

Special Report:
Finishing the Pah Nmm Road -
The Akha Community
Working Together



With a little funding to cover the cost of food while they were away from regular tasks, the Akha of Pah Nmm finished the road back to their fields, following a forced relocation. Forced relocations have a brutal effect on nutrition and infant mortality. Pah Nmm Akha lost more than 50 infants after they were relocated from their upper location more than ten years ago.



Back To Eden

Pah Nmm Akha in Ampur Mae Faluang was forced to relocate more than ten years ago by the Thai Forestry department and the Thai army. Pah Nmm was regularly visited by trekkers before this time, so exemplary was their use of the fields and forest around them. Their Meeh Sauh Law forest still exists at the old location. This is the Akha sacred forest. But the army told them, "Move or get pushed into Burma!" Since the army and police units were also burning Akha villages in the region at this time, the Akha had little hope. However there was extensive forest below the village in the location where they were told to move. The army told them it was no problem to cut this forest for a new village and new fields. But in the end this deforestation was again blamed on the Akha.

Despite promises of a better life, miscarriages increased at the new location, pigs died, cattle died, and chickens were more difficult to raise. Crowding the various tribes such as Lahu and Lisu and Akha together the government then told them they were free to kill each other's animals for trespassing. The crustian Lahu were more than happy to oblige and often killed their neighbor's animals.

With encouragement and help the Akha of Pah Nmm began rebuilding a road back to their distant fields which they were walking to one and a half hours each day. The trail was narrow and easy to be robbed on.

Digging the road was an enormous task accomplished over a number of years. Bamboo, tree stumps, large bolders, all had to be removed for a level grade to make it easier on the women to walk this distance each day. The men walked their horses loaded with farm supplies back and forth on this narrow trail before so the road would make safe passing possible.

Hornets in the ground made for extra excitement. To this day it is hard to figure why hornets more often than not sting workers around the eyes, which soon swell up and keep them from seeing from one eye.

Work patterns were noticeable, the women working slow but steadily, the men working hard but for shorter periods of time, carving out one section of road and then resting.

Lunch was either chicken or ducks.

Pick handles, hoe handles, knife blades, axes, all gave way to the hard ground and dry tree stumps left over from the days when the Thais logged the area.

Small red ants were aggressive fighters and biters as the Akha chopped down through rocky soil to get a large rock out.

One woman brought water around to all the workers to drink. Women rested in the shade to breast feed their children. Young girls carried the babies while their mothers dug on the road.

Enormous boulders or bamboo stumps were the most work. Bamboo required much chopping and digging, destroying many a hoe handle.

Everyone had their share of blisters upon blisters. Bugs joined the fray, biting at will. The occasional snake was driven out of the brush while clearing the narrow shelf for the road.

But in many days of digging not one person was injured or became sick despite incredible heat and dust.

The new road, not really large enough yet for regular vehicle use can be used by motorcycles. Just walking on the new road saves at least fifteen to twenty minutes from when it was a narrow trail. Before the daily walk was three hours.

Numerous volunteers showed up to help on the road and add their philosophy.

At the end of a long trying project the Akha lined up for a night time photo of more than 61 workers.





A group of travellers help the Akha get the job done. Julie, Sarah and Ferg. You can always depend on the Irish!!!











The Road Rock

The road project included many large tasks. An immense rock bigger than what could be removed or chipped out of the road was made to disappear. Workers dug repeatedly under the huge bolder until it sank completely out of sight and was covered over. Lunch time was a chance to sit, eat, sew, smoke. Children came along to care for the babies and carry them back and forth to their mothers. In the evening everyone lined up for muster at a job well done.





News Notes

One of the central efforts of our work is a visitation circuit to all the Akha villages in Thailand. Village visits help to assist the villagers with first aid needs and human rights information. Cases of human rights abuse are brought to light and investigated. Assessment of water needs are made, people with serious ailments are assisted with a clinic visit in their area. Arrangements are made for special surgery or treatment as necessary.

Village discussions help assess the factors that are either benefitting or damaging the village community.

The Flower Farm Pesticide Exposure

Flower farms run by the Chinese use large quantities of pesticides daily, polluting both people, the soil and water. No government regulation is in place regarding the sale and use of these very dangerous chemicals which include nerve agents.

23rd Pah Nmm Akha Baby Dies

A woman of Pah Nmm Akha was the 23rd woman to loose a child during pregnancy or shortly after birth in four years that records have been kept there.

The Akha Love the 30 Baht Plan

Whatever others have to say about it, the Akha mostly love the 30 baht plan and have been able to correct health conditions which would otherwise be impossible for them to afford. However there are still cases of being charged under the table for treatment or refusal of treatment. Bill irregularities and over charges confuse and often keep the Akha from seeking medical care as they don't know what it will cost them. As well, when they can not pay the hospitals either take their ID cards away or refuse to let the patient leave till the bill is paid.

Women Healers Are First To Be Silenced By Missionaries:

Women who are traditional healers called Gneeh Pah's in the Akha community are the first people to be silenced by the missionaries in their effort to coerce communities into conversion. The missionaries frequently tell these women that they are worshipping the devil in their attempts to heal people. From a purely theological standpoint it would seem that the Gneeh Pah healers would not be able to do good with power from the devil????

Tetanus Toxoid Vaccine How Many Times?

Tetanus toxoid vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women unless you are the WHO. In any case, only so many injections are suggested. But Akha women state that they are required to go to the clinic for a number of tetanus vaccines for each

pregnancy. The number of miscarriages immediately following the vaccines are noteworthy. Yet no investigation has been made into this at the local village level either by WHO which pushes vaccinations or the Thai health authorities who implement vaccine programs

Akha Who marry foreigners

We haven't started a social function yet, but numerous western men and women are married to Akha people. If you would be interested to know more about what is going on in the Akha community, please contact us. Akha spouses are excellent sources of up to date information on the pressures being forced down on the Akha communities and can provide valuable human rights information, as well as ideas on how to assist their particular villages. We have Akha language resources available for those of you who wish to know more about the Akha culture and learn some of the language.

New Ministry of Culture

We are told in Chiangmai that the Hill Tribe Research Center is to be moved to Bangkok, not a good sign of things to come. Further away from the cultures they claim to study, the studies will become less relevant.

Know of a village relocation or news story?

If you are aware of an Akha village being relocated, please do not hesitate to call us so that we can take quick action to protect this village.

01-884-8111 or email akha@akha.org

Shooting Case Still Unsolved

A falang was shot last year here in north Thailand, miraculously surviving. The case was investigated and it became clear that robbery was the motive and that a ranking police officer was running a theft ring. But as usual in Thailand there was no prosecution, impunity under the law is the word of the day for police officers involved in killings, drug running and prostitution rings.

Hilltribe who feared for their life in the last drug war had good reason to do so. Police officers with whom they had done business were trying to clean up after themselves, while at the same time getting drug war brownie points from their boss. A game they couldn't loose, killing their hilltribe partners who had supplied them with drugs from the Burma side. In some cases it was just a matter that the police involved didn't want to pay up the transport bill so it was easier to kill than to pay.

Is it an NGO or is it a MISSION?

There is surely the need for more networking of NGO's which don't have a hidden agenda of



Akha woman stabbed, survives.

An Akha woman of Bpah Cheeh Akha who was stabbed by an Akha man from another village survived two deep knife wounds after lengthy surgery. The man, angry that the police had found his drug stash, killed a young woman, an old man, injured another old man and knifed this woman. He has been caught. Word is that he mutilated another woman who didn't want to marry him a number of years prior to this incident.

evangelization. We continue to investigate NGO's to find out which ones can work on a cooperative pro Akha culture agenda. Afect and Impect are the only prominent NGO's with Akha staff.

Akha Politics

Bpah Mah Hahn gets new Pah Luang Ah Gaw

The last Pah Luang got strung out on heroin, Ah Baw Lay. Ah Gaw states that there is insufficient back up an assistance from the government to deal

with drug problems, that help at detox and reducing drug use are too slow in coming, incomplete or half hearted, something the villages detect and do not take seriously. Simple police and military patrols are still lacking, while the Ampur demands an end to the drug use. Drug use and criminality are most notable in villages that have been relocated, and suffer from extreme poverty. While the government may have a case on the drug issue, it remains to be seen if any attempt at solving the problem can occur separate from addressing community problems, starting at nutrition and farming. A long list of "Thou Shalt Not's" does little for the communities and the only visible government investment in these communities is possibly a new strip of concrete on the steeper sections of road into the village. Meanwhile the fact that the logging of the traditional forests next to the Akha villages was done by the Thais, continues to be concealed from the public. Most villages are custodians of secondary forests. Forced relocation caused deforestation in new areas, when the old village locations had fifty and sixty years of land investment both in crops, caring for the local forest and water systems. While the forestry department villainizes the hilltribe over the environmental problems, increased movement of population from the low lands into the mountains is not spoken of. As well, Thai farming practices that are brought in, such as building a pig farm next to a river and letting the effluent flow freely into it, are not noted or prevented. Local restaurants place increasing demand on the forest for wood products for temporary structures as well as charcoal, while the blame can conveniently be laid at the feet of the hill tribe in the ongoing hypocrisy in Thailand.

What the Akha say they want

The Akha say they need more village level investment in agriculture that is in harmony with the environment, less herbicides and less pesticides. Moneys are needed for coffee, tea and fruit trees that don't require spraying.

Oranges orchards require heavy spraying but are being planted everywhere. Orange orchards also require heavy use of water resources.

Few of the orange orchards are planted by the hill tribe but rather by outsiders moving into the mountains with their chemical dependent plantations. Much of the dangerous chemical application which leads to continued exposure is done by the hill tribe who are pressed under poverty. For 60

baht a day, less than the national minimum legal wage, hill tribe people endanger their lives and are continuously exploited by greedy orchard and flower farm owners.

Seeds and Volunteer Gardener Needed

We need all the vegetable seeds we can get and we also need garden volunteers to live in the mountains and help with vegetable plots. There is a fee to cover living arrangements and transport costs. Learn some Akha language, enjoy the mountain forests and work with the local villagers for a memorable experience.

Forestry Camp Heroes

The Akha, blamed for deforestation at every turn of the road, are seldom shown for who they are, reforesters. The Akha make up a large number of forestry workers in northern Thailand. Akha who are hired by the forestry department to run a forestry camp often turn their accommodations into a permanent village of ten to fifteen years, gathering many herbs, flowers, fruit bearing trees and even fish stocks to their location.

Akha Hani Meeting

Back from the Akha Hani meeting, it was decided that the next meeting would be in Monglar, East Shan State, Myanmar.

Village Fund

Few know how the village fund that Thaksin set up works. So we were encouraged when we heard that these low interest loans benefited the villages in a number of ways. First the loan is guaranteed by several families. Then the fee on the loan that is taken out at the beginning, becomes part of the new village fund for that village. This allows the village to collectively take on some projects. After a year the full amount comes due, and is paid back all at once when all the money loaned to the village is collected. Villages slow to pay back all at once are put on the bottom of the list for next round. Villages with drug problems do not qualify for second round, and villages that are on time can borrow collectively again if the village decides it wants to. Last year many Akha bought a new piece of land, built a rice terrace or bought water buffalo or cattle with their loan monies.

The Falling Mountain

Ah Baw Pooh's brother Ah Gaw at Bpah Mah

Hahn Akha village had a close call. He took his money with him to the field for safe keeping but when he was weeding in his rice, the entire mountain fell down taking away most of his rice field, the field hut where he left the money, and all his banana trees, as well as relocating a couple hundred truck loads of mud. A creek up on top of the mountain had gone wrong, leaking into the clay, till the whole mountain side came down. For several days Ah Gaw probed the mud with test holes and sticks looking for where his field hut had gone and finally found it. Digging for two days down through the mud, he finally recovered his money bag with everything in tact. He then went out and bought two water buffalo to avoid further accidents. But then a year later, in what might have been a dispute with the Lahu, eight water buffalo suddenly died including his two. Four one day, four the next in what looked very much like a poisoning.

Akha Accidents

Two Akha girls drown in the Chiangmai Klong near Loi Kroh Road. Akhas, not all who are used to swimming have their number of swimming accidents. In this case two girls waiting for their parents went swimming in the klong unattended and drowned.

Two Akha girls from Pai ah Prai village die at Pasang. Once again, working at a restaurant near a large pond, the girls went swimming to cool off and drowned.

One Akha died at Pai ah Prai village in a pond near a tea plantation.

An Akha boy was hit by an ambulance at Bah Boh Loh Akha village while crossing the road that divides the village. 7 years old, he died at the scene.

12 Akha and others died in early December when a pick up truck that was overloaded went out of control down hill and slammed into an embankment on the mountain pass between Mae Chan and Tatong just west of Pah Yah Akha village. The passengers were going village to village singing christmas carols.

Akha Journal makes an income for street Akha

The Akha in Chiangmai are given Akha Journals for free in order to help out with distribution and they make a nice income selling the journals for 20 baht each. Missionaries upset with the stories exposing their practices demanded to know where they got the Akha Journals and told the ambitious flower women not to sell them. The Akha however were making a profit so just kept on

selling them as soon as the people left the street. Missionaries like free speech?

Leo Dead

In December of 2002, after a trip to China, Abaw Leo, as the Akha knew him, passed away in Chiangmai. Leo had worked many years for Akha causes and had commented regularly in the press to correct misperceptions or prejudice used against the Akha.

Shell kills Akha man Huuh Gkah Akha

In a story which has been a little hard to track down but continues to surface, it is said that in the artillery exchange to push back Wa insurgents in the Haen Taek area last fall an artillery shell fell short and landed in a field on the Thai side of Huuh Gkah Akha, killing one Akha man. The report is that the Army paid the family money, as long as the story kept quiet. Some villagers still deny that the incident occurred or which family it happened to.

Lothar at Lobo Bar passed away

Lothar who ran the Lobo in Chiangrai died this last year. He had run bars in the Chiangrai area for many years. He is survived by wife and daughter.

Cha Lay Akha near Doi Tung

The villagers of Cha Lay Akha near Doi Tung say that they have not been allowed to plant rice in ten years and have to go where ever they can each day for work and one day's pay. A far cry from being independent farmers like they were in the past before all the pine plantations took over. They say they have very little to look forward to, having been farming that area for more than sixty years. The newcomers now tell them what to do.

Pah Nmm Forestry pine

In the area of Pah Nmm Akha near Haen Taek, like so many other areas, Forestry Department continues to plant pine trees. Meanwhile there is still no forestry representative appointed in the villages to make it a more cooperative effort and few native tree species are planted. Without community participation or agreement, forestry agents take older farming land from villagers, increasing the pressure on the existing forest elsewhere, and the cycle of deforestation goes on, everyone wearing blinders and pointing at the hill tribe while claiming not to know the mystery of what is going on.

Still NO ID cards

The ID card process is still slow. many villagers among the Akha, up to 50,000 still do not have ID cards.

Petition On Line

Go to www.akha.org and click on the link for Admin-Resources and add your signature to this request to the Thai Government to ease conditions on the hill tribe people.

Pah Nmm Road finished

Pah Nmm's road to the fields is finished, a very small road, that allows horses and field workers and motorbikes to pass each other and travel safely. Just having this improved road has saved the workers who walk some thirty minutes, reducing the daily walk from three hours to two and a half hours. This is still a very long daily walk.

The Truck

Be a sponsor: Parts, fuel, tires, license. The truck is the backbone of our service out to the hundreds of Akha villages, and we are dependent on donors to keep it running and moving into the villages.

Meeh Pah Dies

Loh Hah's daughter Meeh Pah, who had always been afflicted by a heart ailment that went poorly treated for years, finally died this fall. In school books she wrote: "I don't have long to live, I will never see years or become an old lady." Having lived in the village of Huai Krai, she was buried in the traditional Akha cemetery.

Coffee and Tea

Some tea sells for as high as 1500 baht a kilo once dried. Doi Mae Salong and Pai a Prai villages both have large tea crops.

Doi Chang

The Akha in Doi Chang are planting many macadamia trees.

Hua Mae Kom Days

I dropped into the lower village of Hua Mae Kom. I called it the "organized" village because of how it was built in the broken down crustian fashion. The Gneeh Pah, she was a nice lady, sort of hidden, thin, her husband and son had both died, sick from the fever. She wanted to practice her traditional Akha skills as a healer

but the crustians wouldn't let her so she sat by while her children died. Her daughter was blind, had a son, her husband left her, but she had a gentle voice. She returned to her mother's house and lived there. Her son went off to school. She gathered wood, worked around the house, was pleasant to talk to.

A woman named Meeh Nay had a cousin in this village. Not really a cousin, but when Meeh Nay was younger they helped raise this girl, I forgot her name. She was talkative, her sister a little older and mostly silent. I would stop in to see her father and talk. He said he already planted a lot of coffee plants, like he had some initiative that wasn't so often present these days. Many of the villages were giving up the opium smoking so maybe now they would turn their hand to new things.

On this one particular night there were two men visiting. Lah Kaw Beh Jeh and Ah Dzoh, not sure what his last name was. You never know when people are walking around with broken hearts. Back in 2001 Ah Dzoh worked for this guy who made sour cabbage in a town called Sah Sai or San Sai. Sah Sai was a ten baht ride from Chiang Saen toward Chiang Khong. The Thai man had a wife and children. Ah Dzoh was divorced and his daughter stayed with him. The sour cabbage man was about thirty years old and ran out of work. So Ah Dzoh and Lah Kaw went to build a field house for a man. Lah Kaw was only visiting with his wife and two sons for two months. His one son was five and his one son was six. Ah Dzoh's daughter was six. But there was a problem, the Thai workers thought that the Akha men should find drugs for them. Funny how this always works. The Thais want their drugs, but always blame the hill tribe for being industrious enough to get them. At any rate the two Akha wouldn't supply the drugs and this made the Thai men angry.

Each evening the grandmother of Ah Dzoh watched the kids and around evening about five o'clock the three kids together would go in to the pond area and take a bath where the shallow water was. The bottom was very slow to go down deeper so there was no danger. On this particular evening the kids went up to bathe a few meters away and then after a few minutes their voices stopped so the grand mother went over to the water to see what had happened. Then she spotted three men walking away into the hill side forest and the three kids had been thrown into the deep end of the pond, she could only see one. She called for help and villagers came and dove deep into the pond and pulled the bodies of the other two children out and lined

the three of them up on the pond side. White, silent, still, without voices or the breath of God, they lay there in their muddied and soiled tattered clothes, all they could afford, the day cut short by the hand of evil men, their eyes never to light a fire again. Lah Kaw's wife left him after that and both men came to the mountain. For the few minutes before they told me the story I might have noted them like any other Akha men in the mountain, faces not always telling the heavy burden that the heart is carrying. As they told me the story I could feel the deep sadness, despair, a sense of destiny unwanted, a ship run onto the reef, all the children drowned. The police came and made a report. I told myself that one day I would go to Sah Sai and look for this place.

Celebrating Akha Life

The villages ringed the mountains, not asking for near as much as the government was busy promising them over the years. And not much was delivered. For whatever the Akha "got" they got also a problem. Villages shrouded in mist and jungle, a way of life that had gone on for many years short of war and would have gone on again if it wasn't for the greed of others to take and take some more.

Akha life none the less was a celebration. Going on in the villages, the traditions and ceremonies, songs and dances, life in soft tones of brown, green and black. But what exactly did they have to celebrate from all the changes? The government came and told them how to live, took their land away, took their food away, gave them electricity and a school, took their children away, imposed new religions on them, ran police and army through their villages. Wayward soldiers raped their women, beat their men, led some away to die. This was no liberation but slavery. Global slavery.

The Thais didn't know how to leave alone as much as they knew how to "develop". Development was just the same as taking it all away, the great lie, telling the Akha what they didn't have while taking away the great many things they did have. After many years the villages went from clean water to dirty water, from good health to malnutrition, vaccines and miscarriages. The Akha men who had grown opium for years were now in the prisons, the DEA leading a war of genocide against them, the Thais more than willing to play along. No stories would be told in public of the political figures who were big time drug lords while Akha men paid with their lives, were beaten to death, imprisoned by the thousands.

Diabetes and Ants

Diabetes can be detected by ants which are attracted to the sugar in the urine, a good recommendation to go and see a doctor.

Dental

An Akha had his tooth pulled, took it home, broke it in half, and found a worm inside, the cause of all the pain.



Water Tanks

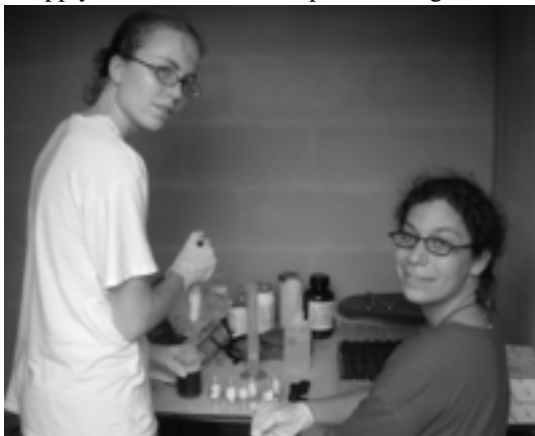
Water becomes an increasingly important resource as mono crops farms take the lion's share of water. Water tanks in villages help the village farmers protect their local water supply. Few communities have clean water supplies.



**Paraquat - Gramoxone:
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Environmental Hazards to Health

Many Akha experience health problems and suspect birth defects from using pesticides and herbicides as shown below. Claiming it saves them time in a use now pay later scheme, the Akha continue to apply these chemicals despite warnings.



Volunteers set up a water testing lab for checking the water in Akha villages. All of the tests came out for positive for contamination. UNSAFE drinking water. Churches but no water!

Safe water?

An Akha woman takes drinking water from a holding tank which is fed by rain water that flows off an asbestos roof.



Medical Solutions:

The Truck Ran Over Your Foot????

Why don't some of the Akha go to the doctor for broken arms or legs or limb related injuries?

Well, the story of Law Chaw Verh might be some clue. Peeh Hkoeuh broke his arm when he was kicked by a horse. Ah Baw Ngo treated it. When there was a medical survey in the village we asked Peeh Hkoeuh why he didn't go to the doctor, the clinic? He explained to us that for a long time it was known that if you hurt your arm or leg or broke it, when you went into the doctor they would cut your limb off!

Being rather incredulous at this (who would do such a thing?) we asked for further explanation and then Peeh Hkoeuh told us that there were three cases locally, but two of the Lahu had died, and that there was a third Lahu who was still alive. We went immediately to Loh Mah Cheh Lahu and found Law Chaw Verh who we had to coax out of the house into view, and then he told us his story. He is 19 now. When he was 11 a car crushed two of his toes. He was sent to Mae Chan hospital where they cut his leg off below the knee. He recovered for 15 days. He said that there was nothing wrong with his leg or ankle to justify doing this. No wonder tht the hill tribe treat medical care with suspicion.



Ah Baw Nghoh

Ah Baw Nghoh of Pah Nmm Akha is know for his herbal and other medical remedies for the treatment of broken bones, knife wounds, gunshot wounds, hives, etc. Here he is continuing treatment of Peeh Hkoeuh's broken arm. The treatment includes herbal wraps, as well as handling the arm in a certain way while saying certain poetry.



Scarred hands and feet, results of arthritis. This woman from the displaced village of Huai Knott has difficulty working.