



VIETNAM:



« Day Twenty-Three - Silkworms and Easy Riders

Day Twenty-Five - The Big Cheese »

Day Twenty-Four - Aquatic Elephant

July 9th, 2007 by ben



My Elephant was sinking! The young elephant rider had guided him, quite roughly I opposite shore. Lak Lake is not a small lake; the shore was quite a distance and the water, to my thinking, likely to get quite deep - so I had my concerns.

The going was slow, especially when the water rose to just below that poor elephant's eyes. His trunk would regularly emerge dramatically from the water sucking massive quantities of air into its huge frame. Then the upper part of its trunk would hover there a little, arching out of the water like some kind of Trunk Ness Monster until slowly descending below the surface again.



Then the water started lapping at my toes.

The boy behind the elephant rider then turned to me and communicated through a

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MISSION

TRAVEL PLAN

GALLERY

VIDEOS

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Archives

July 2007

June 2007

SEARCH

the elephant seating as, well... the elephant was sinking.



The water rose a little more, then a little more, till I was sure that poor elephant's eyes were completely submerged. I put my daypack on my back and held my camera aloft.... Then, nearing the opposite shore, we soon hit an uphill gradient and that great elephant began to rise - like a triumphant sea monster emerging from the water!

It was moment of tension followed by release. A climax I think they call it.

On the other side we elephant lumbered through some rice paddy fields, past farmers and buffalos, then to M'nong village.



M'nong people are an ethnic minority known for the skills in capturing and training wild elephants – my elephant riders were M'nong. They are also known for being matriarchal (the women hold the power), matrilineal (the mother carries the family line) and for being fiercely belligerent to Vietnamese. My thinking is that this belligerence extends to Westerners 'cause no amount of smiling could make these people warm to me. I guess, what with me being a lily-white westerner, perched on top of an elephant, smiling that stupid grin of mine, I'm not surprised. Old ladies frowned and children turned their backs to me. I really wasn't feeling the love.



So we elephant lumbered on, past thatched roof stilt houses with walls made out of some kind of woven plant life. There were pigs in pens and rice drying in the sun, into which our elephant, much to an old lady's distaste, attempted to plough. When we'd passed through the village, we lumbered back across that lake again... almost sinking, but surviving as before.

It was an okay day really. It was an elephant ride and all.

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