

SABAH – MALAYSIAN BORNEO

21 July 2013

Presenter – Margaret Ball

Margaret's trip to Sabah stemmed from a chance meeting with a woman who has been raising money for the rehabilitation of orangutans there. The group in Woolgoolga, NSW, regularly hold street stalls to raise funds, as does the local public school.

Margaret and three other women arranged the trip on the internet, and set off in September 2012, traveling via Kuala Lumpur to Kota Kinabulu. The main aim was to visit the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Sanctuary, and to arrange the adoption of another two orangutans using the money raised. They arranged a number of short tours and linked them together. First off while in Kota Kinabula, they undertook a culinary tour where they were accompanied by a guide and bought local produce to prepare and cook and eat for lunch. They were surprised what the locals readily bought and cooked – obviously their staple diet is a far cry from ingredients used in Australia. Following on to that they went on a river trip south of Kota Kinabulu to see some wildlife – proboscis and other types of monkey, various birds, crocodiles, etc..

A visit to the foothills of Mt Kinabalu and Poring Hot Springs proved eventful. The mountain is usually covered by cloud, but they had occasional good glimpses of it when the cloud drifted away. There is a popular but extremely tough walk ascending the mountain which normally takes about 18 hours, with a night spent near the summit. The object is to arise in the early hours and reach the summit at dawn. At Poring Springs the group went on a tree-top canopy walk. This involved five sections of a wobbly structure built from bamboo, timber, chicken wire, and rope of various thicknesses, much of it fraying. Once on it, the walk had to be completed - the view from the top was worth it.



Mt Kinabalu Mountain range

A visit to Turtle Island off the coast near Sandakan was of great interest. Turtle eggs are harvested and placed in hatcheries until hatched, and then sent out to sea. The turtles are now endangered due to the number of predators just waiting to make a meal of the freshly laid eggs. A 130 km boat trip up the Kinabatangan River took them to Sukau Rainforest Resort – from there they were taken up and down the river by boat to see the pygmy elephants, proboscis monkeys and prolific birdlife.



Pygmy elephant in Kinabatangan River

The group was very saddened by the stories of the UK, NZ and Australian troops who were tortured, starved and treated so badly by the Japanese while they were in prison camps. There were three death marches from Sandakan to Ranau, a distance of approximately 260 km, where only six of the two thousand Australian troops survived. A number of monuments to these atrocities were visited.

A couple of visits were made to Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Sanctuary, and on the second one it was arranged that the Woolgoolga group adopt two more orangutans, an 8 month old male and a 1 month old female. These had become separated from their mothers, and will be taught how to survive on their own. When they are considered ready, they will be put out into the wild. An annual amount for their maintenance was also arranged. Their habitat is quickly being diminished by deforestation and the world's great need for palm oil. There must some way for the orangutans' natural habitat to be preserved to save these creatures from extinction.

