

Mounts Loser, Leuser and Tanpa Nama

In April 2016, Anthony Nightingale accompanied by Steven Drive Liwe, Sofyan, Brury and Dewe, headed to North Sumatra to trek through the rainforests of the Mount Leuser park to climb the mountains of Loser, Leuser and Tanpa Nama.

We flew from Medan to the village of Kedah and drove to the lodge of Mr Jali, where our porters were assembling.



Like most of his Gayo countrymen, Mr Jali is keen on coffee and cigarettes.

Led by Dewe, the only one of our guides who had done this trek before, we entered the forests pausing briefly at Mr Jali's forest hut which was surrounded by unusual trees.



In the early morning, you can see plenty of orangutans and gibbons near the river there. We had missed them as we passed through in the late morning but we could still hear the loud calls of the gibbons.

We crossed an open area where local farmers have cleared land to plant tobacco.



We then hiked up through the forest to our first camp site, Pintu Rimba “door to the jungle”, at 1,700 meters.



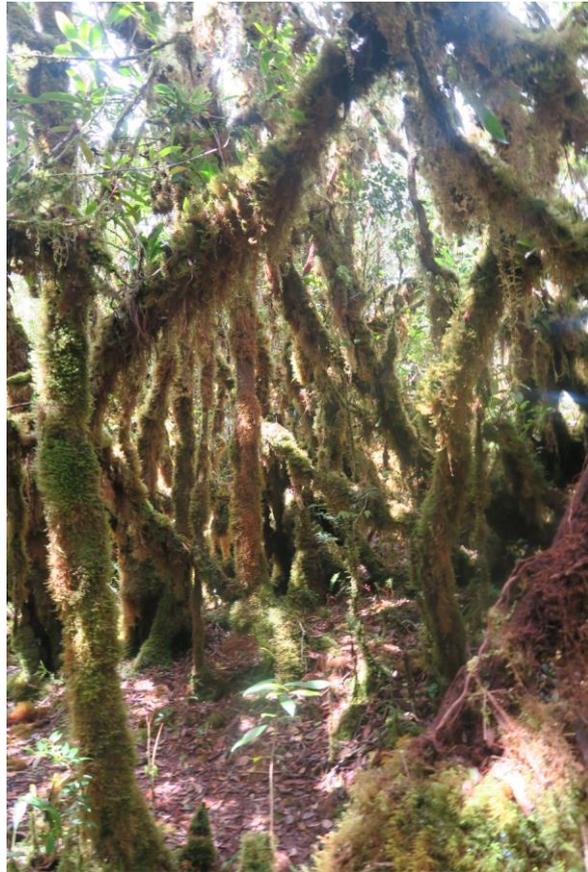
The following day saw a steep climb, most of it in thick forest where you need to take care both of overhanging branches and tree roots and also the sharp spikes of the innocent looking rattan plant.



There were some open areas and beautiful mountain flowers.



But plenty of dense jungle as well.



We covered a distance of some 7.7 km to reach the top of Mount Angkasan (2,927 meters).



The next day's trek encountered some thicker jungle as we went up and down three hills called Kulit Manis 1, 2 and 3, with plenty of crawling under or clambering over fallen trees.

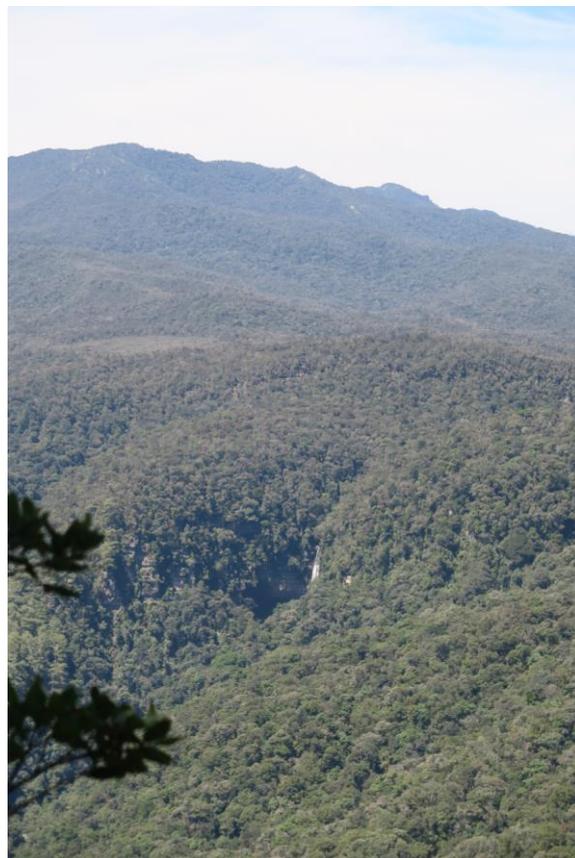


On the middle one of the Kulit Manis hills, suddenly a sloping meadow full of nepenthes flowers opened up. These flowers also known as pitcher plants or monkey cups can trap and devour unwary insects.



We camped at Lintasan Badak “Rhinos Crossing” at 2,330 meters, home to some persistent and aggressive insects able to bite through thin socks or shirts!

Our fourth day started in dense forest as we climbed up to mount Pepanyi, but every now and again the trees would open up to give us great views like this far away waterfall.



And again, even deep in the jungle there were some lovely flowers.



Finally, after about 5 hours, we came to a very welcome open area



We also saw a footprint of the elusive Sumatran tiger.



After a mixture of open country and sections of forest, we came to the Alas River. Crossing this needed care.



The camp site was not far from the Alas River at 2,294 meters. After fixing the tents, the porters relaxed.



That evening at our camp site, we saw a beautiful sunset.



And next day, an unusual array of spiders' webs in the early morning sun.



We set off on a pleasant morning on an easy path. But unfortunately, the open ground only lasted for a while and soon we were back in the jungle till we came to the Rhino's Pool.



I should add that unlike the tiger, we saw no sign of the Sumatran rhino though it does apparently still exist in these forests in tiny numbers.

In the early afternoon, it began to rain. Nasir, the lead porter, helpfully used his parang to clear the path.



After about 8 hours with a lot of up and down, we reached camp. The rain had eased turning into a lovely evening followed by a spectacular morning. Camp Putri (Princess) at 2,926 meters, was the most beautiful of our camp sites.



On our sixth morning, we soon plunged back into the rainforest.



But we emerged on to a hill called Bipak 3 with some fine views of Mounts Loser and Leuser.



It rained as we set up our camp at Bipak Batu (stone bivouac) at 2,947 meters but cleared for a stunning evening.



Here is Sofyan sitting nonchalantly on the edge of the “stone”.

We had our first good view of Puncak Tanpa Nama (literally “No Name Peak”)



Next day (our seventh) unusually stayed wet and misty all day and our journey through the jungle involved crossing the same small river twice.



A mid morning break for Gayo coffee was welcome.



We reached our final camp at Lapangan Bola (the Football Field). Since no one lives in this rainforest, we reckoned at that point that we were about 50 km from the nearest human beings.

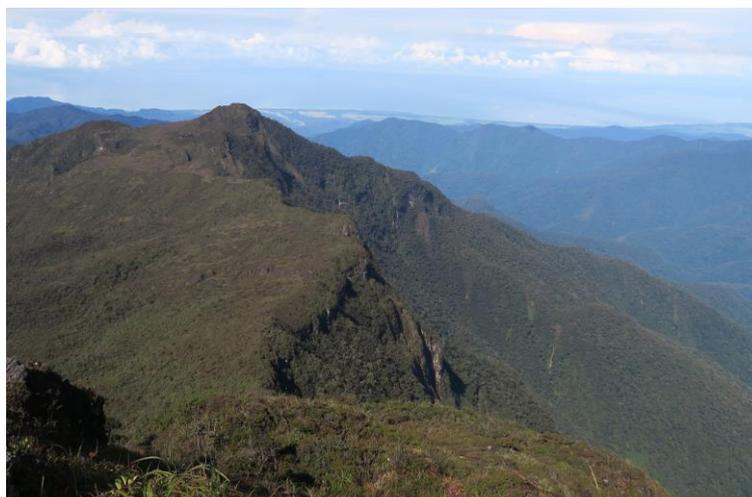
The following morning fortunately dawned clear and at 0715 we set off for Mounts Loser and Leuser. The hike up to Loser was pleasant, mainly over open ground with some great views. Some of the porters came with us.



The top (3,404 meters) reached in under 2 hours from the camp was marked with a stone pillar.



There were great views of the ridge across to mount Leuser and over to the western sea which though very visible actually takes a further 7 days through thick jungle to reach.



The journey from Loser to Leuser starts with a steep 300 meter descent through thick jungle.



It then emerges on to a narrow track along the ridge often next to some precipitous drops.



We deviated slightly from the route descending further to the small but beautiful Lake Loser.



As we climbed up to Mount Leuser (3,119 meters) the clouds came in.



We retraced our steps as the rain began, reaching our camp just under 9 and a half hours from the start having climbed and descended about 1,260 meters each.

In the early evening, Anthony's left thumb malfunctioned and he spent a night wondering what best to do, waking early to a spectacular dawn.



The decision was to seek a helicopter exit. This proved a good call in hindsight as it turned out to be a ruptured flexor tendon, requiring a complex tendon graft operation for which time is of the essence to achieve a descent result.

First, however, there was one final mountain to climb, and while Steven worked the Sat phone looking for a helicopter willing to venture into unknown terrain, Anthony and a small team set off for Tanpa Nama.

The lower part of the mountain was dense forest but this then opened up.



Only Nasir, the lead porter, had climbed this before which turned out to be valuable. While Nasir and a small group of porters went their way, Anthony, Sofyan, Brury and Dewe headed to the high point marked on the survey map.



Once there we could see that clearly this was not the actual top of the mountain which was far away across a saddle.



We rejoined Nasir below who led the way up to the real summit at around 3,470 meters.



Back through the jungle one more time, we returned to camp.



While we were climbing the mountain, after a lot of hard work, Steven had located a helicopter from Pekanbaru in central Sumatra. This was prepared to pick us up so on the following day we took a group photo expecting to say farewell to our comrades.



But by the time the helicopter had reached our vicinity, it had clouded over. Failing to locate us, they returned to Medan (an hour's flight away) to try the following day.

After an anxious night, hoping for good weather, it dawned clear.



The helicopter landed successfully and Steven and Anthony climbed on board with their gear.



The pilots tried to take off but anticipating some trouble finding us, they had loaded plenty of fuel and we could not lift off. Steven first jettisoned the surplus camping equipment he had planned to take with us to ease the porters' burden and then nobly threw out his backpack too. Finally, the helicopter rose up and we were on the way back to Medan.

