

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា
Anlong Veng Peace Center

Anlong Veng Peace & Human Rights Study Tour

Weaving Old and New Threads: Connecting Place and Memory

By: Emmeline Eao
Research Associate of DC-Cam's Anlong Veng Peace Center

June 8-11, 2018



Group photo with the participants of Anlong Veng Peace & Human Rights Study Tour

On the evening of Friday June 8th, twenty university students gathered in Anlong Veng to participate in the Anlong Veng Peace and Human Rights Tour led by Ly Sok-Kheang. Fifteen students traveled from Kampong Cham Province while the other five were local to Anlong Veng. Supporting team members—Phat Bora, Sout Vechet, Keo Theasrun, and Emmeline Eao from DC-Cam's Phnom Penh offices, as well as myself. Laignee Barron, journalist from Times Magazine also joined us for the majority of the tour. This was the largest tour group to date.

This report will go over the specifics of the various activities and presentations experienced throughout the tour with an emphasis on the complex emotional aspects tied to Anlong Veng, putting history in context. The goal is to highlight the importance of uncovering these memories in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of past events-- to uphold DC-Cam's mission of memory, justice, and healing.

June 8th:

After arriving on the 8th, the group did a walking tour to Anlong Veng High school and Hospital. Both sites are examples of infrastructure that were implemented in the early 90's by Ta Mok, one of the last commanders in chief of the Khmer Rouge Era. The school was the main high school building up until 2017, when a new, larger structure was built on the



Ly Sok-Kheang giving presentation to the participants inside Anlong Veng Peace Center

grounds. The original hospital building (since 1993) is still in full use. Before Ta Mok there were no such institutions in the area.

The students were interested in knowing more about the specific curriculum taught during the Khmer Rouge times in the high school. The tour guides told us that lessons were planned with Khmer Rouge leanings focusing mainly on Khmer language and mathematics and sent to nearby Thailand to be printed.

Both buildings are symbols of the complicated history Anlong Veng holds. Through the guides students learned that most of the population of Anlong Veng believe Ta Mok to be a generous and fair leader because they saw him in his later years and he provided for them. Many people do not have clear knowledge of the horrific events he was responsible for, including the mass evacuations and killings from 1975-1979.

Although both structures were quite run down, they still held a sense of beauty, their design reminiscent of those from the era of New Khmer Architecture of the 60's. That visual paired with our presence and the information learned from the guides was the beginning of our active weaving of historical contexts and perspectives.



Mr. Mon Mao talking to a group of participants in the garden in front of the Anlong Veng Peace Center, Ta Mok's former meeting house.

June 9th:

Saturday we made our way up the Dangrek Mountains to the Anlong Veng Peace Center, utilizing the former meeting place of Ta Mok as our educational hub. We filled half of the day with presentations and lecture from Mr. Kheang. The presentation began by establishing the great power of our group taking up space in the historically loaded site-- "This is our house after all, our land and country, and our responsibility to preserve it," Kheang pronounced to us all. I could feel the groups' sense of importance and diligence focus as we sat around the large meeting table. He then went on to go through the history of DC-Cam and the three main objectives of the tour-- to learn history through site visits, meet and interview Anlong Veng residents, and to use what is learned to teach others as well as raise awareness about the peace projects.

When asked to share their knowledge of the Khmer Rouge Era most students explained that most of their information was from their parents. Kheang reflected on the amount of information the group was able to come up with, noticing that they knew much more than groups in past years. We then continued presentations about Khmer Rouge and Anlong Veng History, looking through several map figures of KR regions and reviewing DC-Cam future plans for the Peace Center.

A key feature of Kheang's presentation apart from the factual statistics was the encouragement of critical thinking to the students. Kheang used Vietnam's invasion of

Cambodia as an apt example, posing the question, “If Vietnam hadn’t entered Cambodia - what would’ve happened potentially, who would’ve helped?” This thought is especially relevant and challenging for Khmer students because of the general ignorance and disdain towards Vietnam felt by the Cambodian population. It served as a vital point in reframing “enemy” attitudes into peace planning and reconciliation. By questioning histories that are presented as one dimensional to consider the multitude of experience by both survivors and perpetrators-- how those roles can easily be switched.



A villager of Romchek, Anlong Veng

During the afternoon the students had the opportunity to hear first person accounts of KR times from Hov Teng, Mon Mao, and Sokhy. Mr. Teng and Mr. Mao both served as civil parties to Case 002 of the ECCC and Mr. Sokhy was a former KR soldier beginning in 1991 during Ta Mok’s time in Anlong Veng.

Mr. Teng lost 23 of his family members during the Khmer Rouge. He described the unbearable working conditions to which the students repeatedly questioned the exact timing of, seeming to be in disbelief that they worked around the clock everyday. The students asked Mr. Teng if he ever thought of running away or trying secretive things to survive like stealing food to which Teng replied that where he was during the time, there was nowhere to run and they (KR) were always watching. Out of eight brothers and sisters in his immediate family, two survived. He didn’t learn about most of his family’s fate until much later, a common story for many people displaced and separated from their homes.



A villager of Romchek, Anlong Veng

The final guest speaker, Mr. Sokhy told students about his experience as a KR cadre. At sixteen years old he attempted to escape Cambodia into Thailand unsuccessfully and became a soldier. When

questioned about his reasoning for joining Khmer Rouge forces he told students there were no other options, saying, “we had no choices.” The students were very interested in Sokhy’s perspective of Ta Mok after he claimed to have had contact with him. He gave the students a straight forward reply, saying Ta Mok always kept his word and didn’t appear to manipulate everyday people, but had was known for having a very bad temper once crossed. He reaffirmed the glorification of Ta Mok as a figure head telling the group that everyone from the community loved him.

We ended the day with going over interview techniques and media training in preparation for the following day in the village. There was particular emphasis on how to conduct the interviews sensitively, understanding that asking individuals to open about such dark memories could be difficult. Students were advised to note each

person's attitude and disposition and pay attention to the details of the interview in order to gather the truth from the story as much as possible.

June 10th:



Video interview with a villager

Sunday was dedicated to collecting material for the students' video projects. After arriving in Rom Chek commune the students split into their preplanned groups (3 full video, and 3 audio only) and set out to find interviews. I was able to accompany four interviews with a student group throughout the day. The interviews unsurprisingly varied immensely from quite worried and hesitant about sharing experiences to very talkative and open. The most striking similarity I noted throughout the interviews was each person telling the crew at one point or another of their coping mechanisms to live their lives after the Khmer Rouge. They all expressed their inclination to keep thoughts of the past out of their minds, and avoid any feelings relating to that time to keep from upsetting younger people.

The most in depth interview I was able to witness was the last one before we left Rom Chek. Students began to make their way back from their interviews to the house we used as our meeting place, when the owner of the house who is the mother of a Peace Center staff member began talking about her life. I quickly encouraged a group of students to get their equipment set up and we captured her story. Through tears she described her experience as a young girl in a KR commune. During that time it was only her father and other young siblings. After her father refused an arranged marriage by the KR she remembers him being taken away, and never seen again.

The interviewing process provided the students with a focused arena for inquiry with

an understood purpose of preservation and documentation of individual's stories. Given that this history is so recent, essentially anyone and everyone in the country has a story to tell that relates to the KR, and with the tools and experience gained during this time the students will be equipped to continue their work to ensure their longevity.

Overall the intensive in Anlong Veng was an incredibly rich and valuable experience for all that were involved. The trip allowed the students to connect what their knowledge of Anlong Veng and the Khmer Rouge with tangible reference points. All of the students agreed that physically being able to visit the historical sites and speak to residents added much more depth to their understanding of the KR time period. The variation of information and techniques used in the tour are invaluable for future Cambodian educators.



Anlong Veng Lake

Also to note:

Upon leaving Phnom Penh to Anlong Veng we traveled with almost 200 plant starts that were generously donated to the Anlong Veng Peace Center. Unfortunately due the tight schedule we were unable to do a tree planting with the students as planned.

Upon arriving, Mr. Kheang was put into contact with a former Peace Tour participant that was so inspired by what was being done in Anlong Veng that he returned to contribute his own skills to the community. The young man was studying agriculture at the Royal University of Agriculture when he attended the tour and since graduating has moved to Anlong Veng to begin forest protective work. He met with Mr. Kheang to express his interest in assisting with future projects. The meeting was an unexpected success story and proves the great impact the Anlong Veng Peace Center and DC-Cam can have on future generations!

**APPENDIX: List of Participants
June 8-11, 2018**

No	Name	Sex	School
1	Proeung Leang Horn	F	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
2	Thy Srey Phors	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
3	Krech Somoniroath	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
4	Nang Sreileak	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham

5	Im Veng An	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
6	In Seanghai	F	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
7	Khun Leakhena	F	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
8	Thou Meng Thai	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
9	Sem Darany	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
10	Heng Vanara	F	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
11	Koeng Peou Chetra	F	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
12	Em Sokun	F	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
13	Set Samnat	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
14	Pat Khlok	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
15	Nat Kuy	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kampong Cham
16	Bo Leaki	F	Anlong Veng High School
17	Nhim Thida	F	Anlong Veng High School
18	Phuong Seiha	M	Anlong Veng High School
19	Hien Seihak	M	Anlong Veng High School
20	Hel Lay Hieng	M	Anlong Veng High School

TEAM: Ly Sok-Kheang, Phat Bora, Sout Vechet, Keo Theasrun, and Emmeline Eao

REPORT: Emmeline Eao

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Activity supported by the
Canada Fund for Local Initiatives
Activité réalisée avec l'appui du
Fonds canadien d'initiatives locales



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