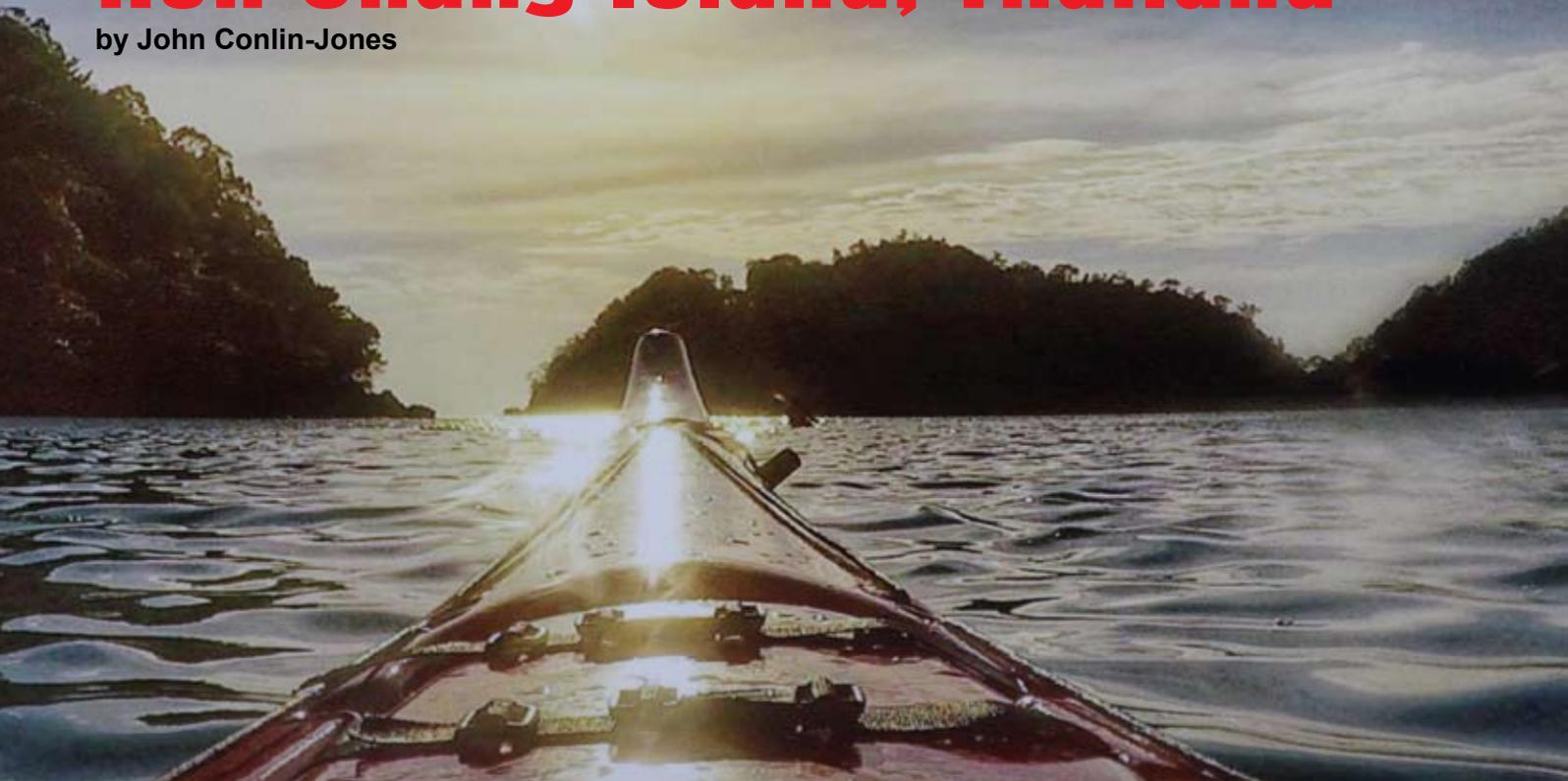


# Circumnavigation of Koh Chang Island, Thailand

by John Conlin-Jones

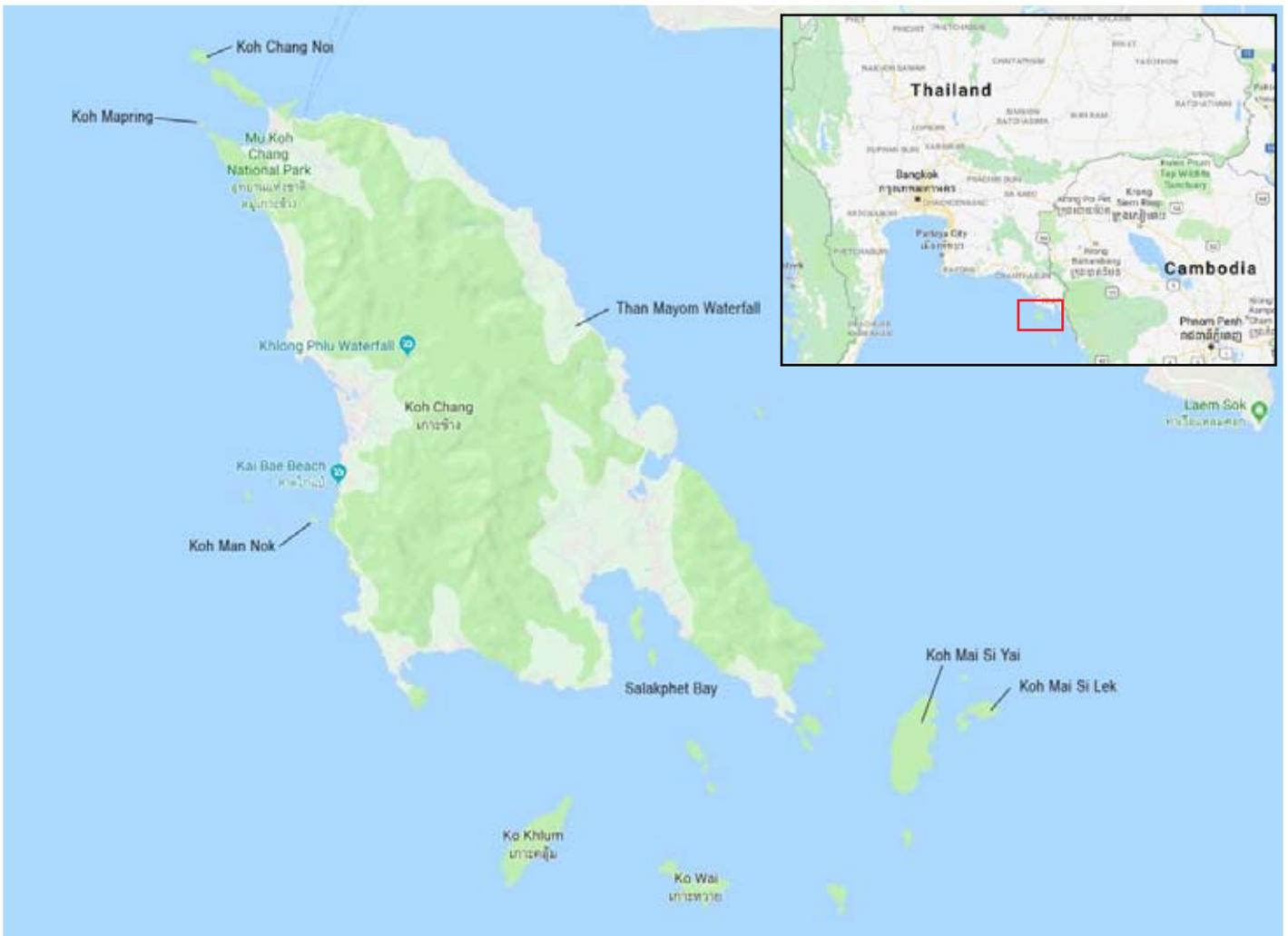


I was invited on a Sea paddle to circumnavigate the island of Koh Chang in the Gulf of Thailand by three sea paddlers that I met on a sea kayaking course run by South East Asia kayaking. They have formed a club in Bangkok and carry out sea and river trips throughout Thailand. As you can imagine, this has been a great contact for me as I am always on the lookout for people to paddle with here in Thailand. They have passed their three star and are now BCU (British Canoeing) overseas members. The trip was to take place over four days, and we would be camping once on Koh Chang and twice on the islands of Koh Gnam and Koh Man Nai.

Luckily, I had brought one of my sea kayaks to my home in Isaan, Western Thailand from Koh Chang where I keep them on a trailer at a friend's house. I then drove the 500 km to meet the other members of the

group on the mainland to prepare for the journey. The forecast was for strong to near gale force winds starting in the evening on both days and easing off between 11 am and noon. It was going to be a very rough few days. We heard on our return trip from the trip, that it was even worse on the opposite side of the Gulf of Thailand. They'd had the worst storm in thirty years causing lots of damage to property and disrupting their tourist industry with lots of islands being evacuated.





So, after packing our kayaks we set off from the mainland at a place called Natural Beach to complete the 7 km crossing to the island of Koh Chang Noi. Here we had a short break before continuing our journey south west around the island before stopping for lunch on a small beach





enroute to Than Mayom Waterfall. We had a shower, a change of clothes and an evening meal at a restaurant built over the water. Approx. distance 24 km.

On day two we left our campsite at about 8.45 am after some food and our trio continued to Koh Mai Si Yai (Yai means big), a paddle of about twenty kilometres with no landing places until we got there. My Thai paddlers had arranged to meet a friend of theirs who owns a homestay and fish farm and organizes sea fishing trips from his boat. They had arranged to have a seafood lunch of fresh crab and what they called praying mantis. They looked to me like giant sea crayfish with claws like a crab. I was

amazed how many fish they kept there in large netted lagoons until ready to be eaten or sold on. We rested there a few hours after lunch and then headed off around the island with Koh Mai Si Lek on our left (Lek also means small like Noi) to get to our next campsite on Koh Gnam with the islands of Koh Bai Rang, Koh Mak and Koh Kradat to our left in the distance. Just as we were nearing Koh Ngam we met another friend of theirs staying at a resort nearby with his family. He was fishing from a Sit-on-Top and had just landed a large groper fish. We landed on the island and pitched our tents on a lovely sandspit lined with coconut trees with a beach each side that joins one side of the island to the other. We had a meal and settled into our tents for the night. At about 1 am, as predicted, the wind started







to blow with gusts near gale force, so we spent most of the night securing our tent and checking the pegs. Approx. distance 32 km.

The next morning the wind was still pretty strong and gusting but was forecast to die down by about 11 am, so we had some breakfast, packed our tents and kayaks for the day and the next part of our journey. At about 9.30 am we got back on the water, using the island of Koh Chang as a wind break, stayed close to the shore as much as possible. We then made our way along the coast passing the islands of Koh Wai, Koh Klum and Koh Lao Noi in the distance. When we reached Salak Phet Bay we travelled around another island called Whitesands with a lovely white sandspit on it, again to shelter from the wind and get back across to the coast of Koh Chang. We then stopped for lunch on a deserted beach with a saltwater lagoon at one end and lined with coconut trees. Getting back on the water, we proceeded to our next campsite on the island of Koh Man Noi stopping off at Lonely Beach for a short break. It is not lonely anymore, with lots of tourists preparing for their new year celebrations and lots of music playing. We then made the short paddle to Koh Man Noi just as the wind began to strengthen again. We pitched our tents, had some food and watched the many firework displays taking place on Koh Chang. Again we had another windy night, but not as bad as the night before. Approx. distance 26 km

The following morning after breakfast the forecast predicted the wind would ease by about noon, so we decided to leave fairly early as we were close to Koh Chang which would still shelter us from the worst of the wind. There were still occasional gusts and a stiff breeze blowing. We carried on along the coast to the river at Klong Prao after passing the islands of Koh Man Nok, Koh Yuak, Koh Sewan and Koh Rom. We paddled up the river for a few hundred metres to wish happy new year to friends of mine who own a restaurant and bar set on the river. We then travelled back towards the island of Koh Chang Nai passing the towns of Chai Chet and Whitesands on the island of Koh Chang around the headland passing the

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small gap between Koh Chang and Koh Mapring for a snack on the beach. After the break we paddled across the bay passing between the island of Koh Chang Noi and made the crossing back to the mainland and our starting point. By now the wind had dropped right off. We then took a well-earned shower unpacked our kayaks and loaded our vehicles for the journey home. Approx. distance 24 km.

The names of my fellow Thai paddlers are Sarinya Sangiemsak who likes to be called Amey in English, Somjate Wattanaveakin or Jate for short and Tripod Trimanka, Tu for short. Three great people who all speak pretty good English. My next trip is a six-day trip with four paddlers from my old club in Wales in February around the islands in the archipelago of Koh Ckhang islands. 🌴

Photos by John Conlin-Jones, Sarinya (Amey) and Somjate Wattanaveakin.



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