

Sampling Temburong's backyard in Sumbiling

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TEMBURONG

APPROACHING the Sumbiling EcoVillage from the Temburong river evokes pleasant memories of my time growing up in the lower divisions of Sarawak. Lazy rides on leaky boats, hazy days of firewood smoke and that striking absence of urban noise.

My mobile phone has also taken the day off but I'm only slightly concerned; I'm more relieved to walk back up the riverbank to clean off the mud and retire to my tent.

It wasn't intended to be much of an expedition, actually. We'd set off about six hours earlier for a light jungle trek, snaking a four-km trail in Sumbiling Lama, just north of Temburong's more famous National Park. But our three guides, two of whom were Iban locals, made for a rather interesting trip.

A Swede and two Italians came along, first-timers to Borneo. Travelling light, we made short work of the beginning of

the trail, but Manggat and Nazri, our scout and guide soon took us to bear on the first of many stops. Sulaiman hangs back, making sure the herd isn't separated.

"Ferns and this plant, *kulim papa*," he shows us some crushed plants in his palm. "Rub the juice on a stitch or cramp and you'll be fine."

The Italians, I realise after a while, have some stake on this trip. They're biologists, and the taller one, Gianluca does research at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Our stops get longer as we find more interesting wildlife, and cameras and notebooks keeping coming out. Bo, the Swede, takes plenty of photographs.

"Seems we have a thing or two to learn from the scientists!" grins Nazri, as Gianluca and Mario prod into the foliage, rattling off scientific names. Our guides are no amateurs themselves, and I feel slightly ashamed at my failure to identify jungle herbs, having grown up in Borneo. They point out more herbs and plants like the *simpur*, *tagar berkumbang* (for kidney failure) and *selokai* (incense).

We pass by a well-used clearing and are told that it is used by the army as a helicopter landing. Our path, it appears, cuts through very old army routes which saw intense fighting during the Brunei Revolt of 1962-63. The jungle area is still used today for military training.

A banging noise sounds in the distance, but Nazri tells us it's just our scout telling us to hurry. We later come across the huge roots of a buttress tree and Nazri asks us to try pounding on it with a stick. Loud booms reverberate when we do. The guides say the Ibans of old used to communicate with far-away villages using these trees, usually to warn of intruders.

After making our way past muddy hills, cutting through a few streams, and crouching under fallen trees, our guides inform us that it is time for lunch.

"Iban style cooking," proclaims Nazri, as Manggat and Sulaiman go off in search of bamboo and *simpur* leaves. We set our things down by a stream.

The biologists balk at first, politely declining food but help to fill bamboo with chicken

and vegetables. When ready, the simmering and hissing bamboo are lifted and their contents poured out. Everyone fills up, as even the tempting aromas seem to have swayed the Italians.

"This was so good," said Mario on his second helping. "No spices, just ginger and vegetables. Very natural taste." I look for Bo to ask his opinion but his contented look saves me the effort.

We laze around for a while, but a light shower forces us to resume our trek. We hit a shortcut, doubling back on an early part of our trail as the raindrops get larger.

Presently, we arrive at the Temburong river where our boat is still moored. The EcoVillage, where we'll camp the night, is just across. There isn't much light left and an evening programme awaits our weary attendance.

Our guides silently row us back. Darkness and jungle sounds start to swallow the trees and river.

How to get there on your own:

By boat: Take a boat from Kianggeh Jetty at the Waterfront to Temburong Jetty. The boatride should take 45 minutes. From Temburong Jetty, it is only a 15-minute drive to Kg Sumbiling Lama. A short 5-minute trail from the Kg Sumbiling Longhouse will take you to the Sumbiling EcoVillage.

Otherwise, Borneoguide offers transport arrangements. Contact them at info@borneoguide.com or visit the website at www.borneoguide.com

The Brunei Times



Clockwise from top right: Trekking with the EcoVillage guides provides not only an authentic experience, but one that encourages environmentally friendly practises; even cooking and eating tools are used from nature; some of the wildlife spotted in the jungle areas surrounding Kg Sumbiling; a cluster of periuk kera or pitchers plants found on the Sumbiling jungle trek; vines and trees get thicker and longer, the deeper you trek.. Pictures: BT/Daniel Wood

