

Sandakan Sunset Cruise

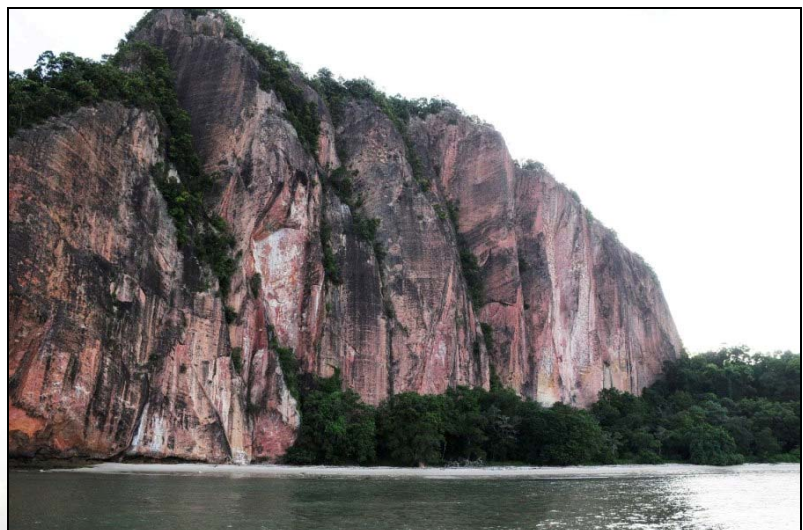
A Sabah Society-Sandakan Activity

3 June, 2011

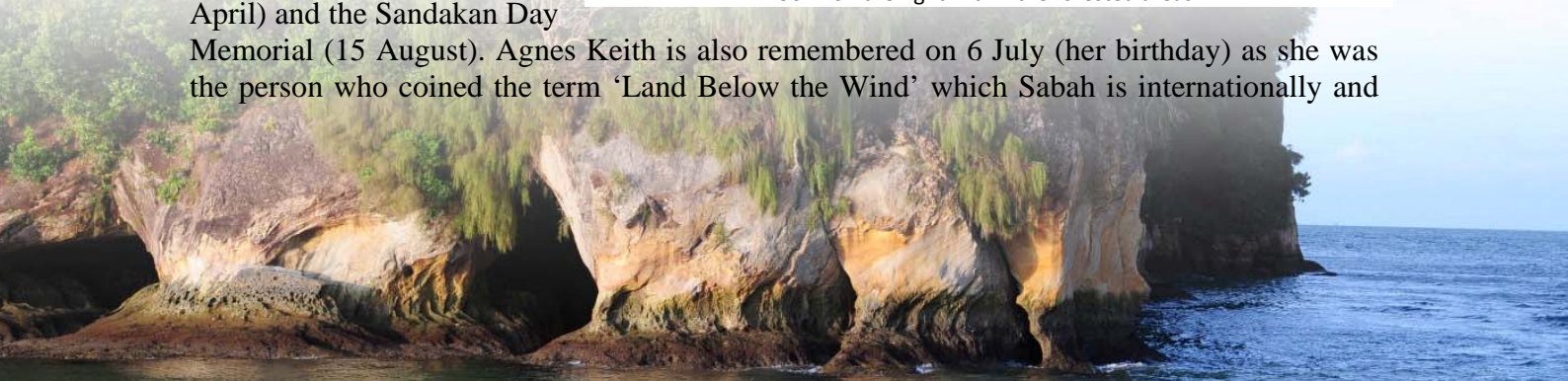
A total of 28 persons participated in this cruise, comprising the Sabah Society-Sandakan members together with their families and friends. It was a bright and sunny day, and we were looking forward for a beautiful sunset. The journey started at about 5:15 pm from the Sandakan Yacht Club, cruising towards Berhala Island within the Sandakan Bay. On the way, we saw the fishing village of Kg. Tanjung Aru, from a distance. In less than 15 minutes, we reached the Berhala Island which is easily recognized by prominent vertical sandstone cliffs. It was featured a number of times in the MAS inflight magazine as well as the Travel & Living Channel (TLC). Next to the spectacular cliffs on the right is a forested area with fine sandy beach. Historically, this area was the detention camp of the civilian internees and prisoners of wars (POWs) during World War II by the Japanese. Part of the remnants of the detention camp still could be seen today. The award-winning author of the 1939 book 'Land Below the Wind', Agnes Newton Keith was detained here during the war. Her detention ordeal was interestingly featured in her second Bornean book 'Three Came Home' which was later made into a movie. Every year, some families of the Australian POWs make their pilgrimage to Berhala during the ANZAC Day (25 April) and the Sandakan Day Memorial (15 August). Agnes Keith is also remembered on 6 July (her birthday) as she was the person who coined the term 'Land Below the Wind' which Sabah is internationally and



Some of the participants of the cruise.



The famous Berhala cliffs. Remnants of the WWII detention camp are about 50 m on the right within the forested areas.



fondly known till today. Prior to the war, Berhala Island had a small leper settlement colony. However, not much is known about the exact location of this settlement on the island.



The fisherman showing off his catch of the day.

As we cruised along, a fisherman in a wooden boat proudly showed off his catch of the day – a giant Jackfish (Ikan Putih). Fishing is a livelihood to many coastal residents of Sandakan. Many people travel to Sandakan to savour its fresh seafood and the many varieties it offers. As we were cruising, we spotted a White-bellied Sea Eagle soaring above the Berhala's forest. This is among the common birds of prey on the coastal areas of Sandakan.

The cruise moved on to the other side of the Berhala Island facing Kampung Buli Sim Sim, Sandakan. It was here at Kg. Buli Sim Sim that Sandakan was founded by William Pryer in 1879. Initially, he named the new settlement 'Elopura' which means 'beautiful city'. A few years later, however, the name was changed to 'Sandakan' which in Suluk means 'the place that was pawned'. Who pawned it, and to whom, remains a mystery. One of the landmarks next to Kg. Buli Sim Sim is the magnificent Sandakan Mosque, built in 1986. With houses on stilts, Kg. Buli Sim Sim is also popularly known by locals and tourists as a place to buy and savour fresh seafood in Sandakan, especially the restaurants at 'Jambatan Nombor 8'. The market at Buli Sim Sim is known for its grilled fish (ikan bakar) which is much sought after by the local community and tourists from Peninsular Malaysia.



View of the Sandakan Mosque and Kg. Buli Sim Sim from the cruise.



Close-up of a Filipino boat that brings bartered goods.

Moving on, we passed through some giant boats, and we were told that they were licensed Filipino boats from the neighbouring country under the barter trade system. These boats were quite unique in appearance and we managed to snap a few close-up shots.





Having refreshment on board.

The sun was slowly setting and it was a good time for sunset photography. It was also at this time that our cruise encountered some engine problems because of plastic bags and rubbish that were entangled onto the propeller. Hence, we were stuck for quite a while. The ship moved in tandem with the waves and one could not even walk properly. The rocking motion was a bit too much for a few of us, and we had to hunt for sea sickness bag to throw up. While busy throwing up, I missed the opportunity for the best sunset shot for that evening!

Eventually, the staff managed to resolve the engine problem, and we moved on, passing by the Sandakan town with the brightly-lighted Sandakan Harbour Square (SHS) at the waterfront. The SHS project was launched in 2003, and will provide a vibrant dimension to the established township and is poised to propel Sandakan towards becoming a more modern city. A modern three-storey central market, a fish market/jetty, retail outlets and shop-offices, and hotels were built on the town's unique waterfront. The construction of a four-star hotel with a convention centre is also in progress.

The ship made a turn at the end of the SHS, and we headed back to the Sandakan Yacht Club for dinner. It was revitalizing to have a wonderful meal after throwing up. The sunset cruise is something new for the Sandakan community and it can be an additional attraction in promoting Sandakan tourism. Overall, it was an evening of fun and good fellowship.



Compiled by Arthur Y. C. Chung and edited by Robert Ong, with sources from:

Anon. 2003. *Sabah, Malaysian Borneo: alluring east coast*. Sabah Tourism Board. 38 pp.

Anon. Undated. *Sandakan: the nature city*. Sandakan Tourism Committee, Sandakan Municipal Council. 48 pp.

Lai, K. H. (ed.) 2004. *Sandakan Nature City commemorative book*. Sandakan Municipal Council. 98 pp.



More snapshots!

Photos by Irene Chong

