

THE THAI DANISH PREHISTORIC EXPEDITION 1960-1962

by

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(Leader of the Expedition)

**A short report on the activities and results of the
main expedition 1961-1962**

The Thai Danish Prehistoric Expedition started its investigations in the Kanchanaburi Province with a preliminary expedition from Nov. 1960 to Feb. 1961. The results of this preliminary expedition were published briefly in the J.S.S. vol. 49, part I, July 1961, and as their results were very promising, the committee of the expedition decided to continue investigations on a larger scale with a main expedition, which took place from November 1961 to April 1962.

The expedition also in the second phase enjoyed the privilege of the personal interest of H.M. The King and Patron of the Siam Society. With sanction of the President of the Council of Ministers, H.E. Field Marshal Srisdi Dhanarajata and the Council itself, upon recommendation of H.E. the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Education, the expedition had been permitted to survey and to make extensive excavations in the area of the Kwaë Noi in the Province of Kanchanaburi. The task of the expedition could not have been completed successfully without the splendid cooperation and assistance of the Director General of the Fine Arts Department, the Governor of the Province of Kanchanaburi, and the Provincial Police who have protected all members of the expedition in the field during day and night.

The scientific staff of the main expedition was comprised of Mr. Chin You-di, Curator of the National Museum of Thailand; Mr. Aphorn na Songkhla and Mr. Thamnoon Attakor, all from Thailand; Dr. H.R. van Heekeren from the Netherlands, Mr. Per Sørensen, M.A. and Dr. Eigil Nielsen, both from Denmark. All these had taken part also in the preliminary expedition. As new members of

the expedition came Count Eigil Knuth, the zoologist Palle Johnsen, M.A. and the botanist Kai Larsen, M.A., all from Denmark; the latter as associated member of the expedition. Furthermore, Mr. Pricha Kanchanakom and Mr. Prapat Yothaprasert, from the Fine Arts Department also took part.

Prof. Sood Saengvichien, as in the first year, without being a member of the expedition, did very valuable work in excavating the human skeletons at Ban Kao. It must also be mentioned that Mrs. Per Sørensen came along with her husband and was of invaluable help to the expedition.

Moreover, a large number of Thai students, for shorter or longer periods, helped in the excavations, as part of their archaeological training.

The programme of the main expedition, based on the results of the preliminary expedition contained the following six points :

- I. Continue examinations of the locality Bang site near Ban Kao.
- II. Examination of the Sawmill site at Wang Pho, a Bronze Age site first reported by Karl Heider in 1956 and first visited by our expedition on the reconnoitering trip in 1960.
- III. Continued examinations of a rock shelter and adjoining caves, explored during the first campaign in 1960-61, the so-called Tam Phra, or Priest Cave, near Sai-Yok (c.f. H.R. van Heekeren's a Preliminary Note on the Excavation of the Sai-Yok Rock Shelter, J.S.S. vol. 49 part II, Nov. 61).
- IV. Examination of the two Chande Caves (c.f. J.S.S. vol. 49 part I, July 61, pp. 48-49).
- V. Examination of the Ongba Cave near Sri Sawat.
- VI. Examination of different localities that might contain pleistocene deposits with fossils, i.a. locality near Nakorn Sawan, from where pleistocene mammals were reported some years ago, and the Lawa Cave.

To get through this programme effectively it was our plan to establish 3 archaeological teams, one of which should start with the Chande Caves, another with the Sai-Yok locality and the third at Ban Kao further south. The two northern teams were later to move to other localities; thus for instance, the Sai-Yok team to the Sawmill site and these two teams therefore should have their bases on bamboo rafts which could relatively be easily moved down the river. The Ban Kao team should stay on the rich neolithic locality during the whole season and therefore chose to use as permanent base a number of small bamboo huts, arranged almost as a small village on the bank of the Kwae Noi. The construction of the rafts and the huts were ordered some weeks before the main expedition started, but while the "village" at Ban Kao, as well as the rafts at Chande were ready in time, the rafts at Sai-Yok were not. Therefore a combined team, including both the Chande and the Sai-Yok archaeologists, on November 12th started investigations at the two Chande Caves. The staff of this big team, included Dr. van Heekeren, Mr. Chin You-di, Count Eigil Knuth and Mr. Thamnoon Attakor. After 18 days of excavation in the Chande Caves the rafts were moved down to the Sai-Yok site, where the northern group started their excavations on December 2nd. Here the two other rafts ordered previously had been delivered and were taken over by Palle Johnsen and Kai Larsen who at the same date — December 2nd — arrived from Ban Kao. There the northern group had its base consisting of 4 rafts, until January 21st, when Palle Johnsen and Kai Larsen joined me in moving their rafts southward. On February 7th Dr. van Heekeren left for Wang Pho to start investigations at the Sawmill site, while Eigil Knuth and Chin You-di continued investigations at Sai-Yok. Dr. van Heekeren finished his work at the Sawmill site in the first week of March, then returned via Bangkok to Europe, while the Eigil Knuth and Chin You-di team continued their excavations at Sai-Yok until March 24th.

I arrived in Thailand on December 15th after having visited the various localities under excavation, once before and once after New Year. In between, with Dr. Boonsong Lekagul I made a short excursion to the localities near Nakorn Sawan, from where

earlier finds of pleistocene mammals had been reported. On January 21st I took two of the four rafts from the Sai-Yok base down stream to the Tam Phra or Lawa cave and started investigation there, together with Mr. Thamnoon Attakor. From 1st—3rd Feb. accompanied by Mr. Thamnoon and the zoologist Palle Johnsen, I made an excursion with four elephants inland from the hamlet Kaeng Raberd at Kwaie Noi, in an attempt to verify a rumour we had heard already a year earlier, of the existence of a cave—Tam Roop, or Picture Cave—said to contain many old rock paintings. It turned out that there was some truth in the rumour, although the paintings were not in a real cave, but on the steep walls of a typical rock shelter, situated at a height of about 500 metres above sea level, and with a fine view over the jungle towards the Burmese frontier.

Our guide, Taeng Klincharoen, a hunter from Kaeng Raberd and the man who, together with his brother, 10 years earlier, had found the place, told us that far above the rock shelter, in a large almost vertical fissure, there was an entrance to a very large cave, with many rock paintings and many stone implements. However, this cave could not be reached without a system of ladders leading up through the steep fissure. I arranged with the guide to have such a construction made, but as this work could not be completed in less than 10 to 12 days, we returned to the river to report the find to our committee as well as to our different archaeological teams.

On account of the report, the following weeks brought several visitors. First to arrive were Per Sørensen, from his Ban Kao camp accompanied by Mr. Werner Jacobsen from the National Museum in Copenhagen and member of the committee of the expedition. Then my group from the Lawa Camp came for a second visit and at the same time Mr. Chin You-di and Count Eigil Knuth arrived from the Sai-Yok camp; and finally Dr. van Heekeren towards the end of February made a journey from Wang Pho to the Picture Cave.

On my second visit, when I had six elephants, I had as guests the journalist, Mr. Frank Robertson from the London Daily Telegraph and the B. B. C. television cameraman, Mr. Hugh Gibbs, as well as the secretary from the Danish Embassy, Bangkok, Miss

Sumalee Viravaidya, while Dr. van Heekeren was accompanied by the Danish cameraman, Mr. Robbert.

I had the disappointment during my second visit to Tam Roop, that the big upper cave did not exist. After having climbed the steep ladders we found only a very small upper cave, with very faint traces of paintings and without implements. However, the discoveries in the rock shelter gave full compensation for closer study of the paintings here revealed more and more interesting details. Already during my first visit we had collected a few pebble tools of a mesolithic type from the floor of the rock shelter and a few more have later been found, but no artifacts at all of younger age, for instance no potsherds.

Eigil Knuth stayed with his group at Tam Roop for about ten days in order to study and copy the paintings and to carry out excavations in the floor of the shelter. Afterwards he returned to the Sai-Yok camp where he and Chin You-di finished the investigations there.

Per Sørensen and his team, apart from his short visit to Tam Roop, were working for the whole season at the neolithic site near Ban Kao and finished the excavations there on April 2nd.

After visiting Mr. van Heekeren's excavations at the Sawmill site, I returned to Bangkok, on the 21st of February, to revisit the Ban Kao and the Sawmill sites for the last time between February 25th and 28th.

From March 5th to 11th I made a trip to northern Thailand to visit the lignite and the triassic beds at Mae Moh. On this trip I was accompanied by a curator of the Bangkok Museum — Mr. Somphorn Yupho, who assisted me in the best possible way.

The zoologist Palle Johnsen and the botanist Kai Larsen carried out their studies, using the archaeological camps mainly as their bases, that is to say at Ban Kao, Sai-Yok and Lawa Cave. From the Lawa Cave camp, Kai Larsen, with some Thai colleagues, Mr. Prasert Yusamran, Mr. Suwan Klipbua and Mr. Tem Smitinand, on January 23rd started on a three weeks' excursion across the country of Kwae Yai for botanical studies.

As will be understood from the above, five of the six localities mentioned in the programme for this season have been investigated. The one locality not visited, because of lack of time, was the Ongba Cave near Sri Sawat, but as we found and investigated the Picture Cave, Tam Roop, the number of investigated localities is the same as in our programme.

Regarding the results of the investigations in our six localities, I shall try to make a very brief summary, based on reports from the various groups of the different expeditions.

I shall begin with the results of the investigations in the rock shelter and the adjoining caves near Sai-Yok, because these results in fact give the very backbone of the prehistory of Thailand. The excavations carried out here were a direct continuation of last year's trial excavations at the same site, summarized by Dr. van Heekeren in the JSS, 1961. The Sai-Yok rock shelter is unique in showing extraordinary thick deposits—4.5 metres—thereby telling us a very long, probably almost continuous story, reaching from the palaeolithic through the mesolithic and the neolithic periods. A story far more complete than told by any other locality so far investigated in Thailand. Summarized from Dr. van Heekeren's report written in February 1962, we have in this remarkable locality and uppermost layer of dusty rubble of angular limestone fragments containing a mixture of historical potsherds and some pebble tools. Just below we have a shallow neolithic layer, and below that a thicker layer without remnants of pottery, but with monofacially chipped pebble tools and with bone points hardened in the fire. A surprising element new to this part of Asia are bladelets (small, narrow flakes with relatively long, parallel sides). Similar mesolithic industries are known from India. Below a depth of about 3.5 metres the deposits suddenly become very hard and thus were very difficult to penetrate. This hard layer continues down to rock-bottom at 4.5 metres. The hard lower layer contains a fair number of large primitive tools and flakes. The tools are heavier and cruder than the layers above and are obviously of palaeolithic age. In the first season we found, at a rather high level, a buried human

mesolithic skeleton. Another, but incomplete human skeleton, likewise from a high level, was discovered during this year's excavation. In addition to the deep excavation in the rock shelter, a long trench was made down the slope outside the shelter. Furthermore a deep pit and later on an extensive excavation was made at the junction of the slope and the upper river terrace. By these excavations large numbers of implements were found, especially farthest down the slope and in the deposit of the terrace. In the first 1.5 m. an iron axe was found, together with mixed mesolithic and neolithic materials which can be explained by all these things having been washed down the slope. Below this level was found a mesolithic layer above layers with palaeolithic pebble tools.

To this short summary can be added that new excavations were made in the caves adjoining the rock shelter and here neolithic burials were found as well as articles from Bronze Age and historical times.

Both the Lawa Cave and the Chande Caves have given a number of interesting finds, i.e. including mesolithic tools and neolithic burials, but at both localities the deposits are rather shallow and therefore cannot tell a story of anything like the same length as that of Sai-Yok.

As to the Sawmill site at Wang Pho, I have no written report, but according to verbal information from Dr. van Heekeren, the excavations here have given us good material from the Bronze Age as well as pottery and other artifacts.

The extensive excavations at and in the immediate neighbourhood of Bang site, near Ban Kao, have yielded an immense amount of material in the form of human skeletons, animal bones, pottery of many different types, implements of stone, bone and shell, and bracelets and necklaces etc., enough to give the most detailed information about the neolithic dwellers in that area. It was already suspected last year by Dr. van Heekeren that the culture represented at Bang site was related to the Lungshan culture known from northern China. This season's finds have, according to Per Sørensen's reports given an absolute proof of the connection

between the Lungshan culture and the Bang site culture. Almost every sort of artifacts known from Lungshan having now been discovered at Bang site. The neolithic site at Ban Kao must now be considered by far the richest neolithic site in South-East Asia.

Concerning the Picture Cave, Tam Roop, I have mentioned already that in addition to the paintings we have only mesolithic implements in the rock shelter. As to the interpretation of the locality, the opinion of Court Eigil Knuth, as far as I know, is that the rock shelter had never been a real dwelling place, but rather a sort of shrine or holy place in which some pictures indicate Bronze Age and others possibly, older.

According to Kai Larsen and Palle Johnsen, the botanical and zoological studies have given very good results. The zoological collection made include about 2,000 specimens and the botanical collection comprises of approximately 1,700 dried plants, 200 wood samples, 250 seed samples, and an alcohol collection of 400 items, as the area in which the collections were made was almost a terra incognita in botanical and zoological respects, it is probable that the collection contains several forms new to science.

The results of the main expedition are to a very great degree due to a continuation of the close cooperation between the Thai and Danish members, I thank all my comrades from the Thai-Danish Expedition for their part in this cooperation and fine work. On behalf of the Expedition I tender my best thanks to the E.A.C. Ltd. the Otto Mønsted Foundation, the Danish Expedition Foundation and the Siam Society for their financial support of the expedition.

I feel a deep debt of gratitude for every sort of assistance given by the following gentlemen :

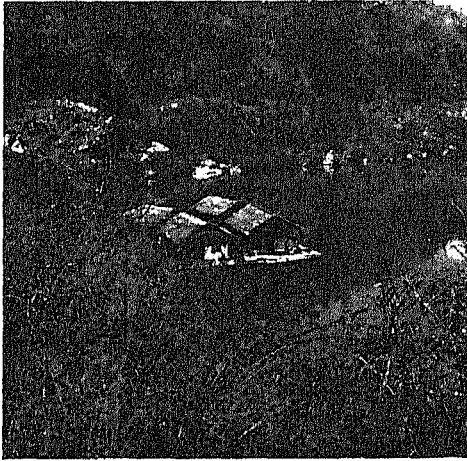
H.H. Prince Dhaninivat, President of the Siam Society;

Mr. Dhanit Yupho, Director General of the Fine Arts Department;

Mr. Likkit Satayoot, Governor of the Province of Kanchanaburi;

Mr. J.J. Boeles, Director of the Research Center and

H.E. Monsieur Ebbe Munck, Danish Ambassador to Thailand.



Raft in Kwae Noi at Sai-Yok



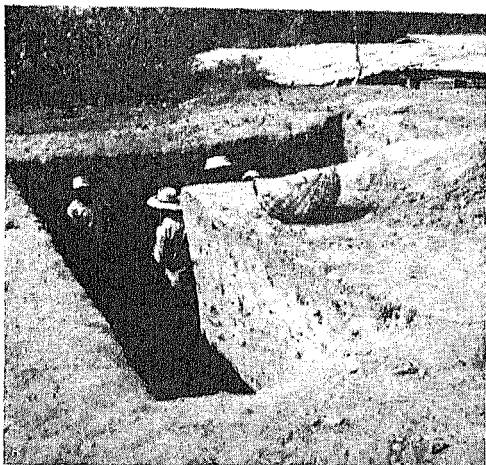
Cave A at Sai-Yok site



Excavation in rock shelter



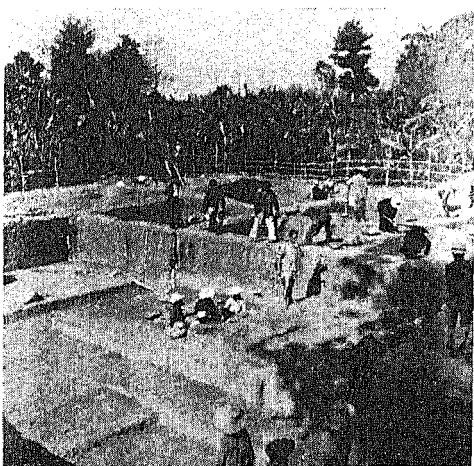
Lower part of the long ladder
at Tam Roop



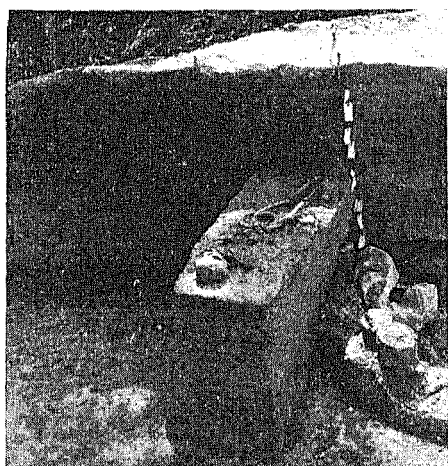
Excavation at Wang Pho site



Excavation at Ban Kao site



Ban Kao, Bang site (1962)



Ban Kao, Bang site skeleton (1962)