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ORCHID CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

Newsletter, March 2016

OCA Trip to Thailand, March 20-April 2, 2015

A group of 11 OCA travelers, including myself, began our orchid tour to Thailand on March 20, with our arrival at the airport in Chiang Mai. Our first day was basically “jet lag recovery” but it included a morning whirlwind tour of some of the more famous of the Buddhist temples of this northern Thai city. Our first stop was Wat Chedi Luang, built around a partially ruined pagoda (constructed towards the end of the 14th century), believed to be one of the tallest early structures in Thailand. The pagoda had heavy damage from both an earthquake (16th century) and canon fire (1775), but much of it was still standing. The famous Emerald Buddha (Phra Kew) once “sat here” but had been moved and replaced with a black jade replica. We also visited Wat Phra Singh, Wat Phra Man, and finally the elaborate, hammered aluminum covered Usboth at Wat Sri Suphan. It was a warm day, and between the heat, our jet lag, and temple overload, we were all glad to climb in our air conditioned minivan and return to our hotel for lunch and a short nap. In the evening we were treated to a slide show presented by Kevin Gurney of Australia about the orchids we were about to see on our trip. Kevin had traveled with Peter Williams, our Thai host and tour guide, on a number of different trips and had visited all of the sites we were going to explore. The photographs were enticing, and we were looking forward with great anticipation to the exotic plants we were about to see.



Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai



Wihan at Wat Phra Man, Chiang Mai



Silver Usboth at Wat Sri Suphan, Chiang Mai

Day 2 the group met in the hotel lobby and climbed into the mini-vans for our first adventure into the field. Well, sort of. Today we were headed to upt Doi Sutep, a temple built on the summit of a mountain on the outskirts of Chiang Mai. Probably the most

visited temple in northern Thailand, it certainly had the most gold leaf, covering every possible surface, that I have seen in any temple. Despite the crowds, it was easy to see why this was such a popular destination. But we weren't really there to see the various buddha statues, chedis or other embellishments. The large trees growing on the grounds of this temple had many large orchid specimens, including a magnificent *Dendrobium thrysiflorum*, many *D. primulinum*, and a few *D. lindleyi* high up in the trees. On the way down from the temple children of a local hilltribe were posing for photos. After lunch, we visited an orchid farm called Mountain Orchids, also on the outskirts of Chiang Mai. This farm featured a large collection of *Vanda* hybrids, as well as an eclectic collection of antique cars. This farm also featured a fairly large collection of orchid species, mostly mounted to look "natural" on trees around the grounds. We had our first taste of the delicious Thai iced coffee, perused the orchid related trinkets in the gift shop and then made our way back to our hotel.



Dendrobium thrysiflorum



Dendrobium primulinum covered the trees





A few of the antique cars in the collection at Mountain Orchids



Dendrobium lindleyii



Dendrobium secundum fma. *alba* (top)
Vanda brunnea (bottom)



Vanda dennisoniana



Dendrobium parishii

The destination for Day 3 of our adventure was a trip to Doi Inthanon, the highest mountain in Thailand (8415 ft). However, before driving to the top, we stopped to visit the Royal Project, a conservation effort that had been funded by the Queen of Thailand (who loves orchids!). This was a reserve primarily dedicated to the paphiopedilum species that were once abundant on Doi Inthanon, although numerous other local orchid species were also represented in the reserve. There were also a few campy Paphiopedilum sculptures, perhaps constructed to attract more tourists. As you can see by the photo below, they were somewhat larger than life!



The OCA trip participants, in front of a giant *Paphiopedilum villosum* from left to right. Back Row: Spiro Kosemenakis, Tom Parks, Tom Biggart, Neal Biggart, Kay Klumb, Pauline Brault, Linda Larson, Debra LeMonde



Paphiopedilum hirsitissimum, *P. sukhakulii* and *P. villosum*, three paphiopedilum species that were once abundant in Thailand and are now nearly extirpated in the wild, due to both habitat destruction and overcollection

In contrast to the hot and smoky atmosphere down below, the air near the summit of Doi Inthanon was cool and clear. We toured the gardens at two adjacent chedis, Naphamethinidon and Naphaphonphumisiri, which were built to honor the 60th birthday anniversaries of the King and Queen of Thailand. The gardens were popular with local tourists because they featured exotic flowers such as marigolds, snapdragons, pansies and petunias, but for the sharp eyed orchid hunter, it was soon obvious that the trees were covered with *Oberonia* sp., *Coelogyne nitida* and *Otochilus fusca*,



Coelogyne nitida high up in the canopy.



“Exotic” flowers of Doi Inthanon

After an hour or so of exploring the grounds, we headed back down the mountain, stopping briefly at a turn in the road. Amazingly, just a few feet off the pavement we found orchids growing on the trees and in the bush, including *Diploprora truncata*, *Dendrobium infundibulum*, *D. chrysanthum*, and *Sunipia rimanii*. Another highlight of this day was a brief stop at a hill people roadside market, where we treated ourselves to dried fruits from the area.

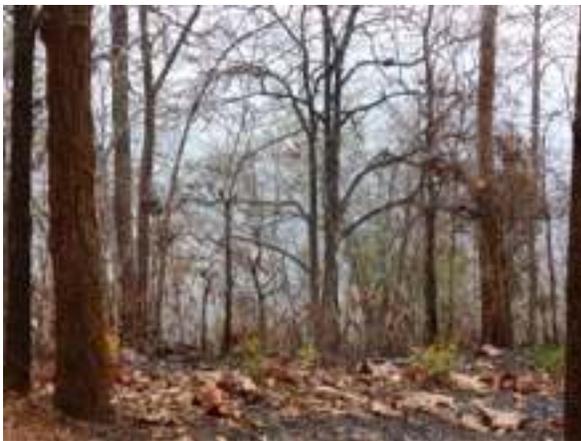


Dendrobium chrysanthum



Shopping for dried fruit treats at the mountain market

The next five days of the tour started with a long drive to the northernmost region of Thailand, destination Chiang Dao. We stayed at the lovely Marisa resort replete with ponds, orchids, colorful birds, delicious meals, and attractively appointed rooms. Our first evening here gave us an inkling of what it must be like to visit this country in the rainy season. We were treated to torrential rain, high winds, thunder and lightning, culminating in a power outage late in the night. However, the next morning dawned bright and sunny and we set off for a days trek in a wildlife sanctuary in the mountains to the west of Chiang Dao. The forests here were an excellent example of tropical dry forests. It had not rained (at least substantially) for several months and the broadleaved deciduous trees had dropped all their leaves. Small fires were burning here and there in the undergrowth, but they did not develop into raging forest fire as the forest here was fire adapted. Most of the orchids we found exposed to bright, hot sun, although later in the season they would be shaded by the leaves of the trees as the wet season progressed. Our trek was to be along a ridge on an unmarked, but fairly easy to navigate trail. Almost immediately we began to find orchids, and our list of species expanded quickly. Many of the trunks and branches of the trees were encrusted with the bright yellow flowers of *Dendrobium dixanthum* and *D. lindleyi*. We found many large



Tropical dry forest



Bulbophyllum muscarirubrum



Dendrobium pulchellum

epiphytic plants of *Vanda coeruleus*, *D. gratiosissimum*, *D. cyrsotoxum*, *D. findlaysonianum*, *D. pulchellum*, *Cymbidium aloifolium*, a few *Hydrochilus parishii* high up in the trees, and a small group of *Bulbophyllum muscarirubrum* and three large *Paphiopedilum bellatulum* plants, growing on some rocks. We also spotted a few terrestrial orchids including *Cheirostylis yunnanensis*. There were numerous orchids out of bloom as well, including *Dendrobium parcum*, *D. carinerferum*, *D. draconis*, unidentified *Bulbophyllum*, *Coelogyne*, *Trichoglottis*, and assorted vandaceous species. On the second day a smaller group of us set off on a more arduous adventure, climbing through some primary forests (without a trail) to some rocky outcrops where a few remnant plants of *Paphiopedilum bellatulum* were found. Our third day in this area was yet another trail, slightly different exposure and elevation than the first two treks.

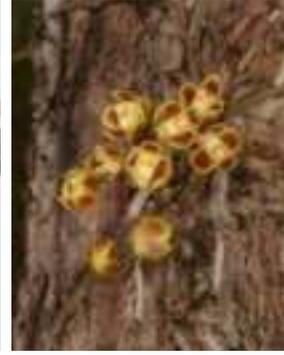
Here we found many of the same orchids as on the first day in the Chiang Dao wildlife sanctuary, but also some new ones including *Dendrobium signatum*, *D. secundum*, *D. draconis*, *Eria perpusilla* *Pholidota* sp., *Oberonia* sp., *Coelogyne tenasserimensis* and *Chiloschista lunifera*.



Vanda



Dendrobium signatum



Chiloschista



Spiro finds a



Hygrochilus parishii



Dendrobium gratiosissimum



The

next part of our journey to Maejo University where we visited their department of orchid biology, another project funded by the Queen of Thailand. Here students and professors were actively involved in an orchid restoration project, growing thousands of orchids from seed, mounting the small seedlings on flat mounts to harden off, then with the help of local hill people, replanting the seedlings back in the forests where they originated. They showed us their methods and facilities for tissue culture, deflasking, the extensive collection of mounted seedlings and their methods for mounting the orchids back on the trees. The students were very excited to have visitors interested in orchid conservation.



Visiting the orchid project at Maejo University

After returning to Chiang Mai for an evening, we then set out for the eastern part of Northern Thailand. Our first orchid related stop was in Phu Hin Rong Kla National Park, located in the Loei, Phitsunulok and Phetchabun provinces. The park is generally mountainous, with a mixture of forest types including dry deciduous and hill evergreen forests. The park is well known for Lan Hin Taek, an extensive natural rock formation that is literally covered with orchids, ferns, mosses, lichens, rhododendrons and seasonal flowers. This was also the site of the communist headquarters in the late 1970's, and much of the fauna had been killed or fled due to the ongoing battles. A museum at the park headquarters displayed some of the photographs, weapons, uniforms and equipment from that era. Growing on the rocks here we found numerous plants of *Doritis pulcherrima*, *Thunia sp.*, many different *Bulbophyllum*, *Luisia curtisii*, and *Otochilus*. In the evergreen forest we found jewel orchids on the forest floor (*Anoectochilus roxburghii*) and several different *Eria* species.



Anoectochilus roxburghii



Doritis pulcherrima



Lewisia curtisii



Bulbophyllum sp.

The next reserve that we visited was the mountainous Nam Nao National Park, located in Phetchabun and Chaiyaphum provinces. The higher elevations in the park are known to get very cold (for Thailand), with occasional frosts and freezing temperatures. We only visited a small part near the Park headquarters, but found lots of orchids and other interesting plants. We found a clump of terrestrial orchids, possibly *Nervilia concolori*, a few colorful ginger family plants (e.g. *Kaempferia rotunda*), *Vanda dennisoniana*, Vanilla, *Cymbidium aliofolium* and *Dendrobium trigonopus*. We also found some enormous Staghorn ferns and even spotted a few colorful birds. Our overnight accommodations were in a lovely family run hotel called the Rainforest Lodge, and featured locally grown fruit and produce and tasty organic Thai cuisine.



Three gingers, left to right: *Curcumin* sp., *Catimbium speciosum* and *Kaempfera rotunda*

From the Rainforest Lodge we set out the next morning for the city of Loei, which is located near the Thailand:Laos border. The final reserve that we visited was in the province of Loei, and was a wildlife sanctuary originally set aside for the local elephant population. This large reserve is strictly protected and quite difficult to get permission to visit, so we were fortunate that our guide Peter Williams had made advance preparations for us. We saw literally dozens, if not hundreds of *Dendrobium unicum* in full bloom, as well as numerous plants of *Bulbophyllum capillipes*, *B. dyanum*, *B. siamensis*, *B. wallichii*, *Coelogyne brachyptera*, *C. lactea*, *Cymbidium devonianum*, *C. insigne*, *Dendrobium chrysanthum*, *D. fimbriatum* var. *oculatum*, *D. findlayanum*, *D. infundibulim*, *D. gratiosissimum*, *D. primulinum*, *D. thyrsoiflorum*, *D. tortile*, *Diploprora truncata*, *Eria discolor*, *E. siamensis*, *E. paniculata*, *Paphiopedilum villosum*, *Sunipia racemosa*, *Taenophyllum* sp. *Trichotomia* sp., *Vanda dennisoniana*. There were also many other flowering plants in this reserve, including *Rhododendron simsii*, various *Gentians*, *Cyanotis*, *Macrosolen arvensis*. Truly an outstanding finish to our orchid journey!

We then made our way back to Chiang Mai (a full day's drive) and upon arrival spent some time (and money) enjoying the Chiang Mai night market, art and culture displays, and of course, more delicious Thai food! On our last day, some of the group visited Maetang elephant reserve, and the remaining members of the group visited Joe's Orchids, where we purchased numerous healthy, well grown *dendrobiums*, *paphiopedilums*, *chiloschista* and other orchids. Joe made the arrangements for CITES and phytosanitary documentation, and the orchids were then shipped later to the US. Several weeks later our orchids arrived, providing years of future enjoyment and lasting memories of our Thai orchid adventure.

Mary Gerritsen
OCA Director and Thailand Tour
Coordinator

Next page (L-R, T-B) *Bulbophyllum siamensis*, *B. dyanum*, *Vanda dennisoniana*, *Eria paniculata*, *Dendrobium tortile*, *D. unicum*, *Cymbidium devonianum*, *Coelogyne brachyptera*, *Eria discolor*, *D. fimbriatum* var. *oculatum*.

