

Yeak Laom Commune Protected Area

Ratanakiri - Cambodia



Yeak Laom Commune Protected Area
Conservation and Recreation Committee

A Community-Based
Natural Resource Management
And Income Generation Project

Supported by IDRC/UNDP/CARERE

LOCATION:

Yeak Laom Commune is located 3-4 kilometers east of Banlung, the capital of Ratanakiri Province. The center piece of the area is Yeak Laom Lake, a volcanic crater lake believed to have been created about 700,000 years ago. The present day lake is about 800 meters across, more than 50 meters deep at the center and surrounded by forest to the top of the crater rim.

HISTORY:

The indigenous inhabitants of the region, the *Khmer Leu*, have long recognized the lake as a sacred place, home to the spirits of land, water and forest. These 'geosymbols' are considered points of privileged encounters between the celestial world populated by supernatural entities and the world of humans. Yeak Laom Lake carries a rich mythology, evoking its genesis and history and describing the fabulous aquatic beings that live there. It is said that no permanent buildings can be established on its banks, just as the surrounding forests cannot be cut because they are the privileged home of the spirits.

In the 1960's, during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum period of King Sihanouk, the recreational potential of Yeak Laom Lake was first realized. A journal of the period describes the Yeak Laom area as 'A 400 mètres d'altitude, bénéficiant d'une climat agréable et d'une absence à près complète de moustiques, ce site a une incontestable vocation touristique'. King Sihanouk had a chalet built at the shores of the lake, as well as a road around the lake and rest houses. Bombing during the 1970 war between the Khmer Rouge and Lon Nol forces destroyed the chalet and these initial infrastructure developments.

After the Khmer Rouge Regime, the people came slowly to settle in their present positions. In that time there was a large amount of forest clearance for agriculture, and soldiers were responsible for some logging. To this day there are remains of the soldier's trenches and gun placements around the lake.

YEAK LAOM COMMUNE PROTECTED AREA:

The Province of Ratanakiri designated Yeak Laom Commune Protected Area in May of 1995 by His Excellency, Governor Kep Chuk Tema. It covers over 5,000 hectares. The Yeak Laom Lake is the Core Zone of this protected area. Within the area are five Tampuan villages, consisting of over 300 families.

Since 1996 the International Development Research Center of Canada and UNDP/CARERE have been working with Tampuan leaders to develop a natural resource management program to protect the pristine beauty of the lake as well as to generate income by promoting indigenous culture and traditional handicraft production. A Cultural and Environmental Center has

been established, limited recreational facilities built and nature trails developed. Swimming, hiking and picnicking are favorite activities.

In August 1998, the Ratanakiri Provincial Government, in recognition of the traditional rights of the Tampuan community to the lake area, signed a 25-year lease with Yeak Laom Commune. A Commune Conservation and Recreation Committee, composed entirely of Tampuan villagers from the surrounding community, was elected to manage the area. Proceeds generated from admittance, parking and handicraft sales and other income generating activities help pay staff salaries as well as are contributed to a Commune Development Fund. IDRC/UNDP/CARERE continue to provide technical support.

ACTIVITIES:

Elephant rides and guided tours around Yeak Laom Commune and the surrounding area are available upon request. Also, the Cultural and Environmental Center is available for workshops and retreats. For more information about activities at Yeak Laom Lake contact the Yeak Laom Commune Protected Area Conservation and Recreation Committee at the United Nations Development Program/CARERE Ratanakiri or by E-mail: carere_ratanakiri@worldmail.com.kh.

NOTE:

All the income from the activities and sales are used to sustain the project and the Yeak Laom commune development fund. The handicrafts are purchased directly from the producers, ensuring a fair income from their work.

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