

## Cable Car Project at Ngong Ping : environment-friendly or not?



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### Stream of muddy water

Stream trekkers trekking along Ngong-Sham stream noted some drastic changes on the stream water quality in early April this year. The water quality of this once badly polluted stream has been much improved over the last few year. However, the situation worsen again suddenly, and it was so bad that the stream was transformed into "a flood of creamed coffee", filled with muddy and foaming water (see *photos above & below*). The change was in fact caused by the large scale construction work carried out at Ngong Ping for the MTR Tung Chung Cable Car Project.

Muddy stream water poses many problems to aquatic lives. First the lower of the dissolved oxygen to an unacceptable level causes respiration problems of animals. The build up of semi-decomposed organic matter also lead to a high biological oxygen demand and the water becoming anoxic. Silt deposits on the aquatic plants prevents them from absorbing enough light for photosynthesis and therefore produce less food as well as less oxygen. All these eventually lead to the killing off of most life in the stream.



The muddy Ngong-Sham stream.  
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### Destruction of Natural Stream Course

At the same time, environment protection groups Green Lantau Association had discovered that a 400-meter-long section of the natural stream course at Ngong Ping, the upper stream of the Ngong-Sham Stream, was drained and filled up in order to make room for the theme village, restaurants and shopping area as part of the cable car terminal complex. The section of the stream, which the MTR had previously promised to preserve, and was one of the few natural habitat for the Romer's Tree Frog (*Philautus romeri*), Rufous Burrowing Snake (*Achalinus rufescens*) and brown thrush (*Turdus chrysolaus*), was destroyed forever.

Hundreds of trees were cut down and hectares of land was dug up in the nearby country park area to build a 10-meter-wide trench as a "replacement" or "compensation" for the lost stream course. The case has created a very bad precedent of the sacrifice of country park land and natural stream course to give way to commercial development.

The MTR spokesman insisted that the stream course alteration work was absolutely necessary in order to prevent potential flooding at Ngong Ping, and was based on the advice from the Drainage Services Department. However, the Drainage Services Department said that the work was mainly for making room for the theme village development, and not flooding



The 10-meter-wide trench at Ngong-Ping, created by clearing woods on countrypark land.

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prevention. Ngong Ping is located at a highland area with mountain on one side and steep down-hill slopes on the other three, at which no flooding has ever been recorded.

Villagers at Ngong Ping welcome the fill-up of the original stream course, saying that the stream had already been polluted by the sewage from the nearby villages anyway and not worth preserving.

MTR promised to construct the trench in a way as close to the natural environment as possible, using natural rocks and boulders instead of concrete as lining, and would plant 600 trees along the trench. It was believed that the current approach was least damaging to the environment, and a natural habitat would be regenerated after a period of 6 to 12 months. However, natural migration of wild life takes time, but the original stream course had already been drained and filled long before the their "new home" is ready, and that means leaving them homeless for at least 6 months - longer than the life cycle of some species, and effectively making them disappearing from the area.

### Pollution of Stream Source

The route of the cable car will pass through the upper-stream area of three of the most natural and pollution-free streams of Hong Kong : Nei-Sham, Nei-San and Nei-Sha Streams. Those ravines are the home of 83 species of butterflies, including the Common Birdwing (*Troides helena*) and the rare Golden Birdwing (*Troidini aeacus*) , a species which is protected by law locally and internationally. With the cable cars going up and down along the ridge right next to the streams, the natural landscape of the area will surely be scarred. Furthermore, many environmenists and hikers worry that noise pollution as well as water and soil pollution near the sources of these streams during construction and operation periods will effect or even damage the natural habitat of the wild life in the area.

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