

Travelogue – May 2010

Denzil's School

With all the troubles in the world today, it is nice to see some people do a good deed. I was invited to a school opening last week. The experience is worth sharing.

We started at 7:00 to drive about 45-50 minutes to the north – on the way to Siem Reap from Phnom Penh. We assembled at the foot of a brand new bridge across the Mekong. The officials had arranged for the bridge to open a few days early, just for this event. Otherwise we would have had to take a ferry across the Mekong.



Approaching the "new" Chinese bridge.



The caravan arrives at the school.

Entrance to the pagoda across the street.



The old school building, with leaky roof.

Denzil was approached to help with the school. The monks had a piece of land right across the road from the pagoda.



Entering the new school, just across the road.

The school was built for 900 students, with an enrollment of 650; before it was completed, enrollment is over 750. They had 2,500 chairs delivered for the event, and it was standing room only.



They arrive mainly by moto. (My record sighting recently increased to 9 on one moto – 3 adults and 6 children!)

The VIP's gather on the stage. Glad it started at 8:30 as it was a hot day in Cambodia.



The stage was situated under a tree.

View from the stage.



The monks were there for their blessing.



Denzil with the Cambodian Minister of Education.



The ribbon ceremony.



The Australian Ambassador signs the official documents, as AUSAID supported some books etc.

The typical classroom is modest, clean and efficient. Temperatures in Cambodia this time of year have been between 36 and 41 C (97 to 106 F) and there is no air conditioning.



Kids are arriving up to an hour before class starts and report "we love our new school." Amazing how much these young children want to learn.

Plaque commemorating the opening day.





The children showed up in uniform, and lined up to show their appreciation to the departing guests.



Denzil was like a pied piper! All the children love him.



We crossed the road back to the pagoda where we had parked. A rice tractor used to haul people to town. Note how shy they were when they saw my camera.

A couple of observations –

In Cambodia, litter is a problem. People just drop trash wherever they are. When the school opened, the litter was a problem. Denzil asked that rubbish bins be put in and asked the children to use them. The school is now immaculate.



The children insisted to learn English from the fifth grade. Denzil supplied the teachers. The children wanted to be able to speak to Denzil and the guests he brought to the school. Learning English is also a step out of poverty. We found the country of Cambodia is starting the same policy next year.

Denzil is the second person I know who has built a school out of his personal funds. Now the real work begins. The teachers need to be paid more than \$40-50 per month, the children need books and uniforms and the school needs supplies. Denzil has worked with his grown family and they no longer exchange Christmas gifts, they take the money and buy things for the families in this area.

You cannot forget you are in Cambodia. Here is a picture of the main pagoda. Note the monk, or a small orange spot, on the left side of the temple.



Here is the young monk. I had to get a closer look.



Some of the housing in the pagoda.

Hope you enjoyed the story as much as I enjoyed attending the event and writing this to share the event with my friends.

Jim