

HKNHS OUTING REPORT SEPTEMBER 2007 - THE SOKO ISLANDS

The response to last month's junk trip to the Soko Islands was overwhelming, with a total of 74 people attending. Fortunately our chairman Dave England was able to arrange a second boat at the last minute so everyone could be accommodated.

The Sokos are located off the south coast of Lantau and are one of Hong Kong's remoter island groups. Our journey from the new public pier in Central lasted slightly over two hours. At times our bearings were slightly confused due to the thick "haze" (aka pollution).

We visited the two main islands in the group, Tai A Chau and Siu A Chau. Tai A Chau has been much in the news recently, due to CLP's proposal to construct a liquified natural gas storage plant on the island, together with an submarine pipeline to transport the gas to its Castle Peak power station. This would be built on the platform near the pier where the former Vietnamese refugee camp, now dismantled, was located. Only a decorative rock sculpture remains there now. A road leads to a low hill on top of which is helipad (constructed by the refugees, according to an inscription in the concrete). Some more intrepid members also descended a rocky slope to a sandy beach, sadly disfigured with rubbish. On the opposite side of the island is a small and now overgrown, reservoir built to service the refugee camp. It is a delightful spot, surrounded by large shady trees, with many dragonflies darting over the water, hopefully feasting on mosquitoes! Despite the name of the island ("A" means "crow" apparently), we did not see any crows; according to a magazine article, the islands were known for the flocks of crows which were attracted by the pieces of fish discarded prior to drying them, formerly a major source of income for the islands' inhabitants.

Amazingly, everyone heeded the organiser's dire warnings and urgent whistle blasts to board the boats on time to cross over the smaller Siu A Chau, where we had the opportunity to relax on the long sandy beach, or battle the (nearly) impenetrable jungle which has reclaimed the former village land in the centre of the island.

After technical hitch (one of our boats' propellor became caught in a nearby fishing boat's anchor rope, providing an interesting photo opportunity) which slightly delayed our departure, we made our way back to Central.

We were delighted to welcome so many new faces on this visit, and we hope that many of them will take the opportunity to become NHS members and join us again in the future.