

BAYON

A detailed blue and white illustration of the Bayon temple facade, featuring a central face and multiple smaller faces in niches, topped with a tiered crown.

pearl

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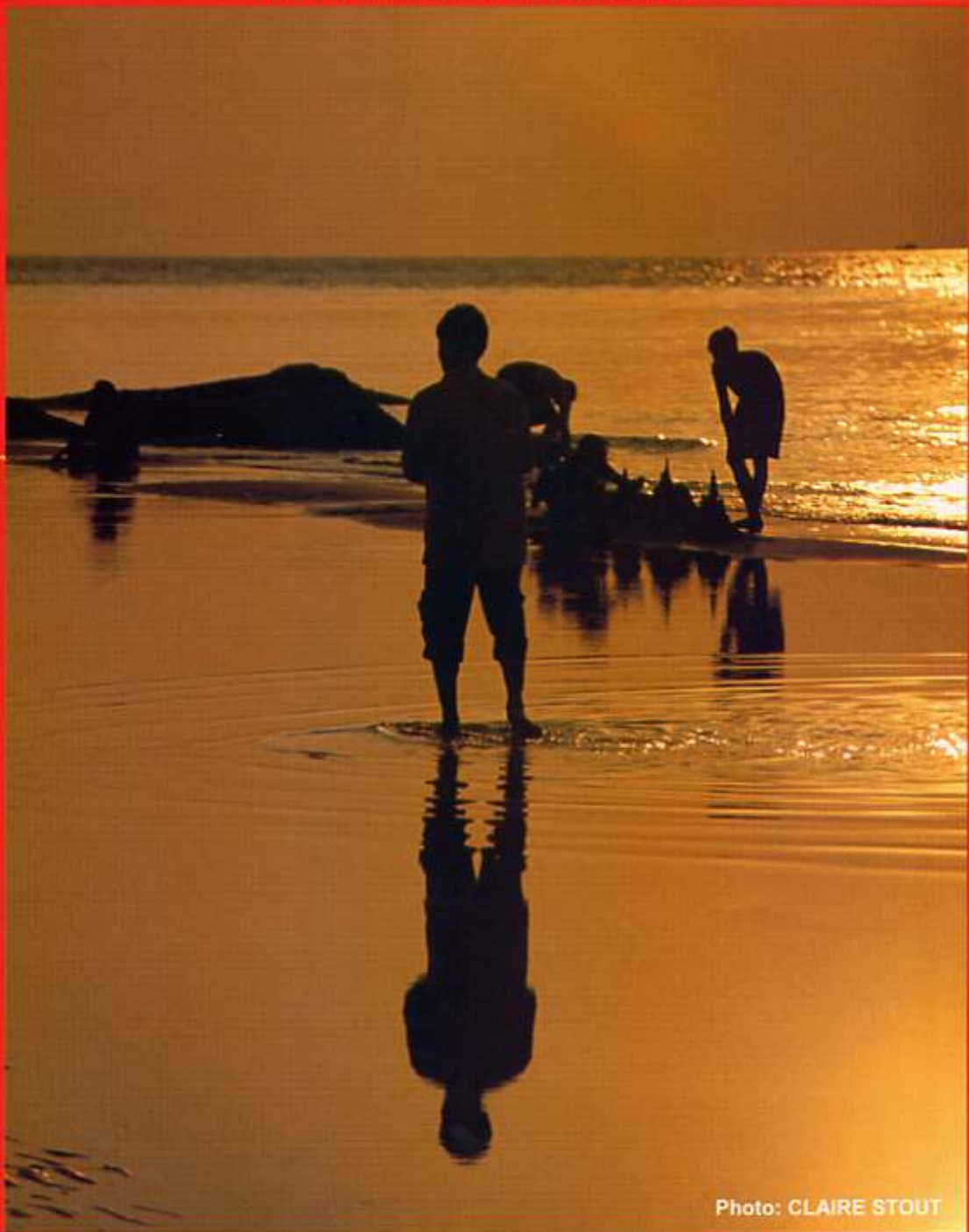


Photo: CLAIRE STOUT

Down the River

Experiencing the Ponle Mekong Crossing by Wayne Murray

We have all heard about it, the Bayon Pearnik has flagged it and now ... here's the first definitive report from someone who has experienced it! What the hell is he talking about you may ask? Well, Noddy ... the trip from Phnom Penh down the river to Chau Doc and beyond, what else!

It started when we set off from the pick-up point in Phnom Penh at 7.30 a.m. The starting time was more dependent on our ability to get motivated early than some tight schedule but as we were to find out, anywhere between 7.00 and 8.00 would have been fine.

On this occasion, 'us' comprised of myself, a between-contracts-consultant, a quiet Italian traveler and a Vietnamese lady who originally came from Chau Doc. The quiet Italian and I were doing a quick circuit to experience to new route to Ho Chi Min City and Than Can, from Chau Doc, was trying the new, quick route back to see her family.

The three of us set off in a freshly cleaned and scented taxi from Phnom Penh. Our first stop was over the Bassac bridge where the taxi driver hunted for extra passengers to fill the empty seats. There were already four of us including the driver, so how many can you fit into a standard

indicated that 'this was it guys!' There was no further indication of what would happen next.

3 or 4 locals wandering around or sitting in the shade of tress and outrooms of the well kept house. The greatest emphasis appeared to be whether anyone from the taxi wanted to use the toilet. No-one spoke English but everyone smiled a lot and sign language works wonders in these circumstances. We were eventually directed around the side of the house and down the riverbank onto a pontoon serving as a floating mooring for 3-4 small fiberglass dinghies. These 9-12 seater open boats were equipped with a 40hp outboard and zipped along at a good pace in calm water but got into a bone-jarring bounce when we hit windy chop. A calm lady seemed to be in control and although not in the least pushy, she organised our bags, the right boat and a young driver. According to our new found interpreter, Thanh Can, she was the owner, who spoke Khmer and Vietnamese but no English.

After a small wait we were seated in the boat and the driver kicked the motor into gear and we were off down the river. Now the disconcerting thing was that the driver had donned a full-face bike helmet for the journey which nicely isolated him from the world and the rest of us. Despite my apprehension and few hairy moments negotiating the wake of faster boats and those heading toward us, the helmet proved more of a sensible piece of occupational apparel than a safety measure. At least he didn't get wind burned ears and a face full of flying insects.

As we zipped along the Mekong between Nek Leung and the border we aroused the curiosity of many riverside folk, enthusiastically waving kids splashing in the tepid water yet our passing in the noisy boat hardly warranted the turning of a head from the many buffalo soaking their thick hides in the warm Mekong mud.

The sameness of the Mekong Delta riverbanks was broken with various shapes and purposes of buildings and working boats, either fishing, dredging, carrying cargoes of everything you will



Camry sedan one may ask ... 'always one more' is the local answer!

Fortunately for us there was only 'one more' person heading in our general direction so it didn't get that cramped in the car, however I was the bunny who got to sit on the lump in the middle of the back seat. This in itself wasn't so bad, what proved annoying were the plastic noddys and gaudy tissue box covers that kept tumbling onto my shoulders from the rear window ledge as we cleared town and hit the ever-so undulating road to Nek Leung. On this stretch of sealed road the usually encountered Cambodian potholes have, for the most part, been carefully engineered out of road design only to be replaced with some incredible dips and bumps that in other circumstances people would pay good money to experience at sideshows and carnivals. Here its free.

The trip to Nek Leung was no better or worse than the majority of reasonable Cambodian highways. However comfort margin of the road was offset by the concentration of all passengers, each praying in our own little ways that the decision making process of the driver would not get us all killed as we ducked and dived in and out of the traffic and from behind high-backed earth moving trucks in the right-hand-drive taxi. Our prayers were answered as the man-with-a-mission tactics of the driver combined with the laissez faire practices of the other road users resulted in us proving how close we were to God by sometimes forming three lanes, undertaking, blind overtaking and always with the constant application of the brake as other road users didn't quiet do what our drive predicted they would. But the world unfolded as it should and as our use-by-dates were not up yet, we arrived in Nek Leung a little before 8.30.

The taxi drove us through the small market to a riverside house and

find in the markets, along with some, I expect, that will only be sold in back rooms, on either side of the border. At one point we passed a beautiful kaleidoscope of greens and blues in a colony of some type of kingfisher birds darting and hovering in the wind current above the riverbank, itself dotted with small burrows that were their nests. The Mekong is visually quite clean at this time of the year and there appeared to be relatively little flotsam or other garbage amongst the reeds on it's banks. A number of small rafts of cane or banana stems were caught in the riverside foliage. These looked like floating religious offerings or maybe something to do with cremation ceremonies.

A good number of large, hardwood logs were tendered or partially dragged up the riverbank in areas where there was no obvious sign of commercial saw milling. I can only assume that these commercially harvested and valuable lumps of timber originated somewhere north of Kampong Cham and floated loose from the rafts of logs that head down the river in the darkness of night.

There were no towns and very few villages in sight of the river between Nek Leung and the border. And the border itself appeared to be only a couple of small settlements with a very small no-mans-land between.

Arriving at the border was a staged event. First we pulled into the bank to let off a local passenger who exercised tremendous agility in leaping from the bobbing boat onto a steep wet and muddy riverbank with his carry bag as a counterbalance and a pair of old flip-flops for traction. It was a little like watching motor racing where spectators are macabrely waiting for the spills while watching the thrills. In this case any expected pleasure in observing a dunking was

Continued Page 29

Ghosts of the Embassy

by Max Lunchtime

THE 1950S, THE RECENTLY INDEPENDENT AND NEUTRAL CAMBODIA OPENED RELATIONS WITH NATIONS AROUND THE WORLD. PHNOM PENH BECAME A HOTBED OF DIPLOMATIC INTRIGUE. IT WAS THOUGHT THAT FEW RECORDS REMAINED OF THIS IMPORTANT ERA. RECENTLY A PALM-WINE FARMER IN SVAY RIENG STRUCK A BISCUIT TIN WHILE SOWING HIS FIELD. IN POOR CONDITION, THESE HAND-WRITTEN DOCUMENTS HAVE PROVEN TO BE A FASCINATING SNAPSHOT OF PHNOM PENH EMBASSY LIFE. WHILE DIFFICULT TO DECIPHER, THESE BOOZY TRANSCRIPTS OF REMINISCES BY AN OLD CAMBODIA HAND HAVE A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE FOR ALL OF US.

The tragedy of Mungo Polk-Stiggles is one (said Hilton) which should give every Thoughtful Person Pause. It did me. It still does. By the purest inadvertency he found himself cast into the Bottomless Pit. He was a bit absentminded that day. Yet what happened to him could happen to any of us.

Mungo was posted to us from the Blues as Military Attach, and he was a gallant and carefree young colonel, full of the spice of life. You felt that he had a rich inner nature if only he could be persuaded to open his mouth. He was one of those mournful cylindrical men with hair parted in the middle—men who say little but think a lot. Yet who knows what they think? I don't. But he was an officer and a gentleman of unblemished reputation and a sportsman to boot. Not only to boot, to saddle as well. He had what is known as a splendid seat. He rode to hounds. However pointless the point-to-point, Mungo would be there, clearing hurdle after hurdle on his thoroughbred mule. He played polo without ever once hitting his horse. Myself I don't know much about horses, and what little I know seems to me singularly charmless. The last time I went hacking with Smythe-Ewing I got left in a tree for roughly the same reasons as Absalom. But that is neither here nor there....

Mungo had won a huge collection of cups and saucers which he wore on his mantelpiece. He shot. He dynamited fish. An all-round sportsman if ever there was one. We were proud of him in the Mission. All this, of course, only made his tragedy harder cheese than ever. It happened while he was in Saigon for a week to help reorganize the French cavalry to face the threat of a rocket age. On the morning of his return he lurched into my office looking like a lot of over-looked washing-up." Hilton," he said, "Hear my story. I am finished, old thing, absolutely finished. I've just put in my resignation and left Smythe-Ewing in tears." He sat down and fumbled for one of my cigars.

"It happened while I was in Saigon," he said. "Quite inadvertent, the whole dashed thing. It could have happened to anyone. I popped into Maxims for a bite. It wasn't until the addition came that I realized. Old man, I had eaten a piece of horse!" I sprang up, startled, "You what?" I cried incredulously, realizing that I was in the presence of tragedy.

"Horse," he repeated wearily, passing his hand over his forehead. "As I live, Hilton, a slice carved from a gee-gee. It all seems like a horrible dream. Yet I must say it cut quite sweetly and the sauce was so dashed good that I didn't realize it. It was only when the bill came that the whole of my past life flashed before my eyes. Dear God—a horse! And I a Colonel in the Blues! I was so surprised you could have poured me out with a spoon."

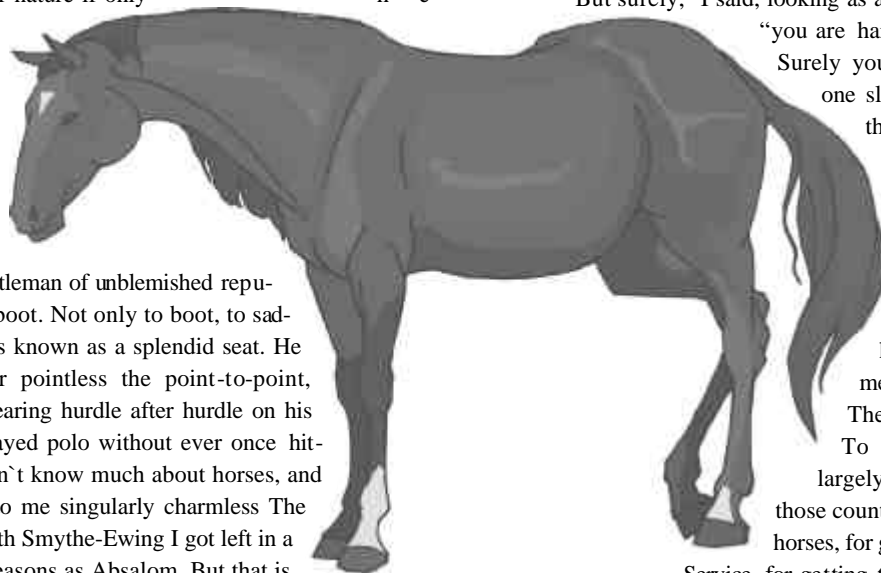
I groaned in sympathy. He gave a harsh cracked laugh and went on. "To think of it, I who have lived for, and practically on, horses. The irony of it all. To find myself sitting there, involuntarily wrapped round a succulent slice of fetlock, feeling the world's biggest bounder. And with a touch of mustard too." He shuddered at the memory.

"But surely," I said, looking as always for the Silver Lining, "you are hardly to be blamed, Mungo.

Surely you could have absorbed just one slice and the Hushed Everything Up? No-one could find it in his heart to blame you." He shook his head sadly. "I thought of that," he said, "but my conscience wouldn't give me any rest, Hilton. After all, here I am, a founder-member of the Society For The Prevention Of Everything To Nags. Old Boy, I was largely instrumental in getting all those country houses set aside for aged horses, for getting them into the Health Service, for getting them painted by Munnings

before the Passed On. Why, we were hoping to get one into Parliament this year...How could I strike my colours, go back on my basic principles? I admit I thought of it. After all, I have eaten many strange things in unguarded moments. I once ate some smoked grandmother in the Outer Celebes, but that was to save the regimental goat. And once at Government House in Gibraltar I think I ate a portion of infant monkey. But it was never proved. The A.D.C. refused to confess. But all this is a far cry from horses, old chap. A different world. No, I confess that I sobbed aloud as I paid that bill."

(To be concluded next month)



KHMER LITERATURE AND PUBLICATIONS

Written by Dr Khing Hoc Dy - CNRS Translated by Damien Morrison

Until the beginning of the 20th century Khmer literature remained hand written script on palmleaf and traditional paper folded in accordion style. The limited number of copies were produced in monastery workshops and at the King's Palace. Khmer traditional manuscript literature, was written to be sung or narrated aloud to an audience unlike modern printed literature which is usually destined for silent reading.

The opening of Cambodia to the modern world began with the signing of a treaty with France in the 1860s. The first signs of change, which paved the way for international exchanges began with the construction of a European style palace in the new capital Phnom Penh during the 1870s,

The first printing press arrived in Indochina in the second half of the 19th century to print official documents for the colonial administration. It published the *"Bulletin officiel de l'expédition de Cochinchine"*. For several decades publishing remained fixed in Hanoi and Saigon, where French administrative texts including journalistic articles concerning Cambodia were edited.

Publishing did not arrive in Cambodia until the end of the 19th century and only in Latin characters for the official French press created by the Protectorate Authorities: *Bulletin officiel du Cambodge, Annuaire illustré du Cambodge, Bulletin de la Chambre mixte de commerce et agriculture...* There were no privately owned printing presses in Cambodia until after 1910: the first newspapers e.g. *Petit Cambodgien* were written then lithographed...

Publishing in Khmer script was introduced late to Indochina and notably Cambodia and it did not have much influence on Khmer culture, because the old cultural structures were essentially still intact, and the Buddhist monks wished to perpetuate the magico-spiritual nature of the Buddhist texts. The new printing technique served the needs of The Protectorate Administration, scientific institutions and missionaries.

The first Khmer publication was in Saigon in 1878 by Son Diep, Etienne Aymonier's interpreter. The Protectorate Publisher under the direction of Adhemard Leclere edited around 20 publications on traditional Khmer law which are conserved in the "Bibliothèque de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient" in Paris. In Cambodia the first texts of pure Khmer literature were published in 1908 in Phnom Penh, again under the direction of Adhemard Leclere, Resident Mayor of the Royal Capital.

In France at the end of the 19th century the priest M.J. Guesdon created mobile printing characters in Khmer script that were used for publishing by Plon-Nourrit, 8 Rue Garancière, Paris.

By 1906 the priest Marie Joseph Guesdon was considered to be the foremost expert on Cambodia and Cambodian culture, especially Khmer literature, there were no contemporary researchers to match him. Even today his immense talent and years of work collecting and publishing Khmer literature remain largely unacknowledged.

Born in Palluau [Vendée] France 21st January 1852 Guesdon was 23 years old when he arrived in Cambodia, the enlightened young man was

in trouble the year after his arrival for encouraging slave emancipation, and by 1881 conflicts with superiors in the Jesuit Mission Order led to his exclusion from the Cambodian mission. He spent the next two years

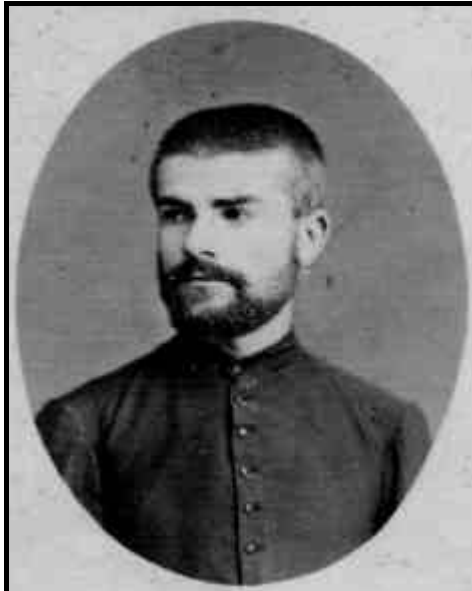


PHOTO "M. J. GUESDON" COURTESY OF

in Hong Kong translating a Khmer/Latin dictionary into Khmer/French. In 1883 he returned to Cambodia and completed an extensive 3600 page Khmer/French dictionary, but he was soon in trouble with his superiors again, for collecting money from outside the white Christian community to build a hospital in Phnom Penh [there was no hospital in Phnom Penh at the time]. In 1886 Guesdon left the Jesuit Order and in 1888 he returned to France.

Guesdon had a global understanding of traditional Khmer literature, and classed works from the 16th to 19th centuries into 3 major divisions:

- 1 The Satras tes [tesna] - doctrinal works
- 2 The Satras Ibeng - pleasant attractive works
- 3 The Tamras or Kbuon - technical works, medicine, astrology, magic, architecture

To give the reader a better appreciation of his work here is an abridged list from his 53 publications:

Khmer Paintings, with explanations

12 education manuals

Tumpek teang buon, The 4 Bald Men

Chau kdang bay, The Rice Crust Man

Sek som nung sraka, The Parrot and the Backbird's Friendship

Krong sapplamit, Grand Poem on the Buddhasatva

Rottisen neang pitan dap, The 12 Women [Buddhisatva] Buddhas (or enlightened ones) to be.

Chbap srei, women's education manual

Pralieng meas, To the Seasons [rhymed chant]

Christian book of prayer, [preas thorsaut]

Mday pit apuk pit, srei pit, The King Marries a Poor Girl

Vorvong Saurvong, Epic Poem [Buddhisatva]

Royal Vocabulary, Pali, Khmer, French

2 Cambodian maps, Khmer text/ French text

Pimpea Nirpean, Confessions of Buddha's wife

Vesandar, Buddha's Last Avatar

600 Cambodian Proverbs

55 Sutras with Analysis and Critic. (Works considered to have been revealed by Buddha after he passed into Nirvana)

The History of Khmer Characters Cambodian Grammar

French - Khmer dictionary Khmer - French dictionary

Unfortunately most of Father Guesdon's publications are not in the National Library in Paris because before the 1st World War Plon- Nourrit Publications did not always copyright, however the complete series can be found in the Etienne Aymonier collection conserved in the Cedrasemi Library [Centre de Documentation et Recherche sur L'Asie de Sud Est] of Paris, currently housed at Nice University. All the manuscripts of the Guesdon collection and some of the publications from the Plon Nourrit Cambodian printing house are conserved in The Library of L'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient in Paris.

Continued next month



Quiz Time

Taken from the Ministry of Tourism's web site. This piece of travel advice seems to have some glaring mistakes along with quite a few others we haven't printed.

Defunked airlines and destinations not serviced on a piece of paper to the M.O.T. please.

"By air, you can travel with Cambodian Airlines for domestic flights such as Royal Air Cambodge, Siem Reap Airway, Royal Phnom Penh Airways and the President Airline. The flight routes are set for major tourist destinations and economic zones at the provinces of Siem

Reap, Battambang, Koh Kong, Ratanakiri and Monduliri."

Housework

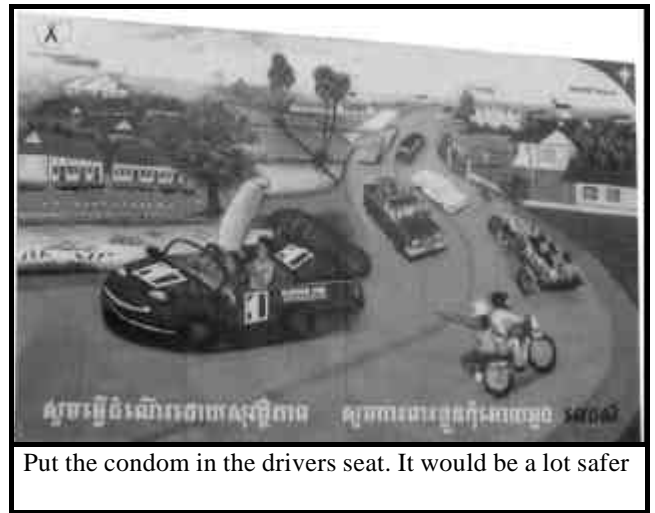
If you rent a house here and you don't want it in a Khmers name put it in the contract as your office or business premises. That way you only pay 650 riel a kwh as opposed to 800 riel a kwh. Do it now and backdate the contract as EDC are on the prowl and are backdating the higher charges.

Scam Survey

Interesting to see a new census of foreign nationals is underway here. Knowing the people involved it stinks. One person already processed had to produce his tax returns for the last four years. Sounds like they are using it as an excuse to go beyond their powers and explore all avenues of extracting cash.

Be prepared

On a more somber note. If you live here and happen to die. Leave instructions and contact details with friends. Basically keep the embassy (U.S. & U. K.) out of everything except the paperwork. They don't care about you, friends or obligations you have here. They just want to pack all your stuff and ship it with your remains (cremated as cheaply as possible. Not even a coffin) back home. Presenting



Put the condom in the drivers seat. It would be a lot safer

your family with a large bill and leaving a sour taste in friends mouths.

On the same note congratulations to the Daily for the most factually incorrect piece seen in years here concerning the death of Greg Schuske.

Even after a visit to your offices pointing out the glaring errors the correction the next day was wrong and incomplete as it didn't address the main errors.

He was hit head on by a car driving on the wrong side of the road. He did not work for this magazine or the American School. As all this was explained in the first place to one of their reporters. Obviously your training (joke) program is failing miserably.

To the editors contacted. If you can't even get a correction correct it's a pretty sad state of affairs. So count this a payback correction for your mistakes.

The Geography of a Woman

Between the ages of 18 - 21. A woman is like Africa or Australia. She is half discovered, half wild and naturally beautiful with bush land around the fertile deltas.

Between the ages of 21 - 30. A woman is like America or Japan. Completely discovered, very well developed and open to trade especially with countries with cash or cars.

Between the ages of 30 - 35. She is like India or Spain. Very hot, relaxed and convinced of its own beauty.

Between the ages of 35 - 40. A woman is like France or Argentina. She may have been half destroyed during the war but can still be a warm and desirable place to visit.

Between the ages of 40 - 50. She is like Yugoslavia or Iraq. She lost the war and is haunted by past mistakes. Massive reconstruction is now necessary.

Between the ages of 50 - 60. She is like Russia or Canada. Very wide, quiet and the borders are practically unpatrolled but the frigid climate keeps people away.

Between the ages of 60 - 70. A woman is like England or Mongolia. With a glorious and all conquering past but alas no future.

After 70. They become Albania or Afghanistan. Everyone knows where it is, but no one wants to go there.

The Geography of a Man

Between the ages of 15 - 70. A man is like Zimbabwe - ruled by a dick.

WHERE DO THOSE TAX DOLLARS GO? NICE WALL SHAME ABOUT THE



Ministry of Tourism FAQ

THE CAMBODIA MINISTRY OF TOURISM RECENTLY PUBLISHED A FAQ ON ITS WEBSITE. GOOD IDEA, YES? IN PRACTICE. NO.

Granted, there is some accurate information, but there's quite a bit of misinformation as well. While some of the answers are good for a chuckle, other answers are dangerously irresponsible in the false information they provide. Here's a bit of what they have to say:

After first mentioning that visas can be obtained at Cambodian embassies and consulates overseas, (*Do not get a three month visa abroad at an embassy as they are not valid. One month is all they can issue so a large overstay penalty is due when you go to leave. This has happened a few times recently!! ED*) they offer the following:

Where else can I obtain an entry-visa?

Beside the Pochentong Airport International and Siem Reap Airport, there are additionally few of border gateways where travellers can apply for an entry-visa upon their arrival such as Poi Pet and Cham Yeam Cambodian-Thai Border-(gateways and Bavet and Phnom Den Cambodian-Vietnamese Border-gateways????).

In particular, the entry-visa is free for Cambodian nationals who live abroad and Malaysians. Also, the entry visa is free of charge for the Service and Diplomatic Passport holders from Myanmar, Brunei, Philippines and Vietnam.

Well they don't seem to have much of an idea do they. Visas are issued at Thai border crossings but not Laos and Vietnam.

How much shall I pay for my entry-visa?

There are two types of entry-visa shall be paid:

Business visa US\$ 25.00 Tourist visa US\$ 20.00

Apparently the MOT has never tried to enter by land from Thailand where they demand 1000 baht (now about \$23.75) for the tourist visa and 1500 baht (now about \$35.65) for the business visa refusing to accept US dollars. Likewise, at the embassy in Bangkok, while accepting US dollars they also accept Thai baht but at these same ridiculous exchange rates.

How much shall I pay for airport tax?

The costs of airport tax are: Domestic Airport Tax: US\$ 10.00 International Airport Tax: US\$ 20.00

Not exactly the whole story. International departure tax from Siem Reap is \$8 and until recently, domestic tax was \$4. At Phnom Penh and Siem Reap (and possibly everywhere else) domestic departure tax is now \$5.

Do I need any vaccinations?

Travellers have very little to worry about in a country where health standards are ranked amongst the highest in Asia. Vaccinations are not required to enter the Kingdom of Cambodia; unless coming from a "yellow" infected area.

Hello. Are we talking about the same planet?

"...little to worry about in a country where health standards are ranked amongst the highest in Asia"? High standards by what measurement? The likelihood to contract frostbite?? Please guys, be honest, health standards in Cambodia stink. Promote tourism as much as you want but don't misrepresent the health standards of Cambodia it can put tourists lives at risk.

What are temperature and climate for the whole year round in Cambodia?

Cambodia has a tropical climate with three distinct seasons – Hot/Dry from March to May, Rainy/Monsoon from June to October and small Winter/

Cool from November through February. The average annual temperature is 28C – 32C, this ranges in the capital city of Phnom Penh. The temperature during the small winter is 14C - 16C at provinces throughout the country but in Phnom Penh is about 16C – 20C. In the early April, it is found that there are some rain showers through the beginning of May. The end of May and the beginning of June the full monsoon starts till the end of October.

For the average tourist, hot all year with varying humidity.

What are the medical services available in Cambodia?

Medical services are available in all towns at government run hospitals and private clinics. Non-prescription drugs are available at pharmacies as well as supermarkets, hotels, and shopping centres. International class hotels also have their individual in-house medical Doctor to service their guests.

This is where the answers begin to go from funny to dangerously irresponsible. Yes, medical services are available at government-run hospitals. There are hospitals in every provincial capital. You do not want to go to any of these. Contrary to what MOT may try to tell you, the standard of medical care in Cambodia is nowhere near international standards unless you're using the standards of say, the year 1920. There are a few decent clinics in Phnom Penh: the International SOS, I mean SOS Clinic, Naga Medical Center, and Tropical and Travellers Medical clinic If you have a serious problem, the best thing to do is get yourself to Bangkok ASAP.

As for drugs, well yes, non-prescription drugs are available at pharmacies, as well as most any prescription drug (and I do mean ANY), none of which you will need a prescription to obtain. However, counterfeiting of medication continues to be a problem. Buyer beware.

Is it safe to drink tap water?

It is generally safe to drink water directly from the tap. However, mineral water is also readily available in shops and supermarkets everywhere.

This is ridiculous. Absolutely positively irresponsible false misleading dangerous bullshit!!!! Don't even think about drinking tap water. EVER!!!! Many expats, won't even use tap water to brush their teeth. C'mon, has MOT forgotten how many deaths there were in 1999 from cholera in Ratanakiri province alone??? Any tourist that takes a drink of tap water will almost certainly be sprinting for a toilet in short time. And that's if they're lucky. DO NOT DRINK TAP WATER!!!!!!

How do I rent and drive a car in Cambodia?

You will require an international driving permit or a valid license issued by your government to drive in Cambodia. Car rental can be arranged through hotel or through various car rental companies which can be located through the Yellow Pages Directory.

I've never heard of anyone ever having to produce a driver's license to drive any vehicle in Cambodia. That said, unless you have experience driving in a third world country, you'd be absolutely nuts to drive a vehicle in Cambodia. Don't do it!! Hire a vehicle with driver.

Do I require medical insurance before travelling to Cambodia?

It is a good idea for you to take have medical insurance before you travel to Cambodia as Cambodia does not have reciprocal health service agreements with other nations

You will definitely need insurance if you follow the MOT's suggestion to forego vaccinations, drink the water, drive a car, or use local medical facilities.

The Matrix - Reloaded

Movie Review by Cletus J. "Bubba" Huckabee, Jr.

Now if you ask me, and plenty folks do on a semi-regular basis, this here moving picture is one of the finest examples of sequelization to come out of Hollywood in the past...oh, three months. Have ya'll noticed that them brain-dead Hollywood boys can't seem to come up with an original idea any more? There are basically two main types of moving picture coming out of Hollywood these days; sequels and moving pictures based on a television program from a couple decades back.

Brother Danny, the pastor of the Emancipation Church back in Chesterfield County, claims them Hollywood boys are all caught up in prurient, lascivious, debauchery and the reason they can't come up with no new ideas is because their minds are all addled due to too much booze, too many drugs, and left-leaning politics. I don't rightly know what their problem is, but I certainly am sick and tired of nothin' but remakes and sequels.

I sure enough did enjoy the first installment of this series, but I don't know if I can stand a string of 15 pictures based on the same blasted story.

It's like Junior and knock-knock jokes. That boys gets one he thinks is a winner, and he tells it for the next six months over and over and over again. If I fuss at him he pouts, if I ignore him Mama scolds me, if I play along then he is encouraged to tell the same joke again

thirty minutes later because he thinks we all enjoy it as much as he does.

Bernice (that's Betty Mae's cousin who's here staying with us while she and Billy-Ray work things out) tries to help out when she can by distracting him and getting him on different subject, but it don't take long for him to remember his joke and tell it all over again. A while back I got so sick of this one knock-knock joke he was tellin' that I took him out back and used a roll of duct tape to fasten him to the tree out behind the house. He stood there for a good three hours while I went in and had me a nap, but then mama came home and found him out there and she liked to chewed my ear off fussin' and snappin' at me because of what I had done, "to her boy."

She made me take him out for ice cream to make up for the duct tape ordeal and we ended up at that Filipino place and he had him some ube flavored ice cream. I asked the woman who worked there what an ube was, but I couldn't understand a lick of what she said when she answered. Now, I don't know about you, but another thing what gets me all worked up is the misuse of our language. That place two countries to the East is called The Philippines. The folk what live there are called Filipinos. We ain't got gender differentiation for nouns like the French and Spanish, so we ain't got Filipinos and Filipinas.... We only got Filipinos. If them folk

want to go to the trouble of differentiating between the genders in their own tongue then I have no beef with them because that is fine with me. But when they commence to communicate in English then I sure as heck do wish they would drop the "Filipina" and shift their gears over to English and just use "Filipino." I attempted to discuss this with the woman at the ice cream place, but I couldn't understand a word she said and actually I am not sure she was right in the mind.

Then, with purple ice cream drip-pin' down his arm, Junior told her his favorite knock-knock joke and she liked to bust a gut laughin'. She laughed so hard that tears were streamin' down her cheeks and she looked at me and said somthin' I couldn't understand, then because she and Junior were standing there looking at me like I was supposed to answer a question, I realized she had asked me a question.... But I didn't have any idea what she had said, so I turned to Junior and looked at him for some help, and they both busted out laughin' and slapped their thighs and clutched at their guts and leaned against the walls and they have been the best of buddies ever since.

Me and Mama were up on the riverfront a while back and we went in to that Filipino dive called San Mig Pub and told them to rustle up some grub and they brought out a couple plates of offal, some barbecued innards, a bowl of half

cooked meat of dubious origin, and some warm beer. I had nightmares for three days running, and I didn't even eat any of it. That was the skankiest stuff I ever seed in a Phnom Penh eatery and it ain't no wonder that place closed down due to lack of interest. I went back in the back looking for the kitchen because I wanted to complain to the cook, but it was a labyrinth of passages and doorways back there and I never did spot the kitchen nor the cook, but the word labyrinth reminds me of the word matrix, which is the title of this here series of moving pictures and I guess that is as good a segue as I'm going to get this month.

This here moving picture gets three thumbs up from me because that girl what plays the part of Trinity is so winsome. Mama wouldn't look at it because she finds Science Fiction confusing, but Junior, Bernice, and the twins thought it was pretty good too. We went out and had ube ice cream at the Filipino place after.

IRINA'S RUSSIAN RESTAURANT

Forget any negative preconceived ideas you may have about Russian cuisine, due to a dodgy experience a few years ago on the countries national airline serving food you found difficult to recognize or describe. Irina's traditional home cooking is top notch, located in a large villa in very pleasant surroundings. Irina's been serving her popular speciality cuisine in Phnom Penh for many years, gaining a loyal expat following. We couldn't fault it, enjoying every plate and rate it one of the best places to dine in town, plus their reasonably priced. Starters about \$2.50, set meals / main dishes \$5, we tried Sefjodka – fresh salted fish, Borsch – tomato and chicken soup, Ljula - minced pork kebabs, Lamb with Russian sauce and Irina's special – meat, potatoes, vegetables baked in the oven topped with cheese and mayonnaise. Lots more to choose from including vegetarian, check it out.

Irina, Russian Restaurant, #7 St 228 open 12pm – 11pm, Tel: 012 833524




Horror-Scope

Agro Vänker, Scandinavia's best-loved diesel mechanic and odd jobs man, is having a break. So Fred Twisted (evenly balanced, he has a chip on both shoulders) reads your stars.

Gemini: (May 21—June 21)

You've never asked for much out of life, but you have every reason to be disappointed, anyway.

Cancer: (June 22—July 22)

An unexpected career change will give you cause to look back fondly on the days when you had no idea who made fat-granny pornography.

Leo: (July 23—Aug. 22)

Most people believe they're the star of their own story, but you're actually a supporting character in the story of that guy Dave in the design department.

Virgo: (Aug. 23—Sept. 22)

Everyone wants to live forever, but in your case it would just mean more time being chased by an angry swarm of bees.

Libra: (Sept. 23—Oct. 23)

You're not actually the lost prince of a world within our own, forced to hide among the surface dwellers to protect yourself from your vengeful uncle. But thinking that may help you somewhat.

Scorpio: (Oct. 24—Nov. 21)

The age-old war between the sexes will come to an end next week when you unleash your nuclear sex bomb.

Sagittarius: (Nov. 22—Dec. 21)

If you think happy endings are superficial and unrealistic, you should be pleased with the way it all wraps up next Thursday.

Capricorn: (Dec. 22—Jan. 19)

The wonder is not how well the bear dances, but that it can dance at all. Still, the bear dances a hell of a lot better than you do.

Aquarius: (Jan. 20—Feb. 18)

You will devise a scheme that guarantees worldwide peace and prosperity, but it turns out to be unmarketable.

Pisces: (Feb. 19—March 20)

Lord knows you've tried, but you still can't understand how one person could watch all the high-quality TV they offer.

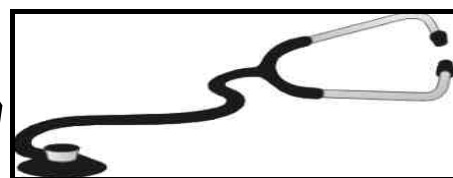
Aries: (March 21—April 19)

Your desire for a belt of human nipples wanes when you are told where human nipples come from.

Taurus: (April. 20—May 20)

If it makes you feel any better, red to you is not red to everyone else. Other people's red is slightly deeper and more tasteful.

SKIN INFECTIONS



"Skin, skin is a wonderful thing,

Keeps the outside out and the inside in"

Fungal infections

These can affect any part of your skin, especially around the sweaty areas such as the groin and feet. Tinea (ringworm), the cause of athlete's foot, can affect any part of the body and is usually acquired indirectly; for example the lady who developed ringworm on the buttocks as a result of her husband's habit of cutting his toenails with his feet resting on the lavatory seat.

Candidiasis (thrush) is a normal part of our digestive tract; commonly get this infection in the vagina due to the latter's close proximity to the anus, and male partners are likely to develop a rash under the foreskin and at the top of the legs. Antifungal creams need to be used for at least two weeks; in difficult cases oral

antifungals are necessary, but care is needed in choosing which one, as one commonly available in Phnom Penh can cause severe liver damage and death. Antifungal powders are pretty useless but are the preferred choice of the lazy.

Bacterial Infections

"A mighty creature is the germ Though smaller than the pachyderm.

His customary dwelling place

Is deep within the human race.

His childish pride he often pleases

By giving people strange diseases

Do you, my poppet, feel infirm?

You probably contain a germ."

In the tropics a simple cut on the foot can lead to a severe leg infection so clean all cuts with betadine, and keep them covered and dry. Recurrent boils, particularly in the armpits, may require antibiotics for over a month.

Skin Parasites

"There is a squeak of pure delight

From a matey little mite

As it tortuously tunnels in the skin,

Singing furrow, folly furrow

Come and join me in my burrow,

And we'll view the epidermis from within"

Scabies is caused by the mite *Sarcoptes Scabiei* (Greek "flesh cutter") and is acquired by close physical contact of a prolonged nature. After fertilizing the female, the male mite dies and the female then burrows all over the place laying eggs as well as faeces—it is the faeces which cause the itch some four weeks later.

Considering how widespread this disease is in Cambodia there is a surprising lack of suitable medication available (beware the unlabelled plastic bottle of white liquid from under the counter—it was probably appropriated from the

UN in 1992 and expired five years ago).

Other Diseases

There are many tropical diseases which can affect the skin. Avoid walking barefoot on a beach or in a garden where there are dog faeces, otherwise you may see a dog parasite migrating under the skin of your feet. Another typical skin affliction frequently seen are what appear to be cigarette burns on the neck or belt line caused by a local insect.

So sleep under a mosquito net, use a knock-down spray in the room, sleep tight but don't let the bugs bite.

—Dr. Gavin Scott

TROPICAL & TRAVELLERS MEDICAL CLINIC

#88 St 108 Phnom Penh Tel 023
366802, 012 898981, 015 912100.

GORDONS MOTODOP MISSION

A CONTINUANCE OF MR. SHARPLESS'S ONE MAN
CAMPAIGN TO OVERHAUL ON PART OF THE NATIONAL
TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE.

Motodop hassles!!!

What? Did you think I'd go a month without offering more #\$\$%& on that omnipresent Cambodian form of public transport? However, this upcoming advice applies equally to car taxis, as they can be just as guilty of what I'm going to address as their two-wheeled cohorts.

Okay, you're taking a motodop (or taxi) to a place a bit outside Siem Reap like Banteay Srei or Kbal Spean, or perhaps you've hired a guy to take you somewhere a few hours from Phnom Penh, say Udong or Tonle Bati, or even as far as Kampot. Despite having agreed upon a price, halfway to your destination the guy stops, turns around and asks for more money. What do you do?

If you're not too familiar with your surroundings, perhaps you'd look around, have visions of Khmer Rouge abductions or maybe have concern for spending the night in some village miles from where you want to be, so you agree to his demands and pay up the extra cash. Bad idea.

Call the bastard's bluff. Get off the bike or get out of the taxi. If he leaves you where you are, you will find another ride, trust me. If you're anywhere north of Siem Reap on the road to Banteay Srei, Kbal Spean, Phnom Kulen, or even quiet route 34 to Anlong Veng, it will be short time before another motorbike or car will come by and happily agree to take you where you want to go and probably for a whole lot less than the first price you had agreed to with Mr. Reliable. TRUST ME!!!! Do not yield to this kind of extortion. No matter what B.S. the guy pulls, do not budge. Having gone halfway to the destination do you really think the guy is going to go back to Siem Reap or Phnom Penh empty-handed? And if he does, let him. His loss. This of course assumes you didn't pay the guy anything up front. When dealing with taxis, motodops, pick-up trucks in Cambodia - NEVER pay anything up front!!!!

I know it would seem mighty intimidating to be standing on the side of the road in an unfamiliar place in an unfamiliar country, but please take my word for it - if the guy refuses to continue at the agreed upon price, then leave him -- You will get another ride in very short time. Fortunately, this is not a common occurrence, but, regrettably it still does happen. Don't be bullied!

Motodop Mafias in Siem Reap

I've often complained (*underestimation*) about what a pain in the arse motodops can be, with their overcharging, little scams and games and so on... so here's another piece of motodop nonsense in Siem Reap.

Some motodops affiliate themselves with a particular hotel or guesthouse. Through whatever connections they may have with the owners, the drivers will hang out at the guesthouse or hotel using it as a source of customers. In return for this privilege they'll have to pay a dollar or two back to the hotel as a commission each time they get a customer.

Needless to say, these guys are very protective of their turf. You would think as a tourist this is of no concern to you, but it can be a concern because some of these guys are going way overboard with protecting their little 'hoods.

Imagine if you will, that you flag down a motodop in Siem Reap simply to return you to your guesthouse, perhaps you were shopping in Psah Chas, maybe having lunch in a local restaurant. And the motodop is not one of the guesthouse thugs but is perhaps some old guy that works independently. You get near your guesthouse, maybe 50 meters away - and he stops. But you're still not at the door? Why's he doing that? You complain to him but to no avail as there is a language problem - you don't speak Khmer and he can barely speak English. He refuses to go any closer to your guesthouse. Annoyed, you throw some money at the guy and stomp off.

What you didn't know and the driver would have told you if he could, is that your particular guesthouse has a nasty group of motodop drivers that, had your driver taken you to the door, would have at the very least given him a hard time for "stealing" one of their customers and just as likely demanded he give them a commission - a cut of what you paid him. Do you see the sense in this? Neither do I. But it's happening in Siem Reap.

Way to go, motodop morons.

Gordon is currently undergoing psychiatric evaluation after complaining that he could only get to sleep by closing his eyes and counting motodops crashing over a gate and the odd incident where he thought they were coming for him out of the wallpaper.

His opinions are not that of this magazine (well they've never come for me out of walls). The sleep technique seem quite interesting. It would give you that satisfied warm glow inside. Yes some are pricks!! ED

The World Café, Battambang. **facts of life!**

Delicious, hot and steaming, bread fresh from the oven, homemade soups, pasta, made on the premises, transformed into lasagna, ravioli, tagliatelle.. roast lamb. chocolate mousse. Surely we must be talking about a new restaurant in Phnom Penh. Actually, no, Battambang to be exact.

The World Café, a riot of colour and dragonflies, situated by the Sangket river, is a delight on the eye, the palette and the purse. Opened by Eddie a Brazilian chef, trained in the US and his partner Vincent, the quintessential Englishman, the World Café has taken Battambang by its culinary laurels and thrust it into the 21st century.

Open for lunch and dinner, the café is a place to unwind and meet other ex-pats and travelers. The host, Vincent, is a mine of information on the local area and will help with information and contacts if he can, and, while Eddie cooks up a storm in the kitchen, you can chill out in a hammock, find a backgammon partner or just read a book and watch the world go by.

The Café was set up last December and has been steadily gathering converts ever since. Because the food is delicious and the ambience relaxing and welcoming the café has since become something of an early evening bar for many of the ex-pat crowd in Battambang who gather there before moving onto the late night venue, the Balcony Bar. There they are usually joined by Eddie or Vincent who themselves unwind after a hard day.

The menu is essentially American Italian, with loads of what 'barangs' like, cheese, tomato sauce with locally grown herbs, fresh homemade bread, soups made fresh daily with local ingredients, prawns, delicious salads, chicken breasts, steaks. Specials change weekly or daily depending on Eddie's mood. The, pudding menu is expanding all the time, and with the advent of the new freezer, there is also the possibility of ice-cream.

Prices are moderate, for approximately \$4 you can have a small salad, soup and a roll and a main course of pasta. Coffee is 80cents.

So, if you want a languid lunch or a delicious dinner the World Café is worth a visit, we're sure you won't be disappointed - it's bloody good grub!

Open Tuesday to Sunday 11am to 2pm Dinner 5pm to Late (ish)

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**DO NOT READ THIS IF YOU ARE RELIGIOUS,
EASILY OFFENDED OR JUST NARROW MINDED.
YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!!**

- Q1. If the dove is the bird of peace, what is the bird of true love?
A1. The swallow
- Q2 How do you annoy your girlfriend during sex?
A2. Phone her.
- Q3. Why do women fake orgasms?
A3. Because they think men care.
- Q4. What is the definition of "making love"?
A4. Something a woman does while a guy is screwing her.
- Q5. What should you do if your girlfriend starts smoking?
A5. Slow down and use a lubricant.
- Q6. How many sextists does it take to change a light bulb?
A6. None, let the bitch cook in the dark.
- Q7. What's the difference between pre-menstrual tension and BSE?
A7. One's mad cow disease, the other's an agricultural problem.
- Q8. Why does the bride always wear white?
A8. Because it is good for the dishwasher to match the stove and refrigerator..
- Q9. What do you say to a woman with 2 black eyes?
A9. Nothing, she's been told twice already.
- Q10. How many men does it take to open a beer?
A10. None. It should be opened by the time she brings it
- Q11. How do you turn a fox into an elephant?
A11. Marry it!
- Q12. What is the difference between a battery and a woman?
A12. A battery has a positive side.
- Q13. What are the three fastest means of communication?
1) Internet 2) Telephone 3) Telawoman
- Q14. Why do hunters make the best lovers?
A14. Because they go deep in the bush, shoot more than once and they eat what they shoot.
- Q15. How are fat girls and mopeds alike?
A15. They're both fun to ride until your friends find out.
- Q16. What should you give a woman who has everything?
A16. A man to show her how to work it.
- Q17. How are twisters (tornadoes) and marriage alike?
A17. They both begin with a lot of blowing and sucking, and in the end you lose your house.
- Q18. Why does a bride smile when she walks up the aisle?
A18. She knows she's given her last blow job.
- Q19. What's the difference between a bitch and a slag?
A19. A slag sleeps with everyone at the party and A bitch sleeps with everyone at the party except you.
- Q20. Why is the space between a women's breasts and her hips called a waist?
A20. Because you could easily fit another pair of tits in there.
- Q21. Do you know why they call it the Wonder Bra?
A21. When you take it off you wonder where her tits went.
- Q22. How do you make 5 pounds of fat look good?
A22. Put a nipple on it

B.P. MOVIE REVIEW

Star Wars 2: Attack of the Clones

Reviewed for Bayon Pearnik by Jacko

It was with calm, soberingly mild anticipation that I began watching the latest freshly-pirated installment of the Star Wars saga; naturally Cambodia is mercifully free of the commercial hype and hysteria that would normally accompany a major money-spinner such as this.

I, like many others, found Episode 1 largely unsatisfying despite its foundation-building pretext, and so was looking forward to a redemptory effort from Lucas and Co. And on the whole, I was not disappointed.

Episode 2 is a remarkable marvel of a movie with all the laser-filled battles, political intrigue, astounding vistas and colorful characters that we have come to expect from great sci-fi films. The major clashes in the second half of the film are pure entertainment: to see a myriad of droids battle a clone army with the entire Jedi team in the middle is simply spectacular cinema. The always popular lightsaber fights are also plentiful here, the undisputable highlight being little Yoda (voiced by Frank Oz) taking on Jedi-turned-bad Count Dooku (Christopher Lee) in a blistering duel that proves size isn't everything.

The story finds Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) acting like a spoilt momma's boy while pining over Senator (former Queen) Padme Amidala (an exquisite Natalie Portman) as they find themselves fighting the dark side again after ten years apart. While their fairy-tale relationship is drippy to the point of implausibility, it was forgivable since we know where it has to go: there are blanks to fill in here that we've been waiting twenty years for. There are even some tongue-in-cheek references to the foregone conclusions: Obi Wan laments to an arrogant Anakin, "Why do I get the feeling that you'll be the death of me", prompting chuckles from devotees. Ewan McGregor (Obi Wan) settles flawlessly into his role of dutiful but frustrated Jedi Knight, however Samuel L. Jackson (Mace Windu) is still in bad-ass mode and thus fails to convince as a semi-enlightened Jedi Master. The annoying Ja

Ja Binks makes an unwelcome return, but thankfully only for a few minutes.

The plot advances with trademark swiftness, with the duplicitous Supreme Chancellor (Ian McDiarmid) furthering and legitimizing his power over the republic while the furtive clone army gets its finishing touches from some very tall X-Files aliens. Still, the whole Anakin-misses-his-mommy sub-plot was not really a credible arc in which to plant the dark seeds of his inevitable turn.

The visual and sound effects are fantastic and the first-class score - with the now familiar themes - is consistent with the entire saga. While the film falters at the weaknesses of some of its support cast, Episode 2 finally does the Star Wars franchise justice as easily the best episode since *Empire Strikes Back*, and will probably accompany it one of the great pieces of sci-fi cinema.

And now another perspective.

Star Wars2: Attack Of The Clones

In many ways, George Lucas has only his success to blame. As one of the leading lights of the digital movement, Lucas and his effects wizards at Industrial Light & Magic have made miracles look a little more commonplace with every passing year, by turning out CGI worlds so awesome that awe alone is beginning to show its limitations. In *Attack Of The Clones*, a turgid and uninspired entry in the diminishing Star Wars pantheon, virtually every shot has been designed to introduce jaws to the pavement, with dense cityscapes that stretch to infinity in all directions and breathtaking panoramas that put nature's best to shame. But without the mythical power or giddy adventurousness of the first two Star Wars movies, the impact is strangely numbing, like watching a two-and-a-half-hour ILM show reel in search of moneyed investors. Though a marginal improvement over 1999's *The Phantom Menace*—if only because it pushes infa-

mous clearance-bin sidekick Jar-Jar Binks to the margins—*Attack Of The Clones* runs into a similar set of problems, mainly caused by characters opening their mouths to speak. Never a competent director of actors, who often look stiff and disoriented against the blue-screen backdrops, Lucas gets little help from Hayden Christensen, his choice to bring young Anakin Skywalker from precocious childhood into petulant adolescence. As a gifted Jedi under the strict tutelage of Ewan McGregor's Obi-Wan Kenobi, Christensen pouts and glowers at the camera every time the Dark Side tempts him, which happens a lot when he oversteps his bounds to stop a faction of separatists that threatens the stability of the Republic. Assigned to protect Natalie Portman, former Queen and now Senator of the peace-loving planet Naboo, Christensen breaks the Jedi code by falling in love with her, though no amount of frolicking and flowery dialogue can get those feelings across. Away from their square courtship, McGregor looks far more comfortable and commanding this time as Kenobi, whose investigation of an attempt on Portman's life leads him to a larger plot involving a bounty hunter (Temuera Morrison), a former Jedi (Christopher Lee), and a massive clone army. Lucas and his technicians sweat heavily over the eye candy, crafting amazingly detailed worlds and opulent interior spaces that wouldn't have been possible before the digital age. But save for a crowd-pleasing moment with Yoda, the movie remains pretty and inert, with no authentic emotion, no cumulative power, and no sense of physicality and danger in the action sequences. In lieu of a proper climax, *Attack Of The Clones* ends with a tantalizing cliffhanger for the next episode, but Lucas' lumbering series is presenting fewer and fewer reasons to tune in.

Down the River

thwarted as the guy nimbly made his way up the greasy slope onto flat land at the top. His broad grin and farewell wave were more of a triumphant gesture than a goodbye. We had barely taken off again when we pulled in beneath a large mango tree high on the riverbank. Someone jumped out from the front of the boat, scrambled up the bank and disappeared only to reemerge 10 seconds later accompanied by a Cambodian police officer. A short conversation took place where we were pointed out, some discussion and nodding of heads took place and in less than a minute the guy scrambled back down the bank and we were off again. Our next stop was at a small café/office of the boat company another few hundred meters downstream from the virtually hidden police station. Here we disembarked for the first time in 2 hours and experienced the pain/relief of the blood circulating back into near-numb bums and cramped legs. This stop lasted about 10 minutes and was to primarily to fill out the exit papers for Cambodia customs. It is a service the boat company provides as part of the package. The manager was the son of the lady back at Nek Leung and proved a very amiable guide in the following procedures.

We re-embarked into the dinghy with the helmeted captain guarding our luggage and again set off downstream. Another 300 meters down we docked at a far more organised and official complex with a real pontoon and were led up and into a very smart looking compound of government buildings. This was the Ponle Mekong crossing and where we were to go through the official exit formalities of leaving Cambodia. The compound was the most tidy and well organised I has seen during my years in Cambodia. Well-maintained lawns, shady trees, with half a dozen empty but waiting chairs and very polite customs/immigration officers made up this border post. Having officially completed all the necessary paperwork overseen by a pleasant and diligent officer who meticulously checked everything against an official checklist we again joined our luggage in the boat and set off for the last time. During this stop the local manager of the boat company helpfully facilitated the processing of our papers when he appeared from along the riverbank on his moto.

Our 4th stop was the final step on the Cambodia side of the border. This time we disembarked along with our luggage, bid farewell to the helmeted boat jockey and staggered to the border under the weight of our belongings. A nonchalant Cambodian official checked our passports against our faces as a dozen Vietnamese moto-taxi drivers started to heckle us for a quick ride down the road to Chau Doc. We were waved through and only had to walk across the 50 meters of no-mans-land and we were in Vietnam. Here there are no pushy porters hassling you as at the Bavet land crossing.

By comparison, Ponle Mekong is dead quiet. Dozens of smiling kids on their way to school or somewhere all attempted to practice their 'hello's on you at once but apart from that life seemed very

calm and layback.

On the Vietnamese side of the border things were different. In total it had taken us less than 30 minutes to clear the Cambodian red tape and that included walking time. It was now around 11.00 and the day was heating up. I had traveled across Bavet before and now expected a very formal process of searching and stamping from distant/unconnected officials. What we experienced was very different. We were directed into the shade and relative coolness of a nepa-roofed opened-sided village restaurant cum everything. Everything was then organised by the smiling representative of the Vietnamese boat company that would take us to Chau Doc. This again friendly guy handed out Vietnamese entry papers to fill out and disappeared with the completed single sheet and our passports after giving instructions to "wait here, have a drink, I'll fix it!" So we waited, had a cold Saigon beer from the icebox and waited as we fended off the moto drivers who insisted that their trip to Chau Doc would be even more interesting than that via the river. Sorry guys, my boat ticket is already paid for, and while I understand that your \$4.00 fare is cheap, not interested!

After some 20 minutes the guy with our papers and passport returned and that was that! We could go! Everything had been 'fixed' and we hadn't even sighted an official apart from a smile from the guard on the border crossing. It was as easy as that although I know that several of the other 'customers' in the café were off-duty or out of uniform Vietnamese officials quietly sussing out this new of crazy foreigners invading their precious country.

We picked up our bags and headed for the final time down the rough riverbank to where a couple of tourist boats were moored. One was ours heading downstream, the other from a different company had just arrived from, I think Saigon. They had just enjoyed an on-board luncheon and were now heading across the border to their Cambodian adventure.

These boats were much larger than the craft that had brought us from Nek Leung. They were regular boats that could easily carry the 25 passengers seating had been built for. They even had a toilet and a shady roof and were very well maintained! We started off on the final 2-hour journey to Chau Doc. There were still only the 3 of us so after dumping our bags we each grabbed a double seat and settled in for the rest of the trip

I continued to watch the changing river life as we slipped further into Vietnam territory. The change had become apparent even before we reached the border. The numbers of the flat conical straw hats on the peasants had increased several kilometers before we had left Cambodia. Now everyone was wearing them as they toiled over fields of rice, tobacco, corn, beans and numerous vegetables and vines indistinguishable from the boat. The riverbanks looked the same but the river had become noticeably busier. There were boats everywhere. The architecture of the houses had changed little but the imposing silhouettes of

Continued on Page 30

Down the River

the Khmer pagoda gave way to more utilitarian churches and less obtrusive Chinese style temples. Some 45 minutes downstream we approached a large rural town attempting to emulate a porcupine with several thousand tv antenna sprouting from every rooftop on the skyline. Three large dredges were busily grabbing great chunks of the riverbed with their massive mechanical toothy buckets and dumping the sandy mixture into the bellies of eagerly awaiting barge boats. Large and small boats fairly bustled along the river living and plying their trade in bulk transport of everything from the river mud to bricks, rice, rice husks and straw. You name it, I'm sure it's carried.

We made a hard right turn at the porcupine city and were now on the long canal heading straight for Chau Doc. About at this point, wherever that was under the midday sun, I nodded off to the steady chug-chug of the boats engine. If I missed anything significant, well, you'll have to do the trip yourself to know what it was!

Someone woke me about 15 minutes out of Chau Doc. The river was quite cluttered with floating fish farms and working boats. There were several hundred of these fish farms moored in rafts of between 2 and 6 that caused serious congestion amongst the river traffic as the river was getting toward its lowest levels, hence narrowest at this time of year. The heavy slow freight boats would have been on their toes keeping away from them.

We saw Chau Doc long before we reached it. It is an incredibly sprawling river transport center of over 100,000 people, situated on the confluence of the large canal (from the Mekong) and the

Bassac River. Boats and ferries were coming and going every which way as we lined up the profile of the massive Victoria Hotel and headed into the milieu of watercraft arriving and departing from the busy loading docks.

The captain and crew helpfully answered queries on accommodation options as carefully maneuvered alongside a parent freight boat and were assisted, along with our luggage, onto its deck by the willing hands of a dozen dockside navies. It was then only a quick scramble up a steep gangplank into the chaotic quayside unloading area. This was Chau Doc.

Staying in Chau Doc has a vibrancy of its own and Sam Mountain with its 1000s of tiny temples is a most intriguing place to visit. But these are different stories for another time.

The trip down the river was great. The organizers of the package knew their business and were as helpful as you could expect. The Cambodia officials were the same. I couldn't fault their attitude and presentation and everything thing went as smoothly as you would ever need. I can't comment on the Vietnamese side because we literally didn't see anyone. Great if it all works. All along the way there was not the slightest hint of requests for 'unofficial taxes' or out-right begging and the \$12.00 one-way ticket was the total for the whole trip. Visas were extra and necessary for crossing either way before you get to the border.

I can't imagine the package surviving given the low numbers of travelers but then again it is a relatively new service and the operators are proactively searching for more outlets in Phnom Penh. For those who feel like an alternative route into Vietnam, I fully endorse this route. It is only a 5-hour bus trip from Chau Doc to HoChiMin City at a cost of about 40,000 dong, less than

US\$3.00 and there are things to do in Chau Doc. The bus trip itself is rather interesting as you journey back over the Mekong to Saigon.

My advise is to use plenty of sun-block on the trip, wear a secure hat (or a helmet) and carry some drinking water for the 2 hour boat trip.

So there you have it. Phnom Penh to Chau Doc. A new crossing, a great trip and another source of travelers' tales.

