

Baz reminisces about his 800km trek to help the Yaowawit School

Blazing Saddles

By Baz Daniel

AT 7:30pm on a Saturday, we trooped into a meeting room on top of the Majestic Grande Hotel in Bangkok overlooking Nana Plaza. Mainly male, average age mid-forties, hailing from Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Canada, with one Englishman now domiciled in Phuket – me.

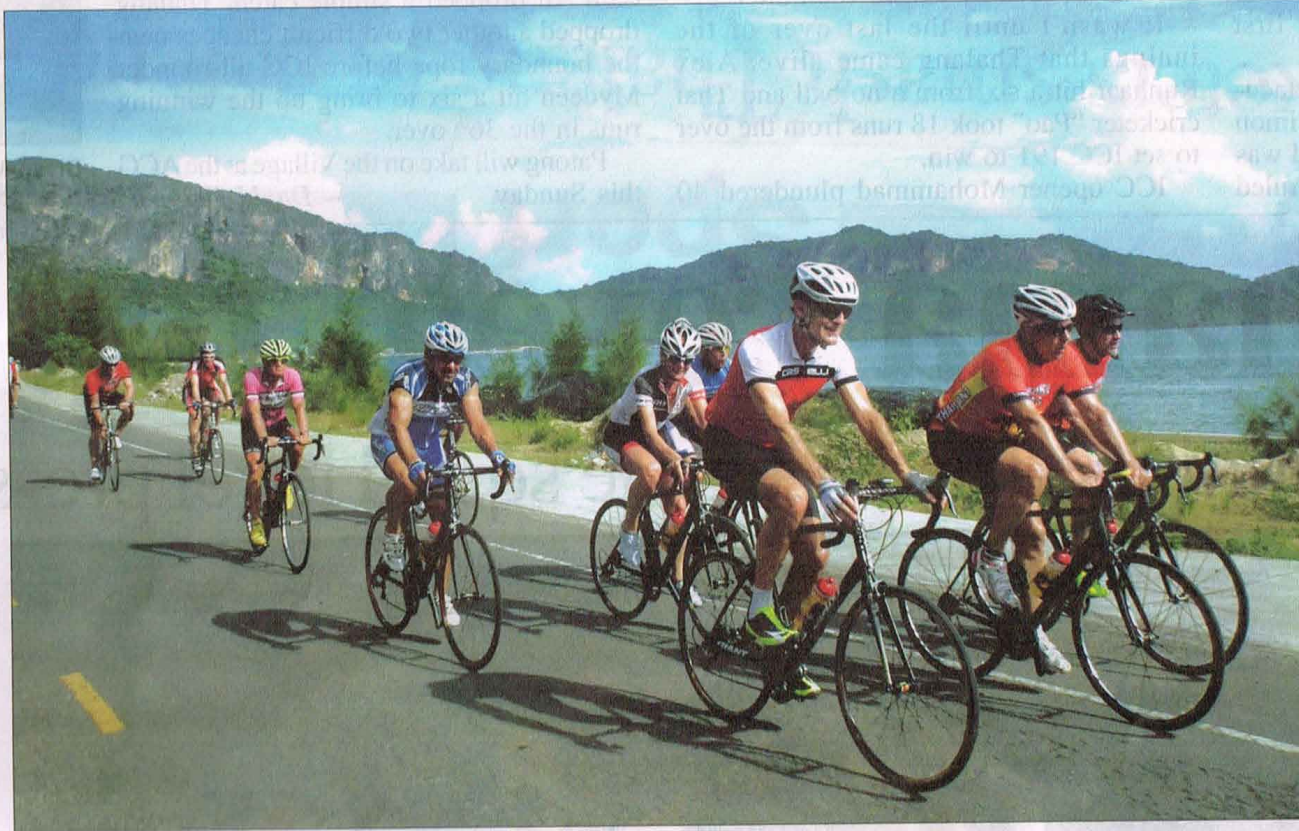
Martin Brot, owner of Siam Bike Tours, started his briefing about our Bangkok to Phuket tour, which we would be starting the next day. We were going to cycle a total of 810 kilometers over seven days with one rest day.

Martin explained that each day's format would be an 8am start and cycling in a group or peloton covering the first 40 to 50km in a couple of hours prior to a coffee/banana/sticky-bun stop. Then cycling onwards for another hour or so to have lunch around the 90km mark. Finally, the post-lunch pain session would cover the final 30/40/50km taking us to our hotel for the night.

Each day would see upwards of four hours of pedaling, but fear not, said Martin, our hotels all had spas and swimming pools (not to mention cold beer) with which to salve our aching bodies and souls.

We set off the next day by taking a mini-van to Petchaburi in order to avoid the congested Bangkok suburbs.

The ride started at around noon and took us to Cha-Am, then Hua



The tribe of 24 cyclists rode more than 800 kilometers from Bangkok to Phuket.

Hin, past deserted prawn ponds and burgeoning condominiums rearing out of the heat haze. We were on the main highway for much of the day and, reassuringly, the passing juggernauts did give us a wide berth as they passed what was essentially a collective organism comprised of 24 cyclists plus a support van replete with spare parts, energy drinks and a highly efficient support team.

It became clear that staying with the peloton was important, not only for the protection from traffic, but to gain shelter from the wind if you happened to be at the back, as I seemed to be!

I was becoming aware of what tribal primates humans are. Being part of this tribe of *homo pedalus* became a matter of an almost primal imperative for survival.

On day two we cycled through some of the most enchanting terrain of the trip – dramatic karst topography of Sam Roy Yod National Park.

After a beachside lunch at a ramshackle wooden restaurant, we cycled onwards for a total of 115km for the day. We ended in the quiet seaside town of Prachuap Khiri Khan and settled into our hotel, which overlooked the promenade and was bracketed by vaulting headlands and islands.

Day three took us along back roads through charming towns to the beach at Haad Ban Krut – a real Thai secret where the smiles and laid-back Thai charm were evident in abundance.

Day four was a 125km ride along beach roads colonnaded with palms, then over rolling hills on quiet side roads displaying a rich variety of Thai life. Our destination was a delightful resort on the beach of Ao Thung Wua Laen, 15km north of Chumphon where (oh, bliss) we had a rest day!

Day five was the longest day, a total of 140km firstly though Chumphon, then across the

“elephant’s trunk of Thailand”, from the gulf to the Andaman Sea. We cycled through pristine forests and beside clean gushing rivers, which were reassuring to see after life in an increasingly polluted Phuket.

The final part of our day was the long descent into Ranong and to our hotel, which featured thermal pools with water from the hot springs for which the region is famous.

The next morning we were on the homeward stretch and in our final days: first, we stayed at a jungle lodge south of Kiraburi, then onwards to Khao Lak for our final night. We were on familiar territory to anyone who has enjoyed the dubious pleasures of doing visa runs out of Phuket.

Our final day was a 90km ride onto the island, terminating at Siam Bike Tours shop where a hearty salvo of cold beer waited to celebrate our survival.

A large percentage of Martin’s clients are “returnees” who’ve done many tours with him. Once I got over the bone-tiredness from the trip, I too started thinking about my next long-distance bike ride... maybe once I am able to sit down again without wincing!

Baz endured – sorry, enjoyed – the trip to support Yaowawit School for underprivileged children. If you would like to make a donation please send funds directly to: Children World Academy Foundation, Siam Commercial Bank, Takuapa-Talad Yanyao Branch. Account Number: 533-2-45237-1. Swift Code – SICOTHBK.