Through the highlands of South Sulawesi

Ian Caldwell

> To tell the truth, the historian is not unlike the traveller. He tends to linger over the plain, which is the setting for the leading actors of the day, and does not seem eager to approach the high mountains nearby. More than one historian who has never left the towns and their archives would be surprised to discover their existence. And yet how can one ignore these conspicuous actors, the half-wild mountains, where man has taken root like a hardy plant; always semi-deserted, for man is constantly leaving them? How can we ignore them when often their sheer slopes come right down to the sea's edge?
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> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, 1972, pp. 29–30.

In November 1992, a friend, Gerard de la Garde, and I made a journey of over two hundred kilometres on foot, horseback and by river across the remote northern highlands of South Sulawesi. This little known and sparsely inhabited region lies between the northern arc of the Quarles mountains and the southern extension of the Takolekaju or Molengraaf mountains. These highlands, one of the most mountainous areas of Sulawesi, are the denuded fragments of a shattered and uplifted peneplain. The deep valleys that cross this peneplain are cut by torrential rivers, or formed by tectonic depressions (Bemmelen 1949:42). The region is the wettest in South Sulawesi, with a rainfall of between 1500 and 3000 millimetres a year. The dense virgin forest that covers the mountain sides is home to numerous species of animals, including the solitary and dangerous anoa or dwarf buffalo, and the babirusa or 'pig-deer', the males of which possess extraordinary, inverted canine tusks that curve upwards and backwards from the snout, piercing the skull.

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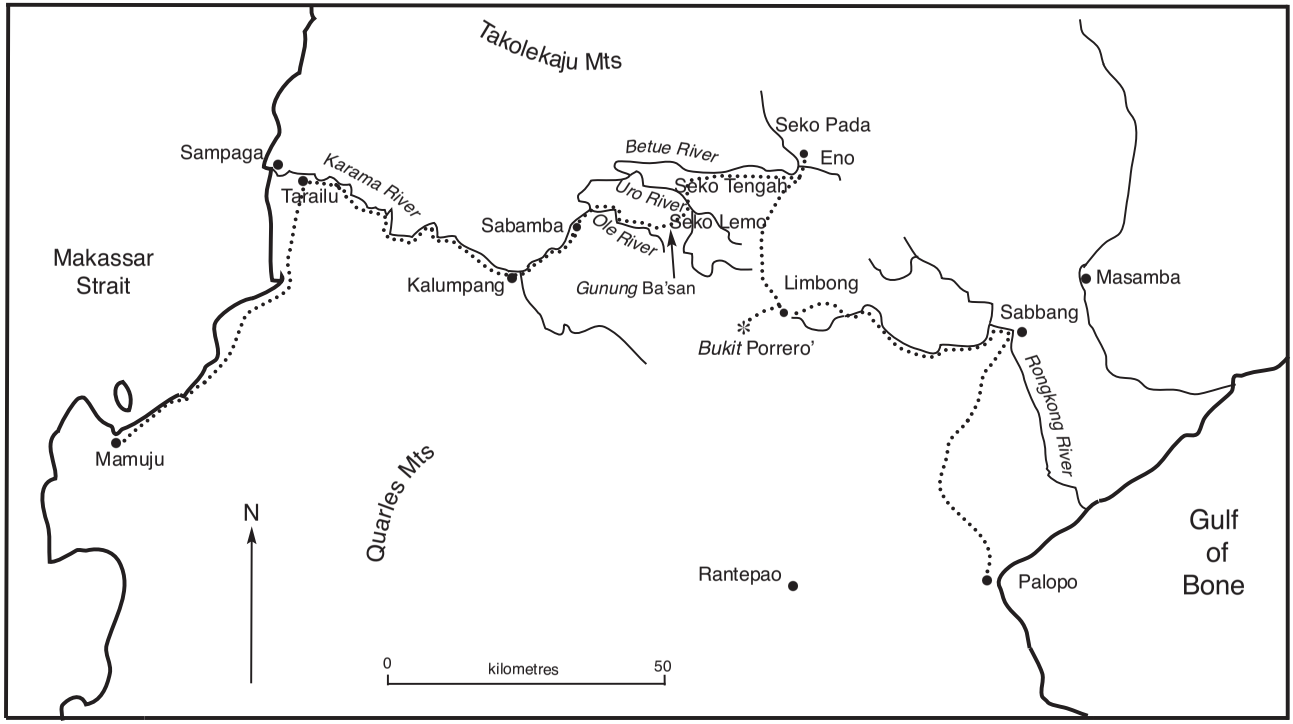

Map 1. Northern South Sulawesi, showing the route taken in 1992

I had first set eyes on this largely undocumented region two years earlier, from the window of a small aircraft flying from Palu to Makassar. Below, in the shadows of the late afternoon sun, lay a vast, dark and faintly menacing ocean of trees. I knew that this region was in earlier times a part of the kingdom of Luwu, once the wealthiest and most powerful of the Bugis kingdoms of South Sulawesi (Bulbeck and Caldwell 2000). I wondered what attraction this sombre, tree-clad, mountainous land had for the kingdom of Luwu and I resolved to find out by exploring the region on foot.

Visits to libraries in Canberra, Leiden and London established that no accurate map of the area could be found. The most detailed map of the central highlands of South Sulawesi was a reproduction, published in 1920, of a sketch map made by the Dutch missionary AC Kruyt, who lived and worked in central Sulawesi. In the same year, Kruyt published articles on the peoples of the Limbong and Seko regions (Kruyt 1920a, 1920b). Limbong lies at the head of the Rongkong valley, which starts at the edge of the coastal plain of the Gulf of Bone. Limbong is an oval valley approximately five kilometres wide and ten kilometres long; the main settlement, of the same name, lies at the eastern end of the valley. From Limbong a broad path winds through the vast forest I had seen from the air, connecting the Rongkong and Seko valleys. The Seko region is divided three regions or valleys. Seko Pada is a circular valley, roughly ten kilometres in diameter, through which flow the *salo* (rivers) Betue and Kasumong. Seko Tengah is the lower valley of the *salo* Betue, which runs west from the southern edge of Seko Pada. Seko Lemo is the valley of the *salo* Uro, which runs from the south, in a northwest arc, to merge with the *salo* Betue. We therefore planned a route that would take us west from Sabbang on the coastal plain up the Rongkong valley to Limbong, then due north to Seko Pada, then southwest along the Betue river through Seko Tengah, before turning south along the Uro river and climbing northwest once more through the hills to rejoin the *salo* Betue and Uro, now merged to form the fast-flowing Karama river (map 1).

Our journey began early one morning from the main bus terminal in Palopo, the administrative capital of *kabupaten* Luwu. After a hurried breakfast of coffee and bananas, we piled into a minibus for

the two-hour ride along the metalled road to Sabbang, at the foot of the Rongkong valley that leads up to Limbong. The historic settlement of Sabbang, now abandoned, once prospered from the trade passing out of the central highlands. Today all that remains are the hundreds of looted pre-seventeenth century graves which lie a short distance from the main road (Willems 1940).

Waiting at the junction of the turn-off to Limbong was a four-wheel-drive Toyota Land Cruiser, its roof piled high with baggage and its interior crammed with passengers. Diesel cans and baggage were lashed fore and aft. After a short negotiation, we squeezed in to make twelve including the driver. Four more people climbed on to the outside of the vehicle before we set off up the bumpy dirt road for the four-hour, fifty-seven kilometre drive to Limbong.

The road to Limbong winds along a narrow, twisting valley, its steep sides covered in tropical forest. Over a rocky bed rushes the shallow, fast-flowing Rongkong river. Our vehicle halted frequently to disgorge its passengers so that its driver could negotiate the small wooden bridges which cross the numerous streams that flow into the river. Halfway, we refueled from a cache of large oil drums brought up from Sabbang as a makeshift petrol station. We stretched our legs and photographed the wood-planked, thatched or tin-roofed houses perched over small patches of fertile ground clinging precariously to the valley's lower slopes. The small courtyards in front of the houses were planted with yard beans, cucumber, marrow, chillies, rambutan, tapioca, papaya, banana, coconut and kapok trees. Many hamlets had small, whitewashed fences bordering the road, behind which grew marigolds and poinsettia. People here looked healthy and prosperous, with only the older people showing signs of goitre due to iodine-deficient soils. Small girls in Girl Guide uniforms, or wrapped head to foot in checked cotton sarong, came to stare at us.

At Kanandede I enquired about iron and copper mines and was told there were none, but that gold was still panned from rivers in the Kalumpang region, further to the west. Shortly after Kanandede, about two-thirds of the way up the valley, the road crossed the Rongkong river, then steepened and deteriorated into a dirt track as it wound up to Komba. The air cooled and coffee bushes appeared. Four

hours after leaving Sabbang, we reached the crest of a pass and saw below us the countless green ripples of gently descending terraced ricefields, half shrouded in mist and ragged clouds, before a brief descent brought into sight the glistening tin roofs of Limbong.

Limbong is one of the four *dusun* (hamlets) that make up *desa* (village) Marampa, in *kecamatan* (sub-district) Rongkong. The four *dusun*, Lowarang, Ponglegen and Salutallang and Limbong, sit around the edge of a small fertile valley at the head of the Rongkong river. The valley is terraced with ricefields; coffee is grown on the lower slopes of the surrounding mountains. The higher slopes, which are partially deforested, have been replanted with pine trees. The people of Rongkong speak a dialect of the Torajan language and are renowned as hardy and enterprising traders. Sturdy mountain ponies are bred here to carry coffee down to Sabbang, while salt, dried fish, paraffin and manufactured goods are carried up from Sabbang, and traded northward to the Seko valley.

In Limbong we stayed at the home of the 33-year-old *kepala dusun*, Pak Effendi Sewang, a quiet, reserved man with a keen eye for human foibles and a subtle sense of humour. He was to prove an excellent guide as well as a source of information on the districts through which we passed.

Coffee and rice are the main export crops of the Rongkong valley, but in the Dutch period (and possibly earlier) dammar, a resin or gum excluded by certain trees, notably of the genera *Shorea* and *Hopea*, was the most important export product. I was told that families in Rongkong and Seko have traditional areas for gathering this resin, and that a man can collect 40 to 50 kg of dammar in 5 to 8 days. These areas are registered at the *kecamatan* office in Limbong, and an annual tax is levied on them. Amber is found in small quantities, and river stones (presumably a kind of agate) and rock crystal are collected and sold.

When I explained to Pak Effendi that we were interested in locating old iron mines, he told us of three sources of iron in the district. The first two, Balanalu and Pangiwangen, lie south of Rongkong; the latter was said to have yielded weapons-grade (that is, high quality) iron. The third and outstanding source was at *bukit*

Porreo', a hill about five kilometres southwest of Limbong. The ore here yielded an iron, *bessi* Porreo', which was reputed to be highly poisonous, to the extent that a single scratch from it could kill. The deadly nature of the iron — the ore is said to be harmless — probably reflects a practice of coating the blades of weapons with vegetable poisons. Pak Elias Tipa' (b. 1942), a Christian neighbour of Pak Effendi, told us that in former times the people of Rongkong were the chief defenders of Luwu and well known for their martial prowess as well as their fierce loyalty to its ruler. Weapons made from *bessi* Porrero' are said to have been worn by Luwu's nobles, and the metal is famous throughout Luwu and the Toraja area.[1] Pak Effendi told us that *tombak* (spear-heads) and *parang* (cutting and slashing knives) were once made in Rongkong, some with beautiful veins, produced by working a strip of nickel-rich iron between two strips of plain iron.[2] Some *kepala tombak* (spear heads) were as long as the hand and forearm. Pak Effendi claimed that no agricultural tools were ever made from *bessi* Porrero'.

The following day we awoke to find that the northwest monsoon had arrived early, bringing with it light but frequent showers. We set off in the drizzle, walking up a steep ridge that leads towards *bukit* Porrero'. On our way out of the village we passed a small forge, its four bamboo air-pipes showing that it was still in use. The metal worked is most likely to have been brought up from Sabbang in the form of scrap steel from motor vehicles, and the forge's main products agricultural implements, including the ubiquitous *parang* (a long knife with a heavy tip, used for cutting and slashing), which every self-respecting Rongkong male wears at his waist (figure 1).

After a hard walk of an hour and a half, we arrived at the foot of *bukit* Porrero', the source of the ore. The gentle slope of the hill's foot was deemed by Pak Effendi to be an excellent site for a *kampung* (settlement), but added that people were reluctant to live there due to the poisonous nature of the ore. This seemed difficult to square with his and Pak Eli's statement that the ore was not poisonous until refined, but presumably reflects the general awe in which *bessi* Porerro' is held. The ore is also found on the surface at the foot of *gunung* (Mount) Beradarada, a mountain visible from the ridge. The route to *gunung* Beradarada, down a valley and along another ridge, looked difficult and

Figure 1. Forge near Limbong

it was already mid-morning. No ore was visible on the surface of *bukit* Porerro', but we dug up a fist-sized lump of light brown ore from just below the surface of the soil. We were told that there was a large pit nearby, possibly a disused mine working, but this proved impossible to find in the heavy undergrowth.

Slipping and sliding on the narrow muddy path in the intensifying rain, a circular route back brought us out on the trail to Seko, which terminates a kilometre north of Limbong. Knee-deep in mud and soaked to the skin, we cut through a patch of forest, stopping in a clearing to cook lunch and to remove the small leeches we had collected on our arms and faces. Late in the afternoon, we arrived back at Limbong, somewhat the worse for wear and wondering if the rest of the journey was going to be so taxing.

On our way to *bukit* Porreo' we had passed a small path leading off to the south, which I was told was the trail to the Toraja region and which exits at *gunung* Sesean, ten kilometres north of Rantepao. I had enquired about this trail two years earlier in Rantepao, but had failed to learn much about it. According to locals, the trail is still used to transport buffalos and coffee down to Rantepao, where the price is higher than in Palopo. We were told that the journey through the forest would take three days, or rather two nights, distances in the highlands being counted in overnight stops. The trail does not seem ever to have been a major trade route as the products available at each end are similar: coffee, buffalos, rice and, formerly, dammar. Further conversation elicited the fact that a difficult trail, starting below Limbong on the road along the Rongkong river, could take you in a day to Rampi in the north, and that Rampi is connected to Masamba by an air service run by a Church mission.

The following morning dawned overcast with ample promise of the rain that was to follow. We arranged with Pak Effendi to hire two ponies: one we loaded with our rucksacks, cooking pots, rice and coffee, and grass for fodder, while the other was fitted with a crude, stirrupless saddle of wood and sacking stuffed with straw. With one of us riding and the other on foot, we set off shortly after nine for Mabusa, a clearing in the forest where travellers spend the night.

The trail from Limbong to Mabusa, and from Mabusa to Lambiri runs due north through a vast, uninhabited forest covering the slopes of the Quarles mountains. The trail was built as a road by the Dutch before the Second World War and is two metres wide, but is now heavily overgrown, with a well-trodden path running down its centre. Due to its inaccessibility, this forest is one of the remaining virgin forests in South Sulawesi. It was this forest I had seen from the air as a dark, green ocean two years earlier; on the ground it was no less forbidding. For most of the day the road climbed through its gloomy shade, winding upwards towards the western shoulder of *gunung* Tabembeng. At three in the afternoon the trail reached its highest point, which we estimated to be about 2000 metres, and began its descent to the bridge at Mabusa, which we reached an hour before dusk.

Here we found a substantial roofed bridge, a large wooden hut, and a house on stilts, occupied by a single family. We unloaded the packhorse, which had developed ugly sores on its flank due to the swaying motion of the crude saddle. After a meal of rice, boiled leaves and a rehydrated packet of meat, we unrolled our camping mattresses in a back room of the hut and spread out the large acrylic blanket we had brought with us from Limbong. The sun went down, and the air turned cold. As darkness fell, forest rats came out in their hundreds, forcing us to hang our belongings from the rafters as the creatures scuttled round the room and frequently over our heads. While my companion attempted to sleep, I went outside to join the traders camped out on the sturdy wooden bridge that, like all bridges in the region, was roofed to prevent it rotting in the wet season. These bridges are excellent camping places; a fire is lit at one end and people gather to talk and to slumber until dawn. In the east the Pleiades were rising, while overhead stood the great autumn square of Pegasus; in the west Cygnus the Swan made her slow, graceful descent to the horizon. At a height of 1800 metres, the air was surprisingly cold. At one end of the bridge was a blazing fire around which sat half a dozen traders, men and women, surrounded by sacks of coffee, on their way down to Sabbang. In the encircling darkness, ponies snorted restlessly as forest rats scuttled back and forth across the bridge and sniffed boldly at the feet of the people sitting around the fire. Talk centred mainly on the hardships of mountain life and the lack of a surfaced road, which meant that profit on coffee was low due to the cost of transport, while salt, paraffin and manufactured goods cost double what they did in the lowlands. Wherever we went in this mountain region, people unanimously spoke in favour of a road that would link them to the outside world, and of the progress (*kemajuan*) that this would bring. It was agreed that the dammar market was at a nadir and that little money could be made collecting it.

Sleep was punctuated by loud voices, babies crying and the ponies' hoofs reverberating on the wooden bridge. Early in the morning when the sky was still dark, the household arose to prepare a communal breakfast and, as soon as it was light, we set off to walk the remaining 38 kilometres to Lambiri in the Seko Tengah valley. Just after

the bridge, a trail led away to the left, starting the shorter and more difficult route to Sepon and Kariango in the Seko Lemo valley. The trail crosses a pass between *gunung* Malimongeng and *gunung* Takokong, both more than 2000 metres high. The rain had now stopped and at mid-morning the sun made a brief but welcome appearance. We continued along the main trail, which now ran due north along the western side of a deep, narrow valley. The path clung high to the side of this valley, dipping down occasionally to run alongside the river at its foot. All day we walked through the dreary valley, the monotony of the scenery occasionally broken by large, apricot-coloured flowers growing at the edge of the forest, and yellow-and-black and tiny sky-blue butterflies that settled in miniature clouds upon the path. Around mid-day we passed a caravan of coffee-laden ponies heading down to Sabbang, and shortly after three o'clock we were rewarded by our first view of the low, grassy hills of the Seko Tengah valley, bathed in afternoon sunlight. Here the path crossed the river and continued along the right-hand bank, then left the river and curved around the shoulder of a hill at the end of the valley. We entered an open grassy region, walking past *pondok* (field huts) in recently burnt *ladang* (dry fields) awaiting the rains of the monsoon, which had followed us across the mountains. An hour later we arrived in Lambiri, a settlement founded a decade or so ago by people from Ambalong, further to the west. Despite its height of 1170 metres, Lambiri's climate was pleasantly warm and dry, due partly, we suspected, to local deforestation.

In Lambiri we stayed with Pak Tasi, the 34-year-old *kampung* head. He told us that in former times dammar had been collected in the surrounding forests, but that the current low price made collection uneconomic. The ground around Lambiri is scattered with large boulders, which are attributed to Tolambi a legendary *pendekar* (champion) who could lift two cows at one time and who fished for eels (*ikan belut*) in the local rivers. He is said to have thrown the large boulders in order to scare away rice birds from his fields.

Eno, or Wono, at the foot of the Seko Pada valley, is a pleasant morning's walk away, along the Betue river that winds through high grassy hills. After a kilometre, we passed the path leading west to Seko

Tengah and Seko Lemo; further on, we came to the deserted village of Sae, now a travellers' resting halt marked by a large wooden *bale* (shelter). A two-hour walk brought us to a broad tributary of the Betue river. Footsore, muddy and covered in scratches, we plunged gratefully into the cold water, where we bathed and washed our clothes before walking the final kilometre to Eno.

Eno is a well-kept village with bamboo-fenced houses, a junior high school, a district health centre, and a large grassy airstrip that connects it to the outside world by a twice-weekly flight from Masamba. Eno stands at the junction of the trails to Gimpu in the southern Palu valley and the valley of Rampi to the northeast; the former is a three-day walk and the latter is two. Eno forms the central terminus for trade and communication from these districts, as well as for settlements to the west and south. We did not have time to explore the valley to the north, but a map at the *kepala desa*'s office suggests that that it is roughly circular in shape and about 15 km in diameter. The Betue river flows past Eno to the west but is not bridged as the river becomes a torrent in the wet season. Across the river is a hot spring, marked by a foetid pool with a temperature of about 45°C. The Seko Pada valley has a marked dry season, and the arable land produces coffee and sugar. The staple is rice and there are some fruit trees; wild deer are hunted for meat. Dammar was also once collected all round Eno. The local people seem prosperous and content and do not appear to travel much, as we were unable to learn anything about the route west to Kalumpang, nor was anyone willing to hire us fresh ponies for more than a day's journey out of Eno.

The acting village head, 56 year-old Pak Anshar, took us on a tour of Eno's historical sites, which included two unrecorded large stone structures, just out of the village on the path to Rampi. The first consists of four standing stones, each slightly less that a metre in height arranged in a square; one has fallen over and is half buried in the soil (figure 2). The sides of the square are oriented to the cardinal directions, and no markings are visible on the stones. The second stone structure was a large vat or sarcophagus (*kalamba*) of the type found in large numbers in Central Sulawesi, particularly in the district of Besoa, where not less than 54 of them are to be found (Heekeren 1958:60). I

Figure 2. Standing stones at Eno

was told that the vat is the only one of its kind in the Seko Pada valley, and that it had been carried from Central Sulawesi, having been broken into three pieces to enable its transport, following a successful raid by the men of Eno. No lid could be seen. Locally, the vat is known as *lesung batu* Tolambi (the mortar of Tolambi, the strong man of the Lambiri legend). The vat has four ridges carved round it and a substantial ledge on the inside (figure 3). It would have taken considerable effort to transport such a heavy object all the way from Bada or one of the other valleys of Central Sulawesi, yet this is indeed what seems to have happened.

We rested the ponies for a couple of days before setting off on the second, more arduous stage of our journey to Kalumpang, a settlement on the bank of the Karama river, four days journey to the west. We backtracked to Sae, where we located some open cut iron mines at the foot of a small defile, a couple of hundred yards off the main track. The mines consisted of dozens of one to two metre-wide

Figure 3. Broken kalamba *or large stone vat at Eno*

pits, originally two to four metres deep but now filled with earth.[3] The area is heavily overgrown with secondary forest and the mines are at least fifty years old. Local informants agreed that all local iron manufacture, whether smelting or re-working of scrap iron, was for local use only and was never exported.

Turning west after Sae, we entered the Seko Tengah valley along a well-marked footpath that wound in and out of the hills with the Betue river snaking below us. In the early afternoon we stopped at Ambalong to enquire about reports of iron working, but the men were away in the fields. In the mid-afternoon we enjoyed a splendid view as far as the northwestern end of the Seko Lemo district. In the late afternoon we reached Longa, a small village perched high up on the side of the Betue valley. That evening, Pak Ansar from Palopo, aged 26, who was visiting relatives, told us that at Hartorondo, half a day's excursion from Longa, there was a group of rocks etched with images of people, buffaloes and other subjects. We were told that iron was once mined at

Figure 4. The Betue river, Seko Tengah

Berropa, further along the trail past Kariango, at the end of the Seko Tengah valley, and also at Pewaneang. Informants again insisted that the iron was smelted and worked solely for local use. Copper was also said to be found at Singkalong, ten kilometres from Eno.

In the morning we continued westward down the Betue valley. Shortly after the hamlet of Kalaha, *gunung* Sandapang, with its remarkable double summit, came into view. We descended to Kariango and crossed the *salo* Uro on a long suspension bridge, the ponies crossing further up river. Here we left the Seko valley system, where travelers to the west are checked by the gorge in which the Betue and Uro rivers meet. We now entered a less developed region of scattered hills, patches of freshly burnt swidden, and pioneer settlements. At Berropa, as at Ambalong, the men were away in the fields, and we were unable to learn about iron working.

At Berropa we took a wrong turning, and headed west instead of south. We spent the night in Leden, a small, recently opened

settlement, which we were told was the last until one reached Bau, directly to the west. Our host warned us that the road ahead 'rose a little' (*ada sedikit naik*) in the course of its progress.

The house we were staying in was dirty and infested with fleas. After a night of broken sleep we set off and began what could be described, with some understatement, as a steep climb through difficult country, hacking our way through the undergrowth and dragging our long-suffering ponies up the side of what was evidently a small mountain. By now the trail was so poor and the undergrowth so thick that we had to unload our belongings from the pony and carry them ourselves. Had we had a modern map, we could have seen that the trail we were following was a difficult shortcut over a small mountain, *gunung* Ba'san (1489 m). After three and a half hours of battling through undergrowth, we emerged, bruised and weary, on the summit. The view from the top, down on to drifting clouds and jungle clad hills below us, was worth at least some of the effort of the climb.

The trail we were supposed to have followed ran south from Berropa, via Rantedanga and Buakayu, before descending in a northwest direction along the *salo* Ole to a valley just a few hundred feet above sea level. The difficulty of this trail, and the absence of settlements along the Ole valley, suggests it was never an important trade route. All the way along the Seko valley system I had asked people where they sold their coffee, and was surprised to learn that as far west as Leden coffee was traded to Sabbang. It would appear therefore that *gunung* Ba'san (actually a series of ridges and summits rather than a single massif) forms a barrier that divides the northern region of South Sulawesi into two distinct economic zones, one focused on Sabbang and the other on Kalumpang.

In the early afternoon, after an equally precipitous descent from the summit of *gunung* Ba'san, we arrived in Bau, a small Christian village, where we talked to the pastor, Robert Tumbangi, aged 41. Like most other villages in the region, the economy of Bau, which has about sixty families, is based on monsoon-irrigated rice (both wet rice and hill-grown dry rice), root vegetables and maize grown in swidden fields. Coffee is grown as a cash crop and exported to Kalumpang.

Figure 5. On the trail down to the salo *Ole*

We continued descending slowly, following the right bank of the *salo* Ole with a fine view of *gunung* Sandapang (1705 m) to the west. Crossing the *salo* Ole, we walked through a series of villages until we joined the Karama river at Tambingtambing. We decided to push on to the next village, Sabamba, where we heard that we could get a boat down the river to Kalumpang. Our ponies were by now in a sorry condition, grown thin and with ugly sores on their backs. A few kilometres out of Sabamba, we came across a large patch of sweet grass which the animals refused leave until they had eaten their fill. Having ourselves suffered the pangs of hunger more than once on the journey, we left them in charge of a local man and walked to Sabamba, which we reached at dusk.

By now, the steady diet of rice and boiled leaves was taking its toll and my companion had acquired an intestinal infection. We decided not to attempt the final 24-kilometre walk to Kalumpang but to stay in Sabamba and wait for the boat, which was expected shortly. To put it

mildly, Sabamba was not an impressive place. The entire population appeared to have large goitres, presumably as the result of acute iodine deficiency, and at dusk people retreated to their kitchens, lit by a single, dim light. By eight it was pitch black. The next day was Sunday, when work is forbidden, and we sat on the verandah of the house of the village head (*kepala kampung*) while villagers squatted before us, silently inspecting their visitors. No boat appeared. Evelyn Waugh's novel *A Handful of Dust* came to mind and we began to fear that at any moment an English-speaking chief would appear and command us to read him the novels of Dickens. When we finally enquired when the *kepala kampung* would arrive to meet us, he was pointed out as one of the men squatting before us.

Our enquiries as to the expected boat were met with polite expressions of hope, and the offer to construct for us a bamboo raft on which we could float down the Karama river to Kalumpang. One look at the turbulent waters was enough to make the reading aloud of *Little Dorrit* an attractive alternative. My companion was becoming increasingly ill, so on the following morning we engaged two young men to walk to Kalumpang to charter a boat. We said farewell to Pak Effendi, had proved to be an excellent guide, as he set off with the ponies for the long walk back to Limbong, via the mountain route from Kariango to Mabusa.

In the mid-afternoon, a long outrigger canoe fitted with three large outboard motors arrived from Kalumpang. After negotiations in which we had little leverage, we set off down the Karama river. Sabamba is almost the highest point these boats can reach due to the shallowness and speed of the river, and Kalumpang was reached after barely an hour through a narrow gorge cut by the Karama, past rapids, large whirlpools and invisible hazards from which the outboard motors kept us clear. The footpath, which we could see from the boat, followed the south bank of the river, winding across treeless, grass-covered hills and freshly burnt patches of grassland. Soaked but exhilarated, we stepped ashore at the large stone embankment of Kalumpang, after our journey of eight days.

Kalumpang is a large, attractive village and the administrative centre of a large district. The settlement is set around a large open square and has an air of enlightened prosperity. This is due partly to

government money in the form of schools and health programmes, and partly to good communications with the outside world, despite the fact that it is far inland and distant from the nearest town, Mamuju. On our journey we had seen how much of the character of a village stems from the personality and energy of the village head. The village head of Kalumpang was away in Mamuju at the time of our visit, but was evidently a man of energy and enthusiasm. The village had its own electricity supply, powered by a generator, and several houses had television sets. My companion was able to get medical treatment from a Balinese doctor, who had married a local school teacher and set up a clinic in the village. A road to connect Kalumpang with the Toraja area was under construction and had already progressed six kilometres. A large *rumah adat* (modeled on the traditional large wooden houses of the district) has been built at the edge of the village in order to preserve some of the customs and traditions that development will likely destroy. The village head's wife, with whom we stayed, an energetic and capable woman of about 45, was engaged in resuscitating the weaving industry for which Kalumpang has long been famous.

Kalumpang is dominated by *gunung* Paken, which lies on the north bank of the river, directly across from the village. We were told that the mountain can be climbed in about two hours, and that on the summit is a large hollow stone in which rice grows. Kalumpang is famous as the location of an important neolithic site, excavated by the archaeologists van Stein Callenfels in 1933 and van Heekeren in 1949.[4] We were told that gold is still panned from the Karama river and from its tributary, the Karataun river, especially in the dry season. We also heard talk of plans to open a gold mine at Batuisi, 18 kilometres north from Kalumpang, which probably means no more than that a geological survey has been carried out in the district.

All that remained the following morning was for us to complete our journey was a two-and-a-half-hour boat ride down river to Tarailu, along the fast-flowing, but now more benign, Karama river. At Tarailu a mini-van was waiting for the two-hour journey to Mamuju, and from Mamuju to Parepare, and our first cold beer in nearly a fortnight.

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What had we learnt from our journey? Firstly, that iron ore was plentiful between Sabbang and Karama. Iron mines, if that is the correct term, were simply holes dug in the ground, from which the ore was extracted. No-one knew of an export trade; villagers everywhere claimed that the iron was smelted and forged into tools and weapons for local use. This may have been true of most of the production, though the fame of Limbong's *bessi* Porerro' suggests at least one exception.

Secondly, we learnt that the northern mountainous region through which we had passed was divided into two economic (and to some extent cultural) regions, separated by the formidable barrier of *gunung* Ba'san. It was our distinct impression that, to the west of Ba'san, the culture was different and that people looked west to the coast rather than east to the Gulf of Bone.

Thirdly, we learnt that gold was still panned on the Karama river and its tributaries. It was at the mouth of the Karama river that the Sampaga Buddha was found. This is the most famous bronze object from Sulawesi, the Buddha image in the style of Amaravati (2nd to 5th centuries AD). Pelras (1996:25) speculates that the Buddha is evidence of trade along the Karama river to 'the iron ore-producing area of Seko, one of the few places in the archipelago where iron could be extracted relatively easily in ancient times, which suggests the existence there of early trading.' The physical separation of the Karama and Seko valleys, however, as noted above, suggests otherwise. A more likely reason for the import of a fifth-century Indian bronze Buddha is the gold panned on the Karama river.

Fourthly, we learn that dammar was formerly collected throughout the region, and that traditional collecting territories are still recorded in local government offices, where a tax is levied on them. Today coffee is the main export crop and the means of paying for necessities such as salt and clothing. But coffee is a fairly recent introduction, dating back no more than one or two centuries. Dammar trees grow in large numbers in the highland forests right across Luwu and, while the origins of the trade cannot be dated, the physical difficulty of hauling less valuable products, such as rice or rattan, down to the coast along difficult mountain trails would have made dammar

an attractive export product. No-one I questioned seemed able to name another marketable forest product and dammar was always the first product mentioned after coffee, today's main export crop. It seems possible that the economic basis of the relationship between Luwu and Rongkong — and Luwu's influence much further north into Central Sulawesi — was based, at least in part, upon the trade in dammar as well as upon the export of iron goods and weapons.

Lastly, and significantly, we had seen the attraction of economic development for the people who live and who make their living in this difficult, mountainous region. It is easy for visiting outsiders to bemoan the sight of airstrips, television aerials, forest clearance for farming, and modern concrete housing with sanitation and electricity, all of which detract from the romance of isolation and the natural beauty of the unspoilt landscape. But the monotonous diet, the physical effort involved in moving even short distances — we averaged just 20 kilometres a day with two ponies— the difficulty of educating children and the poor health of many of the people in this isolated mountain district, as a result of ignorance rather than poverty, convinced us that 'progress' was far from being a bad thing. No-one we spoke to was in doubt that a metalled road from Sabbang to Kalumpang would be anything other than good, and all were in favour of better connection with the outside world. In short, it would allow people to enjoy some of the basic amenities that we in the developed world take for granted.

Ian Caldwell now teaches at the University of Leeds. His email address is: i.caldwell@leeds.ac.uk

Notes

1. Later I was told of the poisonous nature of *bessi* Porrero' in the Mori-speaking settlement of Matano in eastern Luwu.
2. See Do (2013) for a detailed analysis of the Lake Matano ores.
3. Bronson (1992:68) observes that in Southeast Asia mining rarely involved underground working. Ores were collected from the surface of the ground, panned from river sands, broken from outcrops, or dug from shallow pits.
4. The area has continued to attract archaeological attention. For a recent account, see Anggraeni 2012.

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