

The Borneo Wire

A Publication of The Borneo Project

Summer 2005

Rebirth of the Rainforest: Penan Restore Biodiversity, One Seed at a Time

Lina Kajan, a young Penan mother, is waiting for the giant canopy trees of the world's oldest rainforest to bear fruit this year. When they do, she'll be there, traversing steep slopes and ravines, searching for fallen fruits and seeds. As she finds them, she'll toss them into a home-made rattan backpack and make her way back to her village before dark.

In the patchwork of beauty and devastation that is the landscape of Sarawak, Malaysia, Lina belongs to a forest-dependent culture with highly developed systems for survival and self-sufficiency. The Penan are traditionally nomadic hunter-gatherers in the northern mountains of Borneo. Today, most Penan have been forced to settle permanently into villages as the government appropriates their lands for logging, but they continue to depend on forests for their sustenance. Defending their ancestral lands from further degradation is politically dangerous in Malaysia, since the government views resistance to logging as anti-development.

When Lina rejoins her friends and relatives upon their return from gathering in the forest, they will place each seed in a small plastic bag filled with earth, and water them well. By the end of the fruiting season, the 30 families of Long Lunyim hope to be caring for 2,000 seedlings. These trees will be planted in logged areas to provide wood, fruits, oils, dart poison, medicines, tools, firewood, handicrafts, and wildlife food sources.



The thirty-seven women of the Long Lunyim established an organic community vegetable garden in April 2005. The produce will combat malnutrition in their children as forest resources dwindle with the encroachment of logging.

In seven other Penan communities of the Baram River watershed, villagers are prepared to do the same. The Borneo Project is helping them invest in the future and establish formal claims to the land of their ancestors.

In the village of Uma Bawang (Sister City of Berkeley), reforestation with native trees has been taking place for nearly twenty years by Kayan farmers who sought to improve the value of their fallowed fields. Collectively, the community has replanted 20,000 trees in areas degraded by logging, using seeds from the nearest patches of primary forest.

In 2004, leaders from the seven communities took a
(Continued on page 4)

Shortwave Radios Address Nomadic Penan Communication Woes



Penan blockade logging roads to protest corporate theft of forest resources; Shortwave radios improve communications among themselves and with allies. Credit: James Blampied, IcomAmerica.com

The remote mountainous regions inhabited by the last bands of nomadic Penan are also the frontlines for logging pristine tropical rainforest. Due to their isolation, nomadic groups are vulnerable to the whims of companies that destroy sacred sites, bulldoze hillsides into streams, and routinely violate the rights of the community to determine land use in their ancestral territories.

Addressing this concern, The Borneo Project is helping to establish a solar-powered radio network to enable Penan communities to monitor company activities and provide updates on violations to neighboring bands as well as their legal advisors. Thanks to generous support from our members at year's end, The Borneo Project purchased and donated four shortwave Icom 718 transceiver radios and two solar panels to nomadic and semi-nomadic communities, and their city-based advocates.

An international radio expert has voluntarily spent the spring of 2005 installing radios and training local people how to operate them. Later this year, he will install four additional units. We are soliciting additional training and troubleshooting from friends at a local Amateur Radio Club, to ensure communications continue to improve.

Interested in sponsoring a nomadic group? For US\$500, your donation will buy and install a radio for people who have no other means of communicating with the outside world. If you have shortwave experience, your help may be needed in Borneo!

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I just returned from a month in Borneo visiting community partners to learn their news, and review the impacts of the small grants and equipment we donated in 2004. I'm happy to report that the results are inspiring: seven Penan communities are starting new reforestation initiatives. Organic vegetable gardening is taking off to combat malnutrition. The most promising new development is the Penan Youth Community Organizer Training Scholarship program. If we can raise \$10,000 in scholarships for ten Penan youth this year, we can dramatically enhance the leadership skills of the next generation of forest activists of Borneo.

Other exciting news: Thanks to a small grant, the Iban community of Sungai Bong is transitioning to organic methods in their black pepper cultivation, after years of using the dangerous herbicide paraquat. At the same time, they face an intensifying struggle to protect their ancestral rainforests, as the oil palm company Shin Yang has begun to bulldoze their lands. The good news is that the community has a strong, unified fighting spirit, and the maps they have developed for their pending court case are some of the most detailed and precise in the history of community mapping in Borneo.

With Borneo Project help, shortwave radios are being installed in the most remote communities on the island. Mapping continues at a rapid pace for dozens of villages eager for the courts to recognize their customary land boundaries. And I learned of some promising news on the legal front from award-winning native rights lawyer Harrison Ngau. In March, the courts of Sarawak decided not to overturn the 2001 indigenous land rights victory of Rumah Nor vs. Borneo Pulp and Paper. This case set the precedent for indigenous land protection in Sarawak, and as long as it stands native peoples have constitutionally guaranteed rights to ancestral lands, including uncultivated forests, that predate the Malaysian constitution.

With the onus of proof on communities to demarcate their own ancestral lands, mapping and legal vigilance remain the most effective tools to keep loggers and plantation companies out of ancestral forests. While

resources for community mapping remain scarce (no government agency offers assistance or funding for this purpose) their remains strong hope that native rights and forests can be permanently protected in Malaysia.

I will return to Borneo in July to assist Partners of Community Organizations (PACOS) with a project to advance the grantwriting skills of indigenous communities that have been shortlisted for United Nations Development Program's Small Grants Program to Promote Tropical Forests. One of the shortlisted communities is Uma Bawang, the Sister City of Berkeley. They are proposing to double their reforestation success—from 20,000 trees already planted, to over 40,000 in the next two years.

It will be with a heavy heart that I return, though, since two friends in the community, Saging Anyi and Louis Ngau, died of natural causes since I have been away. During my visit I will discuss how to best dedicate the planting of trees in Berkeley and Borneo in their memory.

If any of our members would like to join me on this July, 2005 trip to Borneo (or our next planned trip in January, 2006), you are most welcome-- give me a call if you are thinking about it. As Liz and Steve can tell you, it's an unforgettable opportunity to connect with people who are fighting against great odds to continue unique ways of living with nature, and each other.



Jessica Lawrence and long-time friend and guide Saging Anyi (left), with four men from the Penan village Long Belok.

Jessica Lawrence,
Executive Director

In Loving Memory of Dear Friends

In May, 2005, two dynamic indigenous organizers and forest activists from Berkeley's Sister City of Uma Bawang, Sarawak, both long-time friends of The Borneo Project, passed away unexpectedly due to illnesses. Mr. Saging Anyi is survived by his parents, siblings, wife and two daughters, and Mr. Louis Ngau is survived by his father,



Saging Anyi (left) and Louis Ngau entertain friends in Berkeley with traditional Kayan songs in 1998.

siblings, wife and nine children. Saging and Louis were tremendously talented leaders. They were instrumental in organizing their Kayan community to map and document ancestral land claims, sparing their community forests from fur-

ther industrial logging. They shared their skills in the pursuit of justice with struggling communities across Borneo. Both men were also articulate cultural ambassadors to the outside world, representing indigenous land rights struggles to audiences in the U.S., South Africa, Indonesia, and Italy. Many friends of The Borneo Project had the opportunity to meet Saging and Louis in 1998 when they traveled to Berkeley to accept the Conde Nast Environmental Award on behalf of their village.

For those who have traveled to Borneo, Saging and Louis were among our most trusted friends and cultural intermediaries. We miss their great strength of spirit, energy, laughter, sense of humor, and wisdom.

Their deep commitment to family, community, and the land of their ancestors inspires us to continue the struggle for the rights and the well-being of the indigenous people and forests of Borneo. And to do this with the love, warmth, and good cheer that they taught us.

Borneo Newsflash

Borneo Mapping Skills Studied by Ethiopian Tribes

Thanks to a grant from the Christensen Fund, Borneo Project Director Jessica Lawrence spent December 2004 in southwest Ethiopia advising community mapping initiatives of the Konso and Zala tribes. At several well-attended community workshops, Jessica shared the history of community map making and land defense in Borneo. Inspired by photographs and stories from Borneo, the participants set out to conduct their own mapping activities.

Using skills honed in Borneo, Jessica facilitated collective decision-making on how to document traditional land-use and resource management. She also taught orientation skills and GPS data collection to teams of community-nominated mapping technicians who are preparing maps for UNESCO World Heritage Site nomination of their cultural landscape. The communities created artistic ground maps, sketch maps, and topographic map overlays detailing their historic and sacred relationship with their land.

When Jessica returned to Borneo in April 2005, she brought stories and photos of the mapping activities in Ethiopia. Borneo mappers were proud to be an inspiration to other indigenous peoples. With a participatory mapping conference convening in Nairobi, Kenya in September 2005, Bornean and Ethiopian mappers are hoping to meet and exchange ideas directly.

The Borneo Project continues to support Konso and Zala mapping through procurement of maps and satellite images, training manuals, and information from UNESCO. Volunteers with experience in GIS and/or community mapping are welcome in Ethiopia!



Konso elders comment on a community-made sketch map of their village and surrounding farmlands.

Community Potluck Gatherings Resume!

In the early '90s, The Borneo Project took shape from monthly community potlucks. As the years passed and many supporters had families, potlucks became sporadic, and working meetings became the norm. This fall, we'll be reviving the tradition with community potlucks open to any and all who might be interested-- to be held every three months. We'll post the schedule on our website, to begin in August, 2005.

Upcoming Events: Borneo Land Rights Activists to Visit Bay Area in August

In July 2005, community mapping technicians Mark Bujang (Iban of Sarawak) and Philip Chin (Kadazan-Dusun of Sabah) will be attending a month long training in Geographic Information Systems at ESRI and Society for Conservation GIS in southern California. In early August, Mark and Philip will be in Berkeley to chat with Borneo Project members. Keep an eye on our website for event dates and times!

Raffle 2004: And the Winner Is....

Borneo Project member Scott Ullman of Berkeley was the lucky winner of our Grand Prize Week in Tuscany, Italy. Scott and his wife Carol will be staying at the villa near Pisa in September, 2005, which was generously donated by friends of the Project. Other prizewinners went home with boxes of chocolates, wine, a Mountain Hardware tent, Patagonia clothing and backpacks, gift certificates to Osmosis Enzyme Bath and Massage.Rivoli's, Chez Panisse, Changemaker's Books, Mission Cliffs, California Peddler, Alameda Bicycle, Rainbow Grocery, Berkeley Bowl, Holistic Hound, and the Mexican Museum. Congratulations to all 50 winners! Thanks to all members who sold raffle tickets-- together we raised over \$7000 for grassroots efforts in Borneo! Keep your eyes out for our next amazing raffle--to be held in March, 2006.



Dodger Stirling (center right) enjoys his lunch break with Terian residents during construction of the hydro catchment system. The bamboo table and benches they are using were made in the same time it took to prepare lunch!

Oakland Volunteer Assists Microhydro Project

In the fall of 2004, Earl "Dodger" Stirling spent a week in Terian, Sabah, helping the community build the catchment and piping system that will bring clean stream water to the energy-generating turbine. Dodger recounts a day eating what they could gather in the forest: fruits, ferns, shoots, snails, and, yes, grubs. (Not bad, he says!)

Penan Restore Biodiversity

(Continued from first page)

cue from Uma Bawang and established the Indigenous Forests Restoration Initiative. With the help of small grants and equipment donations coordinated by the Borneo Project, they built rainforest tree nurseries. Project managers in each community have begun meeting periodically to exchange skills in composting, seedling survival, transplanting, and organic pest management.

Why all this effort to replant native species? One reason is to reestablish wildlife food sources that have been severely degraded by logging, which takes out the large canopy trees that provide food for squirrels, barking deer, mouse deer, bearded pigs, and dozens of rainforest mammal species.

Planting trees on ancestral lands is also a political act. It allows indigenous groups to document a formal land use that is valid in the eyes of the Malaysian government. "Uncultivated land" is considered eligible for logging and conversion to industrial plantations, and native land rights are automatically "extinguished." Planting trees is a form of cultivation that can legitimize land use by native peoples, and challenge the rights of corporations.

A History of Struggle

In the case of Long Lunyim, the community has long fought to prevent logging of their primary forest by one of the world's most rapacious timber companies, Rimbunan Hijau. In 2001, Long Lunyim worked with an ethnobotanical research team to document and map more than 200 species of useful plants found in their community designated protected forest. The research showed that it would cost the community over \$34,000 per year-- a crippling financial burden to people who earn precious little cash--to replace these useful non-timber forest products with items bought from the market.

Research report in hand, the community asked Rimbunan Hijau and the government to leave their protected forest intact. The company and government agreed, then sent in bulldozers and chainsaw crews in open violation of their public agreement. When the community blocked the bulldozers, several villagers were arrested on false charges, jailed, and tortured. Soldiers arrived and fired shots at the village from afar, but the community stood strong and the bulldozers finally pulled out. The arrested villagers were eventually cleared of all charges, and a malicious prosecution case is now pending in court.

Nevertheless, damage was done, and two-thirds of their forest has been damaged by logging, roads and landslides. Outside the protected forest, the impact was even worse. Vast areas, once rich forests, have lost their magnificent canopy trees. Today, these areas are a dense mass of vines harboring few sources of Penan food, such as sago palm, ferns, shoots, leafy vegetables, fruits, medicinal plants or wild game. As a result, malnutrition has worsened in the village. For residents of Long Lunyim, reforestation is a vital step to accelerate forest restoration and improve overall community health.



Lina Kajan, organizer of new community initiatives in gardening and reforestation initiatives in Long Lunyim.

New Organic Gardens Battle Malnutrition

In April 2005, Lina Kajan organized the women of the Long Lunyim to take on the fight against malnutrition. Armed with only kitchen knives and sharpened sticks, they chopped and weeded a patch of earth beside the riverbank, and planted several hundred beans. It was the first step to establish a vegetable garden to supplement dwindling forest resources. Prior to the advent of logging, the Penan could gather everything they needed from the forest, with no need to grow crops or raise livestock. Today, villagers struggle to learn cultivation skills. With a small grant for tools and seeds from the Borneo Project, Lina and her group are now tending a community garden of squashes, corn, beans, cucumbers, papaya, ginger, melons and greens. They have plans to rear chickens in the near future.

Penan Youth Leadership Training

The environmental injustices that burden Long Lunyim exemplify the vulnerability of Penan communities across Sarawak. They are hampered by illiteracy, non-existent communications infrastructure, and a limited understanding of their legal rights. Long Lunyim has stated its desire to become independently capable of filing complaints, communicating with outsiders, and dealing with authorities. It hopes to share its lessons and experiences with other Penan villages facing similar struggles.

In response, The Borneo Project is working with community and regional activists to establish a shortwave radio network for remote Penan settlements. In addition, funds are being sought to establish a series of **Penan Youth Community Organizer and Leadership Trainings**, which will allow young Penan, nominated by their communities, to study with Partners of Community Organizations (PACOS), one of the finest native rights and community-based conservation organizations in Southeast Asia. PACOS has successfully trained dozens of youth across Sabah. This training will allow young people to acquire the skills to advocate for their community's rights and communicate effectively with both adversaries and allies. PACOS trainers will then accompany the youth back to their home villages to help them build networks and locally-appropriate strategies.

Seed collector and gardener Lina Kajan is one of a number of talented young Penan thrilled with the possibility of participating--just as soon as the community garden and reforestation nursery are well on their way to feeding her community and restoring the rainforest.

What You Can Do: Through the Borneo Project, you can sponsor Lina and other Penan youth to participate in the Community Organizer and Leadership Training. As with each trainee, **Lina needs a scholarship of \$12 per day** to cover living expenses and training costs. You can donate securely online at:

<https://www.earthisland.org/borneo/donate.html>

Please note "Penan Youth Fund" and your donation will go directly to student scholarships. You'll receive a certificate of sponsorship, and regular updates from the students as well as The Borneo Project.

Long Trek For Micro-Hydro Power *by Liz Varnhagen, volunteer*

It's only five minutes by helicopter. It couldn't take us that long to walk it, could it? My partner Steve and I ponder as we set out on the trail from Penampang, Sabah to the remote Kadazan-Dusun enclave of Terian. It is early morning and the muggy rainforest roars with cicadas. We leave the paved road, ascending a worn trail of clay and rocks, clinging to branches and tree trunks along the way, eyeing the leeches that wave opportunistic suckers from nearby plants.

Our guides, Nousa and Enroe, youths in their early twenties, demonstrate casual agility as they lead us along the unmarked trails in flip-flops. They have covered this territory countless times, often hauling five gallon tanks of petrol fuel needed to power generators in their village. Everything in Terian, with the exception of a few things delivered by helicopter, comes up this path by human power. I lose my footing again and grab onto a vine full of thorns. I can understand why men like Nousa and Enroe, who haul the petrol, are so excited about the 5 kilowatt micro-hydro project they are constructing in their village.

The hydro project in Terian, now well on its way to completion, will provide a steady source of electricity for all 40 families. Over the past three years, The Borneo Project has coordinated grants, technical assistance, and international volunteers in cooperation with the Sabah-based Partners of Community Organizations. PACOS, as they are known, provides training and project oversight to ensure that the village manages the project successfully. Micro-hydro replaces fossil fuels and the community agrees to protect the upstream forested watershed.

Steve and I came to Sabah this March in part as Borneo Project volunteers. In the eighties, I taught science and math in a Sabah secondary school as a Peace Corps volunteer. I yearned to come back and reconnect. Steve had visited Sabah in the mid-nineties and was eager to see more of Borneo. As a mechanical engineer specializing in energy efficiency, Steve wishes to offer his skills and ideas

to the people of Terian.

After eight hours of jungle slogging, slipping and lurching, we arrive in the village exhausted. Nousa drops us at our host family's house, then jogs off to join a soccer game. We fall promptly into afternoon slumber.

The Terian enclave consists of wooden houses on stilts connected by footpaths, situated along the hillside above a clear, rushing river. The central hillside is groomed with manicured grasses. Chickens roam freely and small hunting dogs trot in and out from under the houses.

We are greeted the next morning by the unforgettable view of mist floating between layers of forested hills. We join Nousa and Enroe at the river, and watch them catch our lunch-- delicious fish. Steve and I join the rest of the village for one of the many *gotong royong* (community work sessions) that are held to construct the micro-hydro project. We hike up a steep forested hill behind the village to an area with small diversion dams that channel water into a PVC pipeline that drains into a concrete receptacle. This penstock controls the flow of water plunging to the powerhouse, 160 feet below. Our task is to bury sections of the pipeline with hoes. Though the work gives us a feeling of accomplishment, we are relieved that the session lasts only a few hours in the midday heat.

We spend the next five days working in a similar rhythm side-by-side with the people of Terian. Steve, Nousa and other village leaders discuss ways to address anticipated problems with the design, such as forest debris clogging the pipes, lighting efficiency, and equitable distribution of the electricity. Back at PACOS, Steve helps develop a spreadsheet with a variety of calculations for power generation and distribution.

Overall we have a lovely week in Terian, contributing our small part to an impressive undertaking. ***As this newsletter goes to press, PACOS reports that the project is now complete, and the inauguration ceremony on June 30 will be a huge celebration!***

Special Thanks to All Borneo Project Volunteers and Donors

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Dan Scollon
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Dr. Nathaniel Tarn
Willow Rosenthal
Liz Varnhagen
Carrie Wilson

Donors

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Rivoli's Restaurant

Found: Over Three Hundred New Species!

Borneo one of the world's most important centers of biodiversity

An April 2005 report, "Borneo's Lost World: Newly Discovered Species on Borneo" by WWF asserts that **thousands of additional plant and animal species are yet to be discovered** on the world's third-largest island, where rainforests have been evolving continuously for 35 million years, and humans have been managing the dynamic forest mosaic landscape for at least 40,000 years.

The report highlights the **361 new species** identified on the island over the past decade, including **260 species of insects, 50 plants, 30 freshwater fish, seven frogs, six lizards, five crabs, and two snakes.**

Much of the island's wildlife -- even the largest mammals -- are yet to be closely studied by scientists. In the past few years, scientists have determined that both Borneo's **pygmy elephant** and the Bornean **orangutan** are genetically distinct subspecies, found nowhere else on earth. Other threatened wildlife in Borneo include rhinos, clouded leopards, sun bears, binturong civet cats, flying foxes, pangolin, crocodiles, flying lemurs, flying snakes, macaques, slow loris, and gibbons.



Sumatran rhinos and gibbons add majesty to the forests of Borneo. Credits: Int'l Rhino Fdn; J. Blampied.



The Borneo Project supports indigenous initiatives for human rights, rainforest protection and community development through small grants, equipment donations, technical training, & citizen diplomacy.

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