

# *The Akha Journal of the Golden Triangle*

September 20, 2002 Vol. 1. No. 1

20 Baht

Human Rights - Land Rights - Language Rights - The Rights of the Child  
The Right To Citizenship - The Right To One's Own Culture and Religion

## *Best of the Akha*

*An International Magazine Of Tribal Peoples*

Village Fires -  
Akha Nature  
Conservancy -  
The Endangered  
Pangolin -  
Pine Trees and Bad  
Policy -  
The Akha Spindle -

*Dead Men  
Missing  
Fathers*

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**LaoAkha Journal of the Golden Triangle**

**From The Editor:**

More than Just A Tour And Trekking Destination

## The Akha Heritage Foundation

The Akha Heritage Foundation was conceived of the idea that the heritage of the Akha Hill Tribe people is worth preserving in a time of encroachment and fragmentation at the hands of the outside world. Social and economic change in the region is rapid.

Fragmentation of culture is not an abstract thing, it is an event which radically effects the lives of people, forcing them into poverty, destroying the very things which support their communities. It is about leaving people without land to farm, shaming their traditions and leaving their children to poverty.

The Foundation was set up on the concept that decline is not something that people welcome, that it is something that eats at the soul, a child born of injustice in a world become too busy to notice.

Many people will not find it pleasant to think of the world as a place of the have and the have nots, but it is also a world where the Akha see what they have being taken away by forces they can not control.

The Akha Heritage Foundation seeks to offset this process by working from within the community of the Akha people to try and offer respite. The job is without end it would appear, but that does not discourage us from helping safeguard as much as we possibly can from those elements powerful enough to take the good away without second thought, preying on whatever weakness can be found in the villages and lives.

The Akha Heritage Foundation focuses on saving life which starts with infants, providing medical assistance, clean water systems, improved nutrition, assistance with agriculture, forestry, advocacy in human rights and promotes the recording of Akha oral literature as a means of reinforcing the culture as it comes under great pressure from the outside. This includes working with the Akha traditional knowledge system which has an enormous understanding of the environment in which they live. Culture is important, because woven together by the people it is part of their immune system. These restorative activities are especially important in the many villages which have repeatedly been relocated.

When outside forces damage the culture of the Akha they damage both their health and their economic capacity for survival. The culture is often intentionally damaged to increase dependency on an alien power structure be it governments or missionaries from the Taiwan or the United States.

We attempt to help the Akha to have choices as to what they want to do with their future. We can not pick it for them. We oppose those who would.

The Akha have a rich tradition to their benefit and it is hoped that by drawing on this heritage they can find the resources for survival in this time of transition.

In the early years of our work our goal was to bring as much assistance to the Akha people as possible and come to understand their needs. We continue to do so after twelve years.

In Thailand there are some 300 Akha villages alone, so the task is enormous. The need for resources to counteract the erosion of the villages is also quite large. But we think that with the help of many interested people we can provide solutions to many of these situations.



### ***The Cover***

Leeh Jurh, son of Ah Juuh Cheh Muuh is now fatherless along with his 7 brothers and sisters.

His father died in an Army drug detox camp from a beating. The Haen Taek Hospital would not make the autopsy 'cause of death' public. No one has been criminally charged.

The drugs still flow, the people who launder the money and produce the precursor chemicals remain protected.

It doesn't pay to be a poor people when the drug war needs its trophies. Robberies by the army have continued in this village.

### **Amnesty International Report Cites Killings:**

<http://www.akha.org/humanrights/abuse/amnestyreport.htm>

# Akha Journal of the Golden Triangle

## From The Editor:

### The Purpose of This Magazine

The hilltribes have been in Thailand for more than a hundred years, and there is little reason to believe that hilltribes of one kind or another have not always been living in the mountains of Burma and Laos as Thai people have been long living in the flat lands of Thailand. The current borders of Thailand have been disputed for many years. So the issue of whether or not the Akha and other hilltribes “belong” here continues to rage.

In stark contrast to the need of many to dispute this issue the hypocrisy evolves that the Akha and the hilltribe in general have long provided an excellent income as tourist destinations in much of northern Thailand. While generating enormous sums of tourist dollars, being of great interest to Europeans, the hill peoples themselves have gotten little of this revenue. On the contrary they are the most convenient kicking and punching targets for all the perceived ills of the country from drugs to environmental damage. Blamed for trafficking in drugs while the big boys go untouched, blamed for cutting down the forest while the loggers and owners of the big timber companies sit home in front of the TV.

Most of the looks at these people are superficial, and often derogatory. Racism is noted.

Researchers come and go, books get published, and the poor treatment of the hilltribe continues.

Try moving around the country or province with no ID. If you end up in jail you will get what they give you. If you are a woman, you will be less fortunate. Although prostitution as such is illegal in Thailand the brothels that still somehow mysteriously exist are full of hilltribe women, with little legal protection. The point seems to be that if you want to exploit hilltribe, it just doesn't matter.

Forestry will come and plant pine trees in their rice fields and call it reforestation.

Missions living in comparative luxury and wealth will tell you how unfit the Akha are to raise their own children and suggest they are best off to live at the mission boarding school. How unfortunate the hilltribe does not know the history of the missionaries to indigenous people and what has come of those people now. Particularly in the countries the missionaries come from. The American Indians and Aborigines continue to be exploited and lose their land to the same people who are sending the missionaries to the Akha now. A time-sequence problem in the western world. Come to Thailand, forget it all and do it all over again to another tribal peoples. But ultimately it is the math of the huge dollars that mission personnel live on while the tribal peoples continue to suffer in the villages with so little support for health or human rights. The missions are a business and they are here to exploit to keep their own souls out of hell, with little concern to the culture and overall needs in the villages. The money they spend in the name of the hilltribe would have put the hilltribe on sound economic footing decades ago. “What would Jesus do?” is just so much lip grease. Or as the Akha say, “The missionaries build a wonderful rice terrace on the back of the Akha that never goes dry, least not for them.”

With more than 300 Akha villages in Thailand alone, not to count other hilltribe villages, or the nearby countries, there is a lot to report. We hope to offer a close up look at the realities for these communities which is seldom made public.

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An Akha ceremonial rice house which connects the home to the outside rice fields. The Akha never separate themselves or any aspect of their lives from the land they live on and the food they eat. They are very aware of the importance of their mountain rice crop that it be planted with care as they can not afford a single year's rice failure.



**Two traditional Akha Gates protect each Akha Village. The Missionaries try very hard to destroy these gates and burn them. The Chinese Baptists tell the Akha that the devil comes in and out of their gate and that is why they burn it.**

## The Akha Project

### Dear Friends of the Akha:

I haven't written many of you in years. Ah, the age of computers, least I haven't written on paper.

But its nice to get a piece of paper, a letter in the hand every now and then, plus some of you aren't on line, least I don't have your email address (please send it).

At any rate, though some of this could be done on line, I like the idea of a printed newsletter with pictures and stuff, so this is sort of a step in that direction.

I have now been here in the north of Thailand for more than twelve years. I did business when I first came here but not much of that any more or time for it. My time is mostly spent getting around to the many villages, a night here, a night there, more time in the truck than any other place.

I started out attending to medical advocacy which gradually evolved into other things such as efforts to try and prevent the medical problems by addressing issues like good nutrition, clean water, enough land to farm, land rights, human rights.

Still working on one of my very old and fond goals of producing Akha language books and of course this journal which is now translated into Akha for distribution to all the Akha locations in Thailand and many in Burma and Laos.

The press is now in hand, but a small budget of many years has made for very slow progress.

As you may know nutrition in the villages is very low. This is due to a number of reasons, like not enough access to seeds and land, and just way too much work to do when you add walking long distances to fields.

When the villages were at their high mountain locations, it was easier because they built wealth of agriculture up over the years, but forced army relocations that were designed to take the lands away, has greatly impoverished them. The area is rapidly getting developed with roads, and so times are changing fast for the Akha.

If you can be of assistance financially, a monthly pledge or single time donation, that would help very much.

Also I would very much appreciate getting letters from you.

For things that you can send, any kind of vegetable garden seeds are nice for the villagers and light weight. If you are in country, there is always

the need for blankets or you can help accomplish a bigger project.

Many people have come here to work as volunteers and seen the great results of a little donated energy and materials to a water project for a village that is just barely hanging on. Clean water radically reduces illnesses in the villages, and this is mostly needed where villages have been relocated by the government or war. Villages left to themselves have clean water, and sufficient agriculture for nutrition.

If you would like to be added to the Akha Weekly Journal by email, then just send the email: akhaweeklyjournal-subscribe@yahoogleroups.com.

Once you have subscribed you will be able to access the list archives which go back more than three years. Invite a friend to join as well for weekly updates from the Golden Triangle about work here with the Akha Hill Tribe to protect their way of life and help them gain increased representation.

Akha.org presents much information and photos about our project and the Akha people.

Become a part of this important work, check out our web site and drop us an email. Always great to see many of you come back to this northern area of Thailand and Burma to help with the work in the villages.

And to the many of you married to the Akha now, your specific interest and involvement is crucial.

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Donations by check or money order may be sent to:

The Akha Heritage Foundation  
PO BOX 6073  
Salem OR 97304 USA

We live with the Akha and your donation goes directly into their villages.

We do not remove children from their families or traditional villages either physically or psychologically.



**An Assembly of Akha Spirit Women and Healers.  
In villages which the missionaries overrun, they immediately silence  
these women and say that they are worshipping the devil.**

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**Nyeeh Pahs**

These Women are essential to the well being of an Akha village. From herbal medicine to counseling these women treat the illness of young and old alike. No Akha village does well without them as they are integral to the survival of any Akha village. They make up part of the elder and traditional leadership structure, so it is no wonder that the church tries to destroy them by villifying their jobs. Even less fortunate is the fact that as women of power in Akha society they are the first to be silenced in the mission efforts to take over the village. Little wonder that the young people of Akha villages which have had the culture destroyed see so little future.

Due to the destruction of many villages the traditional Nyeeh Pahs who are left travel extensively

as long as they are able, in order to assist Akha in both traditional villages and those who the Christians claim to have converted. For even in these villages most of the Akha did not agree to the events which were forced on the village and seek to continue to practice their traditions including healings and the application of herbal medicines.

From the west where doctors increasingly seek the assistance of traditional healers, the missionaries continue to travel to Thailand to destroy what many professional people see as an indispensable element of human well being, health and healing.

Until one sees physical ailments that require surgery in the west to heal, suddenly healed by a Nyeeh Pah one might not believe according to western thinking that these women know what they are doing. One would wonder why people of limited resources would continue to take the time to do something if it didn't work?

## A Brief History of the Akha

The Akha are an Indigenous mountain people who live in Laos, China, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand. They may have originally come from Tibet via Mongolia, spending considerable centuries in China's Yunnan Province. Estimates of their population range from 200,000 to 400,000 people.

The social structure of the Akha does not resemble that of the west or nation states. As a result, they are often misunderstood, pushed aside, or exploited.

They are capable hunters and expert farmers. They are able to use just about every plant in their environment for either shelter, food or medicine. Akha Zauh (The Law) which is tied together in a manner of social organization most closely resembling an environmental theology governs their life and society.

The Akha see the earth as an environment in which they have been placed to grow and carry on their lineage with thanksgiving back to their parents, and parents before them, the continuation of a great line of human beings.

Their obligation to live correctly and carefully, balanced in the environment in which they live, governed by their orthodox law, is taken very seriously. What others may consider foolish or superstitious is a careful orchestration of life, based on specific knowledge and concern for the environment around them. They live almost entirely from that environment, and those who would change them, can claim no such skill or respect.

Akha Zauh is not to guide one life, one family, one village, it is to guide an entire people, not for one century, but for millenia. Limited consumption of natural resources around them guaranteed their communities.

The Akha do not have a tradition of schools or writing, but rather teach their children by a means of songs, recitals and story telling, a strong oral tradition built on what the Akha call "Heart Book", which is all the accumulated knowledge one holds in their heart.

Akha who leave their tradition for other religions often do so because they have been wrongly convinced that they need not have obligation to either their society or their environment.

Living in their high and cool mountain homes they are often misunderstood regarding their culture and traditions by people who have grown up in other societies.

Quite stable if secure and left to themselves the Akha have frequently been forced to move their villages.

The Akha began immigrating into Thailand more than a hundred years ago, living in the mountains at locations where villages had existed for much longer before them. While some villages in Thailand may have only been established for 30 years, many are in fact much older.

The Akha are a people without a country they can call their own, often having had to move due to war. They are a tribal people with little power or representation. As a result they often have no land rights, and when land is taken away from them entire villages have ended up with no land to farm. The land they have lost is often planted in mono crop alien specie pine for later harvest. Little farmers displaced by big powerful farmers, that is all.

In many cases the Akha lack national identity papers which makes life nearly impossible. They become easy targets for exploitation. They are considered squatters on the land on which they live.

Having a cash oriented society forced on them, they have to make hard decisions in order to feed their families. Human rights are taken for granted in the west, while for many people in the world such as the Akha, there is little protection.

Those who would blame the Akha for deforestation, do not mention how they have been forced to move so often, and how this has prevented them from being in places long enough to do things such as rearing fruit trees for the nutrition of their children, or building rice terraces to prevent erosion and water loss.

Villages lack clean water, adequate medical care and have few resources for a cash economy. Malnutrition and infant mortality are high as a result of the oppression that is faced in the villages at the hands of policy makers. Take their lands, move them, offer them nothing in return, force them into ever deeper poverty.

There are many attempts now to present Akha culture as a picture show, while failing to present the true conditions many villages face with food shortages.

Currently there are more than 300 Akha village in Thailand with more than 70,000 Akha. Many Akha also live in Thai cities and towns.

## **The Akha Projects**

The Akha projects are simple in design and application.

- \* Medical assistance
- \* Clean water systems
- \* Recording cultural knowledge into books that the Akha can read
- \* Seeds and fruit trees for better nutrition, forestry
- \* Advocacy

We do not invest donor's money in expensive administration systems, but rather use it directly in the villages to improve life there and slow the process of decline that is being imposed by the outside world. For with decline comes the death and dispersion of many people, a process that is not without a face or painless. Some people call it assimilation.

## **Medical Assistance**

Medical Assistance comes in the form of visits to villages to deliver first aid care and provide transportation to clinics and hospitals. This may sound simple, it is not. Roads are especially bad during rainy season and we have to continue to modify our truck in order to cope with this to say nothing of repairs. Then there are hundreds of villages and first aid supplies do not last long enough. As well, the Akha lack the money that the clinics often charge for services. We do not understand this because we are told the clinics are free, yet find out that a special card must be obtained to gain this service. Many Akha are not told of this nor aware of it. Without saying anything, the government clinics continue to take their money. Hospital services are also expensive for the Akha who are basically a cashless society. One visit to the hospital can take the cash that they might get in six months. Often medical services are substandard, with some racial prejudice, and we try to improve on this situation as much as possible. In complicated health situations such as infection or injury, besides just providing transport we also check back on the individual after they have returned to the village to make sure that the injury has healed properly or the illness has gone away, as sometimes these medical problems can be

very persistent when the individual has a poor diet.

AIDS and HIV would appear to be low in most villages, while those villages closer to town will have the higher incidents.

Drug use has a health effect. The more remote villages use mostly opium while heroin and methamphetamine are more common in villages close to town, once again.

Overall, the healthier the environmental situation for the Akha is, the better the individual health of both adults and children will be.

## **Clean Water Systems**

Our first goal with water systems was once again concerns for prevention of illness. Traditional villages used springs which were clean enough and this was not a concern, but after many village relocations by the army, which still to this day has no just logic, many of the Akha ended up with contaminated water supplies. Wells and piping can improve on this situation.

Wells are carefully dug, cased in concrete surrounded by filtering gravel, and capped and sealed with cement, with a pump mounted on top. This prevents contamination which may occur at the well from flowing back into the well. A wash pad area is constructed to flow dirty water away from the washing and well area. We warn very strictly that pesticides and herbicide spraying equipment must never be brought near the well for cleaning. We showed this situation to some of the chemical companies involved, they were for a loss of words as to the practical and very serious problems their products created.

## **Traditional Knowledge and Publishing**

Akha books record Akha culture and assist those Akha who have been displaced over the years in reconnecting to the culture of their parents. Orthodox cultures are worth preserving. It has only been of recent decades that these cultures were deemed necessary to replace and already many people are questioning why one would replace what has worked well for centuries?

We sponsor recitals and the writing of books and publishing. Currently we have numerous books waiting to be printed when we gain sufficient funding.

## **Seeds And Fruit Trees For Displaced Villages**

In the grinding poverty and marginalization that



A truck delivers well rings to a village that was forced to relocate to the flat lands.

many villages find themselves, there is little food for nutrition or variety of fruits and vegetables for the people to gain all the vitamins they need in order to resist illness.

As a result of this need we do our best to locate seeds indigenous to the area as well as hybrid for increasing vegetable yields.

Where a seed is not at all available for a specific vegetable variety, we find donations such that the quantity and variety of vegetables can be increased.

Loss of land means that the Akha must farm the ground they have more intensively.

Because so many villages have been moved by the army, fruit trees must also be bought and replanted.

### **Forestry**

Matters of Forestry are of particular concern to us as it is quite apparent that the Thai Forestry department is extremely racist against the Akha, have a policy of confrontation, often either carry guns or rely on the back up of armed soldiers.

Thailand is a strange place. On one hand you can have the extreme, such as confrontations between Akha villagers and forestry personnel, shootings,

and on the other hand simple logic to follow a course of accomplishing a goal at conservation while working with the people, not against them, is not followed.

The forestry department is very fast to tell the Akha what they want, speak on their behalf, as well as fail to state accurately the true nature of the situation. A village that has been in one location for many years, the forestry department claims they are squatters and have been there for only a few years.

The Akha are often blamed for slash and burn agriculture, but this is in part erroneous. The Akha still do and always have rotated their crops between fields which they burn prior to reusing. One village can only put so many workers into the field. Old fields lay fallow from 3 to seven years, depending on the steepness of the terrain. As well, if the village is left undisturbed, they will soon begin investing the labor they can afford into building terraces to avoid erosion of the top soil. Older villages have many terraces, collecting the run off as best possible from upper fields. The old villages are almost completely reliant on terraces, using hillside fields only for some corn and vegetables.

Being as that government agencies in Thailand are often not open to comment, it is difficult to suggest that the best policy for forestry would be to work with the people. Without racism. Yet the overall agenda of the forestry department has been to convert mountain areas into managed parks for rich people, taking land, displacing people, and planting pine on thousands of rai of land where only natural large tree forests and jungle stood before. Since it is obvious that this pine is planted to enrich someone, being as it has no other value to the environment, one could assume that this agenda is behind the displacement of the villages and the taking of the land. If jungle growth and the rebuilding of the natural environment is the goal, forestry could never find a better partner than the Akha people. But this requires a fair shake.

## **Advocacy**

In the area of advocacy we try and give voice to the collective concerns and needs of the Akha people, as they seek ID card rights and land rights in their mountain locations. In the past, many villages have been moved by the army with the Akha given little say in the matter, not just many, scores of villages. Their lands were taken and they were reduced to poverty in a policy that can be sited as unjust and racist. The hope is that ethnic minorities will be given respect by Thai society, that Thai society can make room for the minority people who live here and enrich Thailand. Propaganda in the Thai newspapers would still like to foster the phoney concept on the public that many of Thailand's problems are the fault of the hill tribe peoples. While many cities make use of Akha girls for prostitution in the brothels, people are silent on the issue of justice for everyone. We present this situation to a world audience as well as a Thai audience and advocated that people would become educated to better understand cultures different from their own. Other groups intentionally seek to destroy the culture of the Akha. These groups are often foreign and the laws protecting the Akha from these people are not enforced.. We try to prevent and block their activities which are so divisive and destructive.

## **Current Projects Are:**

Fish Farm

Mountain Akha Language School

Akha Nature Conservancy Project

Contact us for how you can help with these projects.

akha@akha.org

## **Accomplishments To Date**

### **Some Background**

Twelve years of working with the Akha hill tribe, from both street people to villagers in the Thai highlands and Myanmar have seen much accomplished and a significant network established. Many times there has not been enough money to accomplish what we would like to accomplish or as quick as we would like to accomplish it.

Medically we have succeeded in saving many lives, particularly those of children, as well as supplying an enormous amount of first aid supplies over the years totalling in thousands of dollars to needy villagers.

Initially we could not easily know what was causing much of the illness but with time we came to find that the poverty was caused by relocations of the villages on the part of the government with little concern as to how the people would survive. This resulted in low nutrition and many difficult conditions in the villages. Un-relocated villages prospered, and prosper until this day many years later.

On the behalf of prevention we went to building wells, piping clean water, and finding ways to improve nutrition by supplying seeds. Seeds in the Thai market place were not plentiful and there was a great lack of the colored vegetables such as squash which provide specific vitamins in short supply in the Akha diet. We began a large fish rearing project, not yet completed, which we are using to boost the protein supply in the villages. Currently we are producing only a few thousand fish.

A new script was developed, clean, neat and easy to use, with no "guess work". A phonetic script. This script is rapidly accessible to the computer, and we now have numerous books waiting to be printed as we find funding. Books in Akha language are about traditional Akha values and culture, recitals, ceremonies and herbal medicine.

In the category of advocacy we have come to work with other Akha and Thai organizations as well as the Thai Army and Government to stop the senseless relocation of villages. We hope to continue to be beneficial to the Akha in getting their story out and providing advocacy for human rights. Many groups come into the villages taking advantage of the poverty of the Akha.

A video about our work and the Akha people, called "The Akha Way" showed recently on National Geographic Television in Asia. We have had

our videos shown in Singapore, Hong Kong, Israel, Europe, US, and now recently here in Italy on National RAI TV.

In the future we hope to see publishing, forestry, intensive agriculture and better nutrition be the continued focus of the services we provide.



### **Just a few termites in the kitchen**

Ah Baw Beh's kitchen in Loi Chiang Akha Village of Mae Suai District has an enormous termite mound which is over six feet tall. The Akha don't destroy termites, not bad logic considering how much they are part of the forest. Asked if the termites ate his wooden house, Peeh Zeh, his son, commented that they didn't eat any of the wood, but were good guests, living there for many years now.



## **Looking Down From The Mountains: Feast of Eyes**

It is hard to understand the Akha people without having spent considerable time in their villages, speaking their language, listening to the details of the ceremonies, walking the trails in the mountains, working in their fields along side them for hours in the heat of the sun and then walking home to the village, parched and tired.

But as one works in the mountain side fields, or walks the high trails of the remaining villages, it is clear to see what great view the Akha have, how it has effected their feeling, their mind a store room of visual memories. A grand people.

For in many of the village locations, one can feel the chill of the altitude, the constant blowing of the wind and can see down on the clouds and hills for as far as one can see in all directions. This is a wealth that the Akha have, which people these days do not often value. And it is being swept aside because of unjust agenda and the brutal forces of the market and consumer societies that will not stop till they have destroyed all that is beautiful in the earth.

Without justice, there is no hope. And now for much of the world, justice is only a farce, while the rich take more and the poor are destroyed.

### **Akha Fish Project Under Way - EU Help**

The Akha fish hatchery project is under way, ask for information on how you can be of help.

## The Akha Belief And Life System

In the west we often say a single word to streamline an entire event or collection of events or ideas. However much can be lost in this process, much can be assumed as known and taken for granted by the speaker when it is not. Culture and Religion are such terms. As soon as we use such terms, and have taken the quick judgements to label events under one or the other, we also quickly jump to the pronouncement as to whether they are good or bad. Similar to our religion and beliefs or different.

There is not much way in which a person could quickly have a clue as to the complexity and detail, the subtle tones of meaning, that the culture of another people have by use of this means..

The culture of the Akha People has often been dismissed by those who don't understand it and would readily replace it with their own alternative. The chief problem with this, is that it is the culture, the way in which a people live their collective lives, which gives them strength, and to come and tell them that all which they are and know is wrong, and must be abandoned, is to destroy them.

This is true in any instance, but particularly true when speaking of people already greatly marginalized for numerous reasons.

The Akha find themselves in such a situation. The lives of the Akha people are settled in mountain jungles, a progression over many centuries that has not moved very far geographically. They are erroneously considered nomadic and migratory by some, yet the distance total is no more than what a person could do in a few hours by car but the Akha did over many hundreds of years.

The jungle and mountains bring the Akha life, life up and out of the earth, the elevation brings fog and rain, growing all that they need abundantly, including their farming. They hunt from the jungle, collect many items of food and shelter, as well as till mountain side fields.

The Akha are maligned as slash and burn migratory farmers. This is not true. Stable village sites are many years at the same location, the land being farmed in a circle around the village for years and years on end, rice terraces slowly creeping up from the bottoms of the watershed. Forced relocations and wars have resulted in the Akha villages being relocated over and over, leaving them no option but to cut and farm in the new location. Distant relatives of the Akha, the Hani, in China, are regarded as "The Terrace Builders" for having used terraces

at the same locations for centuries in a fine tuned harmony to get along with what supplies them with food.

But it is more than farming, and it is more than the misperceptions of the Akha that make their lives go on, carrying out the annual cycles for centuries. This is the Akha life, not something you can so much name, or separate into parts, not even name it as of them as compared to their environment, because they are not so separable from it. Their lives are built in a unique relationship, interweaving with the land, the soil, the water, mountains, jungle and fields around them. Both with the plants, animals and people. They have continued on in an environment of geological isolation that has only known wars and forced moves. Amidst this careful interweaving with their environment, they have built over an incredible history of time, a lineage, that has carried them on better than a thousand years from anywhere anyone can identify. They have their own language, and the names of their fathers and fathers and fathers going back so much further than that.

All passed down till now, knowledge, careful rules for living safely together and getting on with life, and carrying themselves into the future. Part of it is a law, but it seems so much fuller than that, than a law, as in western terms, it is a carefully orchestrated piece of music, each note in its right place, all done up at once, every instrument going, as Handel's Messiah would require.

The Akha have a couple of items not native to them which they trade for. Salt, iron and silver. The salt for food, the iron for blades and axe heads, the silver for ornament. It may vary from village to village, but these are the intrinsic things that the Akha don't produce themselves in their villages. All the rest of their lives is going on by themselves, the mountains and jungles, and the plants, animals and bugs that grow all about them.

Best descriptions of the Akha, still dwarf who they really are, what they really know.

The Akha have a collective mind. To say that you know something, does not mean that you have those informations in your head, but that it exists in the Akha mind, and that possibly you need to go down to that hut there on the left to talk to the woman who can speak it out of the collective mind and into your ear.

Do Akha songs and recitals carry forward all what they know? I don't think so, no more than sheets of music make an orchestra. The songs, in part or completeness here and there, made up as they go along,

or well known traditional songs sung by different peoples during different times in the village gives only hint to what resides within them as a group. Akha Zauh, is the law, but their villages and lives are made up of a constant closeness to the earth. The law is just like tally marks on a map, which are cause for pause or turning here or there, which is located at the places of chafe or remembrance which they take note of.

This law would appear to be no more than the framework on which all the rest of their knowledge and interactions are reflected to. The law is the top points of collective memory that help remind each person of things to remember to do or not to do, or the settling of disputes, marking of times for harvest and so forth. Long experience in the same family has taught these people, that if you do like this, you get a problem, but do like that and you avoid it. So they make each such item which is crucial to remember to avoid injury, insult or pain, as an event. Some people call this culture. A small word for such a large matter.

Fighters, bombers and missiles have computer memories. Culture is the collective memory of already charted waters that a people have lived upon for many hundreds of years. It becomes automatic. You remember your parents, your mother, your father, your grandmother and grandfather and how they lived life carefully such that you got this far, because, unbeknownst to outsiders, a whole lot of people didn't. They died. Early. And so the memory is an ongoing thanksgiving to doing it right, surviving, living on to be old, to have lived to the end of life, after which of course there is nothing else to do for the moment.

And the cloth of Akha life gives testament to this, the Law, the Zauh, the songs, the dances, the festivals, all the goings on, to how people should live their lives by the day, in all the available events which can occur to them.

A wild boar runs through the village. Well, that isn't suppose to happen, and it isn't normal, don't tell me why, but villagers know that boars are not safe, they have long tusks, are generally quite nervous, and can hurt you and don't belong rousting around in the village. And I suppose there is much more to it than that, but they stop the village for a day in the case of this rare event and do a purification ceremony for the village.

Now on a particular day, an old woman in the village gets sick. You don't have to be appointed an elder to be an elder, you get old and you are an

elder, they are one and the same. So on this particular day, the village elders take counsel, and in order to cause the illness of the Akha woman to leave, the elders order that today when everyone goes to the fields, no one will work on any soil that has rice planted on it, or is prepared for rice, but can only work on other soil, such as bean fields or corn fields. Not to minimize it, but not a bad show of support. And once again I am sure that there is much more involved.

The point being made is that these people live carefully, not adjacent to the earth, the soil, but within it. Relying on all of it for what they need, what grows up by the year, and what is more complex in making and getting than that is not needed it would appear.

There is this identity, this keen understanding of how the people and the earth best work together. Eden wasn't lost, people just forgot they were still in it. Blinders put on their eyes, people tried to do a different thing with the land and the elements that came from it. Possibly good, but increasingly looking as not.

Some of the Akha migrate or are forced into the cities, but there is some understanding that as poets of the earth, they would prefer to stay in the mountain, listen to and write more poetry.

Not all that the Akha do has a detail to it, but the Akha are quick to tell you what is related to the law or a special order and what is not. Generally they say about something that it is tied up in Akha Zauh. So on this day we have a ceremony to this, this is the order. Then when you go into the forest to look for Zah Mah, the mother pig of yours that ran to the forest to have her litter, you take a knife. It is illegal, or against the law to go looking up the trails for your pig without a knife, like a machette. No one bucks the law, or questions why something should be a part of it, just understands that it is part of the formula for knowing and doing carefully all that you need to know and do. Cause when you find that pig, it will have made a great nest of sticks and leavers like a great bundle, and inside you must look for how many pigs were born, and then later load them into your basket and carry them back to the hut where the mother will return and care for them, but you mustn't look into that nest with your hands, you must cut a bamboo stick, with a hook on it, and use that hook to pull aside the nest and look inside.

There is no part of Akha life that is not carefully guided by these traditions and ceremonies of time. They lived completely till now by their use, harm

ing no one, no apparent need to abandon them now. In any village environment, some people are more wealthy than others, some have better luck with a crop at a season than another has, one's pigs do better than another's, and in the end, one family may not have near as much meat as other families, thus suffering from less protein in the diet. One can not say this is the sole reason, but certainly bares logic, that many of the ceremonies requiring the sharing of meat, relate to this. If you build a new house, you have a new house ceremony, carefully done, more than another people, and the meat is shared. The poorer in the village get to eat alike. The richer you are, the more meat you will take down, the poor are fed.

Mother in laws. Some people fight with them. The Akha end sentences with certain words that ascribe specific feeling about the event. "I won't do that to avoid being illegal" or "I won't do that due to fear of the consequences, physical fear" not because it is wrong or illegal. In the case of a new bride, there may be many cases when it is illegal for her to return to her mothers house, and the groom seldom will. Married, she moves to her groom's village and the families are separate, life goes on. There are many laws among the Akha regarding the relationships between the relatives of married people and also regarding the different clans among the Akha, identified by family names.

All order, to carry on life peacefully, know where and who you are. The Akha have great emphasis on relationship. We occasionally say, our uncle, our aunt, our cousin or our friend. In the case of the Akha they speak of people who are related to them by marriage in a host of names for relative position by age and marriage to another person. And each position has a name. Among the Akha names are not much used, as ones name given at birth or family name, but names of position in relationship are used instead. Ah Meeh, one doesn't call her, instead they use the name for what one calls their brother's wife's younger sister, and so forth.

When you harvest rice, and watch the Akha do it with such fine grace, you notice just how hard it is on a lean stomach in the heat, on the steep hillside. You take a bunch of rice in your left hand, many stalks, grabbing them low, cut them off with a sickle, and take a few stalks and twist and wind them to hold the bundle, then you lay it back gently on the top of the ends of the remaining stubble where it will be allowed to dry for a few more days. But you don't just set it anywhere, you set it with the



cut end towards the rice hut and rice threshing place of the field. Why? Because it is the law. Sure, there is a reason, but it is also now part of the law to do that. You don't do anything carelessly if you live in the earth.

The law, much different than we hear of the history of Jewish law or Christian law, was not about being wrong, or getting punished as much as it was about keeping yourself in a good position with the world of life around you, the elements that produced your food, and that could also leave you with nothing to eat. A code of survival. You don't do it not because you don't want to get punished but because, why would you want to do something that is bad for you to do? Do you know more than all those who lived before you in combination? So will you change the law? Just for today? Just for you?

And all throughout the life of the Akha they adhere carefully to these known ways of doing things in what is for them a well known and finite environment of plants, animals, people, soil, water, rain, and wind. They believe in Spirits. There are some good spirits, but also many bad ones who are accountable for the bad things which occur. Sounds

reasonable enough. And the careless actions of humans can increase the damage that these bad spirits can do. So even when you are in the jungle, you must be careful, yes, there are guidelines for it all, such that neither you or anyone else get messed up.

In the west, most people not being able to name their great great grandfather, we often mock or minimize these sorts of things. But in this order and understanding of their lives the Akha, as a single race for hundreds of years, have preserved and carried forward their collective knowledge and caution about living long in the jungle and upon the earth, baring children who live and carry forward their people into the future in this way, believing in things which to those who don't know about them or their true meanings and implications, mock them as foolish superstitions or down right evil.

Yet in travels about the world, seldom will you find such a careful people about how they live their lives. Through this careful life, they live their lives through many eyes, each giving light and focus to each event. Carefully the Akha are wrapped up in the arms of this collective mind and cradle that brings them forward, like the new bark on a tree, their life soon to become the wood, straight and strong, going on, the rings never disappearing, one link of time, in a not so long total history of time for humans, not such an insignificant part of the whole, each and every one of them.

To be Akha is to be a way of being, a way of being alive, not just living, but it is the very definition of life, to have more than one eye, to have many eyes, to have many ears, always one heart.

You are not separate from anything or anyone, in one way, yet you part down slightly different roads by marriage, the younger sisters wailing as they see their older sisters leaving the village to become a bride, their dearest friend, leaving from beside them, to take that slightly one over road, from theirs.

Sitting next to fires, looking at the light in the old woman's face, trying to figure out what it is, within the context of the obvious temporary status of life for all, not shrouded or masked in Akha life. To die.

Carefully she has walked all the trails, farmed every clod of soil, sat beneath every tree, picked one of every leaf, eaten one of every fruit, like she has been so carefully laughing and joking, manicuring the face of the earth for so many years her time on it. You say there is more down off the mountain, different, better? How could she possibly care,

she is where and who she is and has done it all, how else can you be old but to have done and seen it all? Someone else has done more, different, not hardly, think they have, maybe done a whole lot less. She threshed the rice and ate on it for the whole next year, fed it like manna to her children, and gave the seeds back to the soil to give her the next batch also. Events came and went, the law carefully guided her to remember the unseen old couple who live in the rice field and take care of it when she is not there.

Enough to make you sing a song, if you can figure out all the lines.

## **Akha Songs**

Akha Songs are the heart of much of Akha Culture. A chorus of onrolling mountain sensibilities, sung alone in the fields, on the trail or in groups as the work goes on. Not just work, raising your food, caring for the earth, like one large piece of moldable clay that will return your health. A history of the lives of young and old both, the hopes and aspirations of a tribe, rolled up in a song.

Singing can be heard in this field from that one across the valley, carried on the wind, sung in long lines, the words one knows, the heart cheered, the heat not so hot, a laugh for all. So who is the old lady way over there? Oh that is so and so's wife.

## **A Mountain Knowledge System**

People speak of the hilltribe not being educated but what they mean without daring to say it is that the hilltribe are not educated in the western system. But educated they are, in every leaf and plant and the ways of the birds and the insects, the cycles of life, and how you can put your hand out and have a meal. For people who grew up on "by the sweat of thy brow" putting your hand out for a meal that comes to you from the forest might sound like blasphemy.

Schools try to take the children of the Akha out of their way of life, villages and fields, to "educate them" but one can not imagine what you must teach someone who knows how to live in the jungle, how to raise all the food they don't catch. Unless it be the assumption that the western system hates nothing more than independent people who don't need THEM.

And for the children it is a forced education system, a forced culture, in a policy of assimilation.

One might suggest the right to "non-education" when it is spoken of in this sense.

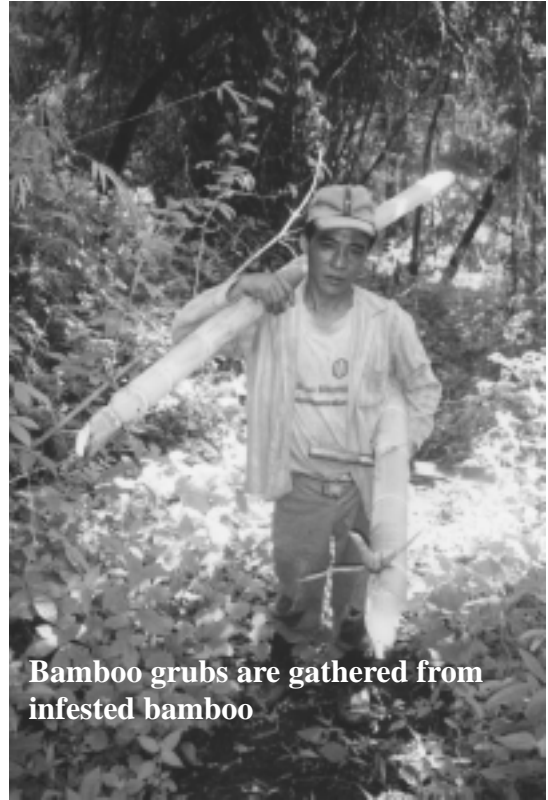
# The Akha -The Environment and Forced Village Relocations

## Down The Road

In years past the Akha always lived IN their environment, not adjacent to it, not across from it, not down the road from it. They did not “visit” the environment, but were a part of it. Forced army relocations have changed this in many villages, the Akha seeing that in ruthlessness, the environment must be more often exploited if it means one’s life and survival. There is a big difference between living down the road from the forest and living in the forest. A forest is not a garden, doesn’t look like one, and its exchanges with humans must be different from a garden. There are few who hold these values today while people make a hobby of talking of “sustainability” and “sustainable development”. Are they trying to “develop sustainably”? or are they speaking of “developing” other people for their own use and then calling it “sustainable”? One would guess the latter.



Collecting edible mushrooms



Bamboo grubs are gathered from infested bamboo

## Just Who Did Destroy The Environment?

When we look at the Haen Taek region we see that the Haw Chinese and Wa inhabited this area for a long time with the Shans and others before the Thais came into the area. Outside people came in and began building big roads, imposing social projects and generally telling everyone how to live while they cut down all the big trees and took them out of the area. Now the outsiders are cutting more forest, importing pigs farms, herbicides and pesticides and fumigating their orange orchards. How quickly people forget the facts. Thousands of rai of jungle are now covered with single specie pine. Half the bio mass of jungle and it doesn’t allow any other species.

Who approved all this madness while the hilltribes take the blame?

## The Akha Nature Conservancy

The Akha have seldom been consulted about the care for the forest they live in or who would have access to it. While forest and lands were destroyed, the forestry department came in with the idea that pine tree farming for profit would work, that nature is really no more than a park or farm where you plant trees in rows, yes, this will work for an eco system.

And plant pine trees they have. Their swath of death can be seen where ever they were planted. The large trees from the original forest were logged off by the Thai logging companies more than twenty years ago. Yet it is common to blame the hilltribe for all of this.

For these reasons the Akha see it in their self interest to head up their own nature conservation projects.

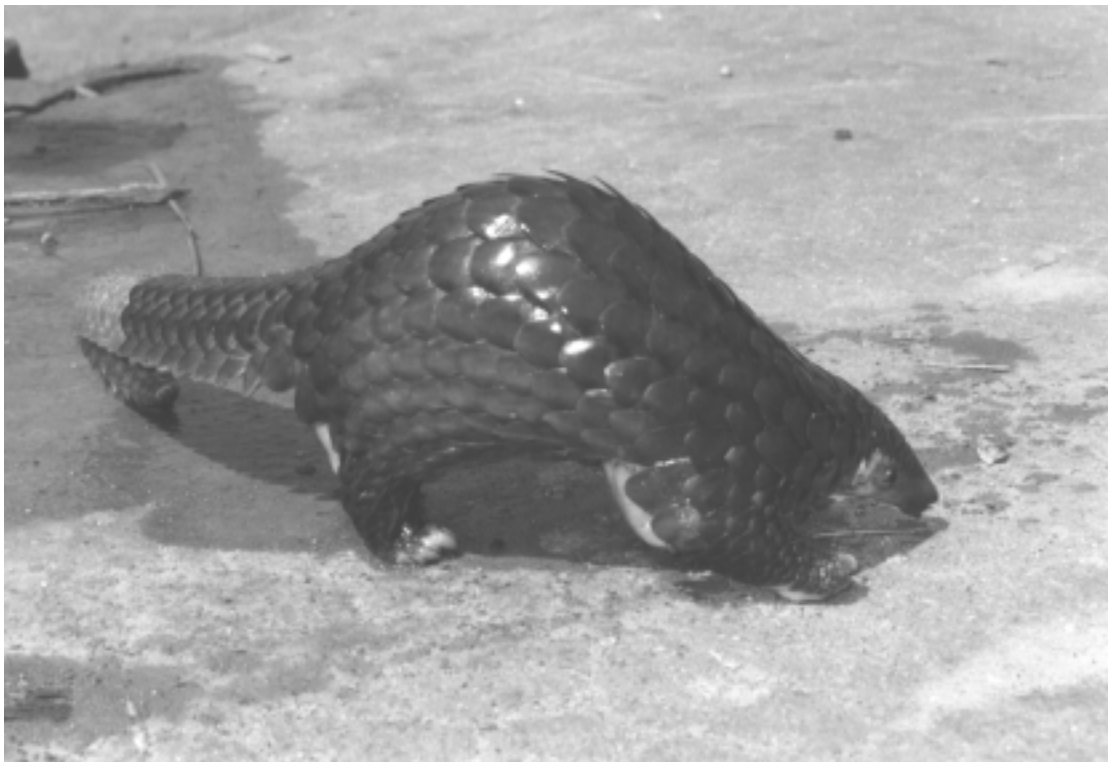
## Endangered Pangolins

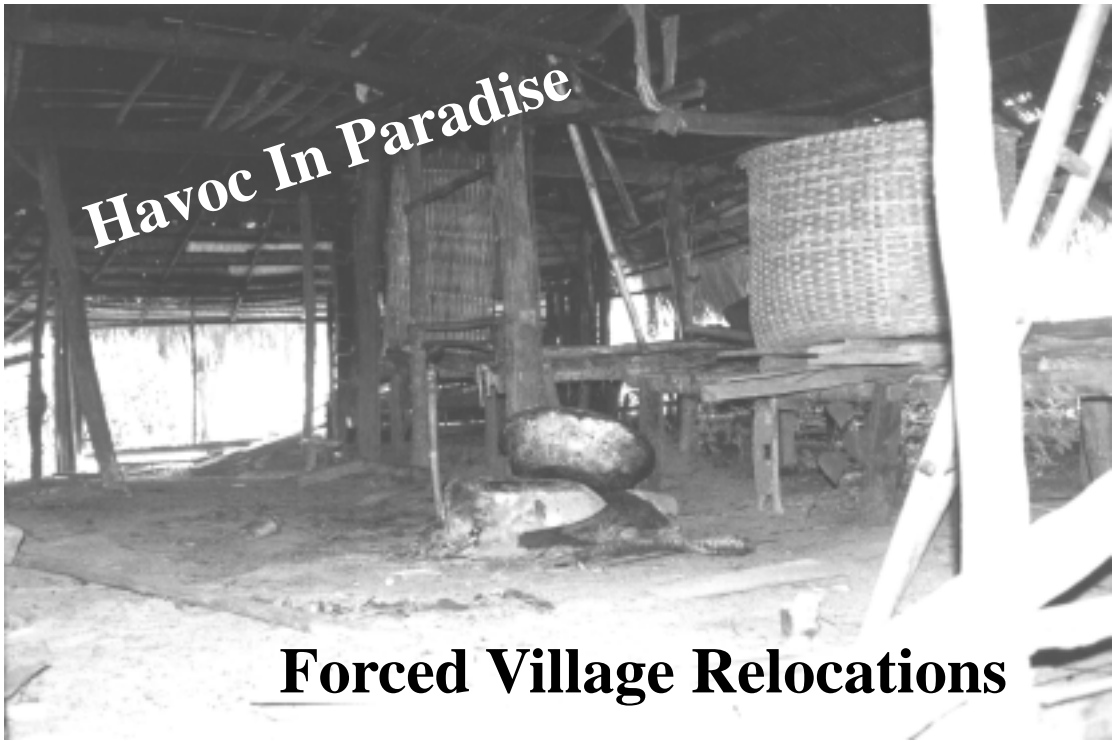
Attitudes are hard to change, and the case of the pangolin or ant eater is no exception.

Prized for meat, this animal is considered endangered. Getting people who have no food in the house to see the animal as anything other than a



meal takes some work. Addressing issues of poverty is directly linked to issues of the environment. Thais pay 300 baht for a big pangolin.





## **Forced Village Relocations**

### **Huuh Yoh Akha Village**

More than four years ago Huuh Yoh Lisaw Akha village was forced to relocate to anywhere they could find. A very old village, once Lisaw, as the name signifies, Huuh Yoh was on a trekker's route to a string of beautiful Akha and Lahu villages along the border mountain areas. With gorgeous views of the mountains and mountain fields, most of which are still farmed, the Akha had enjoyed a life few see these days.

Ah Zeh grew up at Huuh Yoh village and endured the relocation to the low lands for four years before relocating with his family to one of the nearby villages again. Four years of seeing families torn apart, babies die of low land diseases which the Akha didn't understand and the doctors didn't treat. Working for farmers who didn't pay, having to own a motorbike to get anywhere, renting rice fields, fighting mosquitos and watching young people always looking for drugs in the Akha villages but never being arrested. After his wife Meeh Sah died of fever Ah Zeh moved back to the mountain and remarried. Since he came back many other families have done so also. Mountain people live in Mountains.





## 21 Miscarriages

### The Pah Nmm Road Story

Nearly 12 years ago the army relocated the village of Pah Nmm in Ampour Mae Faluang. In those years the region was full of beautiful forests and all the hill tribe villagers lived up on the tops of the mountains as they had for many years, good view, good wind, and cool air. You could live off the view alone. But in a great act of arrogance the army moved these people who were no trouble to anyone and had no boss. The army didn't need to move them, it was just a matter of race and disregard. Now these years later we can see the result of this decision. Drug problems are greater, not less, the forest below the mountains has been completely destroyed as the area is turned into a business area in addition to the villages. There is no zoning and no planning. In addition to the hilltribes, people from out of the area are buying up land, planting non native species, and introducing insecticides and herbicides which further damage the ecosystem. People not native to the region have imported mass pig farming, the excrement being dumped directly into the rivers. Bamboo and forest products are increasingly harvested, and the beauty of the region

is lost, nothing compared to what it was 12 years ago when I made my way into the area by hard travel on unimproved trails with a dirt bike. In those years trekking could be done from mountain top village to village.

Not only did the army move the village of Pah Nmm but it moved these Akha people a good five kilometers from their old village and field site. So now for 12 years the people of Pah Nmm have been walking back to those fields from the crowded village location they now live at many meters below their previous home of many decades. And this has not been without a price. There is less investment in the land for two reasons. One, the Akha have to walk three hours a day to and from the fields which eats time and energy, and secondly the fields are so far away that many things that they might plant would be stolen or destroyed from the lack of close care.

Records started three years ago and in this time there have been 21 miscarriages among the 40 families of Pah Nmm Akha. Numerous women have given birth right on the trail to the fields, and the baby subsequently dying.

The effort to build a road along this trail to shorten



the distance to the fields has met with stiff resistance on the part of the Lahu who live in a Christian village fragment between the Akha village and the fields. Though no damage can be shown to occur to the Lahu due to a road, their headmen oppose the road due to the specific reason that for a number of years they have been busy making deals with forestry to take over sections of the Akha farm land each year. The agent for the forestry department is also the pastor for the village drawing substantial salaries for each job.

But the Akha intend to wear the Lahu down with time and have built nearly two thirds of the road.

The additional need for a road comes from the fact that the Lahu are continuously cutting trees without permit from the forest and burning large sections of the old forest which is hard to catch when there is not quick access along this trail route.

The Akha intend to establish this region as the first part of an Akha Nature Conservancy Project preventing the cutting of trees, establishing a native specie nursery and protecting the birds and animals of this forest.

## Proposed Village Relocations

The Thai government announced it would force to relocate 1,115 Mountain Villages. While Village Communities flourish in networking on the internet from all over the world, sharing ideas on sustainability and preserving the mountain environments, the Thai government, not having heard of the coexistence of humans with nature before, demands that the villagers all leave, and into poverty at that, amid great promises of aid and care, the likes of what we have not seen in Thailand before. Tourism and interest in the hilltribe will be restricted to cultural shows far removed from the land grabbing areas. The real people will be gone, as well as their lives and culture. But the assumption is made that tourists and historians will not be able to tell the difference anyway.

How ever, to protest these actions, many hilltribe took to Chiangmai at the provincial office in Mae Rim to enlighten the government. ID cards and Land. Every once and a while a government pencil pusher would come out to wring their hands, promise anything to the crowd and then go back into the



Villagers make their way back to their old village location.



air conditioning. The hilltribes assembled could not be sure of getting anything by this process. Grass roots organization on a village by village level is encouraged for long term protections and gains. See article page 34.

### **Relocations fight back**

Some Akha villagers who were once relocated are now moving back to live near relatives in the mountains again. In the flat lands they don't have enough work, not enough pay, not enough food, no food security, no land, heat, fever, other illnesses, bad water, no place for livestock and mosquitos all plague them.

### **Asian Development Bank Mountain Policy**

Asian Development Bank is paying money to have all the mountain people in the Upper Mekhong Subregion relocated from the mountains. Been there a few thousand years, mountain people of one kind or another.

Protest to the ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK OFFICES!!!!



An Akha hut stands overgrown with vines at the location of an old Akha village on the trekking routes, Huuh Yoh Lisaw. An old village, many years at that location. Before the Akha were there the Lisaw were there as the name illustrates. Fields of other villages can be seen in the distance.

## The Akha Family

Life is not easy in an Akha village, but has a very nice rythm to it.

The Akha get up early, cooking the rice which they let set in water from the night before. 4 am means that the rice will be ready by 7. They may not have time to eat it though, so will pack large quantities of it into bags that they take with them to the fields and eat when they get to the field huts. They also cook greens, squash, carry peanuts and water to drink. When they have all these items of course, which can be often or not so often depending on the history and difficulties brought to the village.

Generally the Akha don't make trouble for other people. An Akha with a gun? What's an Akha gonna do with a gun? They ask. Unless it is hunting only and then that is with the long muzzle loaders the men take into the woods.

Akha women, they know all about plants, herbs, bugs, and good things you can dig from the earth. Lots of things like special tree bark you can chop into meat for a meat cake, or there is a jello, clear as a mountain spring, that you can get out of the middle of bamboo stalks. There are bamboo worms, big Jerusalem crickets and mountain acorns. But be careful when you go way up high for the nuts on the mountain top woods, because lots of strange soldiers hide up there.

Huts are divided, the men sleeping on one side, the women and small children on the other.

Smoke from cooking fires laquers the inside of the bamboo, wood and grass thatch hut, making it not so friendly to mosquitos. The chill mountain air also drives the mosquitos away.

Akha life requires much work, but there are many days when you don't go to the fields either, ceremonies in the village, all a rythm to it to make life go on easier. Sometimes you take sick and don't go to the fields, or sometimes you go to a friends fields, all sort of one big related family. Later they give you back a day's labour in your fields.

Dating is usually between villages, boys from this village, marrying the girls from that village. Divorces happen but aren't any big deal when they do, the person usually doesn't stay single for very long and then there are always more kids. The kids sort of belong to the village, that's what the village is for really. The Akha can't really figure out people who want to own things till they get old instead of have children and grand children and great grand-

children. Then when its your time to go, the village has a big old feast for three days and takes you off to the heart of the mountain.

## The Importance of Names

The Akha have a naming system by which every person is given a two syllable name at birth. This is in addition to their family name. The Akha know their family geneologies back more than 2000 years and can repeat their geneology down to their own name. Each person ads their name to the list, then their children's name and thus the geneology goes on. The names are recited in pairs, the last syllable of the name before and the last syllable of the next name.

Example:

Leeh Sah, Poeuh Jurh, Ah Soh

Three names. But when they are said in the geneology they are said like thus:



Leeh Sah  
Sah Jurh  
Jurh Soh.....

As a ryme so that remembering is easy.

## **Leaving Your First Love**

The old village in the mountain knew nothing of machines, sometimes something of war, sometimes saw an airplane. Travel was by horse and foot and one spent their days either in the fields or in the forest.

But then the exploiters came, figuring they could cut the trees if they built a road. These people weren't Akha. Then they came to buy things or steal, and sell merchandise, paving the way for the market economy. Forced relocations also forced market economy on people as they had to take jobs and then buy the necessities they needed whereas before there was no need for this. The new economy is not sustainable, but the duration of the new economy gives people the impression it is. In exchange for the new economy roads have been built and much of the natural resources destroyed, the newcomers blaming this on the hilltribe. As more and more life falls into the new economy, it must then turn around and see the wild environment as something to exploit in order to survive the new economy, a friend selling a friend.

## **Akha Girls And Prostitution in Thailand**

There has been over time much effort on the part of Christian missions to accuse and exploit the poverty of the Akha and the resultant circumstances that this poverty has forced many girls into.

Missions have done everything in their power to portray the Akha, starting with Gordon Young and Paul W. Lewis, as the pagans that they saw them as, to justify their establishment of missions and building of mission wealth and resources. A very old story of colonialization with which we would readily compar to Korea, the Philippines, Hawaii.

Missions chose to divide the society, cause conflict which eventually results in the military domination of the people by outside forces. The ownership of all the resources suddenly shifting away from the Akha to others.

Paul Lewis facilitated this by spreading

many untruths and half truths about the Akha. He was an exploiter. He was accused by the Burmese Government for being involved in both the CIA and the heroin business. He was expelled from the country.

After being expelled from Burma Paul W. Lewis ran a sterilization program against hundreds of Akha women who he abandoned in poverty. Women who had only one or two children were convinced to be sterlized by Lewis's pastors as henchmen, and then when their existing children died due to illness, these women were childless and became abandoned. Paul Lewis never repented of this incredibly insensitive project. He insists that he is an anthropological expert on the Akha while continuing to promote the overthrow of traditional Akha villages and the removal of teen age Akha girls from their villages.

Many of the bars which provide Akha girls for prostitution are in fact run by foreigners both in Chiangrai and Chiangmai.

But the chief problem with the mission stance is that they accuse the entire Akha culture of the problem, as a reason to do away with it, something they would never apply to their own culture where more than a million babies are aborted each year, an act few traditional Akha would do.

And further, they can not explain the math of how they live so well, on so much money, when if a small fraction of this money was spent in the villages for agricultural investment, the conditions in the villages would quickly change.

You can ask any Akha girl in any bar why she is there and she will quickly explain she feeds her family and younger siblings. A trip to her village will rapidly verify this situation. To "save" the girl while doing nothing for her family or human rights situation (god forbid) is hypocrisy, very convenient hypocrisy at that.

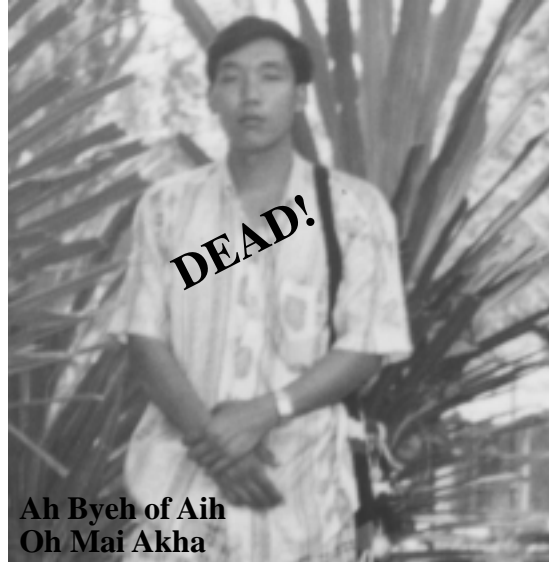
Whatever one thinks, Chiangrai is full of "Houses" removing Akha girls from their villages. The situations in the villages don't change much but rather gets worse, so we wonder if these people are interested to get at the root of the problem or if they are only in it for the short haul? Where is Purachai?

## Dead Men and Missing Fathers...

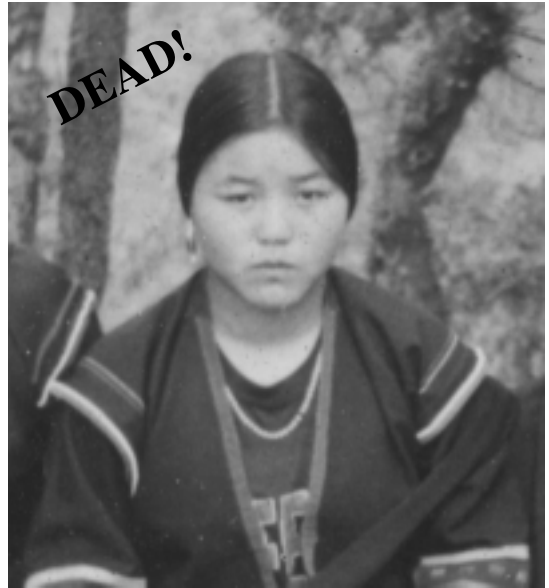
**Two Lahu Men NOW Missing, contact [akha@akha.org](mailto:akha@akha.org) for details!**

Leeh Jurh is one of the children of Ah Juuh Cheh Muuh who died in what was called an army detox camp but was really a hole in the ground. Along with five other men taken into custody for smoking opium in what was organized as a voluntary “quit smoking” campaign, the men were beaten. One old man from a neighboring village feared that he would not survive the experience and escaped. Two of the other men were beaten severely. Around 6 am Ah Juuh began passing blood. Crying out he fell down dead. He was taken by the army from Meh Maw Akha village to the Haen Taek hospital where an autopsy was performed. Hospital staff would not release the incriminating report and though army officers were identified and transferred there was no official prosecution for a crime. Are Akha lives considered cheap? Ah Juuh was 47.

Ah Tay was the other Akha who was severely beaten and he began having trouble breathing and was taken to the same hospital around 7am where more than a unit of blood had to be drained out of his chest from a lung hemorrhage.



Ah Byeh was taken into custody in Bangkok as a suspect but not charged. After 7 months of torture he was returned to Chiangrai Prison. He told his wife what was done to him and his body was covered with scars from being burned with electricity and other items. He died two weeks later. His body was examined upon being returned to the family. He left three children.



## Meeh Pyaw Dies at Meh Joh Akha

Meeh Pyaw Seh Dooch of Loih Chiang Akha died while visiting Meh Joh Akha in Burma at her uncle's house. She was shot through the chest while preparing the morning's rice. She was robbed of her jewelry even though she was still alive. She did not die for three hours and was only 2 kilometers from a Thai clinic. The attacking soldiers would not render aid. Meh Joh Akha was subsequently burned with the loss of more than nine lives. There still has not been an adequate investigation into the death of Meeh Pyaw and the recovery of her body. Meeh Pyaw was 24, an only daughter.



## Ah Myah Cheh Muuh Looses to Army

After a suspected drug runner was arrested the Border Police unit 514 from Mae Rim (trained by US personell) broke into his house and removed personal belongings and money. When headman Ah Myah went to the unit to ask that his money and possessions be returned they shackled him for four days until he signed a statement that nothing was stolen.



## 2 Missing Lahu



# Beat and torture the

## Ah Bah Rgoeuh Zurh

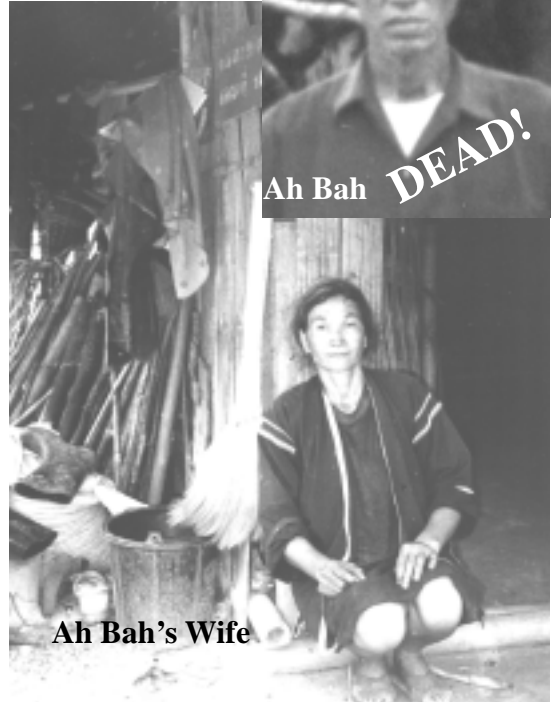
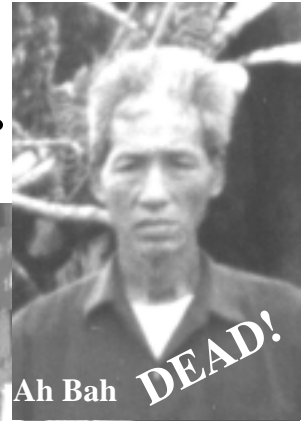
Maybe the fact that his daughter was married to a man from Germany had something to do with it, maybe someone wanted money, regardless, police came to his house in the evening and beat him, drug him outside and hauled him up to the road junction where they beat him some more despite the pleas of his wife that they stop.

He told his wife he felt in his body that he was dying as they took him away in a police truck. Only a few minutes after leaving the Sam Yaek - Mae Salong Jct. Ah Bah fell dead. He was left on the road as if he had gone to sleep but he was found minutes later by a passing motorist who noticed that he appeared completely without injury from a fall, except a small amount of blood seeping from one ear. The passerby moved him out of the road.

The autopsy showed that Ah Bah had died from a blow to the base of his skull which fractured it and caused a brain hemorrhage. But the police claimed he jumped from the truck and were trying to collect money from his family for his release hours after he was already dead.

The Chiangrai police said that the family should make a new report with that office but then refused to accept it. No criminal charges were pressed and the family was given a small amount of money but not enough to feed small children for years who now have no father.

**poorest...**



**Ah Bah's Wife**



**The road where  
Ah Bah's body was found**



### Ah Nyoh

The Akha call him Ah Nyoh, the word for water buffalo, because he is without home and works by the day tending anyone's water buffalo. Without home or family he makes about 20 baht a day.

When the 514 Gow Lang Task force came, who knows what he was doing but when they shot the light off the front porch of the hut he ran out the back door and down into the hole behind the house that the water runs through. It was dark and with repeated gunfire from m-16's and 9mm handguns the boys from the mighty 514 Border Patrol using their latest US training, were able to "flush him out" from his hiding place in the dark next to the outhouse when he finally received one bullet wound across the back of his head. Considered a threat to humanity, Ah Nyoh was hauled away to locations unknown for three hours where he was soundly beaten and allowed to wash his face by holding his head under water.

### Profiling?

Not only does the enforcement policy in effect show little sign of making any lasting changes, or building trust with the hilltribe but one might also ask why there is not an international protest regarding this harsh and selective enforcement aimed at hill folk who have the least representation and rights in Thailand? Is having army living in every village considered a sign of democracy and health? Arrests incidents with this kind of saturation presence will of course be higher than in neighboring populations.



### Ah Peeh

Well, he was less talkative, taken into custody at the same time, and he wouldn't tell anything bad about anyone, not being of that kind of spirit, so the good ole 514 boys, once again using good old fashion proven US methods, took some rolled up paper, lit it on fire and burned the skin all off the back of his neck. Then they held his head under water to put the fire out. An American working for the Justice Department commented on seeing the wound that it looked "rather boiled".

## maybe the drugs will stop??

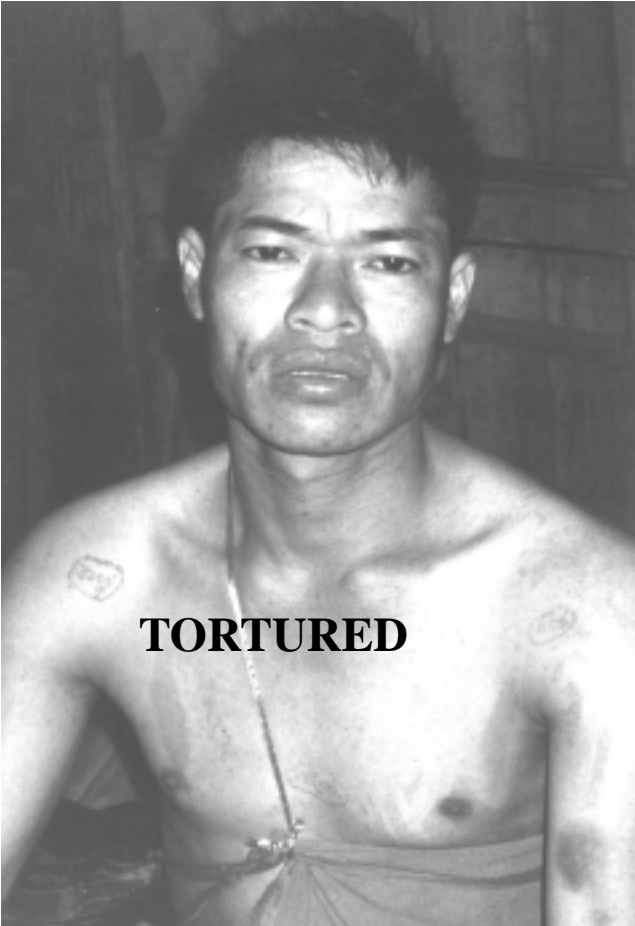
### Ah Zeh

The oldest brother of Ah Peeh, he was dumped in the Haen Taek Jail after his experience, his hair also wet from his late night session at the salon. From the appearance of these three stuffed in the tiny make do cell, one was convinced that there would soon not be any drug dealers in all of Thailand, no one who used drugs and certainly nothing more for the 514 boys to do, American policy saving the day. The cop on duty, knowing better profusely claimed that he didn't do it.



## Dvek

Headman of his village, Dvek was working in his Mae Salong Lychee orchard when the busy boys from Sam Yaek Cavalry Squadron 241 caught him and his son doing just that, working. Convinced there must be an evil pill running plot behind the two, they were taken to Sam Yaek army base and beaten for four days. Tied like pigs, hands and feet, Dvek said he especially enjoyed the part where they beat the back of his neck with a club and hooked electricity to his ears to see if he could get up off the floor and dance with his hands tied like that. For his poor performance he was beaten some more, as all father and son events should go. After he wasn't able to tell the army anything they wanted to know they let him go home, where he claims he fondly enjoys the memories and looks to hide when strangers come.



## Good Times At the Sam Yaek Army Base

Ah Dteeh sits contentedly with his broken ribs bound and unable to walk from his similar dancing experience to that of Dvek at Sam Yaek Army camp.

The army claims they did nothing wrong, that they never beat anyone, but Ah Dteeh would choose to differ with them. The base is small and he wonders how you could get beaten senseless, have your ribs kicked in, electrocuted, and a few miscellaneous bruises without the base commander knowing about it. We'd like to know too.

In any case, thinking that base commander Col Apisit did know about it, Ah Dteeh thought he would be better off somewhere else before ending up dead like a few others so he managed to creep his way out of the place and found a new home in Burma.

Could all these people be dreaming?  
It didn't really happen to them?  
Just one big misunderstanding?  
Body counts while the drugs flow.

## Booh Nmm

The mother of three children, Booh Nmm lives in a low land village relocated from the mountains. Her village is endlessly the subject of visits from Thais who are looking for drugs and police who are looking for Akhas.

Rather impoverished where she lives with her husband's blind father, the place sports the luxury of a rusty and battered refrigerator propped up on a shelf in the dirt floor hut. They didn't have enough wood or money to build a hut above the ground like the Akha normally do or like the hut she had before in the mountains of Hua Mae Kom where it was cool and the children didn't get sick much.

Whatever her fortunes she rues the day that her husband Loh Guuh got called to talk to someone at the low end of the village. While he waited a man in plain clothes walked up behind him and shot him in the back of the head from a meter away. His sister had just asked him who the man was but he looked and said he didn't know, just before turning away and then getting shot by the same man.

The police said that they had sent a Thai man to the village to try and buy drugs and that the Akha man was shot because of this. Do they shoot every Thai involved with drugs on the spot? Is that the law in Thailand? An unarmed man looking the other way?

Loh Guuh was 32 and was expecting his fourth child at the time. If he was a drug dealer his wife would like to know where he hid all the money?

The Mae Chan police called it a barbaric treatment of a human being but no officers were charged and the issue of due process was never addressed.

The Chiangrai Head of Police claimed that the incidents such as Ah Bpah and Loh Guuh "would not be swept under the carpet or forgotten" but that is exactly what has happened as the months have passed.

Someone still has to feed the children.



**HUSBAND DEAD!**

### A Problem of Balance

The problem with the police and military involvement in the Akha villages regarding drugs is that a drug problem is a medical problem and doctors are used to deliver babies and treat other medical problems so why in this case are the police and army running the show? Where is their success story? Drugs in Thailand are far worse than they were ten years ago.

Why don't the hilltribe trust these people?

The US trains Border Police Task Forces and next thing they are implicated in murders and tortures of hilltribe peoples.

But even more important is the fact that the Thais would never settle for army living in all their villages and shooting anyone they saw running. Where is the oversight?

# The Drug War

## A war on Drugs and Terror or a War on People?

### **Border Police 514?**

In the village of Gow Lang there is one Border Police Unit, the 514, which has established itself as rather brutal.

### **Meh Joh Akha Attacked and Burned**

In February Meh Joh Akha on the Burma side of the border across from Gow Lang Akha Village in Ampur Mae Faluang District, Chiangrai, was attacked by combined forces and burned. Meh Joh Akha no longer exists, added to the lists of Akha villages in Thailand and Burma which have been destroyed without representation or recourse. The reason given for the attack was that this was a preemptive strike on a Burmese position but in fact there were not very many Burmese soldiers at that location, other than at the border post.

Drugs had long been pushed through the village by various forces on the Burma side, and the attack was seen by some as an opportunity to remove the village which was close to the border.

One may then ask if attacking and burning villages will be the case for all villages located near the border? Will this include Bala and Som Peeh Akha as well as others?

In the attack on Meh Joh the Akha girl Meeh Pyaw Seh Dooh of Loi Chiang Akha in Chiangrai area was shot while preparing the morning rice. Soldiers shot through the house walls from the nearby fence. She was visiting her Uncle in Meh Joh. She was 24 years old, an only daughter. Shot through the chest, her brother drug her from the house before it was burned, but could get no assistance to get her back across the border into Thailand to a clinic. She bled for three hours and finally died. While she was still alive, soldiers came and stripped her of her jewelry and watch before leaving into Thailand.

A Chinese man from Haen Taek, Chou Lou, 21 years, was also killed. Cheh Kurh, a Lahu man from Loh Mah Cheh area near Gow Lang village was also shot and killed.

Meh Joh Recent Update:

Word has it that a reporter for Channel 7 TV not only filmed the attack but was a part of the attack as well. Quite a large amount of money and a few vehicles are missing.

### **Burma Says Naughty Boys Did It**

The Burmese Government says that naughty boys from Thailand with the help of the Thai Army burnt Meh Joh Akha village.

Witnesses saw the soldiers flee in trucks in this direction.

The SSA says they did it. (Shan State Army)

But some have questions back at Rangoon as to that being the entire story.

Thai Army said the attack came by the SSA from way deep in Burma.

How they got Thai TV 7 to accompany them from there is anyone's guess.

Just another case of "time - sequence" confusion in Thailand.

### **Drugs and Border Problems:**

There are some 300 Akha villages in Thailand, mostly in the mountains against the border. Since some people are busy pushing all the methamphetamine that they can, and others are busy moving all the chemicals for making it, and the banks are busy laundering all the money, the Akha villages are caught square in the middle. Convenient enough, because if the heaviest enforcement goes on in the villages, there will be disproportionate arrests, while the big cats slip away. But that does get rid of a lot of Akhas.

How about stopping the flow into the Akha communities instead? Would that be too much to ask? Where are the Thai Army patrols? Haven't seen any lately. Some areas would appear wide open around the villages, when there could be a steady patrol of these areas providing security to the villages and as an alternative to a no man's land.

In addition, the Akha villages are very impoverished, many have been relocated and the Chiangrai Forestry department is busy taking all the rice growing land they can. So where are the Akha going to make up the money? This land policy only increases the likelihood that the Akha are going to turn a blind eye to the drug runners or even participate. It would seem that the Army, which backs up forestry with guns and has this big relocation plan anyway, is working at cross purposes. And any concern the government has over all this and their enforcement plans are lost when you look at the fact that no aid goes to the Akha villages. The people just don't figure in big boys games. Night vision equipment,