

John Gray's SeaCanoe Media Release

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PRINCE OF SONGKLA-PHUKET STUDENTS CLEAN UP PHANG NGA BAY JANUARY 13-17

Prince of Songkla University – Phuket (PSU-Phuket) and John Gray's SeaCanoe (JGSC) host a Phang Nga Bay National Park Marine Rubbish Clean-Up from January 13-17, 2009. The effort highlights 20 Years of Caveman's "Natural History By Sea Kayak" in Thailand.

"Last year in Puerto Princesa, Palawan, I walked 8 kilometers of an island coastline and found just three small pieces of rubbish that didn't fill the palm of my hand," says Gray. "If a small town in the Philippines can eliminate marine rubbish, why can't we do the same in Thailand?"

"We won't clean up the Oceans in five days with 80 PSU-Phuket students. But after 20 years of solo collecting, "When I'm 64" is a good time to create long-term awareness. Now, Thailand's future generation can spread the message instead of just one crazy Farang."

Each day, 16 different PSU-Phuket Tourism and Environmental Science students will collect marine rubbish while kayaking with the Caveman, who's pulled about 8,000 black plastic bags of rubbish from Phang Nga Bay in the last 20 years. "Phang Nga Bay still isn't as dirty as Vietnam's Halong Bay. UNESCO should threaten to pull Halong's World Heritage status if they don't clean it, just as UNESCO did with Peru's Inca Trail to Machu Pichu. Vietnam won't do it on their own."

Tourism students come from Gray's Coastal Tourism Management course and Dr. Rick Kramer's Environmental Sciences program with Tourism School Dean Somjate Srirabai, Ph.D. administering the PSU-Phuket effort. . Phang Nga National Park Ranger Warut Rattananun is coordinating from the Park side. .

After 20 years, Caveman turns marine rubbish into science. "Phang Nga Bay is a mix of tourism dumping; shrimp farm Styrofoam and local resident rubbish. Tourism rubbish includes plastic water containers (cheaper than glass bottles), small clear plastic bags for souvenirs (mostly seashells) and cameras in lieu of proper dry bags, energy drinks and cooking bottles, Styrofoam

PHANG NGA BAY CLEAN-UP

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lunch containers, plastic straws, food bags, cooking utensils, and anything else plastic."

Styrofoam breaks free from shrimp farms, drifting with winds and tides. Non-biodegradable, Styrofoam floats forever, developing its own micro-ecosystem. Floating high on the sea surface, unsightly Styrofoam generates constant tourist complaints. Properly maintained nets enclosing Styrofoam floats virtually eliminate the issue

"Local" rubbish includes sneakers, sandals, plastic toys, tampons, kotex, disposable diapers, fishing gear, food containers, hairbrushes, toothbrushes, t-shirts and items of personal use. Even after they break-up, fishing nets continue working. Monofilament nets never biodegrade.

The clean-up features a Klong Kien guide team JGSC formed to create employment and environmental awareness in the villages around the Bay. "The local villagers were frustrated watching Phuket boats coming into their territory and making a lot of money without providing jobs for coastal villages," says Gray. "So we are training professional sea kayaking/caving guides in Klong Kien. At first they didn't have any environmental awareness, but they are learning fast."

Hong By Starlight guests are welcome to join in the Clean-Up effort on a second day, but asked to donate B1,000 each to help cover transfers, meals, guides, cleaning gear and additional kayak rentals. All available JGSC kayaks are already allotted for the students."

For more information, call 076-254-505.

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