

A Walking Tour of the Kelabit Highlands

The Natural History Section of the Siam Society sponsored a trip to the Kelabit Highlands of Sarawak March 28th–April 4th of this year. The group leader was Dr. Steven Török. Participating were Nusara Chukaew, Francoise-Xavier DuPorge, Jerry Heugot and myself. Our guide was Mr. Jeffrey Balang, who was born in the Kelabit Highlands and now operates Borneo Jungle Safari of Miri, Sarawak. The walk began at the village of Bario, made famous by Tom Harrisson's *World Within* and ended four days later in Bakelalan.

Because of the extremely rugged terrain logging roads have not yet been able to penetrate into this area, and most of the trip we walked through primary rainforest. The only secondary forest we encountered was the site of an abandoned village which had been dominated by enormous bamboos, descended from those kept for household use by the villagers.

In the primary forest some of the more prominent plant species included ironwood and *Ficus* trees, pitcher plants, various orchids and lianas and numerous epiphytes. We did not get to see a *Rafflesia* flower, however, wild boars having recently consumed the only one in the vicinity. Rattans are also numerous, and are used by the Kelabit for baskets and cording material.

The Kelabit cultivate irrigated rice but depend on the forest for building materials and for most of their meat. We were treated to venison on occasion and wild boar on another. The Kelabit received us with great hospitality. Their friendliness made the trip a great success.

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