

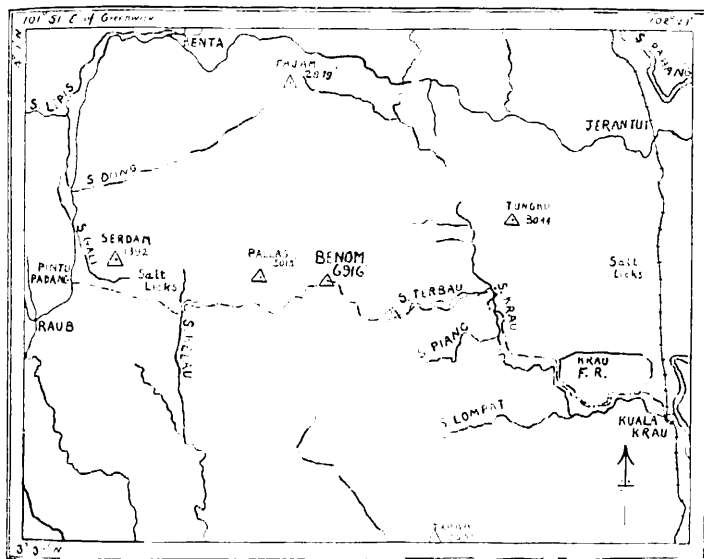
AN ASCENT OF GUNONG BENOM FROM RAUB.

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PLATES V VIII AND A SKETCH MAP.)

Gunong Benom is the highest peak of an isolated mountain-group near the centre of Pahang. Its height is given on the latest maps as 6,916 feet and it is one of the highest mountains in the Malay Peninsula.

The word *benom* is used by the Malays in the sense *hutan benom*, which may be translated as "a faraway, dark forest of tall trees in which no one lives," a true description of this mountain.



MAP OF THE COUNTRY SURROUNDING GUNONG BENOM.
THE DOTTED LINE SHOWS THE ROUTE OF THE JOURNEY.
SCALE: EIGHT MILES TO ONE INCH

Incidentally the phrase "*pergi hutan benom*" is the equivalent of our consigning a person to the nether regions. Gunong Benom has a bad reputation for evil spirits. Noises of people talking and of rocks falling are said to be heard, and there is a tale, terrifying to the credulous Malay peasant, of a large *biruk*, or monkey, which inhabits the mountain, a fierce animal standing five feet high on

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all fours. Fables apart, it is certain that some curious coincidences of sickness and death have occurred in connection with the mountain, and so, in the case of the present trip, it was not surprising that desertions were frequent before the day of departure.

This account describes an ascent going eastwards from Raub, followed by the descent, still eastwards, down the other side, to the railway at Kuala Krau. It is believed that no one had previously reached the summit of Bénom from the west.

The descent to Kuala Krau was made under very difficult conditions, for we could not get a view from the summit owing to clouds, and could not therefore "lay a course" along a ridge leading downwards towards the east, as had been hoped. The old track climbing up from Sungai Krau could not be found, and direction had to be kept by compass. This entailed a very hard journey, more strenuous than the climb up from Raub.

An attempt was made on the mountain from the Raub side by W. D. Barnes, Warden of Mines, Pahang, in 1900, for the purpose of putting a trigonometrical-survey beacon on the summit. (Journ. S. Br. R. A. Soc. No. 39, 1903.) He succeeded in reaching Kluang Terbang, named Gunong Pallas on the maps, a peak three miles away from the real summit, and separated from it by several deep valleys. This was the only attempt from Raub of which there is any record, before E. J. Strugnell's trip of September 1929, when he reached 5,500 feet, and found the ridge which we later followed to the top. However, on that first occasion, he was forced to return to Raub to get medical attention for a poisoned hand.

The mountain was climbed from Kuala Krau in 1906 by J. N. Sheffield accompanied by A. E. Young, who erected a survey beacon which is still in good condition, on the summit. F. R. Twiss observed from the summit in 1907, and A. Cochrane in 1917. In 1923, I. H. N. Evans, of the Museums Department, made an ascent from Ulu Dong in the north, considerable difficulty being experienced in finding the top. The present trip was made in May, 1930, and the top was reached early on the fifth day, the whole journey, from Raub to the summit of Bénom, and down to Kuala Krau on the Pahang river, taking ten days.

The party numbered thirty four, and consisted of the two writers, Mayah bin Latib, a Malay collector of the Geological Survey Department, Forester Ismail bin Haji Zainudin, four forest guards, Ah San, a Hylam "boy," and twenty five coolies. Actually, we had planned to have thirty coolies, and, by sending most of them two days ahead, laden with rice and camp-kit, had hoped to arrange that the first two camps should be more comfortable than usual, and, really more important, that the coolies should have a good rest to prepare for the steep climb up Bénom. However, although the party had been put in charge of a Malay who had accompanied E. J. Strugnell on the expedition of the previous September, and who therefore knew the sites of the first and second

camps, yet he could not find the old *rēntis* (narrow path cut through the jungle), and had not the initiative to cut his own way due east. Two days afterwards, on May 19th, we came across them at the edge of the jungle, only about three miles from the road.

Two sick coolies had to be sent back, and these casualties, together with previous desertions, reduced the number to twenty five, so that it was necessary to rearrange the loads and leave some baggage behind. It was tied high in a tree, above the reach of elephants, to be collected again at some future date. We took with us seventy gantangs of rice, which accounted for twelve of the coolies, a quantity of dried fish, two canvas sheets for use as tents, two camp beds, pots and pans, bedding and clothing for ourselves and the others, and our food.

Meals were prepared for us by Ah San, who had three fowls, bread, twenty pounds of potatoes and onions, tins of meat, soup, bacon, sausages, fruit, peas, biscuits, milk, butter, and dripping, as his larder, from which were daily produced large and appetising meals. Mayah carried a twelve-bore shot-gun for protection against elephant and tiger, and a bag with a hammer for collecting geological specimens, and, needless to say, the hammer was more useful than the gun. One of the forest guards carried several wire presses containing Chinese paper for pressing botanical specimens.

When all was reorganised each coolie had to carry about forty pounds, packed in a *rotan ambong*, tied to his back by a strap over each shoulder, with an extra loose one for occasional additional support, passing round his forehead. It may be interesting here to mention that the rate of pay was 70 cents a day, from which the cost of food was deducted, a lower rate than was paid by Mr. Barnes in 1900, for he gave them food in addition, and it was very well earned! The Malay may be a lazy, idle fellow in certain civilised walks of life, but he is very willing and hard-working in the jungle.

At about noon our complete party recommenced the journey eastwards, having now said "good-bye" to known tracks and clearings. The three miles already traversed from Pintu Padang, at the 36th mile on the road from Kuala Lipis to Raub, had lain across the Gali plain, flat *kampung* land, overlooked by several limestone hills, Bukit Serdam and others, and from it had been seen the long ridge running north and south from the Sungai Dong to the Bilut Forest Reserve. We knew from the topographical survey map (S B 4), and from E. J. Strugnell's previous trip, that the Sungai Kéluau flowed along the eastern side of this ridge, and the saddle between Bukit Redan and Bukit Kluang, which gave the easiest access to the river, could be seen on a bearing of 110 degrees, so, by using a compass, there was no difficulty in ensuring the right direction to reach our first camp (Plate V).

Almost at once, after entering the jungle, we passed from the alluvial plain overlying limestone on to low hills of mica-schist, and then, at *Jenut Keladi*, the first salt-lick, on to fine grained hornblende-granite and augite-syenite. Tracks of elephant and *selaang* were very common, and big grooves had been gouged in the sides of mounds of earth by elephants' tusks. No animals were near as our party passed through this district of salt-licks, but, on the occasion of E. J. Strugnell's previous visit, he had found it wise to make a deviation to avoid a herd of *séladang*. The animal-haunted jungle around the salt-licks was a mass of climbers, with very few forest trees, and this poor forest continued to the top of the ridge. From the saddle a rather indistinct path was followed southeast to the Sungai Kélau, where at 4.30 p.m. we made our camp at a height of 550 feet.

The next day, May 20th, we set off at 7 a.m., following the Sungai Kélau upstream until a large tributary was met, flowing from northeast to southwest. It is named the Sungai Kélau on the topo map (3B/4), but the Malays of the district give this title to the other stream flowing from north to south. We continued northeast up the tributary, and then left it to go east up a ridge 2,300 feet in height. At 8.30 a.m., at 1,000 feet, (near the S. of S. Kélau on the topo map, the bedrock was granite of the common, dark, hornblende-bearing type, without prominent felspar crystals, and the soil was yellow-red in colour. A little further uphill was country built of augite-syenite, with abundant, rectangular-shaped crystals of felspar showing a roughly parallel arrangement, and the soil was brown, quite different from that lying on the granite.

At 9.45 a.m. we came to an extensive *runtok* (landslide), and, from the huge, freshly-split boulders, it was possible to determine the age of the various granite rocks relative to that of the syenite. Oldest is syenite. This is intruded by black syenitic vein-rocks, and both are penetrated by hornblende granite.

We reached the top of the *permatang* (ridge), which had a north and south direction, and went down to a brawling stream, flowing over boulders and outcrops of syenite. Uphill, on the other side, after altogether two miles of syenite, the red soil of ordinary granite (not hornblende-bearing) appeared, which continued up to the highest part of Gunung Bénom and for some distance down the other side. Our party went eastwards to the top of the ridge at 3,000 feet, and then descended to 2,500 feet, where, at 2.45 p.m., our second camp was pitched alongside a small stream.

We started at 7 a.m. on the third day, May 21st, going eastwards up the flank of the next ridge by ascending a spur. At the top the ridge led east, and, after following it till 9.20 a.m., at 4,300 feet, we left it to descend to a stream flowing north at 3,500 feet. The bed of the valley was covered with large granite core-boulders, difficult to cross, especially for the coolies. These masses of core-boulders at the bottoms of valleys, known to the Malays

as *gugup*, are typical of Bénom. In a pool of water near here it was interesting to find a crab two inches across. At 10.30 a.m. we cut eastwards across the valley, climbing a spur which brought us, at 2 p.m. to the top of a ridge 5,500 feet high, whence the summit of Bénom could be seen on a bearing of 68 degrees. This 2,000 foot climb was the longest continuous rise of the whole ascent. On the ridge were fresh tracks of rhinoceros (*budak sumbu*).

At this stage the experience gained by E. J. Strugnell on his previous trip was invaluable. He had reached the same point, and, after a long search, had found water in a valley, 800 feet below, at the foot of a huge landslide, where he had made his highest camping-place. It was an uncomfortable spot to spend the night in, a difficult climb-down for the coolies with their loads, and the thought that the ascent up the same landslide would have to be made next morning was rather depressing, but still it was a definite gain to be able to pitch our tents at 4 p.m. without having had to tire ourselves further by a long search for water. A spring emerged from the landslide and trickled down for only a few yards before disappearing below *gugup* once more.

Some excavating and banking had to be done to make a site for our tent, and the others of the party all had very steep slopes to lie on. Luckily, on this, as on other nights, there was no shortage of leaves for *atap*, which was fortunate, because it began to rain as darkness fell. It was very unpleasant paddling about in the mud, and difficult to get wood dry enough to burn for cooking the evening meal, for we were here near the mossy forest. However, there was reason to bless the rain, when, next afternoon, pools of rain-water were the only means of cooking rice. But for them, most of our party would have gone without supper and breakfast. The night was uncomfortable, and three of the coolies deserted their dripping leaf shelter to sleep under a huge rock, which certainly gave better protection from the rain, but nevertheless was a much colder and more draughty refuge than their leaky *pondok*. It was indeed a cold camp; the chilly night-air flowing down the landslide into the narrow valley kept most of the Malays awake, and some were coughing the night long.

On May 22nd, the fourth day, we got off at 7.40 a.m. and had regained our position on the ridge at 8.15 a.m., to go northeast along a well-trodden rhinoceros-track. A parallel ridge, 5,700 to 6,000 feet high, could be seen about a mile away. At 9.40 a.m. we were on a minor peak, 5,700 feet high, where boulders of the usual coarse-grained, non-porphyrific granite were common, and a peak of about 6,500 feet could be seen over a mile to the northeast, with others in clouds, evidently including the summit of Bénom, to the east of it. At 10.30 a.m. we had attained 6,000 feet, still following the very useful rhinoceros-track, and then trouble began; for, at 11 a.m., the track was lost in very difficult *gugup*, flung right across the ridge, and an hour's delay ensued. Great boulders of granite, twenty, thirty, and forty feet across, lay one on top of an