

Wiggling Deep into the River Kwai's Death Cave - Finally!

January 2015



After stymied attempts over two years to get back into the Death Cave Sir Rodney Beattie of Id, uh, Oz and I returned to Hintok River Camp for a third go. Hintok Camp was the site of the WW-II POW camp on the River Kwai's Death Railway. Now it's an upmarket resort paying homage to it, and the site of the museum we've been creating with both POW and Paleolithic find from Hintok cave on site and Death Cave a mile away.



With us was a documentary crew made up of newly minted Explorers Club member Les Nordhauser (white shirt on left) of Greenlight Films and prospective and cameraman Jesper Brehe Nymand (black). Sir Rodney carries one of the O₂ tanks in the red case and I have the other. Two years ago we had to exit the cave fast because of deadly CO₂ levels. Last year the new tanks our silent partner, resort owner Khun Supareerk, purchased for us, failed due to a factory misfire.



Shooting a doc means interviews. First Sir Rod before the entrance to the Death Cave.





It's a fun descent.



Getting the O2 ready. You don't go in without an extra light either. Rod was hooked up with a GoPro too.



02 levels were the best ever in the first gallery. We really didn't need the tanks there.
But the problems would be further back and down low.



The candle test at the entrance to the wiggle space into gallery two. Whew. No problem.



The crawl space was about fifteen feet long and so narrow we had to wiggle through on our sides. Helps that my nickname as a kid was Skin, short for Skinny.



Rod squeaks through into gallery two.



Our focus! Ten years ago Rod had wiggled in here and spotted what he thought was a collapsed burial jar but he had to exit fast because of bad air. It turned out to be what may have been an offering laid out on a flat "plate" of limestone. The large snail was a Stone Age food and commonly found in offerings, and the location also lent support to the theory.



We took samples.



Professor Ernie Walker, a noted physical and forensic anthropologist in Western Canada, identified them as from a hoofed animal, probably a pig or piccunary-like animal (though the rib was too small to ID as anything).



I sent jpgs of this odd molar to Drs. Keith Hamilton of Saskatoon and San Francisco's Gary Nomura. Both dentists concurred that it was unusual and, if human, was probably a third molar. Prof. Walker identified it as probably a pig's. I'll give him the last word:

"The images you sent to me for an opinion all represent non-human remains. The lumbar vertebrae are from an immature animal. Similarly, the rib is non-human . It is too large and I suspect an ungulate of some sort. The two phalanges are first phalanges from a mature ungulate and very likely a bovid. Anyway it is a split-hoofed

animal like water buffalo or some such animal. Finally, the tooth crown is definitely non-human and looks very much like a suiid such as a pig or peccary type animal. There is very little or no wear on the occlusal surface of the tooth suggesting a young animal and in this case, I would suggest the tooth was unerupted and the root portion of the tooth not fully formed. I am not all that familiar with the fauna of Thailand, but clearly these specimens are not of human origin."



Fifteen feet away on a shelf five feet above the cave's floor we found this five-foot-long skeleton, encased in calcium carbonate, a testament to its age. Rod thinks it's human but I'm unsure. I'm awaiting identification. I followed the cave back 75 feet as it somewhat narrowed though it was still a dozen feet across. The floor was littered with waist high boulders. When O2 levels decreased I called a halt and we exited.



We only had the film crew for a day and had to shoot Hintok Cave too. It's another steep descent.





I gathered charcoal from an ancient campfire for carbon dating.



And we shot the museum which has had a soft opening. The title will go in the white space above Su and Rod.



There's still more to do, but it's coming along well.



The display cases still have to be filled properly. Call this rough copy.



Media room where a loop will run showing the interior of the caves and our digs.

Early Man in Thailand

While Homo Erectus (Java, and Peking Man dated 750,000 years) were hunting and gathering in the region more than a million years ago (stone tools in Malaysia have been dated to 1.83 million years), our species, Homo sapien, didn't arrive until after our ancestors explored Out of Africa 60,000 years ago. The first evidence of their arrival on the Kwai is dated to 8,000BC. Over this long period stone tool technology evolved.

Paleolithic
100,000 - 8,000BC
(Crude Tools)



Grinding Stones

Mesolithic (Hoabinhian)
8,000 - 4,000BC
(sumatraliths)



Stone Knives

Neolithic
4,000 - 2,000BC
(polished adzes)



Stone Axe

The Story of Hintok River Camp

From July to September 1943 Hintok River Camp was a British PoW camp of 300 of whom 79 died. Today's camp pays homage to its predecessor in name and theme, by using tents, reminiscent of the PoW's bell tents, motifs such as railway ties and a guard tower. There was a steep and difficult 250-foot climb to work on the railway everyday.

This museum is on the site of the former camp kitchen. A short distance from the front door is a near vertical 25-foot deep limestone natural drain hole. At the bottom, it levels out somewhat and descends gently to a narrow opening 12 feet long leading to a small, lower gallery. This drain hole was used as a refuse pit by the PoWs.

The previous owner of this land, Rodney Beattie, creator of the Death Railway Museum in Kanchanaburi, spent many months in 1998 excavating the pit recovering hundreds of PoW artifacts. Many are displayed at the Kanchanaburi museum as well as here. As he continued digging, he was startled to discover polished Neolithic tools. Excavations continued, including a Flag #50 Explorers Club expedition with himself, Jason Schoonover, Capt. Norm Baker, Martin Saunders and Su Hattori, with the tools becoming increasingly primitive as they dug back into time.



Rodney Beattie, Su Hattori, Suparerk Soorangura and Jason Schoonover
outside the exploration cave . January 2013

If the writing blows you away, it's because I wrote the display cards. Of course.



Wrap up interviews.



My turn again. Fun day!