



RTC-TH Oct 2013 Special Report Dragon Boat Racing-Thawangpha

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

ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนชนบทขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

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

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The Setting

Dragon boat racing in Thawangpha is on along the Nan River along the southern section of the town. The course is about 0.75 km long. The weekend of qualifying races determines the team standings for the Provincial championship races in Nan Muang (the provincial capital).

On this clear sunny day, shade was at a premium. This is a good time for food and beverage vendors. Many families come to the races. Children get restless and bored. So carnival activities thrive in occupying the little ones. And with no department stores in town, entrepreneurs step in to cater to anyone seeking shade or escaping the long lulls between races.


This special report will cover the Dragon boat races and associated activities.



The dragon boats race downstream toward the finish line south of the bridge.



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The Race



Race Start Official with mic and air horn



Boats use a rope tether buoy to position for the start



The starter uses a PA system to direct boat alignment



The start fills the air with shouted cadence calls



Radio announcer with a bamboo antenna mast.



Race announcer calling the exciting start.



Just past the explosive start, the crew shifts to a steady pace for the long haul to the finish line.



The starting line is at a small bend in the river, so they have to make a course correction for the finish line.



Approaching the home stretch ~ 300 m to go



Weary crews dig deep for a final burst of speed



The sprint to the finish line is telling.



Sometimes it is a clear win: endurance is everything.



Turning the boats around takes some time.



Then they row upstream for the next heat.

The Boats & Supporters



(Clockwise from left): The boats vary in length depending on the number of crewmen from a village. Typically a team will have a support tent and cheering fans. (We haven't seen any female crews in our area.)

The history of dragon boat racing goes back 2,500 years. Legend says the boat racing represents the rush of villagers to rescue the famous Chinese poet Qu Yuan who drowned himself in sorrow for the defeat of his home state. There is an international organizations for dragon boat racing. Our dragon boat races don't conform to the international organizations regulations and policies.

Each village organizes its boat crew and arranges for practice. The amount of time dedicated to practice varies. Everyone had different priorities in life. The larger the crew, the more variables to handle. Ban Wangwa's crew numbers over 36 men. They were rather successful in the past counting a provincial championship a few years ago. However, this weekend, the Ban Wangwa's team lost both qualifying heats. They can go to the Provincial races, but can't win more than third place.



The dragonhead and tail adorn the boats. (Dragons are "water animals" in Chinese mythology.)



A boat crew heads upstream for their next heat



A crew gets ready to head upstream.



The safety boat gives a crew a lift upstream



A boat getting set up at the starting line.

Ban Wangwa (Our Team)



The Officials



Officials keep the team rosters and start times.

These photos are of the officials at the starting line. My apologies for not getting photos of the officials at the finish line. It was a lapse in the photo coverage. I guess the heat, crowds, and distances got to me. Shortly after lunch, we headed for home.

I think the race officials were using CB radios to coordinate. I spotted some of the “red” radios among them.



The aligner uses the PA system to direct the boats



The safety boat on patrol

The Radio Announcers / Reporters



The radio announcer at the start line hands off commentary to another announcer further downstream. I wasn't clear on the location of the finish line reporter.



The Spectators Seeking Shade



Shade is at a premium at the boat race.



Race Day Traffic



Motorbikes are the main transport mode.



The number of pickup trucks and cars are on the rise



A motorcycle vendor en route to the races



A modified tri-cycle often used for deliveries



Once at the races, it is all pedestrian traffic.



Obviously, not everyone is excited about boat racing



Strolling in the vendor area.

Food and Beverage Vendors

The Thai government makes a concerted effort to reduced conflict and traffic accidents during festivals by prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol. Uniformed police are assisted by volunteer auxiliaries dressed in khaki uniforms.

So let's take a look at the offerings at the Thawangpha Boat Races: beverages, fruit, meals, and desserts. After all, people will get hungry and need to eat.



Assorted cold drinks available with ceramic cups



This soft drink vendor offers something unusual to Western palates: black grass jelly



Fresh "young" coconuts



Coconuts cut for easy drinking and eating



Peeled mangos on ice



Peeled and cut mangos on ice



Fresh Longkong (Lansium domesiticum)



Durian (Durio zibethinus Murr.)



Banana buds (unopened flowers)



Boiled peanuts



Fresh grilled Thai sausages



Four different Thai noodle box lunches



Various forms of BBQ or grilled chicken





Assorted "meat" on a stick multiple choice



BBQ chicken choices



Fried won ton on a stick



Banana leaf covers for the pots



Fresh clams



BBQ pork



Breadball on a stick; a kind of dessert



Thai desserts

Dry Goods Vendors



Shoes, shoes, and more shoes (~\$2.60 USD)



A toy vender waiting for customers



Chopping boards



Aluminum pots and pans



Assorted T-shirts (note US flag and "Canada")



Hats and caps



Glasses, frames, and sun glasses



Assorted household goods

Entertainment



The heat of the day kept kids off the "merry go round". The air bounce / slide was more popular.



Dart throwing games of chance lure players with stuffed animal prizes.



Shooting galleries tempt players with prizes and the "you shot it, you got it" or traditional target shooting.



A variation on Bingo using bottle caps and cards.



An ear shattering speaker system for music