

Dear Bamboo Schoolers,

the past week has been, by far, the most adventurous one in Laos.

On Friday we embarked at 11:00 a.m. with a 7 ton heavy truck to bring construction material to Ban Mok Eauy in order to build a water tank.

Our team consisted of Satheet, Marco (our Swiss volunteer), Mr. Boonkhen(our construction manager) and myself.

We had previously donated the same amount of material to Ban Mok Lep. However, that time we transported the material from Nong Khiaw by boat to the Nam Ou river bank, at the bottom of Mok Leap. There, the villagers carried the material (cement, bricks, sand) up the mountain by themselves since this village cannot be reached by truck.

In the case of Mok Eauy there is a (narrow and bumpy) road passing through Ban Hoay Loar, so we decided to transport the material by truck. Not the easiest thing to do.

Since it had rained the night before, the road was still wet and muddy, which created a perfect condition for the truck to get stuck in the mud four times. Furthermore, a tire blew and needed to be exchanged. During steep slopes there were times when the truck started to drift backwards, so Marco and I (sitting in the back of the truck) were told to jump off the truck. Adventure at it's core.

Since the "road" was very narrow, we had to painfully endure unexpected branches hitting us suddenly in the face, leaves falling into the back of the truck, insects crawling all over and somehow manage to hold on tight as the truck passed big muddy holes or little, unstable wooden bridges (which I never expected to carry the weigh of the truck, but luckily I was wrong).

The last time the truck got stuck (almost reaching Ban Mok Eauy at 8p.m.), we had to unload the cement bags , since the weight made it too heavy to drive up a steep slope.

Luckily, Satheet managed to contact the Naiban (head of the village) and asked him for help from the villagers in order to load the cement back on the truck, as we finally managed to get the truck out of the mud and up the steep slope.

About 10 villagers arrived with their motorbikes and loaded the bags back onto the truck. From there on, after driving for 9,5 hours (which would normally take only about a 3hour drive), we arrived in Ban Mok Eauy totally exhausted.

There, the rest of the villagers helped to unload the entire truck, which was followed by a delicious dinner at the Naiban's house.

Exhausted as we were, we all quickly fell asleep after watching some Thai boxing at the Naibans House. (Ironically I haven't watched TV in 6 months but got to watch some in the most remote and smallest village ever.)

The next morning Mr. Boonkhen instructed the villagers how to prepare the construction site for the tank, explained how deep to dig the holes for the poles etc.

etc. .We were happy to have him with us, since the villagers have never worked with cement or bricks before.

Unfortunately, during our 2 days there we were surprised by a lot of rain, which got into the way of the construction. Therefore, Satheet and Mr. Boonkhen stayed in Ban Mok Eauy until the end of the construction of the tank, whilst Marco and I proceeded to Mok Lep in order to deliver the requested paint (that we still had from the construction in Ban Khon Khuen) in order to paint the water tank that had been build 3 months ago (by the villagers themselves).

We stayed there for 2 nights and helped to paint the tank before heading down to Ban Phonsana.

Initially, we had intended to also go to Ban Hoay Lor in order to deliver construction material to build a toilet and a solar panel for the school. However, the truck would have been too heavy to reach both villages and apart from that, currently there are school holidays in Laos, so the solar panel will be delivered before the school starts again in September.

As per our volunteers we are sadly saying goodbye to the 2 last remaining ones. Pat and Marco are finishing their time with Bamboo School and we couldn't be happier and thankful for their contribution towards our organization.

Pat has been with us for about 4 months and has made a huge impact during her time here with us (apart from becoming part of the Bamboo School family). She was working 5 days a week (from 8-12 and then from 2-4) at the hospital in Nong Khiaw and was a huge asset to the team there (accompanied by our great translator, Sytha). Furthermore, every 10th day she visited our clinic in Muang Ngoi with Sytha during market day and was more than needed and appreciated over there. As a token of appreciation the director of the hospital thanked her with a certificate of appreciation! A great gesture!!

In her offtime she was always nursing the volunteers and myself as well as Sytha and Satheet and we always felt safe to have her looking out for us.

Pat is one of the most special, strong, funny, caring, amazing human beings I have personally encountered (you should see her hiking and dancing skills) and we are more than grateful to have had her on our team.

She will go back to America and will continue to volunteer as a hospice assistant.

Marco will continue his travels in Asia and as per myself I will head in a weeks time on my well deserved holiday to Thailand and Malaysia to suck up some new energy for the upcoming projects in July (visit of Dr. Lung, the eye-specialist).

We wish you all a great remaining week with many greetings from Laos!



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Isabel Montano

