

SUPPORT CAMBODIA TRUSTEE VISIT 2020 – THE TOUR DIARY

This is a rough transcript of the daily reports posted on Facebook/WhatsApp during the trip.

Apologies for typos or poor grammar: it was written 'in the field'!

In the interests of space, some of the pictures have been omitted.

ARRIVAL



Arrived in Phnom Penh this morning exactly 24 hours after leaving home. 25c here though it feels considerably warmer. Met by **Daly** and her brother-in-law **Sang** and redoubtable driver **Mr Thy**. Lunch on the Riverside (yes Bob, there was amok!) followed by shopping for hygiene supplies and stationery in Orussey Market and early dinner with friend **Savy Liem**. Its been a long two days....

DAY 1 Nice surprise to begin the day: an unscheduled visit to the Russian Market with our good friend **Dr Nhor Chamrom** who lives nearby. Chamrom is currently working at the Health Centre run by the Catholic Church in Battambang but happened to be home for a few days and was happy to help us track down these distinctive shopping bags. Okoun charen Chamrom.



After lunch at the (newly improved) Sovanphum Hotel in Kompong Chhnang a visit to the tiny community of

Chomcatamau where Support Cambodia have connected mains water (2018) and provided 6 toilets (2019). This has made a real difference to the village and they are very happy. But this house, home to 10 people is obviously not fit for purpose so Support Cambodia have arranged for it to be rebuilt immediately. A good example of 'small money, big difference'.



DAY 2 A brief visit to the new Kindergarten at St Peter's Church in KCN preceded the 3 hour drive to Pursat. But before reaching Pursat City, we called in at the Farm and Marketing Outlet inspired by Jesuit **Brother Noel Oliver** and the Karuna Battambang team. This ground-breaking initiative aims to empower small rural farmers by teaching them new techniques, such as the SRI method of rice growing, composting and getting a good return for their produce. Their latest scheme involves local schools, encouraging children to get hands on experience of sustainable farming. As Brother Noel puts it, "The child of today is the youth of tomorrow and the future of the world".

Support Cambodia funded a borewell (2018) here and we were very pleased to see it is not only in good order but proving essential to the everyday management of the farm.

Thank you **Peter, Noel, Tom Chheat and Sophal** for your time and your welcome

[pictured L to R on next page]



**KBO
TEAM at
CROAP**



DAY 3 Travelling day today arriving in **Battambang**, our base for 3 days. Afternoon meeting with **Isma El Lim**, previously Head Teacher at Phnom Priel Primary in Pailin Province where Support Cambodia did our first two borewells. He's now working in Battambang and we have arranged to visit his school on Monday en route to one of the highlights of the trip: seeing the latest SC borewell at Reendonkao. Tonight dance display and dinner at Pet Yiey Chee Church Centre. Fr Mark and his group from East Anglia were also there which was nice. Thanks to **Fr Manoj** and the students for your great welcome and hospitality .

DAY 4 Sunday morning Mass at Battambang, always special, preceded a very long and 'interesting' visit to Nikum Village where Support Cambodia have been providing water filters for some years. Over a 6 hour period we refurbished three filters, presented /replaced 6 more, handed over 5 bicycles (from proceeds of the 2019 Plant Sale) visited the family of a disabled person, inspected two prospective sites for future borewells and asked endless (annoying) questions! Perhaps fortunate we only come once a year! .

As a result of all this activity, the Community Filter at Nikum Kindergarten is now surplus to requirements and will be moved tomorrow to a residential hostel in Battambang where it will be of great use. It joins another Community filter, (from Pursat) which is also being transferred to Battambang. Thank you to all those whose contributions have made. clean water a reality for rural Cambodians.



DAY 5

715am: surreal start to an otherwise excellent morning, driving interminably (and veery slowly) round Battambang trying to locate **Brother Francis** driving in from Pailin. An hour late (and another 40 minutes on the 'scenic' route) we arrived at **Prek Khpout** (pronounced Prek Kabo) Secondary School to find all 150 students and 10 staff waiting to greet us: something of a surprise since we'd never been there before and only vaguely knew one of the teachers. 45 enjoyable minutes with some lovely young people and constructive discussion with Director **Hun Hulbunroem** and his friendly staff. Watch this space for news!

Then, to the highlight of the trip so far: a visit to **Reedonkao Village** to see our new borewell. Its great! and the villagers are delighted with improvement in health, especially the reduction in skin infection. Presentation of toiletries and a 'Metta' Support Cambodia teddy bear completed a happy morning's work. Thanks to **Francis and Vary Nivaa** for their invaluable help.



This afternoon it's back to the water filters with a demonstration for 5 'ladies of the parish' at Battambang Church centre. This was accompanied by much hilarity, especially when Fr Manoj was inadvertently drenched! and was followed by demo and presentation of Community Filters at two of the church's residential Hostels. These particular filters, previously in use in other places, have been relocated to the hostels to ensure maximum benefit to the greatest number of people. The students, 48 in total, responded with enthusiasm and great attention and will be encouraged to be responsible for operating the filters in their respective houses. We wish them all good health and success!



DAY 6 After a meeting with **Fr Rajat** and delivery of vitamins to the Pet Yiey Chee Health Centre, we unexpectedly came across **Theara Kao** who helps facilitate the safe delivery of Support Cambodia's project funding to its various destinations. Lovely to see her and be able to say 'thank you' in person. Time to move on to our next base in Pailin via a brief visit to the Killing Caves at Phnom Sampeau: a sharp reminder of the terrible recent history that so shapes modern Cambodia. Visiting here, seeing the Buddhist shrines and offering incense for those so brutally murdered is a sobering, and arguably necessary experience in understanding where this country has come from. However, practicalities are never far away here so it was no real surprise that the first sight at the top of the hill was a sign for Walls Ice Cream! (And yes, we did buy one) . Completely incongruous... but this is Cambodia! This evening we were invited (unprepared) to share our worklife experiences (geologist and teacher) with student groups studying English at the Marist Brothers Education Centre. Generally very rewarding... but my goodness we certainly earned our nice supper with the Brothers! Sleep well!



DAY 7 Yesterday was a quiet day!!!! Today, 1.30pm and we're just back from from an 80 kilometre round trip of project visits with the amazing **Sister Vangie Dunton**, eight centres in 5 hours, the highlight being the formal opening of the Kon Damrai Day Care Centre. Support Cambodia have already done two borewells(2017) and a kitchenette (2018) here so it was great to see both boreholes working properly, the rice soup programme continuing under the direction of the parents and not a single piece of litter in sight! All 356 pupils had turned out for the opening ceremony , complete with speeches, tape

cutting and endless photos. Lovely to see a project come to fruition and so many people happy with the result.

We can also report that 3 of the other four SC borewells in this area are working well:(the 4th had a problem which is being sorted) and are making a real difference to the health of the children. This evening, our second presentation to the students at Marist Education Centre, this time in the form of a quiz on 'England & Cambodia' (thank you Fran Ludden!). Very successful... but I'd forgotten how exhausting teaching



can be!! Delicious supper and watermelon juice very much appreciated.



DAY 8 It's our Birthday!!! Support Cambodia was officially registered as a UK charity 5 years ago today and what better place to celebrate than **Pailin** where we have received so much encouragement. Sad that our other Trustees, Bob and Carol (not forgetting original members Ian and Jan) are not here with us.



After a lively visit to the Marist Preschool to hear the children sing and show off their very good English, it was a day of meetings. Not perhaps as riveting as village visits but very necessary for forward planning. A PowerPoint Presentation from **Brother Max** was most interesting and inspiring: it would be good to share this at home in the UK.

David continued his introduction to geology with a group of interested students and the day ended with an very enjoyable dinner in the company of our friends here in Pailin, a fitting way to mark 5 years as a British NGO in Cambodia. Huge thanks to every single person who has helped Support Cambodia make life a little better for disadvantaged people in this beautiful country. .



DAY 9 Another travelling day today, this time from Pailin to Svay Sisophon where we will spend the weekend.

On the way we stopped at **Tampoung** for (another) delicious meal, hear the kindergarten children sing and a chance to check on several SC projects. The kindergarten Dining Hall, funded jointly in 2018 by Support Cambodia and the Caring for One Foundation is in good shape and being well used by the local community as well as the children. At last, a proper kitchen is being built on the back with a small group dining area at the side.

Owing to new government rules, the Student Centre now only has 9 students and the building itself is showing signs of wear but Karuna was able to check up on a couple of his old mates.

However, the main concern is the lack of water :ponds nearly dry, huge fissures in the ground and drinking water now having to be bought. Some sort of water harvesting is surely called for here.

Tonight we're in **Sisophon** : 28c and a gentle breeze.....very pleasant....



DAY 10 Another surreal start to the day: breakfast on the roof terrace (not nearly as classy as it sounds) accompanied simultaneously by a Buddhist wedding chant (very loud) and a Japanese tour group apparently holding morning prayers at the breakfast table, complete with hymns in three part harmony. Only in Cambodia.....

Spent the day with staff from **Jesuit Service Cambodia** (JSC) visiting several schools where Support Cambodia have, through JSC, provided bicycles for rural children to get to school. Educational support in a variety of ways is just one of the many facets of JSC Sisophon. Wheelchairs are another and this afternoon we met 10 year old **Kheavy**, who has polio and is the recipient of one of the 10 wheelchairs donated by Support Cambodia in 2019. We also met **Moa Leak**, 38, also with polio who says his chair has given him the freedom to move around and continue his electronic repair business. Two more examples of "small money, big difference". Thanks so much to **Ham Sok** and his staff for taking us round and showing us their impressive work. It's been a long, very hot (37c) day. Night night.



DAY 11 This has been the kind of day where, at the end of it, all you can do is put yourself and all your clothes under a shower and stand there for a very long time. Today we've seen three different sites in Svay Sisophon with varying degrees of poverty, deprivation and squalor, demonstrated yet another Community Filter, served rice soup in 37 degrees Celsius and presented T shirts and play equipment (thank you St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary, Norwich) to some very overexcited children.



All this via translators (variously Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Khmer) - which gives the phrase "lost in translation" a whole new meaning.

At 430pm we set off for **Rohal Village**, about 30k out of Sisophon to view the Hand Wash facility SC installed in 2019. And very impressive it is too, enabling the school to deliver their Hygiene programme on a daily basis. Very encouraging.



Now on our way back to town for dinner with the students at the church centre followed by 'party,' PowerPoint presentation, and dancing. That shower might have to wait.....!

[more pictures on next page]



DAY 12 8am visit to the wonderful **Xavier Jesuit School**, the first in Cambodia. XJS provides the opportunity for poor children to receive quality education with quite a different approach to the usual state-run schools. Those of us who saw the empty 18 hectare site in 2013 could never have imagined this beautiful, ordered, happy place where 665 smiling students, 100 teachers and countless admin staff have the opportunity to develop into 'the best they can be'. XJS puts great emphasis on hygiene, sustainability, parental cooperation and care for the environment. The pictures speak for themselves.



DAY 13 The final 'working' day of the trip: an inspiring and enjoyable visit to the villages of Taom and **Anlung Sa** where Filipino missionary **Betty Millena** runs a women's education group twice a month. Nearly 30 women attended today and the topic was Sanitation. Visual examples of good/bad sanitation were given out with some explanation by Betty and then the women were invited to stand up and speak about the pictures themselves. Much laughter and encouragement from the group after which toiletries were distributed: the women make a small donation towards this, whatever they can afford. I introduced myself, bringing greetings and friendship bracelets from the women in the UK, emphasising our common bond as women (children, husbands, health etc) and the necessity to be a strong influence in our local community. The friendship bracelets went down very well!

Big thanks to Betty and to **Kate** (Edinburgh) for sharing their Cambodian experience and insight and to **Thon Thoen** for driving us, especially the last section on a real "d and p" (dirt & pothole) road. A memorable day. *NB: For anyone wishing to support Betty's work with rural women Support Cambodia has a designated Women's Health Fund. Details at www.supportcambodia.org.uk.*



DAY 13 EXTRA: There are many blessings from trying to make a difference in this wonderful country but two of the major frustrations are a) the inability to communicate adequately and b) ones natural inclination to "get things done" which doesn't always sit well in the local culture. But I learnt an important lesson today from Betty and Kate, both of whom have far greater experience of Cambodia than I and it is



this: what really matters is being here, having a presence, and this counts for far more than talking or doing. It's something I hadn't really thought about before and it's a significant insight, comforting in one way but perhaps not so easy to accept. Thank you Betty and Kate for pointing it out.



DAY 14 Shopping today! No, not for me.... for promotion and fundraising for Support Cambodia. Lots of lovely things but with restricted weight on the aircraft we have had to be very picky. Many old favourites for sure but some new lines as well eg: wraparound skirts, some with tops and a new range of bracelets.

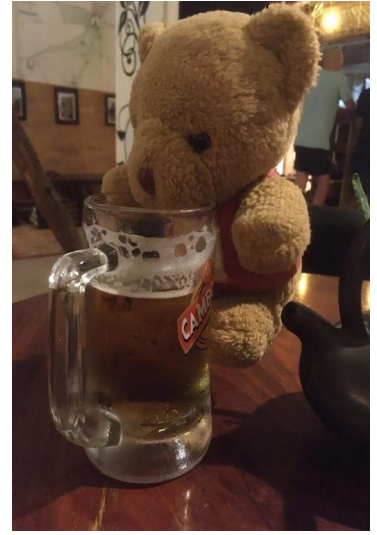
Kate McNeil from Edinburgh who spends 3 months of the year here working as a volunteer, gamely offered to help us choose the crafts and what a help it was. Thanks so much Kate.



DAY 15/16 Final craft shopping in the Psar Chas (Old Market). **Srey Noch and Kunthea** always do us 'best price' partly because we go back every year but also because they know about the work of the charity and what the crafts are for. 'Okoon charen' to them both for Supporting Cambodia!!! Great to catch up with **Fr Franco** this morning after nearly 6 years and be able to say 'goodbye and thank you' to Betty and Kate but sadly missed Fr Totet who is still away. Big thanks also to our good friend **Daly** who came to wave us off along with the wonderful Mr Thy. As we prepare to leave this lovely country once again, a HUGE THANKYOU to everyone (too many to name individually) for your welcome, your hospitality, your enjoyable company, your endless patience with the 'barang' and for your friendship and support, especially in the absence of Bob. Sorry if sometimes we've been rather persistent in our questions but it's only because we care. Special thanks to David for surviving 2 weeks with me and for his invaluable practical support. God willing, we will be back in 2021 + Bob. Bye bye beautiful Kampuchea, Choom reap lee-a!!!!



KARUNA'S TRIP....



Pailin Microfinance scheme is going well



How to use a Community Water Filter!



**Francis proved the new well is working!! and the community enjoyed their toiletries
IF YOU'VE ENJOYED THESE PICTURES, COME ALONG ON MARCH 28th AND WATCH
OUR SLIDE SHOW. CATHOLIC HALL, NORTH WALSHAM 1pm – 2.30pm.**