Lost in Laos

It was cold and the eight hour bus trip from Pongsavan to SamNeua(XN) was no joy but what I saw and learned and the interesting people I met(including Ric Ponne and Mr. Nyot of the Lao Tourist Agency in XN ) more than made up for the hardships.

I spent two days on the Plain of Jars and two days at sites in that area, one whole day at the Pathet Lao caves and what turned out to be a day going to the Hintang from XN , getting lost in the Hintang and returning to XN.

In the Hintang I had seen the two obvious sites near the visitors pavilion and a signboard (the former is a shambles and the latter is starting to fade, by the way)when the driver and I decided that I ought to take the 45 minute walk each way from the Keohintang spot marked on the Houaphanh Province brochure( put out by LNTA-ADB)to a third and fourth site. The driver went on his way to tend to the carburetor, agreeing to meet me at the starting off point in 90 minutes.

I reached the sites without event on a less than terrifically marked path but on the way back I took a wrong fork, wound up on the top of a hill(off the trail) and could not re-trace my steps successfully back to the correct trail . I wound up hopelessly lost(no one else was on the trail)and followed a stream out of the Hintang-still lost. By 4 p.m, I could hear the staff shooting off pistols in the hopes I would be near enough to hear them and communicate with them but, of course, they could not hear my calls for help.

By about 4:45, I had taken two false trails and then decided to take one that seemed to go nowhere when I noticed cow dung which I took to be sign of a nearby farm. I was correct and at about 5:15, exhausted, I reached three very rural farm houses. The villagers were as astonished to see me as I was they and they quickly noticed my muddy appearance, heard me say Hintang and produced a cell phone. I called Mr Nyot; he called the driver and in 45 minutes we were riding in his truck over the worst rode I have ever seen to the main highway. By 8:15,we arrived in XN, very cold and tired. I was grateful I did not have to spend the night in the wild.

The flight in the 17 seat Lao Air Cessna over the Nam Theum II dam from XN to Vientiane was also a highlight.

Back in Vientiane, I was fortunate to see (and photograph)the wonderful reconstruction of the paintings(are they frescoes?) at the vihan at Wat Oub Mong. I am delighted to learn they are of the Ramayana and I am hopeful that with some of that information, I can decipher what I photographed.

So, all in all, a wonderful trip.

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