NOTES
FROM
THE SARAWAK GAZETTE,
1909—1915.
NOTES
FROM
THE SARAWAK GAZETTE
BY
J. C. MOULTON,
Curator of the Sarawak Museum.
(1909–1915.)

Reprinted January 1915.
# CONTENTS

## EXPEDITIONS

| I. | Mount Penrissen | ... | 1 |
| II. | An Expedition to Batu Lawi | ... | 10 |
| III. | A Collecting Expedition to Mt. Kinabalu | ... | 19 |
| IV. | A Collecting trip to the head-waters of the Sutong River | ... | 37 |

## NATURE NOTES

| V. | A Crocodile on Satang Island | ... | 41 |
| VI. | A Museum Murmur | ... | 42 |
| VII. | Musical Sand | ... | 45 |

## BIOGRAPHIES

| VIII. | Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, o.m., f.r.s. | ... | 46 |
| IX. | Seventieth anniversary of the first visit of H. H. the Rajah to Sarawak | ... | 49 |

## REVIEW

| X. | "My Life in Sarawak", By the Rance of Sarawak | ... | 53 |

## RAINFALL NOTES

| XI. | The Kuching Rainfall for 1910 | ... | 57 |
| XII. | Notes on Kuching Rainfall | ... | 59 |
| XIII. | Kuching Rainfall for 1913 | ... | 60 |
| XIV. | Kuching Rainfall | ... | 61 |
EXPEDITIONS.

I. Mount Penrissen.

[Published January 6th, 1910.]

The following account is an attempt to set forth in brief a history of all the ascents made of Mt. Penrissen, a lofty mountain at the source of the Sarawak river, some 60 miles from the sea as the crow flies. The mountain is easily seen from Kuching, showing well above its neighbours. To the immediate north lies Mt. Mesuah separated from the Penrissen group by one deep valley. Penrissen itself resolves into three separate peaks, Mts. Seruru and Prang, running north and south, and the table-topped Penrissen running south-west to Prang with little more than 100 feet difference between their respective heights.

The mountain is particularly easy to ascend and the distance from Kuching is by no means formidable. By travelling quickly it would be possible to reach the summit in 24 hours from Kuching. To do this the traveller should follow the Penrissen road to Segu, take boat from there to Pangkalan Ampat, and then walk to Sennah and thence a 7 hours' comfortable walk should bring him to the summit.

From a naturalist's point of view it presents many points of interest. Some mammals (chiefly small rodents) seem to be common to Kinabalu and Penrissen, and several species of insects found on Kinabalu also occur on Penrissen. A few insects have been found to be peculiar to Penrissen: and another feature is the perhaps rather unexpected absence of many Matang and Santubong species. A prolonged stay on
the mountain would doubtless produce many interesting novelties even now, in spite of the large collections already made by Messrs. Shelford, Cox, Everett and Dr. Haviland, since even in a four days’ trip there last month a few were found.

Beccari describes the group thus:—“The Pennerissen group is an isolated elevation which is not connected with any extensive mountain range, and lies between the territory of Sarawak and that of Sambas and Pontianak. From its northern slopes flow the waters of the eastern arm of the Sarawak river, and those of the Sadong; while from the southern slopes rise the Sambas, Landak, and Sikayan rivers, the latter, as I have said before, an affluent of the Kapuas.”

The first mention of Mt. Penrissen appears in Low’s “Sarawak” published in 1848. In this he says (p. 295):—“The southern branch of the Sarawak river has its sources in the Gunong Penerissen: the highest land in this part of the island. Penerissen, or Besuah,* as it is sometimes called, is a table-topped mountain, about 4,700 feet in height, situated between sixty and seventy miles from the coast in a direct line. One of the tributary streams of the great Sangow River……… flows past its southern base.”

And it seems probable that Mr. Low was the first white man to ascend the mountain (1845—1847).

Sir Spenser St. John in his “Life in the Forests of the Far East” speaks of “Penrissen, one of the highest mountains in Sarawak.………It is estimated at above 5,000 feet above the level of the sea.”

The first account of an attempted ascent of Penrissen is published in the Sarawak Gazette for January 1886.

In that number is published the fourth instalment of “A tour among the Dayaks of Sarawak.” The first chapter deals with the start of an expedition in which Mr. Chalmers, a missionary, and the author were the only Europeans; the object being a tour of the villages

---

*Besuah is almost certainly a mistake for Meseuh, which is not another name for Penrissen but a separate peak to the North.
on the left-hand branch of the Upper Sarawak river. Accordingly a start was made on May 6th 1858 from Belidah Fort, and after passing several nights at the villages on the river, they eventually arrived at Sennah on the 19th; and on the 22nd a start was made for the mountain from Tebia. "From one of the houses in the village," this author relates, "there was a fine view of Penrissen, the great mountain which Mr. Low ascended, and which it was my ambition now to reach. There it frowned, with its table-top half enveloped in clouds, some three miles off. The view from Tebiak was certainly imposing, the village itself being situated on a pretty high peak surrounded by higher ranges." The author dwells on the excuses put forward by the Dayaks, such as "Sennah was nearer;" "We should have to be in the jungle five nights;" "The rocks were tremendously steep;" "It was very cold on the top;" "Nobody knew the road;" "There was none;" etc., etc. They finally reached a summit in the afternoon, only to find that it was not Penrissen which they had ascended at all, but its neighbour, Mt. Mesuah. In discussing the height, he says, "we had no barometer, but I think we could not have been less than 5,500 feet above the level of the sea. Penrissen is about 6,000 feet high." No further attempt was made to reach the higher mountain by these two travellers.

The next ascent, if Mr. Shelford's statement is accurate, would be that made by Dr. O. Beccari in 1866. In the Sarawak Gazette of July 1899, Mr. Shelford in his account of a trip to Penrissen writes: "On the following day (Saturday, May 13th) Mr. Cox.......... reached a magnificent plateau of considerable extent ....... without doubt the situation occupied by Signor Beccari who once visited this mountain." In Dr. Beccari's book "In Bornean Forests," however, he distinctly records his failure to ascend Penrissen; but he indicates his intention of visiting the mountain thus: ".......but I remained, awaiting the Sennah Dayaks, whom I had sent for to fetch my luggage, and to guide me to Mount Pennerrissen of which I wished to attempt
the ascent." He stayed in the village of Tappo Kakas, from which point he wished to make the ascent. The account of his failure to do so is given thus: "It was my intention to start from this place, which has an elevation of about 1,150 feet, for the summit of Gunong Pennerrissen, or as I have also heard it pronounced, Mengrissen. This has been considered one of the highest mountains in Sarawak, but it is certainly inferior to Gunong Poe†. Seen from a distance, Mt. Pennerrissen does not seem to have any striking summit, nor to tower much above its neighbours.

"The Dayaks of Tappo Kakas, for some special motive of their own, showed no wish to guide me up the mountain. On the contrary, they did their best to dissuade me from attempting the ascent, and declared that unheard of difficulties would beset me on my road to the summit. Most certainly from the village in which I was the way to Mt. Pennerrissen was neither short nor easy, as I could see for myself. Besides I had brought with me only a small quantity of provisions. So making a virtue of necessity I contented myself with the ascent of Gunong Wa, an easy undertaking from Tappo Kakas."

He went up on November 19th returning to Pangkan Ampat on November 21st, to Sennah on the 23rd and to Kuching on the 25th.

This I think must certainly disprove an ascent made by Beccari during that visit to Upper Sarawak, and I am unable to trace any other mention of his journey in that neighbourhood again; I was also unable to hear any mention of his name from the Sennah or Tebia Dayaks among those of Europeans who had climbed Penrrissen during their time. And the old Orang Kaya of Sennah told me he remembered Tuan Low's ascent when he was a little boy, i.e. over sixty years ago.

This brings us to the first published account of the ascent; this time made by Mr. Oliver St. John with a certain Mr. C. in February 1880. An excellent descrip-

†Beccari makes the height of Mt. Poe to be 5,520 feet.
tion of the trip appears in the Sarawak Gazette for February 28th 1880, from which we get the first authentic record of the height of the summit. They started from Sennah on February 5th about 8 a.m. and finding the path by no means difficult arrived a little after 2 p.m. at their first camping place, 3,200 feet. Next day they started for the summit, arriving at 11 p.m. on "a narrow neck of land, sloping down steeply on either side, which we were told was the foot of the last peak."

A little way below this ridge is a large overhanging rock, under which they camped for the night, and today it is known as Tuan St. John's resting place. As the remaining part of the climb is the only really difficult part I give St. John's description of it and the summit: "After a short rest we left our camp (4,000 feet) accompanied by one guide to try the peak. By this time it had become very clear to us that the compiler of the map we had consulted had drawn considerably on his imagination in putting down the mountain at 6,000 feet, but from what we could see, we concluded that the last climb might be some 700 to 800 feet. It was undoubtedly steep enough, and made up for previous deficiencies in that way, and in one or two places it was nervous work, but we persevered and in a very short space of time we gained a level space. Our guide then informed us that we were on the extreme top. We could not credit it, but on examination found that it was true. The top of Penrissen is a plateau of no less than 50 to 60 acres, with comparatively large trees on it, surrounded by a dense growth of scrub, rattans, etc. There was a sort of water course trickling through it. The elevation was found to be 4,450 feet or almost exactly 4,000 feet above Sennah village. A finer situation for a sanatorium could not be wished." And as Mr. St. John justly remarks, the ascent from Sennah is remarkably easy and gradual, with the exception of the last cliff which should be easily overcome by a system of ladders. He gives the temperature at 1 o'clock (4,000 feet) as 68°, falling to 62° in the night. They descended next morning "and arrived at Sennah fairly tired, about 3 o'clock."
In June 1882, Mr. St. John made a second ascent, accompanied on this occasion by Mr. O. F. Ricketts and Mr. Safe. Mr. St. John again gives us an account of the trip in the Sarawak Gazette of July 1882. In this account he notes that his Dayak guides chose a different path to that taken in 1880, apparently rather steeper. Their first camping place was at an altitude of 2,400 feet; this they left early next morning, passing St. John's old camping-place, and arriving in a dip of the mountain (3,700 feet). This was evidently between Mts. Seruru and Prang, as he goes on to describe "a sheer climb of 400 feet immediately above to get out of this dip in the ridge," and then "another dip with the peak immediately in front." The former camping-place under the big over-hanging rock was again utilized and in the afternoon they explored the summit. After staying the night on the mountain, they returned to Sennah the next afternoon.

During the next ten years, three more Europeans seem to have made the ascent, of whom a Mr. Henderson, at one time in charge of the Matang Estate, was probably the first. He is still remembered among the Sennah Dayaks as Tuan Matang, and they assert that he never reached the peak. The next European was Dr. G. D. Haviland, who lived for some little time at Pangkalan Ampat from where he used to make many botanical excursions. About 1890 he went up to the top of Penrissen but does not seem to have stayed on the mountain any length of time or made any large collections there. The last of these three was Mr. A. H. Everett who went up in July 1892 and made some interesting collections of mammals there, finding many forms common to Mt. Kinabalu. He too, according to the Dayaks, did not reach the summit.

Penrissen then appears to have been left in peace till 1899, when Mr. R. Shelford and Mr. E. A. Cox made the ascent. An interesting account of this trip appears in the Sarawak Gazette for July, 1899, and another more detailed account from a naturalist's point of view appears in the Journal of the Straits Branch, Royal Asiat-
ic Society (January 1900), both accounts from the pen of Mr. Shelford. This was essentially a collecting expedition and during the three weeks spent on the mountain, a remarkably fine collection of birds, beasts, and insects accrued, resulting in many new and interesting species. The botanical collection was small, although found by Mr. H. N. Ridley to contain some interesting forms.

They left Sennah on May 11th camping for the night at Batu Tinong—"a huge over-hanging boulder of sandstone conglomerate,"—altitude 2,400 feet. Next day they arrived at the accustomed resting place, where all the previous Europeans appear to have stopped for a night, at an altitude of 3,400 feet (3,200 feet according to St. John). Here Mr. Shelford spent a week collecting assiduously, while Mr. Cox had reached the summit, which he made out to be 4,800 feet, returning thence to a lower place for camp. On the 18th Mr. Cox moved on to Mt. Prang, 4,000 feet, Mr. Shelford joining him there two days later. A week later they returned to their old camping place and "on May 30th we left at 7-45, Mr. Cox arriving at Sennah at 3-30, myself at 4-30; from Sennah we proceeded straight to Pangkalan Ampat, leaving for Kuching on June 4th."

Ten years later (Nov. 20th, 1909) there might have been seen yet another little party assembled at Sennah, worrying the old Orang Kaya about recalcitrant coolies, just as Messrs. Shelford and Cox had worried him in '99, Messrs. St. John, Safe and Ricketts in '83, and perhaps the others too in the years before. This time the party was composed of three Europeans—Mr. H. B. Crocker, Mr. H. P. Adams and myself—under the guidance of an elderly but none the less active Dayak, Beracha by name, from Pangkalan Ampat, who had made the ascent with Mr. St. John. The would-be early start resulted in getting off at 7-30 a.m.; and fording the river, luckily quite shallow for the time of year, we were soon on the upward climb. Having climbed two steep hills, only to descend again, we found ourselves at the foot of Penrissen proper about