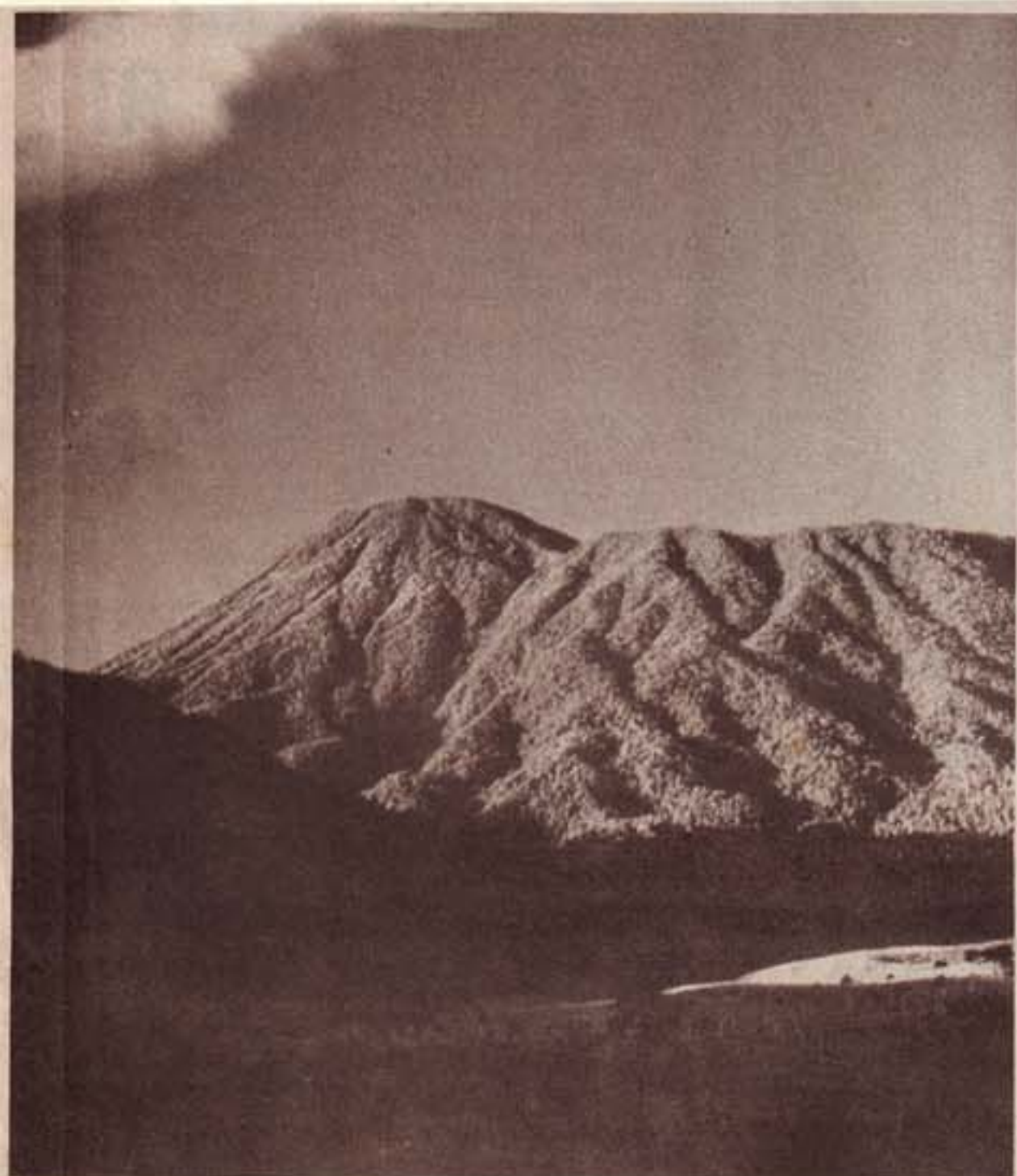


Trekking takes on new meaning in West Java mountains



Profil Propinsi Indonesia

Mount Gede in West Java offers attractive trekking, provided one is prepared for leeches. Native guides will also take visitors to the neighboring Mount Pangrango.

JAKARTA (JP): Along the edge of a steep ravine in the forest, at about 1800 meters, the trail disappeared. Our guide Ujang began to hack out openings with his *parang*, a short but effective Indonesian machete.

Clumps of mist nearly as thick as smoke meandered through the trees, suggesting the possibility of disintegrating visibility. Our party of five crawled through tunnels of ferns and, with only thorny vines to provide friction, climbed steep muddy slopes. It was my second weekend in Indonesia, and I found myself trekking near Pangrango and Gede mountains. Returning to civilization depended on Ujang and my brother Alex, an economist who lives in Jakarta and frequently treks with friends near the two peaks.

We paused briefly so I could burn several leeches off Alex's legs with a Bic lighter, but not before they'd sucked his blood for a while. The plump creatures squirmed from the heat and lost their grip as the flame singed Alex's flesh. One feels not their bite but the intense itching that follows their visit. I luckily was able to brush off a few of the black vampires before they bit me.

"A lit cigarette or tobacco juice is better to get them off," said Ujang. "The worst thing is to pull them off by force after they've attached themselves. The result can be very bloody."

Just as dark fell, we discovered a trail that would lead us back to the plantations and later to the village. But finding our way back was no sure thing. A night in the forest would have meant huddling

By Charles W. Korn

together to stay warm and hoping for no rain.

It was one week after my arrival from the United States when Alex and I and two of his Indonesian friends, Tommy and Ian, had headed off to a small village not far from Taman Safari. At about 10 p.m., after a two-hour drive from Jakarta, we arrived in Kampung Baru, introduced ourselves to a family and settled down for the night, filling the living room floor and sofa with mats and sleeping bags.

It's customary in West Java for families to accommodate unannounced visitors at almost any hour. (In my home state of Oregon, an unannounced knock would be greeted with suspicion, if not a loaded gun.) Having learned only a few words of *Bahasa Indonesia*, I was helpless to join in introductory conversations, so I sat on a couch as Bob Hope babbled on a small color TV from the other side of the world.

An hour later we were horizontal. Discombobulated by the first night of my life in the home of strangers in a new country, I slept intermittently for about four hours before the household sprang to life.

A store at the front of the house, only three meters from the toes of us trekkers opened at 5:30, selling kerosene, snacks and cigarettes to early shoppers. Our group commandeered the meager kitchen and its pots and utensils to fix rice and vegetables. I learned from Ian that our hosts, like most of the village people, don't eat breakfast together at the

same time but instead grab a bite here and there as they carry out their chores.

Led by Ujang, who happened to be the head of our host household, we hiked out of the village, through tea plantations, past women carrying 30-kilogram bundles of sticks, and into the forest. It would be 12 hours before we returned in darkness, guided by flashlights. Approaching Kampung Baru, we walked by a dozen or so grave sites that lay only five meters from a gentle river.

After four or five hours of sleep Saturday night on the same living room floor, I announced my plans to return to Jakarta to relax after what I explained was the hardest hike of my life. How could

my body carry me through another day of slippery slopes, fern tunnels and leeches? But the more I thought about carrying my 20 kilogram backpack in various bus depots on the way to Jakarta alone, knowing only a few words of *Bahasa*, the less appealing my retreat seemed. After learning that Sunday's route would be avoid the forest, I decided to stay.

More friends

Moments after my decision, three more Indonesian friends — Rasyid, Noni and Aryati — joined our group for the day's hike. Rasyid hikes frequently in the region. Noni, a botanist, is especially

interested in observing the plants, flowers and agriculture. She showed me a *Putri Malu*, a small flower whose delicate fern-like leaves retract at the slightest touch. Aryati, a member of Indonesia's Women's Mountain Climbing Team, has climbed Annapurna and Chulo West in Nepal, Aconcagua in Argentina and Mt. Blanc in France, among other peaks.

It turned out to be a splendid hike through villages, rice paddies, tea plantations and miscellaneous vegetable gardens. At one point we passed a public *mandi* a few meters from the bank of a small river. Several women oained inside its stone walls.

I'm still marveling at the noises of my Tebet neighbor-

hood. Various vendors push their carts and announce themselves with distinctive cries or perhaps taps or honks. A high-pitched nasa cry of "taaay" signals the satay vendor selling chicken skewers with a tangy peanut sauce. He walks by every half hour in the evening. If we don't have quite enough food, for everyone at the dinner table, Alex stops him and places an order. Another fellow hoots "tahoouo" to alert residents of his tofu for sale. Less interesting is the jingle of the ice cream man.

Alex's rooster and battalion of pet birds sing their reviles each morning around 05:00 a.m. The days begin early in Indonesia.