

Burma “Sea Gypsies” Compendium

Report by Project Maje




3610 NE 70th Ave, Portland OR 97213 USA, maje@hevanet.com

June 2004

CONTENTS:

Map: Sea Gypsies Region

1. Myanmar's .net “Sea Gypsies: The Salone People of Myanmar,” undated website article, viewed 2004.
2. TNT Diventures, “Burma: Land of Dynamite Fishing,” undated website article, viewed 2004.
3. Marinasia, “Burma Eco-tour,” undated website, viewed 2004.
4. The Irrawaddy, “The Threat from the Sea Gypsies,” April 2004.
5. Myanmar Times, “Tourists Descend on Salone Festival,” Kerry Howley, Feb. 23-29, 2004.
6. Myanmar Times, “A Study of Humans,” Maw Maw San, Feb. 23-29, 2004.
7. Myanmar Times, “Myeik Archipelago Development Urged,” Kerry Howley, Feb. 23-29, 2004.
8. Xinhua, “Myanmar to Invite Foreign Investment for Archipelago Tourist Development,” Feb. 23, 2004.
9. Democratic Voice of Burma News, “Burmese Villagers Robbed by Uniformed Dacoits,” Feb. 20, 2004.
- 10.
11. The Irrawaddy, “Thirty-Seven Killed At Sea,” Naw Seng, Feb. 17, 2004.
12. Democratic Voice of Burma News, “SPDC Rounding Up Sea Gypsies For Show,” Feb. 11, 2004.
13. DPS Map website, “Festivals in Myanmar: Sea Gypsy Festival (Salone Festival),” Feb. 2004
14. Sydney Morning Herald, “Burma’s Gypsies of the Sea,” Jeni Harvie, Jan. 29, 2004.
15. Myanmar News website, “Concert to Benefit Salone (Sea Gypsy) People,” Jan. 19, 2004.
16. Democratic Voice of Burma News, “Burmese Sea-Gypsies Forced to Live on Land for Tourists,” Jan. 14, 2004.
17. The Greater Phuket Magazine, “Endangered Idyll?” Collin Piprell, October? 2003.


- 
- 
- 
18. Science News, "Children of Sea See Clearly Underwater," J. Travis, May 17, 2003.
 19. Blue magazine, "Burma: Drifting with sea gypsies," Bruce Northam, May 2002.
 20. Project Maje, "Sea Gypsies Again!" (e-mail) August 30, 2001.
 21. The Baltimore Sun, "Excursion to Burma," Frank Langfitt, July 10, 2001.
 22. Sea Kayaker Magazine, "Paddling Myanmar's Mergui Archipelago in Search of the Sea Gypsies," Joel Kramer, June 2000.
 23. The Daily Telegraph, "Travel: Between a shark and hard place In Burma's Mergui Archipelago," Gill Williams, July 24, 1999.
 24. Project Maje, "Sailing Through Ethnicide" June 1999.
 25. Outside Magazine, "The Trip-Finder, Burma: Sailing the Mergui Archipelago," Jan. 1998.
 26. Le Courrier de l'UNESCO, Inalco website, "Where the Spirits Roam," Esteban T. Magannon, 1998.
 27. In Depth Adventures website, "Eco Tour," 1998.
 28. Images Asia Environment Program, "Saloun Relocation Camps," Nov. 1997.
 29. Sea Green, "Dynamite Fishing Boats in the Andaman Sea," June 19, 1997.

Introduction

"The Salons or sea gypsies are the among the smallest minorities in Burma and no less vulnerable or defenseless against human rights abuses committed by the junta. They need the attention of Human Rights activists and organizations."
-- Chin Forum Information Service

Freely roaming the ocean in small boats from birth to death, living simply off its riches, a Southeast Asian people seem as mythical as mermaids. These ethnic groups known as "Sea Gypsies" are still found from the Philippines to Borneo to Thailand to Burma. Their lives are romantic but increasingly difficult.

This report focuses exclusively on those from Burma's waters. Burma's "Sea Gypsies" face particular problems which may even threaten their existence as a culture and people. Amid the vast array of documentation on Burma's human rights situation and ethnic groups there has been very little investigation about Burma's "Sea Gypsies." A series of books by a French ethnologist, two new books published in Burma, and a recent documentary film are among the main resources available. There has been little press coverage outside of a few tourism-oriented articles and a spate of news coverage in early 2004. Even an activist from the Mon ethnic group of the same region of Burma comments about the "Sea Gypsies": "These people are living offshore and rarely have communication with the people on the coast."



As a compendium, this report seeks to fill some of this information gap with a collection of 29 documents and articles from 1997 to 2004 concerning Burma's "Sea Gypsies" in a format accessible to those who are interested in Burma and indigenous/nomadic peoples issues. This compendium is modeled on Project Maje's previous "A Chin Compendium," released in 1999. The material contained here is compiled for nonprofit public interest use. For reproduction contact the original sources. Be sure to credit the original sources, not Project Maje, if quoting from non Project Maje material contained here.

This is not a scientific study or a comprehensive report. It is intended as a reference and background resource. It draws upon available information in English about Burma's "Sea Gypsies" from an array of sources, including news articles, tour agencies, and researchers. Project Maje, the compiler of this report, does not endorse, confirm or deny the veracity of any of the non Project Maje material.

In some cases, only excerpts directly relevant to the Burma "Sea Gypsies" are included, rather than a complete article. Places where articles were cut for excerpts are marked with three woven rattans (###.) The beginning and end of each article is marked with three nautilus shells (@@@.)

Seafaring

"Not only have the islands escaped development by the modern world, they don't even have a significant indigenous population." -- "Adventure Travel" (a Hong Kong magazine)

The "Sea Gypsies" are known in Burma by a name spelled in variations including "Salon," "Saloun," "Salone," "Salum" and "Salong." "Salon" appears to be the most common spelling. The Burma regime tends to use the spelling "Salone." Project Maje has in the past used the spelling "Saloun" for phonetic reasons. Some articles in this compendium refer to Burma's "Sea Gypsies" as "Moken" (or "Mawken") people, using the name of the "Sea Gypsies" of neighboring Thailand (who are apparently closely related.)

"Moken" is actually the most politically correct term, as it is what Burma's "Sea Gypsies" call themselves. However, in news reports and tourism articles about Burma, "Moken" is not used as often as the Burmese (Salone/Salong) terminology which serves to distinguish those in Burma waters and under the Burma regime's rule, from those indigenous to Thailand who have a different set of experiences and problems. The English name "Sea Gypsies" refers to a nomadic style of life, rather than any direct relationship to the Roma (Gypsy) people of Europe. In French, the descriptive phrase is "Nomades Marins" (Sea Nomads.)

Burma's "Sea Gypsies" are rarely mentioned in books or reports on the ethnic groups of Burma. This obscure status is probably because of their inaccessibility, their lack of an armed force or political organization, and their very small population. In the days of British colonial rule over Burma (1885-1948), some scrutiny was brought to bear on the "Sea Gypsies" by traders, traders and administrators. The Burma "Sea Gypsy" population was estimated at 1,325 in 1901, but such figures were hard to verify due to the ethnic group's nomadic nature. A 2000 article in "The Greater Phuket" magazine estimates between 2,000 and 3,000 "Sea Gypsies" in Burma. Tourist literature associated with various Thailand-based excursion companies often diminishes the extent of Burma's "Sea Gypsy" population, referring to their region as uninhabited, or claiming that they exist only in one particular village. There are also populations of "Sea Gypsies" originally from Burma's waters who live as refugees in Thailand, particularly around the port town of Ranong. In addition, there are an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 "Sea Gypsies" indigenous to Thailand, mostly living on and around the island of

Phuket.

The Moken ethnic group, including the “Sea Gypsies” of Burma and Thailand, has historically been based around Phuket, a large Thai island which was a coastal trading center. Phuket, now a tourist resort island, was known in Malay as “Ujong Salang” which may or may not have given these people the name used for them in Burma. It has not been irrefutably determined whether the Mokens are an early autochthonous ethnic group of Southeast Asia, or are descended from some land-based group (such as the Mon-Khmer, Malay, or even Vedda) which took to the sea for economic or political reasons in centuries long past.

The Moken language, which has been classified as “Austronesian” features many Malay words, as well as strong Thai vocabulary influences. There are other ethnic groups in Southeast Asia known as “Sea Gypsies” which do not appear to be directly related to Burma and Thailand’s Mokens, although they live in a similar way. These groups live off the coasts of Malaysian and Indonesian islands including Borneo, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and the Sulu Archipelago. Burma’s “Sea Gypsies” are found amid the Mergui Archipelago, a chain of hundreds of small islands parallel to the southeastern Burma coast (Tenasserim) of the Indian Ocean’s Andaman Sea. Burma’s regime calls this the “Myeik Archipelago” (and calls Burma “Myanmar.”)

Burma’s “Sea Gypsies” are thought to have held fast to their own traditional Animist beliefs. French ethnologists Pierre and Jacques Ivanoff have made extensive studies of Moken belief systems, folklore and the spiritual symbolism used in their boat-building. There have been conversion efforts by Christian and Muslim missionaries but these made few inroads among the Mokens. Buddhist conversion efforts may be part of current relocation programs by the Burma regime.

A maritime hunter-gatherer culture, Burma’s “Sea Gypsies” are said to spend most of their lives on their thatch-roofed wooden boats. In small groups, they roam among the islands, harvesting crustaceans, turtles, and shellfish. Some accounts insist that the Mokens do not eat fish. Sea cucumbers, a holothurian animal related to starfish and sea urchins, are known as “trepang” or “beche de mer” when dried and are a delicacy of Chinese cuisine which the “Sea Gypsies” collect for trade. Several articles in the Compendium refer to these sea cucumbers as “sea slugs” but they should not be confused with actual sea slugs which are nudibranch snails without shells. Pearls and decorative shells have become Moken trade commodities as well. Vegetable crops are planted sporadically on the islands, which serve as seasonal meeting places and storm shelters. Trained dogs are used to hunt small game on the forested islands.

Map of Sea Gypsies Region Roundup

“The Salone nomads do not easily mix with other people. They do not participate in economic, social or even cultural development of the country they live in. Their society has different cultural values from those offered by modern society. They are locked in the value system that they believe to be their own.” -- “Myanmar’s .net” website, 2004

Burma’s “Sea Gypsies,” whose ancestors may have originally taken to the sea to avoid conflict, were far removed from politics until the 1990s. Unlike many of Burma’s ethnic groups, they never had their own rebel army (or navy) although a few might have joined the forces of Andaman Sea coastal Mon or Tavoyan ethnic groups, or even seafaring units of the All Burma Students Liberation Front (ABSDF) or Arakan Army (from the Western Burma coast.) The “Sea Gypsies” were too poor to be the prey of pirates marauding in the Andaman Sea. Although some have accused Burma’s “Sea Gypsies” of being pirates themselves, there seems to be little evidence to support this and it may come from confusing

them with more aggressive “Sea Gypsy” groups from elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

In the late 1990s a few reports leaked out about forced relocation by Burma’s military regime of Burma’s “Sea Gypsies” to on-land sites. At least one such report claimed that most of them had been relocated by 1997. This practice would be consistent with an enormous pattern of forced relocation of suspect ethnic, economic and political groups, conducted throughout Burma, particularly in the late 1990s.

The Andaman Sea off the Tenasserim coast received increasing attention from Burma’s regime during the 1990s due to offshore petroleum exploration, discoveries and transport by multinational corporations including Unocal, Total, Premier, Petronas and others. This led to a drastically heightened military security presence, with fishing communities of the Mon and Tavoyan ethnic groups moved elsewhere and small-scale fishing boats chased away. The increased presence of foreign trawler fleets under joint-ventures with the regime also discouraged small-scale local fishing.

While the effects of the 1990s developments on the “Sea Gypsies” off the southern coast of Burma were less well-known than those on the Mons and Tavoyans to the north of the Mergui Archipelago, reports indicated that the “Sea Gypsies” suffered as well. An unknown number of them are have said to have fled to Thailand. There the men reportedly took jobs on Thai fishing boats, a dangerous and often economically exploitive situation. Most of the fishing boats used legitimate methods, but there was considerable use of dynamite fishing by Thailand-based fleets as well. Refugee “Sea Gypsy” women and girls may have ended up in prostitution in Thailand’s notorious port brothels, where HIV/AIDS exposure was extremely widespread.

Display

“When we came there was nothing here, no buildings, no cottages, only the Salone houses. We had to gather the materials and build all of it.” -- U Soe Thein, Myanmar Travel and Tours (regarding 2004 tourism festival)

An entirely new challenge appeared for Burma’s “Sea Gypsies” in the late 1990s, when Thailand-based tourist agencies sought and won permission from Burma’s regime to conduct scuba diving excursions in the Mergui Archipelago. “Live-aboard” yachts would set forth from Phuket, carrying avid divers from foreign countries. Cash payments were made to Burma regime authorities for the privilege, and a Burma regime “guide” or even a military escort was usually on board.

Initially, the “uninhabited” nature of the archipelago was touted. Later, the chance to encounter an exotic people, the “Sea Gypsies,” became part of the tourism promotion. Controversy ensued, not only over the payments to the regime during a tourism boycott called for by Burma’s democratic opposition, but over the possible role of “Sea Gypsies” in dynamite fishing which was fast destroying the very reefs attracting the foreign divers. It was difficult to determine whether the dynamiting was actually the fault of the local “Sea Gypsies” or of other commercial fishing interests.

The scuba tour situation began to set up an indigenous/nomadic people vs. nature conflict. The idea arose that it might be best to remove the “Sea Gypsies” from the open water where they could harm the marine habitat. This would put them under government (regime) control, and they could be civilized and educated. The drive to control all ethnic groups has been one of the mainstays of Burma’s military regime. Now, on a tiny scale, this would happen in the Mergui Archipelago, with many “Sea Gypsies” corralled onto a single island, Bocho, under the apparent control of a Burma Army colonel turned Buddhist monk.

The regime launched its own aggressive promotion of Mergui Archipelago tourism centered on Bocho Island's "Sea Gypsy Village" with a "Salone Festival" in February 2004. Promotion of the festival included repeated references to "eco-tourism" (a trendy catch-phrase also favored by the scuba tour companies.) Reports indicated that "Sea Gypsies" were forcibly rounded up to participate in the tourist festival, and that a boat carrying coastal villagers compelled to attend it sank, drowning 37.

Interestingly, "a large television" was among gifts "bestowed" by regime officials on Moken representatives during the tourism festival. The eyes of mainland Burma will be on the "Sea Gypsies" again when a new Burmese movie, "Maw Kin U Dan," shot on location in the Mergui Archipelago and starring a popular young actress, Nandar Hlaing, is released. A different perspective is being revealed in other countries through a documentary film, "Burma's Gypsies of the Sea" (distributed by National Geographic as "Burma's Forbidden Islands") by Klaus Reisinger and Frederique Lengaigne, which unsparingly reveals threats to the Mokens including forced relocation, outside fishing fleets, and logging on the islands.

A website for the "Mergui Archipelago Project -- Research and Integrated Development" of the French ethnologist Jacques Ivanoff, the preeminent Moken expert, appeared in February 2004. The MAP-RAID website lists several ongoing projects, including the collection and exhibition of Moken artifacts/possessions, the establishment of a traveling Moken school on a boat, and an international conference on the Mokens to be held in Burma in 2004. MAP-RAID also proposes plans to encourage a revival in traditional Moken boat-building, and advocates "a nomadic zone between Thailand and Myanmar where the Moken will be free to go and where the two countries will be able to build cooperation." Interestingly, one of MAP-RAID's "partners" is the French petroleum corporation TotalFinaElf, which has been implicated in severe human rights violations connected to its offshore gas pipeline project in the Andaman Sea and Tenasserim Peninsula of Burma.

CONCLUSIONS

Whether or not they have been complicit in the recent destruction of habitat in their archipelago, Burma's "Sea Gypsies" still have extensive knowledge of the maritime environment of the Andaman Sea. Recent studies have shown that Moken children have an extraordinary ability to see underwater. This may be only one of many ways in which their senses are in tune with the ocean. If the "Sea Gypsies" of Burma are wiped out by disease, or turned into a tourist parody of themselves, or criminalized, or assimilated into larger groups, the Andaman Sea will have lost its indigenous guardians.

The "Sea Gypsies" of Burma are important beyond their tourism value to outsiders. They are part of a worldwide web of surviving hunter-gatherer nomadic populations stretching from the Arctic to the Kalahari to the Outback. These groups have much to teach the world about sustainable use of scarce resources. Like the Ma'dan "Marsh Arabs" of southern Iraq, the Moken "Sea Gypsies" are a water people under siege from land. The Marsh Arabs have recently been able to come back from the brink to regain an ancient way of life. So must Burma's "Sea Gypsies."

As Global Warming appears about to make some of the world's islands and coastal flats disappear, we all may have much to learn from those humans who know how to live on a boat. Which is not to say that the Mokens should be made to endure life under the scientific microscope, either. If there is one consistent thread among contacts with them, even by the few outsiders who know their language, it is that these "Sea Gypsies" really PREFER TO BE LEFT ALONE. Protection from the military regime which has displaced, enslaved and massacred many of Burma's indigenous peoples

and exploited the environment in the most destructive ways, is the most urgent priority for the survival of Burma's Moken nomads.

SUGGESTIONS

1. More human rights information is obviously needed about Burma's "Sea Gypsies." The highest priority is for firsthand human rights interview research, particularly with Moken refugee populations from Burma in Thailand.

2. Tourism in the Mergui Archipelago needs to be seriously evaluated. Is it providing funding to Burma's regime and encouraging displacement and exploitation of "Sea Gypsies"? Or, as claimed by some tour agencies, is it preserving valuable ecosystems?

3. International advocacy on behalf of Burma's "Sea Gypsies" would be useful. If "Sea Gypsies" are being "rounded up" there should be protests from Burma democracy groups, indigenous peoples' advocates, and others.

4. Burma's regime should not be allowed to turn the "Sea Gypsy" culture into another of its "human zoos" for tourist purposes.

5. Thailand should not be allowed to exploit Burma's "Sea Gypsies" and other refugees for economic gain, including prostitution, or to forcibly repatriate "Sea Gypsy" refugees to Burma.

6. Burma's overall dire Andaman Sea situation, including petroleum drilling, tin dredging, shrimp farm pollution, island logging, overfishing, piracy, and ethnic cleansing, needs to be reported on and protested internationally.

7. There are three populations of Burma's "Sea Gypsies":

- * Those who are still nomadic
- * Those who have been relocated under regime control
- * Those who are refugees in Thailand (and possibly Malaysia)

Each of these populations needs human rights research, support and advocacy. Under ordinary conditions, the "Sea Gypsies" would mostly need to be left alone, to live their lives. Under current conditions, they need awareness and help.

8. Individuals and organizations with an interest in the survival of Burma's "Sea Gypsies" should share information, with publications, meetings, and perhaps an online "Salon salon" network.

BURMA "SEA GYPSY" RESOURCES:

Books:

Anderson, John The Selungs of the Mergui Archipelago 1890.

Ainsworth, Leopold A Merchant Venturer Among the Sea Gypsies: Being a Pioneer's Account of Life on an Island in the Mergui Archipelago White Lotus, Bangkok 1999 reprint (originally published 1930.)

Hope, Sebastian Outcasts of the Islands: The Sea Gypsies of South East Asia HarperCollins, London 2001 [a summary of the Burma-relevant sections of this book is included in this compendium.]

Ivanoff, Jacques A Journey Through the Mergui Archipelago White Lotus, Bangkok, 2002.
Ivanoff, Jacques The Moken Boat: Symbolic Technology White Lotus, Bangkok 1999.
Ivanoff, Jacques Moken: Sea Gypsies of the Andaman Sea, Post-war Chronicles White Lotus, Bangkok 1997.
Ivanoff, Jacques Rings of Coral: Moken Folktales White Lotus, Bangkok 2001.
Lowis, C.C. The Salons Government of Burma, Rangoon 1909.
Ma Ohmar, A Traveller's Documentary of Ma Kyone Galet and Surrounding Islands Rangoon, 2004.
White, Walter G. The Sea-Gypsies of Malaya: An Account of the Mawken People of the Mergui Archipelago White Lotus, Bangkok 1997 reprint (originally published 1922.)
Yangon University Department of Anthropology, The Economics and Life Style of the Salone Nationals Rangoon, Burma, 2004.

"Burma's Gypsies of the Sea" documentary film by Klaus Reisinger and Frederique Lengaigne, 2004, Compass Films (currently distributed by National Geographic as "Burma's Forbidden Islands.") Other documentary films are cited on the website of the Mergui Archipelago Project, which also has a Moken slideshow photo galleries: <http://www.mapraid.net>

Numerous websites promoting Thailand-based scuba and other tours to Burma's Mergui Archipelago can be found through internet search engines.

The website for Southeast Asia Liveboards (SEAL) has links to dozens of tourism-oriented articles about the Mergui Archipelago: <http://caa.pair.com/press-coverage/>

Information on sea cucumbers came from <http://www.seaslugforum.net>.

THE ARTICLES

1. Myanmars.net "Sea Gypsies: The Salone People of Myanmar" undated website article, viewed 2004.
(<http://www.myanmars.net/people/seagypsies.htm>)

The "Salone" of Myanmar, who called themselves, "Moken," are forgotten people who fight for their survival. They adopt their way of life as marine nomads. They are expert in swimming, diving and submerging in the sea -- and hence the names "Sea - Gypsies" or "Men of the Sea."

Habitant

The Salone can be found in the Southern part of Myeik Archipelago which has more than 800 small islands. It has been believed that the Salone people had lived, in the ancient times, on the Malay Peninsula until the Malay incursion when they left their native places and lived scattered throughout the Myeik Archipelago. Now-a-days, the Salone can only be found on the coastal islands around Kawthoung, formerly Victoria Point -- the southernmost town of Myanmar.

Social Life

The Salones do not live on agriculture or farming, instead they roam in the sea near the coasts and pursuit on sea and marine products that they could obtain in their strange and various traditional ways. Their boats, made of light wood, are convenient and appropriate to go in the sea. Their customary way

of living in the sea is extraordinary in that they take all the household things -- utensils, food rations and including dogs, cats and chickens -- with them on the boat.

During the hot and cool seasons, they survive their living by fishing, gathering and selling of natural marine products. However, during the rainy season, when the weather is strong and rough, they managed to stay slovenly on the nearest islands they could find. They built long legged huts made of bamboo, canes or anything that they could find useful for building huts. As their name, sea-gypsies, implies they are skillful in returning back to their islands, shortly, when they behold an unfavorable weather.

The cleverness and expertness of the Salone in diving and submerging in the sea is incomparable. They could dive down to 8 - 10 fathoms and stay for long time. They used to dive and submerge several times in a day. It is presumed that the Salone are the only people who can stay underwater for many minutes without using oxygen tank.

They collect and trade marine products such as sea shells, oysters , mollusks, ambergris , seaweeds, pearls etc., as well as the edible nest of swifts (*Collocalia* spp.) honey and medicinal plants that grow on the island.

The Salone nomads do not easily mix with other people. They do not participate in economic, social or even cultural development of the country they live in. Their society has different cultural values from those offered by modern society. They are locked in the value system that they believe to be their own.

Customs & Traditions

The Salone nomads still hold on their own beliefs. They worship two spirit gods - the good and the evil. Shamanism is the central element during the spirit festival. The devotional offerings, at the festival, include pop corns, alcoholic drinks, honey, betel and flesh and blood of ducks, chickens, dolphins and turtles. They used to sing at the festivals. The talents of the Salone are very remarkable that they could sing songs at hand to the scenes, happenings and fact they see. One of their musical instruments is a drum made from monitor lizard (*Varamas* Spp.) skin.

The rites and rituals at the festival were done by the shaman, who involved not only at the festival but also during illness or at death. The Salone do not bury the corpse, instead they left on a scaffold stand and all the people of the village move to another island.

@@@

2. TNT Diventures, "Burma: Land of Dynamite Fishing" undated website article, viewed 2004.
(<http://www.tntdiventures.com/burma.html>)

Excerpt:

The Burmese fishermen have extensively dynamited every dive site reducing them to shadows of their former beauty. In a way, who can blame them. They are so poor and have to feed and cloth their families and will never be privileged enough to dive. They do not see anything of the money that the dive shops coin in or that the government charges as an entrance fee. Another strange thing on the trips was the fact that all our divers complained about the state of the reefs and lack of marine life, yet they were quite prepared to eat fish and lobster traded to us by the sea gypsies; probably the same

people who were exploding dynamite as we were diving.

We soon learned how to interpret such phrases as, “a good site for macro life”, which either meant “look for the small stuff as all the fish have been taken”, or “the visibility is so bad that there is no point straying off the reef as you will never find your way back”. Another phrase is “interesting topography”. This translated as “there are no fish here so enjoy the rock formation or destroyed corals”.

Our advice is to avoid diving in Burma!!! At least until dynamite fishing is banned or the Mergui Peninsular is declared a World Heritage Site -- which will probably never happen. Save your money and dive the Similans in Thailand instead.

@@@

3. Marinasia, “Burma Eco-tour”, undated website, viewed 2004.
(<http://www.marinasia.com/>)

Few have ever heard of it. Very few have ever been there. 800 islands - inaccessible for the past 50 years. Now MARINASIA can take you on board for this EUROPE CONSERVATION Project. Be one of our research team members. Study biodiversity and wildlife with us.

Marinasia Projects and Associates

Ecoswiss and Marinasia have joined efforts to organize research projects in biodiversity and local culture in the archipelago north of Victoria Point, (Kaw Thauung) Burma.

Biodiversity

Marinasia Ltd. is a company registered in Phuket, Thailand, dedicated to sailing in the region and is one of the first holders of a license to navigate in the Mergui Archipelago of southern Burma (Myanmar). Europe Conservation Switzerland (Ecoswiss) is the independent Swiss branch of the European organization for the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage.

The goal of this project is to provide a basis for a comprehensive protection plan for the islands and their inclusion on the UN World Heritage Sites list. The survey will be conducted by biologists, ethnologists and other scientists who will cruise through the archipelago on sailing catamarans.

Corporate and private sponsorships are sought, but the primary means which allows us to operate the boats is the participation of eco-volunteers. These are students or ordinary people who are ready to help with the project and who are willing to contribute financially.

At the same time we seek collaboration with local and international nature-oriented NGO's as well as universities and local scientists (Burmese or Thai). We are also ready to organize cruises for special interest nature groups such as those interested in bird watching and ecotourism. Additional charters and exploration cruises will sail in the archipelago up to Mergui (Myeik) town with paying guests. Ecoswiss and Marinasia are happy to offer researchers a base for their studies by supplying with all the requested infrastructures.

The research is on wildlife with particular focus on threatened species such as wild cats, marine mammals, hornbills and sea turtles. Existing ecosystems and habitats will also be surveyed, including tropical rainforests, mangrove swamps and other vegetation, coral reefs and tidal shelves. Their interaction with the local population such as the Moken sea gypsies and the few fishing villages will be considered.

@@@

4. The Irrawaddy, "The Threat from the Sea Gypsies" April 2004.
[note: population is overestimated.]

The Burmese government withdrew a one-off magazine it had chartered to publicize this year's Salone (Sea Gypsy) festival in Tenasserim division before it even made the shelves of the bookshops.

Apparently, the text of publication repeatedly referred to Sea Gypsies as a "national race." The standing joke in Rangoon is that top junta leaders were concerned that such labeling might embolden the group to either demand secession from the Union, or a seat at the National Convention that is to be tasked with drawing up a new constitution in May.

Sea gypsies are a minority group that number only a few tens of thousands in southern Burma and Thailand. They live almost entirely on boats and practice shamanic rites.

@@@

5. Myanmar Times, "Tourists Descend on Salone Festival" Kerry Howley, Feb. 23-29, 2004.

U JO KENE, a dark, handsome Salone man with an easy air of authority, has never seen anything like this on the archipelago he calls home. A leader of the Salone, or Moken 'sea gypsies' who inhabit the Myeik region, U Jo Kene acted as a liaison between his people and the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism before and during the first annual Salone Festival. More than 100 tourists from all over the globe descended on one of the archipelago's 800 islands to observe, explore and, most of all, take photos, during the festival, from February 14 to 17.

A five-hour boat ride from the nearest small town, Bocho Island still serves more as a home to its native population than an escape for adventure-seeking tourists. Ma Kyone Galet Village sits on this densely forested oasis, temporary home to dozens of nomadic Moken. The Salone Festival was held on the village shoreline, accessible by boat from Kawthaung in Myanmar and Ranong in Thailand.

The Moken people traditionally live from birth to death on small wooden boats, residing on land only during the monsoon season and returning to sea when the weather subsides. U Jo Kene said his people were happy at the chance to gather and observe the foreigners. He said his primary concern for the future of his people, including his three sons, is that they be properly educated and taught, at the very least, to read and write. His daughter, a teacher in Yangon, is the only one of his children to have received formal education.

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism arranged Salone Festival 2004 with the stated objective of developing and promoting Myeik archipelago for the international market. After the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Brigadier-General Aye Myint Kyu, selected Bocho as the ideal venue six months ago, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism initiated a massive effort to transform the village into a festival ground. In a matter of months, the shore was equipped with temporary housing for 200, a clinic, a stage, a school, information booths, toilets, electricity and a water supply. Officials from Myanmar Travels and Tours, the Ministry's travel agency, said more than 100 staff, including housekeeping and food service personnel, were brought to the island to ensure the tourists' comfort. An official from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism said the massive operation cost US\$100,000 and was funded by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Kawthaung township and a local fishery owner.



Myanmar Travel and Tours general manager U Soe Thein says he arrived five weeks before the event to start construction. Standing in a 'food centre' he helped build for the festival, U Soe Thein described the process of preparing the island.

"When we came there was nothing here, no buildings, no cottages, only the Salone houses. We had to gather the materials and build all of it," he said.

A team of government employees kept the island clean throughout the festival, scouring the beach for refuse before most tourists had awoken. A clinic built for the festival was staffed with doctors from Kawthaung, the nearest coastal town, and swathed with preventative health information on malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Dr Lei Kyaw said he had seen 30 to 40 Moken patients a day during the first three days of the festival.

"So far we have treated minor injuries, fever, cough, gastro-enteritis and some cases of malaria," he said.

The four-day affair gained momentum on February 15, when scores of tourists started to disembark from private cruise liners and government-owned ships. The arrival of camera-toting Thais, Myanmar and Westerners who had come to observe the lives of the Moken evoked a curious juxtaposition of tourists and natives. Except when participating in organised events such as boat-building demonstrations and diving contests, the Moken mainly stayed offshore in boats while tourists roved the beach shopping and eating.

Conscious that they were being given a rare glimpse into the lives of a nomadic population, many tourists expressed delight with the event.

"It's just a fascinating place," said Mrs. Patsy Connick, an American tourist who came to the island with Taw Win Travel. "I would hope it would be left somewhat as it is. I would love to come back and explore the islands."

Like many of the island's guests, Canadian Mr. Jaime Beteau came to the island for a single day with a live-aboard diving operation based out of Phuket.

"I'm only here for a day, and I would definitely come back, mostly for the fact that there is so little tourism here."

The eclectic group of visitors included an American photographer, senior executives from Yangon hotels, members of non-governmental organisations and media representatives.

The festival's official ceremonies were held on Monday, February 16, when Commander of the Coastal Regional Command Brigadier General Ohn Myint and Minister of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Brigadier General Thein Zaw offered welcoming addresses. Various government officials bestowed gifts on representatives from the nomadic tribe, including a large television, rice and cash.

The Minister of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Brigadier-General Thein Zaw announced that next year's festival would be held on an island closer to Kawthaung, to ensure easier transport from mainland Myanmar.

American photo-journalist Mrs. Brenda Davidson-Shaddox assisted with this article.



@@@

6. Myanmar Times, "A Study of Humans" Maw Maw San, Feb. 23-29, 2004.

Yangon University's Department of Anthropology has published a Myanmar-language book about the Salone people, or sea gypsies, a nomadic people who inhabit the Myeik Archipelago.

The Economics and Life Style of the Salone Nationals, launched on February 7, examines the history, social life, beliefs and economic activities of the Salone. It was compiled by a team of seven anthropologists who spent two weeks in the islands.

"We published this book because people around the world value other people's culture. As we are anthropologists, we were very interested in undertaking this research and the government encouraged us to do it," said Professor Daw Tin Yee of the Department of Anthropology.

"We went to the islands where Salone live and stayed with them to find out about their life and culture. We had many difficulties while we were doing this. None of the researchers working on this project can swim and we had to visit all the islands in tiny boats. We wrote about this in the book," she said.

The release of the book came ahead of the Salone Festival on Bocho Island from February 14 to 17.

A movie, titled Maw Kin U Dan, has also been produced that explores the Salone people's love of the sea. It stars well-known actors, including Kyaw Hein, Nyunt Win, Lu Min and Nine Nine.

@@@

7. Myanmar Times, "Myeik Archipelago Development Urged" Kerry Howley, Feb. 23-29, 2004.

"We would like investors to look around the islands."

The government is ready to promote the Myeik Archipelago as a major tourist destination and is inviting foreigners to invest in the area, the Deputy Minister of Hotels and Tourism, Brigadier-General Aye Myint Kyu, said last week.

Improved relations with Thailand had paved the way for opening the area, including the border port of Kawthaung, to greater development, Brigadier-General Aye Myint Kyu told Myanmar Times on February 16.

Speaking at the first annual Salone Festival, an event arranged to promote tourism in the area, he said sensitivities linked to the border had previously prevented mass tourism in the area, but regulations would be eased to encourage development.

"We would like to invite any investor to look around the islands," the deputy minister said.

The Myeik archipelago comprises more than 800 pristine islands spread over 14,000 square miles. The forested, coral-fringed islands teem with wildlife and are almost completely devoid of tourist facilities.

The largely uninhabited islands are home to a small number of Salone people, who are also known

as Moken or 'Sea Gypsies.'

The festival, held from February 14 to 17, was intended to promote the Salone's native habitat as a potentially profitable tourist destination.

Access to the islands was closed to foreign tourists from the late 1940s until 1997. Today, 43 tour operators, mostly live-aboard diving operations based on Phuket in Thailand have partial access to the area, said Daw Lai Lai Aung, a manager at the government-owned Myanmar Travels and Tours.

Tour businesses seeking access to the region are required to buy a two-year licence from the Directorate of Hotels and Tourism for US\$1000 and submit passenger and crew lists and detailed itineraries to the authorities five days before visiting the archipelago, Daw Lai Lai Aung said.

Several pioneering tour agencies have already set up operations in Kawthaung.

They include the Shan Yoma Travels and Tours Company, which opened an office in Kawthaung last year in anticipation of increased marine tourism in the archipelago.

"In Myanmar we focus only on cultural tourism in places like Bagan and Mandalay. But 85 per cent of the tourism in the world is marine tourism and we have over 2000 kilometers of coastline in Myanmar," said the company's managing director, U Hla Aye.

Shan Yoma Travels and Tours offered its first tour of the region during the Salone Festival, a five day cruise that U Hla Aye says "amazed" his passengers, most of whom were Myanmar.

"Some of them had never seen the sea before," he said.

While U Hla Aye is targeting domestic travellers, industry sources say there is also potential to cater for tourists from Thailand. Mr. John Arbidans, a Yangon-based travel industry consultant, says visa renewal trips by expatriates based in Thailand bring a steady stream of visitors to Kawthaung throughout the year.

"Right now, there is nothing for them here, but if we could give them something to do while they're here, they would stay for a few days," Archipelago Mr. Arbidans said.

Mr. Arbidans is doing consultancy work for the Moby Dick Tour Company Limited, which is typical of the tour operators that are beginning to penetrate the region.

Three years ago, the company's managing director, Mr. Bjorn Burchard, and his Myanmar partners started the Moby Dick Restaurant, an international standard cafe that overlooks the port at Kawthaung. The Moby Dick Tour Company, which has offices next to the restaurant, is taking advantage of a town on the cusp of greater development.

"The potential is enormous," said Mr. Burchard.

The company plans to start day tours of Kawthaung by early March and is considering developing an adventure camp on one of the nearby islands next tourist season.

While optimism abounds among the pioneering tourism industry investors, they acknowledge that infrastructure needs to be upgraded to allow for rapid development.

Kawthaung has only two hotels, neither of which are international standard, although there is a luxury resort on small nearby island. Hot springs in Kawthaung also have the potential to be developed into a major tourist attraction.

Tour operators say the frequency of flights between Yangon and Kawthaung also needs to be increased.

Myanmar Airways offers the only service to Kawthaung, with one flight a day during the tourist high season.

"The flights only operate if there are enough passengers to make them profitable," said U Tint Aung, a manager at the airline.

While the eventual development of the archipelago for tourism seems inevitable, industry sources say efforts must be made to ensure the region avoids the environmental degradation that has occurred at tourist destinations elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

"We have already learned about the repercussions of quick development in Thailand," said U Win Aung, the chairman of the Woodland Travel Group, that recently helped produce an award-winning documentary about the archipelago and its people.

"Investors must be concerned about nature," U Win Aung said.

"They have to be aware that this is a long-term investment and once it's gone, it's finished and they will have to move on."

Mr. Arbidans agrees that ecological awareness is a key concern for investors.

"If you've seen what's out there, you know it has to be protected," he said.

@@@

8. Xinhua, "Myanmar to Invite Foreign Investment for Archipelago Tourist Development" Feb. 23, 2004.

Myanmar has planned to develop an archipelago in its southern Tanintharyi division into a major tourist destination by absorbing foreign investment in the area.

The first annual Salone Festival held recently in Myeik archipelago where Salone ethnic minorities inhabit has paved way for promoting tourism in the area, the Hotels and Tourism Ministry was quoted as saying by the Myanmar Times on Monday.

The forested and coral-fringed Myeik archipelago, made up of more than 800 pristine islands covering over 36,240 square-kilometers, teem with wildlife and are almost totally devoid of tourism facilities.

To develop tourism in the area, especially to attract tourists from neighboring Thailand, the border port of Kawthoung is being opened to bring tourists to the area and a number of tour agencies have already been set up there for operation, the report said.

Kawthoung so far has only two hotels though there is luxury resort on small nearby island and hot

springs in Kawthoung also have the potential to be developed into a major tourist attraction, said the report.

According to official statistics, tourist arrivals in Myanmar reached 277,600 during the first seven months of the 2003-04 fiscal year which began in April, increasing by 27.3 percent compared with the same period of the previous year.

Statistics also show that contracted foreign investment in the sector of hotels and tourism of Myanmar has amounted to 1.06 billion US dollars in 43 projects as of the end of 2002 since it started such investment in late 1988.

@@@

9. Democratic Voice of Burma News, "Burmese Villagers Robbed by Uniformed Dacoits" Feb. 20. 2004.

A group of Burmese villagers who were forced to attend the Salon (Moken) sea gypsy festival at Lampi Island, Mergui Archipelago, Kawthaung Township in southern Burma were robbed by a group of uniformed dacoits in early 19 February.

Seven uniformed dacoits armed with standard Burma army weapons including carbines, G3 and G4 assault rifles, believed to be Burmese soldiers opened fire on the boat carrying seven passengers including four women and two children and robbed them.

Increasing numbers of Burmese soldiers are resorting to piracy and dacoity to feed their impoverished families while their commanders are getting richer with bribery and other underhanded means.

Before the festival, sea gypsies were rounded up and detained on designated islands by Burmese soldiers who forced them to perform for tourists, and the local Burmese living along the Andaman Coast were told by military authorities to attend the festival to bolster audience numbers.

Recently, a boat carrying passengers sunk on 16 February drowning at least five passengers who are mainly women and children. According to the locals, the accident occurred because greedy boat owners carried more passengers than the capacity of their boats.

@@@

10. Mergui Archipelago Project -- Research and Integrated Development, Feb. 18-25, 2004. (<http://www.mapraid.net>)

Excerpts:

History and Presentation of the Myeik (Mergui) Archipelago Project - Research and Integrated Development

MAP-RAID is international. It was created by a group of scientists, students and professionals and is supported by a network of specialists from many disciplines: ethnologists, anthropologists, painters, photographers, biologists, geologists, computer engineers, film makers, cultural operators and specialists in informal education.

The members come from many different countries and backgrounds but share a common objective: to study and safeguard the natural and cultural heritage of the 800 islands that make up the Myeik (Mergui) Archipelago and its coastal area.

MAP-RAID operated through the Tenasserim Division and more specifically through the 800 islands of the Mergui (Myeik) Archipelago since 1998. The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism allowed Sibian Discovery, a non profit association founded in Paris by Jacques Ivanoff and Thierry Lejard to sail in the Moken islands in order to help the promotion of the region while allowing them to work and investigate. We have been allowed to follow the Moken in their wanderings, to search for sites of historical and archaeological interest, to collect artifacts and material and to film and photograph for promotional purposes. We took advantage of this exceptional climate of confidence and co-operation and rented a Burmese cargo boat, 30 metres long, that is invaluable for our expeditions and investigations. A project was then set up with the aims of rediscovering the region, to promote it, to give our aid and to accompany the development of the local groups and minorities. This is done in co-operation with the local people, for instance through co-operative agreements (one was signed by the Myeik and Tenasserim Journal and the CNRS), exhibitions, collective books, etc. Concrete proposals in the field of preservation, education, micro-economy, citizenship, will be made to local leaders and policy-makers.

To support discussion and exchange of ideas, we then decided to arrange an exhibition which gave back to the Burmese part of their forgotten history. The CHAT (Center for History and Tradition), regional center of the SEAMEO offer its support (given previously by the Universities Historical Research Center) needed for the exhibition. Together with the Cultural Services of the French Embassy we submitted the authorisation to held the authorisation to the Ministry of Education together, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and we ask the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Special permits were granted to collect in the Archipelago traditional items to be presented in Yangon. The exhibition was held at Pan Sea hotel (20-28 April 2002) and then donated to the CHAT.

The success of this project convinced our partners (sponsors, local and national institutions) of the viability of the project. Proposals of association for conferences and research projects were made. We are currently working on the modalities of such an agreement which will include, CHAT, CNRS, French and Italian Embassy.

###

Moken Mobility

The first strands in the cord that brought us to the Myeik (Mergui) Archipelago were the Moken (Selung) and our desire to make discoveries. We found ourselves in the interior of a vast space, going from one island to another, from one village to another. It is impossible to imagine finding oneself in the Archipelago with no possibility of mobility and no method of transport: we are planning to build a traditional boat adapted to this situation, for use in our investigations in the Archipelago.

A wooden cargo boat would be ideal for our expeditions and would be one of the elements towards eventually building an eco-museum or collecting items for exhibitions. In addition it will be a place where we can live, work and travel towards the realisation of our projects. On board the boat we will have the necessary logistic support, staff and the material we need to develop our research and our project. We intend to offer our help in such domains as health, education and a program of small loans for underprivileged people. By taking advantage of the mobile structure of Moken society, we will try to offer our help and support towards the realisation of a dynamic development program to keep alive the ancestral culture and mobility of the sea nomads by helping them to build boats, for instance a

boat would be given for each new couple who married, thus making the tradition go on. In order to do this, we will take the traditional economy into account, including both barter and collecting, and find the necessary financial credit so that they can build their traditional boats. We will also try to set up a nomadic zone between Thailand and Myanmar where the Moken will be free to go and where the two countries will be able to build co-operation.

The Moken Nomad School

Taking into account the initiatives and good will of other people we meet, we want to develop a project for setting up nomad schools in both Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). The main elements are the following:

- A school boat, where the teacher will live and have all the school material he needs (books, blackboards, pencils, notebooks, etc.). Essential supplies for first-aid care and hygiene for the children will be included.
- A Moken teacher, who will be able to teach the children in their own language, with reference to their own culture, and who would be in close contact with them in their daily life.
- A poly-cultural teaching method that takes into account that they are inhabitants of a frontier zone and so should have some knowledge of how to read and write both Thai and Burmese (let us not forget that these children are all bilingual in Moken with either Thai or Myanmar - Burmese).
- School books written in Thai, Burmese and International Phonetic Alphabets, books with Moken tales and myths, as well as those that refer to their daily lives.
- A supple and open teaching method, closely adhering to their own way of life and environment; an ethnic and poly-cultural school, with a school program that takes into account that the children will be taught by someone speaking their own language, who is versed in their traditional way of life and culture, and will regard the value of this as the first element of knowledge.

@@@

11. The Irrawaddy, "Thirty-Seven Killed At Sea" Naw Seng, Feb. 17, 2004.

A boat accident near the Mergui Archipelago in southern Burma killed 37 passengers early yesterday morning. The boat was en route to a Salone, or sea gypsy, festival organized by Burma's tourism authority.

The boat sank in an undisclosed location in the Andaman Sea near Lampi Island, about 400 miles southeast of Rangoon. It departed from Bokpyin, a mainland town in Tenasserim Division inhabited by Burmese.

U Shein, a Burmese villager from Bokpyin, told The Irrawaddy via mobile telephone that nine of the 46 people on board the sunken vessel were rescued. The rest are missing and assumed dead. He said the majority of the passengers were women and children.

The Salone Festival began on Feb 14 and closed today. It was held at Makyone Galet village on Bocho Island, near the accident site.

Mergui Archipelago is comprised of over 800 islands inhabited only by Salone, or sea gypsies. The

residents live on boats during dry season and remain on land during rainy season. Salone practice centuries-old fishing and boat building techniques and live only along Burma's Andaman coast.

Sea gypsies were rounded up by Burmese soldiers who forced them to perform for tourists, said U Shein.

Burma's Hotels and Tourism Ministry and local tour companies, including Shambhala Tours Co, Ltd, organized the festival, which aimed to attract international tourists and operators of marine eco-tourism trips to the Mergui Archipelago. A staff member of Shambhala Tours said it brought 83 foreigners to the festival via Rangoon and Ranong, a Thai town near the Burma border.

Sea gypsies were rounded up and detained on designated islands by Burmese soldiers who forced them to perform for tourists, said U Shein. Burmese from elsewhere on the Andaman Coast, such as those killed in the boating accident, were told by authorities to attend the festival to bolster audience numbers, he added.

Over 250 Burmese and foreigners were aboard a Chindwin cruise liner, which visited the festival on Feb 14 as part of a tourism promotion by the Hotels and Tourism Ministry, according to the state-run newspaper The New Light of Myanmar.

@@@

12. Democratic Voice of Burma News, "SPDC Rounding Up Sea Gypsies For Show" Feb. 11, 2004.

The local authorities of Burma's military junta, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) are rounding up and arresting sea gypsies, the Salons (Mokens) in southern Burma to make them partake in a sea gypsy festival starting on 14 February.

On 9 February, 12 Salons escaped from their native islands in Kawthaung Township, Tennesserim Division and fled to nearby Ranong in Thailand.

According to them, the Burmese authorities are arresting and detaining 5 young Salons on each island and force them to perform traditional dances for tourists. The Salon women were also treated with disrespect by the soldiers who arrested them.

According to the latest report, the Thai authorities have sent the escaped Salons back into Burma waters on 10 February and they are in danger of being arrested and tortured by Burmese authorities.

@@@

13. DPS Map website, "Festivals in Myanmar: Sea Gypsy Festival (Salone Festival)" Feb. 2004. (<http://www.dpsmap.com/festival/february.htm>)

In February:
Sea Gypsy Festival (Salone Festival)

Salone Festival will be held from 14th to 17th February 2004 at Makyone Galet Village on Bocho Island near Lampi Island with the following objectives.

- (a) To develop and promote Myeik Archipelago as a Tour destination.
- (b) To promote tourism in acquaintance with Salone and Myeik Archipelago as one of the tourism

attractions for International Market.

(c) To realize the actual situation of peace & tranquility in Myanmar.

To be more convenient and attractive for the International visitors, Ministry of Hotels & Tourism in co-operation with local authorities, relevant departments, local tour operators and travel agents will organize this as a tour package.

Salones and Mergui Archipelago

Myeik (Mergui) Archipelago, located in southernmost part of Myanmar (Burma), comprises over 800 beautiful islands. Due to its virtual isolation, the islands and surrounding seas are alive with an amazing diversity of flora and fauna.

The only human inhabitants in the area are sea gypsies, namely Salone in Myanmar. They live on boats during dry season and remain on land during rainy season. They still practice the same fishing and boat building techniques used for generation.

Being affectionate to sea, much skillful in swimming and diving, their ways of life and customs are so characteristic that traditional festival will be launched intending to attract international tourists as well as to operate marine eco-tourism around the islands in Myeik Archipelago.

Sea Gypsies

Among Myeik Archipelago many interesting features is a small village on the Bo Cho Island south of the Lampi Island. Culturally {and ethnically separate from the others, the Salone exists in only a few isolated areas along the Myanmar Andaman Coast. These seafaring people -- often referred to as sea gypsies live a spartan existence, shunning most of the trappings of modern society in favor of time-honored traditions. A shy and reserved people, most depend on the sea for their livelihood. Although fishing has always been their main priority, selling seashells to tourists is increasingly common. If logistics allow (a fairly high tide is needed to bring a dinghy ashore here), a visit to these villages offers a glimpse into a unique culture. As you wander amid the huts and boats, remember that you are a guest in someone else's home and be respectful of your hosts' right to privacy. The villages may be closed to visitors during the full moon in March, when the Salone hold ceremonies involving ancestor worship.

In February NEW!!! Sea Gypsies Festival (Salone Festival) Venue - Mergui Archipelago

@@@

14. Sydney Morning Herald, "Burma's Gypsies of the Sea" Jeni Harvie, Jan. 29, 2004.

ABC, 10pm

This beautiful, gentle documentary, filmed off the southern coast of Burma in the Megui Archipelago, gives the viewer a rare insight into the lives of the seafaring Moken nomads who "are at one with the water that gives them life". They live on wooden boats, moving between the 800 islands that make up the archipelago and "live and die by what the sea gives and takes".

From the start, we are made aware of their fragile existence and dwindling numbers. The Burmese Government is trying to bring them within the auspices of its military regime, the loggers are developing an appetite for the area's untapped resources and fishermen are encroaching on their traditional grounds. The modern world is closing in and the future is very uncertain. "Can these determined

nomads resist the terrible gifts of civilisation?” asks the voice-over.

Filmmakers Klaus Reisinger and Frederique Lengaigne have spent many months with one of the few clans still roaming the sea, reasoning “we want to document this life before it ceases to exist”.

For an hour, we follow the lives of this elusive tribe, joining their hunting expeditions above and below water, sharing their pain as one of their number becomes ill and witnessing their centuries-old customs and traditions. They invoke the spirits’ help in healing ceremonies, boat launchings, even to ensure their survival in such precarious times.

We make brief visits to Moken communities that have been forced by the government to settle onshore and discover how contact with civilisation is destroying them, particularly the effects of heroin. The traditional ways have disappeared in these villages as the people are overwhelmed by drugs and feelings of desperation.

The freedom and independence of those still roaming the seas is under threat and their survival is precarious: “It seems that time is not on the Mokens’ side. These are special people - not sailing for the future, not coveting what others have ... they continue to resist modern life, materialism and tyranny ... We don’t know what will happen to them.”

@@@

15. Myanmar News website, “Concert to Benefit Salone (Sea Gypsy) People” Jan. 19 - 25, 2004.

The first music concert to raise funds for sustainable development and tourism in the southern part of Myanmar will be held at Yangon’s Mya Yeik Nyo Hotel on January 31.

The main purpose of the concert is to provide necessary infrastructure to benefit the residents of Salone villages, the ethnic group also known as Sea Gypsies.

Twenty well-known vocalists and music groups - including Ringo, Graham, R. Zarni, Phyo Gyi, Htoo-L-Linn, Htun Eindra Bo and Tin Zar Maw - will perform.

The development of tourism also helps raise the living standards of local people by offering more job opportunities.

The four-day Salone Traditional Festival begins on February 14 at Ma-kyone-galet village on Bo Cho Island, one of about 500 islands that comprise the Myeik Archipelago.

@@@

16. Democratic Voice of Burma News, “Burmese Sea-Gypsies Forced to Live on Land for Tourists” Jan. 14, 2004.

General Khin Nyunt, the Prime Minister of Burma’s military junta, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) visited and ‘inspected’ Salon sea-gypsy villages on 12 January for the benefits of tourists.

The visit was arranged before the coming Salon sea-gypsy festival which many foreign tourists are expected to turn up.

Burmese soldiers from local naval bases forced the Salons, who normally live on boats in the deep sea, to live on land in 'human zoos' so that the junta could charge tourists money.

The Salons (generally known as Mokens) who were arrested and forced to give up life on sea were sent to Nyaughwi, Lanpi, Kyuntale and Phila islands.

They are finding it hard to survive on land as they have neither have the experience of foraging in the jungles nor settling down on land.

@@@

17. The Greater Phuket Magazine, "Endangered Idyll?" Collin Piprell, October(?) 2003.
(http://www.phuketmagazine.com/html/PM%20Issues/Vol.14.7/Endangered_Idyll.htm)

Andaman sea gypsies live, work and play on the water but is this ancient way of life now at risk?

Ever-changing constellations of islands recede into the distance ahead as we sail up the Burmese coast from Kawthaung, the southern-most town in Myanmar. Deserted white-sand beaches backed by prime rain forest line the shores, and mountain peaks on the larger islands beckon from many miles away. We've cruised most of the day without spotting another vessel.

Then we encounter a scene out of some Hollywood fantasy. Snugged in between a couple of uninhabited isles lie a congregation of exotic wooden boats, each raggedly festooned with lines and pennants and teeming with men, women, children and dogs. And there's more to come. Some miles off the nearest island, the next day, we spot a train of 14 dugout canoes full of women and girls in tow behind one of the same odd-looking wooden houseboats. A week later, off yet another island, we make way for a fleet of dugouts streaming back to a be-pennanted mother boat with the afternoon's catch, where bare-breasted women have been diving from their canoes for a variety of marine organisms, including shellfish, crabs, shrimp and sea cucumbers. On the tidal flats in front of a temporary encampment, young boys are spearing stingrays with tridents longer than themselves. A few women and children dig sand worms along the waterline.

There's a dreamlike quality to cruising this archipelago. These scenes have the flavour of other times and other worlds. And 100 years ago the sense of mystery and wonder was much the same:

"Of all that has happened amongst their islands^ since men first came to live and move amongst them, there is no record, and there never will be any now Their main, and it would seem their earliest, human interest centres in the fast-dying colony of the Salon, which has made these islands its last refuge. When or whence they came, one can only guess; and whether they had any human predecessors it is difficult even to conjecture. But it is probable that they are an extremely ancient people, kindred of that aboriginal stock which peopled the mainland before the advent of the Htai."

-- V. C. Scott O'Connor (1904)

O'Connor, a late 19th-century British observer, referred to the indigenous people of Burma's Mergui Archipelago as "Salons". Indeed, these sea nomads have been variously described as Moken, Mokken, Mawken, Selon, Selong, Selung, Salon and Salong. English-speakers, often assimilating them to related but distinct groups to the south, tend to call them Sea Gypsies. (The more southerly peoples, however, are not Moken, but rather the related Moklen and Urak Lawoi peoples who have been more strongly influenced by Buddhism, Islam and mainstream societies. In Thailand, all three

groups are collectively known as chao le or chao nam, “sea people” or “water people”, respectively. About 2,500 Moklen, whose language is very similar to Moken, have abandoned the nomadic life to live on the coasts of Phang Nga and Phuket. About 4,500 Urak Lawoi live on Phuket as well as along the coastlines and islands of Krabi and Saturn.)

In view of their small numbers and apparent lack of “vitality”, European commentators, including O’Connor, quoted above, were already predicting the imminent extinction of the Mokens back in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today, 100 years later, many would still describe the culture as “fast dying”. And little more is known of its origins or how long this people has lived among these islands.

Probably the first book on the Moken was *The Selungs*, by John Anderson, a British doctor who visited the Archipelago in 1881-82. Before the 19th century, however, little was recorded about these people, although references to simple non-Muslim boat people along the Trang-Mergui coastline may be found as far back as the 16th century. The archipelago itself was at various times part of Siam, Burma and the British Empire. Still, historical information about these islands remains scant. For one thing, even though the town of Mergui was long an important trading hub and, later, a regional pearling centre, most travellers were reluctant to visit the more southerly islands, legendary haunt of pirates and crocodiles. Outsiders’ histories of the area and its people thus tend to be fragmentary, largely anecdotal. The Moken themselves have no written history, and their myths and legends are only poorly recorded and understood.

Some assume that they were originally an offshoot of the Veddas, the aboriginal inhabitants of India. There are those among the Moken themselves who suggest they made their way from the Nicobar Islands, whether directly or else by island-hopping up through the Andaman Islands and then along the southwest coast of Myanmar. (Turn-of-the-century encyclopaedias did describe the “Selungs” as inhabiting both the Mergui Archipelago and the Nicobars.) Most experts, however, believe they migrated up the coast from the Riaw-Ringga Archipelago, south of Singapore.

The Moken are related in uncertain ways to other groups of sea nomads inhabiting the waters of the Malay Peninsula. The Mergui Archipelago population, however, is that least affected by mainstream societies. Most speak only Malay and Moken, an Austronesian language, together with a few words of Burmese or Thai. And these “Burmese” Moken are the only group of sea nomads, among an estimated total of 20,000, who remain largely uninfluenced by Islam or Buddhism.

The groups farther south have settled in coastal villages, for the most part. The Moken, on the other hand, have long been nomadic hunter-gatherers whose range is mainly limited to the littoral zones the shorelines, together with their contiguous marine and forest shallows of some of the more than 800 islands of the Mergui Archipelago, which extend hundreds of miles up Myanmar’s southern coast. A lesser number inhabit the Surin Islands and Phuket, in Thailand. Moken communities are organized on kinship groups exogamous extended families based around flotillas of six-eight boats, each fleet having its own loose territory. Although estimates vary given the difficulty of counting such a shy people dispersed over such a broad and largely wild area 2,000-3,000 Moken with somewhere between 200 and 500 boats still maintain a semi-nomadic lifestyle in the Mergui Archipelago, a few still travelling back and forth across the border in their boats to visit kindred communities in Thailand.

These people recognize two main seasons -- the wet May-October southwest monsoon, and the dry October-May northeast monsoon. Traditionally, families spend six-eight months aboard their distinctive wooden boats. They stay ashore only in the wet and blustery southwest monsoon. In the latter season,

you might sail around a point of land and into a protected cove where you find yourself confronted with a scene from another age. And the Moken are as startled to encounter you as you are them. The boats have motors instead of sails, and plastic oil bottles serve as marker buoys; otherwise, the scene could as easily be from 100, even 200 years ago. An animist totem pole stands in the centre of the stilted and thatched village of 20-30 dwellings, and work is proceeding on the dugout keel of a traditional houseboat. In the wet season, they occupy their time with boat maintenance and construction, hunting wild pigs and other small game, gathering fruit and vegetables and digging for wild yams.

Historically, the Moken have sought home ranges both rich in littoral resources and remote from other cultures. Eighty-odd years ago, one British observer reported that the islands were very seldom visited, and those who did go there tended to be Christian missionaries or government officials: "The former want taxes and the latter want to convert them; and the [Moken] is very timid, and avoids both."

But today the winds of change are blowing in earnest. Sights such as the rainy season village described above are only rarely encountered. In the interests of bureaucratic efficiency and political security, the nomads are being encouraged to give up their nomadic ways and settle in easily administered areas. The Burmese government has established a permanent settlement on Pu Nala, just south of Lampi Island. As you round the north end of the island, you sight a small pagoda on a grassy hill. Back of the beach stands a coconut grove and several dozen atap huts on stilts. High-prowed wooden longtail fishing boats lie at rest along the waterline. Farther up, on the sand, several of the distinctive traditional live-aboard Moken vessels, weathered and to all appearances derelict, sit high and dry. (Burman fishing boats are also in evidence, for a number of Burmese have settled here as well.) The Myanmar government has built the pagoda, a monastery, school and even a small museum to cater for tourists. Every two months, it also supplies the village with essentials which, together with the educational facilities, provide incentive for Moken families to relocate. Shops offer everything from biscuits to cigarettes and beer; though you still find sea cucumbers, delicacies for trade in Ranong or with visiting dealers from Mergui Town, drying over charcoal fires in the main street.

The trade-off, of course, is exposure to Burman and other cultures, Buddhist assaults on their traditionally animistic beliefs, and loss of at least part of that indigenous knowledge that allowed them, on the one hand, to brave the elements for eight months of the year aboard their famously seaworthy boats, and, on the other, enabled them to survive in a sustainable relationship with the littoral ecosystem.

The fringing reefs of the Mergui Archipelago are still rich in marine life. The forest remains home to all sorts of wildlife. Early in the past century, the Mergui Gazetteer, for example, listed the following animals for the district: gibbons, flying lemur, jungle-dog, flying fox, civet, tiger, leopard, bear, elephant, boar, mouse-deer, sambhar, barking deer, bison, wild cow, tapir, rhinoceros (single- and double-horned), turtle, python and cobra. Virtually all of these species still inhabit these islands, although some are now threatened with extinction.

What is perhaps an even more profound tragedy, however, goes relatively unremarked. The indigenous sea nomad culture -- as rare and as endangered a phenomenon as any animal species in the region -- may truly be dying at last.

@@@

18. Science News, "Children of Sea See Clearly Underwater" J. Travis, May 17, 2003.

For hundreds of years, small nomadic tribes called sea gypsies have lived among the islands of Southeast Asia, earning fame for their swimming and diving skills. Sea-gypsy children regularly collect food such as clams and sea cucumbers off the ocean floor. A research team studying one sea-gypsy tribe has now found that its children have better-than-normal underwater vision because their eyes adapt to the liquid environment.

While some animals such as frogs can see equally well on land and in water, the human eye has evolved to work best in air. Underwater, its focusing capability significantly deteriorates. That's why people typically need goggles to see clearly when diving.

Intrigued by tales from a colleague who had observed the food-collecting prowess of sea-gypsy children, vision researcher Anna Gislen of Lund University in Sweden decided to investigate how such kids can pick out small objects while "diving without goggles. Since many sea-gypsy tribes live on boats in remote areas and dislike strangers, Gislen and her colleagues had to find a tribe willing to be studied. The researchers eventually worked with the Moken, a tribe living in the archipelago along the west coasts of Burma and Thailand.

Initially, the researchers compared the underwater vision of 6 Moken children with that of 28 European children visiting the region. In eye exams conducted in local waters, the sea-gypsy kids had superior resolving power and better perception of contrast, Gislen's team reports in the May 13 Current Biology. Using an infrared video camera to film the eyes of both groups of children underwater, the investigators found that Moken kids constrict their pupils while European children don't. And the sea-gypsy children could also change their visual focus -- in what researchers call accommodation--more than the European kids typically could.

"The small pupil and the accommodation both would serve to increase visual acuity, says David Guyton of Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions in Baltimore. Despite this improvement, the underwater vision of the sea-gypsy children is still impaired compared with their above-water eyesight, he adds.

Since sea-gypsy tribes have depended on the ocean for hundreds of years, it's possible that the Moken children have inherited genetic variations that enable them to see more clearly underwater, the researchers note. Or it may simply be that with regular diving, the eye learns to adapt to the underwater environment.

"My guess is that it's learning," says Gislen. She and her colleagues have preliminary evidence that with training, European children can develop better underwater vision in a few months. They still don't match the sea-gypsy children, who spend years diving for food, Gislen notes.

@@@

19. Blue magazine, "Burma: Drifting with sea gypsies" Bruce Northam, May 2002.K
(<http://www.americandetour.com/home.html>)

Excerpts:

###

The Moken belong to no country, they carry no identification papers, and they speak their own language. In the 1990s, the Burmese and Thai governments started an effort to permanently "resettle"

these wayfarers on solid ground, so they can be present and accounted for, so children can attend school. With no official count, locals estimate that 1,000 Moken live a traditional life on Burmese waters. During their seven-month stretch at sea, the gypsies drift in groups of at least six boats, each vessel housing one family, usually of three generations. They wed young, and the community builds couples a boat, wherein the newlyweds can start their own family. Women cook over an on-board fire, even when moored near a beach. The sea is the children's playground. Babysitting isn't an issue.

The floating villages migrate between temporary moorings alongside beaches, in lagoons, and near the leeward edges of islands, where the Moken hunt sea turtles and collect sand worms, shellfish, and clams for food. Using traps, nets and spears they catch an amazing number of species.

Typically, these houseboaters have no concept of rent or "meet you in three days." They have no reason to make (or keep) appointments. Like their mythical kin, the sea turtles, often existing between water and land in tidal flats, the animistic Moken appease the water spirits with ceremonial flags, spirit poles, and ancestral effigies.

Exploring Mergui by trimaran, my friend Peter and I stop often to kayak, entering caves, gliding through mangroves, and looking for the Moken. It has taken us days to find these elusive people who are born, live and die at sea. On land, when we approached them, the invitation to exchange confidences evaporated, but approaching our first seagoing Moken in a kayak seemed to lend us a bit of credibility. My friend and I paddle up to a band of families musing in dugout canoes. Sitting with paddles across their knees, they wait for the tide to go out.

A Moken woman, impossibly beautiful with broad cheeks and shiny long black hair and sitting alone in a small boat, smiles to reveal teeth stained dark red with betel nut. "How's the fishing?" I ask the woman. Our guide, Tham (pronounced "Tom"), translates my question into Burmese, and an elderly man then translates that into Moken. "Fish scared away -- now over there," nods the woman, paddling in place. I turn to my friend to jest about their seabound life being one way to avoid paying rent. When Tham inordinately translates the quip, the grandfather glances our way, winces with gentle, searching eyes, and speaks. Tham says something lost or found in translation: "Don't rent space in your head to just anyone."

###

Then, a kabang approached, smoke rising from the stove. The nose of the boat pulled up to my kayak and a wiry man emerged from beneath the thatched roof with a curious glance -- a quiet exchange ending with a smile. Tham looked at me but said nothing.

This seagoing tribe granted a simple interaction that shows there is more binding us than separating us. We were, after all, floating. And even in western culture, disrespect for the earth stirs spirits that bring sickness, strife and dismay.

A gesture is made. Tham translates it as a beckoning for peace. The man invited me to board the kabang. The one-room interior resembled a liveaboard vessel belonging to a boat mechanic -- basic but prepared.

Half of all Americans live within 50 miles of their birthplace. Most Moken live right on it. The kabang features a canoelike carved hull, wood and bamboo pegs, rattan rope, and thatched palm leaves for roof and sails. Resembling a cartoon depiction of Noah's ark, the boat is as versatile as a studio apartment, with many items like tables doing double duty. A hammock and fishing nets blend in with

cooking utensils. I point to various items -- stove, bed, fishing spear -- and mime their uses. Each guess receives nods and smiles. There is a sturdy feel to the boat, warmth emanates from wood and family. Open on both ends, enough light streams in to see a grin.

The ingenious rigs, balanced and light for their 20- to 40-foot length, are designed to safely carry a family of up to eight through vicious Indian Ocean storms. Though they look rustic, the naval technology of traditional kabangs has mystified sea traders, pirates and anthropologists through the centuries. Their gypsy creed explains how a detached nomadic tribe mastered boat building using techniques that metaphorically link culture and design: They travel by the stars.

Moken philosophy focuses on pride in the face of scarcity. Kabangs symbolize the ownership of nothing -- a formalized "letting go." Identical scroll designs on the bow and stern illustrate the mouth-to-exit digestive process that holds onto nothing permanently. In another era, this sapient design announced to pirates, "We have nothing to steal." Freedom dictated by the whims of the sea.

Pete and I reflect on how possessions often enslave people -- but this dilemma must be easier to manage when you spend so much time at sea on a small craft with eight relatives. When the man (who is both father and son in this room) showing us around cottoned on to our conversation, he chimed in: "Sometimes you have \$10 and something's waiting for you that costs \$20... sometimes you have \$1 and you can do whatever you want."

Water World

Some anthropologists think the Moken are descended from peoples who migrated from Mongolia, later moving down Burma's northeastern Shan states. Although their origins remain obscure, the Moken may be the last link to the indigenous Southeast Asians who survived the Ice Age by taking to boats 10,000 years ago, when the region was submerged in 300 feet of water. Why did they stay offshore? One theory is, they didn't want to convert to Islam, which spread into the region in the 14th century. In the last 200 years, these Moken's "country" has changed hands several times -- been ruled by different governments and different religions, been closed to outsiders and opened and closed again. Through it all, the Moken culture has hung on by a thread.

However, the Moken are by no means a people that time forgot. Moken songs and folk tales recall how they became sea cucumber and pearl divers. When the Chinese began sailing through, these sea nomads quickly learned to dive for pearls and sea cucumbers to trade with the foreigners. Today the Moken swim deep into submerged caves harvesting sea cucumbers for export to China and Japan. Not having modern scuba gear, they dive up to 20 meters equipped with only a mask, fins and a hosepipe acting as a super long snorkel. Today, the pull toward commercial fishing and Buddhism is taking hold.

They prefer an insular life but many Moken are settling in permanent villages built by the government. Whether the Moken want to live on land is a difficult question to answer. A "land village" on the southern tip of Lampi Island is allegedly a Moken resettlement project developed to homogenize them with the rest of Burma. A few mainland fishing families have also moved in.

Hopefully the Moken who still live traditionally off the coast of Burma won't go the way of their cousins in neighboring Thailand. For them, the modern world means living a life of poverty (by land standards) eked out by selling souvenirs to tourists.

Maintaining their way of life and creeds has been and seemingly always will be a matter of alien arrival and their flight to the sea. The Moken's strong cultural identity developed on the water is

being forced to adapt to new environments -- rows of thatched huts elevated on stilts driven into the mud. Still, they seldom venture any distance inland from the beach. Boat dwellers don't have much business on land.

Though they can leave these permanent villages when they please, the temptation to resettle on land is challenging the Moken's rootlessness -- yet their traditional ways are not really rootless. The family is tightly connected and activities revolve around the boat, just as western families' revolve around the ranch house, chalet or high-rise apartment. Their homes just happen to move. Despite living on the move, they live connected: connected to the water, connected to the stars, connected to the seasons, and connected to each other.

Legacy

As the world changes around them, the Moken are slowly disappearing. But, for as long as they last, they seem to be sublimely impervious to the despair occurring in the rest of world. Many cultures like theirs persist under the gun, seemingly impossibly, because genetically they don't know when to quit. In this lonely dockside corner of Asia, knotty vitality breathes, even though on the fringe of a country at war with itself. Optimists and pessimists are both correct about Burma -- pick your reality. As the kabang floats away, a teenager on board turns around and lends one more Moken smile.

@@@

20. Project Maje, "Sea Gypsies Again!" Summary of Burma-relevant sections of Sebastian Hope's *Outcasts of the Islands* [edited e-mail] August 30, 2001.

Outcasts of the Islands: The Sea Gypsies of South East Asia by Sebastian Hope, published by Harper Collins UK.

The author is a British journalist who has travelled around looking for the remaining "Sea Gypsy" boat-dwellers, mostly near Sabah; also off Sumatra and Mindanao. In the midst of that, he has one short chapter on his search for the Moken/Salong in Thailand/Burma.

Hope goes to Phuket (Thailand) to start with. Then he goes to the scuba tour outfit South East Asia Liveboards (SEAL), which is run by a British family. He meets a German travel writer, Milda Drucke, who writes about Sea Gypsies and has just gone to see them on a (SEAL) kayak tour on the Burma side. Hope mentions that SEAL was "the first company to receive a licence from the Burmese authorities to take their yachts into the Mergui Archipelago." He mentions a French anthropologist named Pierre Ivanoff who went illegally from Thailand to Burma to study the Salongs there and died there in 1973; and that his son Jacques Ivanoff continues his work and is "the foremost expert on the Moken.

"The owner of SEAL "explained the arrangements they had to make with the(Burmese) authorities to be allowed access: the permit that had to be cleared by the district military governor; the government guide that had to accompany visitors at all times; not to mention the unofficial courtesies expected by right."

Hope goes to Ranong and then in SEAL's Zodiac over to Kawthaung. They pass by the Andaman Club island casino. At the Skol Bar in Kawthaung, they meet with Tin Moe Thaung, "the nice one" of local Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT), and his assistant "Aun." They go "to a karaoke bar together and Tin Moe Thaung offers a trip to a brothel which meets with Hope's "abrupt refusal."

The next morning, Hope meets with “various officials” mostly from MTT, apparently. Aun looks at Hope’s map and points out where the “Mogen” might be found, and comments that they might be of Mon origin, like him. The islands he points out turn out to be mostly off-limits: St. Lukes Island (Navy base), Loughborough (Army), another (pearl farm), “there Navy, there Army, there Navy again...” Then, the manager of the hotel was able to tell me about the attempt the local government had made at settling the ‘Selon’ of St. Matthew’s Island in a stilted suburb of Kawthaung; one night the whole group left in their boats and had not come back.

“Tin Moe Naing reappears and suggests that Hope accompany Jacques Ivanoff on an upcoming trip in a charter boat, The Moken Queen. Rather than wait for Ivanoff, Hope decides to go on a trip with the SEAL guys instead. He gets to help out on a tour for 10 American kayakers who paddle 100 miles from Lampi to Mergui, camping (on islands?) along the way. No Salong sightings en route to Mergui. Then, on the way back from Mergui, Hope and the SEAL crew see some Moken boats near Bentinck Island. The Mokens try to hide from them but they can’t. They are “all raggedly dressed.” They don’t speak Malay (which Hope does) and “...our government guide tried out their Burmese. He received only one syllable answers.” Hope describes their traditional wooden boats, and mentions that he “took more photographs of the mistrustful faces” and feels bad about it. (The book contains one color photo of two of the boats.)

Hope mentions that Chinese traders bring rice and opium to the Mokens. SEAL gives him a visit to what they call the “Sea Gypsy Village” in their brochure, a poor village on Bo Cho Island (Burma) across a narrow strait from Lampi. “a string of damp huts... Graham (of SEAL) pointed out where the original Moken monsoon camp had been, but three years ago the local government had decided to ameliorate their lot by building them houses. A noble idea, but as soon as the monsoon was over, the Moken fleet put out for the season. When they returned, they found that Burmese fishermen had moved into the village. They were worse off than before, marginalised in their own place and compelled, if they wanted to retain a share in the island’s resources, to abandon the key element of their identity. Those that stayed had been assimilated into the permanent settlement, which had gained a community leader, a retired Burmese colonel who had become a monk. He lived in the big house under the hill.

“Hope describes the shabby village (“impermanent” looking huts), boats; nobody can speak Malay. He is “hailed in English by a man with a rifle wearing what had once been a uniform.” He mentions that the retired colonel had told Graham he’d become a monk because “he had seen too much killing.”

Back on the Thai side, Hope goes looking for Mokens at Ko Lao, a mangrove area near Ranong’s estuary. (The book has a color picture from Ko Lao.) The people of the village there seem shy or afraid to him. He learns that they had been living there for ten years, previously having been living on boats “between the Surin group and St. Matthew’s Island, right on the Thai/Burmese border. He asks an old woman (who speaks Malay) why they left but she “could not say for certain. It seemed that the attitude of the Burmese authorities towards the Moken had changed, providing the original motive, but the reason for the change was also unclear. It is not unheard of for the Burmese to persecute their own citizenry, but how did it come to be the Moken’s turn? It is hard to imagine the activities of a reclusive people warranting military attention, but I had the impression there was something she did not want to tell me.

“Then he goes onto a Moken boat that pulls in there, and on it meets a Moken fisherman from Ko Lipe who is going fishing in Burmese waters. He tells Hope he can’t come along: “It would be dangerous for you. It is dangerous for us.’ ‘Pirates?’ ‘No, the navy. They shoot at us sometimes.’ But why? Why would they waste ammunition on a boat like this?” Hope reveals that it is because the Mokens use a

compressor and homemade bombs to fish with, to explain why.

Still in Thailand, Hope visits the village of Pulau Pingai (Ko Sin Hai) and the local headman tells him that fishermen from there used to fish in Burmese waters and trade in Kawthaung, "but recently three young fishermen had been arrested by the Burmese navy for illegal entry. "Despite payment of fines and bribes, they were still in jail.

Hope finds a Moken settlement at Pulau Pingai and meets a fisherman whose arm had been blown off by his own fish-bomb. The fisherman also has a shattered knee: "A bullet from a Burmese rifle had smashed through it." He still fished in Burmese waters.

@@@

21. The Baltimore Sun, "Excursion to Burma" Frank Langfitt, July 10, 2001.
(<http://www.baltimoresun.com/travel/sns-myanmar-burma.story?coll=sns-travel-headlines>)

Excerpt:

###

That afternoon, we made our way toward the Mergui's only settlement, a village of about 400 sea gypsies and 200 Burmese fishermen who live in stilt houses along a beach. The sea gypsies, known as the Moken, are Southeast Asian nomads who speak their own language and travel from island to island in flotillas. They collect seashells, hunt sea turtles and seem to do little else. First encountered by the British in 1826, they had fiercely resisted integration. The Burmese corralled them into a government-built village six years ago.

Many of the gypsies, whose faces are dark from the sun and whose teeth are yellowed from a lifetime without fluoride, seemed friendly. Young mothers held their children up for us to see as we strolled past their homes. Others, though, exuded the sort of toughness one might expect from a life spent largely on the sea. Some young women walked around with cheroots -- cigars -- sticking out of their mouths.

It was hard to know if the sea gypsies liked their new, sedentary life, because we couldn't speak their language. We visited a 62-year-old monk, who lived on a hill above the town and spoke Burmese, the country's dominant tongue with an alphabet comprised of various circular and horseshoe-shaped letters. We gave him several cans of Coke and Sprite -- valuable commodities when the nearest cold soda is at least 10 hours away by boat. Then we sat down on rattan mats and asked questions as Tom translated.

The monk said the sea gypsies found the island hard to farm and complained about the lack of food. But they also thought the village safer than the open sea. Two weeks earlier, a sea gypsy had been gunned down when robbers attacked his boat and stole his engine.

@@@

22. Sea Kayaker Magazine, "Paddling Myanmar's Mergui Archipelago in Search of the Sea Gypsies" Joel Kramer, June 2000.

Excerpt. Full article can be accessed through (<http://caa.pair.com/press-coverage/>)

###

As we rounded a rocky shoal, the distinct shape of the thatched roof of a hut came into view, rising and falling in the deep blue swells. Beyond the floating hut was a shallow reef where a half dozen dugout canoes of various sizes were being paddled by women. We knew at once that we had finally stumbled upon a band of sea gypsies.

These people live like no others on earth. They don't plant coconut trees or grow greens in gardens on land and amazingly, they don't fish. They are harvesters, living afloat over their "gardens" where each day they wait patiently to be lowered to their food sources of crustaceans and other sea creatures that are exposed by the out going tide. We had happened upon them just as they were beginning to harvest the day's catch.

We watched from our kayaks as the women worked feverishly, each with her own task, to take full advantage of the narrow window of opportunity with the sinking tide. We paddled closer to a group of gatherers and asked Aung Kyi to greet them for us. The women answered Aung Kyi's questions with single words or a head nod, and acknowledged Jeremy and I with several quick glances and a few shy smiles as they went about their work.

An older woman with a weathered face stood with graceful balance in the middle of one of the dugouts as three young women crouched at the front of the craft. When the elder put her weight into the oars crisscrossed in front of her, the canoe glided quickly across the surface. Lifting the carved paddle blades free from the water, she leaned back, setting up for another push. She paddled through the swells to within a few feet of the top of a boulder exposed by the tide, where the three younger women scampered out onto the rock. There, they began striking the mass of rock oysters with stones and collecting the tiny portions of meat into baskets with astonishing speed and efficiency.

Nearby, a man's legs sprang up into the air as he disappeared beneath the surface. He remained underwater for so long that if Jeremy or I had done so, it would have drowned us twice over. The woman who stood at the oars of their canoe looked unconcerned. After what had to be over four minutes, He finally emerged from the deeper regions of their "garden" with a couple of sea cucumbers stuck to the end of a bamboo spear.

As the crabs, oysters, sea cucumbers, sea worms and other food stuffs were collected, the dugouts began too make runs to the main boat for unloading. Smoke rose from the thatched roof of the boat, where several women and children were busy cooking the harvested food over a fire. The man at the stern kept a close watch over where the boat was drifting along the rocky shoreline.

We observed the families for a couple of hours. Finally, with the setting sun and rising tide, activities slowed. Some of the couples stayed aboard their dugouts to eat their portion of the meal given to them by the cooks on the main boat. We paddled up to the main boat. With the day's work done, the sea gypsies finally took the time to contemplate the two fascinated kayakers and their guide. Aung Kyi tried to speak with one of the men who knew some Burmese. Their mannerisms were reserved and shy. They didn't ask us questions, like Burmese fishermen had done when we stopped for a visit earlier in our trip. They answered our questions in as few words as possible. "Where are you going" we asked. "Wherever" was the man's reply. As I gazed into the weathered faces of these sea wanderers, I sensed a lifetime of experience that made me feel like a greenhorn. In their presence, everything seemed turned around-as though the water was really the land and the land was really the water. For them, the water is their home, while the land is just a place to explore from time to time. With so much of our

world covered by water, maybe they have it right. For them it is a “water world” they hold secrets about the sea that the rest of us will never know. [the last sentence is as it appears online.]

@@@

23. The Daily Telegraph, “Travel: Between a Shark and a Hard place In Burma’s Mergui Archipelago” Gill Williams, July 24, 1999.

Excerpts. full article can be accessed through
(<http://caa.pair.com/press-coverage/>)

###

This may be the last place on Earth where man is not top of the food chain. Sharks give the orders in the waters surrounding the 804 islands that make up Burma’s Mergui or Myeik Archipelago. The islands are uninhabited, apart from the military (who style Burma “Myanmar”) and the handful of Moken sea gypsies who’ve escaped resettlement. Wildlife has evolved without interference, cut off from the rest of the world by the melting ice cap, then by malarial swamp and dense jungle.

###

A convoy of military boats appeared on the horizon, heading towards the harbour on Lord Loughborough Island. We were forbidden to approach, the few foreign vessels allowed into the region denied anchor anywhere within five miles of a base.

We even had a government minder on board, though Aung Kyi also worked as a galley hand. He was happiest making tea, good-natured when bullied by Nong - the fearsome Thai cook - and smiled shyly when spoken to. He didn’t even take offence when Nong threw him overboard as punishment for not providing better weather.

At three the next morning, I was woken by a spotlight shining through the porthole. I slipped up to the deck. Our skipper stood in the shadows watching Brendon and Aung Kyi row across to a fishing boat. “They’re Navy posing as fishermen,” he whispered. “At least they didn’t shoot first this time.” I heard voices across the water as Aung Kyi negotiated with the sailors.

It was always an uncomfortable surprise when the military appeared. Barefoot soldiers in raggedy uniforms carried rusting rocket launchers and Armalites provided by Germany in the days when Burma had Western allies. They were more bored and curious than aggressive, and could be fobbed off with a few cans of beer.

The poachers they’re paid to catch don’t get off lightly. Once, a crewmember made the mistake of reporting fishermen to the local military for dynamiting coral, little realising that setting off explosions along the reef is a capital offence. The fishermen would be executed. The punishment may be harsh but the danger to legitimate fishermen and divers from illegal dynamiting is also extreme. Brendon pulled me away from a clay pot I found during a dive in a shallow bay. He shook his head and mimed an explosion. “The poachers put dynamite in those pots,” he said. “You were about to pick up an unexploded bomb.”

The Moken use lines rather than fuses so their haul has little impact on the environment. They eat and sleep curled on the narrow planks of long-tail boats. Their ancestors were pearl divers and collected

swifts' nests from limestone cliffs. In Burma, the sea gypsies are being forced to live on shore.

Nong spotted their fishing boats as we sailed toward a deserted pinnacle called Western Rocky. "Gypsies," he shouted. "Now we'll be able to buy fresh fish." Our vessel was a welcome diversion for the crew on the fishing boat. They'd been at sea for three days and the hull was packed. Nong clambered on board and bargained, agreeing to pay 200 baht for a wahoo large enough to feed 20.

@@@

24. Project Maje, "Sailing Through Ethnicide" June 1999.

A little-known aspect of Burma tourism is the growth since 1997 of scuba diving tours to the Mergui Archipelago/Burma Banks area. Located off Burma's southern Tenasserim region, these islands in the Andaman Sea are described in websites and articles as "pristine," "breathtaking," "unspoilt and fascinating," etc.

The diving regions are reached on live-aboard sailing or motor yachts, usually leaving from the southern Burmese towns of Kawthaung or Mergui. Divers can observe a variety of marine life, including sharks, and sea-kayaking is now also offered in the area. Several scuba diving companies based on the Thai resort island of Phuket, plus some international tour agencies, offer this access to Burma's Andaman Sea islands. Prices range around US\$800 to \$2,200 for 5 to 8 day cruises.

These trips are advertised as "eco tours" or "eco cruises" and the exotic, untouched aspects of the area ("one of the last pristine environments on earth") are emphasized to attract "been everywhere" divers. Tour operators negotiated with the Burmese military for some three years for permission to run the tours, even though the Burma Banks dive site is in international waters, as the regime considers it all within the Myanmar Exclusive Economic zone.

"Adventure Travel" magazine [a Hong Kong publication], in an article titled "The Last Eden" touting the Mergui Archipelago tours, commented, "Amazingly, apart from a few 'sea gypsies,' there's not even an indigenous population," and "Not only have the islands escaped development by the modern world, they don't even have a significant indigenous population."

"Some of the tour company websites use the Sea Gypsies as one of the attractions of their cruises: 'The only humans you'll encounter are the Moken Sea Gypsies who roam the area in their small boats, largely the way their ancestors have done for centuries. They are very friendly and like to visit for a chat or to barter some fish... Where we have contact with the inhabitants, Moken sea gypsies, this is on a basis of mutual respect and in no way degrading for them.'" -- Faraway Sail & Dive Expeditions.

The small, endangered ethnic group referred to as "Sea Gypsies" or "Moken," the Saloun people, traditionally have lived on boats in the region and survived on ocean and island foods. According to a Thailand-based environmental expert, "Most of the Salouns in Burmese waters have been forced by Slorc to settle in permanent onshore camps, sort of like relocation settlements." Further sources have documented that at least 700 Saloun families were forcibly resettled on land since 1993, in the Burmese regime's effort to secure the Myanmar Exclusive Economic Zone for activities such as petroleum drilling and commercial fishing. Reportedly Saloun men who have fled persecution in Burma have wound up working on Thai fishing boats, and some of the Saloun women have been reduced to working as prostitutes in the notorious AIDS-deathtrap brothels of the Thai port of Ranong.

The effects of the dive tours on the remaining sea-roving Salouns are hard to determine. What is readily apparent is that the tours work to the advantage of the very regime which obliterated the traditional way of life for most Salouns and many other indigenous peoples of Burma. An "Outside" magazine endorsement of one of the tours added this caveat: "Burma's military dictatorship began heavily courting tourist dollars. Be forewarned that a percentage of your trip fee will go to support this regime."

The tour company websites mostly make only passing mention of a "port and customs entry fee" sometimes including visa, which is paid to the regime, varying between US\$90 and \$130. In one case, Fantasea Divers posts a page about its "Myanmar Entry Fee" (US\$130 in "new undamaged and unmarked bills," not including visa) specifying that it "is simply the amount that the Burmese authorities charge us for each passenger" and "The money is divided between the [Tourism] Ministry, Kawthoung district and the Southern Army Command. It does not go into some general's Swiss bank account." What is not noted on Fantasea's website (or any of the other dive outfits') is the well-documented extraordinary human rights abuse record of the Southern Army Command of Burma -- enormous levels of forced labor, village burnings, ethnic cleansing, rape, torture, and murder of civilians. Why giving even one dollar to the Southern Army Command's bullet fund or a mere colonel's local bank account would be justifiable for a pleasure cruise seems incomprehensible.

The tours usually are escorted by a guide/translator from the regime's Ministry of Tourism. A bizarre self-satisfying combination of individual concern for preservation of the environment with blissful ignorance of the wholesale human and ecological mayhem committed by Burma's regime seems to result. The scuba tourist's Burma impression is one of "world-class dive-sites," "awesome creatures," "incredible photo opportunities," and of course the "seafood and cocktail extravaganza."

In an article in "Nautica" (an "international yachting magazine") about one of these trips, the author mourns a dynamite killing of barracudas and other fish as "a massacre" and feels "sad and embittered" because of it, but is apparently oblivious to the massacres of indigenous people by Burma's military, taking place not far away in the Tenasserim area.

One Phuket-based dive tour company, Seacats, publicizes its refusal to run tours to Burmese waters due to safety concerns (citing disputes between Thai and Burmese naval vessels earlier this year) "without questioning the ethics of operating in Burma in the first place." It is up to Free Burma activists from around the world to raise those ethical questions to the operators of the scuba tours.

Below are the addresses, phone, fax, email and websites for several tour companies. Please contact some or all of them and express concerns about:

- * Their payments to Burma's military regime.
- * Their pleasure tourism in such an oppressed country.
- * The effects on indigenous people of the area.

The tour companies will probably reply that they are somehow helping to preserve the environment by making it a tourist dive site; but they should be made more sensitive about whether that justifies their relationship with Burma's brutal regime. Are they really doing something to save the environment or are they just pushing the thrill of a new region for scuba divers before such tourism is really appropriate? Your questions may make the tour operators reexamine the effects of their business.

[NOTE: The companies cited in the 1999 campaign alert are omitted in this 2004 Compendium, as some may have stopped their Burma tours. To obtain contact information for companies which still

run tours to Burma's Mergui Archipelago, do an internet search with keywords including "Mergui Archipelago" plus "tour."]

@@@

25. Outside Magazine, "The Trip-Finder, Burma: Sailing the Mergui Archipelago" Jan. 1998.

Outfitter: Asia Transpacific Journeys 800-642-2742
\$849, boat accommodations

The Route: Five days of cruising a vast uninhabited island rainforest aboard a 55-foot sailing trimaran equipped with sea kayaks and scuba equipment. Includes daily shore excursions to white-sand beaches.

When to go: Year-round
Difficulty: Easy

Travel advisory: Last year, Burma's military dictatorship began heavily courting tourist dollars. Be forewarned that a percentage of your trip fee will go to support this regime. High/low points:

- * Bartering for fresh albacore with families of sea gypsies, who live aboard the thatch-roofed boats that wander the islands.

- * Watching a python flop from an overhanging branch into your boat.

@@@

26. Le Courrier de l'UNESCO, Inalco website, "Where the Spirits Roam" Esteban T. Magannon, 1998. (http://www.unesco.org/courier/1998_08/uk/dossier/txt38.htm)

From Indonesia to the Philippines, the Orang Laut, Moken and Bajau oscillate between land and sea. For centuries the waves have shaped the lives of the Orang Laut, Moken and Bajau. How much longer can the traditions of these small Southeast Asian communities withstand the pressures of 'modern' development? For outsiders, they are the "sea nomads". Admittedly peaceful, simple folks, they are however mistrusted as fugitive pagan savages. Their houseboats look dirty, crowded with children, women cooking and a tangled mess of household belongings likely to include a cackling rooster among the Bajau and a dog among the Moken. Moored along beaches, lagoons, estuaries and even the backwaters of beach-front hotels, their floating communities are scattered throughout Southeast Asia.

They form three distinct cultural groups stemming from archipelagic environments: the Orang Laut from estuaries of the Lingga-Riau-Straits of Malacca mudflats, the Moken from the Mergui Archipelago and the Bajau from the Sulu Archipelago of the Philippines, in the adjoining islands of East Borneo, and those of eastern Indonesia, in particular the coasts of Celebes and Flores.

Their numbers remain somewhat of a mystery, partly due to imprecise census-taking. While they are counted as citizens in the countries where they are found, they are considered as ethnic minorities subject to discrimination reserved for "outsiders".

Anthropologists put their total population at about 35,000. Yet they estimate that probably not even one third of this number still live by tradition -- meaning with the sea, not simply on the sea, nor by it

-- because of sedentarization. This distinction is important but often ignored as many anthropologists and others continue to oppose land and sea people, as if the two ways of life contradicted one another. The boat dwellers, in fact, oscillate between sea and land.

The Moken compare themselves to their “mythical sister” the turtle. They live between two elements, water and land. Moored in a lagoon or the leeward edges of an island, their houseboats are removed from the threats of coastal predators but not far enough to be swept away by ebbing currents. With variations, their houseboats are the outriggers with mounted roofs common to Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The Moken kabang, for example, “are a marvel of ingenuity,” according to anthropologist Pierre Ivanoff who studied them in the 1950s and 1960s. “Stable, light, able to carry five to eight people, they are capable of withstanding the worst storms of the Indian Ocean. They are seven to ten metres long, and one and a half metres wide... Not a single nail is used in construction: the various sections are secured with wood and bamboo pegs, strands of rattan or various creepers,” with palm leaves used for roofs and sails.

Again to outsiders, the boats look crowded. There is barely enough room to stand, let alone walk. Older men find their legs gnarled from the lack of movement. Yet here we fall into the trap of comparing our perception of space on land and at sea with theirs. With endless horizons as a backdrop for the constant interplay between water, air and light, these people live open and free.

The monsoons shape and regulate their lives. As the waves rise dangerously high with the rainy season, they seek the protection of the shore. The Orang Laut are settled on fixed sites in estuaries, while the Moken and Bajau move from one temporary mooring to another in lagoons or along beaches and the leeward edges of islands. This time is largely spent constructing boats or repairing them, while food is found hunting wild pigs, gathering fruits and vegetables and digging up tubers like yam. Once the dry season sets in, they ship off again.

The Moken also move from island to island, hunting sea turtles and collecting sand worms, shellfish, and clams for food. But paradox of paradoxes, they avoid the main fruit of the sea - fish! Sea-slugs are the closest they come and even these creatures are collected only to be sold to the Chinese, who love them. In contrast, the Orang Laut and the Bajau run after the fish, with the first group scouring estuary habitats and the second sifting through coral reefs and mangroves.

Clearly, the sea represents life. Children are always born on the houseboats, never on land. They play either on the strands or swimming around the boats. Women would never think of cooking ashore, even during the rainy season when their boats are moored along beaches.

In contrast, death and illness are bound to land. All of the sea people go ashore to heal or to bury their dead. Older people who feel that they have outlived their usefulness to the community often discreetly ask to be left on a deserted isle to die.

While spirits (hantu) roam everywhere -- on trees, under water and rocks, in caves and even the air, their sole requirement of the sea-people is respect. The sea people believe that failure to respect the “environment” -- the abode of the spirits -- results in illness, conflict and death. A fisherman who dares to cast a net during the rainy season without performing the prescribed ritual inevitably suffers. The only cure lies in exorcism and appeasement. Basically, a shaman enters into a trance to invite the spirit to inhabit a wooden human image which is then brought to an island designated for the spirits. The dead are buried in common island cemeteries.

These associations of illness and death do not mean that land is the domain of evil or suffering for the

boat-dwellers. It simply signifies that there are things which belong to the land and activities which are better done ashore than on water. Thus, girls are named after tender flowers while boys' names often reflect the strong qualities of trees or animals.

However, through their contacts with coastal and plain dwellers, land has historically been a source of misfortune for sea people. They recount this in their songs, legends, and epics which are sad. They recollect how the Orang Laut, aside from taking care of the rulers' hunting dogs and other menial duties, were practically the indentured defenders of maritime routes for the great Kingdoms of the Straits of Malacca; how the Moken became pearl-divers for the Chinese, and the Bajau trepang (sea cucumber) collectors for the Tausug sultans. These tasks were considered to be lowly, worthy only of savages. And yet, had it not been for these specialized roles, the sea people would have lost their cultural identity long ago.

Indeed, it looks as if fear of conversion to Islam, which swept the region from the fourteenth century on, greatly motivated the sea people to stay offshore. It is their best way of surviving and conserving their beliefs. All three groups are bound by a common thread: the opposition between us and them; Orang sama and Orang bagai, insiders and outsiders. Whereas their communities are structured on fleets organized around kinship principles, human relations are governed by the more fluid distinction between us and them. History has instilled in them a fear of those who do not belong to them. And their instinct is to flee -- inevitably to the sea.

Today, it is increasingly rare to find the Orang Laut, Moken, and Bajau at their habitual moorings. Once again, they are fleeing. From what? From the onslaughts of blast-fishing, from the conversion of traditional fishing and collecting grounds into industrial production plants. Will they survive this time?

@@@

27. In Depth Adventures website, "Eco Tour" 1998.

[Note: this company continues to run tours to the Mergui Archipelago, according to their current website, and the text about "no indigenous population except for one tiny sea gypsy village" remains on the current In Depth Adventures website:
(<http://indepthadventures.com/index.htm>)]

One of our best trips is a 10 day adventure to the Mergui Archipelago. These 800 islands lie just North of Thailand in Myanmar. They are virtually uninhabited, and mainly unexplored. 10,000 years ago, during the last iceage, they were part of the mainland. They are covered with uncut rainforest and inhabited by a richness of wildlife, including crocodiles, tigers, elephants and rare birds. We have, as a consequence of additional interest, tentatively scheduled another trip for March 23-April 2 on the trimaran, Naga, the same motorized sailboat we have chartered for most of our other trips.

This trip will be more or less identical to the Mergui trips scheduled for earlier in the year. I say "identical", but all trips are subject to some variation: The Myanmar government may restrict our area of access, or change its policy without notice. It is a military dictatorship which brooks no opposition. We also learn from each trip and modify itineraries based on our explorations. Weather is always a factor and can redirect a trip's route.

This area has been entirely closed since W.W.II. Last February 10 was the first tourist trip into the area in 50 years. We found that there was no indigenous population except for one tiny sea gypsy village, and no fishing fleet plying the waters as there is in Thailand. As a result, we have seen enormous

numbers of fish, including many marlin and sailfish, barracuda and fish in the sand and grass flats that are probably bonefish and permit. I am told by locals that there are many large tarpon also.

No one has ever flyfished this area. It is a complete unknown. There has been a tiny amount of deep sea fishing, but not enough to provide much more than enthusiasm. If you are a flyfisherman and wish to go on this trip, you will be among only the second group to have ever fished here, except for the sea gypsies.

###

The beaches are full of shells, many of them unusual, such as Nautilus and Cone shells, and there are many miles of beach without a human footprint.

The cost of the trip is \$2,200 U.S. plus \$120 for the Myanmar gov't.

@@@

28. Images Asia Environment Program, "Saloun Relocation Camps" Nov. 1997.

The following information was related by a Burmese source with many connections among fishermen and others active in the areas around the Mergui Archipelago. The source has proven well informed and reliable with substantial information over a period of 4 years. It is necessary that for the safety of the source, and so as not to jeopardise his further monitoring of conditions in the area that his identity must remain confidential.

Date of interview 19/6/97:

According to the source who said he spoke to eyewitnesses of the relocations, almost all of the forced relocations of the Saloun people took place in 1993 and 1994. After that "almost all" of the sea roving Saloun had been "relocated already so the relocations stopped". The locations of the settlements were given as follows: (Note Kyun means island in Burmese, Ywa means village):

Kawthaung area:

- Zadetgyi Kyun -- about 60 households
- Kyalen Ywa, [also on Zadetgyi Is.] -- more than 50 households
- Lei Lei Kyun -- more than 30 households
- Kyun Kalei Ywa [a village on Lampi Kyun] -- nearly 100 houses

Bokpyin Township area:

- Langaen Kyu -- about 30 households
- Busa Kyu -- about 40 households
- Bei Sein Kyun [Green Fire Island] -- about 50 households
- Kawrei Kyun -- about 30 households

Kywan Tzu Township area:

- No Nguan Kyun -- about 40 households
- Daun Kyun -- about 40 households

Mergui Township area:

- Palei Aw Kyun -- over 50 households
- Reigan Aw Ywa -- about 30 households

Gei Maw Gyi Ywa -- over 30 households

Palaw Township area:

Wa Kyun, Mali Ywa -- over 60 households

According to the source there are some 200 Saloun people from 60 households staying in the area of Ranong in Thailand.

@@@

29. Sea Green, "Dynamite Fishing Boats in the Andaman Sea" June 19, 1997.

There are thousands of fishing boats operating out of the Andaman Sea ports in southern Thailand. Among them are at least 113 boats that regularly use explosives to kill fish in Burmese waters. Many are based out of the port of Ranong, or operate out of villages and jettys in the extensive mangrove swamps along the coast.

Dai Sein is a influential man in Ranong. He is a broker or "Hweizar", who arranges sales of fish, timber and boats. He also owns 10 fishing boats which use dynamite to kill and harvest fish. Dai Sein has 10 dynamite boats, and 3 - 5 other ice transporter boats which they look like.

Dai Sein's boats are all modern boats, equipped with radar, sonar and other modern equipment. They use the sonar to locate the schools of fish and track their movements. The boats move into position above the fish schools. They then drop the explosives overboard, which sink like small depth charges. The boats then speed away, wait for the charges to detonate and then return 5-10 minutes later to collect the fish.

The number of fish harvested at one time can be over 10,000 Kg - and these are big fish only, small fish are ignored or discarded.

Sometimes one set of charges is enough to catch all the fish they want, other times they set off 2 or 3 rounds of explosives. After they have been collected up the fish are stored in the ice the boats carry.

The boats always search with sonar/scanners for the fish. However they do not always take the fish because of the navy patrols, rough weather, because they have loads already, want to keep their speed or other reasons.

He stores the fish in his store in Ranong -- a very large compound. Everyone in Ranong knows it as "Dai Sein Godown". This boats are specially designed for using the explosives. The dynamite fishing boats do not even carry nets. However they look like the boats that go out to buy the fish from the fish catching boats in places like Lanpi Island harbour and Douwn Kyun. The dynamite boats move frequently to avoid being detected, contacting the catcher boats by radio and making brief rendezvous'.

The boats go out 2 times per month, each time for about a week. They go out on the rising moon and return after the full moon, and at the new moon. When they return the boats hide - and are supplied in their hiding places by other boats. The owner sends food, girls, alcohol and etc.

The dynamite boats are illegal in Burma, also in Thailand. However, Dai Sein is a very rich broker. He

and other people involved in the dynamite fishing can afford to pay off the authorities. All authorities need money. Also there is no-one powerful enough to oppose him and the other people involved in keeping the business hidden. The honest ones are shot. So they remain silent. There is no-one who is honest, brave and/or powerful enough to stop this. Some people know about Dai Sein's illegal activities, most not.

Ranong is a very notorious area, very violent. It is not uncommon for 2 or 3 people to be killed there in a day, and up to 10 people have been killed in a day before now. Aside from the killings there many drug users, and there is a lot of prostitution. Heroin, amphetamines, phensedyl, and marijuana are easily accessible. The drugs are directly carried down from Bangkok. Most of the women come from Burma, some through Thailand.

Other owners of dynamite boats are as follows:

Most of the owners of the boats are Thai-Chinese, though a few are Thais and one, the owner of the Vilamor Medicine Shop (AGDvmarm) is thought to be a Thai-Muslim. 'Vilamor' also has 10 boats.

Ko Tau Godown: The owner has 15 boats. All are sophisticated.

Ko Tee Godown: The owner has 7 boats

Ko Nwe Godown: The owner has 9 up to date boats with radar. He also has 12 ordinary small boats without radar that also use dynamite.

Sho Kyaing Godown: The owner has 12 dynamite using boats. These are ordinary boats, not sophisticated and without sonar.

Won Tein Godown: 30 small boats, no sonar. All workers on Won Tein's boats are Saloun people.

There are different sized boats. The largest boats can carry more than 10,000 kilos of fish. Medium sized boats carry up to 5,000 kilos, while small boats carry a maximum of 3,000 kilos.

The boats range very far out to sea and along the coasts. They are often found in amongst the islands of the Mergui Archipelego, off Moulmein, and off the Irrawaddy Delta. They are sometimes also found in Bangladesh waters and off the Arakan coast.

All of the boats carry weapons. Mostly they are light arms such as AK47's, HK's, M16's, M79's.

The Arakan Army sometimes meets these boats which use many of the same hiding places. Although the Arakan Army has better arms than them they can not afford to have too many enemies, so they do not do anything to make bad relations with them. They exchange information with them, including news about the movements of the Burmese Navy.

Thanks for assistance with this Compendium to: Carol Richards, Images Asia E-Desk, Salai Kipp Kho Lian, David Arnott, Bruce Sharp, Bruce Northam, TK, WT, Nai Sunthorn.

THIS REPORT IS IN MEMORY OF U AUNG SEIN THA