

## XI. A TRAGEDY OF BORNEO

It was a nice and cool evening in October 1958, when we were sitting in all safety and comfort in the Resthouse at Ranau. The sky had cleared up and Mt Kinabalu dominated the scenery in all its rugged majesty. Mr D.I.Nicholson, the Ecologist of Sandakan, and I were to start next day to climb the mountain. The preparations had been made, and, lingering around, my eye fell on a booklet on the table. It was "A Tragedy of Borneo 1941-1945", and its subtitle was "Kinabalu National Memorial Park Project". While reading, I became deeply impressed. The Tragedy of Borneo began seriously in September 1944. Then the 2400 prisoners, 1800 Australians and 600 Englishmen, who had been kept in a P.O.W.camp at Sandakan, were driven by the Japs westward, into the interior, along a murderous track 150 miles long through the heaviest country, on a daily ration of 2½ ounces of rice, while the stores in Sandakan were packed with International Red Cross parcels, and while the American planes came over high in the sky, using the Kinabalu as a land mark, unaware of the terrible things that were happening on the ground. When in August 1945 the death march ended at the foot of the Kinabalu, the Imperial Army of Japan had massacred all these men, except for six Australians who somehow had managed to escape.

While we made the ascent, I saw Mr Nicholson busy collecting data for the setting out of a National Park. This will comprise the summit of the mountain, and a good deal of its slopes. In the booklet, which I was very glad to see now again on my desk, this is explained extensively. For its ob-

jective is to seek approval and support for the following aims:

" 1) To commemorate in a more constructive way than War Graves Cemeteries are, by their nature, intended to do, a war-time disaster and recovery of deep national significance to Australia, Great Britain, and British Borneo.

2) To symbolize for posterity the close bonds of friendship, mutual respect, and common endeavour, which have always existed between the British and the indigenous people of Borneo, and which during World War II found frequent and courageous expression throughout the dreadful ordeal through which the country passed.

3) To focus historical interest on Kundasan (4000 ft) near Ranau on the slopes of Mt Kinabalu (13455 ft), the highest mountain in SE.Asia and the most imposing feature in all Borneo. Subject to other conditions being favourable, to work also towards the development of the area for the future benefit of native as well as British interests in Borneo."

This testifies to a great vision. A better monument could not be designed than this very mountain, which is of so great a value to the local people and to international science. This value is dealt with very instructively by the booklet. Mr J.K.Cox wrote a chapter on the Agricultural Potential of the Ranau District, Mr C.S.Carter on the Historical Background and on the Service Reconnaissance Detachment, Mr Tom Harrison on the Wild Life of Kinabalu. Many photographs, of scenery, people and their action, animals and crops illustrate the booklet.

Kinabalu is of the utmost significance both to the country of North Borneo and to Science. To North Borneo, because of the vast forests on its slopes that have a favourable influence on the climate, thus saving the land from fatal destruction by erosion, and supplying many useful products. To Science it is important because only a fraction of its wealth in plants and animals is known. Many species are unique on our globe and endemic on this mountain, and facilities to study them alive can easily be extended. For years to come, every expedition will bring novelties. Even of the 90 collections made on our hurried, 4-day trip along the only and seemingly well-known track, 2 plant species appeared new to science.

It is especially the lower slopes that are badly known. Many species were once collected between 500 and 1500 m and have never been found back since. It is of foremost importance that this area is prevented from being completely destroyed.

A fund, sponsored and supported by many prominent persons in Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo, has been established.

The aim of this fund is, to develop a park at Kundasan with a memorial that is to illustrate the combined sacrifices and endeavours by all races towards freedom and future progress of Borneo; to create a leave centre at 1200 m and encourage high altitude agriculture; to establish a Youth Hostel or Outward Board School within the Park, in order that the youngsters of the country will realize what here happened and what is still to be done.

After the initial survey during the trip in 1958, good progress has been made towards the conservation of a Kinabalu National Park. To this purpose several experts have visited the area to find out what needs to be conserved and what not. The Government is giving full support, and for everything it is much hoped that the establishment of this National Park, which is to be by far the largest Nature Reserve in Borneo, soon will be a matter of fact.

For all these reasons, I am very pleased to recommend the Kinabalu National Memorial Park warmly in your attention.--  
M.Jacobs.