

Fishing

BY BERTIL LINTNER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY HSENG NOUNG LINTNER

FISHING? IN THE RIVER KWAI? THAT MUST BE AN ADVENTURE SUITABLE FOR ONLY OUTDOOR-ORIENTED ATHLETES LIKE MYSELF AND THE JANE'S DEFENCE WEEKLY CORRESPONDENT, ROBERT KARNIOL. BOTH OF US COME FROM COUNTRIES RENOWNED FOR DEEP FORESTS, TURBULENT RIVERS AND RUGGED MOUNTAIN AREAS: CANADA AND SWEDEN. BOTH OF US HAVE ALSO UNDOUBTEDLY BUILT UP UNRIVALLED PERSONAL PHYSIQUES FROM ARDUOUS BAR-HOPPING BETWEEN THE FCCT, THE FRONT PAGE AND THE CROWN ROYAL IN BANGKOK.



Defending his virtue, Robert Karniol wrestles with a headstrong gibbon.

Bertil with the big stick.

Not many got away.



We, our wives and my daughter packed our fishing gear and set off for the Sri Nakarin reservoir. This mighty, artificial lake has been formed by one of those many controversial dam projects which conscientious citizens today are trying to prevent from being built. Their environmental impact have been devastating and their value as energy producing ventures has been questioned — but they are no doubt full of fish, as we soon were to discover.

To reach what is left of the wilds of Thailand was a much longer and arduous journey than we had initially thought. Sri Nakarin is a gigantic, 60-km long reservoir (the biggest in Southeast Asia, we were told) and the road ends at a nondescript amphoe

called Sisawat. We parked my jeep by the lakeside and continued by boat. It was an hour and a half across the lake until we reached a delightful little fishing resort on the reservoir's northern shore. It consisted of a string of bamboo rafts in a secluded inlet where the Lam Khao Ngoo stream — the uppermost reaches of the river Kwai — comes down from the Thung Yai reserve to the lake. The proprietor, Khun Sutee Suthiwong, turned out to be a very friendly and extremely well-organised former logger with unmatched knowledge of the area. As a young man he roamed the forests of Kanchanaburi years before the dam was built.

There were few locals around: just a few Burmese wood-cutters and the occasional party of forest scavengers. To our astonishment, all of them

seemed to be surrounded by flocks of barking dogs. Khun Sutee's wisdom was needed to explain this otherwise incomprehensible preference for not only one but at least five or six canine companions in the forest: dogs detect snakes faster and easier than humans do. Lam Khao Ngoo means "the Snake Mountain Stream" — and not without reason: the forest is full of interesting snakes, we were pleased to learn.

I have always been of the opinion that the fear of snakes is motivated more by Freudian hang-ups rather than by actual danger. Any civilised snake would slither away as soon as he hears noisy beings come — and the snake may be excused for mistaking two journalists and their families rampaging through the forest for a herd of elephants or wild buffaloes.

Fishing



FCCT Presidentissimo tempts wrath of fish rights activists

One of the few ways of being bitten by a snake is to accidentally step on one — (which I have done, without being bitten) — or if you stumble upon a lady cobra with eggs, and she thinks you are going to steal them. Like any caring mother, she will defend her offsprings. Then, of course, there are uncivilised snakes as well, such as the Malayan pit viper (which doesn't go away when he takes up the scent of human beings) and the green pit viper (which likes to hang out in trees and may fall on you).

The scenery was absolutely spectacular: virgin jungle, a clear, rippling mountain stream, birds, and flocks of gibbering monkeys in the treetops. The smoky bar of the FCCT seemed far away as we walked along the Snake Mountain Stream, up towards Thung Yai. We arrived at a broad stretch of smooth water just below a series of rapids and took up position by a big boulder by the river.

Khun Sutee is not only a good fishing guide: he has also created his own lure, the appropriately named Sutee spoon. I fixed one of these on the line, cast once and reeled in. Nothing. I cast again and as I wound in, it felt as if the hook had got snagged on a log. But then — the reel whirred as the line raced out. The fish was diving deep and the struggle was on. A few minutes later, I landed a one-kilo pla krasup, the most common game fish in the area. It's actually a kind of barb, but not of the more commonly known aquarium variety. A pla krasup — or traverse-bar-barb — can be as big as five or six kg.

But the fish we really wanted to catch was the pla chador, the giant snakehead which is Thailand's finest game fish. It's long and slender and it's got scales on the head, hence its name. It also fights like a salmon or a giant pike. Two strong bites (they got away) were enough to convince me that it was really as



Boring picture of President with fishing resort in background.

strong as people said. A full-grown pla chador can weigh up to 20 kg.

FISHING IN THE RIVER KWAI?

NOT A BAD IDEA

IF YOU NEED A BREAK FROM

BANGKOK.

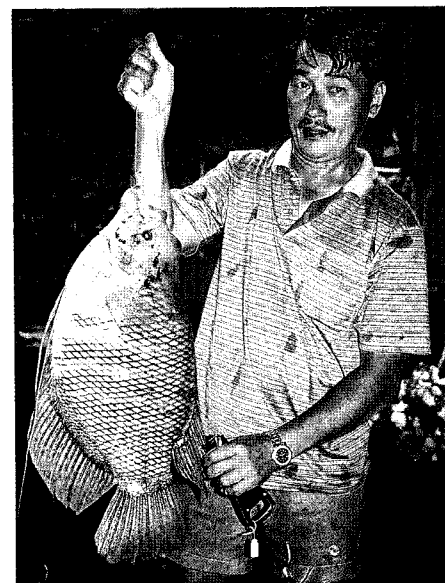
JUST PHONE (OR FAX)

KHUN SUTEE

AT 374-7577.



Lintners slorc defenceless fish.



Sutee and Gourami (the fishy).