

## The Abode Harvest – April 2011



The fields of the Abode, high in the Knuckles Mountains at 4,000ft, have finally been harvested of rice. Just to get there is a trek of several hours. You carry everything you need, for once you arrive water has to be brought from the stream in metal containers, there is no electricity, or modern sanitation and cooking is done in the ancient way on an open hearth fire. But it is beautiful, magnificent and untouched.



Sid joined the villagers to gather the annual harvest and sent this account:

“So, without wasting much time I headed out from the valley to the Abode where the grandparents had been waiting. The sweet smell of the fields and the gentle breeze quelled the burdens I carried. And of course the sight of Abode itself and the grand old couple anxiously waiting brought back nostalgic memories of the good old days. Just for brief moment it felt timeless.



As the twilight gave way to glorious dawn we started our arduous work, cutting and sorting the itchy rice bushes. The art of mastering the sickle demands great skill and I ended up slicing my little finger which oozed with blood. Unhurt, or rather determined, I carried on.



My work wasn't confined to only this role, as grandmother keep appearing and would whizz me away to her kitchen, to get me to help with her stuff in order to feed everyone as we were inundated with visitors who came to bring the harvest in. Think I carried more than 20 gallons of water from the stream a fair distance away just to wash the pots and pans!



So for many days I cannot remember much but work. We carried massive piles of those grassy bushes of rice in bundles to the threshing field which was in the Abode garden. Grandfather had weeded it to perfection and grandmother applied a fine layer of cow dung over the entire patch ( 20 sq ft) using her twiggy broom stick.



Then the water buffalos marched in, all tethered to a single pack of four going in circles atop this massive pile until the grain comes off the tender strands of the rice tree. I reckon we did about 300 circles; shouting and whipping the poor beasts till they succumbed to exhaustion. Their strength and the stamina are immense and it's a rare treat to watch them.



The 'Milk boiling ceremony' began once the harvest was in. In the wee hours a group of elderly men and women gathered outside the Abode. Each of them bought rice freshly milled off the first harvest, fruits and sweets. Below Agora, grandmother's son, is preparing the 'milk rice' for the pot.....





After assembling three cornerstones to prop the pot on to the stove everyone was busy adding to the formula that goes to make tasty milk rice. Grandfather and the soothsayer erected a curious structure like an altar under the big Mango tree with shaven sticks.



They stuffed a new sarong like a cushion between the sticks that form the chamber and placed pieces of milk rice, biscuits and flowers on it. incense was lit with an oil lamp and the wise man started chanting.



It was a very simple Buddhist ceremony, brief and poignant. Afterwards we enjoyed our much relished meal and everybody left by late noon. Up in the mountains after three weeks only three of us stayed on.



The next day came hoards of men and women to help and within two days we managed to move every single sack of rice from the Abode to the valley bottom – a journey of 2 hours each way down and across

mountain passes through jungle. Everything was carried by villagers on their heads.... And these are heavy!



I was quite dreading this as I knew that anything left behind would invite the elephants back. A few years ago, the whole of the tiny village where the Abode sits had been devastated by elephants searching for food and one man was seriously injured when they attacked. But I can proudly say everyone cooperated and with togetherness we achieved our goal.

For the little old lady, we launched phase three of the rice rescue mission to bring her share home. It was hard work but we did it. Thus the curtain came down on the Abode Harvest – everyone exhausted but satisfied that once again we had done it!”

