sen, Cambodia's prime minister. Yuthnea tells us that Hun Sen is a master chess player—a piece of information that makes perfect sense when one considers how many games the long-serving leader of this troubled nation has to have played, and won, during his career.

From Ratha we receive this one basic piece of advice about how to work in delicate political situations: Don't "kill" your sources. He also tells us why he is still safe even though his work, especially on illegal logging, has put him into direct conflict with some very powerful and ruthless people: His stories are true.

## **Day 55-56 - Dolphins**

We take the advice of our hostler and decide to avoid the added cost of a private Camry for the next leg of our journey, this time down the river to Kratie. Instead we book seats on a minibus, which will be quicker and cheaper—or so we think. Twelve hours later, having been shunted between several different minibuses and having along the way completely lost our sense of humor, we arrive in the port town of Kratie just in time for the sunset over the wide Mekong.

In the early night we walk along the waterfront, and every building is dark. We learn from the owner of our hotel that the authorities in charge of the generator that powers the town failed to buy more gasoline yesterday, and so today we are all going about by candlelight.

At a fold-out card table café on the riverside, we bump into a group of Western aid workers and, by chance, meet Verne Dove, a young Australian woman whose every move sounds like a wind chime due to the forest of dolphin charms, earrings, and bracelets she wears. Verne is one of the reasons we are in Kratie, for it is her work with the population of Irrawaddy dolphins living just north of here in the river that has brought us to film these few remaining animals and find out what might be done to save them.

We rise the next day from one of the best mattresses in the Mekong region and eat quickly before walking a short way to the World Wildlife Federation (WWF) office on the boulevard facing the river. We meet Gordon Condon, the recently appointed head of the project in Kratie. And together with Verne, the project's veterinarian, we sit down to work out how best to tell the story of the dolphins.

They explain to us the controversy that erupted a few months ago when WWF released a report based on Verne's work of three years which found that the dolphins' high mortality rate was due to disease—a kind of gangrene that is apparently caused by mercury, pesticides, and other pollutants in the water. A government official, Touch Tanna, reacted with a public outburst, threatening to throw the project out of the country and arrest Verne.

These were threats that in Cambodia—where other unfavorable reports have resulted in these kinds of outcomes—had to be taken seriously. WWF responded by retracting the report. But the research goes on, and when we arrive Gordon explains that concerted efforts are under way to forge a

collaborative relationship with Touch Tanna, the president of the commission established by the government to protect the dolphins.



*Some hypothesize that the survival of this population of dolphins is due to their wariness around people. However, dolphin sightings are not rare in this Dolphin Pool in Kampi township, Kratie province, where tourists come to see the last of the Mekong's dolphins.*

We walk to the local headquarters of the Fisheries Department and find a relatively quiet place to do an interview with Gordon. Then, with a plan for a dawn boat ride together the next day to see the dolphins, we return to our hotel and quickly sit down to compose questions for the afternoon's interview with Touch Tanna, considered one of the most powerful men in Cambodia.

This done, we hire motor scooters and drive north along a beautiful beachside road to the deep pools in the river next to a village called Kampi. There, in a small car and bus parking lot beside the river, we pay an entrance fee at a booth festooned with dolphin paraphernalia. A few minutes after we arrive, Tanna drives up and guides us to a row of benches looking out over the river. An elderly man with a handsome but unfriendly face lined by the sun, he explains that until recently he has been in Vietnam getting treatment for a chronic condition.

We interview him for a long time about many subjects, but deal delicately with the controversy about the WWF report. Some of his answers seem strange, and it is clear that the controversy has greatly hurt his political standing. He is particularly fiery when asked about the dolphins' likely extinction. He insists that their numbers are increasing and sustainable. The WWF has told us that there are only around 70 dolphins left in Cambodia, all living in a 190-kilometer stretch of the river. But Tanna tells us there are as many as 170 dolphins and that their numbers are growing. It is hard to see how the science of conservation can marry with Cambodian politics to produce policies that can save these creatures.

While we speak, dolphins break the golden surface of the river below us, round grey forms making whale-like huffing and puffing sounds. Meanwhile, a small but constant stream of tourists climbs down the stairs onto the bank and into longtail boats to be ferried out to the deep pools in the middle of the river where the larger numbers of dolphins live.

When we finish our interview, we make plans with Tanna for a trip to the villages that are working with his commission to protect the dolphins from fishing. He also promises to assemble his river guards, a small force of men under his command who protect and manage the dolphins and their small river environment.

Then we too catch a boat out into the river's stream and spend the last few moments of sunlight filming, or trying to film, the dolphins and the tourist boats. Back on land, Tanna is waiting for us with the news that if we want, we can go to see a dead dolphin. We do, and in the setting sun we ride back to Kratie and the Fisheries Department where, in a small freezer in an unused room, the head and body of a medium-sized dolphin is being stored.

It is an ignominious resting place for the poor animal, and wasteful too, as much of the biological information that can be gleaned by performing a necropsy requires the immediate study of a corpse, and freezing adds to the loss of much data. WWF has told us that the river guards will hide, bury, and refuse to share the dolphin carcasses, and here in the freezer we find proof of that claim.

## **Day 57 – ‘Only a Handful Left’**

We spring out of the very comfortable folds of our beds at 4:00 a.m. and polish our sleepy faces to get ready for Gordon and Verne. They are already waiting outside with a couple of Camrys, the national conveyance of Cambodia. Did you know that a Camry can drive up the side of a rain-soaked mountain, or ford a flooded stream? They can. It's terrifying!

We leave for the Kampi dolphin pools and are on the water well before sunrise. It is chilly and in the darkness the water starts to glow with that deep indigo which signals the coming of the light, and in its beautiful surface we begin to make out the shapes of rising dolphins.

As the sun touches the tops of the trees, we interview Verne. She recounts her findings about the impact of pollution on the river dolphins. Here in Cambodia, almost all the nutrients and proteins in people's diets come from the fish and from agriculture fed by the river. If the dolphins are being poisoned by the Mekong, then it is only a matter of time before people begin suffering the same problems. And these poisons will remain, even if they are stopped today, in the water for a generation to come.

Verne explains that there were once thousands of dolphins in the river, but that wars, starvation, and the brute cruelty of soldiers have reduced the animals until there are now only a handful left. The impact of fishing with gill nets have further thinned their numbers. She has dedicated the next five years to finding a way to save them. In her opinion unless something is done in that time, it will simply be too late.

After lunch, we return to Kampi village and film the villagers sculpting wooden dolphins of various sizes to sell to the tourists. We buy handfuls of them as souvenirs and gifts. By the river we meet the commune chief, who is working with Tanna to generate alternative incomes for the villagers, who no longer fish with gill nets.

He shows us some of the fishing apparatus still in use—a hand-thrown net, a small fish trap full of good-sized fish, and also a large rattan basket, the size of a small cupboard, that is stuffed with medium-sized branches and suspended on the end of a long fulcrum pointing down into the river.

This works by being lowered into the river and left there, where it will appear as a safe and maze-like hiding place for fish, who rest among its many branches. After a time, it is lifted like a giant ice-cream scoop, and the surprised fish find themselves in the hands of happy villagers.



*In Kratie town on the Mekong River, at the Department of Fisheries, an official shows us a frozen, dead Irrawaddy Dolphin. The endangered dolphins are kept for autopsies performed to identify the cause of death, an issue that has recently sparked open controversy between conservationists and government authorities.*

We film an interview with the chief, who tells us the story of how the dolphins were created. It seems that the dolphins arose from the self-sacrifice of a princess, whose tragic love for a giant serpent who betrayed her caused her to fling herself into the Mekong, whereupon she turned into a dolphin.

Next, we drive farther upstream to the headquarters of the river guards, where Tanna and some 30 men in uniform are waiting for us. We position them in rows and interview their commander about his work.

One of the guards sings a song for us about the dolphins and love. Then, to prove their readiness for duty, the guards perform a drill. They run in formation down to the river and leap into their longtail boats, dispersing in a hilarious display of near-accidents and stalled motors to all points of the compass.

Our time in Kratie comes to a sudden end as we decide to make good time for the next day's story on the Tonle Sap by catching a night bus to Kampong Cham. In the twilight we board the bus and leave with our eyes still searching the waters of the river for the signs of rising dolphins.

## Day 58 – Meeting ‘the King’

When we arrive, Siem Reap is hot, even though it is still early morning. After checking into our hotel, we dive straight into a very tight schedule.

We catch a taxi to the edge of the Tonle Sap, the largest lake in Southeast Asia, and meet the “King of the Great Lake” at a port called Chong Kneas. A young man with a lot of responsibility, the King is actually the government officer in charge of enforcing fishing laws and zones on the Great Lake. He is a much more straightforward person than we usually expect when we meet with powerful government officials in Cambodia.

We drive out onto the edge of the lake in a Fisheries Department patrol boat, which is a couple of tons of hardwood propelled by a supercharged truck engine. The way out onto the open water is a winding network of estuaries lined with floating villages consisting of houses on pontoons, shops, and complexes of nets, bamboo, and various vessels.

At one point, a speeding tourist boat blocks our way, failing to notice us behind them. With a quiet word and a flick of his wrist, the King commands his driver to charge the tourist boat, dumping a large bow wave all over a group of well-dressed Korean tourists. They are not happy. As we leave the tourists wallowing in our wake, one young man stands on the bow of the boat, his shirt and tie saturated, waving his fist and yelling over the engines at us. This gives us a demonstration of the relationship between these police and the civilian population.

But while government jobs in Cambodia often seem to be less about work and more about appearance and politics, the King is clearly dedicated to his job. As we interview him in the open water, where the brown surface of the Tonle Sap reaches to the horizon, he speaks passionately about the task of policing the fisheries of this remarkable body of water.

The lake has been divided into licensed zones, with the local people pushed out of traditional fishing grounds. At the same time, the number of people living on and around the lake continues to increase each year, straining the fish stocks and polluting the waters.

The work of patrolling the lake with just a few boats is nearly impossible considering the scale of the task, which covers an area of around 15,000 square km and a population of millions. But the King clearly loves his work. He is most animated when he talks about the big fish that villagers give them when they are stationed on the Ministry of Fisheries ship in the middle of the lake.

Back on shore, we return to Siem Reap for lunch and then drive to a village where tourist boats conduct tours of the lake, taking people out to a floating village. On the way there, our road follows a small creek through shady villages. Our guide explains that this creek was once the site of a great city that was built here by an ancient king for its year-round supply of fresh water. Now it is nothing more than a trickle of water, no wider than a couple of meters, running between houses and the road. This illustrates just how rich the history of this land is in this region. In the landscape around Siem Reap, even the most mundane creek or hillock may have an ancient biography.

In the narrow muddy bed of the creek we climb aboard one of many tourist boats, all using a long-shafted propeller and auto engine. As we putter along a channel that is at first only 10 or 20 feet wide, the landscape gradually changes from mud-filled paddies to flooded fields with people wading with nets and baskets to gather floating vegetation, until the water covers all but the uppermost branches of a completely flooded forest. Our channel continues through these treetops, while in other channels boats can also be seen coming and going through the trees.

Eventually we reach a village of buildings on stilts and stop at a community center. Here, the

president of the Fishing Association tells us about life in this place where for six months the world is landlocked, and for the other six months is a lake. He says that the village was originally built on a hill where the war elephants of Angkor were kept, and is the burial site of a great war elephant.



*The River Guards of Kratie are given responsibility for patrolling the river and protecting the Irrawaddy Dolphins. Gill net fishing, dynamite fishing, and water toxicity are said to be contributing to the demise of the dolphins.*

Leaving the president, we continue into town, where every house and business sits above the water on stilts. Some of these dwellings are quite large. Others, supported on thin wooden legs and made from bamboo and woven grass, are no bigger than a small room. Along the main street, water laps at the steps, and villagers maneuver small elegant craft from house to house, using a one-handed oar to propel and steer. We see pigpens built up in the forks of tree branches and fishing nets suspended in bushes—a life lifted above the surface of, or floating on, the lake.

Searching for more people to interview, we meet a woman rowing past with her two young children. She tells us that the people here live in crushing poverty, and that for all of its aesthetic appeal, life in this floating world is full of difficulty and hardship. Given the chance, she says, she would wish for her children a life on dry land, where they could grow food and rice and raise animals.

Visiting her single-roomed home, we tread gingerly on finger-thick branches covered by grass mats, afraid that our big Western bodies may bring the whole family home down. Through a square hole in the floor, we see a school of hatchlings kept in a net flickering in the clear green water. A single cooking pot, a shard of mirror, a four-foot-high ceiling, a faded Chinese poster advertising nothing in particular, a colored fish kept in a jar, a clay stove, a single bed for the whole family—the fragility of this family's life is overwhelming.

In the lake that is their only resource, industrial fishing by the wealthy has greatly decreased the amount of fish available for all. This family's life is defined by the pressures of poverty, exacerbated by spending half the year in a flooded world.

We speak to another man, who is working on a car-sized fish cage supplied by an aid organization, and he repeats these sentiments. It is a shame to discover that the story of the common people of the Tonle Sap echoes the suffering and worries of so many other river people we have met. When French explorers first traveled to the Tonle Sap, they reported seeing a tide of fish so numerous that the surface of the lake in some places was a carpet of fish.

The modern world is a witness to the loss of so much wonder. It is a sad legacy. The inconceivable abundance of the natural world is now being replaced by inconceivable loss. And the people who most depend on the gifts of nature, like the people of the Mekong—what will happen to them?

## Day 59 – A Fish Market

As if punishing ourselves for having had too much fun in a previous incarnation, we rise at 4:00 a.m. and visit a pre-dawn fish market on the shores of the Great Lake. It is surprisingly cold in the blank darkness as we park on the side of a long man-made spit leading out into the water.



*By the time the sun brightens the sky, most of the large boats have already unloaded their catches. The Tonle Sap is the heart of the Lower Mekong River Basin fisheries, one of the largest inland fisheries in the world.*

A flurry of trucks and motorbikes loaded with coolers overflowing with ice and fish is already coursing up and down the narrow lane. At the end of the road, dozens of fishing boats are crowded bow-first on the shore of a steep beach. On board, the crews are shoveling tons of fish out of the holds into

baskets and bags for transport to market. Small single-person longtail boats jockey for space next to larger industrial-size trawlers. And beyond the melee on shore, villagers in smaller wooden skiffs pole through the darkness, small silent shadows moving against the brightening sky.

We speak with several people—market sellers and fishermen—to find out more about this market life. They tell us that the fish of the lake attract buyers from all over. As the sun moves to the west over the water, we start to notice details. Some of the huts here are no bigger than a large box. Constructed from sticks and patched with rice bags, one hut is home to a woman and her two young children. She smiles at us, perched in a doorway that rests on thin wooden legs above the water.

Her poverty is such that she cannot even set her foundation on dry land. Rather, she will shift her home with the rising and falling of the lake, always placing her feet in the shallows, in no-man's-land.

We spend hours filming and interviewing, taking in the scenes of fish wealth that have played a central role in Cambodia's history ever since the rise of the Angkorian empire on the shores of this Great Lake. Then we drive back toward Siam Reap, stopping to film a large group of men excitedly casting their nets into what appears to be a rice paddy. This magical world, in which land and water mix, is a wide ditch linked to many other ditches and running to the horizon. Here, 20 or more men are netting catfish, silvery fingerlings, and pretty little spiny green-scaled fish.

At one point, in an apparent parody of his lack of success in fishing, one of the men tries to hunt a white crane that is standing on the back of a grazing buffalo. One small boy fishes by himself, awkwardly casting his net and watching the older men to try to copy their technique. His efforts are both adorable and alarming, as the energy he is expending will have to be rewarded by a catch of equal value. In the efforts of the poor people netting in this ditch, there is no "pretending" to hunt./.