



THE KRONG YONG STORY TRAILS TRILOGY

THE MOUNTAIN CHAPTER

INDIGENOUS

STORIES

• CULTURE

• NATURE

• WILDLIFE

**TRAVEL
GUIDE
BOOK 2**



WHERE THE BROTHERS LEARNED STRENGTH AND VISION



The CPAs (Community Protected Area) that jointly cover the mountain habitats, high points, and ridge ecology assets are:

O'Tabok CPA

- Pok Leang Kav Mountain
- Veal Veul Grasslands

O'Tung CPA

- Multi-village ridge zones and forest edges

CONTENT

01

PAGE 06 INTRO

02

PAGE 10 TRAVELING WITH RESPECT

03

PAGE 12 THE ORIGIN STORY CONTINUES

04

PAGE 16 A DAY IN THE MOUNTAIN



05

PAGE 20 MOUNTAIN CULTURE

06

PAGE 22 RESPECT IN THE MOUNTAIN AREA

07

PAGE 24 FIELD GUIDE

08

PAGE 28 MOUNTAIN BELIEFS

09

PAGE 30 MOUNTAIN KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Mountain Chapter. This chapter takes you into the highland areas protected by O'Tabok CPA and O'Tung CPA, communities who live along ridges, grasslands, and the foothills of Pok Leang Kav Mountain.

These CPAs govern lands that include mountain slopes, grassland plains such as Veal Veul, ancestral caves, and wildlife areas where hornbills, gibbons, and highland herbs still thrive.

These mountains are home to communities who understand the rhythms of clouds, the movement of birds, and the messages carried by the wind.

This booklet shares the second chapter of the Two Brothers' journey. Here they learned strength, resilience, and clarity through the teachings of the mountains.



ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

The mountain communities farm small hillside plots, gather forest plants, weave baskets, and follow long ridge trails to visit relatives Elders hold knowledge of caves, mountain herbs, wildlife behavior, and the cultural meaning of peaks and valleys. The mountains protect the people, and the people protect the mountains in return.



INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Cambodia is home to 24 ethnic groups, many of them indigenous to the land. The Brao live on both sides of the Cambodia Laos border, with around 60,000 people mainly in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng. The Brao include several sub groups such as Kreung, Kavet, Brao and Lun. Their cultural knowledge, forest practices and spiritual traditions shape much of the daily life in these CPAs.



TRAVEL WITH RESPECT

Highland paths are shaped by both nature and human footsteps. Moving respectfully supports safe travel and honors local customs.

01. Move with Awareness

Walk slowly on steep or narrow paths. Careful movement helps prevent accidents and protects fragile mountain terrain from erosion.

02. Listen to Your Guide

Mountain weather can change quickly. Pay close attention when winds shift and follow guidance to move safely through exposed areas.

03. Respect Rocks and Caves

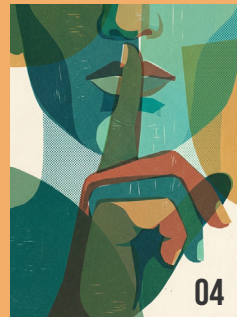
Some caves, cliffs, and rock formations are culturally significant or physically unstable. Always ask before approaching or photographing them.

04. Keep Voices Low

High viewpoints carry sound far across the landscape. Quiet behavior maintains balance and respect for both people and wildlife.

05. Do Not Mimic Sounds

Avoid shouting, whistling, or copying animal calls. Responding to sounds in nature can disturb wildlife and is considered disrespectful in mountain areas.



WHY THESE TRAILS EXIST

The Krong Yong Story Trails were created with mountain communities to protect ecological knowledge and guide visitors through landscapes that hold cultural, historical, and spiritual value.

06. Leave Nature Untouched

Do not remove plants, stones, abandoned tools, or animal remains. Everything in the landscape has a place and purpose.

07. Respect Sacred Markers

Offerings placed along trails or near rocks are sacred. Do not touch them, step over them, or alter their position.

08. Stay on Established Trails

Mountain paths are carefully used to protect slopes and vegetation. Leaving trails can cause erosion and long-term damage.

09. Do Not Touch Animal Remains

Do not touch the bodies of dead animals. These may carry disease or hold cultural meaning and should be left undisturbed.

ORIGIN STORY

Climbing Toward Strength



After their time in the waterfall lands, the Two Brothers reached the foothills of the highlands. Their grandmother had warned them before they left:

“Climb with attention. The mountains will show you who you are.”

With those words in mind, they began their ascent.

The climb was demanding. Paths curved along steep cliffs where eagles glided through shifting winds. Each step required balance and awareness. With every meter climbed, the brothers grew stronger. Reaching the high ground brought fresh air, wide-open views, and a deep sense of joy, a feeling passed down through generations and still shared by Indigenous communities today. Along the way, the brothers learned to read signs in stone, wind, and birds.

They also learned how to behave properly in the forest, how to speak to its spirits, and how to move with respect. This knowledge protected them from harm, including the magical insects said to fall from trees and crawl beneath the skin of those who do not



Ask a Local (non verbal)

Point to the silver-headed fish eagle illustration, then point upward. Locals may show you where eagles nest or circle.

ORIGIN STORY

respect nature, a belief still alive in local communities today. These were the mountains' first teachings.

Their journey continued to Bras Tavar, near the Laos border, a mountain of striking stone and vast rock formations that still carry traces of their passage. Locals point to shapes believed to be Krong and Yong's pipes and seeds, once used to play Angkonh, now turned to stone, along with Krong's footprints. In places, dark marks known as pueng are said to be impressions of clothes laid out to dry by ancient people. These landscapes hold stories that bind communities together, passed from elders to younger generations and still guiding daily life today. Among the Kavet, forests along streams and mountain tops are left untouched, while small hillside plots are farmed in rotation, honoring the land, its guardians, and nature's ability to renew itself.

Yet the brothers' journey was not without conflict. Angered by Yoong's destruction of their fish barriers, they continued their search through the forest, crossing valleys and climbing hills across Ratanakiri. As they walked, they came to know the land more deeply, learning its paths, its moods, and the places their people call home. What began as pursuit slowly became a journey of belonging, drawing them closer to the land and, in turn, to themselves.

Their search led them first to Anlong Preah, where they found Yoong's boat, now turned to stone, another trace of this ancient journey etched into the earth. Knowing he had fled on foot, the brothers followed, climbing still further until they reached Tól Kei Changkar, the zig-zag mountain, where the path could go no farther. There, Yoong was killed, and his blood is said to have flowed across the ground, staining the soil red. Elders say this is how Ratanakiri gained its distinct color, a lasting

mark of struggle and of the many generations who shaped this land.

With the conflict resolved and their bond restored, the brothers turned inward, seeking understanding rather than victory. The mountains called them higher still. As they climbed together, the land revealed deeper lessons.

The mountains taught strength, because progress requires steady steps. They taught clarity, because high viewpoints reveal the shape of the world. They taught protection, because ridges shelter villages from storms.

Elders say the Mountain Guardian is felt in sudden silence, in shifting winds, and in the long shadows cast by peaks. This guardian protects those who walk with care and respect.

Near the waterfalls, the brothers had learned to meditate, carrying the fluid life of water into the stillness of the mountains. Here, they learned to absorb sunlight and fresh air, a source of strength still believed by local people today. This power was not meant to dominate, but to protect.

Guided by the mountains, Krong and Yong gained the wisdom to shield Brao and Kavet communities from harmful spirits and forest beings across generations. They learned to calm unrest, restore balance, and guide all living things toward harmony. In time, the brothers became guardians themselves, protecting both people and the more-than-human world so all could live in peaceful coexistence.

This chapter marks their passage into responsibility, insight, and care.

Small Activity

At a safe viewpoint, breathe slowly and feel the change in wind. This helps you understand why people consider mountains to be teachers of clarity.



A DAY IN THE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES

Life in the mountain region follows the rhythm of terrain and season. Families adapt their daily practices to elevation, weather, and the guidance of the land.

EVERYDAY PRACTICES

01. Weaving Basket Backpacks

Sturdy basket backpacks, known as “Réu” in the Brao language, are woven to carry vegetables, tools, and forest products across steep paths.

02. Harvesting Hillside Fields

Small hillside plots are harvested with care, while mountain tops are left untouched out of respect. Crops include “Samrong” (malva nuts), an important source of livelihood, and bamboo black mushrooms.

03. Drying Herbs in the Sun

Herbs are laid out to dry along ridge paths, using sunlight and wind. Dried “Chanang” flowers are later used in cooking.

04. Gathering Medicinal Plants

Medicinal plants such as “Jrao srang” are collected from the forest and used to treat illness and maintain health.

05. Walking Long Distances

Long walks across ridges are part of daily life, connecting families and allowing visits to relatives across the highlands.



06. Preparing Bamboo Tools

Bamboo is shaped into tools for farming, gathering, and cooking, using skills passed down through generations.

07. Reading the Clouds

Cloud movement is carefully observed before traveling, helping families anticipate weather changes in the mountains.

08. Learning by Joining

Families sometimes travel together to nearby forest streams to fish. These shared journeys offer opportunities to learn directly from elders.

Children quickly learn to balance on narrow paths and to recognize highland plants used for food and health.





Samrong, or malva nut (“Chong” in Kavet language) is one of the most valued forest products in the mountain CPAs, supporting both household income and daily wellbeing. Rich in fibre, calcium and natural minerals, it is used to ease digestion, soothe the stomach and support regular bowel movements. When soaked, it expands into a cooling gel that helps reduce internal heat, hydrate the body and refresh the throat after long days on the ridges.

Small Activity

Point at the malva nut photo then give a thumbs up. Locals may tell you whether they like the taste of the malva nut and show you a Samrong tree.

PRONG: A TRADITIONAL BAMBOO COOKED DISH

Prong is a well loved highland dish made by cooking vegetables inside a fresh bamboo tube. It focuses on wild forest plants and river vegetables, although families often add fish or other meat when available. The combination of bamboo, leaves and slow heat creates a natural aroma that is unique to the mountain and forest communities.



If you are in O'Tung, look out for Bong Onn and ask him for a small cooking class in his family roadside shop.

Common Ingredients

- Gourd and young gourd leaves
- Luffa and luffa leaves
- Tres nhes
- Chanang leaves or dried Chanang flower
- Eggplant
- Chili
- Salt and MSG to taste
- Catfish or other available fish



How It Is Made

All vegetables are cut and washed, then placed inside a bamboo tube that has been opened on one side. Dried Chanang flower is added for aroma, along with salt and MSG. Water is poured in until the ingredients are fully covered. The bamboo is sealed with banana leaves and placed upright on the fire for thirty minutes to one hour. Catfish is grilled beside the fire and, once lightly cooked, its meat is added to the bamboo to finish cooking with the vegetables.

Prong brings together the flavors of forest plants, river life and bamboo cooking, and is often shared during gatherings or after long days of work on the land.

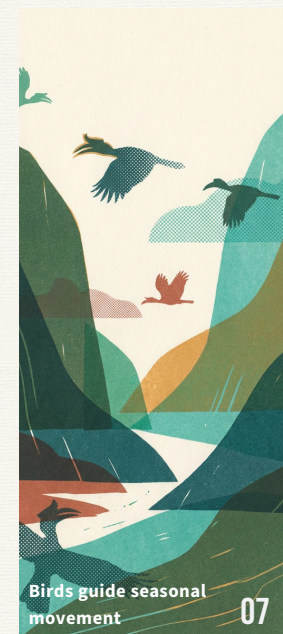
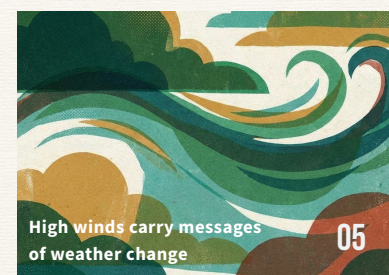
MOUNTAIN CULTURE

For the people of O'Tabok CPA and O'Tung CPA, mountains are teachers and protectors.

For Brao and Kavet communities, mountains are more than landmarks. They are places of origin. Hailing–Hailang holds deep ancestral meaning as the birthplace of their people, lying along the Cambodia–Laos border within what is now Virachey National Park. Families living today in Community Protected Areas once called this highland region home, until the American bombings of the 1960s and 1970s forced them to leave. Though many no longer live there, the mountain remains central to identity, memory, and belonging.

Mountains shape daily life and understanding of the world. Peaks serve as natural watch points, while ridge paths connect families across long distances. Caves are believed to hold ancestral presence and healing water, and strong winds are read as signs of approaching weather change.

*“Walk with intention.
The mountain listens.”*



Certain medicinal herbs grow only at specific altitudes, and the movement of birds helps guide seasonal travel and activity. Each feature of the mountain carries meaning and instruction.

Hailing–Hailang is regarded as the principal sacred mountain, and many families continue to honour the arek spirits believed to inhabit its slopes and surrounding forests. Those who climb these mountains are expected to follow specific rituals. Traditional clothing is worn, traditional tobacco is smoked instead of modern cigarettes, and only Brao or Kavet is spoken. Hunting and harvesting are forbidden, except for small amounts of bamboo used to drink jar wine. These practices express respect, reminding visitors that the mountain is not only terrain, but a living ancestral presence.

ANCESTRAL TEACHING

Across Indigenous communities in the region, forests, mountains, and non-human beings are understood as living and spiritual. Stories and symbols passed down through generations guide respectful conduct toward the land. Many follow the principle of an honorable harvest, taking only what is needed.

Around O'Tung, near the sacred mountains of Mera and Ja Doung and the Badabal waterfalls, people speak of the Teáh insect, a guardian of nature. It is said to warn those who misbehave by falling from the trees and crawling beneath the skin, a reminder that this is protected and sacred land.

RESPECT IN MOUNTAIN AREAS

Traveling in mountain regions requires awareness and humility.



Do

- Move calmly and observe the land
- Pause when elders listen to the wind
- Follow your guide on unfamiliar ridge paths
- Stand aside for elders on narrow trails
- Show a map and ask locals about their sacred mountains and the stories behind them



Do Not

- Shout across valleys
- Climb onto sacred stones
- Touch offerings near cave entrances or on top of stones
- Harvest mountain herbs without permission

Small Activity

Look for “Jrao srang”, the yellow medicinal flower, along the trails. Its appearance often marks seasonal change.





FIELD GUIDE: WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Landscape Features

- Pok Leang Kav Mountain with its steep slopes and stone outcrops
- Veal Veul grasslands used by wildlife and grazing species
- Ridge trails connecting mountain villages
- Caves and rocky overhangs with ancestral echoes
- Moist gullies where mountain herbs grow

Wildlife: Primates

- Northern pig tailed macaque (*Macaca leonina*) moving along ridges
- Yellow cheeked crested gibbon (*Nomascus gabriellae*) calling at dawn

Birds

- Great hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) seen flying across open valleys
- Oriental pied hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) near fruiting trees
- Crested serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) circling on warm air currents
- Hill myna (*Gracula religiosa*) with loud calls during seasonal change

Mammals

- Red muntjac (*Muntiacus muntjak*) in forest edges
- Sambar deer (*Rusa unicolor*) at dawn or dusk
- Common palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*) foraging at night

Reptiles

- Tokay gecko (*Gekko gecko*) clinging to tree bark
- Asian forest tortoise (*Manouria emys*) on shaded trails

Plants

- Jrao srang, a yellow medicinal flower found in upland forest
- Orchid species growing on old trees and moist rock faces
- Mountain ferns in shaded areas
- High elevation bamboo forming narrow groves
- Roots and herbs used in traditional healing

RITUALS, STORIES, AND MOUNTAIN BELIEFS

Mountains are rich with stories that connect people to the land.

Mountain Ritual Awareness

In the mountains, ritual awareness guides how people move and behave. Offerings placed on stones ask for protection before journeys, while elders read the direction and strength of the wind to decide when it is safe to travel. Certain ridges are considered protected paths watched over by ancestors, and caves are approached as places of reflection and remembrance. Peaks are understood as homes of powerful spirits. In the past, and sometimes still today, especially among elders, protective bracelets are worn to safeguard those who travel through these high places.

Sacred Mountain Practices

In sacred mountain areas, people move with great care and attention to the spirits believed to protect the land. On highly sacred mountains such as Haling Hailang, those who ascend are asked to smoke leaf-rolled tobacco in a traditional cigarette or pipe. Commercial cigarettes are avoided, as offering natural tobacco is considered a respectful way to acknowledge the spirits and maintain the purity of the space.

Cultural Stories

Cultural stories shape how the mountains are read and understood. Birds are seen as messengers, carrying signs of good or bad fortune. One such bird is Chicho. When it flies on your left side, it is believed to bring good luck. If it flies on your right side, it is believed to signal bad luck. A similar belief exists for another bird known locally as Brolang, called Kro Leng Vek in Khmer. For this bird, the meaning depends on direction. If it flies and chirps in front of you, it brings good luck. If it flies and chirps behind you, it is believed to bring bad luck.

Other stories speak of hidden springs, such as Dak Los in Virachey, stones shaped by thunder, and trees that survived powerful storms and are believed to hold protective energy. Visitors are welcome to observe when appropriate, but should always follow local guidance.



Ask a Local (non verbal)

Point to the cave illustration and make a gentle looking gesture. Locals may show which caves can be viewed safely from the outside.



THE MOUNTAIN GUARDIAN

The Mountain Guardian is understood as a presence expressed through wlt protects those who climb with humility and awareness.

The Guardian is recognized through birds appearing at key moments and a sense of calm or clarity felt at high points, reminding travelers to move with respect and attentiveness to the land.



MOUNTAIN SIGNS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Mountain communities read signs that only appear at higher elevations.



Seasonal Indicators

Seasonal change in the mountains is closely observed through sound, movement, and subtle shifts in the landscape. Elders listen for the songs of the Nget bird, which often signal the transition from dry season to rain, and watch for orchids blooming when soil moisture reaches the right level. Fast-moving cloud shadows across peaks can warn of strong winds, while the timing of gibbon calls is believed to reflect changing weather patterns. Butterflies gathering on warm ridge stones are also read as signs of clean water flowing nearby.

Ecological Insights

The land itself offers further guidance. Areas where bamboo grows alongside hardwood trees are understood to indicate fertile soil, helping communities recognize healthier ground for farming and gathering. These observations reflect knowledge built through long experience and careful attention to the mountain environment.



Community Practices

Daily practices are shaped by this way of reading nature. Elders observe wind direction before long journeys, and certain birds, such as the Tayeuy, are protected, as disturbing them is believed to bring misfortune, including sudden storms. Herb gathering follows rotational patterns so plants can regenerate, while caves, stone passes, and spirit forests are approached with quiet respect. Families navigate using natural markers like trees, sometimes breaking small branches at regular intervals to guide those who follow. Travelers also stay alert to animals that appear to follow them, which may be understood as a warning sign along the path.



Small Activity

Look at the shape of the clouds from a high point. Try to guess whether rain is coming. This simple observation connects you to mountain weather knowledge.



MAP OF VIRACHEY

The map on the next page shows the Community Protected Areas in and around Virachey National Park that form the Krong Yong Story Trails. Rivers, waterfalls, forests, and villages mark places of cultural, spiritual, and ecological importance. These landscapes are protected and cared for by Indigenous communities who act as guardians of the land. The map and booklets together guide you through these living stories.

In the mountain regions on the map, are where the Two Brothers learned resilience, clarity, and courage as they moved through the rising landscape. The mountains taught them how to walk with intention, when to slow their steps, and how to read the signs carried by wind, stone, and shifting light. In this terrain, knowledge came through effort and attention, shaping both their strength and their understanding of responsibility.

These mountain Community Protected Areas lie along the lower slopes that border Virachey National Park and play an essential role in protecting forest

corridors that allow wildlife to move between high and low elevations. They link habitats for birds, primates, and large mammals, and help maintain the balance between forest, grassland, and mountain ecosystems. For travelers, this chapter offers wide views, quiet moments, and opportunities for reflection, inviting a deeper understanding of mountain knowledge that has guided families for generations.

This is the second chapter of the Krong Yong Story Trails.



1
O'CHAY



2
O'TUNG



3
O'KAMPHA



KRONG YONG MAP



Map of Cambodia



Map of Virachey National Park with Community protected areas

4
MONDULYORN



5
O'TABOK



BRAO AND KAVET WORDS TO LEARN



Useful Expressions

- You - “Hai”
- I - “Ay”
- Mountain - “Chandu”
- Ancestor - “Mek Yak Ando”
- Cloud - “Yook”
- Stone - “Tamor”
- Cave - “Trom Chandu”
- Wind - “Ka Yeav”
- Trail - “Trung”



Try This With a Local

By building a good relationship with a local family, you may be invited to join them in collecting forest products or harvesting from their rotational, multi-crop farms.

EXPERIENCES YOU CAN ENJOY IN THE MOUNTAIN REGION

Activities available in O'Tabok CPA and O'Tung CPA:



Activities Around the Mountains

As the journey moves into the mountain landscape, the path rises toward Pok Leang Kav and across open spaces such as the Veal Veul grasslands. Guided **mountain treks** and **ridge walks** reveal wide views, shifting winds, and the routes that connect villages across the highlands. Along the way, travelers may observe **caves** and striking **rock formations**, and join **bird-watching walks** to spot hornbills, eagles, and other species that move between forest and open slopes.

Visitors are invited to learn through shared mountain practices. With permission, guides introduce **medicinal herbs**, mountain orchids, and high-altitude bamboo, explaining where they grow and how they are gathered with care. **Basket weaving** using highland materials offers insight into everyday skills shaped by terrain and climate, while **motorbike trail** rides through mountain villages provide a closer look at daily life along winding paths.

Deeper understanding comes through time spent with local elders. **Weather-sensing** walks focus on reading clouds, wind, and light before travel, while stories of mountain guardians reveal how peaks are understood as living, protective presences. Together, these experiences invite travelers to slow down, observe closely, and connect with mountain knowledge that has guided families for generations.

Additional experiences may be available across other Community Protected Areas in the region.





YOUR SPACE

SKETCH OR WRITE YOUR TRAVEL PLANS, THOUGHTS OR MEMORIES



CONNECTION TO VIRACHEY NATIONAL PARK

These CPAs lie along the southwestern interface of Virachey National Park, contributing to the buffer zone that protects the park's mountainous ecosystems.

Communities here help prevent forest clearing, maintain ridge trails, and protect medicinal plants that naturally regenerate in mountain zones. Their stewardship supports both cultural heritage and ecological resilience.

Conservation in These Communities

Local families protect their forests through:

- rotational gathering that allows plants to regrow
- careful bamboo harvesting
- protecting key wildlife habitats
- maintaining spiritual groves and ancestral trees
- keeping rivers clean
- teaching younger generations about the land
- hosting visitors respectfully, so tourism supports conservation instead of harming it

Your visit contributes to these efforts and supports community-led eco-tourism in one of Cambodia's last great wilderness areas.



You now hold the Mountain Chapter of the Krong Yong Story Trails. The final chapter leads into the forest, where the brothers learned belonging, culture, and community.

Credits

Created with guidance from elders, cultural knowledge keepers, and leaders from the mountain communities, in collaboration with IUCN, CPA communities, and Itonami.

All content in this booklet reflects traditional knowledge, ancestral wisdom, and local storytelling that belongs to the Indigenous communities themselves.

This activity was financially supported by the Biodiverse Landscapes Fund (BLF) Lower Mekong Landscape project, funded by the UK International Development.

PROJECT TEAM

Shunsuke Miyatake,
Project Lead

Tinzi Fonteyne,
Creative Lead

Miguel Jeronimo,
Indigenous Researcher & Photographer

Roswell Thomas,
Adventure Consultant

Sourkea Heng,
Khmer Simultaneous Interpreter

SokSambath Pen,
Khmer Simultaneous Interpreter

Chivorn Sokh,
Design Facilitator & Researcher

Rathana Hul,
Outdoor & Adventure Consultant

Mondet Youn,
Indigenous Culture Advisor & Translator

CONTRIBUTING ADVISORS

Ecotourism Experts

Marta Saya,
Independent Consultant

Marjorie Schweitzer-van Strien,
Independent Consultant

IUCN

Samuel Leslie,
Coordinator - Biodiverse Landscapes
Fund: Lower Mekong





AN INITIATIVE OF IUCN IN COLLABORATION WITH INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES IN VIRACHEY

<https://iucn.org/>