

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JHM-17
THE HEADWATERS

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Samarinda, East Kalimantan
Indonesia
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Dear Peter and Friends,

I had tried to reach the Lawa River headwaters three times over the past year, but something got in the way each time. First it was too much rain and flooding, then sickness and bad schedules. Last month I finally made it there, and over the ridge dividing the Lawa watershed in East Kalimantan from the Teweh watershed in the province of Central Kalimantan.

During previous trips to the middle reaches of the Lawa River (see JHM-10 and JHM-12) my curiosity was aroused by stories of the "real jungle" and villages near the headwaters of both rivers. Bentian people further downstream on the Lawa consider this area closest to the roots of their distinctive culture, though few downriver people have ventured to the headwaters in recent years.

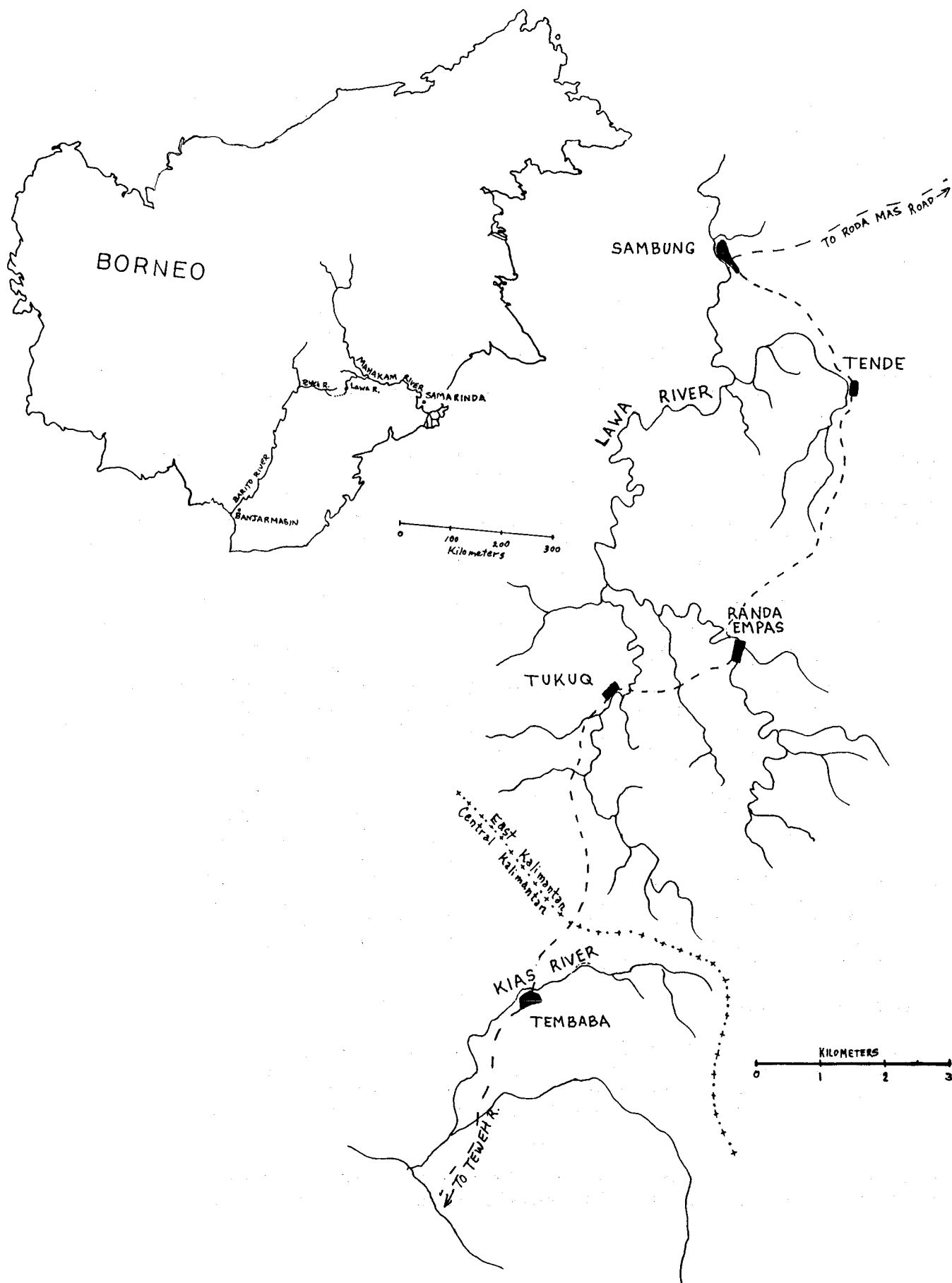
How different would the upriver area be, reachable only on foot through the jungle, from the downriver region I had visited, which is rapidly absorbing outside influences and increasingly dominated by logging and its effects? Would it be like stepping back in time, to an era before logging, mining, oil wells and government resettlement projects had transformed the interior of Kalimantan? I expected a place where vigorous, self-sufficient people lived within ecologically sustainable limits of their land, beyond commercial exploitation.

Just as I was gathering the load of permits and letters of introduction necessary to make this trip, Joshua Barton and Dale Baragwanath, an American nature photographer and a confused Australian tourist, appeared looking for me at the forestry research office in Samarinda. Recognizing a quick way into the interior of Borneo, they asked if they could come along to the Lawa. This trip was to have been my solo challenge to traverse Borneo. But at the last minute I decided the company would be welcome. What would it be like to travel with two guys right out of a Beach Boys video?

Invading Sambung

Originally, I had planned to walk to Sambung along the Lawa River from Jelmu Sibak, the last settlement reachable by boat before rapids, rocks and whirlpools turn the river into a navigator's nightmare. Reports of heavy rains and record breaking floods in the area led me to believe

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the riverside trail would be washed out. I wanted to check on local conditions with the loggers at the P.T. Roda Mas base camp, a friendly but rough outpost where I had been stuck for several days last June. The loggers confirmed that the riverside trail was flooded. And besides, the path from their camp to the Lawa River was inundated. The only other way to Sambung was along the company's corridor road, and a track the loggers had cut from the road to the village last January (see JHM-12).

The camp manager was happy to offer us a ride up to the turn-off for Sambung. But the company's 4-wheel-drive Toyotas could not possibly handle the hazardous conditions on the track approaching the village, which had been severely damaged by the recent rains. We would have to walk the last 23 kilometers.

This seemed hilarious to Pak Anton, a big-hearted logger I'd gotten to know at the camp last June. He volunteered to carry us the last stretch on his logging tractor, a heavy duty machine designed like a tank. I was somewhat skeptical. Even the tractor could be dangerous on the hills, and it was hardly designed to carry passengers. I had imagined arriving in Sambung from the jungle quietly, unobtrusively, gentle travellers on the earth. But the ease of getting to Sambung in a couple of hours rather than two days in unpredictable weather was seductive. We went for the tractor.

We bumped along the logging road for an hour in the Toyota, then climbed onto the tractor, parked at the head of one of the logging skid trails. It would carry six, including Anton and two loggers who came along for the ride. We wedged our packs wherever they seemed to have a chance of staying aboard. Bars, grates, knobs and rattan thongs became precarious handholds as Pak Anton started up the massive machine with a roar, and off we lurched.

The track toward Sambung follows a ridge, much of it through primary forest. Every few minutes, a vast panorama would open on one side or another, marking spots where grading, erosion, or landslides had created a washout-gap between the trees. To the left was a series of jungle-carpeted valleys, with the Central Kalimantan mountains forming the horizon. On several occasions, pairs of black hornbills flew heavily away from the machine racket, gliding over the tree canopy in the valley below, and troupes of macaques leapt to get away from the noise. In many of the hillier areas, landslides covered the track or undermined it. Deep gullies demonstrated the power of water over bare earth. Whenever we approached these points, Anton backed the tractor up and dropped the bulldozer shovel in the front with an earthshaking slam. The ride had become a lesson in jungle road grading.

"Five more kilometers!" Anton must have called above the machine din after about an hour, flashing a smile and reinforcing his inaudible point with a five-finger open hand gesture. I tried to relax and coax some feeling back into my cramp-numbed arms, looking back to see Joshua turning slightly green. I wondered how Pak Anton, gentle, soft-spoken and dignified, could make his living cutting roads and dragging trees out of the jungle with such an earth-shaking, bone-rattling monster.

Beyond the next hill, a patchwork of secondary forest stretched out before us. Shifts in green hues demarcated forest of different ages interspersed with new rice fields. Huts perched on stilts in the fields at strategic points. The sudden emergence of slender-trunked coconut palms above the adjacent scrub and fruit gardens signalled the location of the village center.

Just as I noticed that the track was bordered by soft grass cropped so close it looked like a lawn, seven water buffalo bolted from the trees and stampeded down the village. After chasing them for the next quarter hour, we finally pulled to a halt by the river bank in the middle of Sambung.

Jungle Boom

A dozen wiry men in their twenties gathered around Anton, a frequent visitor to the village. Several wanted to hitch a ride down to the logging camp on Anton's return trip, a few having waited weeks for a way out of Sambung during the rains and floods, when no vehicles came to the village. Anton, in return, asked about the possibility of buying a large pig to feed the non-Moslems back at the logging camp.

We were led to a board house raised on stilts above the bank of the Lawa River. The walkway in front of the house was crowded with makeshift, plastic-roofed stalls displaying cheap clothes, cigarettes, dry foods and canned goods, and a variety of other merchandize as the owners lounged among their wares. As dangdut music blared from a vendor's tape recorder, nasal and percussive, I began to wonder about the stories I had heard of Sambung's extreme isolation. I asked one of the traders where all the sellers come from, and who buys their merchandize. They come from "everywhere", was the reply...from all over East and Central Kalimantan. The shoppers are mostly rattan cutters from Central Kalimantan, unwilling to leave the area to get new supplies, despite prices inflated to double or more what they would be in Samarinda, already one of the highest-priced markets in Indonesia.

After another few minutes of small talk, Anton and the other two loggers excused themselves. Although a couple of people had tried to sell them grey-bristled, 10-kilogram piglets, it seemed all the large pigs were reserved for various ceremonies and feasts taking place over the next few weeks, and were not for sale. Anton apologized to the men who wanted rides to the logging camp, explaining that his boss had told him not to bring anyone back. It was likely they would be stranded at the camp, 48 kilometers up the logging road from the Pahu River, by the continuing rains. But one of the district police officers climbed aboard the tractor with three of his friends. They were going hunting a few kilometers up the track. Since police and army are the only people legally permitted to use firearms in this area, policemen with their guns attract many willing hunting buddies. Everyone else hunts with spears and dogs, airguns, blowpipes, slingshots and rattan-sprung bamboo spear-traps. The new track to Sambung has provided hunters with easy access to a huge forest hinterland along the logging road.

The tidy 35-year old village head, Pak Mariel, arrived from his rice field to inspect our "walking papers and ask why we had come to Sambung and what we planned to do there. He mentioned that we could stay in the house we were sitting in, which he owned but had moved from when his new house was built a year before. After explaining that I wanted to find out about recent changes in the village and forests around it and Joshua would take pictures, I mentioned that after a few days we would continue walking toward Randa Empas, on the way to Central Kalimantan. I took care to explain that we might need to take someone from Sambung along to make sure we didn't lose the path in the jungle. Pak Mariel looked perplexed, wondering why we could possibly need a guide. The path to Randa Empas, about eight kilometers away, he told us patiently, is so heavily travelled it would be impossible to miss. A few years ago we would have had to bushwhack, but foot traffic had picked up on this old route to Central Kalimantan with the take-off of the rattan trade and even more with the opening of the Roda Mas track at the beginning of 1988.

Over the next few days, I learned that Sambung had only recently become a jungle boom town. Six years ago, rattan prices rose dramatically. Men began arriving in Sambung one-by-one to cash in on the lucrative market by cutting rattan from Sambung's abundant old rattan gardens in the secondary forests within a few hours' walk to the village. They got permission to cut from the gardens' customary rights owners, and gave the owners 30 percent of the harvest. They generally stayed in the forest for a month at a time or until they could collect, clean and dry 100 kilograms of rattan which they carried back to Sambung or to their homes along the Teweh River in Central Kalimantan. They sold it to whichever rattan trader could give them the best price. From Sambung, traders floated the rattan down the Lawa River during the few weeks of the year when it flowed high enough to get the rafts of cane over the rapids. Soon, as the trickle of migrant rattan cutters increased to a flood, rattan buyers began assembling crews of cutters, making deals with the garden owners. Many traders made deals with their crews in advance, often supplying them with basic needs on credit against the harvest they expected. Cutters no longer came for a month to the forest and then left. Now they stay for months or even several years on end, many taking up long-term residence in the old forests around Sambung.

Several Sambung people I spoke with, including the village head, estimated there are now as many migrant rattan cutters in and around Sambung as there are permanent residents, overwhelming the local population. The number of merchants in Sambung has exploded in the past few months since the track was opened. Before, the few merchants coming to Sambung had to walk their wares up along the riverside trail, or over from Central Kalimantan, a strenuous journey. Now dozens of merchants rent space on Roda Mas logging vehicles at outrageous rates, hoping for equally outrageous profits. Many villagers have rented their houses to these traders and moved virtually full-time to their bark-walled field huts, which are often a two-hour walk from the village. Children of these families

attend school sporadically, a serious consequence of the tendency to live in the fields, though they are well-versed in the art of shifting cultivation and sustenance from the surrounding forest.

Many people in Sambung have begun to accumulate substantial amounts of money from shares they receive in rattan harvests of gardens they have inherited by customary right. The money rolls in easily, and with migrant cutters, takes virtually no work on their own part. But as the old village has been overrun by migrants, it has become clear to many people in Sambung that their rattan gardens will soon be exhausted. For the past few years, no one in Sambung has planted any new rattan gardens. Cutters also fish, hunt and trap in the jungle, and Sambung people have recently begun to complain of a shortage of game. Over the past few months, several people have refused permission for migrants to harvest rattan from their gardens, with disastrous results. Much of the rattan Sambung people have tried to protect in this way has disappeared anyway. The customary rights owners receive nothing but a rude surprise when they go to check their plants.



Sambung padi farmer who also owns rattan gardens by customary right.

Ibu Mariah, a widow with a 10-year-old son, was trying to conserve a garden her father had planted in order to be able to harvest it later and use the money to send her son to junior high school in Dilang Puti. After she refused to allow several migrants to cut her promising stands, she found that her garden had been devastated, even young plants with no commercial value destroyed beyond any hope of regeneration. It was impossible to identify the thieves because all of the rattan looks alike once it arrives at the buyers' in the village, and cutters can move quickly from one spot to another in the forest without being detected. Ibu Mariah and other victims of such thefts realize the uncontrolled rattan cutting threatens Sambung's only significant source of cash income. They wonder what will become of the village after the rattan, which was their legacy from past generations, is gone.

Throughout my stay in Sambung, women kept pointing out the small number of children in the village. Accounts of couples unable to have children, whose babies had all died soon after birth, and stories of repeated miscarriages were distressingly frequent. In fact, Sambung and all the other villages along the Lawa River headwaters have a reputation for having very few children and many childless couples.

Several villagers without children told me they are worried that if all of the village's old rattan is cut now, they will have no way to support themselves in the future, when they are too old to grow enough rice, fish and hunt for themselves. One woman I met sighed, saying perhaps it didn't matter. Somehow she would get by, and she doesn't have to worry about leaving an inheritance for anyone in the form of forest gardens.

Many of the women who talked with me about the influx of outsiders are pleased with all the new activity in the village, and enjoy getting manufactured goods easily, despite the inflated prices in Sambung. But several women mentioned that with all the strangers wandering around the area, they often feel uneasy about staying in the village center where the migrants congregate. They have also begun to think twice about staying alone in their field huts.

My stay in Sambung coincided with an elaborate belian buntang ceremony to give thanks to spirits and dedicate an ostentatious house built by Pak Renung. The house and ceremony were a chance for him to show off his new wealth, acquired over the past few years by buying and selling rattan. The new two-storey house, the largest in the village, was equipped with a full range of expensive conveniences. He had the community's only pump to lift water from the river to the house, a huge boom-box, a generator, electric lights in every room, and a video machine. The spacious kitchen was equipped with kerosene stoves and a fireplace, as well as brand new pots, plates, and thermoses. (A refrigerator was prominently displayed in the front room.) The kitchen was intended to attract a wife for Pak Renung, who is a widower, one who would hopefully bear enough children to fill the house's ten beds. I wondered how this house would look in another ten years when the rattan, the owner's stock-in-trade, was exhausted. Where would money come from to maintain such an edifice, let alone support the hoped-for ten kids?



Baby hangs in there, oblivious to belian gongs and drums.

The culmination of the eight-day belian ceremony was marked by the ritual slaughter of ten chickens, three pigs, and a water buffalo. The entire village feasted until well after midnight along with



Learning the gongs.

While the new trade has brought a great deal of money into the village, the decks seem stacked against Sambung in the long run as the village's rattan "capital" is sold off for quick profits. How much of these profits will be productively invested to ensure the village's future viability?

The week before I arrived in the village, the camat (subdistrict officer), the highest government official who ever comes to the headwater, had just paid a long overdue visit. Villagers were disappointed when he failed to announce approval of any long-awaited development projects. The upper Lawa River is low on the province's priority list for development funds, which are concentrated in communities designated as "growth poles" according to a set of highly arbitrary and often politically motivated criteria, or in

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Boy offering blood from newly slaughtered pig to village spirits. Human skull from headhunting days is wrapped at his feet.

visitors from settlements as far as two days away, reciprocating previous invitations for similar occasions in other villages. The chanting, gongs, drums, dancing and offerings were accompanied by loud gambling on cards and board games. Many of the most serious bettors were migrant rattan cutters from Central Kalimantan holding stacks of Rp. 10,000 notes worth several months' earnings, won or lost in a single night.

It seemed to me that Sambung may be gambling on even higher stakes by continuing to welcome the roving rattan cutters into the village and its forests.



the interests of national economic efficiency. Lacking any more tangible assistance, the camat suggested that Sambung's future prosperity would have to rely on villagers' own sense of enterprise and initiative. But his only advice was to start planting more rattan.

Tende

We left Sambung the morning after the belian ceremony ended, while the village was still waking up after the excesses of the late-night feast. The trail toward Central Kalimantan passes through the village of Tende, far up a tiny tributary of the Lawa, just over an hour's walk from Sambung. Most of the hard-packed path runs through young secondary growth of recent swidden fields in their fallow phase.

Tende is the most isolated village between the Lawa and Teweh rivers, linked to the outside with only a footpath. The houses are set in a grove of coconut and fruit trees, with a grassy floor maintained by freely roaming water buffalo. There was hardly anyone in the village when we arrived in the late morning, between the people still in Sambung after the belian and those staying out in their ricefields, weeding.

Where Sambung is bursting at the seams, Tende gives the impression of a ghost town. Our presence in Tende aroused little curiosity from the people taking refuge from the heat in the longhouse, constructed with ironwood stilts and shingles, bamboo slat floors, bark walls, and lashed together with rattan. A few families still occupy the longhouse, much like the one in Sambung, but most of the 16 households live in individual homes clustered around the older building. While the longhouse was built entirely of materials available within an hour's walk of Tende, we marvelled that most of the newer houses have pre-fab louvred glass windows and embossed-design doors, manufactured in Samarinda or Banjarmasin, and carried before there were any roads in the area from as far away as Jelm Sibak on the Lawa or from Central Kalimantan, at least two days walking either way.

As we gulped a good portion of the boiled water we had brought from Sambung, a small group of people gathered around to chat, wondering why we could possibly want to come to Tende, when everyone there was always looking for a reason to leave. During the drought of 1982 and 1983, the village had almost ceased to exist when the river beside it, the community's only water supply, dried up and families scattered throughout the region to seek water at other relatives' villages. Since then, Tende has become virtually a satellite of Sambung, a pattern reinforced by strong family ties between the two villages and recently by the opening of the motor track to Sambung.

The ten school-age children in Tende (out of a population of 70) attend classes in Sambung, usually returning home only once a week. The people we spoke with, several of whom mentioned that they were resting in the village because they were ill, gave the impression that Tende is a dying community. As expectations change rapidly all around, the village seems to have become too small and too isolated to continue to be viable on its own. And with so few children, there is little con-

tinued incentive to develop. The rattan boom has brought money into Tende also, but most of it flows out again quickly, much of it into the pockets of the Sambung merchants.

While I would have liked to stay longer in Tende, it seemed there was little going on in the sleepy village, and getting people to take us to their fields or the surrounding jungle (mostly trailless and flooded) would have been a burden. We departed shortly after noon, happy to reach the cool shade of the forest beyond the village, and hoping to get to Randa Empas, three hours away, before the usual rainy season afternoon downpour.

A Trail

The walk to Randa Empas followed hill crests, with frequent cool breezes and views into Central Kalimantan. But it was an obstacle course of muddy slopes. I began to appreciate clambering uphill, with root footholds and vines to grip overhead, and dread sliding downhill in the mud. Along the worst parts of the trail, the sides seemed to be covered with unfamiliar thorny palms and trees with a latex that itches for hours if it gets on skin. Staying clear of all of these, I thought about developing mud skiing as a new sport. But at least, since few people had walked on the trail earlier in the day, the land leeches were sluggish and we managed to avoid all but a few.

And there were compensations for the mud. As we walked, a fluttering pagent of jewel-hued butterflies, iridescent beetles, and other non-stinging insects found only in areas relatively unfrequented by humans were testimony to the continued integrity of the forest even very near the trail. Highly decorative spiders festooned their webs between the lower trees to capture a bit of this display for themselves.

We met only one person on the trail to Randa Empas, an old man with a betel-nut stained smile, carrying his rubber boots so they would not get stuck in the mud, while he walked barefoot. We did not realize how close we had gotten to Randa Empas until we were less than five minutes from the village and came out of old growth forest into a swidden field where two women were weeding padi. We were back at the Lawa River. Up this far, the water was so clear I could see a mosaic of pebbles at the bottom when I stood waist-deep. In the midst of Randa Empas' padi fields, Joshua found a pair of river otters playing by the side of a tributary flowing into the Lawa, but they slipped away when he approached.

The Guci

Randa Empas felt like a haven of normality after the frenetic activity at Sambung and the moribund calm at Tende. As the afternoon light faded, we settled down on rattan mats on the floor of the village secretary's house, where we were staying. As I mixed some of the rice we had brought together with onions and garlic for a porridge, neighbors came by to invite us to drop in at their places later.

The biggest gathering of the early evening, before people drifted off to a Protestant prayer meeting on one side of the river and a belian healing ceremony on the other side, was at the home of Ibu Bohan and

Pak Buseq. They were tying a web of rattan strips around a huge ceramic jar, or guci. The rattan web was both to keep the guci from breaking, and to provide handles for the man who had bought it to carry it on his back to his home in Lampeung, two days away in Central Kalimantan. The buyer planned to carry it to Lampeung on his back, then resell it to a dealer from Banjarmasin, letting the dealer worry about all of the permits required to take antiquities across any provincial border in Indonesia. The price paid for the jar was Rp. 300,000 (about US \$175) in advance; Pak Buseq had already spent the money, so even though he and Ibu Bohan knew the jar would be resold for five times the price they received, they could not change their minds.

Originally brought from China, jars like theirs have been esteemed in the interior of Borneo for centuries, taking on important roles in community life and ritual. The largest of these jars, called guntung Jawa, are over a meter high. In the past, they were worth enough to ransom a whole village in intercommunity disputes. Bu Bohan explained that the jar was last used to bury her grandmother's bones, though it had been in the village for generations. When grave robbers began stealing burial jars a few years ago, Bu Bohan moved her grandmother's into the house. Immediately, her grandmother sent bad dreams in protest. But Bu Bohan was not intimidated. She sold the jar to the first buyer who offered, and reburied the bones in an undistinguished grave.

My concept of distances in Kalimantan changed subtly when I saw the buyer try to hoist the unwieldy jar onto his back. Carrying a jar like this, or a large brass gong, through the jungle and back to a village far in the interior of Borneo used to be one of the major macho experiences of a young man's life. (The current heavy prestige items run toward chain saws, sewing machines, and large screen TVs.) I remembered how heavy my ergonomic design backpack felt, slipping down and struggling up hills earlier in the day. I was not surprised when the Lampeung buyer gave up on trying to carry the guci himself the next day. He left it in Randa Empas for a few more days while he went home to get a friend to help carry it. He figured the ancestors may have done it that way, the jar suspended from a pole carried by two men.



Joshua's Boots

On our second night in Randa Empas, we stayed up late talking with Pak Nyareh and Bu Nyalir, our hosts, gradually drifting off to sleep on the mats as cats chased crickets around in the dark. The extreme friendliness of people in Randa Empas had put us off-guard, and we forgot to bring our muddy shoes into the house from the porch. The next morning, Joshua's leather Adidas hiking boots had disappeared. At first, we thought someone had borrowed them, perhaps taken them for a short test-walk. But as the morning wore on and they had not reappeared we realized, unwillingly, they had been stolen.

Our Randa Empas friends were dismayed, particularly Pak Nyareh, who felt responsible for any mishap in the village, even more in his house. Everyone insisted that no Randa Empas person could have done such a thing. The stolen boots, much admired the day before, would be recognized immediately. Besides, no one in Randa Empas had feet as big as Joshua's. It must have been one of the outsiders, one of the rattan cutters or other profiteers from Central Kalimantan.

Joshua, barefoot, walked gingerly to the village head's house to report the theft, fortuitously arriving during a weekly meeting of village VIPs to settle disputes. The officers agreed to mount an investigation. The man in charge of security, who had bathed in the river with us a few hours before, marched out and reappeared in a camouflage uniform. He started looking for clues from house to house. By noon, it seemed everyone knew of the stolen boots. Amused empathy for Joshua mounted when, trying to leap across a ditch in borrowed thongs, he slipped and landed, chest deep, in muck. The meaning of his curses transcended cultural differences.

When the boots had not shown up by evening, recovering them became a matter of village pride. Pak Nyareh rounded up volunteers to search the rattan cutters' huts in the vicinity of Randa Empas. Early in the morning, officially pecking with his index finger at the village typewriter, he produced a couple of letters authorizing search parties to comb the area looking for the Adidas. At the last minute, as an incentive, Joshua offered a cash reward for the boots' return.

On the day we had planned to walk over the border to Central Kalimantan, Joshua wanted to make the point that there was no way he could walk out of the village without his boots. He hoped, perhaps naively, that staying on in Randa Empas while Dale and I continued across the border would move the thief to return the boots through guilt. This plan made me nervous. You don't ditch a buddy in a pinch, and besides, anyone malicious and thoughtless enough to steal a trekker's boots was unlikely to react to a guilty conscience. But I was concerned that Joshua would hurt himself badly trying to carry his heavy pack in thongs or barefoot, and had heard there were sneakers and rubber boots for sale in Tembaba, the first village in Central Kalimantan. If Joshua did not show up in Tembaba quickly, we could send a pair back to him. He could cut the toes out, if necessary, to walk over to meet us. So Dale and I took as much of the weight out of Joshua's pack as we could for the five-hour walk to Tembaba, and set off.

As we trudged through Tukuq, the last settlement in East Kalimantan, a tiny hamlet centered on a decrepit tea stall, two of the boot searchers excitedly reported there was news. They had identified a suspect! The night of the theft, one of the rattan cutters had been seen leaving Randa Empas suspiciously alone, walking toward Central Kalimantan with a bulging backpack basket. The villagers considered this guy shifty, with a reputation for betting too high at village gambling sessions. The circumstantial evidence was enough to send the searchers after him. They would look for the man at his hut in the jungle, and if necessary pursue him back to his village in Central Kalimantan. From the enthusiasm of the young searchers, I had a sense that they may have had more of a score to settle with their suspect than a pair of stolen boots.

The walk to Tembaba followed a track opened two years ago by a Central Kalimantan trader who is now trying to clear it to run a jeep taxi into Randa Empas. Extremely steep slopes and haphazard grading make maintaining the track a chore. When we walked it crevasse-like gullies and downed bamboo-and-log bridges blocked it in several spots. But it was still clear of vegetation, and the sun was fierce, making me long for the cool darkness of the forest on either side. The view into the forest was blocked by heavy scrub on the ground and a wall of climbers completely covering most of the trees. I wondered how far this "edge effect" dominates the forest near the road, until the jungle's darkness is restored under a healthy canopy.

As I walked, I kept an eye on the mud for a familiar Adidas boot print, but never came across one. Several groups of walkers passing us from Central Kalimantan surprised us by asking about Joshua's boots. They had heard about them from travellers who had arrived in Tembaba the previous night, and in some of the rattan cutters' camps. It seemed the theft was news, and I was amazed at how quickly it was transmitted along the "jungle telephone." Late in the afternoon, having passed through a half hour of broad swidden padi fields and bamboo groves, we arrived in Tembaba, beside the Kias River in Central Kalimantan, a tributary of the Teweh. We groaned at the cacaphony of motors and blaring radios, wondering how these fit into a definition of "civilization." But we knew we were out of the jungle when the owner of the tea stall where we collapsed produced a thermos full of sugary ice frozen in finger-sized plastic bags. The back of the stall was crammed with a variety of goods such as we had not seen since leaving Samarinda, including over a dozen pairs of brand-new sneakers.

Dale and I spent the next day exploring the vicinity around the village, wondering if Joshua would show up. There was quite a bit of semi-wild livestock wandering around in the secondary forest and fallow former fields. Cattle and pigs had a way of suddenly rushing into the trails just as we were rounding curves, surprising all of us. The Kias river bed was full of quartz pebbles and rough crystals which, in Borneo, often appear along with gold deposits. Several villagers have found gold dust in deep sections of the river, but not enough to arouse much excitement. Around sunset, Joshua limped into Tembaba, supported by a stout stick. His optimistic expectation that the boots would be returned had waned after we had departed, and the search parties had come home empty-handed. That morning he gave up, said goodbye and thanked people who had helped look for the boots, then started walking

in thongs. A young man on his way home to a village on the Teweh River accompanied Joshua, and had a malaria attack along the way. This slowed the walking considerably (the sick man was determined to reach Tembaba, where he could collapse) but took Joshua's mind off his rapidly swelling feet, their boot-pampered skin shredded by thorns and splinters. Joshua was relieved to hear the roar of motor-bike engines in Tembaba. They meant a way out to a navigable river without having to walk. But we weren't going anywhere for a couple of days, and settled in to enjoying the pleasures of Tembaba, chief among them a swimming hole deep enough for diving. The village was also in the midst of a belian buntang ceremony to dedicate a new house, its procedures familiar after the one in Sambung.

The next day, my third in Tembaba, was the ceremony's last. An hour before the climax (the killing of a water buffalo) a delegation arrived from Randa Empas. Instead of heading for the gong and drum music in the house that was the focus of the festivities, they came looking for Joshua. Pak Nyareh and Bu Nyalir sat down, exhausted from the walk, enjoying the tea we offered. Casually, Pak Nyareh opened his basket and pulled out a boot. By the time the second boot came out, the uproar of cheering overwhelmed the belian gongs and sent half the crowd at the ceremony out to see what had happened. The boot thief had, indeed, relented, and sent the boots back to the village with a friend of a friend of a man above suspicion, who had returned them to Pak Nyareh that morning.

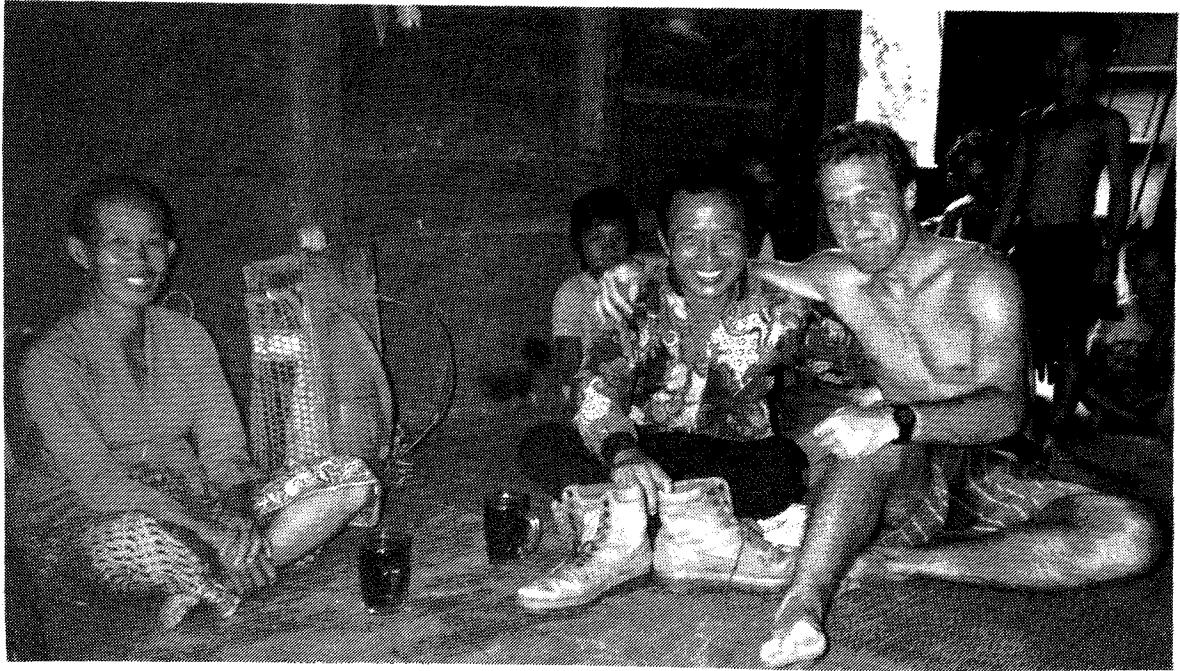
As I took a commemorative photo of the return of the boots, I thought about Kalimantan-style jungle justice. If it works on a small scale, like **retrieving** a pair of stolen boots, why does it seem so impossible to enforce forestry regulations on a larger scale and higher level? A stack of newspaper clippings and pages full of interview notes I've collected over the past year attest to the common belief that even big-time timber poachers and concession-holders who over-log their areas are virtually impossible to catch. The forest is large, and even whole rafts of illegally-cut logs can be easily hidden. The timber thieves and logging tycoons are rich and powerful, and the forest police are few and generally meek.

Is it possible that the intensive style of "jungle justice" used to retrieve Joshua's boots could be used to discourage forest criminals on a larger scale? My sense that something may be changing in Indonesian attitudes about extension of law to the forest was sparked by a headline in the first Jakarta Post I saw upon returning to Samarinda: "Subversion charges await forestry regulation violators." It referred to an Attorney General's **statement** that since poaching, log smuggling, or cheating on reforestation guarantee taxes affect the government's efforts to develop the economy, perpetrators should be treated as subversives, with the most serious penalties. How will jungle justice work when it reaches Jakarta?

Sincerely,

Judith Mayer

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Return of the boots.