



# The Ban Chiang UpDATE

Newsletter for the  
Friends of Ban Chiang

Preserving a **UNESCO** World Heritage Site Issue #8 Fall/Winter 1998-9

## From the Director...

Progress for the Ban Chiang and related Projects since the last newsletter can best be described as multifaceted. Parts of the last six months have been exciting, parts quiet and steady. My work with the skeletal monograph has led to a greatly enhanced admiration for career editors. While I have much still to learn, I can immediately turn to the hyphenation page in Chicago Manual of Style without consulting the index!

I am not sure how editors keep their juices going, but for me the Southeast Asian prehistory conferences in Melaka and Berlin kept me in tune with the thrill of studying Thailand's past. Specialized conferences provide occasions for extended conversations with top scholars in Southeast Asian prehistory, including not only archaeologists, but linguists, specialists in the palaeoenvironment, ceramists, and radiocarbon dating experts. Six papers from the three Penn-related projects (*see LABnotes*) were presented. Such conferences are testing grounds for ideas that can influence one's publications for the next several years. Often the understanding of critical issues can fundamentally change during a conference but be reflected in publications only years later.

For example, unpublished work on the analysis of skeletons from

prehistoric Thailand including those from Ban Chiang suggests that more than one group came into the region, from different sources, thousands of years ago. This finding is changing how we view the relationship between two important sites in Thai prehistory, Ban Chiang and the coastal site of Khok Phanom Di. Prior to the conference, most archaeologists thought the two sites were related. One of several telling signs that the people at the two sites were probably genetically distinct is the presence of the genetic disease thalassemia at the latter and its apparent absence at the former. Clues like this can have a major impact on our view of how the region of Thailand came to be populated, among other interesting topics.

My week in Bangkok was also stimulating and productive. Following my talk at the Siam Society, lively discussion ensued for an additional hour on everything from radiocarbon dating techniques to how osteologists determine if little holes in skull bone might have been caused by iron deficiency or genetic anemia. Productive meetings were had with the Fine Arts Department and Silpakorn University officials. And my wonderful hosts gave me a much-needed decompression and jet-lag recovery rest at their beach house in Hua Hin.

Back in Philadelphia, the visit of HRH Princess Sirindhorn (see

page 2) in October was a Fall highlight for the Museum, the Ban Chiang Project, and the Thailand Archaeometallurgy Project. Between checking charts and editing captions for the skeletal monograph, we gave our labs a cleaning they probably had not seen in years! Our "Ban Chiang Gang" felt pride in showing off our work.

Finally on the fund raising front, progress is being made toward our challenge grant with about one quarter of our goal either donated or pledged. *Thank you all for your support of the challenge and of our work! Your contributions are indeed greatly appreciated!* ❖

Joyce C. White, Ph. D.  
Director, Ban Chiang Project



HRH Princess Sirindhorn views an artifact in the basement of the Museum.

F. O. B. C.

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
33rd and Spruce Streets, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6324 (215)898-4028 [www.upenn.edu/museum](http://www.upenn.edu/museum)

# *The Princess of Thailand* Visits the Ban Chiang Lab

by Ardeth Abrams

On October 26th, Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn visited the University of Pennsylvania, the Museum, and the Ban Chiang and Thailand Archaeometallurgy Labs. The royal visit was the result of Dr. Roy Vagelos receiving the Prince Mahidol award (for service to public health) last January in Bangkok, Thailand. When Dr. Vagelos met His Royal Highness King Bhumibol and his daughter, Princess Sirindhorn, he invited the Princess to visit the University of Pennsylvania and the Museum. The princess accepted his invitation, and the rest is history!

Her Royal Highness arrived at the Museum with her entourage and was greeted at the main entrance by Dr. Jeremy Sabloff, Dr. Vince Pigott, Dr. Robert Sharer, and our own Dr. Joyce White. Princess Sirindhorn then visited many of the exhibits at the Museum including the Maya, the Chinese Rotunda, Buddhism, and Egypt.

She next made her way down the back steps to the Ban Chiang Lab. After entering the

first office, the computer room, we were introduced and she shook my hand! The lab was soon full of people, including photographers, Museum staff, and the Princess's entourage. HRH then proceeded through the lab looking at the displays of pottery reconstruction, computer maps and plans, site illustrations, and finally to Joyce's office.

As Joyce reviewed each display, the Princess listened and took notes. But what really intrigued the Princess was hearing about the paleopathology, a subject in the next Ban Chiang monograph, *Ban Chiang, a Prehistoric Village Site in Northeast Thailand II: The Human Skeletal Remains*, by Michael Pietruszewsky, Ph. D. and Michele T. Douglas,

Ph.D. HRH explained to Joyce that she had a special interest in the health issues of the people of Thailand and their history. Princess Sirindhorn's final visit of the morning was the Thailand Archaeometallurgy Project (TAP). Vince showed several artifacts from copper production sites in central Thailand.

Lunch was in the Lower Egyptian gallery with Roy Vagelos giving remarks. This was followed by a reception in the Mosaic gallery with Thai Penn students (over 60 in attendance). Princess Sirindhorn then left for a visit to the Vet School. Who ever said being a princess was easy?

The next day the Princess left Philadelphia for a day in Washington D.C. and then Florida to see the historic lift-off of the space shuttle *Discovery* with Senator John Glenn on board. Also during her visit to Florida, a rumored (and well deserved) stop at Disneyworld! ❖



Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn visits the TAP Lab on October 26th, 1998.

# My Melakan Experience

by William Henderson

It's quite a long flight from Newark to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, flying eastward almost 23 hours with a one hour stop in Dubai. Barbara and I arrived in Kuala Lumpur in the late evening, greeted by a representative of the IPPA (Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association) who directed us to a cab that would take us to the historic Heritage Hotel located in the old railroad station of the city. I had not been aware we were to spend the first night in the city, but my concerns were soon allayed upon spotting a hand-lettered sign behind the night clerk's desk which advised all IPPA delegates to be in the downstairs lobby for a 5 am bus to Melaka. We signed in and proceeded to our room via an antique cage-like elevator which creaked slowly to the third floor while operated by a bell boy dressed in what appeared to be a 1930s uniform, with just about equal amounts of wear and fade. The clean but Spartan room contained two single cots and a bathroom with plumbing which sort of worked, provided you were not too serious about taking a shower. What appeared to be the *original* York air conditioner was located in a window at the far end of the room, a window which looked on to darkened rail lines somewhere in the nether portions of the station.

After far too few hours of sleep it was 4:30 am and time to

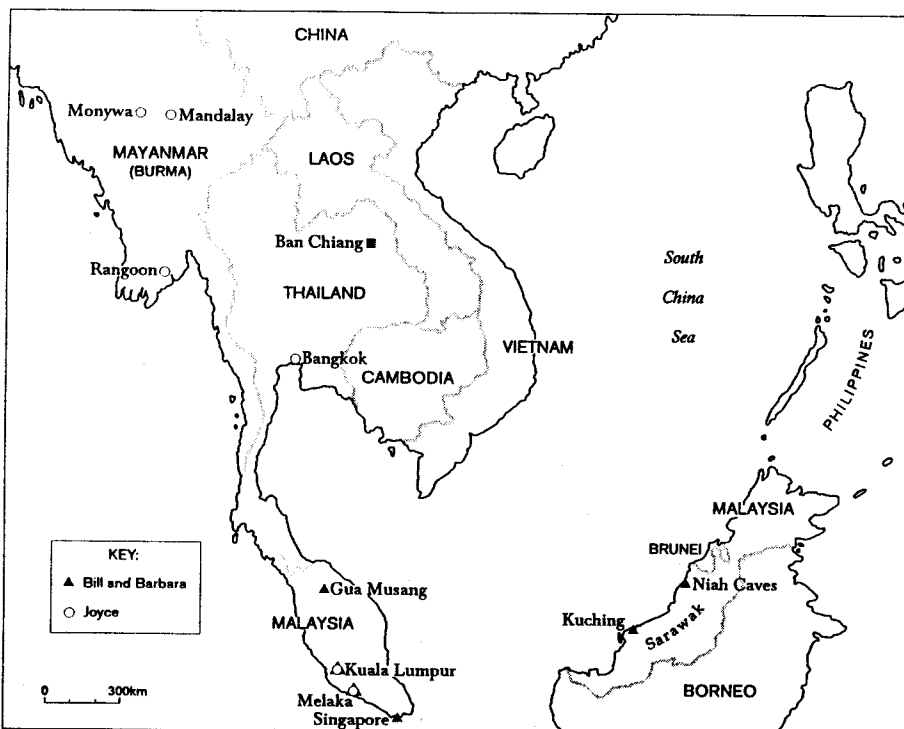
summon the creaky elevator and drag our bags to the already hot sidewalk under the arcade of the Victorian rail station. Groggy archaeologists from various corners of the world were slowly assembling, greeting old friends and colleagues while awaiting the arrival of the bus. A familiar A&W Root Beer sign shining from across the street indicated an open snack bar which attracted a few for morning coffee. We were soon on our way down the Malay peninsula to the old city of Melaka.

The Melaka conference was held in the Century Mahkota Hotel, a complex of numerous multi-storied towers surrounding a courtyard and two swimming pools. A ballroom served for the impressive opening ceremonies with the Chief Minister of Melaka and a welcoming address by the Governor of Melaka, followed by a dinner and cultural performance. It was quite a gathering, with more

than 250 delegates from thirty five countries assembled for a week of presentations covering a wide variety of subjects centered on the prehistory of Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

Presentations were held in four conference rooms every day from 9 am till 6 pm. With four simultaneous papers being given, it was possible only to attend a small fraction of the conferences, so a daily perusal of the schedule was necessary to pick and choose what seemed to be of most interest. Of course, not being a professional archaeologist helped me greatly in eliminating the more technical subjects, but I must say that just about every session that I attended proved interesting in many ways. I did try to make the Penn-related presentations (*see LABnotes*) which were all well received. The most exciting, however, was Joyce's which was the last day, almost the last

*continued on page four*



Map of Southeast Asia showing the journeys of Bill and Barbara, and Joyce.

paper. Although I feared that the conference attendees would have hit the pool by that point, every seat was taken and a "standing room only" crowd lined the back of the room. Interest was so great, an extra discussion session was added during which lively debate occurred. Joyce's paper was one of the highpoints of the conference.

Whenever it all became a bit overwhelming to my jet-lagged mind, there were the ever inviting warm swimming pools. After all, as a volunteer, amateur, not to mention retired, attendee, a refreshing dip was quite guilt-free.

*And the food!* While not being a gourmet, my impression of Malaysian cuisine is somewhat of a mild cross between Chinese and Thai, quite delicious. The dining hall was set up with a marvelous buffet, three times a day, and it was usually hard to choose where to begin. But everyone knew where to end, at the dessert table. Most came away bearing a little of this and a bit of that, one selection better than the other, I am sure no one lost weight!

Following the conference, there were two field trips available. The first was a two day trip north to the town of Gua Muchan, with another grand welcoming reception by the local

officials and tours of prehistoric sites via 4 wheel drive vehicles through the jungle. This was topped off by a visit to a local village where all were presented with ceremonial straw headdresses, followed by a luncheon and cultural entertainment of music and dancing by the aboriginal inhabitants. After returning to Kuala Lumpur and checking back into the famous Heritage Hotel at 1 am, we were

more slippery boards led to a native Iban tribal long-house. There we were greeted by the tribal headman and served tea. The Ibans were formerly head hunters, but of course have long since given up the practice. Visits to local museums and other archaeological sites rounded out the tour.

Following the post-conference field trips, my wife and I returned to Kuala Lumpur for two days of sight-seeing, then two more days in Singapore before the long flight home. But even after almost three weeks of continuous activity, it was with regret that we boarded the Singapore Airlines plane. This had been certainly one of the most interesting trips of a life-time.



**Bill and Barbara** sporting their ceremonial straw headdresses in the village of Kampong Tahoi near Gua Musang, and a Hoabinhian cave site.

allowed to sleep until four! Then back on a bus and off to the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport for a flight to Sarawak for the second post-conference tour.

A busy three day trip around Sarawak took us to the spectacular Niah caves, a 20,000 year old stone age site excavated by Malay archaeologists. Access to this site involves several kilometers of trekking through the rain forest on sometimes slippery wooden walkways. Returning from the caves, a side trip along even narrower and

*Bill Henderson has been a volunteer with the Ban Chiang Project since 1992 and has been compiling a typology of pottery rim sherd forms of the Sakon Nakhon Basin. Bill and Barbara also attended the IPPA Congress in Chiang Mai, Thailand in 1994 and have traveled extensively in retirement. Bill was one of the founders and the Chief Financial Officer of the VT Graphics Corporation of Yeadon, PA for more than twenty-five years.*

## LABnotes

❖ At the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association conference in Melaka, **Dr. Bernard Maloney** presented the pollen evidence from Nong Thalee Song Hong in "A 22,000 Year Old Record of Past Environmental Change from Trang, South Thailand." At the same conference **Dan Penny** presented "Regional Palaeoenvironmental Analysis of the Sakon Nakhon Basin, Northeast Thailand: Palynological Perspectives on Climate Change and Human Occupation."

❖ Also at Melaka, **Andy Weiss** and **Vince Pigott** co-authored the paper "Copper Production in Central Thailand: Technical, Economic, and Social Change over Two Millennia" giving an update on the work of the Thailand Archaeometallurgy Project (TAP). **Joyce** presented "Sex, Dates, Pots, and Bronze: An Example of Why 4+ Fields Will Be Needed to Resolve Southeast Asia's Prehistoric Enigmas."

❖ In addition to **Joyce's** paper "Update on Ban Chiang Dating" at the Berlin meeting for the European Association for Southeast Asian Archaeologists, **Dr. Lisa Kealhofer** presented "A Late Pleistocene to Holocene Environmental Sequence from Southern Thailand: the Phytolith Evidence from Nong Thalee Song Hong, Trang." This lake was cored during the 2nd field season of **TPP**.

❖ **Dan Penny** (now *Dr. D. Penny*) submitted his disserta-

tion "Late Quarternary Palaeoenvironments in the Sakon Nakhon Basin, Khorat Plateau, Northeast Thailand" to the Department of Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University, Australia. Included in his work is the pollen analysis for the sediment core that Dr. Lisa Kealhofer and Joyce extracted from Lake Kumphawapi during the first season of the Thailand Palaeoenvironment Project (**TPP**). Dr. Penny's document will eventually come from the core of one of the monographs in our Thai series.

❖ **Joyce** will be traveling to Monywa, Burma (Myanmar) in January 1999 to visit the new excavation at the bronze age site of Nyaunggan and attend a workshop on the bronze age in Burma.

❖ **Dr. Vince Pigott** will be a Visiting Scholar at the London Institute of Archaeology for 1999. He plans to hole up and get lots of writing done for the Thailand Archaeometallurgy Project.

❖ Teak furniture has been donated to the Ban Chiang Project. It will be sold and used towards the Challenge Grant. If you are interested in more information about the furniture, please contact us at the address inside this newsletter.

❖ Please note the museum's website address at: [www.upenn.edu/museum](http://www.upenn.edu/museum) for additional information about upcoming Museum events and soon *Ban Chiang's very own pages on the web!*



**Spread the word, renew your support – every contribution is gratefully received!**

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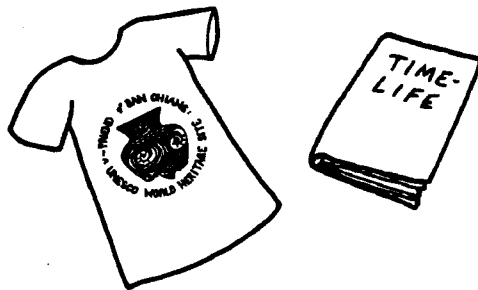
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*While supplies last . . . order your own one-of-a-kind FOBC T-Shirt (50/50 cotton-poly white shirt with large terra-cotta FOBC logo on its front). Also available is the TimeLife book, Southeast Asia: A Past Regained. Both the T-shirt and the book are each specially priced at \$10.70 (tax included). Please make checks payable to TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA and send check and order form to the Ban Chiang Project.*



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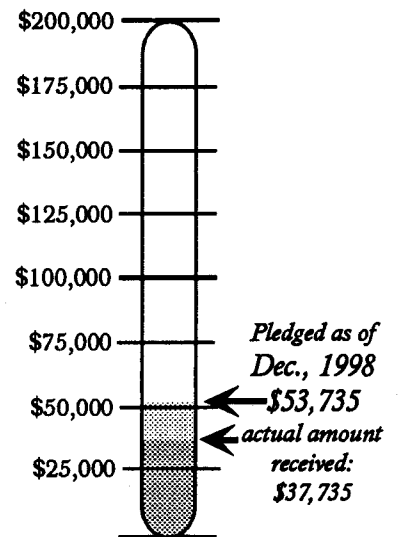
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**Thai Archaeology  
CHALLOMETER**



September 1997 - December 1998  
**The Thai Archaeology  
Challenge Grant**  
was established in early September of 1997. Please help us reach our goal of \$200,000 by the year 2000!