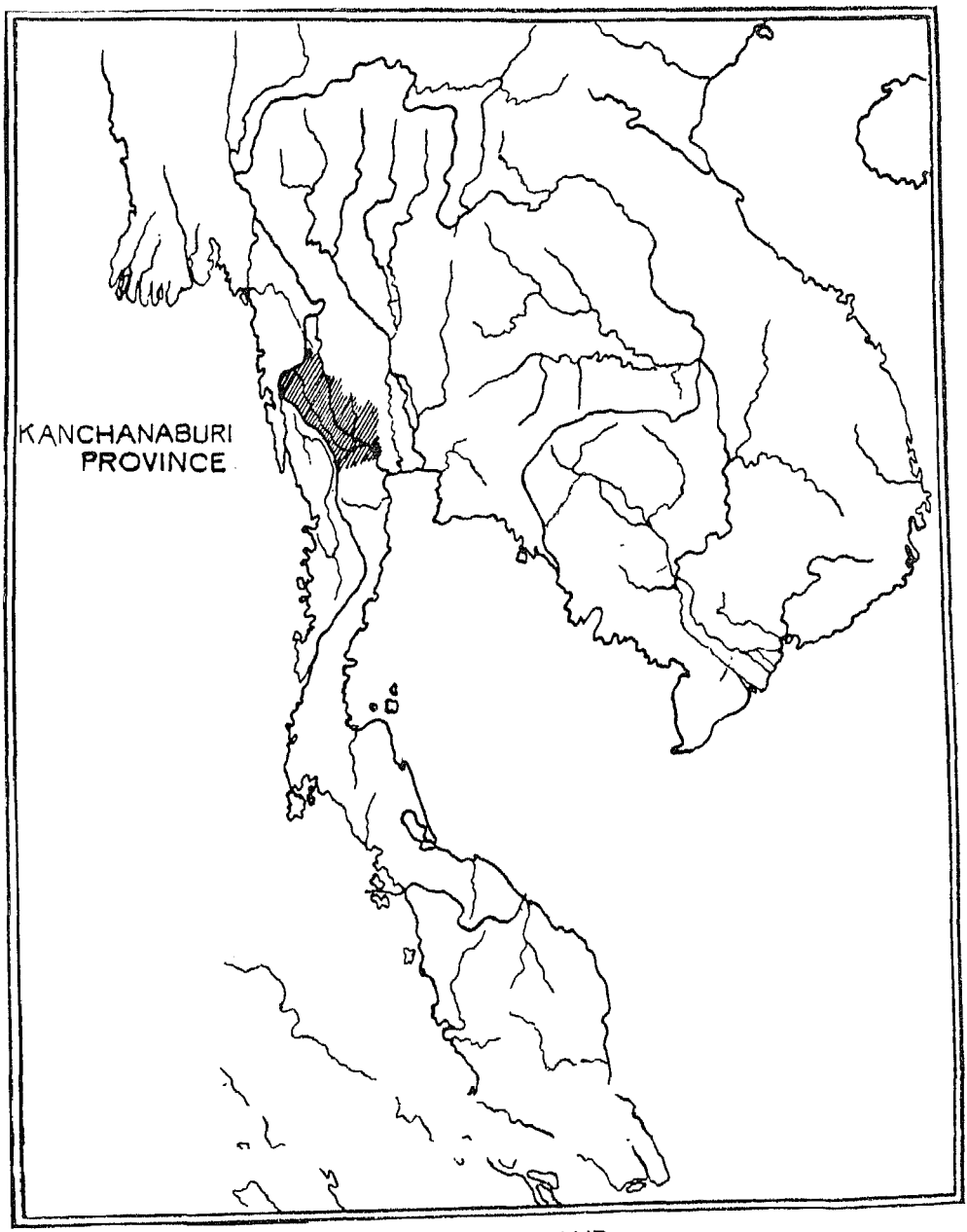


MAP OF THAILAND

SHOWING THE POSITION OF KANCHANABURI PROVINCE

THE THAI-DANISH PRE-HISTORIC EXPEDITION 1960-1962
PRELIMINARY EXPEDITION 1960-61

by

Eigil Nielsen

During a conversation early in 1960 between the Danish Ambassador to Thailand, Mr. Ebbe Munck, and the Director of the Research Center of the Siam Society, Mr. J. Boeles, the possibility was discussed of promoting Thai-Danish science within the framework of an expedition. From this conversation plans were drawn up during the following months for a Thai-Danish pre-historic expedition to the area between the rivers Kwae Noi and Kwae Yai.

That just these areas were chosen for the expedition was due to the fact that the well-known Dutch archeologist Dr. H.R. van Heekeren had found primitive stone implements—pebble tools—during the years he spent with the Japanese as a prisoner of war working on the railway from Kanchanaburi to Burma. In 1956 the American archeologist Karl Heider collected a considerable number of these tools and Dr. Heider also reported two rich finds of neolithic and bronze age artifacts.

Great interest was shown in the plans for the expedition both in Thailand and Denmark and the necessary funds were put at the disposal of the expedition, partly privately – The East Asiatic Company Ltd., the Otto Mønstedfund and the Danish Expeditionfund—and partly from the Research Center of the Siam Society. Early in the autumn of 1960, the Thai-Danish Pre-historic Expedition became a reality.

In accordance with the program the expedition intended to start off with a limited preliminary expedition, which would make the necessary reconnaissance of the working area during the last two months of 1960 and the early months of 1961, while the main expedition, based on the results of the preliminary expedition, would work the following season, i.e, the cold season 1961-62.

The scientific staff of the preliminary expedition met in Bangkok at the end of October. The members were Mr. Chin Yu-di, Chief of Division of Archeology at the National Museum, Mr. Aporn na Songkla and Mr. Tamnoon Attakor, all from Thailand, Dr. H.R. van Heekeren from Holland, Per Søresen, M.A. and Dr. Eigil Nielsen, both from Denmark.

The expedition left Bangkok for Kanchanaburi on November 6th having added to their field kit and bought provisions for an expedition lasting six weeks. The following day they started their first reconnaissance along the Kwae Noi in a big but rather primitive houseboat towed by a powerful motorboat. Besides the boatmen the expedition had been further supplemented in Kanchanaburi by a police escort, which was to remain with the expedition throughout its stay in the area.

The transportation and the police escort were most efficiently organized by the Governor of Kanchanaburi, Mr. Likkit Satayayoot, with whom plans had been discussed during October and who continued to give invaluable support throughout. The plan for the reconnaissance included a quick trip through the Kwae Noi area to the Three Pagoda Pass on the Burma border, a slow return along the same route with short visits to all localities—caves and open dwelling places—that might be thought suitable for archeological or palaeontological studies and finally, time permitting, a similar trip through the Kwae Yai area.

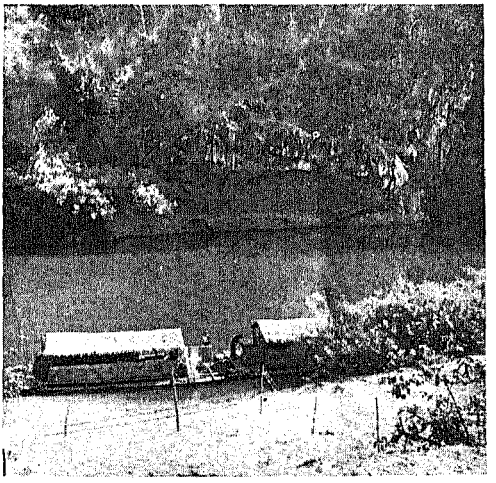
Tha-Khanun was reached on the fourth day after leaving Kanchanaburi and, as the water level further up the river would not permit our boat to pass, we continued overland towards the Three Pagoda Pass using ten elephants as a means of transportation. We arrived at the Three Pagoda Pass on November 13th with a strong police escort. Returning with the elephants to the houseboat at Tha-Khanun on November 17th we visited several caves. From Tha-Khanun we proceeded by truck to examine more caves, but nothing of interest was found.

On November 19th an excursion was made to Chande by speedboat and here we found two caves, Chande I and II, where

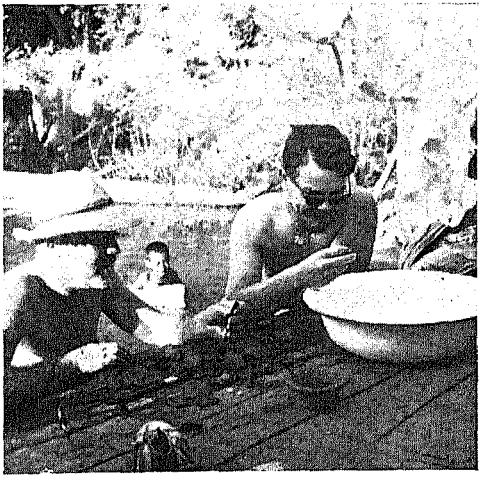

THAILAND
BURMA
BONG CHONG
KOENG KLUAT
THREE PAGODA PASS
BAN TI KHI
CHUP MA LAI
NAUNG LU
CHADENG CHENG
KHAWOENG
THIYALA
THI MAE KHAUNG
KROENG KRAI
DI KA
THUNG NA
THA KHANUN
CHAN DE
ONG BA
BAU NOI
SI SAWAT
NAUNG KHALIN
WANG KHAHEN
LINTHIN
NAUNG NOK YUNG
SA DAUNG
PONG KADANG RA
KUI YAI
THUNG NA KOI CHANG
SAI YOK
HIN HAK
BAUNG TOENG
LAI BON
THA KATHUM
KAEM LAWA
MAE NAM MAE KLONG
NAM TOK
THA SAO
THUNG MASANG
SAI YAUNG
WANG YAI
WANG PHO
LAY YA
LUM SUM
MAE NAM KHWAE NOI
THA KI LEN
KANCHANABURI
BAN KAO
THA MUANG
DAN LAM SAI
THA MAKA
BAN PONG
THA MANAO
PHO THA RAM
NAUNG BUA
CHAUM BOENG
RATBURI

Three Pagoda Pass, Thai-Burma border

At the Three Pagoda Pass



The so-called River Kwae



Dr. H.R. van Heeheren and Per Soresen

there were stone tools, potsherds etc. Furthermore, at an open dwelling place—Chande A—we found stone tools of palaeolithic appearance and also a goodsized hand-axe. The next day we visited another cave which yielded no results, therefore the first three localities were revisited and further finds were made there.

Between the 21st and the 23rd of November the expedition continued down the Kwae Noi visiting a number of caves of which two were outstanding, the Phra cave (the Priest cave, or as named by the expedition, Sai Yok I) near Sai Yok and the Lawa cave a little further down the river.

The Sai Yok area consists of two caves close to each other with a big rock shelter between the two entrances. A considerable number of pebble tools were collected here and several artifacts from the neolithic and bronze ages. In the Lawa cave, a very big and exceedingly beautiful stalactite cave, we found both numerous fossilized bones and teeth and also quite a number of pebble tools.

On November 24th we continued to Wang Po. En route we visited caves close to the railway west of Wang Po and made considerable finds of pebble tools in two of these. On November 25th the expedition visited the so-called 'Sawmill Site' on the outskirt of Wang Po. This was the site found by the archeologist Karl G. Heider in 1956 and we found, as he had stated, that this was a bronze age site of the greatest interest. Between the 26th and 28th of November we visited caves both east and west of Wang Po and revisited one cave, which we had already been to on November 24th which was extremely rich in pebble tools. Apart from this cave none were of any special interest even though we did make some good finds such as human teeth and bones from the 'India Cave' near Lumsum and in a rock shelter not far from this cave. On November 28th we visited the big gravel areas near Takilen, where Karl Heider in 1956 found a number of pebble tools, but our visit yielded nothing.

On November 29th we continued our river trip to Ban Kao. It was in this neighbourhood that Dr. van Heekeren had made his first finds of pebble tools during the World War II and where later Karl Heider had reported rich finds of neolithic artifacts on a site which he called 'Bang Site'.

With Ban Kao as a base the expedition visited several caves but with insignificant results. However, going to and from these caves, we discovered several remarkable open dwelling places on the plain west of Ban Kao. Here we collected well made pebble tools and also a beautiful proto-hand-axe. Twice we visited Karl Heider's 'Bang Site' where we collected a large number of potsherds, polished stone axes, stone bracelets and other artifacts plus some animal bones. Near 'Bang Site' we also visited a locality in the bamboo jungle, where a strongly marked surface relief indicated an early settlement of unknown age. This last locality was pointed out to us by an old man from Ban Kao, who also drew our attention to other interesting places where neolithic artifacts were found of a type different from those found at 'Bang Site'. These localities are situated on the left bank of the river near to the Ban Kao ferry.

From Ban Kao the expedition continued to Kanchanaburi only to leave there on December 6th by houseboat to go up along the Kwae Yai to Si Sawat, which was reached after 4 days travelling. We stopped en route at some small villages by the river and found a few pebble tools which indicated that even here a systematic search might yield important results.

On the 11th and 12th of December we visited the Ongba cave, which proved to be the richest cave in surface finds we had yet come across. To a certain extent this wealth in archeological objects was due to the fact that parts of the cave had been ransacked by treasure hunters, although they had left many objects either because they did not seem sufficiently valuable to them, or they might have been afraid to remove such objects because of the local superstition that any person who removes anything from the Ongba cave shall be struck with madness. Among the ex-

cavated objects were remnants of four large bronze drums, many coffins made from hollowed out tree trunks and numerous pots from the neolithic and bronze ages. The expedition collected quite a lot of this material and also a considerable number of pebble tools and one proto-hand-axe.

From here the expedition again returned to Kanchanaburi making short visits on the way to two caves which yielded no results.

From Kanchanaburi Mr. Tamnoon and Dr. Nielsen went to Bangkok on December 17th to arrange for the transportation of the big collections in Kanchanaburi while Dr. van Heekeren and Mr. Sørensen and Mr. Chin Yu-di went by train to Ban Kao to give Mr. Sørensen an opportunity to see 'Bang Site' which he had missed earlier because of illness.

On December 19th the whole expedition and its finding were transported to Bangkok and the first half of the program came to an end.

The plans for the second half of the preliminary expedition were now formed based on the experience gained during the earlier excursions.

The numerous surface finds we had made in the autumn from many localities could naturally be only of small scientific value but gave a splendid indication of where it might be rewarding to start a more systematic search.

The most promising sites were as follows:

I The two Chande caves, Chande I and II.
II Open dwelling place, Chande A.
III The two Sai Yok caves and the rock shelter between these two caves.
IV The Lawa cave.
V Two small caves by the railway west of Wang Po.
VI Open dwelling places on the plain west of Ban Kao.
VII Karl Heider's bronze age station, 'Saw Mill Site'.
VIII Karl Heider's neolithic 'Bang Site'.
IX The neolithic settlements near the Ban Kao ferry.
X The Ongba cave.

From these ten localities numbers III, V and VIII were chosen for more detailed examination. The examination would consist of a trial digging which would give information that would enable us to decide to what extent the main expedition should be carried through in the next season. There were several other tempting localities on the list but these were thought to be too extensive for the preliminary expedition. This applied especially to localities VII and X, both of which it is hoped will be excavated by the main expedition.

During the first half of the preliminary expedition we had found that the accommodation in the houseboat was insufficient for a large party such as ours. We therefore requested the Governor of Kanchanaburi to arrange for the construction of two bamboo rafts, each equipped with a roomy bamboo hut.

The rafts were to be constructed at site III, which was the farthest site up the river and we planned provisionally to work there for about 30 days and then float the rafts downstream to site IV where we intended to spend 10 days, continuing from there to site VIII, where we would dig a trial trench for about one week.

The scientific members were the same as before except that Mr. Tamnoon Attakor was replaced by Mr. Kampan Boonyamalik, Chief of the Second Fine Arts Unit, Uthong. Furthermore, Professor Sood Sangwichien gave very valuable assistance during the short period spent working at the excavation of human skeletons at 'Bang Site'. Several of the boat-crew assisted and local labourers were hired for the excavations. As in the autumn the necessary police escort was in attendance.

The expedition once again left Bangkok on the January 10th but, as the building of the bamboo rafts was delayed, we had to change the working program so that we started at site VIII where we could make our base in a Government resthouse.

The trial digging was started on January 12th and after only a few days we made several finds from neolithic burials with well preserved skeletons, numerous jars, dishes etc. These finds were so valuable that, when the Governor of Kanchanaburi

visited the excavation on January 19th and reported that the bamboo rafts were now ready at site III, we decided that the examination of site VIII could not be discontinued. For this reason it was thought necessary to divide the expedition into two. Per Sørensen, Mr. Aporn na-Songkla and Mr. Kampan Boonyamalik would continue at site VIII while Mr. Chin Yu-di, Dr. van Heekeren and Dr. Eigil Nielsen would carry out the excavation at site III near Sai Yok.

The Sai Yok team left for Wang Po on January 20th to purchase additional equipment now required due to the division of the expedition and continued the next day by speedboat to the Sai Yok district, where the bamboo rafts had been placed as close as possible to site III. The excavations here lasted from January 21st to February 9th and were carried out both in the big rock shelter and in the caves.

The Main results were as follows:

A. The excavation in the rock shelter:

1. Survey of a profile through the upper 4 meters of the sediments of the rock shelter.
2. Detection of interruption in sedimentation or other irregularity about 3.75 m under the profile.
3. Strategraphical placing of a considerable number of pebble tools in the surveyed layer series.
4. Discovery of a buried human being in a strata containing pebble tools.
5. Observation of the fact that the pebble tools found under the irregular sedimentation differ from those found in higher level in being of much coarser make which might mean that the bottom layer of the profile is palaeolithic.

B. The excavation of the small Sai Yok cave:

1. Numerous finds of pebble tools of the same type as those found in the upper layer of the rock shelter.

C. The excavation of the big Sai Yok cave.

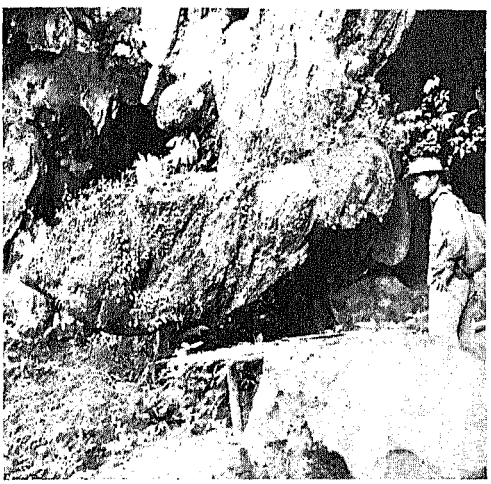
1. Finds of several neolithic burials with almost decomposed skeletons but well preserved ceramics and other burial gifts,

2. Finds of bronze age artifacts in a fairly well defined layer even though disturbed by later burials.
3. Finds of large coffins of a type similar to those found in the Ongba cave. Buried in the coffins were human bones and ceramics and bronze sculptures from the 15th and 16th century.
4. Finds of large earthen jars with burned human bones, possibly contemporary with the wooden coffins.

The excavation of the two Sai Yok caves must be considered as finished but there is every reason to believe that a bigger and considerably deeper excavation of the rock shelter will yield valuable results and for this reason Sai Yok I is one of the main points of the program for next year.

On February 9th we floated down to locality IV, the Lawa cave, which we reached in the afternoon of the same day. According to the plan we had intended to work here for about 10 days but we very soon realized that the people here were extremely hostile towards the idea of our excavating the cave, which was considered to be holy and also because two priests were living in the outer cave. During our first visit to the Lawa cave in November we had met with no such difficulties, but now rumours had spread throughout the area about our finds of human skeletons both at Ban Kao and Sai Yok. The path leading to the mouth of the cave was found to be completely blocked by newly cut bamboo and it proved impossible to find a guide. The first thing we saw in the cave was a written notice saying that it was forbidden to remove or damage anything in the holy cave.

The following morning five of our six workers announced that they were ill, obviously in fear of working in the cave, and as we did not deem it advisable to excavate under these circumtances we continued on our rafts down the river to Nam Tok, which was reached on February 10th late in the evening. The next day we dismissed our workers and moved into the Nam Tok rest house to arrange our collections and equipment for transportation by rail to Kanchanaburi. On February 12th Dr. Eigil Neilsel visited



Sai Yok site

Sai Yok site

Ban Kao site

Ban Kao site

Ban Kao where Mr. Per Sørensen reported that the work was drawing to a close. According to Per Sørensen's subsequent detailed report to the Expedition Committee the five weeks of excavation at site III resulted in the finding of 5 human skeletons, of which two were removed encased in plaster of Paris, burial gifts consisting of earthenware jars and polished stone axes, several fragments of flat stone bracelets and bone implements, grindstones, about 20,000 potsherds and 2 to 3,000 animal bones, mostly fragmentary.

The Sai Yok team arrived in Kanchanaburi on February 16th. After a visit to Ban Kao with the Governor they finally arrived in Bangkok on February 18th, the Ban Kao team arriving two days later.

The field work of the preliminary expedition is now finished with considerably better results than the member ever dared anticipate. Based on the studies and experiences of this reconnaissance, it is now possible to make plans which cover the exploration of a very considerable period of the pre-history of the area. An essential reason for the good results obtained was the magnificent manner in which the Thai and Danish scientists co-operated, a co-operation which will be even closer in years to come. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the expedition members for work well done and carried out in the friendliest spirit.

On behalf of the Thai-Danish Prehistoric Expedition I would like to express my thanks to the East Asiatic Company Ltd., The Otto Mønstedfund, Danish Expeditionfund and the Siam Society, all of whom have contributed to the expedition.

Also on behalf of the expedition, I would like to thank the gentlemen named below for all the help they have given towards the accomplishment of the work of the preliminary expedition.

H.H. Prince Dhani Nivat, President of the Siam Society; Mr. Dhanit Yupho, Director-General of the Fine Arts Department; Mr. Kris Inthakosai, Deputy Director of the Fine Arts Department; Mr. J. Boeles, Director of the Research Center of the Siam Society; Mr. Likkit Satayayoot, the Governor of Kanchanaburi and Mr. Ebbe Munck, Danish Ambassador to Thailand.