

## SEARCH FOR ORCHIDS IN THE NATIONAL PARKS OF NORTHERN THAILAND

Dear Orchid friends,

In March of this year my wife and I flew a second time via Bangkok to Chiang Mai to meet Peter Williams and the other party members to start the trek to the national parks on Northern Island.

The reason for visiting the parks for the second time is very simply because one feels better when one knows what is going on. This year eighteen people from USA, England, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Germany came together on 10th of March to follow Peter's guided tour.

Three nine-seat minibuses were available to transport the members for the whole time of 16 days. I am sure that members from the I. O. S. who have made such a tour before know that it is no holiday due to the early starts in the morning and late returns in the afternoon.

The first day was taken to acclimatize which was very important and we visited the largest temple in Thailand called Wat Phra That Doi Suthep on the top of a mountain near Chiang Mai. Very many local people but also visitors from the rest of the world were inside this area.

In the afternoon the first highlight was the visit of the plant (orchid) market, of course to look for the orchids beginning with the Paphios, Cattleya and Dendrobium hybrids and also flasks were on offer. But the word CITES stopped all request to buy.

The next day was to climb to top of the highest mountain of Thailand Doi Inthanon 2565 meters above sea-level but obviously using our minibuses. At the top it was only +9°C but super sunshine was waiting for us.

There were white coloured *Coelogyne nitida* on many bushes blooming also in the earth. Driving back we visited the garden for cold countries. Fantastic opium poppies, grew around. A short stop on the road down to look for *Dendrobium infundibulum* in the elephant grass.

The following day we left Chiang Mai and travelled north and visited in the morning the Botanical Garden of Queen Sirikit. In the greenhouses you could see plants from all over world and of course in the orchid house Vandas in different colours, Paphios, Dendrobium but also hybrids. There was a gift shop where one could buy clothing (t-shirts, perfume, tea, honey and also orchids and orchid flasks)

On the way to our resort in the mountains we stopped at a butterfly and orchid restaurant full of blooming plants. The following two days were spent jungle trekking with orchid search as our target. This meant getting up early, breakfast and

then take off to the National park, permit and paying at the entrance, talking to the park rangers and then using small roads with many bends and a lot of signals with the motor horn to warn others cars in advance. Final point was a place where the buses could park and then out of the buses and in single file into the forest to discover the orchids blooming in the branches of big trees, (*Vanda coerulea*, different *Dendrobium* in various shades of yellow, both large and small in size.)

Some of our members had not seen orchids in the forest before. The temperature was nearly +30°C with only little shade. Each person received two bottles of water before starting. Rule number one: Peter checked each member to avoid any water problems later. But I can say that no one was seriously affected during the whole time.

One day we visited a local orchid farm which could reach only with difficulties because the little track brought our town buses into danger to pass some bad surfaces.

Mother and father grow orchids which their daughter sells in Bangkok. But some of the orchids will never bloom in Bangkok. It is just too hot in south. It was a pity that they did not speak English only Thai and no names were on the pots. However we enjoyed the meeting with these old people. The lady was very astonished to meet me again and her ire disappeared nearly 100%.

Last year Peter sent me an orchid list from a Thai nursery near Chiang Mai for ordering. There was enough time to get the Thai Export CITES and of course the German import CITES for presenting after our arrival at Frankfurt airport customs.

Also an English member did the same and we both showed Mr. Jo our documents during our visit at his nursery. The day before we flew back he brought us the big package to our hotel at Chiang Mai. If you fly with Thai Airways, as I did, no charges for overweight have to be paid.

In the meantime some of my ordered plants p.e. botanic *Paphios* (*niveum*, *taianum*, *godefroye*, *bellatulum*, *charlesworthii*) are blooming.

On another day we started for a further park together with a local guide for some hours up and down under the trees which were full of *Dendrobium* in yellow and pink colours, Peter's Thai wife and I took many orchids which had fallen down back into branch forks, so we both did a good deed for the day. Back to the entrance we saw local people sitting in a pool with hot water but the water smelled of sulphur. They invited us to do the same but without success.

Our next destination was the town of Loei in the north east of Thailand. On the way we visited Lapang with its famous old Buddhist temple. This district was a major stronghold of Communist insurgents after the second world war. It took time to fight against these people and in 1982 the Thai government forces brought this area under its control. In the visitor building of the park information many artefacts and a short film about the battles in the rocks showed us how heavy the fighting had been.



Only one blooming *Dendrobium* was to be seen but a lot of non-blooming orchids between the rocks like *Ludisia*, *Otochilus*, *Spathoglottis*, and *Coelogynes*.

In the town of Loei we could see in a large lake with some very big fish called giant catfish. Many people feed the fish but they do not eat them. Around the lake many little restaurants tempted us for Thai food at cheap prices. My wife and I have eaten only Thai food during for the whole trip without any problems.

Next day we visited another National park 1400 meter in altitude. What a surprise on our arrival it being only +17°C. It was a shock and a good business for a little shop selling t-shirts. We started with a guide from the ranger station into the orchid garden. There were blooming orchids everywhere. *Dendrobium unicum* in red colour but also wild elephants and tigers live there. We saw on the ground only what the elephants had eaten.

After our stay at Loei we went over to the Rainforest Resort and on the next morning visited a small farm where some of the locals grow Shitake mushrooms. Before we stopped at the Chateau de Loei Winery we saw big branches full of orchids on sale near a Hindu temple

Back in Chiang Mai the last full day of the tour was a relaxing day. In the morning we started to an elephant camp and saw many elephants during a show, including riding on an oxcart and of course on an elephant ride through a river in the nearby jungle. The day ended with a long bamboo raft down the river. After our arrival in hotel Mr. Jo brought us our orchids which had been ordered together with the Thai Health Document and left us with more money than when he arrived. Peter gave us a list with all the names of orchids we had seen on the tour, altogether 51 plants in flower. Thailand is a country full of orchids not only in the forests but also by the road, and in places in the towns.

My wife and I also enjoyed this second trip with Peter Williams and his Thai wife. The tour was perfectly organized. The three Thai drivers made a lot of jokes but in their language. Some were translated by Peter for us so that we could understand them.

Dear Irish members: if you would like more details it is not a problem for me to send you full information about this tour by post. An English friend has improved my English for your better understanding

Greetings from the Continent

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