

TRIP TO BARIO (by Florence Enau, President IWC Miri & District Editor 2012-2013)

The trip to Bario was mooted earlier in the year by Datin Pearl. My friend Chang Yi wanted to come along when she heard about the trip. She is a former English teacher who retired after teaching at the Maktab in Miri. She is a good photographer and writer.

This trip was for us, Rokiah and I to get a feel for Bario and to see the primary school, the students and some of the teachers. The project called "Whispering Hope" was initially to be done by the IW KLCC, IW Kuching and IW Miri Clubs. We were to give stationery items eg. pencils, erasers, exercise books and school bags to the students at the school.

On the 30th August 2012, Rokiah came for her District Chairman's visit to the IW Club of Miri. Datin Pearl also came to the meeting held at Florence's house. During the meeting, Datin Pearl talked about the "Whispering Hope" project. She also said that joining IW Miri, IW Kuching and IW KLCC clubs were IW Bangsar, IW Kuantan and IW Kota Kinabalu clubs.

That evening after the meeting and before we went to dinner we packed up donated clothes and jumpers bought by the Miri club for the Penans in Bario. We also repacked the pencil cases Datin Pearl had bought from KL. We packed biscuits we bought in Miri to give to the primary school students when we went to Bario on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd October 2012.



Rokiah and Florence packing boxes

The Miri Club had bought and sent 2 cooking pots filled with packets of sago flour, 2 parangs, 2 rolls of raffia, 10 toweling blankets divided into 2 bundles and 1 tarpuline . They were sent by road by Dr. And Mrs Roland Mattu with things they were sending to their longhouse in Bario. These were delivered to Datin Pearl's mother's house when we were there.



The four of us left the next day. We tried to get an earlier flight but only Rokiah and Datin Pearl were able to get on the first flight in a 17 seater Twin Otter plane. Chang Yi and I took the next flight which transited in Marudi.



Chang Yi in front of the Twin Otter airplane

Among the four of us we had about 8 boxes. You are only allowed 10kg each. The three of us used backpacks. On these flights they weigh you and your hand luggage together. Luckily Datin Pearl's relative works for MAS wings, so she was able to get those extra boxes on the early flight.

This was my first flight to Bario which is east of Miri and Marudi in the mountains. I had never flown this far east in Sarawak. I was amazed how far east there were oil palm plantations. We flew further east after our stop in Marudi, we came upon settlements and some with airstrips. Bario is at about 3,500 feet in a bowl formed by the surrounding mountains.

We were met at the airport by Datin Pearl and Rokiah. Also there was Datin Pearl's sister, Joanna Joy, a member of the Miri Club who lives in Bario and works for MAS Wings at the airport in Bario. She also has a homestay across the parking lot from the airport. She plants and harvest's pineapples on the field next to the airstrip. She sells the juicy pineapples and makes pineapple jam which she sells.

We were picked up by a friend of Datin Pearl's, whom she had hired to drive us around Bario while we were there. We packed all our things in the double cab truck and were taken to Datin Pearl's mother's house. The house was located in the middle of many houses and near an SIB chapel.



SIB Chapel and Pastor's house on the way to Datin Pearl's mother's house.

The front porch of the house looks out on a beautifully fresh green padi field. Inside is the kitchen which is dominated by a central cooking area which is a wood fire on the floor with a storage area above for wood. In the mornings, Datin Pearl's mother and stepfather would sit on low stools in the jumpers, long trousers and socks with their legs stretched out keeping warm by the cooking fire.



Rice fields outside the front door



Wood cooking stove on the floor.



Chang Yi and Pearl's parents warming their feet by the fire in the morning

We ate two lunches in the dining area of a homestay. We had fried fresh fish for two of our meals, several vegetable dishes, a meat dish and of course fresh pineapple and cooked pineapple which is a speciality in Bario. The two ladies that cooked for us are shown with pineapples.



Later in the afternoon we went to Dr. Roland Mattu's long house which was close by. We had tea with his sister on the porch where they dine which is just off the kitchen.



We went in the kitchen which was totally different from those in an Iban longhouse. Each kitchen had the wood stove on the floor. The kitchen area was open all the way down the approximate 20 plus biliks or doors, like a ruai but for everyone's kitchen. Some families had their dining area inside but most had built covered porches with their dining table on the porch. The kitchen sinks were inside under the windows looking out toward the street.



This shows two cooking stoves looking down through all the kitchens for the whole longhouse.

From the kitchen area was a corridor off of which on one side was the toilet and bathing areas and on the opposite side was a door into all the bedrooms and to the stairs for other rooms on the second story.

At the end of the corridor was a door to the ruai where the longhouse families hold festive events. It extended from one end to the other. The families had hung pictures of all their family members on the wall of the ruai. The ruai overlooked some gardens.

That evening we ate at Datin Pearl's mother's house. During the dinner the power kept going on and off. This is very typical during the dry season so brass oil lamps were lighted for the evening. During dinner, Robert Lian, Datin Pearl's brother, came to visit. He is the head of immigration for Sarawak. He has a house and farm in Bario which he visits frequently.

Later, we all got ready for bed. Thankfully, they had piped water. The others all braved a cold water bath using a flashlight in the bathing area. Chang Yi and I both slept in two small zip up tents with a thin mattress and a light quilt in a sitting room. The other two slept in the adjoining bedroom. That night it rained heavily but it cleared up the next morning before we had our appointment at the primary school.



SK Bario

We were driven to the school with our biscuits and pencils and pencil cases for the children. We waited near the playing field near the open covered wooden assembly hall for all the children to be assembled. The headmistress Dora Tigang gave a short talk to the children and then each of the four of us were asked to say something inspiring to the students. Basically we told them to study hard and to be at school every day unless they were sick. While seated in front of all the children we noticed that some of them were barefooted and many wore flip flops, so our thoughts were that we need to get shoes for these children also.



After pictures with the students we went to the school office for tea. On the way we saw the beautiful flowers that the school's gardener had grown. The purple and white lavender was especially beautiful and bushy. After our tea we were shown the preschool classroom. The children had gone home. They are given breakfast at school. We went to the hostel for the primary school students who were boarders and met the cooks who were cooking a lunch of curry for the boarders.

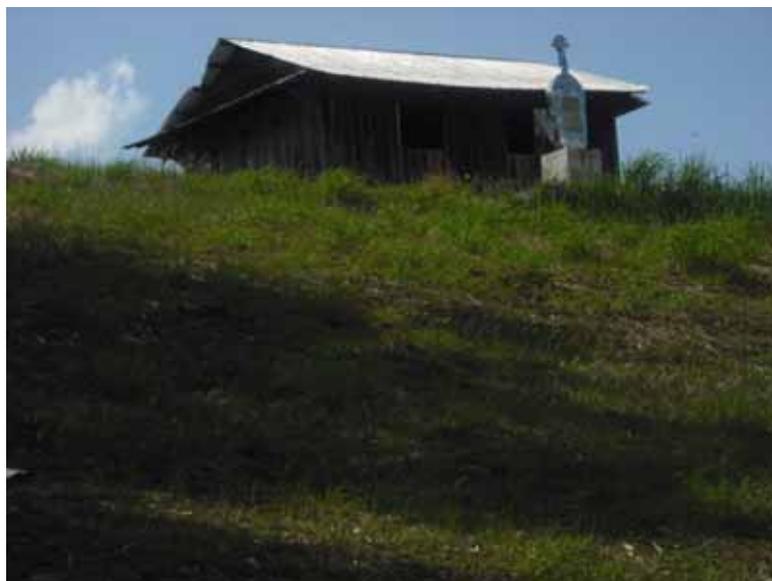


When we finished our tour we were taken by foot to the secondary school to meet the principal, Mr. Yew Kok Wing and talked and asked questions about the school. Later he took us to a small museum up the hill in back of the school. He was very kind to open up the facility for us to see.



SM Bario

After lunch we went for a short tour of Bario. We drove to the outskirts of the town where there was a small house on the top of a hill. This was part of the house where Datin Pearl lived when she was a girl. We all walked up the hill to the house. In front of it was a large plaque about the Australian troops which included Tom Harrison that had parachuted into Bario at the end of the war. Datin Pearl said she eventually wants to rebuild this house and move the plaque nearer the road.



From this hill you look into a farm down the hill that is growing rice seedlings. There is a company in Bario that will plant and harvest rice. Since a lot of younger people have gone to the bigger cities there are only older people cultivating rice and the demand is more than the supply. The company does all the work and will take about two thirds of the harvest and the owner of the land will get one third. They have tractors and other

equipment to cultivate the rice. This seems to be a good solution to continue growing the sought after Bario rice which is delicious.



Rice seedlings being grown

We took a quick look at the I.T centre in town. There you can play games on the computer and use the internet. After this we meet Joanna, Datin Pearl's sister and went to her pineapple field along the runway of the airport. Rokiah and Joanna went down the slope and across a wooden plank to harvest pineapples. She selected about ten that were ripe or almost ripe because we had to pack them in cartons for the trip back the next day. Joanna also got a few that had holes in them and sliced them into pieces and gave slices to us to eat while standing along the road. The pineapples were really big and very juicy. There are other smaller varieties planted in Bario. My friend, Magdalene asked me to bring back pineapples as soon as she knew I was going to Bario. She had gone and really liked the pineapples, but the ones she ate were smaller.



For dinner that evening we were all invited to dinner by Pastor Gerish Balang and his wife at the parish hall for the main SIB church. It was next door to the secondary school. The pastor was also having another pastor take our donations for the Penans to the group that had not come into town due to the rain the previous night. There were about four other male parish members at the dinner. My friend, Ser Lee's husband, Petrus was at the dinner. He had come in from his longhouse which was about an hour away. We had a lovely dinner and good conversation.

We walked back the half mile and it was the only time I had really felt cold. I was not wearing a jacket or jumper. That night there was no rain, so it was much colder.

The next day we packed the pineapples we were taking back to Miri. We went to the airport and had a light lunch and then walked across the parking lot to Joanna Joy's homestay. She had some fruit trees and a fish pond in front of the homestay. She showed us the building where she had 2 – 3 rooms for customers who were mostly pilots from MAS wings. She had a large store room with supplies of food for her customers who had their meals at the homestay. Upstairs was her mini-apartment.

After our tour we returned to the airport for our flight back to Miri. All four of us were on the same flight. We flew west and down out of the mountains following the small streams that all merge into the Baram river. We really enjoyed our trip and we all would like to return one day.

Scenes around Bario



Flowers grown in Barrio

