

**In Search of the Thai Ridgeback Dog's History**  
**From the Travel Journal of Mr. Anusorn Supmanue**  
**Translated from Thai to English by Panuchai "Pop" Praditbatuga**

July 28, 1997

[Note: While this document is primarily kept to give information/perspective on the Thai Ridgeback, it provides insight into the Phu Quoc Ridgeback. This document has copied the information from Pop Praditbatuga's archived but defunct website in its entirety to preserve the information elsewhere.]

The original article from which the translated information here is based was written in Thai by Mr. Anusorn Supmanue (See Footnote 1). The original article was best described as a traveler's journal entry with a first person narrative. From an academic perspective, a personal journal may not have the validity of a more scientific study; however, it is an important source in that it reveals information that was observed firsthand. Since most of us may never get the opportunity to visit Phu Quoc Island in Vietnam, this information is an invaluable description.

In my translation of the article, I avoided the word-by-word approach for the purpose of efficiency. Nevertheless, all of the essential information from the original article is presented here. I have also decided to present this translation in a third person narrative for no other reason than the fact that I feel more comfortable describing someone else's voice from this perspective.



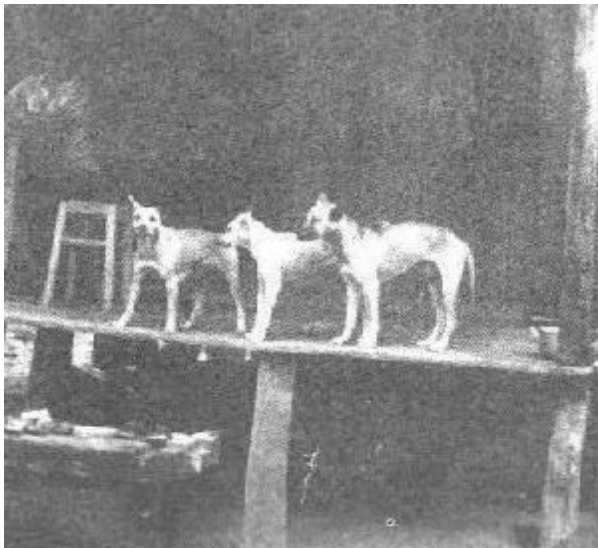
The ridge is apparent on this Phu Quoc Dog.

### **First Stop: Ho Chi Minh**

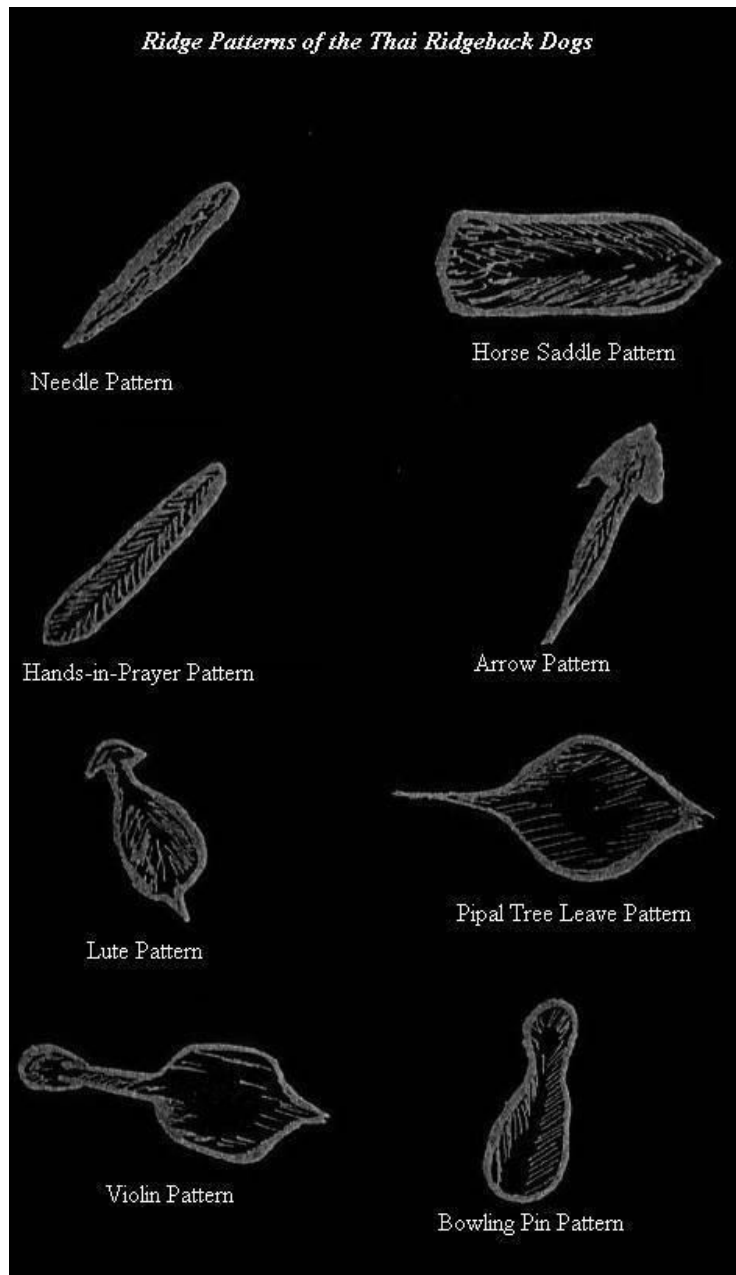
After obtaining their tourist visas to visit Vietnam, Mr. Supmanue and his friends embarked on a flight from Bangkok, Thailand to the Vietnamese city of Ho Chi Minh in 1990. The flight took approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. Once in Ho Chi Minh, the gentlemen rested at a hotel to coordinate a plan to get to Phu Quoc. Luckily, they met a Vietnamese person who was not only on his way to Phu Quoc, but was also an expert on the region. The men hired an additional tour guide for approximately twenty dollars. As a team, they boarded a twin propeller twenty-person plane for a half-hour flight to Phu Quoc. Air transportation to Phu Quoc was only available once per week.

### **On Phu Quoc Island**

Phu Quoc Island in 1990 had a population of approximately 50,000 people. The team first made acquaintances with the local leaders, who recommended native guides to assist in the exploration. Traveling through the island was not easy. The entire island had only three cars and seven trucks, four of which were out of service. Needless to say, the team conducted much of their exploration on foot. The exploration would eventually last four days and three nights.



The team observed many [Phu Quoc] Ridgeback Dogs (See Footnote 2), most of which were concentrated in a market area coincidentally known as "Bangkok Way". Most have ridges with arrow-like patterns. The dogs back in Thailand have ridges that fall into one of eight major patterns: (1) Needle Pattern, (2) Hands-in-Prayer Pattern, (3) Lute Pattern, (4) Violin Pattern, (5) Horse Saddle Pattern, (6) Arrow Pattern, (7) Pipal Tree Leaf Pattern, and (8) Bowling Pin Pattern (Bankitsophon, p.54). Of the foregoing, the arrow pattern has been associated with the highest quality dogs in terms of purity and preference.



[Ridge patterns in Thai Ridgeback Dogs]

During the 1960-70 decade, fighting between North Vietnam and South Vietnam have had a negative impact on the dog population on Phu Quoc. Many of the North Vietnamese who were captured by the South Vietnamese troops were transported as prisoners to Phu Quoc. To the prisoners, food on the island consisted of dogs and other mammals. Consequently, the [Phu Quoc] Ridgeback's population on Phu Quoc was significantly dwindled during this period. In addition, the purity of many dogs was also affected. The American soldiers brought with them many German Shepherds to guard the captives on the island. These German Shepherds interbred

with the local dogs to the extent that the mixed lines are still salient on Phu Quoc today. Nevertheless, Mr. Supmanue points out that despite the impact on the [Phu Quoc] Ridgebacks during the Vietnam War era, the population and the purity of the dogs on the island still surpassed those of the Thai Ridgebacks in Thailand. In Thailand, foreign breeds have been introduced by Europeans or imported by affluent Thais since the Rattanakosin Era over 200 years ago. These breeds have then, at one time or another, found their way to the Thai Ridgeback population and interbred with the indigenous dogs. Consequently, many of the dogs in Thailand no longer exhibit all the traits associated with the original ancient dogs (See Footnote 3). In fact, Mr. Supmanue described the dogs on Phu Quoc to be different from the Thai dogs in the following ways: (1) the dogs on Phu Quoc were larger; (2) they carried a more attractive tail (i.e., more sword-like); (3) they had a deeper chest; (4) their coats were slightly longer; and (5) they had a darker snout. In short, Mr. Supmanue's team discovered many [Phu Quoc] Ridgebacks on Phu Quoc with excellent lineage to the original ancient Thai dogs.

As indicated in the aforementioned, motorized vehicles were very scarce on the island. Many of the natives had to travel on foot. Thus, hunting on the island was also naturally carried out on foot. A local hunter may on rare occasions encounter a tiger, but the animal most feared by the natives were the wild hogs (i.e., the boars). To minimize the risk of harm to the hunter, a pack of four to five [Phu Quoc] Ridgeback Dogs were regularly used to assist in the hunt. A single healthy boar was usually too powerful for even a pack of dogs. Therefore, in order to kill the boar, the hunters would conduct their hunts in daylight during the dry season. During this time many of the water holes were dried up, thus, causing the boars to be less active and more vulnerable to exhaustion.

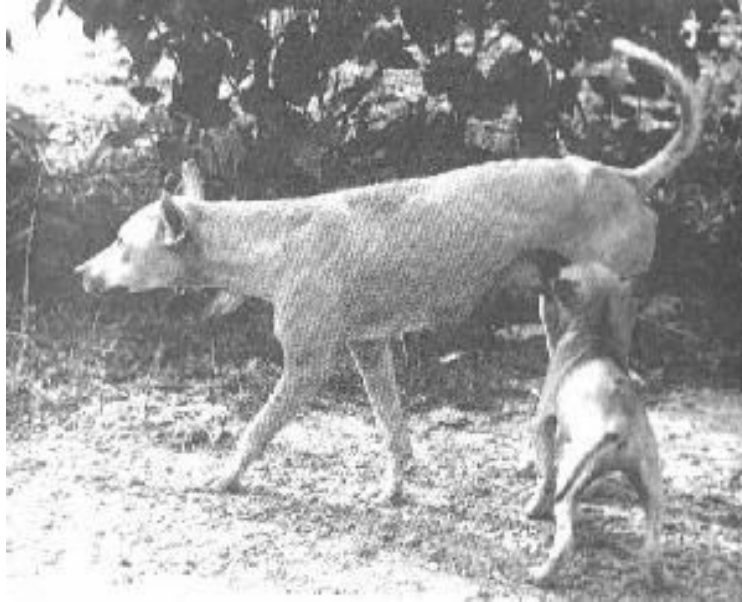
Since the Vietnam War, many local hunters have had access to the M-16 machine gun. So why do they need dogs to hunt? Hunting with the M-16 would require the hunters to hunt the faster and more elusive boars at night. Unfortunately, many people do not have the hunting spotlights required for night hunting. Therefore, the M-16 is used only as a signal to call the dogs to begin the hunt. Matter-of-fact, when the hunter fires his machine gun into the air, the dogs would run enthusiastically to the hunter from wherever they happen to be.



Mr. Supmanue is having a discussion with a Phu Quoc Island native.

Mr. Supmanue have observed and speculated that some of the most intelligent and best working [Phu Quoc] Ridgebacks have the following characteristics (See Footnote 4): (1) black color at the tip of the tail; (2) dark nails; (3) dark snout; (4) dark speckles on the tongue; (5) arrow-pattern ridge; (6) reddish coat; and (7) the root of the tail should be triangular. To test this theory, Mr. Supmanue visited many homes with 11 to 15 [Phu Quoc] Ridgebacks in Phu Quoc. Using these seven criteria, he was able to accurately predict the dog that was most highly regarded by the respective homeowners as most lovable and most intelligent.

In Phu Quoc, many dogs had five to six of the foregoing seven characteristics. Although very few in numbers, the locals claim that several dogs have exhibited all seven characteristics. In contrast, there were no dogs in Eastern Thailand that had all seven characteristics. According to Mr. Supmanue, the attempt of Thai breeders to revive these seven characteristics in their dogs is 75% successful as of 1990. Before departing the island, the team separated to search the large region for a dog that would have all seven traits. They were successful in finding one such dog, which the owner had offered to sell to Mr. Supmanue. The dog was nearly perfect, with the minor exception that its arrow pattern was not as defined as it should be. Nevertheless, the three month old dog showed tremendous intelligence and lovable qualities. Mr. Supmanue noticed that it was the only three month old dog that he could actually get close enough to pet on the entire island. All of the other dogs of equivalent age were so aggressive and protective that they were not at all approachable. The team finally ended the exploration by returning to Ho Chi Minh by boat.



### **Final Word from Translator Pop Praditbatuga**

I just wanted to make a final note that as a translator, I am not responsible for the validity of the information presented in this article or in any future article that I may translate. However, because information about the breed in English is so scarce, I urge that all enthusiasts of the breed keep their minds open for new information. We are merely at the information gathering stage. There have not been enough materials translated for us to formulate a theory on the history of the breed with accuracy. Only when all such information becomes available will we be able to validate or discredit selected information. The Thai Ridgeback Dog has a very ancient history. Even better known breeds have had their share of historical controversies. The rare Thai Ridgeback should be no exception.

### **FOOTNOTES**

1 In translating Thai names to English, it is possible to use different English alphabets to designate the corresponding Thai alphabet. Therefore, it is possible that Mr. Anusorn Supmanue may spell his name differently in English than the way his name is presented here. For example, my surname Praditbatuga has been spelled Praditbatuka by some of my relatives, even though the Thai spelling is always the same.

2 Under the assumption that the Thai Ridgeback Dogs and the Phu Quoc Dogs share a common ancestor, I will refer to the dogs observed on Phu Quoc Island as Thai Ridgebacks. This was also the convention used by Mr. Supmanue. [Note: I have changed this to mention Phu Quoc Ridgebacks instead for less confusion.]

3 Most of the information from the materials available in English have indicated that poor transportation systems in Eastern Thailand have kept the Thai Ridgebacks pure for hundreds of years. In contrast, Mr. Supmanue believes that at one time or another foreign breeds have infiltrated the Thai Ridgeback population in Thailand to the point that the Thai dogs are now inferior to the dogs on Phu Quoc in terms of purity and quality.

4 The original article implied that these characteristics were associated with the original ancient Thai Ridgebacks as described by older documents. However, because the article was based on observations and explorations rather than scientific studies, no source citations were provided.

## REFERENCES

Bankitsophon, Samran. (Date not printed). Mah Thai. Bangkok, Thailand: Kaset Book. p. 54.

Supmanue, Anusorn. (1991). Opening the travel journal to discuss the tracing of the Thai Ridgeback Dogs: From Phu Quoc Island in Vietnam. Nature & Pet Magazine, Year 3, Volume 24, 87-90.

Original translation by Panuchai "Pop" Praditbatuga was completed on July 28, 1997

<http://web.archive.org/web/19990224020655/http://members.aol.com:80/lerdrit2/tr1.html>

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