

## THROUGH RAIN-FORESTS IN CENTRAL MALAYA

By D. DWIGHT DAVIS

CURATOR OF VERTEBRATE ANATOMY

THE INTERNATIONAL Biological Congress held last December at the University of Malaya in Singapore, the first such congress ever held in Malaya, was an outstanding success. Guests from twelve countries, representing four of the five continents, participated in the program, which ran from 8:30 in the morning to 5 in the afternoon every day for a week, with lectures and discussion groups each evening. Sunday was taken up with conducted field trips to places of special biological interest on Singapore Island. The general theme of the congress was divided between evolution, especially as it is seen in the tropics, and tropical ecology. The writer was official representative of Chicago Natural History Museum.

I had planned, following the congress, to spend about two months in the field in various parts of Malaya, exploring the country and collecting specimens for the Museum's reference collections and exhibition halls. Thanks largely to the extraordinary generosity of John R. Hendrickson, of the Zoology Department of the University of Malaya, it was possible to carry out this program in the short time I had available. Together we visited representative lowland areas in various parts of central and southern Malaya, including several localities of historical interest because they were worked a century ago by Alfred Russel Wallace and described in his classical work *The Malay Archipelago*. The spirit of Wallace, who with Charles Darwin propounded the currently-accepted theory of evolution, was much in evidence during the congress and throughout my stay.

### CIVILIZATION LEFT BEHIND

Our first trip was to the King George V National Park, an area of about 1,700 square miles in central Malaya. The park is reached by an overnight train trip on the "Golden Blowpipe" from Singapore to Kuala Tembeling, where civilization ends and the train turns northwest on its way to the Siamese border. The last 50 miles to the park is an all-day trip by small river boat up the Tembeling River to park headquarters at the mouth of the Tahan River. The park is a virgin rain-forest, much of it still unsurveyed, and is without roads and has only a few jungle trails. It is typical of the immense Indo-Malayan rain-forest that once covered much of southeastern Asia, but has been destroyed or seriously damaged by man over most of its former range. Destruction of the remnants of the forest is still going on; in western Malaya we walked through a new clearing where the stumps of giant forest trees were still smoldering among newly-planted seedling rubber trees.

Rain-forest is an endlessly fascinating feature of the tropics to biologists. It is more

favorable to life than any other land habitat, and here life has evolved with an exuberance unmatched anywhere except in certain parts of the sea. The biological problems are almost overwhelming, and challenging new questions come up daily during field work. One of the results of this favorable environment is that it provides a haven for archaic forms that elsewhere have lost out in the struggle for existence. This extends even to

visitor often sees for the first time things he previously knew only from books. I will never forget my first sight, in such a patch of forest, of the giant pitcher plants for which the Indo-Malayan forest is famous among botanists. Slogging cross-country through a particularly bad patch of forest in western Johore, I almost stepped on them, a cluster of globular pitchers, each the size of my fist, on the forest floor. Later I saw bigger and



### NEW YEAR'S EVE IN THE MALAYAN JUNGLE

Celebrating a successful collecting trip as well as the beginning of 1959, Curator D. Dwight Davis, expedition leader (at extreme right) attends party with his associates in camp on the flank of Mount Ophir.

primitive human cultures, and one of the memorable events during our travels in the park was to stumble upon a group of pigmy Negritos, whose culture is as primitive as any that survives today. Naked except for a skimpy loincloth and armed with blowguns and poisoned darts, these people have no fixed abode but wander in the forest as nomads, hunting and gathering food. Later we came upon a spot beside the trail where these same people had the day before been digging edible roots from the jungle floor.

Subsequent trips took us to Bukit Serampang, on the flanks of Mount Ophir on the Malacca border, and to Gunong Pulai and other mountain areas in southern Malaya. All the lowland parts of southern Malaya have been cleared and are under intensive cultivation, mostly rubber, and the only remaining vestiges of the original forest are on hills and mountains unsuited to cultivation. Fortunately a good deal of the plant and animal life of the Malayan rain-forest is able to make a go of it in these patches of forest, and may be expected to survive there as long as the trees are left standing. Much of the biology of the rain-forest can be studied effectively even in these situations. Here too the

more spectacular species of pitcher plants in other parts of Malaya, but none had the impact of the first encounter.

### COSMOPOLITAN PARTY

The composition of our field parties varied from time to time, but always had an international flavor. We happened to be in the Mount Ophir area at the end of the year, and our New Year party was a truly polyglot affair. Seven of us—two Americans, two Chinese, two Malays, and an Iban from western Borneo—welcomed the new year crowded together in a little thatch lean-to in the jungle, with conversations going on in four languages and the heavy air of the jungle night perfumed with the odor of joss sticks burning to repel mosquitos. Our orchestra for this occasion was the distant hallooing of a Tamil rubber planter, shouting throughout the night to drive sambar deer away from his young rubber trees. It was a proper climax for a day in which we had succeeded in getting tape recordings of the astonishing progression of jungle sounds that accompanies the change from late afternoon to evening, and then later had had the good fortune to collect two species of giant flying

squirrels, each the size of a small cat, within a few yards of each other in the forest.

The ecology of the tropical rain-forest is being studied by a small but enthusiastic group of botanists and zoologists in Malaya. To a considerable extent these men are dependent upon background studies that can be made only in the great museums of America and Europe. The interchange of ideas that results from occasional working together in the field is of immense benefit to both sides, and a formal congress such as the one recently held in Singapore is an equally important step in the direction of scientific teamwork.

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## HOW BOTANIST "TICKS"—

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here all the persons to whom we are indebted for assistance in our field work in Guatemala, their help often of a most practical and frequently very substantial nature. We are sure they do not expect thanks beyond those offered at the time their services were performed."

Of interest also is a section of Standley's and Steyermark's plan of the Flora, viz.:

"We have collected most of the vernacular names [of the plants covered by the book]. Others have been taken from the labels of other collectors, and some from publications whose accuracy we trust. . . . The vernacular names entered here doubtless include some mistakes, even after the best of care, and this is particularly probable in case of non-Spanish terms.

"There is much more to be done in the field of Guatemalan vernacular names. In published lists we have seen many plant names whose identity it is impossible to guess. The value of a particular vernacular name varies usually in proportion to the importance of the plant. If the plant is one of which some definite use is made, or a showy and conspicuous one, the vernacular name is likely to be fixed and in common usage. If the plant is inconspicuous, or if no use is made of it, the vernacular name often is open to suspicion and seldom is in common use. However, the local standards of importance and individual ideas of beauty or conspicuousness may differ from those of the questioning botanical collector. It always is unwise to press for a vernacular name, and it is much better to ask for one indirectly. Many people have a talent for manufacturing them on the spot and find great satisfaction in fooling a foreigner and boasting about it afterwards. The senior author greatly admired the ability in this respect of a small boy at Jutiapa. He happened to have a remarkable knowledge of the plants of the region, but he was not content with what he really knew. He would invent a name almost as quickly as a new plant was found, and his names often

were extraordinarily suitable and subtle—too much so for belief. Adults in country districts think they will lose face if they can not supply a name for any plant found, and will often make a clumsy effort to manufacture one. And a great many Central Americans, like natives of the United States, make mistakes in recognition of plants, thus giving them incorrect names belonging to other plants. People who recognize wild plants easily when in the ground, often are unable to place them when they see a detached branch in a work room. Woodsmen usually pay more attention to the bark and trunk of a tree than to any other portion of it, and if reliable names for trees are desired, it is better to obtain them from a qualified person standing by the tree in question."

## Books

**DIGGING INTO HISTORY.** By Paul S. Martin; drawings by Gustaf Dalstrom. 157 pages, 48 halftones, 15 text-figures, 1 map. Chicago Natural History Museum—Popular Series, Anthropology, No. 38. \$1.50.

*Digging into History* is the story of fifteen years' investigation of the prehistoric Indians of west-central New Mexico, under the leadership of Dr. Paul S. Martin, Chief Curator of Anthropology at Chicago Natural History Museum. This handsome book is written for the non-specialist and the beginning student, and not only sketches the life of the people, as it can be inferred from their rubbish and their ruined houses, but also undertakes to explain the purposes and procedures of archaeology. This dual aim results in a book with a great deal of food for thought, and the many definitions and explanations sometimes crowd so closely that careful reading is needed. The story of the past is interrupted with interesting discussions of the means by which archaeologists find and interpret the evidence for that story.

The narrative of *Digging into History* begins very near the beginning of human history in the New World, for the Southwestern United States is one of the regions through which the first migrants from Asia wandered. Besides hunting big game—bison and elephants, particularly—the wandering bands also gathered the seeds of many wild plants. Through their increasing familiarity with the possibilities of plant foods, they slowly came to place greater and greater dependence on maize, and by 500 B.C. it was their mainstay. Both hunting and the gathering of wild plant foods continued but declined in importance; the increasingly large and numerous permanent agricultural communities depended chiefly on maize, beans and squash. Settled life and a more certain food supply were accompanied by changes in almost every other

## SPECIAL EXHIBITS

The following special exhibits are scheduled for the summer months:

**Panorama of the Pacific**, through July 15, Stanley Field Hall. This exhibit, which was the feature of Members' Night, May 8, displays selected material from the Fuller Collection of South Seas artifacts.

**Amateur Gem and Jewelry Show**, sponsored by the Chicago Lapidary Club. June 5–30, Albert W. Harris Hall (Hall 18). See story on page 4.

**The Music Makers—Exotic Musical Instruments of the World.** June 24–August 31, Edward E. and Emma B. Ayer Hall (Hall 2).

**Indian Art of the Americas**, August 1–September 30, Stanley Field Hall. Selected *objets d'art* from the North, Central, and South American collections of this and other leading museums. The exhibit coordinates with Chicago's Festival of the Americas in connection with the Pan American Games.

## Museum Books Recommended on List for Schools

Three books published by the Museum are listed in "An Inexpensive Science Library," a catalog of paperbound books recommended for high school libraries, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Science Foundation. The Museum selections occur in the list of 30 titles in the section on archaeology and anthropology. They are: *Prehistoric Men*, by Robert J. Braidwood; *The Civilization of the Mayas*, by J. Eric Thompson, and *People of the South Pacific*, by Albert B. Lewis.

aspect of life, and Martin describes the changes through the centuries in house architecture, village plans, dress, religious practices, and all the other aspects of the Indians' lives for which evidence has been unearthed.

Although there are a few comments on the relationships of this corner of the Southwest to other regions, the emphasis in this book is on the long record of slow but persistent change in this one small area. It is an impressive record, spanning some 10,000 years, and it is instructive of the ways in which man both depends on his natural environment, with all its constraints, and also continually discovers new means of transcending its momentary limitations. Martin tells the story with both imagination and proper scientific restraint. Everyone who has an interest in Indians, in the past, or in learning how history is unearthed will find this book enjoyable reading.

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