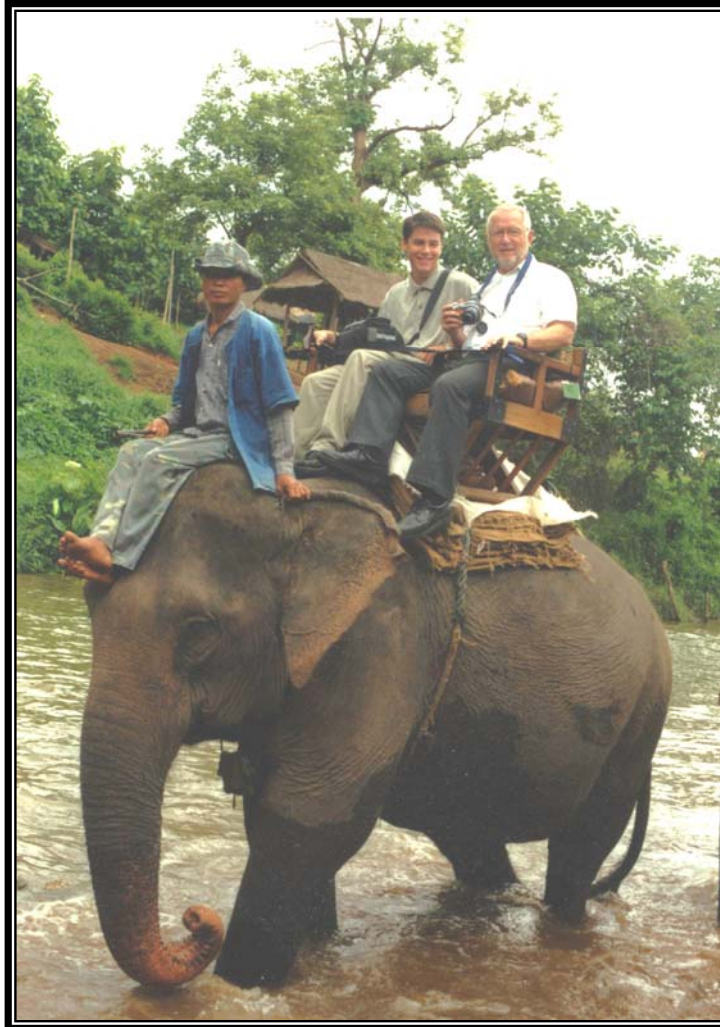


OUR TRIP TO THAILAND



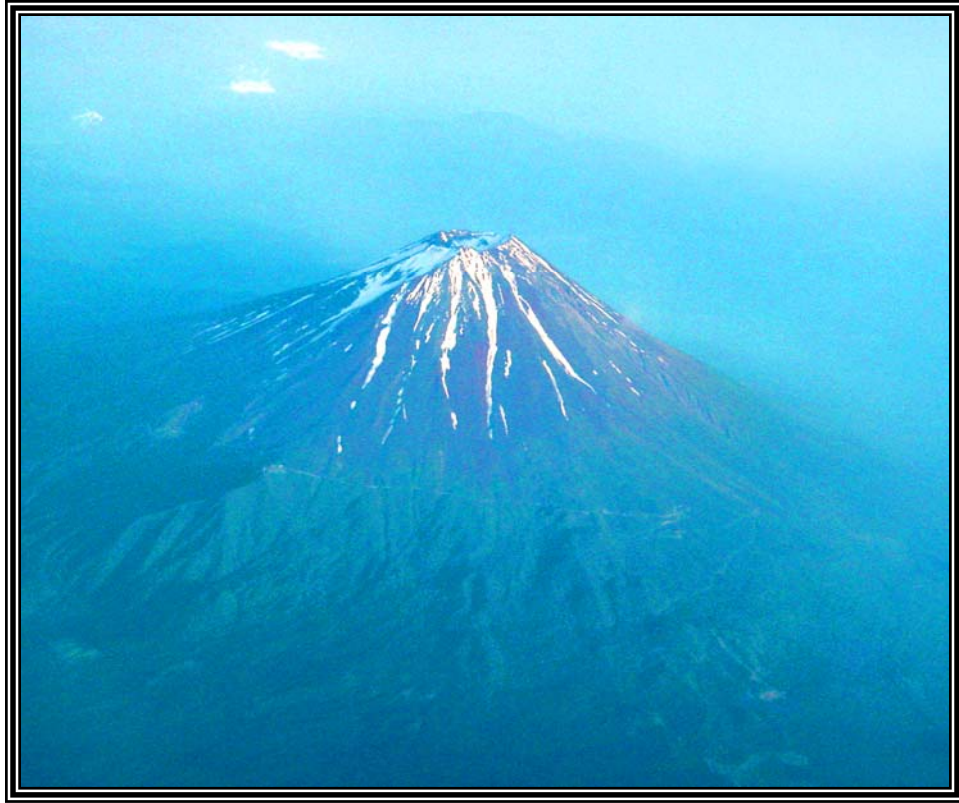
Robert W. and Robert R. Brownlee

June 8, 2002

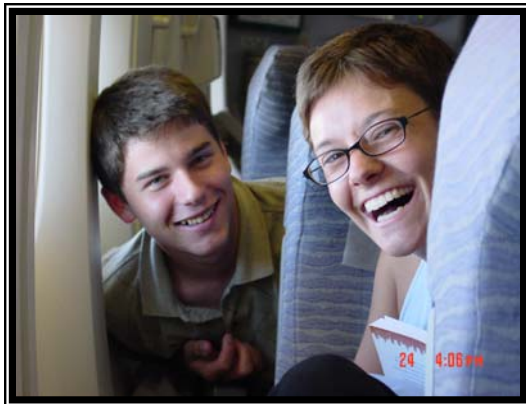


This seasoned traveler is ready for his second trip to Asia

We departed from Denver International Airport in the morning, making it to Los Angeles on United Air Lines in time for lunch and a pretty good wait for Flight 5 to leave for Taipei. We flew all day, landing just after sundown. But it was June 9, thanks to the International Date Line. It truly did seem like two days. We had the seats we wanted in the 747-400 to Taipei, and that helped. We also did well on the 3.5 hour flight on to Bangkok, despite the long hours. All tolled, we were in the air for nearly 20 hours, and it was like 32 hours from the time we left Loveland. We had to take a taxi to the hotel after arriving, and managed to get to bed about 3:30 am. (But it was 2:30 pm on June 9th at home!). The flights were essentially on time, so the connection times were more than sufficient.



On our way to Taipei, we flew a bit to the west of Tokyo, past Mt. Fuji. The crater had snow in it, as you can see. From there on we saw nothing due to darkness. The flights across the Pacific are always much longer than one cares to think about, especially when flying west, against the westerlies. On the plus side, one usually flies over the Aleutians, and occasionally one can get a good view of the Kuriles, too. But this time, there were clouds most everywhere.



Not everybody sleeps on these long trips, and some of us can't resist navigating. It is an old habit.

BANGKOK is a BIG City!



Our room was on the south side of this hotel, to the left in the above picture, and we had the river view which was enjoyed each day. We took the water taxi most days to the mover southerly part of Bangkok, about 14 cents each.



The City is Full of Beautiful Temples



The Temple of Dawn is Decorated Completely with *Broken* China





The Temple of Dawn used to be one of the tallest buildings in Bangkok, but now it is dwarfed by many buildings.

Below, this picture was taken from the “Golden Mount” and shows both old and new constructions.





The statuary throughout Thailand has a “Chinese” air about it, and that normally does not include anybody from New Mexico.

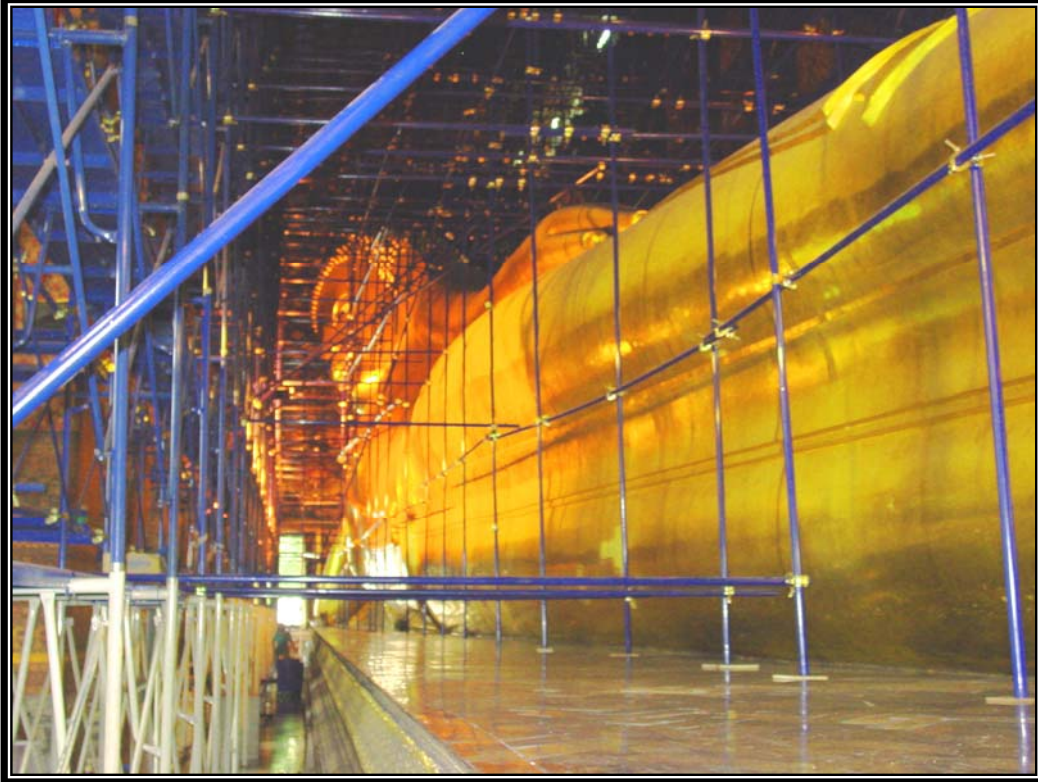
Bobby frowns a lot when around statuary of any kind.



It is a great moment when they change the guard in the Grand Palace, but we could not quite figure out why. Perhaps it is because everything is great in the Grand Palace!



Pagodas, fabulous architecture and decorations are the order of the day.



The Temple of the Reclining Buddha has a reclining Buddha in it. He was being newly covered with gold leaf.



the inlaid Mother-Of-Pearl on the soles of his feet is pretty spectacular, also.

In fact, the incredibly intricately-carved details of every temple complex are very impressive, and can teach us much of what can be accomplished when will and time

have talented hands attached.

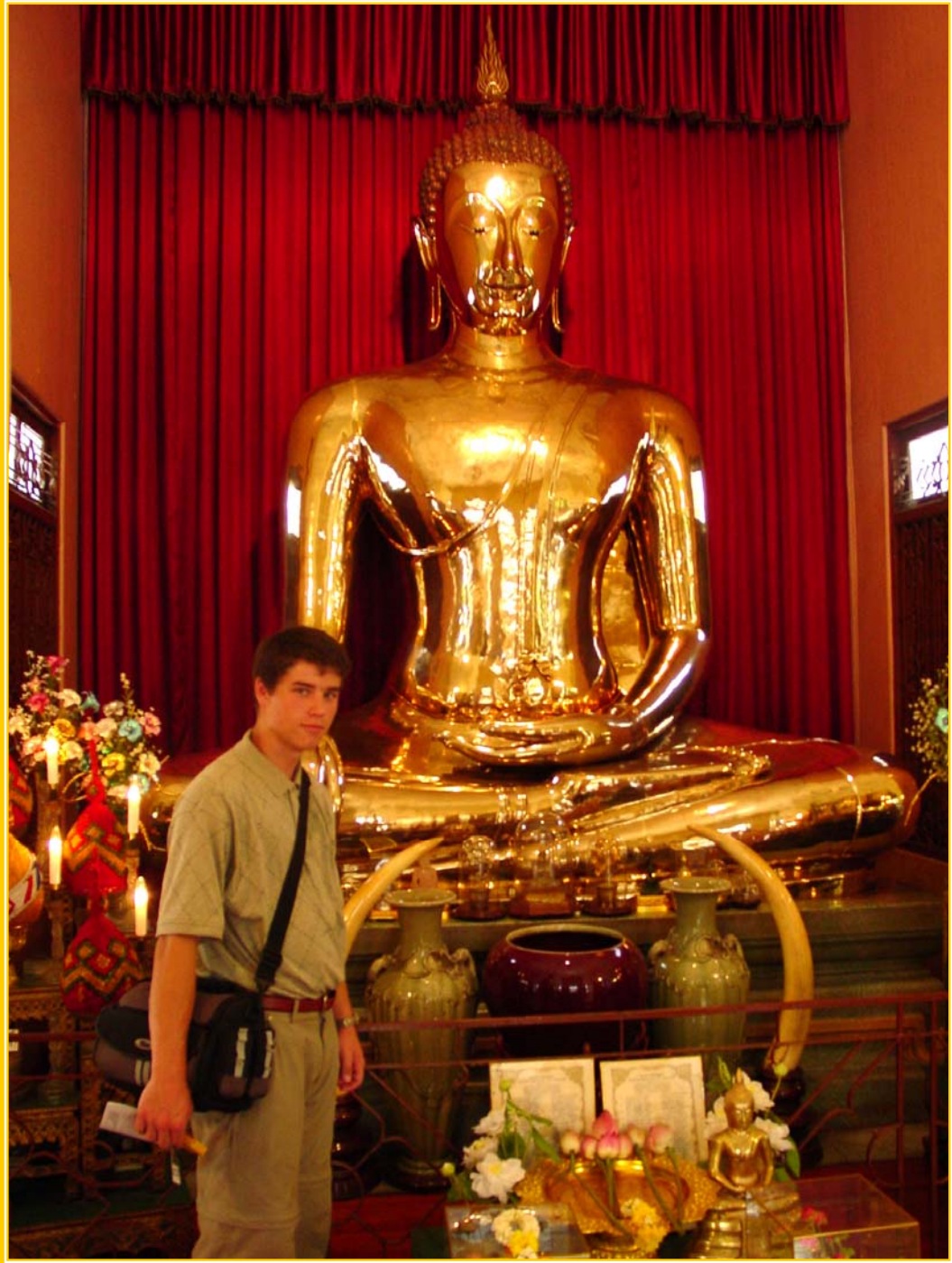




Here is the door to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace. It is forbidden to take pictures inside, but if you have the right camera, you can stand outside, and take a reasonably good picture of what is within.



The Buddha is carved from a single stone, is clothed in fabulous clothes that are changed seasonally. The King of Thailand comes here annually in a hugely important ceremony which the entire nation watches. The King himself play a very important role in the affairs of the nation, and is so well-thought of that any criticism of him is most unwelcome. Indeed, while we were in Thailand there was a daily shooting war with Burma (now Myanmar), principally because Burma was daily attacking Thai's Royal Family. At least that seemed to be the problem.



This Buddha is solid gold, discovered when, upon trying to lift it, the crane doing so collapsed. When dropped the enclosing plaster cracked. Something was gleaming in the cracks!

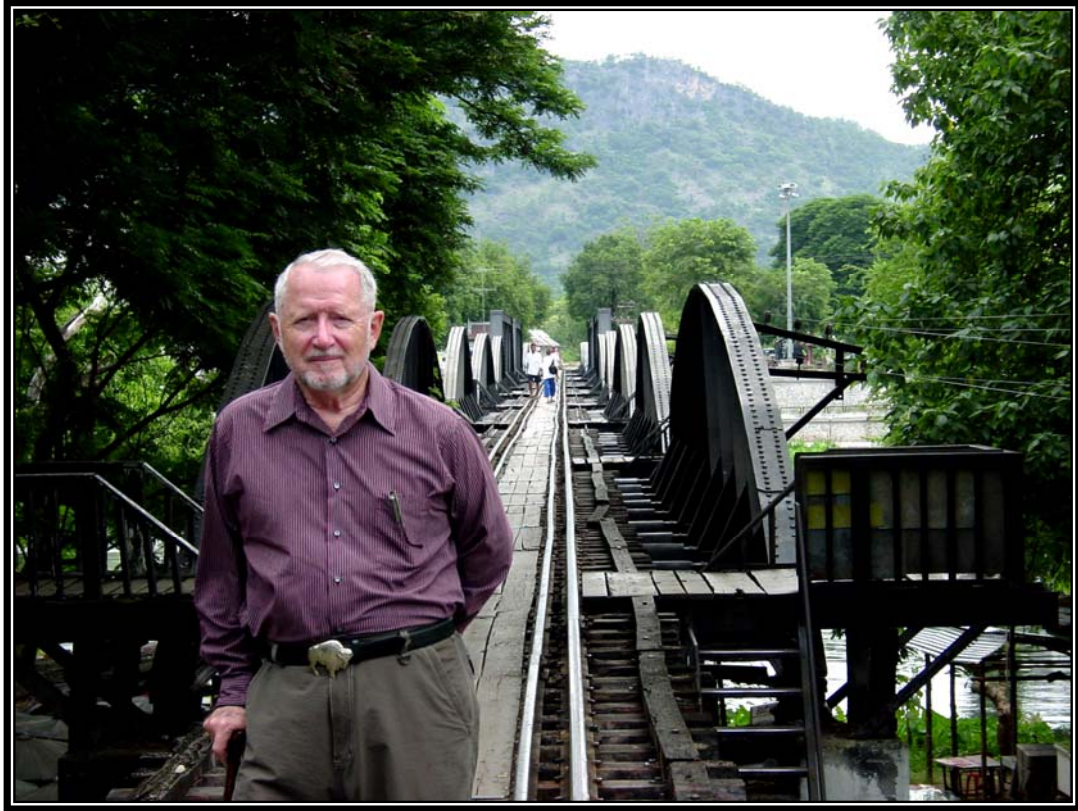
One of the special places we visited was the Royal Barges Museum. They are what is left of the days when the King traveled in this magnificent and majestic manner. We were told that royal barges are still used for special occasions.

The one pictured below was a favorite. It is the cannon that we really liked.



There is another building—not a museum—that houses the barges currently in use, but we never seemed to find the time to visit the place.

To see the bridge on the River Kwai is worth the entire trip to Thailand! We owe it to all those people who gave their lives in World War II to remember why the war was fought, and the enormous suffering and sacrifices that were made for us. The Japanese atrocities perpetrated here should be known by everyone.

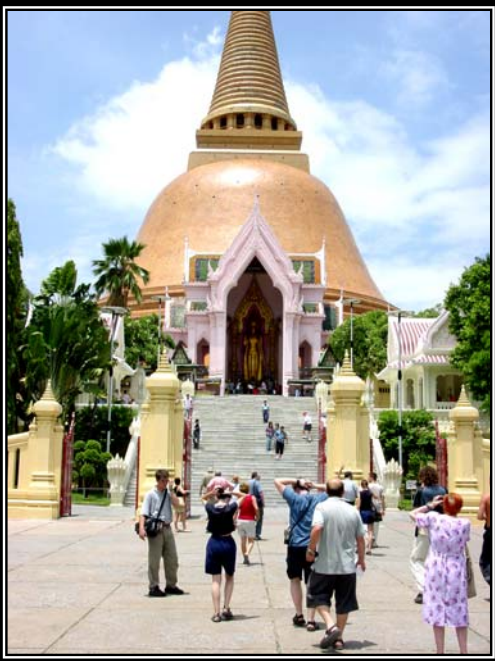


There are many thousands of men from a large number of nations who died here.



More than 16,000 prisoners of war are buried in 5 principal graveyards. More than 100,000 “impressed” workers from India, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma and Thailand also died here.

Think of it!!



We saw this huge pagoda on a hot day, a good distance from Bangkok. There were many tourists, and we took time out to have lunch in an air-conditioned spot, easily recognizable.



In many temples there are enormously detailed murals, some showing great battles in Thai history. We noticed with some interest that everybody in the fight had the identical facial expressions. Probably due to the heat.

During our trip to the River Kwai Bridge, we went to a rural area where much of the food for Bangkok is grown. The waterways are called “klongs” and although many have survived in the southwest part of Bangkok most of them have been filled in to make streets. During WWII there were about 1.5 million people in Bangkok, and for my first visit there in 1958 there were about 2.5 million. Then there were still klongs everywhere, and much of the food was produced right in the city. Now there are million people, and the food producers have been driven out into the country.

There are still floating markets, but they are mostly for tourists.





Tourists are every rampant here, but they seemed to be entirely Japanese, except for us!





These pictures demonstrate there is still plenty of activity in these markets, and that there are still extensive waterways throughout Thailand. And there are still many many temples scattered throughout the countryside.



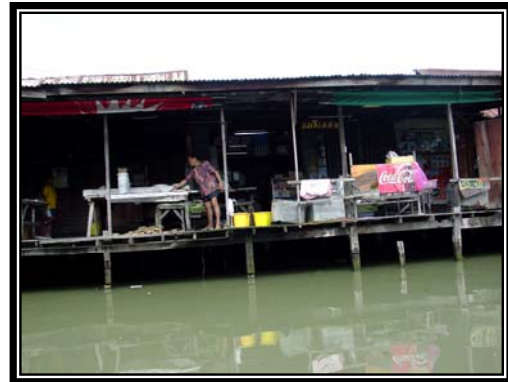
These Buddhist temples are very picturesque, have fascinating architecture.

Meanwhile, back in Bangkok, we are still busy sightseeing, and we wanted to see what's left of the klongs. They are still extensive, but have little traffic.





There were truly some beautiful scenes along the klongs, principally because of the many wonderful flowers. Some homes are quite elegant, some are quite dreary, and some are abandoned and quite decayed.



We spent the last week in northern Thailand, going there by train. The trip took 12 hours each way, and the round trip cost 486 Baht, which was about \$11.50. (Two ice teas at the Sheraton cost us 480 Baht.) The train trips allow one to see the countryside where tourists play no role whatsoever. There were many square miles of rice fields. They can get three crops a year in some parts of the country, and so we saw rice fields in all stages of growth—being planted, being harvested, fallow fields, and the land being worked in a great variety of way—much of it by hand, some with tractors (very small ones) and once in a while with water buffalos.

Our departure station was the first one north of the main terminal and in order to be on time, we arrived very early. There are hundreds of monks in Thailand, and we saw them everywhere, in trains, cars, taxis, boats, busses, shopping centers and tourists places, too.



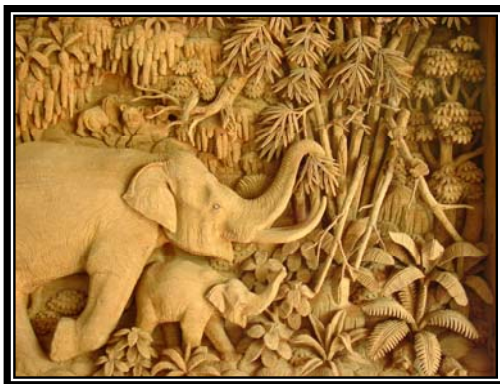
In almost every rice paddy there was a building for storage of tools and for shelter from rain and heat, as evidenced below.



The work appeared to be hard, and never ending.



Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai are special places to visit, ancient in historical treasures. The “golden triangle”, long the source of much of the opium supplied to the entire world, is now a “reformed” society, containing only all of the old problems, poverties, and behaviors. The region is famed for its handicrafts. Teak trees are now protected in the forests, but teak still comes from Myanmar. We liked seeing Mother-of-Pearl being inlayed in what will become magnificent teak furniture. And the wood carvings are exceptional.



Our visit to Laos during our trip on the mighty Mekong River was short, but great fun.



The Mekong has Boats Just Down from China



Children in Laos Play Along the River Just Like Kids Would Do Anywhere



Laos used to be a French Colony, so naturally when it comes to taxes, the message is in French. We paid, in Baht, but it was a very reasonable sum. They will eventually learn to do better.



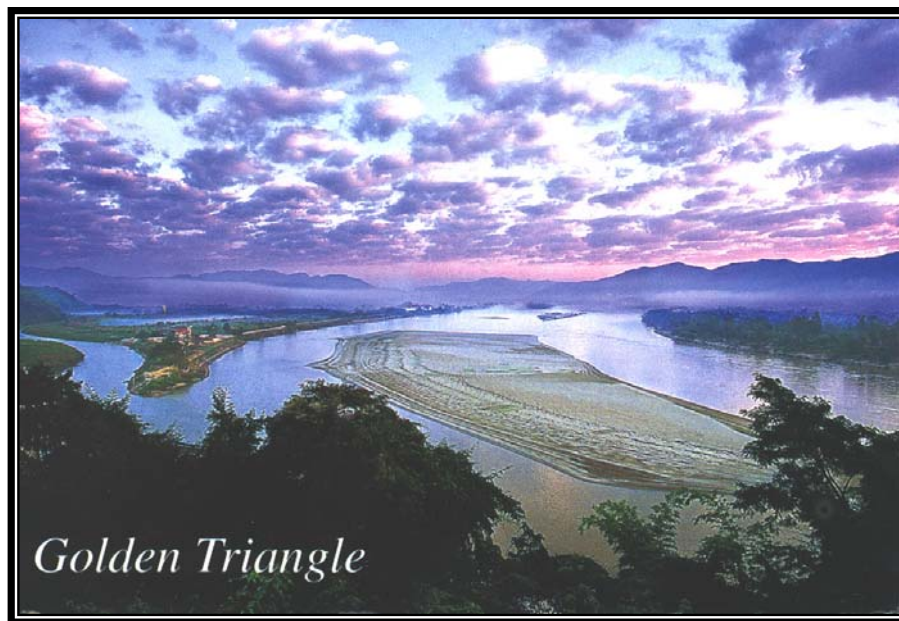
There was a family leaving Laos, and a big crowd came to bid them farewell. They were emotional about it, so the leaving must have been a long term one.



This was the Laos Post Office
26



Sooo-oo I mailed a card to myself to see if the system worked. It did!



It was a picture postcard



We noticed a curious thing about these kids—none of them smiled, and none seemed to be happy. They begged for money, and we donated, but still no smiles!

This is the village dock, just being built. We suspected that people were quite a bit better off by being next to the river and with two other countries very near by. But however well off they might be, things looked pretty sparse. A few years ago you could be shot if you stepped ashore here. I know, because I tried to get my boatman to allow me to touch my foot on Loatian soil and he pointed to the places on the bank where men sat with guns. But progress has been made, for now you can land if you pay the tax!





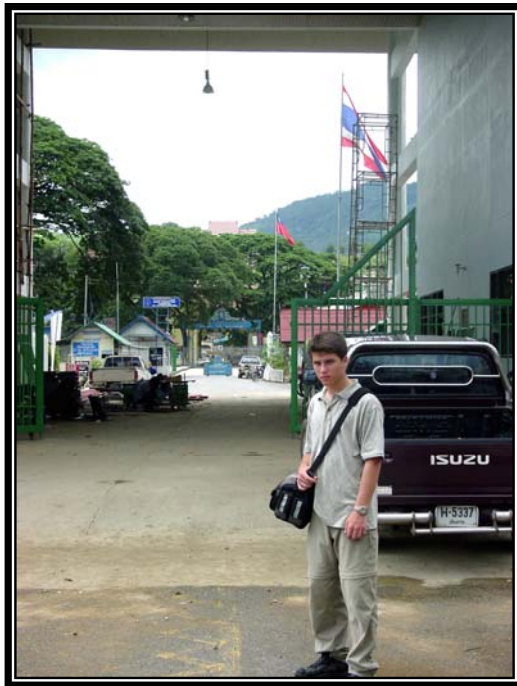
We greatly admired the roots of this tree, and were impressed with the length of the long boat. It is only about one person wide.



A River Village



This very large Buddha is on the Myanmar side of the river. The “war” being fought between Thailand and Myanmar is a few miles south of this point.



The Myanmar border is at the flue barricade some distance behind this particular visitor. The flags of the two countries are nicely visible. We had a good lunch at a hotel here, and enjoyed the day despite the heat.

In the hills of the north of Thailand there are many “hill” or “mountain” people who have come into Thailand from China, Cambodia, Laos, etc. They have come frequently as refugees, live in fairly primitive villages, and look for tourists to market their goods. When we visited this one, it was pouring rain.



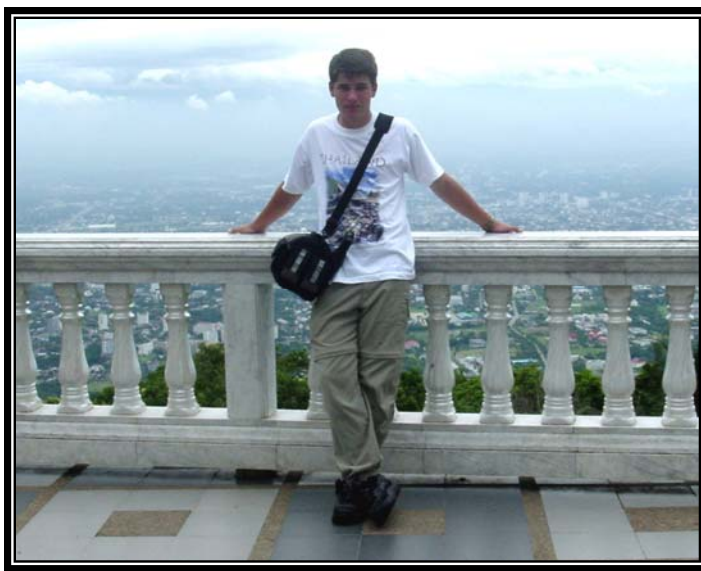
Look at that running water! We were on our way back to Chiang Mai, and didn't much mind that we did not stop to explore.

For the most part, the weather gave us no trouble at all, except the heat. The sun was directly overhead at noon—a new experience for Bobby.

Back in Chiang Mai, we visited a beautiful temple overlooking the valley.



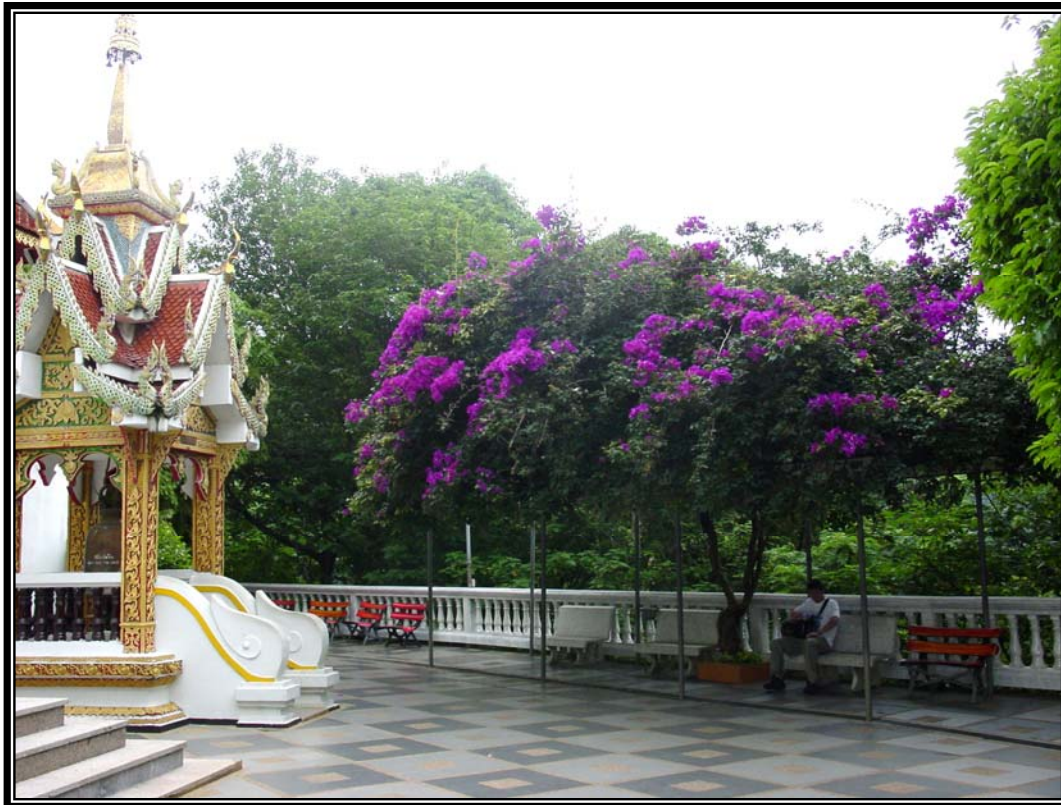
Our first-class hotel, the Chiang Mai Hills Hotel, is the red-roofed building just above the apex of the trees. Through the internet, we were able to get a very good room there for \$22 per night. The hotel in Bangkok cost a bit less than \$25. These rates were only available on the internet (via a set of scoundrels, we think, located in Hong Kong) and would have been about 5 times more had we made the arrangements through a travel agent, or by ourselves after we arrived. It is a very complicated world, but once in a while things turn out OK



Not only is the setting for this particular temple spectacular, but the temple itself is rightfully famous for its beauty.







The guy under the tree declined to come out into the light for the picture.

Once in a while he was looked at with an expression similar to that shown in the picture on the right.

We spent the last day at the Chiang Mai Zoo and it was REALLY hot, so hot that we never did find the penguins. We did see one of the zoo guys carrying a big snake he had found in one of the toilets. We were impressed that he and his friend built a fire, and cooked the snake, pronto. We guessed it was between 6 and 8 feet long—before being cooked, that is.



Our trip to the elephant camp took most of a day. We rode an elephant for two hours, and that was quite long enough. Once these elephants worked in lumber camps, but now that logging of teak forests is illegal, they are used strictly for tourists. They put on a great show, and afterward, away we went.





There were about 30 elephants, mostly with two riders per animal.





Here is an elephant with his “tail over the line”! On the farm I always thought the expression was limited to horses and people. But elephants? Amazing.



At the half way point, the elephants were fed bananas; each one had a pretty good sized bunch, too.



When the rides were over, the elephants were turned loose to forage.



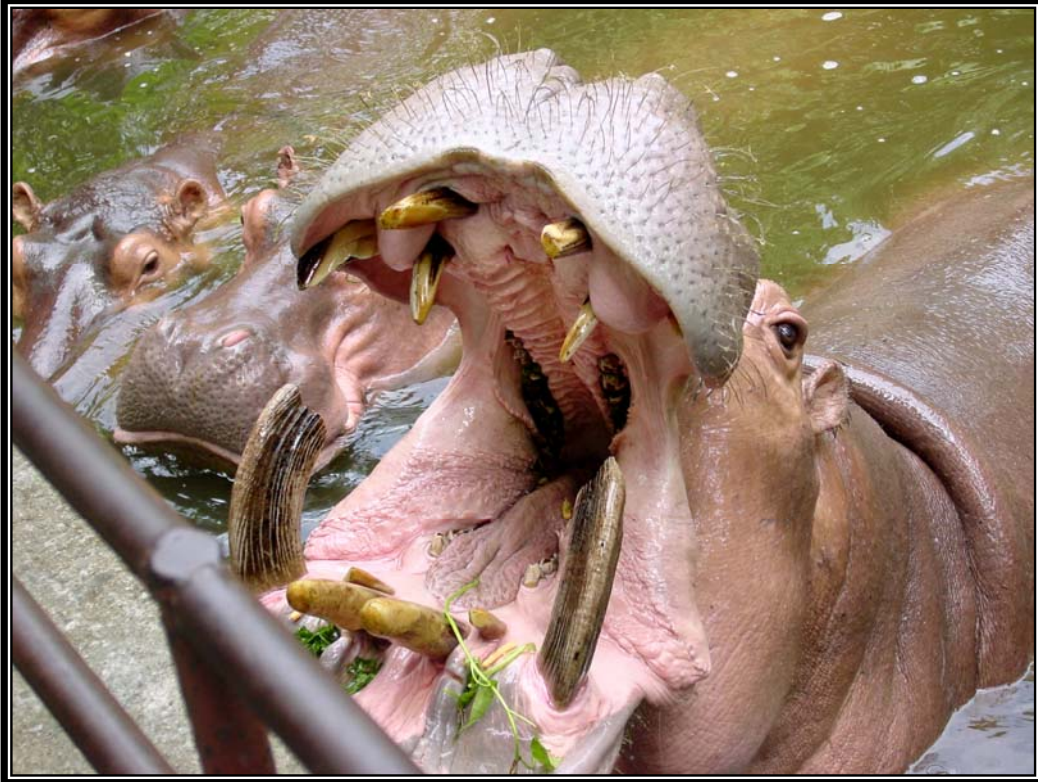
Some of them had a good bath in the river first, though.

After the elephants, we took a rafting trip, and rode in an ox cart. A Good Day!





Exotic flora is one of the real delights of traveling to other climes.



These guys at the Chiang Mai Zoo will work for PEANUTS! (Look closely.)

Chians Mai's zoo covers a huge area, and visitors are advised to hire a taxi to travel from one part of it to another. We found that there were many birds in the area that could have been inside rather than outside, as the bird on the left was. We say any number of exotic birds, but then were next to impossible to photograph. Here's one attempt, thought, to illustrate the problem.





Contemplating the long trip home is a bit sobering. First 12 hours to Bangkok, then in a couple of days a three and a half hour flight to Taipei, a four hour layover, then 12 more hours to Los Angeles—and another four hour layover. The 2.5 hours from there to Denver will go quickly, we think, for we will start anticipating seeing Dad, and Addie Leah, and, once again, planning ahead!



There is one big task to take care of when we return to the Royal River Hotel.





The salesman and seamster join in this happy occasion of fitting out a young man to look as elegant as he should. There were two suits, (a single and double breasted) and two magnificent silk shirts in addition to the silk jacket pictured. There were several fittings, an occasional re-measurement, and a lot of conversation in bringing all this about, as these kinds of decisions are not easily made.

Grandpa joined into the festivities by ordering a couple of pairs of pants, and a couple of shirts also. Any number can play!

The principal factor in all this was that the costs were actually quite a bit less than one would pay if he bought such things off the rack here at home. The only trial was carrying them back, but that was entirely acceptable, hence—a done deed!

We still had some klong running to do, and spent a couple of hours wondering what it must be like to live in a world so different from ours. Didn't look too bad, though.



The boat pictured above is the one we rented for this last water journey. Two hours cost us about \$20.









Upon checking in at the Bangkok airport we were upgraded to Business Class! (The question as to the cost to do so brought the answer, more than \$1600, each. But at the gate, we were upgraded for free!) Here, in the flesh, is Bobby's reaction!

We took a number of pictures from the air. Normally that is not at all productive, but with the new digital cameras, it is surprising what can be accomplished. Some of these are being included as they are unusually informative about the geographies seen.



For example, here is a really big temple complex in the outskirts of Bangkok. It is important to remember that historically the education of all children, especially boys, takes place in the temples. So a good school system makes use of their existence to a degree that our churches do not, except rarely.





That is not a dirt road you see—it is a canal. Notice the bridges that cross it, and the geometry of the rice fields. The roads are on the outside of the housing areas, one on each side of the canal. Nothing haphazard here!



Rovers make the geometry a bit complex, yet it is easy to see how drainage occurs, and the advantage taken of it. As one is flying along, one can make out the small boats on the canals, and the water traffic. There's a lot going on down there.



Depending on the type of aircraft, one may have this television screen at the back of the seat in front of you, and one of the channels gives your location at any given time. Lots of other information is also available, and one can navigate pretty well. Comparisons with navigation capabilities existing during WWII are simply not fair to make!



Below us now is Da Nang, in Viet Nam. We were able to see quite a bit of the ground over southeast Asia, but over the ocean we were soon in clouds, and as we were going east, the sunset occurred promptly indeed. We saw the sun set twice on the same day, thanks to the international date line.



This is the city of Taipei, not very far from their international airport.

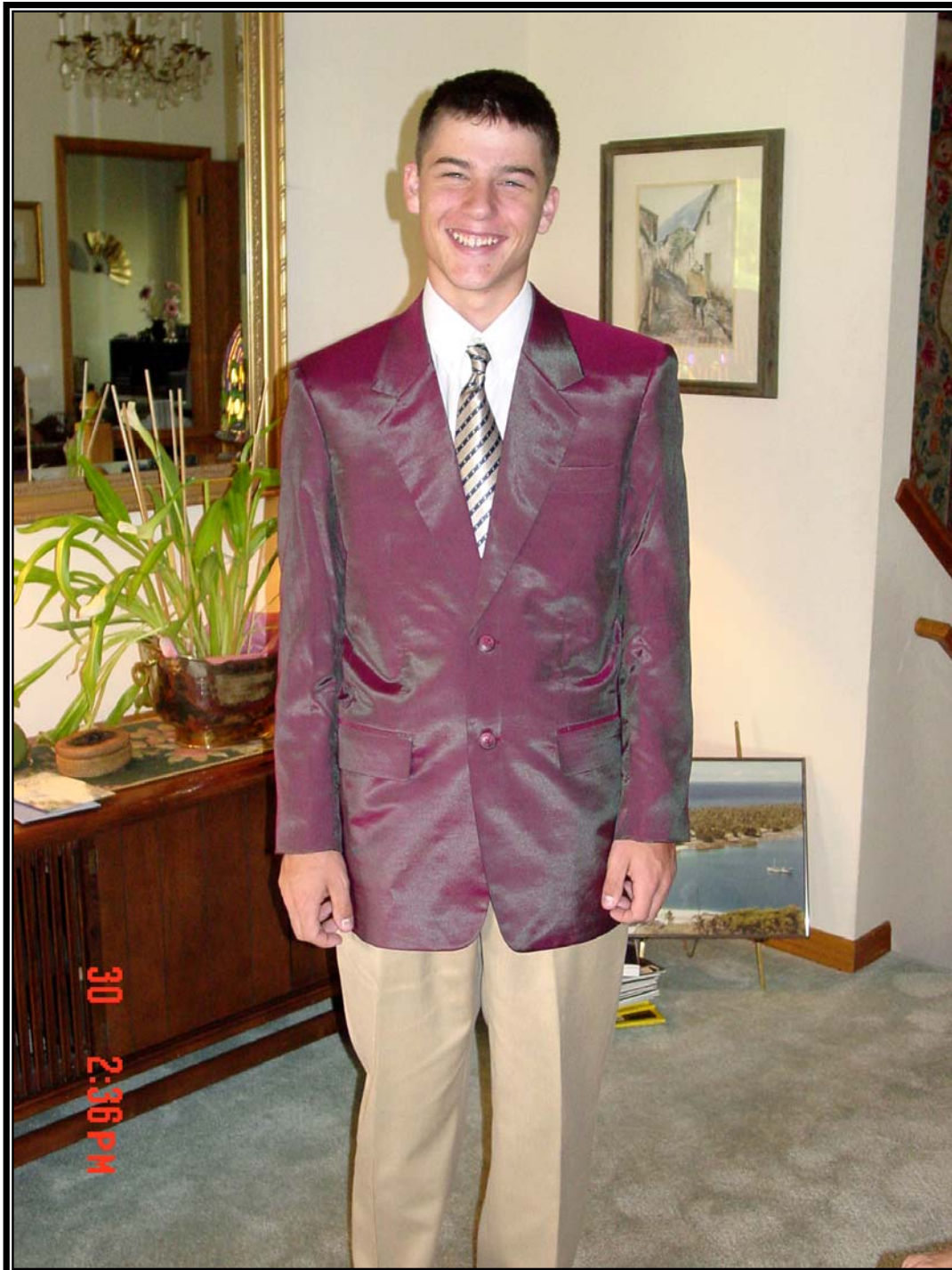


They also have rice fields, and waterways.

The remainder of this book: pictures that need to be remembered, so here they are!









Coming back home is always a happy occasion, but for Grandmothers, especially!



Fathers have the same reaction.

