

The Lost Village

In August 2009, we stumbled upon a village high in the Knuckles Mountains which had never until then been visited by a westerner (or foreigner as the locals call us).

The Knuckles Mountains sit near Kandy in the central region of the country and cover about 90 square miles in all. They run north - south of the Mahaweli Ganga valley rising to 6,112 ft at Knuckles peak and are composed of five mountains which together look like a clenched fist, hence the area's name, Knuckles.



We came across this village by asking, as usual, local people we met on the roadside and one person led us to another and before we knew it we had given lifts to half the local people and were taken to a wayside shop to see the school master. He took us personally to see the former head man of the Lost Village who now lives, because of his age, in the easier landscape of the valley bottom.



After customary tea, talk of where we had been and where we were going and why, it was arranged almost by magic, that we could go to the Lost Village at the top of the mountain accompanied by a youth who had

that day only just come down from there to go to the market. Armed with a piece of paper the school teacher had written introducing us, we were off almost immediately, in the worst heat of the afternoon sun. Perhaps not a good idea with hindsight but everyone was so keen to help us on our way, to delay seemed almost rude.



After climbing a very steep mountainside for over three hours and up 2,000ft from the valley bottom, we found ourselves in a natural amphitheatre surrounded by stupendous peaks with village houses ranged in terraces along the even steeper slopes above.....



This village has always been isolated from the rest of the world and this was the first time it had been visited by a foreigner. Whilst the local people had seen white people at a distance, in the valley where they sell their vegetables and crops, they had never spoken to one before, or entertained one in their village. This made for many curious stares as people brought their children, shy and wide eyed, to see this strange white woman and strange Sri Lankan as Sid was as unusual to them as I was despite speaking the same language and being Sinhalese.

The village is well organised, neat tidy, very poor but the welcome was amazing. Despite having little, the family we stayed with shared all they had and were proud to show us their village. Washing was via a bamboo spout which diverted water from a mountain stream and all water had to be carried in steel pots to family houses. People live communally and work the fields co-operatively.



Though there is a school there and two teachers work with thirty children aged between five and fourteen, they teach a non standard syllabus and therefore the young people cannot transfer to another school in the valley bottom at fourteen as they are not accepted.



We slept in a local house, me on a plank bed shared with a fourteen year old girl while her mother slept in the kitchen, Sid with men on the floor of the main room. We had a meal with lots of rice and plenty of interesting talk, about what life is like in the western world, illustrated by photos I had on my camera of Liverpool, London, a recent wedding and of the latest baby to arrive in my family.

The next day, after a tour of the magnificent amphitheatre where the village lies, we left, promising to return and provide help for their leaking roofs, which will not survive the next monsoon due later this

year. We agreed to supply fifteen sheets of corrugated roofing alone for this house below where the daughter of the family we stayed with lived.



Being invited into this community, experiencing their unconditional acceptance, care and welcome as well as hearing about their concerns and challenges, was a huge privilege. We are returning this honour by protecting the location of the village and making sure any help we give them is at their request and does not disrupt their traditional and chosen lifestyle.



If you want to help, please contact us.

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