

DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

MAPPING PROJECT 1999:

BANTEAY MEANCHEY PROVINCE

On the afternoon of June 21, 1999, the Documentation Center of Cambodia sent a mapping team to Banteay Meanchey Province. The team was composed of Mr. Sin Khin, responsible for contact with local authorities and also interviews with witnesses, Mr. Ouch Sam Oeun, the Global Positioning System Unit (GPS) operator to record geographical positions of mass grave pits, memorials and prisons, Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara, responsible for completing site information forms and assisting with witness interviews, Mr. Yin Nean, responsible for drawing site maps, and Mrs. Iem Sokhym, responsible for preparing the report.

At 3:30 pm, the team arrived by commercial air at Battambang City after a flight from Phnom Penh, and then traveled by car from Battambang to Banteay Meanchey Province. The road trip was 70 kilometers. The team arrived in Banteay Meanchey Provincial town at 5:30 p.m.

The next day, June 22, 1999 at 8:30 am, the team went to Banteay Meanchey Provincial office to ask the provincial authorities for information about the geographical locations of districts to which the team wished to travel. Unfortunately, the provincial governor went to Banteay Chhmar temple to meet with a Thai delegation on June 21, so we were unable to meet with him. However, we did meet with Mr. Diep Chhuon, deputy chief of provincial cabinet. He informed us that after the 1998 election, Banteay Ampil District was removed from the jurisdiction of Banteay Meanchey Province, and became part of Oddar Meanchey Province. If we wanted to go there, he explained, we would have to speak with the Oddar Meanchey Provincial governor. The geography is a bit complicated, and it is about 70 kilometers from Banteay Meanchey Provincial town. To get there would require a full day trip. The district town is located in Samraong, and we could travel via National Road #6.

He then gave us directions to Thmar Puork District. Thmar Puork District is only about 43 kilometers distant, but because of a difficult road, is four hours in travel time. Security has been good since the government initiated its weapons confiscation program. After our meeting with Diep Chhuon, our team decided to set off along Road 69A toward Thmar Puork District, passing through Serei Saophorn and Svay Chek Districts. The road is extremely difficult. There are groups of armed forces deployed along the road all the way to the district town.

At 12:30 pm the same day, our team arrived in Thmar Puork District. For administrative purposes, we contacted Mr. Hean Narun, alias Chhat, who is deputy chief of Thmar Puork District. He said that he knew our team was coming because the deputy chief of the cabinet had informed

him by walkie-talkie (Icom) earlier in the morning. The deputy chief of cabinet had requested that Mr. Hean Narun make our work as smooth as possible. Mr. Hean briefed us about the geographical and security situation of the district. He said that Thmar Puork District consists of six sub-districts. The six sub-districts are Thmar Puork Sub-district, consisting of seven villages; Phum Thmei Sub-district consisting of eight villages; Banteay Chhmar Sub-district consisting of eleven villages; Rokar Romiet Sub-district consisting of twenty villages; Kumrou Sub-district consisting of six villages; and Kathen Sub-district consisting of eight villages. In total, the district has sixty villages and 79,876 people. Among these are 26,749 females and some 10,615 families. Almost 99 percent of the people earn their living by farming. Living standards in this district are worse than any other district in Banteay Meanchey province because the people rely only on farming, and opportunities to supplement income with fishing are rare.

Geographical features of the District

Thmar Puork District is located about forty-three kilometers northeast of Banteay Meanchey Provincial town. Banteay Ampil District bounds it to the west, the east by Phnom Srok District, the south by Svay Chek District and on the north by the Thai border.

The security situation has only recently stabilized. Before 1989, the district was under the control of the “Liberation Resistance Movement,” which was associated with the Funcinpec Party. After the general election in 1993, Son San’s KPNLF and the Funcinpec Party shared control of this remote district. The Cambodian People’s Party had little access at that time. The district administration was controlled chiefly by resistance military forces. Even though there were civilian district authorities, they had to ask permission from the military prior to doing anything.

In 1997, Mr. Hean Narun was assigned to be in charge of the district. Because the security situation remained unstable, he decided to spend a year studying at the National Administrative School in Phnom Penh (1998-1999). Mr. Hean added that the situation prior to 1999 was not as favorable as it is now. The political situation improved as the civil war came to an end, and all irregular armed forces were disarmed and demobilized. The national armed forces have been trying to learn appropriate legal procedures and improve their respect for the power of the civilian authorities. The military has progressively removed itself from civilian affairs. The situation is now good because the country is at peace, and the military no longer concerns itself with administrative work, concentrating instead on new methods of development and staying focused on its own responsibilities.

Mr. Hean told us about his life in the Pol Pot regime. He was born in Thmar Puork Village, Thmar Puork District, Battambang Province. He studied in Serei Saophorn District. His father was a military commander. After the coup against Prince Sihanouk in 1970, he went to study in Phnom Penh. When the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh, his family was evacuated from Phnom Penh to Bakan District, Pursat Province. His six siblings and his mother died from starvation in 1976. After that, Angkar took his father to be reeducated because they knew he had been a Lon Nol soldier; Mr. Hean knows his father was killed. Then in late 1976, the “Pol Pot clique” informed the people in Northwest that they

would be permitted to return to live their previous homes. This news convinced Mr. Hean to set off on a boat journey from Champuh Ka-Ek pagoda, Bakan District towards Svay Daunkeo District, where he spent the night. The next morning, the Khmer Rouge transported people in ox carts to Damnak Pongro Village, Russei Kraing Sub-district, Mong Russei District. Mong Russei District was then in Region 2. Upon arrival, Mr. Hean Narun was shown a hill on which he was told to clear forest in order to build a shelter. He was then 16 years old. He did not know anything about such manual work, but during the Lon Nol regime he had been taught how to camp, so he used plastic sheets to build a shelter. He was then assigned to a regional mobile work brigade and forced to do hard labor. Life was miserable, as there was insufficient food, only one can of rice for twenty to fifty people. Driven by hunger, he exchanged his clothes for rice bran to fry and eat. This caused him to feel very uncomfortable whenever he defecated, and he sometimes had to use his fingers to help push his feces out. He said his feces looked like "pig's shit" because he ate rice bran like a pig. He left a "human's track, but a pig's waste."

In the end, he said that he did not know clearly about any evidence of genocidal crimes, because when he arrived here, the evidence had already been lost. He did not speak ill of the Khmer Rouge.

After meeting with Mr. Hean Narun at 2:30, our team met with Mr. Ek Sangvat, 47 years old, chief of office of Thmar Puork District. He was born in Andaung Thlong village, Thmar Puork Sub-district, Thmar Puork District, Battambang Province. He now lives in Andaung Thlong village, Thmar Puork Sub-district, Thmar Puork District, Banteay Meanchey Province.

Mr. Ek told us that during the Pol Pot regime, Thmar Puork District was part of Region 5 in the Khmer Rouge Northwest Zone. District headquarters was located in Kathen Village, Thmar Puork Sub-district, Thmar Puork District. The Khmer Rouge security office was located in the same structure that houses the Cambodian People Party's headquarters today. The district chief at that time was named Chhat. Chhat was accused of having enemy connections and was later killed. Mr. Ek also knows something about the killings committed at the security office in Thmar Puork district.

In the Khmer Rouge regime, Mr. Ek lived in this village, which is his native place. In 1975, he was 20 years old. At that point, he gave up his studies to help his parents with work. He was then just an ordinary farmer. The Khmer Rouge accused him of being a student, but in fact he was just an ordinary literate. They spied on him, and tested him to find out if he knew anything. His parents were middle class peasants, and his father was a ranking Buddhist official in the region. The Khmer Rouge accused the father of being a "Buddhist soldier." But in fact, he was just an ordinary clergyman. His parents and his siblings died in early 1979. All together, seven members of his family died during the Pol Pot regime.

Mr. Ek said that in the first phase, the Khmer Rouge arrested policemen, soldiers and people who had any connection to the Lon Nol regime, such as being students, or feudalists, or capitalists, and detained them at the security office. All people kept at the security office were later killed. None of them was lucky enough to survive.

In a second phase, the Khmer Rouge took base people to be detained in the security office. These people had made small mistakes such as traveling from one village to another without permission, or were “illegally” in possession of fish, crabs or snails. This was enough to be accused of being an “enemy,” to be arrested and detained at the security office, and subsequently to be executed. Some people did not plow in precisely the fashion they had been ordered to plow; for example, they might be ordered to walk on the right side behind the plow, but instead they walked on the left. Such “criminals” were accused of being enemies and killed on the spot in front of other people assigned to do plowing, so that the rest would not follow this bad example.

In a third phase, the Khmer Rouge tricked the people by telling them that they had to be evacuated from the village to plant cotton and hemp elsewhere. There, the people were told, they would have enough food. The Khmer Rouge instructed the people to prepare clothes and foodstuffs to support them on their journey to the new location. People were very happy, and they hurriedly packed and took their children along with them. After five or six weeks, however, it became clear to all that in fact the Khmer Rouge had tricked them, because they were taking between five and ten families from each group to be killed at the Thmar Puork military barracks, as well as at a water well near the security office. The military barracks where people were killed is now headquarters of RCAF Division 7, Thmar Puork District, and the well is near the Thmar Puork District High School.

Besides killing people, the Khmer Rouge deprived the local population of all kinds of freedoms, even the simple pleasure of chatting with neighbors. Men and women who were only joking with each other were accused of committing moral offenses and taken to be executed in public.

The Khmer Rouge took all the accused who had been detained in the security office to be killed, and threw their bodies into a well, creating a mass grave ten meters deep, and eight meters by eight meters. That mass grave is in Por Phleak village, Kumrou Sub-district, Thmar Puork District.

Between 1975 and 1977, this district was under the control of Northwest Zone cadre. Under that administration, there was adequate food. Although people ate only simple porridge, they had sufficient nourishment to avoid starvation. People produced plenty of crops, but Angkar educated them that they had to be patient because some of the crops had to be allocated to feed people who lived along rivers, and who were suffering from starvation. In early 1977, Southwest Zone cadre came to the district and accused the Northwest Zone cadre of being traitors. The Southwestern cadre arrested Chhat, chief of district, and executed him. The new district chief was Comrade Ream. The Southwest Zone cadre

operated by deception; they called all levels of cadres from the Northwest Zone to a “meeting,” and evacuated the ordinary people to another place. In fact, they took those people to be killed.

In 1977, the cadres from the Southwest purged all Northwestern cadres and seized control of the zone. Then they started killing base people, as well. They also became even more strict toward the 17 April or “New People” in terms of food rations. New People were not even allowed to walk from one house to another. If they saw anyone trying to visit a neighbor’s house, they accused him of being an enemy, arrested and killed him immediately. Mr. Sangvat added that around this time, he fell ill with beriberi. He did not have any rice, only a few potatoes or manioc tubes. So he smashed chaff and fried it, trying to make a meal. One day, getting up very early in the morning to go work the fields, he saw some pork belonging to the Southwest cadres, and he almost took it because he was so hungry. But he dared not. If he had, he feels he surely would have been killed. Instead, he was patient, and simply walked away in tears.

The food situation became critical under the Southwest Zone cadres. Each group of ten people had a ration of three to four spoons of uncooked rice; many people died of starvation. The chief of the model cooperative in which Mr. Sangvat lived was named Comrade Kork. They call him A-Kork, or “the Contemptible Kork.” He was very cruel. No one dared to look at his face. If anyone dared to look at his face and he saw them do it, Comrade Kork would tie them up and kill him or her immediately.

In 1978, Mr. Ek recalls a prisoner who escaped from the security office. Recaptured, he was taken to be killed, and the Khmer Rouge aimed to execute him with a chop on the back of his neck. The victim pretended to be dead, but when the Khmer Rouge left, he sprang up and made good his escape. That lucky man is still alive, and is named Sim Sieu. He now lives in Pongro village, Mkakk Sub-district, Serei Saophoan District. If we want to interview him, Mr. Ek said, we should ask his younger sibling, Sim Koy, who lives in Thmar Puork Sub-district.

In early January 1979, several members of Ek Sangvat's family, including his parents and siblings, were taken to be killed. Others died of starvation.

Mr. Ek told us that some genocide evidence, including bones excavated from mass graves, wells and the military barracks, has been stored in a two meter by two meter thatch hut at Pothiveal Pagoda back in 1982. There were about 700 bones, 400 of which had been excavated at the military barracks, and another 300 from the mass grave site. The evidence was destroyed in 1985 when the Khmer Rouge armed forces captured Thmar Puork District and went on an arson rampage. They burned down people's houses, as well as the hut containing the bones at Pothiveal Pagoda. They also shot a large number of people to death. Mr. Ek himself says he was chased and fired upon with B-40 rockets, but luckily the rockets did not score a direct hit. It was a close enough call, however, that his clothes were set on fire.

In Thmar Puork district, many people were killed during the Khmer Rouge regime, but Mr. Ek does not know the precise locations of all the execution sites. He knows only two or three places.

Mr. Ek added that he himself joined a team exhuming mass graves in 1982, in his capacity as a member of the Thmar Puork Sub-district committee, responsible for social affairs and culture. When excavating the mass grave pits, he saw blind folds on the corpses, and arms bound with ropes. There were three killing locations. The first was called Sep [≡Officer≡] Pheng well, situated in Pophneak village, Kumrou Sub-district, Thmar Puork district, Banteay Meanchey Province. It is ten meters deep and eight meters by eight meters in size. It is located about one and a half kilometers from the Thmar Puork District Office. The second location was at the military barracks, located 700 meters north of the district office. As previously mentioned, that place is currently headquarters of CPAF Division 7 in Thmar Puork District. There were four main pits at the barracks. Each pit was eight meters long, three meters wide, and two meters deep. The exhumation teams in 1982 excavated only one of those pits. The third location was at Dek Keh village, Banteay Chhmar Sub-district, Thmar Puork District. In this place, which the locals called Trapeang Suong, there were two pits. At first, this killing site was unknown to district authorities, but when local people dug up the site searching for gold, they revealed pits in which the Khmer Rouge had buried the corpses of their victims. Mr. Ek Sangvat is not familiar with that particular location, but Captain Ky Kav, commander of army engineering group F7, did know. He guided us to the place, where we saw small fragments of bone and other pieces of material.

Mr. Ek Sangvat believes that there are a lot more pits in Thmar Puork District. He missed the two pits described above, and believes that the authorities have missed others, as well. He ascribes this lack of knowledge to the fact that during the Pol Pot regime, the killings were almost all done in secrecy.

At the end of our interview with Mr. Ek, he told us that he believes he survived the Khmer Rouge regime because he always tried to work hard, even when he was sick with beriberi. Whenever they gathered people, he tried to escape from one place to another. He hid himself in mobile work brigades. He could do this because in late 1978 the rules were not as strict as before. His parents and his siblings, who were confined to concentration camps, did not survive. Mr. Ek said that Pol Potists were very cruel. He will never forget what the Khmer Rouge did to him.

After interviewing Mr. Ek Sangvat, our team met with Happ Svang, 69 years old, born in Wat Chass Village, Thmar Puork Sub-district, Thmar Puork District, Battambang Province. During the Pol Pot regime he lived in the same place, that is, at Ekapheap village, Kumrou Sub-district, Thmar Puork District, Banteay Meanchey Province. He now works in the Social Affairs and Culture Office in Thmar Puork District.

Early in the Pol Pot regime, “Uncle Happ” was a traditional healer in Thmar Puork District. He cured beriberi, diarrhea, fever, and other maladies using traditional medicines made from tree bark, leaves and roots. He made the traditional medicine himself. Sometime later, he met an ethnic Chinese named Vien, and his wife Lun. Vien was a skillful healer. Vien taught Uncle Happ Svang how to steam the medicinal roots to produce liquid medicines. Four other youths also worked with them making medicines. When the Southwest cadre came to take control of the

district in 1977, Vien and his wife were killed. After that, Happ Svay was responsible for treating beriberi, diarrhea, fever, menstrual problems and other sicknesses at the hospital. Later on, he was ordered to work at a plantation.

A woman from the Southwest was put in charge of the hospital in Thmar Puork District. Most patients who came to the hospital died. Very few survived, because only traditional medicines were used in the hospital. The Khmer Rouge cadres played a trick, saying that they were relocating people to plant cotton or hemp at different cooperatives. In fact, they took those families to be detained in a large closed-up hall. They called it a theater hall, and it could hold 5,000 people. All cows, water buffaloes, and oxcarts seized from the captives were distributed to various cooperatives. At night, for some reason, they drove trucks back and forth. It seemed that these trucks were carrying people somewhere, but in fact they just drove empty trucks back and forth.

The people imprisoned in the “theater hall” were taken to be killed at the military barracks, now headquarters of Division 7, Thmar Puork District. The other killing place was Sep Pheng well, as Sangvat also mentioned. Coconut branches were laid at the bottom of the well, and after they loaded in a certain number of bodies, they would put down another layer of coconut branches. They did this until the well was full. In the end, there were seven layers of coconut branches, each covering a pile of victims. He knows this because he joined the excavation team with Mr. Ek Sangvat in 1982. Uncle Happ believes that the Pol Pot “cliques” planned to kill all of the people by 1979, after the harvest season. Before carrying out their killing, the Khmer Rouge gave a Khmer noodle party. Fortunately, Vietnamese armed forces came in time to liberate the district.

Uncle Happ added that he almost lost his life during the Khmer Rouge regime. The Khmer Rouge district chief ordered him to heal the chief’s sick daughter. He was very frightened, because he was not familiar with her particular illness, but he pretended to know what to do and used tree root medicine to treat her. The daughter eventually got better, and was cured of the illness. And so he escaped death. The same district chief later called him to heal another of his daughters who was ill with fever. He was then even more frightened. He thought to himself that he would surely die. Fortunately, the traditional medicines he used again healed the daughter, and she got better. Again he escaped death.

Uncle Happ explained to the team that there are killing pits in every sub-district. In Thmar Puork District, each sub-district was organized as a cooperative. So, in effect, killing sites were created in every cooperative during 1977-1978. In Banteay Chhmar Sub-district, for example, there were ten pits, each four meters by four meters in size.

In short, according to Mr. Ek Sangvat and Happ Svang, in 1984, statistics on people killed in every sub-district showed that 8,000 people died, but only 700 human bones were recovered through excavation. The documents and evidence detailing this information were destroyed by fire when the Khmer Rouge captured Thmar Puork District in 1985. On September 30, 1985, Para armed forces captured the district, and the

remaining evidentiary documents were destroyed. A witness who survived detention at the security office lives far away, too far for us to interview the subject. The witness moved from Serei Saophoan to another location. Only his sibling knows where he lives now.

At the end of our interview, Mr. Happ Svang and Mr. Ek Sangvat said that if a national or international court to judge the Khmer Rouge were established, they would volunteer to testify before the court to help find justice for the Cambodian people. They would not hesitate to do so, because they had relatives killed by the Khmer Rouge, and they suffered a lot during the period of three years and eight months. Uncle Happ Svang has two families of relatives. Between the two families, ten members died during the Khmer Rouge regime. Mr. Ek Sangvat's parents and his seven siblings also died. So, they both are very angry at the Khmer Rouge, and will never forget what happened to them.

At 4:30 pm that same day, after the interviews with our witnesses, the team set off on its journey to examine the genocide sites. There were three places where excavation had been done, as already mentioned. At these three killing sites, there was a total of seven pits. We were guided by Mr. Ek Sangvat and Mr. Ky Keav, captain and commander of engineering army group F7, based at Ekpheap village, Kumrou Sub-district, Thmar Puork District, Banteay Meanchey Province.

Today, the pits are almost unidentifiable, as they have been covered with soil. Nonetheless, the team photographed the pit sites as historical evidence for the younger generation.

After examining the pits, we decided to pay a visit to Banteay Chhmar temple, about sixteen kilometers from Thmar Puork District town, because the team wanted to see the temple and to learn why a Thai princess was visiting the temple.

The same day, the team arrived at Banteay Chhmar temple at 5:00 p.m. According to local villagers, on June 22, 1999, there was a 46-year old Thai princess, Sorin Than, who with students in military uniforms paid a visit to the temple and toured the temple campus. She was accompanied by the Minister of Culture, Princess Bopha Devi and the provincial governor. The province spent 100,000 Baht on renovating the path to Banteay Chhmar temple and building a hut with a dressing room and toilet prior to her visit.

We examined Banteay Chhmar temple. We felt very sorrowful and shocked. The temple was almost completely in ruins. Giant stones were piled up one upon another. There was no entrance to the inside of the temple, as it had been covered with piles of stones.

Banteay Chhmar temple covers an area of one square kilometer, but the temple itself is a ruin. We could see only giant stone piles. According to Mr. Ky Keav and Ek Sangvat, the temple had previously been under the control of liberation armed forces, the Sereikar (or "Free Khmer"). The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) was not responsible for the temple prior to 1998, but since the 1998 general election, the CPP and the Funcinpec Party have cooperated to defend this area. So, the destruction of the temple was not the CPP's responsibility. When the temple was

under the control of the liberation armed forces, some commanders ordered their soldiers to excavate for antiquities such as statues under the temple. This caused the temple to collapse. In one instance, this allegedly caused temple stones to fall on children, killing them.

Up until 1990, the temple was in fairly good condition, but after being looted of antiquities by thieves, the temple was almost completely in ruins. It is said that a large sheet of the temple stone fetches 3,000 to 4,000 Baht in Thailand.

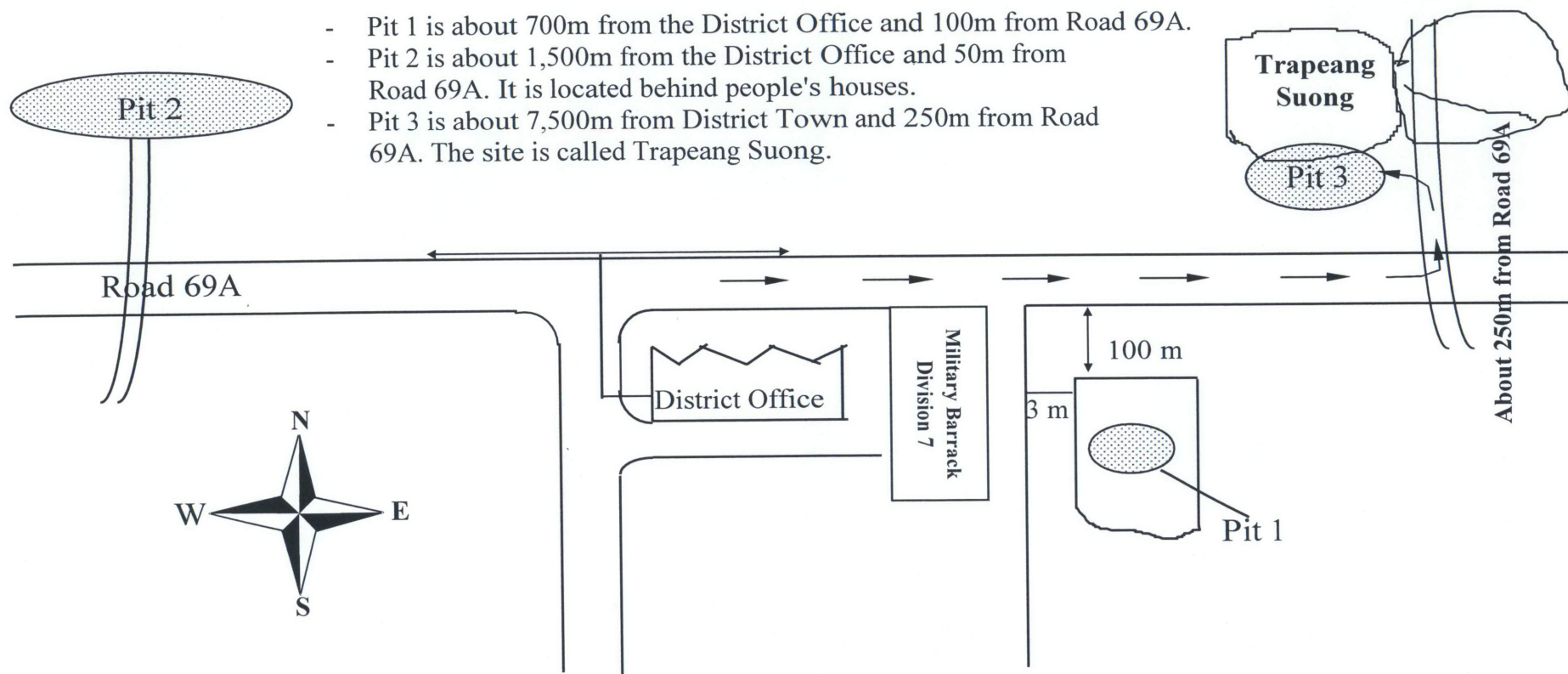
After visiting Banteay Chhmar temple, our team returned to Thmar Puork District at 6:00 pm the same day in order to get ready to go back to Banteay Meanchey Provincial town next day.

In conclusion, we achieved few results from this research expedition. In interviewing witnesses in Banteay Meanchey Province, we went only to one of its districts, Thmar Puork District. We did not go to Banteay Ampil District, because that district is now administratively part of Oddar Meanchey Province. When we wish to go there, we will have to contact the provincial authorities in advance. The trip to that district will be extremely difficult, as there are a lot of big holes in the road and the bridges have been destroyed by flooding. So, it will not be possible to make that trip by car. The logistics will involve a raft and oxcarts. It is seventy kilometers distant, and will require a full day of travel. It will be wiser to attempt that trip in the dry season, rather than the rainy season.

The witness who survived detention in the Khmer Rouge security office lives very far from the site, and we have not yet been able to determine his current address. Time did not permit it, so our team could not interview that witness. Even though we have few results, we nonetheless compiled this document to be published as an historical record for younger generation, so they can be aware of the troubles during the 3 years, 8 months and 20 days of the Khmer Rouge regime.

THMAR PUORK GENOCIDE SITES* **Note:**

- Pit 1 is about 700m from the District Office and 100m from Road 69A.
- Pit 2 is about 1,500m from the District Office and 50m from Road 69A. It is located behind people's houses.
- Pit 3 is about 7,500m from District Town and 250m from Road 69A. The site is called Trapeang Suong.



1. BANTEAY MEANCHEY PROVINCE

District	Site Name/ Visited Date	Site Type	Est. Victim	Witness	File #/ID Code	Latitude	Longitude
Thmar Puork	Banteay/22 June 99	Burial site 4 pits	400 up	Ek Sangvat ឯក សង្កាត	R 062208A/ 010701	N 13°56'5305"	E 103°02'5902"
Thmar Puork	Andaung Sep Pheng/22 June 99	Burial site 1 pit	300 up	Hap Svang ហាប់ ស្វាង	R 062208B/ 010702	N13°55'0222"	E 103°02'4525"
Thmar Puork	Trapeang Suon/22 June 99	Burial site 2 pits	N/A	Ky Keav គី កែវ Ek Sangvat ឯក សង្កាត	R 062209A/ 010703	N 14°00'4451"	E 103°04'0559"