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Cover: *An orang utan at Sepilok Orang Utan Rehabilitation Centre*
Photo by : **Albert C. K. Teo**

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29 JUL 1994

NASKAH PEMULIHARAAN
PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA

INTRODUCTION

Situated on the east coast of Sabah, the town and district of Sandakan are nearly 1,900 kilometres from Malaysia's capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Apart from much smaller Lahad Datu and Semporna, Sandakan is the eastern-most town in



Sandakan Division



Aerial view of Sandakan

Malaysia, situated only 28 kilometres from the border with the Philippines. As we shall see later, Sandakan has strong historical connections with that country. Having been the capital of Sabah from 1884 until the Japanese invasion in 1942, and having been through a heady timber boom period through the 1960's and 70's when the town was said to have contained the greatest concentration of millionaires in the world, Sandakan has settled into a more mellow period, primarily as a market town for a growing agricultural hinterland.

1879 to 3,771 in 1884 - an astounding 40% increase every year for five years. History proved Pryer wrong, but peace and a higher average standard of living in Sandakan than in the lands further east more than make up for smallness of size.



International airlinks to Sabah

Sandakan has a colourful history, although some aspects of the earlier days would perhaps be better described as shady. In the 1880's, William Pryer, the English founder of modern Sandakan town, envisaged a great city fringing Sandakan Bay. In one of his frequent bursts of confident enthusiasm, he predicted that one hundred years hence Sandakan would be larger than Manila in the Philippines. Perhaps this was because the number of residents leapt from 698 in



Logs awaiting export at Sandakan

HISTORY



W. B. Pryer

History books say that Sandakan was founded in 1879 by an Englishman named William Pryer. In fact, the story of Sandakan started more than a century earlier. During the eighteenth century, there was an increasing demand in England for tea, which was replacing ale and gin as the national beverage. Most of this tea was coming from China, but English traders could offer little that was in demand by the Chinese. Seeking ways to diversify their activities as middlemen, the English turned to those parts of South-East Asia which were still free of rivals from other European countries. One man - Alexander Dalrymple of the East India Company - found the Sulu region, a scattered array of islands in what is now the southern Philippines. Spain had tried but failed to conquer this region, mainly because of its strong Moslem population. The Sulu region was ruled by a

complicated family network, under the authority of a Sultan who lived on the island of Jolo, about 340 kilometres from modern Sandakan. The Sulu region provided an abundance of natural products, from the sea and the forests, that was of interest to China. That trade between Sulu and China already existed bothered neither Dalrymple nor later British traders. They found that the rulers of Sulu were interested in goods that they could supply - most importantly, arms and gunpowder to fight their rivals as well as the Spanish. Thus, the power and wealth of the Sultanate of Sulu grew during the late eighteenth century - in part as a result of the English addiction to tea.

The precise origins of Sandakan are a mystery, but we know that it has its beginnings as a trading outpost of the Sulu Sultanate. For the Sulu traders, the eastern part of what is now Sabah was an important source of beeswax (used mainly for making candles), rattan canes (used for many purposes) and edible birds' nests (relished by Chinese communities throughout Asia). The district, centred on Sandakan Bay but including the Kinabatangan River, acquired the Sulu name of Mangindora. By the late eighteenth century, there were several settlements around the Bay, at Terusan Duyong, Pulau Lubokan, Domendung, Segaliud - and Sandakan itself. The exact site of that early settlement is unknown - all that we know is that the name Sandakan means "to be pawned" in the Sulu language and that the settlement was based on a river with that name. So important was Sandakan that Sultan Sharaf ud-Din appointed his own son to govern the settlement from 1791 to 1808. Around 1812, Sandakan was visited by a Captain John Hunt, who

recorded that *"the chief is named tuan Abandool with a hundred Islams and there are many orang idan (natives) in the interior parts. There is a small mud fort mounting 3 large guns, 5 smaller of brass, 30 rantakas, and 60 muskets. Its annual products, when the Sulo people come over in numbers and chuse to exert themselves are 50 piculs (over 3,000 kilograms) of white birds' nest, 200 piculs of black, of different qualities, ... 3 piculs of camphor first sort ... 3 piculs of wax, capis pearls in abundance, 5 catties (3 kilograms) yearly if looked for, and 50 piculs of tripang"* (sea cucumbers). The rise in power of the Sulu sultanate continued during the early decades of the nineteenth century, by expansion of trade and through slavery. Many of the slaves were used to power trading and raiding boats, the largest boats being over 80 feet long, with a crew of more than 100 men plus over 60 oarsmen. Slave-catching

communities emerged outside the Sulu region, terrorising the entire coastline of Borneo and most of what is now Indonesia. In the eighteenth century, slavers had obtained their victims simply for sale to Sulu, but the system degenerated through the nineteenth century into piracy and bloodthirsty anarchy. The European powers in the region, in competition in every other way, were unanimous in wanting to eliminate the slavery and piracy which damaged their trading interests. The power of the Sulu sultanate declined rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century and with it the existence of many trading posts, including Sandakan.

In the early 1870's, however, a mixed group of German and British adventurers and traders formed a small settlement on Pulau Timbang in Sandakan Bay as a base for their activities in the Sulu Sea. The only



The settlement of Elopura established by William Pryer in 1879

one of them of which anything is now known was a Scotsman named William Clarke Cowie, who obtained guns and ammunition from a Carl Schomburg in Singapore and sold these items via Labuan to the Sultan of Sulu. After a few years, Cowie and his colleagues abandoned both this business and the settlement on Pulau Timbang, which had become known amongst the scattered fishing villages around Sandakan Bay as Kampung German. In 1875, Baron von Overbeck, representative of the Austrian government in Hong Kong, had acquired from the Sultan of Brunei what he believed to be a lease on the land that is present-day Sabah. He later learned from the acting governor of Labuan, William Treacher, that most of this land had been granted previously to the Sultan of Sulu by the Sultan of Brunei, and that the validity of his lease was doubtful. At the beginning of 1878, he visited the Sultan of Sulu in order to acquire the eastern part of what is now Sabah. An agreement was reached which would give Overbeck the permanent ownership of all land on Borneo over which the Sultan claimed authority, for an annual sum of \$5,000. Overbeck immediately placed three Englishmen in charge of his new possession and went to London in order to form a company along with the brothers Alfred and Edward Dent, Hong Kong merchants and publishers. Two years later, Overbeck sold his share of the company to Alfred, who proceeded to obtain a Charter from the British government in 1881. The British North Borneo (Chartered) Company was permitted to rule North Borneo, while the British government had the right to appoint a governor.

Two of the men employed by Overbeck to guard the land called Sabah were posted on

the west coast. The third, William Pryer, was given the title Resident of the East Coast and left at Kampung German, along with two assistants (one of indeterminate origins, named Abdul, and a West Indian named Anderson), a barrel of flour, seventeen chickens and six rifles. Pryer was also appointed consular agent by Treacher, the British representative in Labuan. Pryer found that Kampung German consisted of seventeen houses, now with a mixed population of local fishermen,



W. C. Cowie

Arabs and Chinese who traded edible birds' nests and pearls. There were only two other villages in Sandakan Bay - Upak, inhabited by Bajaus, and Timbang inhabited by Suluks. Pryer proved to be an excellent choice for the job - energetic, able, interested in everything, and diplomatic. His personal integrity and bravery stemmed initial resentment at the imposition of taxes on traders using Sandakan Bay, and settlements in the Bay began to grow. On 15 June 1879, Kampung German was accidentally burned down. The original

choice of site for this settlement was in part due to its being invisible from the mouth of the Bay, an important point for gun-runners wanting to maintain a low profile. But by now, Pryer's presence was widely known and respected, and he had acquired some Somali policemen for added protection. Buli Sim Sim, at the mouth of the Bay on mainland Sabah was chosen as the site to begin the foundation of a new town. Pryer named the new settlement Elopura ("Beautiful City" in English), but evidently the name Sandakan was still remembered by older residents of the Bay, and soon Elopura was abandoned in favour of Sandakan.



Sir Alfred Dent

Pryer began a series of explorations of the Sandakan and Kinabatangan region, and started small plantations of various agricultural crops including cocoa, coffee and Manila hemp (a relative of the banana, with a stem used for making rope). The first settlers at Sandakan town were mainly local people from scattered villages. Soon, Chinese began to immigrate. The oldest company in Sandakan, Man Woo Loong,

was started in 1882 by Kwan Woon Kwong who started as a general merchant. An annual flower show was started in 1880, to coincide with Chinese New Year, and this became a focus for the display of agricultural produce.

In 1883, a monthly newspaper, the British North Borneo Herald, was started and printed in Sandakan, continuing uninterrupted until the Japanese invasion. These early newspapers make fascinating reading. In 1884, Sandakan was officially pronounced the capital of British North Borneo. The Chartered Company, finding that North Borneo did not contain the vast deposits of gold that they had hoped for, began to seek alternative sources of revenue. Some tobacco which had been grown experimentally produced good results and soon investors, mainly Dutch, were coming to Sabah to seek land for large-scale tobacco plantations. The best land for this purpose was the alluvial terraces along the larger rivers, which was also reckoned as suitable for sugar cane. By 1888, at least fifteen leases of 5,000 acres each had been granted for land along the lower Kinabatangan River. Most of the land leased was never planted but a few plantations were started and continued for several years. In 1884, Baron de Lissa from Australia acquired 100,000 acres of land for the growing of sugar cane. The price of sugar dropped drastically just after the first part of the forested land had been cleared and in February 1885 de Lissa shipped some of the felled timber to Australia. Soon, timber was being exported to China and Hong Kong, but only small quantities were involved until well into the twentieth century. It is of interest to note that timber from Sandakan was used in the construction of Peking's Temple of Heaven.

The Sandakan Club was formed as the social centre for Europeans. The old town, made entirely of wood and thatch, burned down two years later and more durable structures came up in place, including Sabah's first hotel. William Pryer encouraged education of children in Sandakan and in 1887, the first school - St. Mary's - was started. Pryer owned land, which he named Beatrice Estate, on flat land around present-day mile one-and-a-half roundabout. This was used for pony races, which became a major social event, allowing British administrators, Dutch tobacco planters and Chinese merchants to meet. The first telephones were installed in Sandakan in 1896 while metalling of the previously earth roads started in 1899. As the town grew, land suitable for building became scarce and a process of reclamation started. Most of the present town was, in the early days, under the sea. The Sandakan Town Padang or Green, in the early days called the Recreation Ground, was reclaimed in 1902 while present-day Jalan Dua was completed in 1930. The Sandakan Recreation Club was formed in 1902 to make use of the new Ground - all races and religions were allowed to join - and the present Club building stands on the original site. A public electricity supply was started in 1909 and the first motorcar appeared in 1912. In 1913, a Chinese Chamber of Commerce was started, with a new building in Leila Road, and this formed a link between the government and the Chinese community, who were predominantly traders and merchants. The old British trading company of Harrisons and Crosfield entered the Sandakan scene around the turn of the century. In 1920, together with the

Chartered Company, it formed the British Borneo Timber Company, which was granted a monopoly on timber cutting and export in Sabah until 1952.

On 19 January 1942, Sandakan was invaded by the Japanese, who retained control until 19 October 1945. Starting in 1944, Sandakan town was repeatedly bombed by Allied forces from the sea, until most had been destroyed. In June 1945, the Japanese occupiers finished the town off by burning down whatever remained.

In 1946, North Borneo became a British Colony and, largely because Sandakan as a town had ceased to exist, the new government made Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu) on the west coast the capital town. Rebuilding of Sandakan started immediately, however, and by the early 1950's a growing timber export trade was making the town the economic hub of Sabah. The monopoly granted to the British Borneo Timber Company lapsed, and several old Sandakan Chinese families applied for logging licences. Initially, with no machinery for taking logs from remote areas and hill slopes, they applied for licence areas on flat land along the lower Kinabatangan River. From these beginnings grew the timber boom of Sandakan and Sabah, which peaked from the mid 1960's until the mid 1980's. By the latter period, most of the best commercial timber in the Sandakan area had been cut, and plantations, mainly of cocoa and oil palm, have now come to dominate the hinterland of Sandakan.

SANDAKAN TOWN

a. Fish Market

Sandakan does not have an official town centre, but the busiest, noisiest and most colourful spot is undoubtedly the fish market. Open daily throughout the year, from dawn until late afternoon, all manner of edible marine produce finds its way here, from a vast fishing area that stretches from



A fish vendor showing his catch



Sandakan fish market

Paitan in the north to Tambisan in the east, off to the Philippine border and even beyond. Dozens of people rent a slab in the market. Sea fish and prawns always dominate amongst the available produce, but careful searching will usually reveal something else, such as crabs or freshwater



Dried shrimps

fish. Very rarely, there is something out of the ordinary, such as a python or a strange fish from the deep seas.



Sea Shells



Jack fruit

b. Chinese Temples

The oldest Chinese temple in Sandakan is said to be a small, inconspicuous one named the Goddess of Mercy Temple on the hillside just off Singapore Road. The original structure, probably built in the early 1880's, still stands but was later enlarged. In 1887, as a result of a joint effort between the Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka and Hainanese communities, the Three Saint's Temple (Sam Sing Kung) was completed a little lower down at the foot of the hill.



Sam Sing Kung temple

This is the temple which now stands at the inland end of the Town Padang. Three saints are worshipped here: Kwan Woon Cheung (ancestor of the Kwan clan and saint of righteousness), the Goddess of Tin Hou (worshipped by those who work at sea) and the Min Cheong Emperor (worshipped by those wanting to pass examinations). Dating from after the Second World War are temples in Sim Sim and near Batu Sapi. The newest and most impressive, however, is the Puu Jih Shih temple on the hillside above Tanah Merah. The fine position of this temple and its sheer size and extravagance have made it a major landmark for the town of Sandakan. Costing more than US\$1 million and taking three years to construct, the temple needed nearly another US\$1 million to furnish the

interior and was finally opened on 26 September 1987. The front entrance of the temple faces the steep hillslope and entry is more usually obtained from the rear, which is at the end of the access road. Three



Puu Jih Shih temple

statues of Buddha on the main altar dominate the interior. Each statue, made of teakwood and coated in gold foil and gold paint, is 23 feet in height and weighs about half a ton. Twenty-foot high standing lanterns, made in Taiwan, each containing over 1,700 separate lamps, flank the sides of the main altar. There are smaller altars and statues on each side of the temple. All the altars and statues were imported from Macau. The temple's 34 supporting pillars, also made in Macau, are each enclosed in a dragon made from teakwood and coated with gold foil. People of all religions are



The decorative pillars inside the temple welcome to visit the Puu Jih Shih temple. Weekends typically see 500 visitors while on celebration days, especially Chinese New Year, many thousands of devotees flock to the temple.

c. St. Michael and All Angels Church

In 1888, the Reverend W H Elton of the Church of England Missionary Society for the Propagation of the Gospel opened a small school, named Saint Michael's, in Sandakan. The building also served as a place for prayers. From this grew the idea of a proper church building, the Church of Saint Michael and All Angels, which was the first substantial stone building to be erected in Sandakan. Designed by a New Zealander, Mr B W Mountfort, construction work started in 1893, initially using belian wood, followed by brick and finally stone, which is said to have come from Sim Sim.



St Michael and All Angels Cathedral

The church was not completed until nearly twenty years later. Saint Michael's remains not only one of the very few stone buildings in the whole of Sabah, but also one of the finest constructions in Sandakan.

d. Sandakan Mosque

The first, small Sandakan mosque was built in the early 1880's and has long since vanished. After the Second World War, the town mosque was constructed on the hillside above the Old Slipway. Being rather small and in a highly congested part of town, the need became apparent during the 1970's for a more spacious construction in a more suitable spot. Work on the



Sandakan Mosque

present Sandakan Mosque, situated at Sim Sim, started in 1984 but was completed only in 1988. Simple in basic concept, the mosque is elegant and arresting, and forms an appropriate landmark at the mouth of Sandakan Bay.

e. Japanese Cemetery

A memorial monument, built primarily for Japanese soldiers who died in Borneo during the Second World War, was completed in June 1989 and now dominates the top level of the five levels in the Japanese cemetery above Sandakan town.



Japanese cemetery

The monument was financed by the families and relatives of the deceased soldiers. The history of the Japanese Cemetery actually dates from much earlier than the War. During the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the daughters of

poor rural people in Japan were tricked into prostitution by syndicates who "exported" their victims overseas. Girls of about seven years age were preferred, and they could expect to have to work at least until the age of twenty or so. Singapore and Sandakan were amongst the biggest markets at this time. The 1891 census of inhabitants of British North Borneo revealed 90 Japanese residents of Sandakan, of whom 71 were prostitutes and four brothel keepers (out of a total population of 6,350, including 127 Europeans). The main prostitute house is said to have been located where Borneo Dispensary now stands. Almost all of these girls stayed and died in Sandakan, and some are buried in the tombs of the Japanese Cemetery.

f. Australian Memorial

During the Second World War, Sandakan was chosen by the Japanese as a regional centre for holding prisoners of the Allied Forces. One of the prisoner-of-war camps was behind what is now Taman Rimba at Mile 7, Labuk Road, where the majority held captive were Australians. Remnants of

the old buildings and equipment remained, crumbling and disintegrating under invading plant growth, until the mid 1980's. With funds and encouragement from the families and friends of those Australians, the camp site was uncovered and cleaned in 1986, and a memorial stone constructed.



Disused boiler

The memorial actually commemorates much more than a camp site. By the middle of the War, there were held prisoner in Sandakan an estimated 2,000 Australians (of the 8th Division) and 750 British servicemen (of various British units including the RAF, Royal Artillery, Argyll and Sutherlands, Gordon Highlanders 29th Anti-Aircraft, Royal Army Service Corps, Loyals and Royals, together with some Malayan volunteers). By September 1944, only about 1,800 Australians and 600 British men remained alive. Starting in that month, these men, all undernourished and many sick, were marched through the forest to Ranau. Of the original 2,400 or so men, only six survived to reach Ranau almost one year later. This Death March, although not widely reported in the War literature, claimed more Australian lives than any other single event during the War in Asia.



Australian Memorial

g. Agnes Keith's House

Agnes Keith, a US citizen, lived in Sandakan from 1934 to 1952, apart from two periods in USA and one in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp near Kuching in Sarawak. That period spanned the decline and end of the Chartered Company rule of North Borneo (even in the 1930's, something of an anachronism), the Japanese occupation and post-war rebuilding under



Agnes Keith's house

the British government. Fortunately, Agnes was an unbiased observer and an excellent writer, and she left three books which provide unique and penetrating glimpses of life in Sandakan during that period. The books - **Land Below the Wind**, **Three Came Home** and **White Man Returns** (which cover the three phases of her life in Borneo) - never became internationally known simply because Sandakan was neither a regional metropolis nor a key strategic element in the course of the Second World War. Unfortunately, two of these books are now out-of-print. Agnes Keith lived in Sandakan because her husband, Harry, was the Conservator of

Forests and Director of Agriculture, and the couple lived in a fine wooden house on the hill above Sandakan town. The house was destroyed during the war and rebuilt by the government to exactly the same design for Harry Keith, who returned to his old job. This, "Agnes Keith's House", still stands in its fine garden. For the nostalgic and those with a feel for history, it can evoke thoughts of a past era more strongly than any other place in Sabah.

h. Batu Sapi

The eastern end of the Sandakan Peninsula is characterised by a series of sandstone escarpments, including the hill above the town and two offshore islands, Berhala and Timbang. These forested hills make Sandakan instantly recognizable at a distance, both from the sea and from the air. By a quirk of nature, one fragment of the huge sheets of stone from which these hills arose was left standing in the shallow sea on the north side of Sandakan Bay.



Batu Sapi

Millions of waves breaking on the stone fragment have left it standing on narrow feet. From a distance it seems to be a plump cow standing in the water - hence Batu Sapi, or Cow Stone in Malay.

i. Crocodile Farm

The only Crocodile Farm in Sabah is at Mile 8, Labuk Road, Sandakan. The owner, a family, has a small fleet of fishing boats and for many years, young crocodiles were purchased from casual sellers - usually other fishermen - and raised as a hobby on trash fish and prawns. By the late 1970's, over 1,000 crocodiles had been accumulated and some were slaughtered each year, their valuable skins being exported and the meat (considered a delicacy by some) sold locally. In 1982, in line with an international convention regulating trade in wild animal products, the Sabah government made the crocodile "a protected species", which meant that, legally, no more crocodiles could be caught from the wild in order to rear them for commercial use. This stimulated the crocodile owners to embark on true farming - breeding in captivity. The

number, depth and size of pools have steadily been increased, and mature males kept apart. The first successful hatching of one clutch of eggs occurred in 1984 and now, the farm is self-sustaining, with over 2,000 crocodiles at any one time. It is open to the public, and the breeding pens and a whole range of crocodile sizes can be seen.

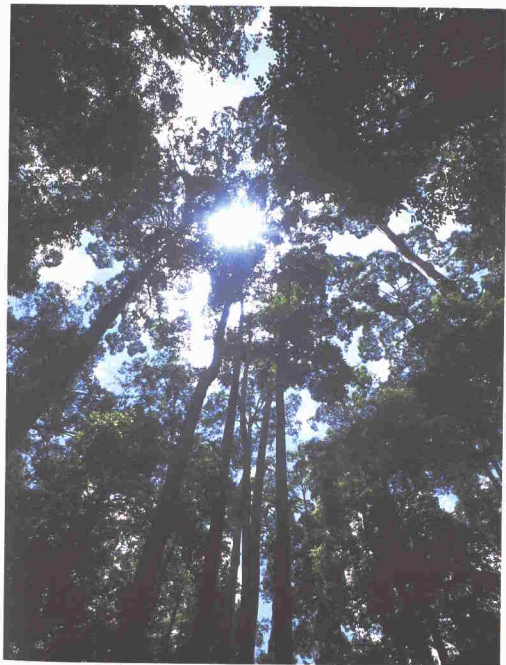


Baby crocodiles

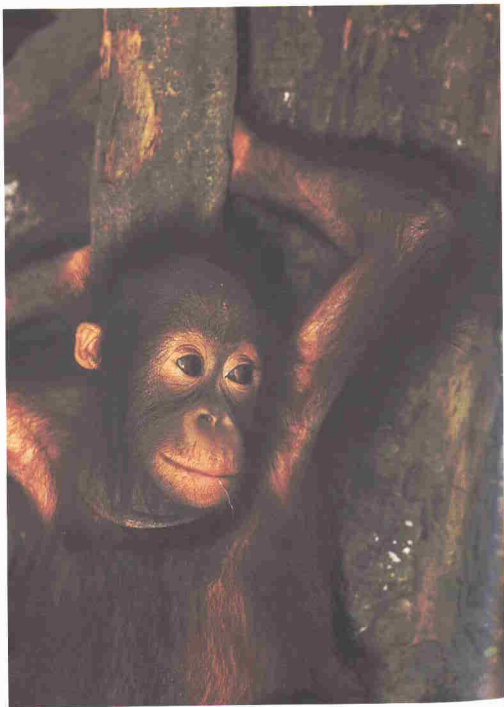


Sandakan Crocodile farm

SEPILOK ORANG-UTAN REHABILITATION CENTRE



Sepilok covers an area of 4,300 hectares of virgin rainforest.



Alice posing for the camera

At a simple level, the Sepilok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre is a place where people can go to see orang-utans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) – the wild red apes of Borneo and Sumatra – in their natural habitat, the tropical rainforest. It is important to understand, however, that the purpose of the Centre is to train young orang-utans, which for one reason or another have been held in captivity, so that they may learn to live unaided in the forest. Viewed in a historical context, the story is more complicated and more interesting.



Grace with baby orang utan

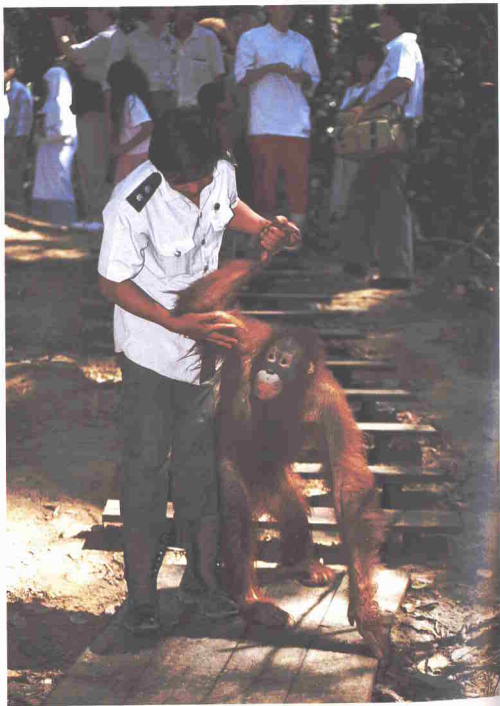


Orang Utans on the feeding platform.



Jessica

Sepilok is an old Forest Reserve, about 43 square kilometres in area, which before the introduction of heavy machinery was logged by hand for timber. In 1957, logging was banned and the Reserve was designated for research and conservation. When Sabah became an independent state in Malaysia in 1963, a Game Branch was created in the Forest Department for the conservation of wild animals. At that time, it was believed that the orang-utan was a very rare species, endangered with extinction. Up to that time, young orang-utans had been a popular pet amongst people in Sabah and elsewhere, and any young one caught during logging or forest clearance was in wide demand. With the new Game Branch came a new law which prohibited anyone from catching or keeping an orang-utan. Many orang-utans which had been kept in captivity were confiscated – but something had to be done with them. Sepilok was chosen as the place



A Park Ranger with orang-utan



Juliana

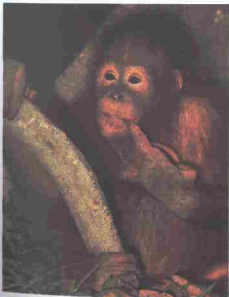
where these orang-utans would be brought and trained to live a natural life in the forest. The rehabilitation process, as it became known, met and continues to meet varying degrees of success. Some orang-

utans disappeared, some died, some grew to live a semi-natural existence ... and some were successfully rehabilitated to survive unaided in the forest. Indeed, some have mated with wild orang-utans and produced babies. One such baby - Juliana, born in



Hein was returned from Germany

1976 - herself gave birth in Sepilok in 1987. Since the early days, it has become apparent that while orang-utans are rare, they are not endangered at present. It is now known that conservation of large areas of natural habitat is a surer way to conserve orang-



Abby



Simbo



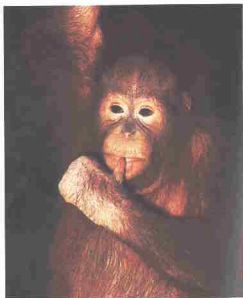
'Orang' and orang utan in harmony

utans than the rehabilitation programme at Sepilok. But orang-utans continue to come into Sepilok, nowadays not from captivity, but directly from areas where forest is being cleared for agriculture. Sepilok serves to



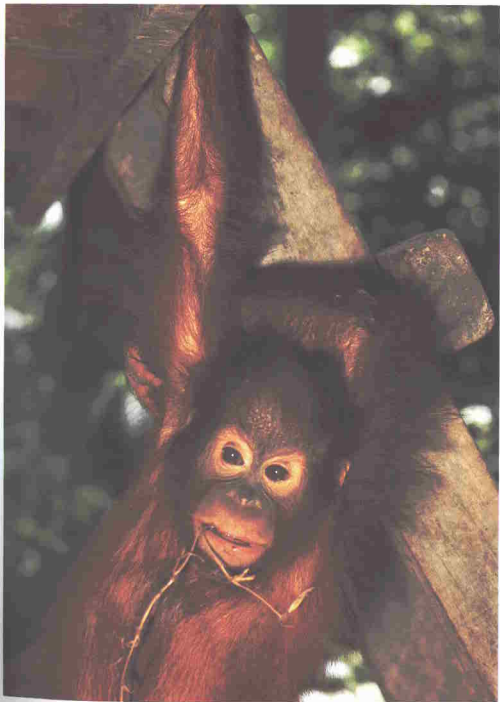
Eddie setting up the tripod

give these unfortunate animals life in the forest rather than an uncertain future in a plantation. And, perhaps most importantly, Sepilok serves as a link between people and Sabah's marvellous wildlife, where the young can gain their first insights into nature and the importance of caring for the natural environment.



Abby

An even rarer creature of the Borneo rainforests than the orang-utan can be seen at Sepilok - the Asian two-horned rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*), often known as the Sumatran rhino. This splendid animal was once widespread throughout South-east Asia. Indeed, during the first three decades of the development of Sandakan by the Chartered Company, rhinos would often wander into the town and outlying gardens. Early issues of the British North Borneo Herald mention visitors going off into the forests of the Sandakan hinterland to hunt rhinos, and there are advertisements giving the cost of rhino horn in local Chinese shops. Since



Sanshiro



Slow loris (Nycticebus coucang)

BERHALA ISLAND

Berhala Island is situated just outside the entrance to Sandakan Bay, opposite the crowded, suburban seaside village of Sim Sim. Consisting basically of two sandstone hills joined together (the higher nearly 600 feet tall, with a light-house on top), the steep parts of the island are Forest Reserve, with a variety of native plants found only in coastal forests, and of interest to the botanist. There is a village on the west side of the island joined by a path on flat land to a beach with picnic facilities on the east side. The southern end of the island

consists of vertical cliffs, of a strange salmon-pink hue. There are several caves in the cliff, some at the base and some high up. Most are used as roosting and nesting sites by edible-nest swiftlets. The island was used as a leper colony before the Second World War and by the Japanese as a prisoner-of-war camp during the first years of the war. Agnes Keith was one of those interned on the island from May 1942 to January 1943, prior to being moved to Kuching in Sarawak.



Berhala Island

LIBARAN ISLAND



Libaran Island

Situated to the north of Sandakan, Libaran Island is a low, rocky shoal which has trapped an accumulation of coral shingle and sand. On it is a mix of scrubby natural vegetation, coconuts, fruit trees and a neat village inhabited mainly by Cagayan people, whose ancestors came from the Cagayan islands, now in the Philippines. This peaceful community, while not self-sufficient, provides some insights into how coastal communities lived generations ago.

Fish and marine produce are important, both as food and as items for sale or barter. Coconuts provide both drinks during periods of low rainfall and oil for cooking.



Fish trap



A woman weaving a pandan mat

(Formerly - before the invention of plastics - fruits, flowers, leaves and trunk were used for all manner of household requirements). The men make boats from large pieces of wood which drift onshore, and the women make mats from pandan leaves.

TURTLE ISLANDS PARK



Aerial view of Selingan Island

Beyond Libaran Island, 40 kilometres north-east of Sandakan, and close to the border between Malaysia and the Philippines, is a group of three small islands: Selingan (8.09 hectares), Gulisan (1.61 hectares) and Bakkungan Kecil (8.49 hectares). These three islands are amongst

the most important in the whole South-east Asian region for sea turtles, which come up on to the beaches, dig a hole and lay their eggs inside, covering their efforts with sand before crawling back to the sea. Most of the turtles come up at night, after 8 p.m., later still under conditions of low tide.



Gulisan Island

Turtle eggs have been collected from the beaches of these islands for many years, traditionally by Cagayan people, and probably since long before Europeans came to the region. Uncontrolled egg-collecting has caused declines in turtle populations throughout the world, and Sabah is no exception. The over-exploitation of turtle eggs, as well as of adult turtles and of marine life generally, had reached such proportions that in 1966, the Game Branch of the Sabah Forest Department established an experimental hatchery on Selingan Island, purchasing eggs from the traditional

collectors and reburying them. In 1971, the Sabah government acquired the entire three islands through compensation to the traditional collectors, and established them as a Bird and Game Sanctuary, under the control of the Game Branch. In 1977, the islands, together with 1,722 hectares of surrounding sea, were upgraded to the status of a Park, under the Sabah Parks authority. Staff quarters, chalets for visitors and a turtle-egg hatchery and research site are situated on Selingan, and there are Park Ranger stations on the other two islands.

Of the turtles which nest on the islands, 83% are Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and 17% are Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Most Green turtles lay their eggs on Selingan Island, while most of the Hawksbills nest on Gulisan, and smaller numbers of both species come up to Bakkungan Kecil. The fact that the Hawksbills prefer Gulisan is explained because there is a greater extent of coral reef off this island, and the adult Hawksbill turtles feed mainly on invertebrate animal life of coral reefs, unlike the Greens, which



Mud volcano on Bakkungan Kecil



The one hour journey to Selingan Island is by speed boat



Chalets on Selingan Island

subsist mainly on marine plants in the open sea. Both species arrive throughout the year, but there is a definite peak of laying by Green turtles during July to October, and by Hawksbills from February to April. Green turtles lay an average of about 110

eggs per nest hole, while Hawksbill egg numbers vary greatly, although there are typically between about 70 and 180 eggs per clutch. The greatest recorded numbers of eggs laid in a single clutch on the Turtle Islands is 180 for the Green Turtle and 250



Turtle hatchery on Selingan



*Baby Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*)*



Selingan beach

for the Hawksbill. When reliable records were first made, during the late 1960's, nearly 700,000 eggs were laid annually on the Turtle Islands. It can only be guessed how many were laid in earlier times but, despite the protective measures introduced,



A Park Ranger collecting the baby turtles

egg numbers declined steadily, and in 1987 only 223,897 were counted. But in 1988, the number of eggs laid increased significantly for the first time, to 336,475. It is hoped that two decades of protective work is now beginning to pay dividends.



A Green turtle on the beach



A female Green turtle



Eggs being laid



Newly hatched Hawksbill (left) and Green (right) turtles

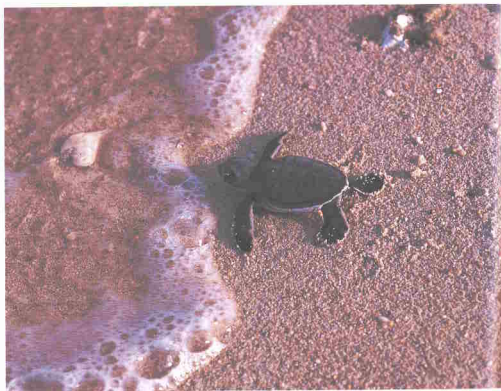
The number of newly-hatched turtles released by the Sabah Parks authorities during the 12-year period 1977 - 1988 was 2,658,882. But it must be realised that, at a rough estimate, perhaps only 3% of these animals reach maturity, even under entirely natural conditions of predators and disease, after a period of between 20 and 50 years' growth in the open sea. It must also be noted that the increase in both marine pollution and use of large fishing nets in the open seas during the past two decades is probably taking an enormous toll of both young and mature turtles.



Eggs are counted and transferred to the nursery

Since 1970, adult turtles coming up to lay eggs have been tagged with numbered labels, clamped to the trailing edge of the left fore-flipper. Each tag is numbered serially and has a return address, with the promise of a small reward. Since 1970,

more than 24,000 turtles have been tagged, and 26 have turned up in the Philippines, plus 3 in Indonesia. More importantly, however, the tagging work has shown that the same turtles return every few years to lay their eggs on the three Turtle Islands.



A baby turtle about to enter water for the first time



An Albino Green turtle



A Green turtle being tagged and measured

GOMANTONG CAVES

Gomantong Hill is one of the largest limestone outcrops in Sabah and it contains two large caves and several much smaller ones. The hill is situated well to the south of Sandakan, on the far side of the Bay from the town, between the road to Sukau and the Kinabatangan River. In the old days, access was gained by a trip which involved a boat and a long walk through the forest. During the last three decades, logging, agricultural plantations and fire have greatly changed the landscape of the region, and visitors now reach Gomantong using a three-mile



Ripe oil palm fruits



An oil palm plantation



Close up view of the fruits



Simud Hitam entrance



Inside Simud Hitam



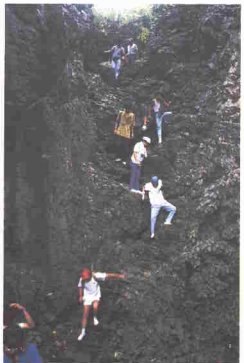
A tail-less fruit bat (*Megascops ecaudatus*)

stretch of abandoned logging road. This rough road may be reached either from the public road linking Sandakan and Sukau (about 108 kilometres) or by boat across Sandakan Bay to Suan Lamba, where a taxi may be hired.

The hill and its caves are fascinating for the naturalist. At ground level is the entrance to Simud Hitam (the Black Cave), about 30 metres wide and 20 metres high, which expands into a chamber 90 metres high, followed by a branching into two separate, large passageways. Simud Putih (the White Cave) is a large, branching cave with several sub-caves and long passages, situated above Simud Hitam. One of the sections of Simud Putih, named Bungbulud, opens on the very top of Gomantong Hill, 150 metres above the cave floor. An

estimated two million insect-eating bats roost in the Gomantong caves, and swirl out daily just before dusk. Some fall prey to several species of birds and snakes which await this nightly spectacle. Specialised cave cockroaches, beetles, crickets, spiders, long-legged centipedes and scorpions (none harmful to humans) are amongst the many creepy-crawlies which spend their entire lives inside the caves, feeding on the bodies of fallen bats and birds, or the waste products of living ones. Outside, the hill and its environs are the haunt of wild orangutans, civets, squirrels, all manner of birds and, sometimes, elephants.

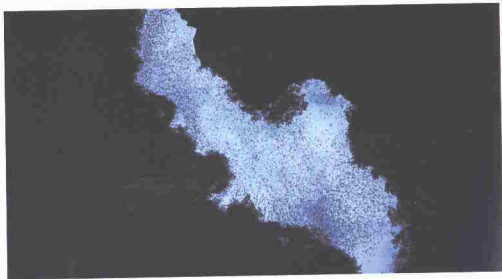
Gomantong Caves are most famous, however, for their swiftlets (small birds) and their edible nests. There are actually four species of these birds, which weigh



Visitors entering Simud Putih

between 10 and 20 grams each, roosting and nesting in the Caves. The white-nest swiftlet (*Aerodramus fuciphagus*) makes nests entirely from saliva, which is sticky when produced but quickly dries hard,

nests of moss and other vegetation, which are not edible. All four species build their nests on the walls of the Gomantong Caves and, in total, the caves support about one million adult swiftlets.



Wrinkled-lipped bats leaving Simud Hitam

while the black-nest swiftlet (*Aerodramus maximus*) makes them from its feathers cemented together with saliva. It is this saliva which is edible, and relished by the Chinese both in Sabah and elsewhere to make soup. The mossy-nest swiftlet (*Aerodramus vanikorensis*) and white-bellied swiftlet (*Collocalia esculenta*) make



Plaintive Cuckoo (Cacomantis merulinus)



Inside Simud Hitam

The edible nests are harvested during two seasons in each year. The first harvest is done during February to April, immediately after the birds have made their nest and before they have laid eggs. The birds then build another nest. During July to September, after young birds have hatched and been taught to fly, the used nests are



Black bird nests



Black nest with egg



White-bellied swiftlets

collected. Good quality white nests, of pure saliva, may fetch US\$400 or more per kilogram, while the black nests, from which many feathers have to be removed, are sold for less than US\$40 per kilogram. The nests are collected from every corner and crevice of the caves. A look at some of the spots from which the collectors have to reach to obtain the nests is enough to explain the high prices. Rattan ladders, ropes and poles are suspended, pushed or hauled to wherever is required to obtain the valuable harvest.



Bats and white bird nests

SUKAU AND THE KINABATANGAN RIVER



Dawn at Sukau

At 560 kilometres long and with a catchment area estimated at 16,800 square kilometres, the Kinabatangan is Sabah's largest river. This mighty river has its headwaters in the remote mountain ranges



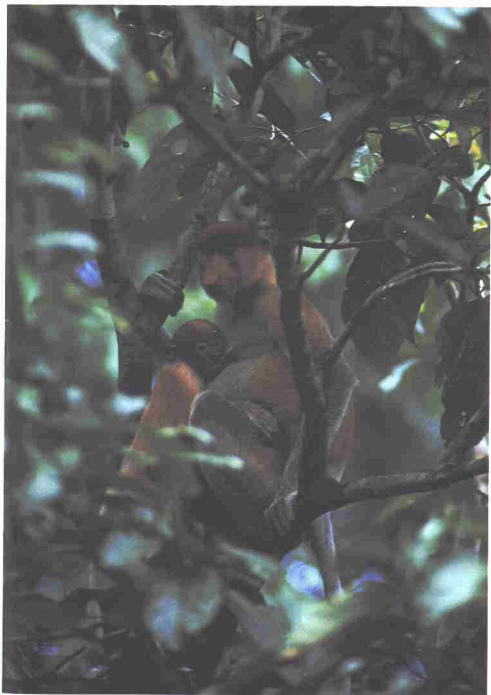
A village house near Sukau

in the south-western part of the state and flows out through a vast tract of mangrove forest to the east of Sandakan into the Sulu Sea. The lower part of the Kinabatangan appears to have been sparsely inhabited

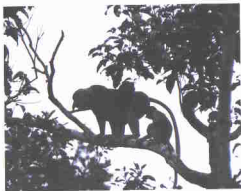
since early times, perhaps mainly because of unpredictable, damaging floods, and partly because of the depredations of pirates during the nineteenth century. It is said that there was a Chinese settlement on the Kinabatangan River many hundreds of years ago, but definite proof has never been found. The village of Sukau, accessible by road and 25 kilometres beyond the rough track to Gomantong Caves, is the largest



Proboscis monkeys (Nasalis larvatus)



Proboscis monkeys at Kinabatangan River



A male proboscis monkey with youngster



A male proboscis monkey leaping

settlement on the banks of the lower Kinabatangan. The original village, named Kampung Melapi, was a little further upstream, around the mouth of the Menanggul tributary. During the nineteenth century, Melapi was the home of many of



Cruising along the river

the Gomantong nest collectors. When the British acquired from the Sultan of Sulu the rights to govern Sabah, they assumed that everything within the state was theirs. The collection and trading of the Gomantong nests was organised by Pengiran Samah, the wily old headman of Kampung Melapi, who refused to recognise the British claim to



Sunset on the Kinabatangan River



Bearded pig (Sus barbatus)

Gomantong. In 1884, Pengiran Samah was shot dead in his home in Kampung Melapi



Monitor lizard (Varanus salvator)

and thereafter Kampung Bilit, further upriver, assumed greater importance as the centre for nest collectors.



A herd of elephants near Sukau



*Rhinoceros hornbill
(Buceros rhinoceros)*



Blue-banded kingfisher (Alcedo euryzona)



*Nest of a black and red broadbill
(Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchus)*

Much of the lower Kinabatangan region remains as it was during the last century. The main river is lined with forest on fertile alluvial terraces. Behind these are extensive, low-lying forested swamps which are usually waterlogged and covered in water during rainy periods. Within the swamps, scattered lakes and small hills dot the landscape. Although rarely seen, various wildlife species abound here, including elephants and orang-utans. Most readily seen are the strange proboscis monkeys (*Nasalis larvatus*), a species unique to Borneo which is particularly abundant in the swamps of the lower Kinabatangan. Living in groups of several up to twenty or more, these placid vegetarians always sleep next to water. For that reason, they can always be found by searching the riverside forests from a boat, either late in the afternoon, before they retire for the night, or early in the morning, before they move off in search of food.



Lesser coucal (Centropus bergalensis)



Intermediate egret (Egretta intermedia)



Oriental darter (Anhinga melanogaster)



A wild durian (Durio graveolens)

BATU PUTIH



Batu Tulug

More than one hundred kilometres upstream from Sukau, and not far above the Kinabatangan Bridge, is an area known as Batu Putih, which in English is translated as White Rock. There are several white rocks - limestone outcrops - of various sizes in this part of the Kinabatangan, but old residents say that the name refers particularly to a pillar of limestone which stands in the river itself and subsequently to a village which sprung up in the late nineteenth century on the riverbank nearby. The village remains and older residents relate tales of former times, but the centre of activity has shifted to the Sandakan - Lahad Datu road, nearer to the new bridge. In the late 1880's, a Dutch company was granted a 999 year lease to a long strip of land along the south bank of the Kinabatangan River, stretching both upstream and downstream from Batu Putih. The company planted tobacco here, apparently until the 1920's, when many years of low prices made

cultivation no longer worthwhile. Much of this land is now owned by the Sabah Forestry Development Authority (SAFODA), which successfully cultivates rattan in the secondary forest which has grown up since the plantation was abandoned. Various remnants of the tobacco plantation exist but are overgrown by near-impenetrable forest. In one of the gardens of the old Kampung Batu Putih is a gravestone, apparently in memory of a Dutch planter and his wife, with the years 1904 and 1909 engraved, rescued from a collapsing bank on the other side of the Kinabatangan River.

About a kilometre north of the Kinabatangan Bridge, on the east side of the road, is an isolated limestone outcrop 130 feet high, surrounded by secondary forest and gardens. Many people believe that this is the origin of the name Batu Putih, but

locally it is known as Batu Tulug. There are several small caves in Batu Tulug, which contain the remains of old, hardwood coffins. Such coffins exist in many caves and rock overhangs in the Kinabatangan region, but those at Tulug are the most readily accessible. Their age is uncertain, but probably many date from the nineteenth century. In olden times in the Kinabatangan, people were buried with their

possessions, but those have been looted and destroyed during this century. The coffins and fragments of bones in the stillness of the caves induce a haunting feeling of a fleeting link with past times.



Burial coffins in the upper cave



A buffalo head carving

CONCLUSION

The first century of Sandakan as an administrative region saw the development of a major timber export industry, from the first shipment to Australia in 1885 to the millions of logs shipped to Japan during the final decades. The rapid decline in the importance of timber to Sandakan in recent years has only been partially replaced by agriculture. Yet the region is still rich in many ways. There is more mangrove and more natural wetland than in any other part of Malaysia. It is for this reason that Sandakan produces more wild-caught prawns than any other part of the country. The greatest numbers of elephants, orang-utans, proboscis monkeys, edible-nest swiftlets and turtles within Malaysia also occur in the region. A pioneering rattan plantation under natural forest, the largest in the world, is coming into production with encouraging results. No-one can tell what the next hundred years holds. But Sandakan offers the prospect of an imaginative yet balanced use of the natural environment, a combination of conservation and change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Albert C. K. Teo was born in Sibul, Sarawak. He received his early education in Sacred Heart School and his tertiary education in the University of London, England where he obtained his Bsc. Econ. (Hons). He was Executive Director of Hotel Shangri-la, Kota Kinabalu for 15 years (1977-91). In 1986 he set up Api Tours (Borneo) Sdn. Bhd. and worked for 5 years until it was sold in 1991. Thereafter he formed his own tour company, Borneo Eco Tours Sdn Bhd, specializing on ecotourism.

He is also a Member of Hotel Catering and Institutional Management Association of United Kingdom (MHCIMA), a Certified Hotel Administrator (CHA) of the American Hotel and Motel Association. He was a founder member and Honorary Secretary of Sabah Hotel Association (1979-85), Chairman of Sabah Tourist Association (1985-86), Chairman of Malaysian Association of Tours & Travel Agents Association Sabah Chapter (1991/93) and President of Kinabalu Photographic Club (1989/91).

He is married with three sons and resides in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. A keen photographer he has published three other books namely **Sabah-land of the Sacred Mountain** (1988), **Exotic Islands of Tunku Abdul Rahman Park** (1989) and **A Guide to Brunei Darussalam** (1992). He has also produced a 45-minute video on Sabah (1990) and over 100 post cards on Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei Darussalam.

Dr. Junaidi Payne is a tropical biologist by profession. He was born in England but he counts Sandakan, where he lived from 1979 until 1988, as his second home. He is a project director for the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia, and his work has enabled him to explore not only the history of Sandakan town but also the natural history of the more remote corners of the Sandakan district. He married in Sandakan in 1984 (his wife comes from the Kinabatangan area) and has two children. He has co-authored three other books: **A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo, Orang Utan-Malaysia's Mascot** and **Wild Malaysia**.

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