



RTC-TH May 2011 Update

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Community-based environmental education for the self-sufficiency and sustainability of small rural family farms

ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนบนบพขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

You may post questions / comments to the Discussion area of our website

Mushrooms Made for Meals



Rather than hunt for them in the forest above the farm, we "planted" these on logs and set them in the shade.

Cut and fallen trees branches could have gone for charcoal to cook food. Instead, these branches were used to make mushrooms. It's not labor intensive and we do love mushrooms in our meals. Here's the harvest of our hed lom mushrooms (*Lentinus Polychrous* Lev.)! The little white ones are babies and the tan ones are grownups. 🌐

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3 Weeks of Scattered Heavy Thundershowers

It's near the end of the hot, dry summer season in Thailand. Summer is when we get convective thundershowers increasing the rainfall data for this time of the year. But it usually isn't very much rain (~16 cm / 6.5 in) in contrast to the rainy season (120 cm / 47 in). But averages are deceiving.

These recent heavy thundershowers dumped about 2.5 cm / 1 inch or more rain in a 2-3 hour time span. We are lucky; it doesn't flood in our town site, village, or farm locations. But many rural Thai families only have a motorbike as their main vehicle and rain is a problem. It's next to impossible to keep dry. Add the wet weather, reduced visibility, and speeding cars, trucks, and buses on the main highway and the pucker factor goes up. Luckily, we can sit and watch the traffic. 🌐



Widely scattered thundershowers forecasted for 3 weeks



The clouds pour forth heavy rain in the DRY?? Season.



Intense showers overload the gutters.



When it rains, it's tough when the only family vehicle is a pick-up truck or a motorbike.



Loads on Country Roads

Driving on the left, narrow winding country roads, and a diversity of vehicles of many sizes, shapes and propulsion add to the challenges of driving in Thailand. Here is a small sample of some of the diversity. In rural areas the challenge is watching for traffic coming onto the highway without stopping or looking, slow moving animals or tractors,



Pick-up cattle truck.



Live pigs heading on the road to their fate.



Bamboo basket saddle bags on a motorbike



Max+ loaded farmer's pick up off to market.



Recently we see more tractors around



Corn heading home from the fields on a tractor



Pick up overloaded with rice straw.



Self-propelled local street vendor

and speeding drivers intent on passing on blind curves. In Thailand, the posted speed limit when going through the villages on the way to our farm is 45 kmh / 28 mph (which most drivers seem to ignore). That's not a problem for Sparky (his top speed on a downhill is about 35 kmh / 22 mph). Seems the only things slower than Sparky are the cows, bicycles, and hand tractors.



Melons to market on a pick up.



Corn en route to the grain depot.



The cattle version of "baby on board"



Water buffalo also on the roads.



A Hawaiian transfusion: a load of pineapples



White bags on truck; what white line on the road?



The "home made" Thai farm truck: lot etan



The common Thai hand tractor

Non-toxic Fruit Protection: Just Bag It!

It's nothing really new. As kids, we used to have to climb up into trees and up ladders to wrap newspaper or paper bags around mangos and other fruit to protect them from fruit flies. Many Thai farmers and families do the same even today.

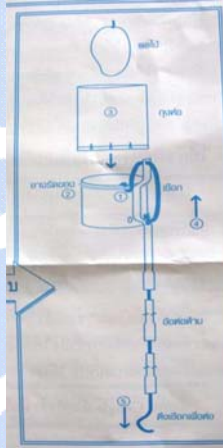
But Aoi came across an interesting tool to help speed the process. You need to prepare the paper "bags" ahead of time and have a supply of rubber bands. The tool is attached to a pole.

The pull cord is looped down outside the rim of the tool and secured with a rubber band. The "bag" is placed inside the rim of the device and is hoisted up to slip around the fruit. When the cord is pulled, the rubber band slips off the rim and closes the open end of the paper bag around the fruit stem.

While this may seem labor intensive, it is a low cost system that fits well with poor rural farmers.



A semi-automatic fruit wrapping device to protect fruit



Aoi prepares "bags" by stapling old phone book pages



Preparing the bags is light work and is another way to re-use paper that is often discarded as waste.

and affecting their metabolism. Well, we don't need official science reports to justify our wanting to eat fresh organic produce from our farm. We just can't afford expensive chemicals and like our farm to stay free of them anyway. 🌍

The practice of bagging fruit to protect them from fruit flies is lower cost than synthetic chemical sprays. We are all for reducing off-farm expenses and keeping synthetic chemicals off the farm. There have been numerous cases of toxins affecting farm workers, farmers, and crops. Studies show fruits and leafy vegetables are more likely to be contaminated by toxic pesticides than produce growing underground (e.g. onions, potatoes).

Recent studies suggest that increasing obesity may be linked to agri-chemicals on farm produce being ingested by humans



Pi Oi busy bagging our wood apples.



With so many fruit, we seem to be papering the trees.

Thai Air Freshener and Food



*Bai toey
(Screw Pine)*

Pandanus leaf (from *Pandanus amaryllifolius*) is the source of a unique fragrance and natural food coloring in Thailand. We use the leaves as an air freshener and sometimes use it to flavor drinking water (as it has a cooling effect similar to chrysanthemum tea). The Pandanus fragrance seems to follow the “Goldilocks” pattern: too little, too much, and just right. Fresh leaves have little or no smell at all. Dry leaves quickly lose their fragrance. Wilting seems to be the “just right” for the leaves to release the fragrance.

It seems this plant has been cultivated for a very long time. The plant is found over Southern India, peninsular South East Asia, Indonesia and Western New Guinea. But none has been found in a wild state. *Pandanus amaryllifolius* rarely flowers. It is reproduced by cuttings. We have this plant growing in all of our gardens.

To make an air freshener, you can simply pick the leaves and tie them in a simple knot. For something more decorative, you can fold them into a “rose shaped”. Put a number of them together for a bouquet. They can then be placed in the room to add a pleasing fresh

smell to a room or car.

The leaves can also be washed and put through a blender, then strained to get a chlorophyll beverage that is used as a detox treatment and a hot weather drink (similar to chrysanthemum tea). It is quite refreshing and soothing on a hot humid day. 🌍



MEWS and Sparky Featured on the Internet

The release of MEWS lessons took on international proportions when two big ham radio websites responded very quickly and positively to our request to help announce the free availability MEWS lessons to the amateur radio community.

While there are numerous sources for learning about weather, MEWS uses a robust system much needed in developing and underdeveloped settings. Both Terry (K7FE) and Don (N4UJW) recognized the value of having weather data coming out a disaster area available to relief organizers.

The effect of the QRZ.com posting was an immediate jump in RTC-TH website hits. We visit QRZ.com for news and looking up call signs. Use the QRZ.com link on our Pages & Links page to read some of the comments in the "Ham Radio News" section.

Don became an instant fan of Sparky and MEWS and created 2 new web pages on his website dedicated to them. It was particularly rewarding for us to be so honored. We visit his website often for all sorts of information ranging from learning the basics of ham radio to getting antenna projects details. We had a great deal of satisfaction to be able to give back to Don for all the help we got from his website. For a wealth of free information about ham radio, visit his site www.hamuniverse.com

Amateur radio has a long tradition of freely exchanging ideas, information, as well as very tangible items ranging from equipment to computer programs (e.g. EchoLink® created by Jonathan Taylor (K1RFD). QRZ.com, Hamuniverse.com, and EchoLink® all inspired us to make MEWS available for non-commercial use to all amateurs. Disasters in developing and underdeveloped places often involve large masses of impoverished people. We hope our efforts will empower amateur radio operators in those places to enhance their skills and value to serve their communities in time of need. FFI: Visit our website www.neighborhoodlink.com/org/rtcth, go to the "Pages & Links" page, and then click on "RTC-TH MEWS Lessons".

National amateur radio organizations in Mexico, Kenya, and Costa Rica expressed interest and posted announcements about MEWS in their membership newsletters. We received an email from a US Skywarn volunteer who said some of the MEWS materials were relevant to his urban weather observing. He found the "home made" weather instruments interesting. "We often get asked if the observations we report are estimates or measurements," he said. Now, other volunteers could make simple instruments and provide measurements rather than subjective estimates and observations. 🌐

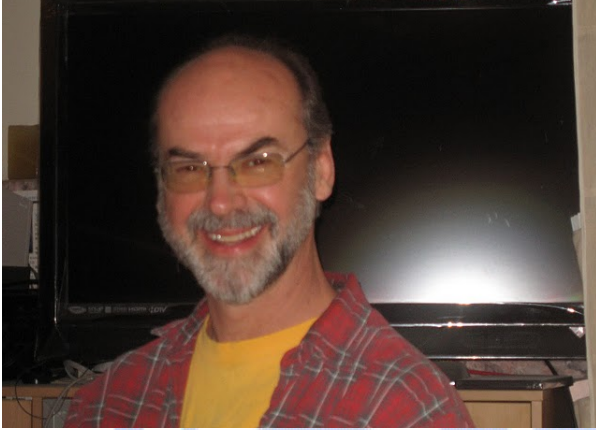


Chief Editor, Terry K7FE, posted an announcement in the "Ham Radio News" section of QRZ.com



"Fantastic" response from Don N4UJW to seeing RTC-TH info about MEWS, Sparky, and antenna projects we did using material from www.hamuniverse.com

Remembering Jeff Bancroft



Jeff Bancroft, former student and trusted friend.

Jeff took Greg's Geography field methods class where students "test drove" many of the lessons we later adapted for use in the RTC-TH REEEPP, sustainable agriculture and MEWS programs. During these field trips, Jeff was enthralled with the idea that "Geography may not change the world, but it will change the way that you see it" (an expression Greg was fond of saying). The full integrated use of the Geographic Systems Model to the trip planning and lessons intrigued him. It was a comprehensive overall generic template for learning and living. "It all makes sense," he exclaimed. It was "simple" in that it was fundamental and universal---not necessarily "easy" due to the complexity of nature and people.

His love of learning epitomized the saying "Learning is a life-long endeavor." Jeff had "aha!" moments when abstract

It was with great sadness that we learned Jeff Bancroft died in a motorcycle accident last month in Los Angeles.

Jeff was an "older returning" student. He "survived" Greg's GEOG 1 course and became an avid fan of the Geographic Systems Model. After the class, he confided to Greg he was "turned off to school by a remark made by a teacher to him in elementary school as a kid. So I never thought I would get so excited about learning again. Thank, you."



Remembering Jeff through the various field trips and trip journals over the years of teaching.



I was lucky to meet Jeff when he took Geography classes from Greg at Pasadena City College (PCC) where he also regained his love of learning and a sense of inner peace.



He transferred to UCLA where he completed his BA, a major milestone in his life. But he always found peace and a true sense of learning at PCC.

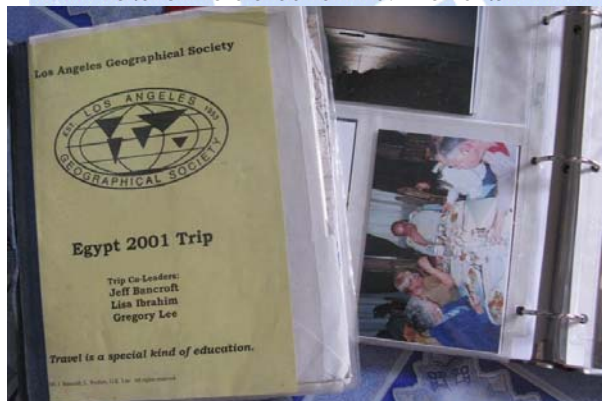
classroom lessons connect with reality in a sudden flash of unexpected clarity. One of these moments came during a 4-day camping field trip to Death Valley. The parched landscape reminded him of scenes from Egypt. He asked a question about the similarity in landforms between Death Valley and an archaeological site in Egypt. Before he finished his question, he answered it himself. It is the kind of moment when teachers see the lessons have taken hold. This “aha!” moment led to conversations about organizing and co-



Death Valley was a special “magic” place that inspired many “Aha!” moments for Jeff.



Morro Bay & Montana de Oro SP was another field trip site for more of Jeff’s “Aha!” moments.



He helped lead a group trip to Egypt where he could share his love of Egyptology and learning with others.



leading a trip to Egypt.

At Montana de Oro SP, Jeff was captivated by the ocean-land interface. Studies of sand dunes, shoreline landforms, and tide pools brought home the reality of Yin-Yang in the Geographic Systems Model. The judicious application of the concepts of location, scale, and time were revealed in common place actions as pitching a tent and building a camp fire. As his understanding grew, it then appeared to be so obvious how all these things in nature were connected.

Jeff was all about giving more than taking. True to the “Teach Back” philosophy, in Jan 2001, Jeff co-led an LA Geographical Society group trip to Egypt with Lisa Ibrahim and Greg. It was a rare opportunity for Jeff to share his vast knowledge and insights about ancient Egypt. His prior trips and an all consuming interest were infectious. It resulted in a once-in-a-life-time trip for the participants.

Egyptian tourism was suffering from a terrorist attack on a German tour group. Many travelers deferred travel to Egypt. But our contacts in various international study groups and in Egypt assured us we would be safe.

Photo on left (l to r): Margaret Nelson, Lisa Ibrahim, Jeff, Marianne Milch, and Erling Nelson onboard M/S Orchid en route from Esna to Luxor on the Nile River in Egypt.



1st dinner on M/S Orchid (l to r): Margaret Nelson, Marianne Milch, Jeff, Lisa Ibrahim, Roger Reid at the start of 3 days on the Nile River.



Photo to left: At Ramses III tomb (l to r) Lisa Ibrahim, Margaret Nelson, Jeff, Marwa (our Egyptian guide), Erling Nelson, Marianne Milch, Roger Reid.

Jeff and Greg teamed up to prepare notes for the group. Jeff handled the Egyptology and Greg provided the physical geography background. Orientation meetings prior to departure covered various aspects of international travel, travel health, and a detailed itinerary. Jeff made his website references available to everyone. He also gave a slide illustrated lecture to the LA Geographical Society to publicize the trip. Lisa and Greg organized an LA Geographical Society dinner meeting showing the trip itinerary. During the trip, periodic reviews were done so give travelers every opportunity to be fully aware of the sites they were visiting. Nothing untoward happened to the group during the 2 week trip. Some of the more seasoned travelers commented they have never been as well prepared for a trip as they were on this one.

There were many “aha!” moments when Jeff saw apparently unrelated or disconnected pieces ultimately fit into the complex web of the world. This also provided many topics of conversation and bonding with the Lees. He never ceased to be amazed at the consistency and comprehensiveness of geography to their life style, beliefs, and endless learning. No matter what they were doing, sharing a meal, taking a drive, eventually something akin to a lesson emerged from it.

Jeff took great delight in asking what he thought was a “gotcha” question of Greg that usually ended with “So what’s up with that?” These questions often drew the typical “ahhhh...grasshopper...” response from Greg followed by a series of probing questions that ultimately led Jeff to answering his own question. To which Greg always delighted in Jeff’s eyes widening in wonderment and his characteristic shoulder shrug and wide smile and chagrin that he knew the answer but didn’t realize it.

From the parts his life story he shared with us, it seems astounding that there were others in his life with vastly more material wealth yet who seemed so driven to take what little Jeff had. He lived modestly. His practical minimalist life-style had a very common sense approach mixed with Asian philosophy. For all that Jeff endured in life, Greg feels getting Jeff’s trust and friendship were the most valuable gifts of all. 🌐



The East meets West: eating pizza with chopsticks

RTC-TH / GERC Collaborate on Ham Lessons

Fast on the heels of the April 2011 Technician License class, 23 of the 28 students took and passed the FCC Technician License exam. Recalling the steep learning curve facing new Hams, we brainstormed with Mark (N7YLA) about ideas to following up with these newly licensed Hams. GERC is always in need of more volunteers and Emergency Communicators.

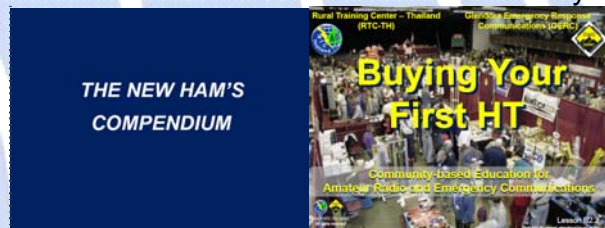
To keep the momentum going with these new Hams, the RTC-TH and GERC developed a series of lessons. The first 3 lessons provide practical knowledge / skills for them to enter the world of Ham radio. These lessons are made for self-study.



GERC Hams Jim (KG6TQT) and Carolyn (KG6RFJ) speaking in the Apr 2011 Technician License class.



Lesson 1 in the series guides them from actually receiving their FCC license and coaches them to getting on the air even without a radio. For many, passing the license exam was the goal. It often turns into a plateau, hence the title "Now what?" This is all about the most basic parts of talking on the air: the ITU alphabet and widely used and understood procedure words and phrases. Newly licensed Hams are encouraged to use the GERC weekly radio Net to get experience.



Lesson 2 introduces the HT (handy talkie, a small compact 2m VHF radio) as the basic personal EmComm radio. Both the RTC-TH and GERC firmly believe in emergency preparedness and the use of Ham radio for emergency communications (EmComm). The GERC basic HT guidelines serve as the template for selection criteria in buying their first HT. GERC provides opportunities for new Ham to gain practical experience using their radios and licenses.



Lesson 3 guides new Ham on taking care of their new HT. It takes a guides them step by step from opening the box to setting up the HT on up to installing a

magnetic mounted antenna on their car. Students learn how to use a VOM to test their radio battery and how to use a SWR to adjust their external antenna.

Mark (N7YLA) and Greg (HS0ZHM) combined decades of teaching experience and insights to create visually stimulating lessons that are clear and practical for new Hams. The lessons are available on the RTC-TH and GERC websites.

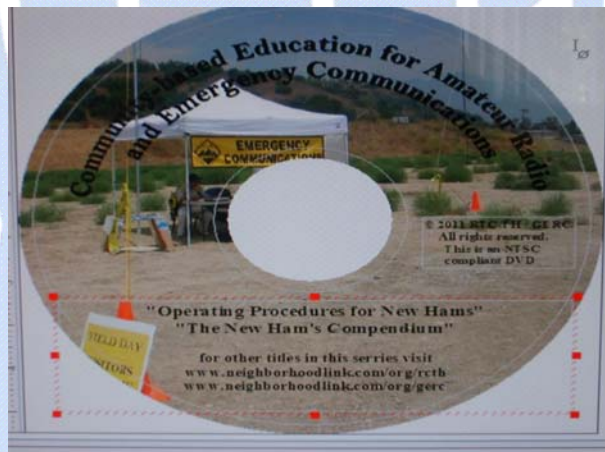


"Master" the first trial DVD for the RTC-TH / GERC collaborative lessons for newly licensed Hams

To reduce the costs of copying and printing the lessons, Mark put them on DVDs. This gives us the potential to better utilize the animation and audio options in PowerPoint. Until now, the presentations were kept simple because we converted them to Adobe PDF presentations. This conversion doesn't have the ability to keep the original animations or audio. It was a simple way to go and get the lessons on the web.

The first 3 lessons in the collaborative series were so engaging and informative, GERC will use show them to both the new

Hams and the existing GERC members. Mark applied the "Compendium" title to the second lesson in the series because "There's a lot of very good information the existing GERC members might need to review," commented Mark. "And it's all done in about 83 slides!" By putting the lessons on DVD, viewing the lessons can be done via computer or a DVD player. [Note: The original intent was for individual self-study. As such, some slides are loaded with text that is easily read on a computer screen. But those slides are not suitable for projection to a larger audience.] Anyone wishing to use the lessons for larger groups should prepare to do an effective narration to summarize or clarify the points being made by the detailed text.]



The rough draft of a lesson in Thailand and ends up popping out on a DVD in GERC publishing central.

Mark and Greg's combined teaching experiences add a different dimension to the collaborative lessons. Mark has many years of experience in Ham radio. Greg is relatively new to the world of Ham radio. The lessons are done from the perspective of the "newbie" being guided by an "Elmer" (an experienced Ham who mentors new Hams). The photo illustrations are done in a step-by-step fashion to clearly show new Hams what to expect. Even after the repetitive review/editing process, Mark commented "I got addicted looking at the lessons. Each time I found or noticed information, details, and points I hadn't noticed earlier." It was this fact that caused him to use the "Compendium" title for Lesson 2. 🌐