

Work at Angkor Continues

This past March the World Monuments Fund restored its full program at the Preah Kahn Conservation Project in Siem Reap Cambodia, after curtailing its activities in response to the events that began in early June 1997 when Prince Ranariddh fled Cambodia, ousted by second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

As communications with Cambodia were interrupted, WMF staff pored over newspapers and Internet reports to determine the status of our team of more than 60 Cambodian workers and professional staff working at the 12th-century temple complex. We could not abandon the individuals we had trained and nurtured, but the consequences of further violence directed at the site and the WMF team had to be considered.

In late July, email messages from Phnom Penh reported that the situation was stable and that most people in the region felt little fear of personal danger. At Angkor and Siem Reap all was quiet; our team had not missed a day in the field. Though tourism is down, positive signs indicate a renewed confidence in the country's stability.

An international group of consultants, led by John Sanday, Preah Kahn Conservation Project Field Director, continues to work at the site, conducting intensive training courses for the students, professional staff and work force. Over the past 18 months, the Cambodian team has received instruction in structural consolidation survey and repair of fractured stone beams supporting corbelled vaults; stone replacement principles and procedures, including cutting, fixing and dressing of new stone; and tree removal (a new forestry team was trained in the techniques of tree felling as necessitated by several of the large trees falling during the course of the year, indicating the need to develop new protocol and techniques).

In addition, members of the FachhochschuleUs program at Angkor Wat demonstrated research technology to analyze sandstone as well as instructed in methods of sample-taking for laboratory testing.

The first five students who trained at Preah Kahn graduated in December 1995 and January 1996 from the University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, and are now members of the Preah Kahn Conservation project staff. Two, Lek Sareth and Var Morin, received further training at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, and the ICCROM Stone Conservation Course, respectively, and now teach at the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Fine Arts. Chan Chamrouen, also a former student, teaches at the Faculty of Archaeology.

Five new students in their last two years at the Faculty of Architecture have arrived for training in documentation, stone conservation and architectural conservation.

As WMFU's initial 10-year commitment in Cambodia nears its completion, we are developing plans for a research center in Siem Reap. The center will facilitate scholarly research at Angkor while fostering educational opportunities for young Cambodians.

Since the 1996 CRM (No. 3, Vol. 19) article on WMFU's work at Preah Kahn, WMFU's efforts to conserve Preah Kahn as a partial ruin and train Cambodian professionals and laborers to identify, assess and solve conservation issues remains an active, successful and evolving endeavor.

*Felicia Mayro with Bonnie Burnham,
John Sanday, Var Morin, and Lek Sareth*



A naga guards the entrance to the Preah Kahn temple complex in Angkor. Photo by William Chapman.