

Thailand Report;

On Wednesday 29th June, myself and 19 other students and 2 teachers flew out to Thailand to build 2 water tanks in a Koren village in the Inthanon mountains. The aim of this project was to provide the villagers with access to clean drinking water. We landed in Bangkok at 5am Thai time and then transferred to Chiang Mai.

Our few days and nights in Thailand were used to help us rest and acclimatise in a resort so that we were prepared for entering the village and beginning the hard work. We met all of the foundation staff that we were about to work with for 2 weeks and prepared ourselves for the first week in the village. In order to acclimatise we went on 2 walks, the first was a short one to a local waterfall and the second was to visit a previous project village. We also visited a school/ children's centre where Gordonstoun did there first water project as it was the 30th anniversary.

On Saturday morning we began the final leg of the journey to the village in the back of pickup trucks as the village was too remote for minibuses to take us. It was the afternoon by the time we arrived as soon as we got to the village we took our stuff to the huts we were going to stay in, the girls in one and the boys in another. After settling in we all walked to the water source, which was about 1.2k out of the village and into the jungle carrying blue water pipes so that over the coming few days the trenches for the pipes could be dug and the pipes could be laid. It was very hot and it soon became clear that it would be hard and challenging work.

From Sunday to Thursday we worked hard to build the tanks, laying pipes, making concrete and constructing 3 rings of the 4 ring tanks. By the end of this first week of work we were already ahead of what we had to do, meaning that we would finish the tanks early and would be able to build for the villagers. Initially we began by digging trenches for the pipes and laying them and building a dam at the water source. On Monday we created the base of the tanks by making a large wire grid and collecting rocks, once the grid was made and the rocks were collected we began making concrete to fill in the space that would be the base. This meant on Tuesday we could create the first ring of the tank, we painted the moulds for the rings in oil so that the concrete wouldn't stick to them and we began making concrete to fill in the moulds, we also had to prod the concrete whilst it was inside the mould to make sure there were no air bubbles, or any spaces that would be holes when the concrete was dry. Wednesday and Thursday were similar days to Tuesday as we created the next two rings, however, after the ring was made on Wednesday the foundation boys we were working with made scaffolding out of bamboo so that we could reach and the last 2 rings of the tanks. On Thursday we all had to go into the jungle to collect Bamboo for the matting that would need to be created when the roof was built. At the end of this week, we had finished laying the pipes, the base of the tank and 3 rings.

Friday to Sunday was the well deserved mid-project break in the resort we stayed at the first weekend we arrived. We visited a local waterfall and local markets and got an insight into the everyday life of Thai people in Chiang Mai. On Saturday we visited temples and also went swimming in the waterfall that we had gone to our first weekend in Thailand. On Sunday we woke up and then headed back to the village ready for our final week of work. Once we got back to the village on Sunday some of us walked to the water source and then walked back to the village following the water pipes, however, it

was really steep and muddy in some places and took us quite a while.

From Monday to Wednesday our focus was on getting the water tanks finished so that we could build a road at the end of the week. We completed the fourth ring and began rendering the tanks to make them smooth. On Tuesday the work on the road began in the afternoon as the roof was complete and so there wasn't much for all of us to do at the tanks, we were split into groups so some could help at the tanks and some could help with the road. To get started on the road we hoed out tracks that could then be filled with concrete, once we had finished hoeing we began making bamboo matting, this would help reinforce the concrete and was placed all the way down the tracks. On Tuesday evening we had a cabaret night to help entertain the locals and the boys working for the foundation. On Wednesday about 5 people stayed up to finish off the tanks and the rest of us headed down to the road for the day. We finished the bamboo matting and began concreting the road, this was the second to last day of work so we worked hard to try and ensure that the road would be finished on Thursday.

On Thursday morning we had the opening ceremony of the tanks with all of the villagers, the villagers thanked us and presented with gifts and traditional Koren shirts. We also presented the villagers whose huts we had stayed in with gifts to say thank you, our gifts contained things such as shampoo that they wouldn't necessarily buy for themselves but would need. Once we had the opening ceremony we headed back to the huts to get changed to ensure that we were ready to leave the next day and to get changed for a full-on afternoon of handwork. We had pork for lunch from a pig that the villagers had paid for to say thank you, this is a grand gesture within these villages as pigs are often very expensive for them to buy. After lunch we went down to the road to finish it, it absolutely poured and we all got completely soaked but carried on working as we wanted to complete the road for them. The road the villagers had at the time was clay and so when it rained it became too dangerous for them to leave the village. We worked from 1 until 6 and finished the road by making concrete from a mix of gravel and sand and cement powder, the same as what we had used to finish the tanks. Once the road was finished we headed back up the village to get cleaned up and changed, we then went down to the kitchen area of the village and had supper and then spent the evening celebrating with villagers before leaving the next day.

On Friday morning we woke up and got our stuff ready to leave the village. Saying goodbye to the villagers and the boys from the foundation was one of the saddest parts of the project. We got back into pick up trucks and then minibuses and headed to Chiang Mai and spent our last weekend visiting local markets and experiencing local Thai culture, and also resting after 2 weeks of hard work. On Monday afternoon we began our journey home from Thailand, flying from Chiang Mai to Bangkok and then Bangkok to Heathrow. Once we arrived at Heathrow we all headed our separate ways home. This project was one of the most eye-opening experiences I have ever and will ever had and will be something I remember forever. I hope to return to Thailand some time in the future and visit the village.



