

Conquering Mount Kinabalu

A humbling journey



Have you ever wonder, how does it feel to have the first flicker of light reach your eyes and the first heat touching your face? The feeling was beyond description. Standing there quietly, looking at the cloud lazily rolled towards you, and slowly, your surrounding become misty and after the clouds passed by, the sun filled the sky with brilliant color. This is exactly how I felt when I was at South's Peak of Mount Kinabalu!

About 3 weeks prior to the Mount Kinabalu expedition, I was running 21km marathon and a week after that Niah Trip (20.6km); these were the most interesting journey that I ever took in my life "Believe the Impossible" ~ this was what exactly happened! People keep telling me that I will not be able to do it; however, I am truly grateful that others did not agree and I chose to believe the latter.

As what one of my fellow climber; Gideon Paren Ding of Technical Record (Engineering Department) told me "Mount Kinabalu humbles me" I could not help but to agreed wholeheartedly. From this time onwards, whoever tells me that Mount Kinabalu is not challenging, I will advice them to go climb Kinabalu then come back and tell it to my face.

Tracking via Mesilau instead of Timponon trail according to Jamaluddin Ahmad of Maintenance (Engineering department) is what distinguished between men and boys!

I discovered that Mesilau really brings out the man in me! The trail was hard; we encountered 90 degree steps (no bigger then 3 fingers put together) with no handles, tall rocks with no rope to climb etc. For someone average high, to jump from one slippery rock to other rock with a very shaky knee was definitely not an easy feat.

During the 10 hours walked to Laban Rata; braving the mountain rain and the freezing strong wind, (I was wearing only T-shirt and Bermuda) and very much alone, never in my life I felt so vulnerable. What keeps me going on was, the beautiful little purple flowers, that looks so delicate, yet despite the harsh weather, it blooms along the trail, I kept telling myself, the flower is so delicate, but it survived. There were couple of times when I feel like I am giving up, and again, I can see the little flowers ahead of me, and as I focused on reaching the next bloom, it means that I am one step closer to the peak.

By and by I keep plodding on, stop before I got too tired, moved before I got too lazy and every time I felt that I cant move anymore.. I kept telling myself that another 5 more steps better than no step at all.

2 kilometers before reaching Laban Rata, my body was already pushed to the limit, the cold wind

has no mercy and I can feel the sharp pain every time the rain drops pelting my tired body, it was around 5pm and darkness filled the surrounding. I had to use my pathetic instinct to move forward groping in the dark. I lost my way and out of desperation I started to shout "Hello!" "Hello" (I don't know why I choose to shout Hello instead of HELP)", few guide's heard my voice and started to thumped their



feet and I followed the noise. When I finally arrived at Laban Rata, the temperature was 0.9 Celsius. The journey doesn't end there when I was told that we will be staying at Gunting Lagadan, which was located 150 meters from Laban Rata, it sound very near, yet so far as it felt like forever before we finally arrived. Not everyone has a head-torch or torch light, and before we reached the place, we practically crawled up the rocks as there were no ropes or stairs to get there. Upon arrival, the electricity was black out and we were all frozen alive. I was wearing my full climbing gear (complete with balaclava), struggling to keep myself warm for few hours before the climb at 2:00am. Sleep difficult to come by, as your body gone through trauma of conserving the last bits of energy and working extra hard to make sure that the body warm.

At 1:30am, we were forcing our frozen limb to leave the cold blanket. After the briefing by the Head

Guide on the do's and don'ts and what to expect during the climb, 15 of us set our journey to the peak. It was very difficult to breathe as the air is denser and you can't even feel your toes (even my eyeball was hurt), we were separated by the first group after a while as there were many other climbers as well. When we reached the rocky cliffs we were strictly reminded not to let go of the rope no matter what, I was thinking "ok, it can't be that bad" and actually being defensive when I was being gently reminded again and again not to let go of the rope. It was on our back that I nearly had heart attack looking down the cliffs, there are no way anybody can find your body if things go awfully wrong. I never had any experience in rock climbing; this was the time when my physical strength tested to the limit. The rock was nearly 70 degree angle and it was very slippery, god knows how I managed.

The moment we reached Sayat-Sayat checkpoint, it was already 5:30 and we were advised not to proceed to the Low's Peak. I was quite adamant and my guide agreed to take me to the South's Peak, the rest decided to stop at the checkpoint. When I reached the South's Peak, I experienced rushed of emotions as I took out the AirAsia flags, I was alone with no camera to capture the moment. My guide (that never gives up on me) felt sorry for me and ran down to the checkpoint to get the camera for me. Finally I managed to take few shoots while waiting for the sun to rise. And when the time finally came, the exhaustion, the cold was all faded away, replaced with total wonder. I just stood there, quietly trying to capture every second in my memory as I witnessing one of God's wonderful creation.

Mount Kinabalu, true to its associations, mountain where the spirits live, as it is as beautiful as a fairytale, place fit for a nymph and fairy. Every flowers, trees and rocks seems like carefully planted and arranged by the hands of the Master Himself.

On the way down, I kept looking back and marvel at how on earth did I ever managed to climbed up the day before. I took my sweet time climbing down as the previous day; I don't exactly have the time enjoy the beauty that the path has to offer. When I finally reached the end point, it feels like saying goodbye to an old dear friend.

The journey taught me lots of things about myself, I was forced to faced my darkest fear and my worst enemy, I am very proud to say that, I overcome it. Just like the local song lyrics "Sayang .. Sayang... Sayang Kinabalu.." I shall come back again to visit my old friend "Dream the Impossible, and Don't take no for an answer!"