

# CoR Newsletter

Issue 2  
December 2020



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### Editor's Note (Prof Dr Norlisah Mohd Ramli)

Assalamualaikum and a Good Day to my colleagues.

**CoR Newsletter**, the College of Radiology first newsletter was created in Nov 2020, as another mode for the society to reach out to its members in adapting to the new normal situation of Covid-19.

Our first, Issue 1 - Nov 2020, was exclusively to commemorate the International Day of Radiology with the theme "Radiologists and Radiographers Supporting Patients during Covid-19" on 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2020. I believe the article, which was put together in a very short space of time by our Radiologists and Radiographers from various parts of Malaysia was absolutely interesting and insightful. A very big thank you to all for their effort and dedication on the project. I hope our member readers have enjoyed the article.

Our aim for 2021 is to have one newsletter issue every 2 months - it may have an exclusive topic or a combination of smaller topics. We welcome members who would like to contribute articles suitable for **CoR Newsletter** to send them to [secretariat@radiologymalaysia.org](mailto:secretariat@radiologymalaysia.org) - for appropriateness, only articles vetted and approved by the editorial team will be published.

Welcome to our CoR Newsletter Issue 2 – Dec 2020. We are coming to the end of historical 2020. The year where our roles as frontliners, teachers, income earners, policymakers, family members and friends have been put to the test. As it is with all tests, some would fail while others would endure and overcome. Hence, the theme for this issue is about endurance.

It gives me great pleasure to present this article highlighting Dr. Ravi Mandalam, our member radiologist. He has conquered Mount Kinabalu fifty times! I hope his story will inspire all of us to endure and persevere when times are at our hardest.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish our members who celebrate Christmas a Very Merry Christmas and to all members a Joyous, Prosperous and Safe New Year 2021. May the new year be kinder than the current.

Thank you.

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#### **CoR Newsletter Editorial Team**

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Prof. Dr Norlisah Mohd Ramli*

*Editorial Assistants:  
Ms. Dionne Pereira  
Ms. Lesley Whitelaw*

# **MY KINABALU JOURNEY**

## **The story of my climbs in twenty five years**

Dr K. Ravi Mandalam

Consultant Radiologist

KPJ Sabah Specialist Hospital

Kota Kinabalu

## **Kinabalu - Sabah's Magnificent Icon**

Kinabalu, the highest mountain in Malaysia is a granite massif, 4095m tall that towers over Borneo – the most commanding feature of its landscape. Its forests cover four vegetation zones – lowland dipterocarp rainforest, lower montane, upper montane and alpine; the summit is bare rock devoid of vegetation except a few shrubs. It is a beacon of biodiversity with an astounding variety of flora and fauna, earning it the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Every year (before the current pandemic) nearly 300,000 tourists visit the Kinabalu Park and about 50,000 climbers attempt the two-day climb to its summit. Kinabalu is Sabah's perennial icon – it features in the State Flag and emblem, the capital city's name, shop fronts, NGO names, party logos, picture postcards, native legends – it is everywhere.

## **My first glimpse**

My own Kinabalu story started with the very first glimpse I had of this magnificent mountain. I had arrived in Kota Kinabalu from India only a week earlier on 16 Sep 1994, to take up my new assignment as radiologist at the Sabah Medical Centre, a position held previously by Dr Ahmad Kamal (1986-88) and Dr Charanpal Singh (1988-94), both from the Peninsula. A colleague took me on a drive along the coastal highway when I suddenly saw this huge mountain in the eastern horizon. Until that moment, it had remained hidden from my view by the perpetual day-time clouds.



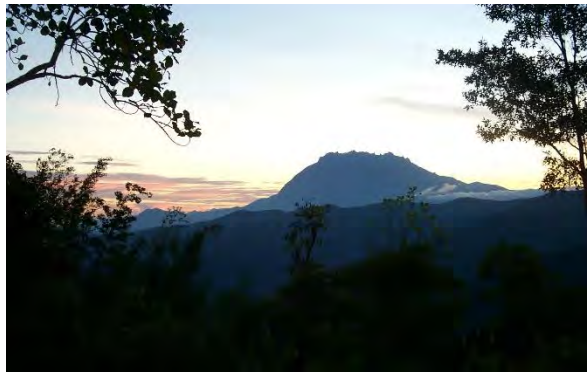
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*On one of  
my earliest  
climbs in  
the 1990s*

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## The very first climb

As my contract was only for 3 years, I was encouraged by friends to attempt climbing Kinabalu at least once, before I left Sabah. My first climb took place on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1995, which incidentally was the first anniversary of my arrival in Sabah. I was accompanied by five other friends and colleagues. I was not to know at that time that I was going to stay back forever in this wonderland and this was to be the beginning of my enduring fascination with Kinabalu.




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*South face of  
Kinabalu –  
the so called  
AP view*

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*West face of  
Kinabalu  
from Tuaran  
– the lateral  
view*

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Upon reaching the summit of Low's Peak, the highest point on the mountain on my first climb, I noticed that it was not just a giant hill I had presumed, but a vast mountain system with many branching ridges, ranges and valleys and a second, much larger summit, the Eastern Plateau across a deep canyon called Low's Gully. Curious to get a more complete idea of its topography, I decided to start collecting pictures of Kinabalu.




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*Aerial view of Kinabalu – the deep gorge in the middle called Low’s Gully splits the mountain into two. Labels name all the prominent peaks. Low’s Peak is the highest peak*

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## **The Radiologist’s Solution – AP and Lateral Views**

It is interesting how a radiologist’s perspective helps in understanding mountain topography – my training in imagining and visualizing 3-dimensional structures from 2-dimensional images, AP and lateral, came in very useful. Picture postcards depicted the mountain from the familiar south face, visible from KK and the Kinabalu Park – can call it the frontal or AP view, to borrow a radiological term! I needed a “lateral” view to get a better idea of the mountain. A drive to Tuaran, north of KK, gave me that magnificent lateral view. Later, I also looked for an “axial” image – an aerial view, and found it ultimately in the library of Sabah Society – a nature NGO quite similar to Malaysian Nature Society. The Sabah Society, whose life member I became, was to be a treasure trove of information in those early 1990s, when Internet was still in its infancy and online information very meager.



*Bulbophyllum lobbii – a lovely orchid species*



*Nepenthes tentaculata – one of the smaller pitcher plants with prominent rows of bristles on its pitcher*




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*Schima wallichii* –  
an upper montane  
bush an upper  
montane shrub with  
spectacular pink and  
white flowers

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Geologically, Kinabalu is a gigantic block of granite that rose from beneath the ocean floor one million years ago and is split by the mile-deep Low's Gully as a result of a glacier that flowed through its middle during the Ice Ages. At the end of the last Ice Age, the glacier disappeared, leaving a deep ravine and a split mountain with two summits, the frequently climbed western and the more remote and much bigger eastern summit, both of them having numerous peaks and pinnacles. Low's Peak, the highest and also the most easily climbed peak on Kinabalu is in the middle of the western Summit.




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*Trachymene  
saniculifolium* – an  
upper montane shrub  
with tiny white flowers

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*Nepenthes burbidgea*  
– a bulbous pitcher  
having pink spots on  
a cream-colored  
background

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*Nepenthes rajah* –  
the King of pitcher  
plants, with the  
largest pitcher that  
can reach up to  
45cm in height

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*Nepenthes edwardsiana* – a large cylindrical pitcher plant with very sharp teeth all around its mouth

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*Rhododendron rugosum* - one of the rhododendron species on Kinabalu

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## Expeditions – off the beaten track

Understanding the vastness of Kinabalu gave the impetus to visit some of its less accessible and spectacularly beautiful parts. In 2001 I teamed up with Dr (now Prof) Chin Shui Hiung, a senior gynecologist and Mr. Christopher Chin, a senior lawyer for a decade-long partnership – a saga of exploring many parts of the mountain. Mr. Martin Moguring, Sabah Parks Ranger and Ms Rossiti, Park Ecologist, were our constant guides. These explorations were to result in two books authored by the three of us “*The Hugh Low Trail*” and “*East Kinabalu*”. On my own too, I wrote two more books “*The Kotal Route Sketches*” and “*The Bowen’s Route Chronicles*”. The explorations took us along many rugged difficult trails and to far-off areas, such as the Marai Parai Plateau on the western flank of Kinabalu, Lobang Cave on the historic Hugh Low Trail and the wide expanse of the Eastern Plateau which we climbed via three different routes – the Bowen’s route in the south, the Kotal Route from the east and the Penataran or Bulangga Route from the north.



The dizzying climb to the Eastern Plateau – a series of ladders on a near vertical rock wall lead to the top of the plateau. Below the ladders is a vertical drop! Not for the faint-hearted!

## Kinabalu – an opportunity for team building and motivation

Good Radiology practice is all team work. Our efficient service depends a great deal on the vital support of a committed team of well-trained radiographers, nursing staff and also reception staff that handle appointments, registration, enquiries and dispatch work. Team motivation is an essential periodic activity in keeping staff morale and cooperative spirit at a high level. After a few years of climbing on my own, I resolved to use mountain climbing as a team motivating exercise. In 2008, I took five physically fit staff members on a new challenge that had opened on Mount Kinabalu – the *Via Ferrata*. The term literally means ‘through iron’. The Kinabalu Park had fixed thousands of metres of steel cables and iron steps on steep rock faces which could be climbed by amateur climbers using safety harness – a new adventure. Encouraged by the success of the *Via Ferrata* climb, in 2011 I took a larger contingent of my staff on a regular climb of Kinabalu; all except one of these youngsters reached the summit! Their enthusiasm and camaraderie could only be experienced, cannot be described in words! The 2011 climb was to be the beginning of many such trips – to Mt Trus Madi, Mt Tambuyukon, Crocker Range Salt Trail, Marai Parai Plateau and Imbak Canyon, to name a few.



*On the summit of Eastern Plateau – King George Peak. Many peaks were named by early British explorers and carry names of British Royals. The Western Summit with its many peaks can be seen in the background, across Low's Gully.*

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*Alexandra Peak,  
seen at sunset from  
the Marai Parai  
Plateau on the west  
side of Kinabalu.*



**Via Ferrata – my staff  
going up a rock face.  
Steel cables are fixed on  
the rock at intervals.  
Metal steps below the  
cables help the amateur  
climber to go up steep  
surfaces. A rope bridge  
can be seen far above,  
across a gap in the rock.**



*Me on a steep rock  
face. Good  
footwear is crucial  
to get a safe  
footing on the  
rock.*



*My staff and I rest  
at a pondok on the  
regular trail to the  
summit – it is a two-  
day climb, very safe.*



*On Day 2 the climb to the summit starts very early at 2AM, to reach the peak by sunrise.*



*Low's Peak, the highest point on Kinabalu. Climbers on their way to the top early in the morning.*



*At the top at last. Our team at the summit of Low's Peak.*

## **Kinabalu – the ultimate interior decoration**

When we moved into our new premises in 2014, I got permission from my management to decorate my department with pictures of Kinabalu. The most attractive of them is a large 6'x6' historic, black and white, aerial photograph, taken by the Lands and Survey Department using a surveyor's large format camera in the early 1960s, which we have displayed in the patient waiting area. The picture is a big attraction and patients often take selfies standing next to it.



*My staff and I in the waiting area of our department with the big Kinabalu picture in the background.*

### **Radiologists can work from mountain tops**

It may interest our radiology colleagues to know that hand-phone and Wifi signals are quite strong on the summit of Kinabalu. In 2016 I took my iPad fitted with a 4G Celcom SIM card and logged in to my hospital PACS system at the summit and reported a couple of x-rays too – radiologists can work from anywhere!



*Log in at the summit – radiologists who use Infinitt PACs will recognize the tool bar.*

## Kinabalu – the fund-raiser

Mountain climbing is a good activity for fund-raising. In November 2017 I and seven other experienced climbers – Dr Helen Lasimbang (Gynecologist), Dr Liaw Yun Haw (Pediatrician), Dr Chuah Uei Chyi (Orthopedic Surgeon), Dr Peter Ong (General Surgeon), Mr. John Linus (Director NGO), Ms Sikunda Anggau (Staff Nurse) and Mr. George Ng (Rotarian) undertook a **back-to-back climb of Sabah's three highest mountains – Kinabalu, Trusmadi and Tambuyukon over 7 days**, as a fund-raising activity for my Rotary Club of Kota Kinabalu to aid poor patients in rural areas needing cataract surgery.



*The 50<sup>th</sup> climb – with my mountain pals at the base of Low's Peak.*

## Nearing fifty

It was after the 3-mountain climb that I realized, I had done over 40 climbs – I had always kept my certificates and Kinabalu Park climber's name tags after my climbs, but never counted them before! This was to be the impetus to reach the 50 climbs mark. Over the next 3 years, I undertook those remaining climbs, most of them solo. For my 50<sup>th</sup> Climb, many of my climbing *kakis* were eager to join me. We started on Sep 11, 2020, duly reaching the summit of Low's Peak on the next day in the most comfortable weather with beautiful blue skies. It has been a great 25 year journey and I am grateful to God for giving me physical fitness and good health and also grateful to all my friends, who have joined, encouraged and supported me in this endeavor. God willing and health permitting, I hope to continue climbing, albeit at a slower pace.

## An earnest message

Kinabalu fascinates and inspires one and all who get 'acquainted' with it. My message to all youngsters in Sabah and elsewhere in Malaysia – we have a world-class mountain with a safe and well-maintained trail – seize the opportunity and climb it as often as you can. The benefits are immense – getting a glimpse into the wonders created by Mother Nature, knowing the importance of conservation for the ecological health of the planet and for future generations and reaping the spin-off bonus of good health and physical fitness.