



## Well, Well, Well, Well, Well: The Five Wells

Last year Lotus Outreach (LO, [www.lotusoutreach.org](http://www.lotusoutreach.org)) and COCD ([www.cocd-cambodia.org](http://www.cocd-cambodia.org)) had asked us to fund 5 wells for 180 families (more in the dry season) living in Pursat region, the north-west of Cambodia.

DAC Foundation agreed and I was able to visit some wells that had been previously dug and the site of one of our future wells. I knew that I could only visit the wells this year as the season had been wrong for digging last year. So we went...



This year in Cambodia, the rains are late and abundant but we decided to go anyway. Little did we know. We, Raksmeay (LO), Melinda ([www.watopot.org](http://www.watopot.org)), a driver and me set out for Pursat early in the morning. It is a good 4 hours drive and the road is not always great. We had an appointment at Well No. 1, Ou Sap

Mort for the afternoon. I learnt that day to appreciate SUVs because we crossed the thigh deep river quite merrily (though unexpectedly). Then we had to walk about 1 km on amazing roads. We waded through streams and of course I fell and had one side completely muddy! But we did arrive to a wonderful gathering of people who had been waiting for hours, knowing the right time but scared of missing us!!! We had a lovely meeting and then noticed that quite a few were inebriated and that there was litter everywhere. So, even though we found out from Pola Ung from COCD



that it takes 6 years to change and establish new behavior patterns, we decided to give them the job of putting the cookie wrappers in the bin, suggesting they clean up the area and that they save the money for their families and not drink. Then we walked back and soldiered on.

And then we went to the second well: Phun Thmey (Tuol Kruos Commune). The road was very bad but nothing compared to what awaited us... Finally we arrived at the well and meeting place and no-one was there. We had passed various

families lying in their hammocks on the way but they didn't seem interested in joining the meeting. Even the head man was not there. (Each well has a committee and they charge about US\$0.10 a month and a one time \$2.50 to those that use it. This money is kept for repairs. Care is taken that the well is never in personal hands or controlled by anyone.) Enquiries were made and it was discovered this commune had not received land rights yet (after the Communist period, land rights are still being disputed) and there was bad feelings between a number of families: this will be followed up or else the well and other families will suffer.



Kongti on a bridge

Then on to Well No. 3: Ou Romchek (Pra Moy Commune). We walked and slithered and jumped and waded and laughed for about 1.5 kilometers. It is slow walking as you have to pick your path and,



where lucky, balance on a board and wade without getting too wet. The whole committee was there to greet us, headed by a retired soldier who had lost an arm. He spoke of how giving a well is like saving lives because before they had to drink puddle water or buy it at US0.25 for 30 liters. Do you remember the bicycles from last year? Well one of the



The road

girls was from this village, 13 year old Chharn Sok Lim. We asked her if she had come to the meeting on her bike and she replied no because it is only for going to school!



We had lunch (bread and bananas for me) and much to our surprise discovered that well No. 4 was further on. The road worsened as we



Raksmei in The road?



walked the next over 1 kilometer. However we had acquired a certain expertise! A warm and excited group awaited us. They greeted us as we arrived and then we sat down and the head of the committee told us how eager they had been to meet the person who had funded their well (unfortunately Douglas A. Campbell is no more with us, so i was his representative). The villagers looked healthy and happy and there was no smell of alcohol. I noticed children going up on the porch to get a glass of water from a bucket. In many places, it is not easy to persuade the people to drink the "new" water!!!

We left them and i opted for a motor cycle ride as my foot was bothering me. Be warned: Never take a motor cycle on muddy roads! It was terrifying and so i ended up walking most of the way with rides on the good bits.



We drove to Well No. 5 which (thankfully) was near the road. They had been there the longest and had their land rights. As they were extremely industrious, they were growing oranges and coconuts and bananas and offered some to us. We then decided to buy oranges for the Wat Opot children and they managed to pick 44 and 22 (it's a traditional measurement).



Melinda



Oranges at Wat Opot

All in all it was a wonderful experience to see with my own eyes what can be done. However, i was very disappointed that none of the wells had a proper path to them and only the Well No. 4 had any plan to build one. In future this should be part of the agreement.

And so back to Phnom Penh.