

An Unexplored Corner of Pahang.

The Pahang River, as most people interested in Pahang affairs know, is the great artery which serves to keep Ulu Pahang in touch with the outer world.

Up it in large numbers, pass the Malay and (of late) Chinese boats, laden with supplies for the shops of Kuala Lipis, Punjom and Silensing, machinery for the mines, and from time to time those Europeans, whose business takes them into the Ulu.

From the main stream, branch off tributaries almost as large as the parent river, to the left the Semantan, up which most of the heavy stores and machinery for the mine and town of Raub passes, and which with its tributaries taps a large belt of country, including the Bentong tin bearing district.

Two or three days farther poling and the Tembeling goes off to the right, at the Kuala of which is situated the grave of the late E. A. Wise, who was unfortunately killed in the attack on Jeram Ampai stockade. He was a young man of great promise, a favourite with both Europeans and natives, and adds one more to the list of bright young fellows who have died in foreign lands on her Majesty's Service.

It was up the Tembeling that Baron Miklucho Maklay, one of the earliest Pahang explorers, made his way over into Kelantan, and from there down the Kelantan River to Kota Bahru, the capital of Kelantan.

That gentleman, whom I had the pleasure of meeting many years ago in Queensland, devoted his life and large income to exploring, and making an ethnological collection.

When I met him in Queensland, he was in quest of the skulls of a hairless tribe of natives, said to have been met with

in the "Back country," and he also succeeded in obtaining the skull of a notorious aboriginal outlaw, who had been recently executed. I remember he was particularly keen on this skull, as it was said to possess some abnormal measurements. An account of Baron Maklay's trip through Pahang, with copious notes on Sakei Ethnology, will be found in one of the early "Transactions" of the Straits Asiatic Society.

From beyond Kuala Tembeling, the Pahang River takes the name of the Jelai. The Lipis River branches off to the left at the town of that name, and some ten miles up is the landing for the Punjom Mine, while up towards its Ulu, it divides into many separate streams, chief among which are the Wong and the Semantan Ulu, which latter is formed by the united streams of the Simpam and Siang, from the former of which Raub Mine is taking its electric power, and on the latter the Liang Coffee Concession is situated.

From Kuala Lipis to Kuala Medang, the farthest point of European enterprise on the Jelai, is about 25 miles, and midway between Kuala Lipis and there, the Telang river comes in on the left, and is utilised by the No. 2 Concession of the M. P. Exploration Co. for getting supplies up to their property. It is only navigable for boats however, and villages are few and far between. A couple of miles farther up the Jelai, the Tanom comes in on the right, close to the residence of the Toh Rajah of Jelai. A great deal of alluvial gold working has been done in former times some distance up this river, in fact it was important enough at one time to have a "Kapitan China," but no reefs have been found.

Kuala Medang is the landing for the Silencing mines, and the last point of European settlement on the Jelai, in fact the Europeans who have been higher up than that, can be counted on one's fingers. The Medang, from which the landing takes its name, is merely a dirty little creek that would not float a boat. Like most of these places, it has its own legend, which was told me in all seriousness by an old Malay. Questioning him as to how the place came to be named Kuala Medang, he explained that a very long time ago, when it was a flourishing Malay village, a man lived there who had a boat

made of Medang timber. This man was fortunate enough to kill a Dragon, of which according to him there was only a very limited supply even then. He skinned it, and nailed the skin as a sort of sheathing round his boat, which had the effect of vastly increasing its speed so that a trip to Pekan and back, which in these effete times takes about a month, used to be accomplished in 24 hours. This lasted for some time, but one night, lying at anchor, the boat sank, and could never afterwards be found. It also seems that shortly after this, a close season was proclaimed for Dragons, and no more skins could be obtained, which was unfortunate, to say the least of it.

About half an hour's poling above Kuala Medang, the dismemberment of the Jelai begins, the Anak Jelai as it is called going off to the left, taking a S. W. course. A little farther up, the main stream divides again, the Seran going to the right or N. E., and the Telom going straight on or about due North. The Telom is much the larger stream of the three, and under ordinary conditions should still retain the name of Jelai. According to my ancient Malay friend, however, when the prehistoric geographers were naming these rivers, some little discussion arose among them as to which of the three should retain the name of Jelai, and to settle the matter they decided to weigh a given quantity of water from each, and the water from the left hand branch proving the heaviest, it retained the name. The Seran, from where it branches off to the right, keeps a pretty general N. E. bearing for a day and a half's poling, when Kuala Besi is reached. Then it divides again, the Seran keeping about its old course, while Sungei Besi bears slightly west of north, and its head waters get round very close to the head waters of the Telom. The Seran forms the highway to Kelantan and hundreds of Kelantan coolies pass up and down to work at the Silensing mines, there being a short day's tramp after leaving navigable water to get over the Dinding Range.

So far, I can only learn of three Europeans who have been over that route, and none who prior to my trip had been up Sungei Besi.

From the junction of the Telom and Seran up to Kuala

Besi, there are a few Malay houses at long intervals, but above that there are none whatever, the whole of it being Sakei country. There is evidence however of ancient native settlement on a large scale, as there are groves of Durian and other fruit trees, now grown to the size of the other jungle trees, where doubtless the villages originally stood. None of the Malays of the present day seem to have any idea as to who were the ancient inhabitants, or what was the cause of the exodus. It is also a noticeable fact that above Kuala Besi the names of rivers, mountains, etc., are all Sakei. The land on each side of the Seran is of much better quality than the general run of land in Pahang, and the paucity of settlements on it is remarkable.

About 8 hours poling above Kuala Besi, and toiling along slowly in a boat, against a rather rapid current, a huge mass of what I at first took to be smoke or fog loomed up among the trees on the right bank. To my surprise on getting closer, I found it to be a huge isolated Tor of limestone, fully 400 feet high, the face of the cliff being quite perpendicular and snowy white. I then remembered that on one occasion, looking from the top of a high hill near the Silensing mine with a strong pair of glasses, we had made out a huge white mass in that direction, and many were our conjectures as to what it could be. Here was the mystery solved! About 50 feet up from the face of the cliff, I found a cave open to the front, capable of holding two to three hundred people, which is used as a camping ground by the Sakeis when out hunting, the limestone being blackened by the camp-fires of ages.

The sight of this vast natural monument, so different to the ordinary monotony of the Pahang jungle, was so absorbing, that it was long ere I could leave it. There is a similar cliff at the upstream end of the Tor, so that the view whether going up or down stream, is equally grand, and deep were my regrets that I had left my camera at home, and so could not get some photographs of it. The native name of this cliff is Gua Bumit.

About two hours' poling above that, a small stream, called Sungei Chok, comes in on the right bank, and there navigation ceases, or at least ought to, for to take a boat farther up,

is chiefly labour and sorrow, at least as far as coolies are concerned. Sungei Chok is not possible for a boat, but a day's jungle tramp (say about 20 miles) towards its Ulu, brings one to another limestone pile, of much greater dimensions. Its name is Gua Senoorat, it is from 1,500 to 2,000 feet high, and has a cave at its base capable of holding a couple of thousand people.

Doubtless in the fulness of time, when Kuala Lipis becomes the seat of Government and Europeans become more plentiful in the Ulu, these huge natural monuments will be more closely examined, but it will always be a source of satisfaction to feel that I was the first European to gaze upon them. What millions of years must have elapsed and what mighty changes must geologically speaking have occurred, since those huge beds were laid down in the ocean, and then slowly eroded and dissolved by the carbonic acid of the fresh water, after the ocean retreated, leaving only these isolated pinnacles to speak of what was once a continuous bed of limestone. The decomposition of this limestone doubtless has much to say for the better quality of the land on the Seran, of which I made mention earlier.

Leaving Kuala Chok, two hours poling brings one to Jeram Rimau, and though it is possible to drag an empty boat through it as I did, still future travellers would be well advised to make a camp, and leave their boat below it, and do any further travelling towards the Ulu on foot, for a short distance above the Jeram the river divides again into two streams which are both very shallow.

The right hand branch is still Sungei Besi, and the left hand one Sungei Wur, the waters of which I find almost join the head waters of the Telom, heading from opposite sides of the same spur. One day's tramp up either of these streams, brings one to the base of the main dividing range, on the other side of which is Kelantan.

After having my boat dragged through, and my baggage carried round the Jeram, I found it impossible to take the boat farther, and so made a camp at the junction of the two streams.

On the left bank of Jeram Rimau is a mountain fully 1,000 feet high, which the natives call Bukit Guroh, and to

which all sorts of legends appertain. It is chiefly a mass of huge rocks, and the Sakeis of that locality have a record of over 60 of their tribe who have been killed by tigers on it. The evening I camped there, a Sakei, who formed one of my party, went about 150 yards below the camp to fish, and while so engaged a tiger came out of the jungle at the base of the mountain and sat on a rock about 50 yards away. The Sakei abandoned his fishing lines and made for the camp yelling, and the tiger went back into the jungle. As a precautionary measure, I had a large fire built and kept going all night.

Next day, leaving a couple of coolies in charge of the camp, I tramped about ten miles up Sungei Besi, and came to a large Sakei clearing on a right hand branch known as Sungei Seringat.

The whole party were away on a hunting expedition to Ulu Telom, but I learned there were ordinarily about 50 of them lived there, and we occupied their houses for the night. The only thing worthy of note to be seen in them, was a string of jawbones, with the teeth intact, of several dozen monkeys in each house, hung up in the smoke above the fireplace. There were all sizes and kinds, and it is evident the Sakei when hungry spares neither age nor sex of the monkey tribe. Every monkey they kill and eat, they add his jawbone to the string, and when they are unsuccessful in hunting it is said they derive great satisfaction from gazing at and thinking over these mementos of former repasts. They have a clearing of a good many acres at Kuala Seringat, planted with plantains and paddy, and would seem to have been there for several years.

There is said to be tin in the streams farther on, close to the base of the dividing range, which is probably the case, but neither Malays or Chinese care to venture so far by themselves, as the Sakeis are said to be wicked, while the cost of getting supplies would be great, and the area is also probably limited.

From one of the hills at the Sakei clearing, a magnificent view was obtained of the limestone mountain, Gua Senoorat, distant about 20 miles. There would seem to be a large belt of

nearly flat country between Sungei Besi and Sungei Seran, as this mountain stands up as it were alone. Having seen all I wished to see in that locality, I came back to my camp at Kuala Wur, and had my boats and baggage taken below the Jeram, and there stayed the night. There was a rise of several feet in the river that night, and next day we came down to Kuala Besi at racing speed, doing in six hours, what it had taken us three days to go up.

I stayed the night at the house of an old Malay friend named Johor, and sitting chatting with him far into the night, he gave me the details of a tragedy which happened in his younger days, which, had a European been the chief actor, would have been cabled all over the world. Johor is now an old man, his wife is an old woman, and the two children who as infants took an unconscious part in the tragedy I speak of, are now a fine young man and woman, the son recently married and the daughter about to be, but both Johor and his wife still carry on their bodies the marks of the affray of which I speak. It took place some 20 odd years ago, and Johor, his wife and two young children were at that time living at Kuala Seran, *i. e.*, where the Telom and Seran, as I before explained, divide, and go in separate directions.

It was just after the Perak war, and one day, Johor was sitting in his house preparing a quid of betel, his wife plaiting a mat, and his two children sitting on the floor playing. Simultaneously two men appeared armed with spear and kris, one at the front and one at the back door. The one at the back door remained on the ground, while the one in front, mounted the three or four ladder-like steps into the house and made a vicious stab at Johor with his spear, which he in the act of rising managed to ward off. Failing in this the stranger reversed the spear, and dealt him a smashing blow across the head, with the heavy petaling wood handle. Half blinded by the blood which poured down over his face Johor seized the spear, and a desperate struggle ensued. Finding he could not wrench it away, the stranger drew his kris and tried to stab him, but he warded off the stabs as best he could with his arms, at the same time with his feet pushing the children away out of danger.

His wife attempting to assist him, seized the blade of the kris, and she showed me the two fingers, minus the tops, where it was dragged through her hands. Johor has the mark where his scalp was laid open by the blow from the spear, while his arms are scored with the marks of the cuts he received in warding off the stabs. Suddenly he bethought him of the Tumbuh Lada (small dagger) in his belt, and drawing it he thrust it into the bowels of his assailant, who fell dying. All this though it takes some time to write, took place very quickly, and the man at the back door, who had been simply gazing at the struggle, on seeing his friend fall, rushed in. Johor seized his gun, which was standing loaded against the wall, but before he could get it up to fire, the stranger seized the muzzle, and a fierce struggle ensued for the possession of it. With a quick snatch however, Johor succeeded in dragging it from him, and shot him through the stomach, and killed him also. "Allah Tuan," said Johor, "Habis t'lahi rumah saya, macham orang potong kribau".

Asking him why this attack was made on him, he explained that these men were relatives of one of the Perak Rajahs, who had taken an active part in the war there, and were fleeing from the wrath to come, to Kelantan. They had crossed over from Perak, and made their way down the Telom, and being hard up, and hearing that Johor owned a couple of guns, they made up their minds to kill him, steal his guns and boat, and take his wife and children to sell for slaves in Kelantan. The next day, coming down to Kuala Medang, I was shown the place when the house originally stood, in which this affair took place.

W. Bertrand Roberts.



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