

REPORT OF CGP MAPPING TEAM VISIT TO PREY VENG PROVINCE

24 - 27 October 1995 13 - 15 February 1996

Survey Team: Charles Bowers and Hak Sophal

Tuesday 24 October

On arrival in Prey Veng Town we met the Second Governor, Mr. Chhay Sayeun, who arranged for us to meet with him and his officer at 2:30 pm. The Second Deputy Governor chaired the meeting, and present were Mr. Khim Sava, Chief of the Department of Culture and the Arts, Mr. Chen Tak, Chief of the Department of Cult and Religion, Mr. Leng Cheth, Deputy Chief of the Department of Information, Colonel Yet Yuon, Deputy Commissioner of Police, and the Deputy of the Cabinet Office.

After discussion of the Genocide Sites in Prey Veng, it was decided that, because of the flooding, the only sites possible to visit at that time were in four Districts, Kamchay Mea, Prey Veng District, Peam Ro and Ba Phnom Districts. The district with by far the most important sites in the province, namely Peareang District (KR Region 22), was accessible only by boat, three hours each way from Prey Veng Town, so it was decided to return there at another time. There was some discussion of the sites in Peareang District, as Mr. Ieng Cheth had visited the sites there in 1979, and was present during the excavation in 1982. Here he described a "hill " of clothing at the Tuol Slang killing site in Krang Village, Prey Sralet Sub-district, and hundreds of mass graves, and also a similarly important killing site at Kanchom pagoda, in Kanchom Sub-district. Ieng Cheth claimed that the two Santesok chiefs of Region 22 were named Men and Mao.

Wednesday 25 October

The survey team set off from Prey Veng Town at 7:30 am, accompanied by Mr. Chen Tak, Chief of the Department of Cult and Religion, who had been a prisoner of the KR in Kamchay Mea District from 1975-77, and two armed policemen.

Kamchay Mea District Sites:

Ta Som Kranhung Sub-district 140201/2

After a fifty kilometers drive over very rocky roads, we arrived at the District HQ of Kamchay Mea District, and were taken by District officials to the Ta Som prison site where Mr. Chen had been held prisoner. According to this witness this was a small prison holding only 150 prisoners while he was there. They were all men, mostly from Phnom Penh. He knew two others in the prison who died there, one a former Representative, Yi Yamret, and another, also a clerk, who died by torture for stealing some green corn to eat. Others were Lon Nol soldiers.

The prison was made of bamboo with palm leaf roof, and the prisoners were kept in separate small cells. Prisoners slept on the ground, and were tortured by being tied to a tree and hit with palm branches. Most of the tortured victims died 4-5 hours later

with blood coming out of the mouth. Other died from overwork (digging irrigation canals) and not having enough to eat. The two prison chiefs were Yem and Samay. There were two mass graves (not excavated) under water in the rice fields nearby.

Prey Boeng Pruos

Kranhung Sub-district

140203/4

We were next taken to the mass graves near Samaki Village (previously Prey Bang Prou) in Kra New Sub-district. We were shown many mass graves in the forest that had been partly opened by grave robbers, with bones and teeth scattered around, and district officials told us that they had counted 62 mass graves at that site, with estimated more than 5,000 victims. About two kilometers away we were shown the site of the prison, and spoke to a witness who saw the prison after liberation and before it was destroyed. He drew on the ground a long narrow building of bamboo and palm thatch, with small individual cells "Tuol Sleng" style.

The Chief of Kra New Commune, Vong Chun, said that one of the killers escaped, and hid in his house for one night. He said that Nuon Chea had planned to kill the killers after they had killed three times, together with the driver of the truck. He said that they used three killers, and that they took turns to kill as their arm tired from their labor. They used a metal pipe, and it became bent with the blows.

Ta Keng pagoda

Smang Kang Cheung Sub-distirct 140205

Ta Keng pagoda is the site of one mass grave, with more than 15 graves nearby under water in the rice fields. Prisoners who were held in the pagoda, and executed here, were staff from the local hospital, and people who tried to escape from the hospital.

Thursday 26 October

On Thursday morning we visited the Department of Cult and Religion office to search through their records in the early 1980's, and managed to located a copy of the 1982 Report on the Genocide in Prey Veng Province, and were given a certified copy of this report. We also began a search in the Provincial Archives to attempt to locate other relevant documents, but had to leave this task in the hands of the Chief of the Department of Information, who will send copies of any documents found to our office in Phnom Penh.

Peam Ro District Sites:

Peam pagoda

Peam Ro Sub-district

140701

The first site visited in Peam Ro District was the memorial at Peam pagoda, close to the ferry where highway 1 crosses the Mekong at Neak Leoung. This memorial contains the bones excavated from the pits at nearby Chroey pagoda. The Stupa containing the bones is in quite good condition, and the bones are well protected from animals.

Chroey pagoda

Peam Ro Sub-district

140702

This pagoda was destroyed in the fighting between the Lon Nol forces and the DK pre- 1975, and was used as an execution and mass burial site 1975-78. We could not

locate any witnesses to this period, and the area was taken over as a military base by the Vietnamese from 1979-89. The present pagoda was rebuilt and re-occupied by the monks in 1991. There are 15 mass graves on the site.

Ba Phnom District Sites:

Phnom Kam Plok

Cheung Phnom Sub-distirct

140101

This mass killing and burial site located in a forest on the Southern slopes of Ba Phnom mountain about 8 kilometers from highway 1 is extremely extensive, with over 250 mass graves. There is a memorial Urn near the site, which has been broken, and most of the bones scattered and eaten by animals. A local witness Chan Youn (Base People) testified that he went there to collect vegetable and vines, and that while hiding nearby he saw that two trucks arrived, and stopped near the burial place. The trucks were full of men, women and small children. The KR led the people to the pit, and killed there by bashing them to death with the wooden spoke from a wheel, or by hitting them on the back of the neck with a hoe. At the same time they played loud music to cover the cries of the victims. This witness said this happen on two separate occasions in the dry season at the end of 1977. In 1978, he saw Sou Phim soldiers being brought by truck to that area to be killed.

This witness gave the name of the KR Chief of Santesok for that Region was Korn, and the most vicious killer was called Rinn. No local people were allowed into that area.

Tuesday 13 February 1996

In October 1995 we were not able to visit the Prey Veng District sites because of the flooding, but were able to meet the Chief of the District and his officers, some of whom had been present at Kriang Kor during the excavations of 1982. Mr. Ouk Ea, Chief of Prey Veng District gave us a long interview in which he said that during 1975 some Lon Nol soldiers and police were evacuated to Prey Veng District, and that one group, the "other ranks "were placed in a work camp in Kim Rodas Village, and were free to move around and work by day. The other group, the officers of higher rank, were shackled at night in a prison at Chrey Roleung.

By the end of 1977 both groups were all taken to the Kriang Svay and Kriang Kor killing fields and executed. In 1978 the prisons were used for Sou Phim army soldiers, who were also killed at Kriang Kor. As Ouk Ea says, "the New Soldiers killed the Old Solders, and then they began to research the Vietnamese families in the District to be killed. "In 1977-78 most Vietnamese in the District were killed at Kriang Kor, including the wives and children of many Khmer who were married to Vietnamese women.

Prey Veng District Sites:

Tuol Kriang Svay

Domrey Poun Sub-district

141001/2

After driving about 15 kilometers South from the District HQ we met the Chief of Domrey Poun Commune, Yem Chhean, who then accompanied us to the sites. Yem

Chhean had witnessed the excavation of these sites in 1982. The first site we came to was at Tuol Kriang Svay, where there had been an extensive purpose built prison consisting of three prison buildings, and several Santesok buildings constructed from adobe mud walls and palm roofs. Nearby were 41 mass graves which had been excavated and the bones placed in a memorial in Thmey pagoda. Several of these mass graves are distinctive in that they consist of very long trenches up to 10 meters.

Tuol Kriang Kor

Domrey Poun Sub-district

141003

After walking a further 500 meters we came to the main killing field for the Kriang Svay prison, consisting of 270 mass graves, some of which had been excavated in 1982. One grave was found to contain the bodies of approx. 40 monks who had refused to disrobe, and who were buried in their saffron robes. Yem Chhean reported that more than 5000 bodies had been excavated from the two sites of Kriang Kor and Kriang Svay together, and the bones placed in Thmey pagoda.

Thmey pagoda (former site)

Domrey Poun Sub-district

141004

The bones from the nearby sites were placed in a memorial in this pagoda in 1982, but when the pagoda was moved in 1988, the memorial was dismantled, and the 3,000 skulls remaining were buried in a long trench at the former site of the pagoda. Many bones had already been eaten by animals.

Wednesday 14 February 1996

On Wednesday morning we headed for Peareang District HQ, 55 kilometers North of the Provincial town, accompanied by Mr. Ieng Cheth, Deputy Chief of the Information Office in Prey Veng, one of his staff, and one policeman. On arrival we were met by the Chief of the District, who arranged for a further police escort of four policemen on two motorcycles.

Peareang District Sites:

Tuol Slang

Prey Sralet Sub-distirct

140801

The first site that we visited in Peareang was Tuol Slang, 15 kilometers North of the Distirct HQ, and the largest killing field in KR Region 22. We met the Chief of Prey Sralet Commune, Paong Chay, and were also accompanied by one witness. We were shown the locations of three large wells, and Mr. Paong Chay said that the victims were brought there by ox cart and on foot, and that he was informed that the tied victims were hit on the back of the neck with a wooden wheel spoke and thrown into the well. Some were still alive, and tried to climb out of the well, but were hit on the head with a heavy bamboo pole until they died. He told us that there were 83 mass graves at the site (not excavated), and that it had been estimated from reports made by neighboring communes in the early 1980's that 15,000 had been killed at Tuol Slang.

One witness, Chun Set, aged 53, was born in Krang Village, and described how he had been asked by Santesok to go to Tuol Slang in 1977. He had been tied when he arrived at the Tuol and placed in a house with other victims. There were 30-40 men, women and children, and they were all tied. After several hours he was released

because they had confused him with someone else. He was told that all the others would be killed, and that he was not allowed to tell anyone about this killing.

He said that he saw a lot of book at the pits, but that the pits had been covered already. When he stepped on the pits he saw that the ground was soft, so he thought that what the KR had told him was true, and he was sick. He said that when Santesok first asked people to go to the Tuol, they were not tied, and were told that it was for work, but when they arrived at the Tuol they were tied and put in the house.

Sla pagoda

Kampong Russei Sub-district 140802/3

After lunch at the District town, we drove 10 kilometers South to Sla pagoda. This pagoda had been destroyed by the KR in 1976, and the kot used to house Santesok. Victims were brought on foot or by ox cart from surrounding communes, and were killed at this site. There are 86 mass graves, partly excavated, and 5,250 victims. The chief monk told us that he had seen this number killed inscribed on the wall of the kot after liberation. The memorial at the pagoda contains approx. five hundred skulls.

Kanchom pagoda

Kanchom Sub-district

140804

After a long and dusty drive back through the district HQ, we turned and drove 15 kilometers East to Kanchom pagoda. New people from Phnom Penh had been brought by truck in 1977 to be killed there. They were killed by being hit on the back of the head with a metal bar, and thrown into large ponds. There are eight such burial ponds, and 26 mass graves at the site. A small memorial did contain some bones that had been scattered near the ponds by grave robbers, but now they have been eaten by animals. The Commune Chief, Mr. Nam Thorn, estimated the more than 5000 victims had been killed at this site.

Thursday 15 February

We headed 50 kilometers South East from Prey Veng town next morning to Preah Sdach District HQ, 15 kilometers South form Hwy. 1, where we were met by Mr. Bun Thuon, District Chief of Information, and his assistant Suon Sok Kham, who accompanied us to the sites.

Srok Preah Sdach Sites:

Neaq Ta Snay

Reathor Sub-district

140901/02

This site is approx. 20 kilometers North West of the District HQ, and was a prison and killing site operating from 1977-78. The victims were initially new people from Svay Rieng, and then mostly Sou Phem army soldiers. They were brought on foot or by ox cart, and were killed by hitting with a hoe, and were buried in 5 large and more than 100 smaller mass graves. Witnesses informed us that the Santesok chiefs were Lon and Hon, and another called Youn, who was killed by the Chief of Police of the District at the liberation. It was estimated in 1982 that more than 8,000 victims were killed at this site.

Witness Sat Pheng, aged 32, was born in Tamau Village near the site. When he was 13 years old he was minding cows near the killing site when he saw 200-300 victims brought to the site and killed by being hit in the back of the neck with a hoe. He witnessed these killings over several days, and said that most of the victims were Sou Phem army soldiers, and women with them.

Prey Andong

Ankor Reach Sub-district

140903

Prey Andong site was quite close to the District HQ, and is located in the rice fields 500 meters behind a row of houses close to the main access road in the District from Hwy 1. The main burial site here was a small rice field about 15 meters by 30 meters. The owner of the rice field said that when they first came back there after liberation there were human bones scattered around the edge of the rice field, and that even now oil comes to the surface of the field when it is flooded. The mud is discolored reddish-brown in the dry season, and was quite different to the surrounding fields. Rags from clothing are still plowed up on the site. Nearby on a raised area there is approx. 100 mass graves which have never been excavated except by grave robbers. Mr. Bun Thuon told us that he had heard that the victims at this killing site were New People from Svay Rieng and Phnom Penh, and that they were brought on foot to be killed at the site in 1977.

Documents:

After searching through old files from the 1980's in the Office of Cult and Religion, we managed to located copies the Provincial Report on the Prey Veng Genocide sites prepared in 1982 to be sent to Phnom Penh. There were two identical copies in the file, and the Chief of Cult and Religion presented us with one certified copy for our records.

Conclusion:

We were not able to contact the Governor in Prey Veng on our first visit due to lack of prior notice of our visit, but we were very well received by his Second Deputy and his Departmental Officers. Our first visit was badly timed, being at the height of the flood season, but we were able to make up for this on our second visit when we saw some of the most important genocide sites in Prey Veng Province, namely in Peareang District, Prey Veng District, and Preah Sdach District.

The team was able to map eight major sites and three smaller sites in five districts in Prey Veng Province, with the major sites visited having a total of more than 1,000 mass graves where approx. 65,000 people were killed.

Charles Bowers 31.10.95 updated with additional sites 19.02.96