

Continuing the Introduction to Belum and Temenggor, Part 2

By Ian Anderson

Eyesore in OA Village

Next came the Orang Asli Village which is an absolute disgrace and not worth the journey. We are sure that at one time this was an untouched sanctuary where the people lived as they have for centuries. But today the village is spoilt by an ugly, government built, water treatment and distribution plant, right in the centre of the village consisting of bare steel girders with tanks on top. It could not be uglier if it tried. Now of course, providing clean water for the people is a noble and necessary thing to do, but when it is done with no thought for nature or the village environment then it becomes an eyesore. We implore the government to be more thoughtful of the environment in their future projects on the islands.

Rafflesia and Leeches

The trek up to see the Rafflesia was wet, a little steep and suffered from a galaxy of friendly leeches who attached themselves to the ankles with gay abandon. The children screamed and cried, but nonetheless made it to the top to see their first Rafflesia, although not yet properly open. One smart trekker had brought the salt and the leeches were soon vanquished although the bleeding continued. Next time we shall wear Leech socks!

Permits Needed



View From Talikali viewpoint

Pulau Talikali was quite different. The walk was steep in places and there were plenty of signs of elephants, wild boar and others. Fortunately we did not meet face to face with any of them, but there was no doubt they were around and probably heard us coming. The view was breathless; as we were by the time we got to the viewpoint on the top. At this point you may be wondering why we did not actually visit the protected Royal Belum Forest and State Park, said to be the final frontier of our disappearing virgin rainforests. The answer is two fold. First we did not know what we were to find in the area and took this short trip as an introduction to future trips and secondly we had not

allowed ourselves the three weeks that are often required to arrange a government permit to visit the park. But rest assured, we shall be back for a longer trip soon that will take in more of both Temenggor and the State Park, for there is so much to experience.

Litter and Useless Jetty

Turning to more general aspects of our trip, we were very disappointed in a number of things. First, our joy at arriving at Pulau Banding Jetty soon turned to dismay when we saw that, despite the huge red sign that prohibited littering, there were polystyrene food packets, plastic bottles and paper covering the entire jetty area with Roti Canai curry sauce all over the seats. Nothing short of disgraceful and if we understand correctly the stall holder who sells these offending items is responsible to the government for the cleanliness then he is just not doing his job. From all accounts punitive government action is long overdue in this area.

Secondly the solidly constructed boat jetty cannot be used as its designer did not take into account the rise and fall of the water and apparently being designed for low water is completely submerged. We therefore boarded our boat over the muddy, litter-strewn bank. A standard floating jetty, in use all over the world is what the government should have spent our money on! Why didn't they? Surely Perak must have someone with knowledge of such basic requirements. One wonders how the contractor qualified for the job.



Banding Island's Useless Jetty

Future Ecology Threatened

Then as we made our way around the lake over the next three days we were surprised to see how many islands are occupied by government departments, we believe as private recreational facilities. Add to these the small tour operators who provide campsites and floating chalets with doubtful control of effluent, litter and use of the lake and again, we worry for the future of the ecology of the area. Unless properly controlled, more people invariably means more pollution, degradation and destruction of nature's gifts, all in the name of profit. Malaysia really needs to take a leaf out of Australia's or New Zealand's book as to how to control reservoir and forest activities without stifling tourism.

Uncontrolled Logging



Logging Barge Temenggor Lake

But if the above is not bad enough the worst is yet to come. Logging! Yes this desecration of our ever diminishing rainforest continues unabated and as we understand it, perfectly legally, the evidence being in the barges on the lake and lorries that abound on the road, carting away the giant trees that Mother Nature took so many decades to grow. Of course there are promises that this will all stop soon, but there have been many earlier, empty, promises which have allowed the destruction to continue, changing the whole face of Malaysia by displacing people, destroying the ecosystems, driving animals into extinction and turning green lands into almost

barren deserts.

Take Action Now

So what can we, who proudly call ourselves Perakians, do to stop all these problems? The answer is simple. First support the MNS and WWF as strength is in numbers and secondly, employ democracy. Let your government representatives know your feelings. We shall not be accused of sedition or being anti-government as long as we do this sensibly and within the law. Can you imagine the effect on your local Exco representative if he was to receive 50,000 individual letters from unhappy constituents? Surely he would act on your behalf or face the rest of his life regretting his inaction. Our failure to take action now will only result in more destruction.