

Trip to Elephant Mountain May 4, 2008

It is a rainy Sunday morning. We had plans to go to Ban Doi Chang, Elephant Mountain in English, today but Daeng and I have been talking about staying home due to the rain. After some discussion we decided to go with Rev. Sunit, his wife and daughter along with Pastor Lota. The worst that could happen is we get really muddy.



The trip was a little snug with four in the back seat. I was lucky as they all voted to let the big, fat boy have the front passenger seat. As you can see from the picture, that was a good idea.

In about three hours we reached the village, stopping to meet Pastor Lota's brother-in-law who guided us up the mountain in his



Chevy pickup.

We reached Elephant Mountain and it was still raining very hard. Even the

donkey had a rain coat on.



It had been quite a trip up the mountain in the rain on a very narrow road. We could not see due to the heavy clouds but we knew we were high in the mountains as it was cold. Everyone had on jackets. I was glad I had brought the only long sleeve shirt that



I have in Thailand.

We sat around eating fruit and shaking hands with everyone. What the “Akha” hill tribe people do to say “Hello” is shake hands without being verbal. Thai’s usually “wah” (putting there hands together in a praying manor) and say “Sa-wat-dee” followed by “kaa” if a girl says it or “khrab” if a boy says it.

We got to meet Pastor Lota’s sister, brother-in-law and one month old baby as it was their home that we stopped at.



They also invited us to stay with them that night. We told them we would love to stay in their “Akha” home. They showed us around and we got to meet the livestock, too.

The little pig did not like me so I kidded saying if he wasn’t nice we would eat him. I say *little* as he only weighs about 100 kilograms or a *little* over 200 pounds.



We all eat a nice dinner having rice, many vegetable dishes, fried pork and a pickled root that I don’t know what it is named.



After dinner we all jumped in pickup trucks and went up the dirt road to the top of the mountain. We parked the vehicles and walked up the mountain another 100 to 200 meters to a little church. It was full of people from this little village.

They were signing songs as we came in. Pastor Lota stepped up after a few songs and started talking in “Akha”.



He got everyone to start signing a song with “How are You?” in a few different languages,

Thai, Akha, Chinese and yes, even English. He did a great job



motivating everyone.

After

a few minutes he managed to get us all on our feet and singing



together.

Although I am not a religious person, it is really nice to see a Pastor that can get people laughing and motivate them to sing.

Rev. Sunit, with a translator from Thai to Akha, talked about being happy with what we have.



It was a nice evening

service.

Well, back down the mountain in the heavy rain to put ourselves into bed. Although the home we slept in was made of bamboo walls and wallpapered with newspaper to keep the wind out, we felt very comfortable sleeping on the floor with mats. I had flashbacks of kindergarten, over sixty-two years ago.

Morning came fast and we were awakened by the roosters and five “Akha” men singing a song. It was about 6:20 AM and I think they were singing a “Good Morning, Happy to be Alive” song.

We got up and had coffee.



Yes, this is coffee country.

Thirty years ago this area was the biggest and best, I’m told, producer of opium in the world. Yes, these are



poppies!

This picture is old as the King, in the center with glasses on, looks very young.

Now this area is becoming a leader in the coffee trade.



In the basket are coffee plants.



These are coffee plants with coffee beans on them.

We talked with folks as they came by. We were right on the corner of the road where the small pick up truck type buses pick up people going to work in the mountain.



All kinds of transportation

are used, from walking to motor bikes and donkeys. Although it is named Elephant Mountain there are no elephants.

We hung around for a couple of hours taking pictures and talking about the crops, the weather and life in general. One of the things that interested me as we talked to a sixty plus year old lady was the coming of hale. Yes, hale, like in frozen water the size of golf balls.

We were shown a video of a hale storm that happen last month that covered the ground with white balls of frozen water.



She told us that she had only seen it once before and that was just a little amount about a year ago. This time it covered the ground with about three inches of hale and hurt the coffee trees.

While in the mountains we were told just north of us a cyclone had hit Burma (Myanmar) and killed over 22,000 people. I am glad we went into the mountains as we were pretty safe.

Maybe this thing about our weather changing in different ways is true. Could global warming be part of it?

Around 11:00 AM we all jumped in a pickup and went for a ride up the mountain again. It had stopped raining and the sun was



trying to shine. The road would go from concrete to dirt and then out in the middle on no where would become concrete again.



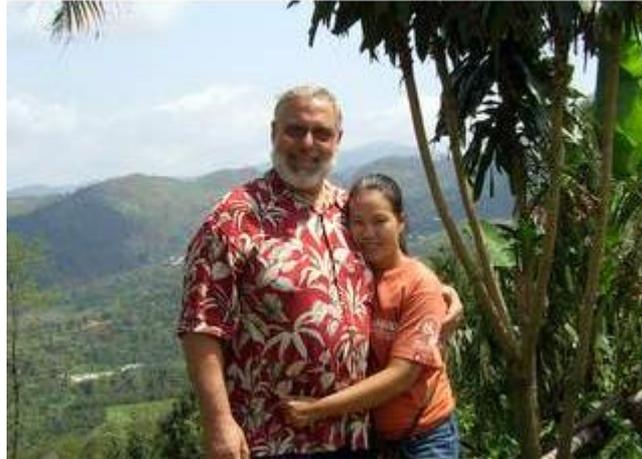
I could not explain that.

We arrived close to the top of this mountain to find the “Doi



Chaang Coffee Company.

We toured the company to find it is “Akha” owned and run by



local people.

As you can

see from the pictures it is very high up in the mountain.

Here is a picture of them sorting coffee beans by hand.



Check out the little kid

under the table.

I had a cup on coffee made from the



local beans

very, very good.

and it was



On the way out of the coffee company we also looked at the



replanting project.

Many years ago; all the trees on the mountains had been cut so now they were trying to re-plant the land.

We jumped back on the pickup truck and went every higher in



the mountain.

We visited

the coffee fields almost on top of the mountain and played with the



kids that live there.

Most of the kids were afraid of me as they had never seen



anyone so funny looking.

One little boy who did not want anything to do with me the day before now wanted to hang up with me all the time.



He was a great little kid.

Yes, that is my stomach in the red shirt.

We traveled down the mountain and as got to Ban Doi Chaang again we found they had butchered the pig.



That means meat for dinner tonight. Many of the village people watched as they cut up the pig. It was for sale for 90 Thai Baht a kilogram.



That amounts to about \$1.50 a pound US dollar.



I told the pig to be nice or we would eat him!

Well, it was time to go so we all jumped in the car, except Pastor Lota as he was staying for a few days.

It was a great trip and fun to be in the mountains with the Akha folks.



Best wishes to all!
Sincerely,
Terry & Daeng