

## WALK TOUR 2010 - Lucy, Keith & Simaon Lanham

“DO NOT LET YOUR CULTURE TO BE WASHED AWAY” SAY KEITH & LUCY FROM UK

Lucy and Keith Lanham live in Kent, UK and they have visited Sri Lanka four times since 2006. They were the people who had set a land mark in Tourism in Sri Lanka in 2006 by walking 174km within 10 days. At that time they walked from Negombo to Dambulla. This time they came in end September and completed walking 168km ending their walk in Kandy. It was my pleasure to elaborate the walking experiences of theirs and mine. Lucy's and Keith's passion for walking has created a great friendship between Sri Lanka and the UK.



It was my first experience in Walking a long distance in 2006 where I managed to design, facilitate and organize their camping locations from Negombo to Dambulla through my personal contacts for the tour company they reserved the tour. The first ever long distance walk in the history of tourism in Sri Lanka has been achieved by three of us together.



Keith and Lucy, both building surveyors in UK, first came to Sri Lanka in 2004 with some friends and stayed in Bentota and Kandalama but actually never saw anything of Sri Lanka. They just stayed inside the hotels and vehicles. Anybody who comes to Sri Lanka can stay in a hotel and sit all day, can't they? But that did not really satisfy Lucy and Keith. They wanted to meet people, see the real Sri Lanka. They came back two years later on their own to do some walking. And they met me, and they call me “the funny little salty man or the snake man”. Being a nature lover, conservator and a naturalist, suggestions of Lucy and Keith for walking has inspired me.

In 2004 they did some good walking, 174km from Negombo to Dambulla. Through villages, cities, forests...meeting different people, visiting most uncommon places, participating in functions in temples, shrines and churches where the regular

travelers usually do not happen to see, and that's what they wanted to do.



This time Lanhams came to Sri Lanka planning to visit the places where they could not go before because of the civil war. Honestly, being a Sri Lankan I too never had chance to visit the East and the North because of the terrorism for nearly 30 years. Thirty Years less my age makes me a boy of 14 and that means I've never been to those areas except for a few visits to give a helping hand to the people who were suffering from all the problems due to terrorism in North and East.

We were able to walk in war affected areas this time. On the 25<sup>th</sup> September Lucy, Keith and Simon, who is Keith's son arrived in Katunayaka International Airport and met me. Early next morning we took the Podi Menike – Badulla Train and arrived in Bandarawela by the evening. We started walking on the 26<sup>th</sup> and had completed 169km of walking when we arrived in Kandy on the 5<sup>th</sup> October.” We walked through Monaragala, Pottuvil, Batticoloa, Maha-Oya, Mahiyangana, Knuckles and reached Kandy.



Why Walk instead of Traveling on a vehicle? Simply because it is much easier to meet people, see what they really do and learn culture. This time we had more opportunity to visit places where we could not go earlier and we saw a lot of development. In the Northeast and West it was happening. It was good because it

opens up the rest of the country and the roads are a lot better than the last time. A lot more help is being given to local people, you can see the development of farms, and local trade has been developed by outside organizations, which is helping also. Ending the war has encouraged us to come back and to go further.



During the Walk this time, when we were chatting in the evenings, Lucy said that was so nice to come out of the hotels and visit small shops, people's houses and meet real people. According to them they enjoyed every moment of meeting people. Their comment was

“People of Sri Lanka are very nice, smiling, open and kind, which shows the culture's core.”



In 2004 and 2006 it was only Lucy and Keith who came to Sri Lanka for walking but this time Simon Lanham, Keith's son also has joined them. This was his first visit to Sri Lanka. Having listening to all the good things about Sri Lanka, he too wanted to join Lucy and Keith this time. Simon, 27, a Heating system technician in UK was a happy faced young man who explained that his walking experience in Sri Lanka was excellent.

Explaining his experiences, Simon said that it was enjoyable and interesting. People were very

welcoming, and the walk has been very nice and the Nature is very beautiful. Although he was not a keen follower of studying nature, could not help learning and experiencing the excellent environment here in Sri Lanka during the past two weeks. He said that he will be trying to learn a bit more when he gets back home, and will be coming back on his own next time.



Answering to the question of what location he liked best in Sri Lanka, he said that it's a tricky one... it has always been something new. Wherever you go in Sri Lanka, it is something different and new. "So I liked everything I saw" said Simon.



Keith continuing to say about his experience said, "Many people know the Tea came from Ceylon. But many do not realize that Sri Lanka is the same place. And most of all, many do not know how it is grown. We were walking through the Tea Plantations, we got the whole history. In our previous visits we didn't walk through the tea plantations. We visited a place where they processed tea. But this time we saw how it grew. We saw how people going to work. How they laid the stick on top of the bush. Now I know how actually tea got

into my cup. To me, that was one of the nicest things I've come across Sri Lanka. So visitors to Sri Lanka should reach the core of Sri Lanka."



We sipped beer in the evenings after walking about 20-22km; strumming my guitar we managed to sing a little and laughed a lot. Lanhams enjoyed every Sri Lankan dish. Their love of exploring new things has certainly made the tour an enjoyable one.

"And food in Sri Lanka is very diverse. There's not one curry that we didn't like. My suggestion is – Curry for breakfast - Curry for lunch – Curry for Dinner... and that is the way...!" says Keith.

For them, according to Lucy, the walking is a kind of therapeutic and de-stresses. For over a couple of weeks, they were de-stressed, relaxed and became healthier and ready for going back home for their busy working life. And they want to encourage other people to do the same.

Keith's message to all Sri Lankans is one of the most important things we've ever heard. Here it is, in Keith's own words:

*"It is what you do that attracts Sri Lanka. If the way you do changes just to benefit of the people outside, you lose the reason for people to come. The reasons the people come to Sri Lanka is because it's a lovely culture. You must maintain what you've got and develop it rather than move away from it adhering to western culture. We come here because we like what you are. My message would be not to lose the personality you got from a culture that is well over 3000 years. Losing what you have is very easy. Because of the influences that come from the larger countries often ruined smaller countries. So don't be influenced by other countries because they're not always right. And when a country develops it is not always positive. When it develops it has some negative points as well. People of this country must be aware of this and have faith on the great culture they have."*



I adore this idea and wish the same to happen.

-Nayana Wickramasinghe-  
WildWorldWatch