

The Thai Cave Rescue

Jill McDougall



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Author's Note

This text is a historical recount based on real events that took place in Thailand in 2018.

A Great Adventure

Saturday, 23 June 2018

On a sunny morning in northern Thailand, 12 boys on the Wild Boar soccer team were feeling excited. After soccer practice, their coach, Ekkapol Chantawong (known as Coach Eak), was taking them to explore the Tham Luang (pronounced *tam loo-ong*) caves, not far from their village.



The Wild Boars were known by their nicknames. Back row, from left: Mix, Night, Pong, Coach Eak, Mark, Tern, Note, Nick. Front row, from left: Bew, Dom, Titan, Thi, Adul.

The Tham Luang caves stretch for over ten kilometres underneath the Doi Nang Non mountain range. The caves are made up of large chambers, winding passages and narrow tunnels. The biggest chambers were given names such as “Underwater World” and “Hidden City” by some of the boys. For them, this trip was going to be a great adventure.

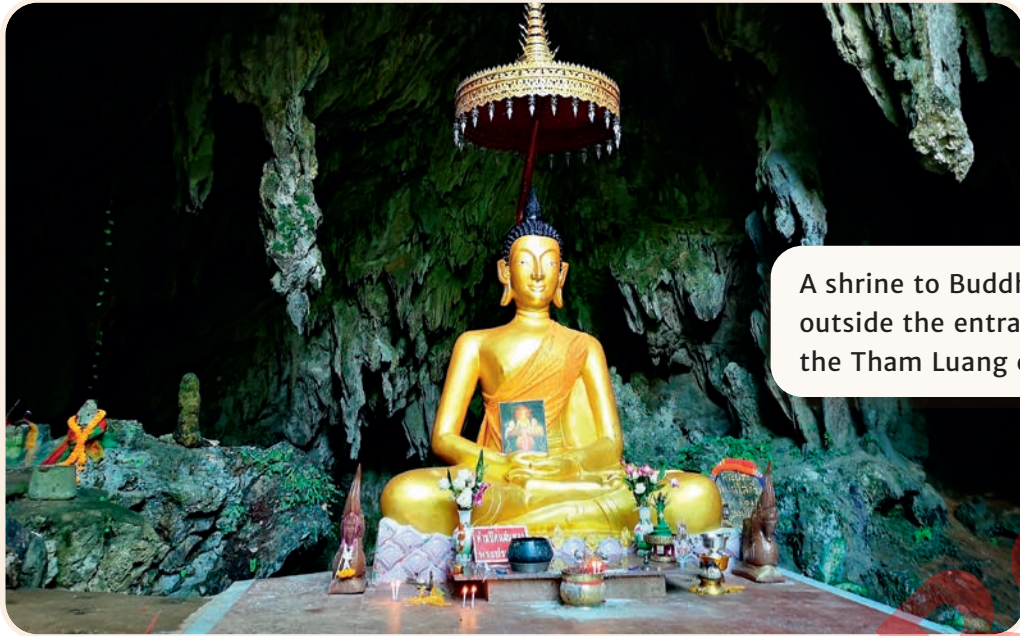
After stopping for a quick snack at a food stall, the Wild Boars and their coach set off on their bikes. The boys, who were aged from 11 to 16, carried nothing but their backpacks and flashlights.

Location of the Tham Luang Caves in Thailand



The Tham Luang caves are found in the northern part of Thailand.

As the boys approached the cave entrance, they stopped to bow and pay their respects at a **shrine** decorated with an image of the **Buddha**. Most of the Wild Boar boys were Buddhist, and they believed that the Tham Luang mountains were a **sacred** place.



A shrine to Buddha is outside the entrance of the Tham Luang caves.

Outside the cave was a sign written in Thai and English. One of the boys, Titan (aged 11), paused to read it. The biggest word was “Danger!!” The sign explained that July to November was flooding season.

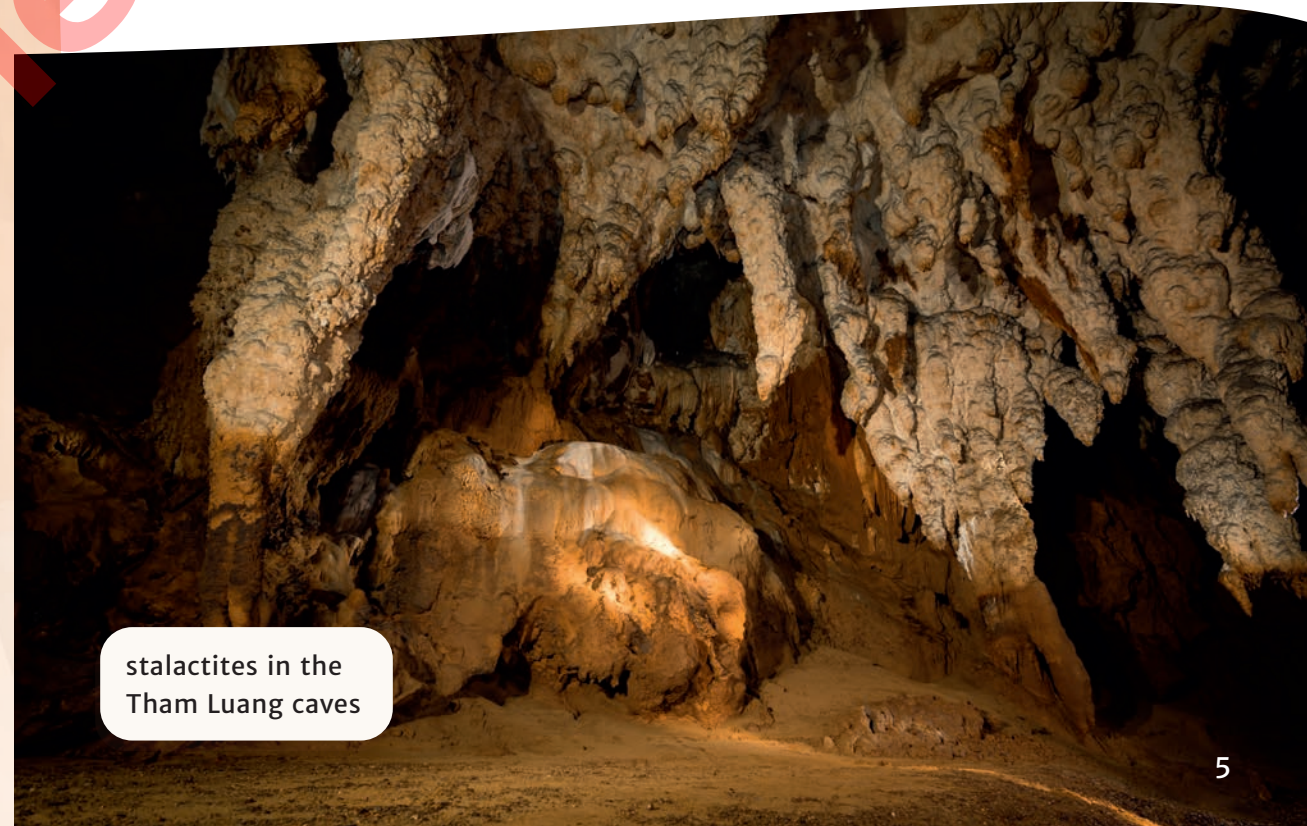
Titan thought about the warning. It was the end of June, so the dangerous period hadn’t started yet. Feeling relieved, he followed the others into the cave.

The air grew cooler as Coach Eak and the boys made their way through the large chambers and twisting tunnels. Overhead hung spiky **stalactites**.

The boys turned left at a junction where three tunnels join, called Sam Yaek, and then continued on, using their flashlights to light the way. As the cave walls began to close in, the boys wriggled through the narrow spaces on their bellies.

After three hours, the boys had travelled around five kilometres. It was time to turn back.

Stalactites form over thousands of years. When water drips from the ceiling of a cave, it leaves behind minerals that harden into hanging cones.



stalactites in the Tham Luang caves

Trapped

Outside the caves, heavy rain had been falling on the mountainside. The **monsoon season** had arrived early.

Soon, water was rushing through the caves, and the boys discovered that the rising flood had blocked their way out. As the swirling water rose higher, the boys were forced to climb onto a small, rocky ledge.

Coach Eak was not very worried. He thought they might be able to swim through the flooded part of the cave. He had some rope with him, so he tied one end around his waist and gave the other end to three of the oldest boys. "If I don't tug the rope, you can swim after me," he told them.



This map shows the caves from above and how far away the boys were from the entrance.

Coach Eak plunged into the chilly water and swam a few strokes. He soon realised there was no air space above him. The water had reached the ceiling of the flooded part of the cave, and he was running out of breath.

Quickly, Coach Eak yanked on the rope, and the boys pulled him back. "We can't get out," he told them. "We must wait until the water level drops."

In tropical areas of the world, the wet monsoon season brings heavy rains. The season begins when warm winds bring moist air from the ocean to the land.

Rain clouds move quickly over the mountains in northern Thailand during monsoon season.

