

HUMAN TREE-DWELLERS OF MALAYA

By CASPAR WHITNEY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR AND CAPTAIN G. S. CERRUTI

FOR two days, through the jungle tangle of interior Malaya, I had been on fresh rhinoceros tracks. Originally I had found some in Perak, only to lose them, and now I found myself on others approaching the limits of the up-country section. Perak is the most important, as it is the most northerly, of the four Federated (British protected) States of the Malay Peninsula. It is also the most mountainous—and the wettest. They told me at Telok Anson, where the coasting steamer dropped me that Perak has no true rainy season; but some months are wetter than others, and I had chosen the wettest, it seemed.

Approaching from the west coast, Perak offers an entrancing view—the irregular clearings hacked for settlement out of the jungle, their dark tropical edging, the hills in the immediate background, and

farther away the Tongkal Range, which helps to give Malay its mountainous backbone—all wooded to the very top. The State has half a dozen peaks over 5,000 feet high, and I had left one of these, Gunong (mount) Lalang, on the west, as I bore northeasterly across the head waters of the Perak River and over the range, laboriously journeying toward Keletan, a native state which pushes into Patani, which again reaches northward into Lower Siam.

I had set out, in the first instance, for a rhino that differs from known Malayan varieties in having fringes of hair on its ears—the Malayan itself being the smallest of the single-horned species—and which was said, on occasion, to wander down from Siam into the northern border of Malay. But my hunting had been unrewarded, and by now I was not particular whether my rhino had



The Sakai Man in Prime of Life.



The Nose Flute Players; Bark Loins-Cloth and Head-Band

hair on its ears or tail. So I was making my way toward the Telubin River, which runs down to the China Sea on the east, and where, I had been told at Singapore, rhino were reported to be plentiful. We had left roads, and the pack elephants, half way down on the other side of the range, and were pushing forward through the jungle with five Malay packers, a Chinese cook, and a Tamil—eight of us all told.

It was my first experience with elephants, and their agility and handiness, and the intelligence with which they accepted and overcame unusual conditions in traveling, amazed and interested me. Without seeing it I would not have believed that so large and apparently clumsy an animal could be so nimble, even shifty, on its feet, on the trying trails we encountered all through the valleys and up and down the mountains. I

was greatly interested, often amused, at the extreme carelessness they exercised. Where the path was at all uncertain the trunk explored every step before the huge feet were placed, with almost mathematical precision. And never for an instant was their vigilance relaxed; always the trunk felt the way, sounding the road, the bridge, the depth of the pool or stream. But perhaps their climbing up steep ascents, and over ground so slippery that I, with hob-nailed shoes, could scarcely secure foothold, impressed me most. One instance of their resourcefulness especially surprised me. We came to a sharp, clayey incline, at the top of which the bank had broken away, leaving an absolutely sheer place about eight feet in height. I wondered how the elephants would negotiate this, but it did not bother them as much as me, for the leader simply put his trunk over the top of the bank, raising himself up until he got his forefeet on it, and then with trunk and forelegs dragged his great body over the edge until his hind legs were under him.

The elephant is not a fast traveler, though he is sure and of enormous strength. I never saw one slip, and they kept going even when sunk belly deep in the swamp. Three miles the hour was our average, which fell to two in the hilly country, and in the mountains I doubt if we made over one mile an hour. Each elephant carried six to seven hundred pounds on fair roads, as a good load, which was reduced to four hundred pounds when they began climbing.

I was without an interpreter. The one I had engaged for the trip died of cholera before we got beyond the settlements, and as the rainy season is the most unhealthful period for adventure into the jungle, I was unable to replace him. My Tamil servant knew a few English words—knew them so imperfectly as to put to confusion every attempt at mutual understanding.

After the first couple of days winding into the hills past tin mines, the most valued deposit in the State, our trail through Perak led across swamps, over mountains, and up and down valleys—and always in mud—sometimes up to knees, always over ankles. Once we had got deep into the jungle, a view ahead was never possible, even on top of the mountains, because of the density of the great forest. And such a dismal jungle! Not even a bird note; not a sound of any kind, save that made by the squashing of our own feet in the oozy going.

The interior of Malay is covered with a primeval forest of upstanding trees, limbless to their very tops, where umbrella-like, they open into great knobs of foliage, and form a huge canopy so thick that not a ray of sunlight may break through. Beneath is the most luxuriant and wettest vegetation to be found on earth. Palms, bamboos, ferns, and plants of rankest and endless variety, hide the ground and rise to form yet another forest of smaller though thicker growth; while rattans and vines and creeping things stretch

from tree to tree, to make a continuous series of giant festoons.

And the malarial smell everywhere!

It required a heavy rain to come steadily through that close canopy; but it arrived. Nor was the rain needed to complete our drenching; except for the footing there was little appreciable difference wading the chin-deep streams, or plowing through the dripping jungle under that leaky canopy. Indeed, the stream wading was much to be preferred, for only at such times we escaped the leeches.

Leeches and lizards and centipedes and numberless other varieties of crawling unpleasantness were, in fact, the only living things I had seen thus far. And of leeches there were literally myriads. They fastened upon you actually from crown to foot, as you worked your way through the ferns and grasses, which reach high above your head. Notwithstanding carefully adjusted puttees and a closely tied handkerchief, it was impossible to keep leeches from getting in at the ankle and at the neck. Every now and again, we halted to pick off those we



Using the Blow-Gun

could reach; and then you could see them on all sides making slow but persistent way toward you, in alternate stretchings and humpings.

This was not ideal country for camping, as may be imagined. Dry ground, even a dry log to rest upon, was not to be found; but, the shelter the Malays built each night at least protected us from the unceasing rain. These were simply made, serviceable little sheds, constricted of the always at hand bamboo and attap leaves in no longer time than it takes to pitch a tent. Here was the one occasion when the mud seemed a blessing, for it proved a yielding, yet firm setting for the four poles which served as corner posts and the two longer ones placed at each end to support a ridge pole. Smaller bamboo and, as often as not, rattan, placed at the sides, and bent and secured across the ridge pole, completed the frame, over which were stretched the large and useful leaves of the attap palm. Inside, again, corner posts with slats of bamboo laid lengthways made very comfortable beds; and, with crossway slats, stout benches for our provisions and general camp impedimenta; for, of course, it was necessary to raise everything damagable above the mud.

So we traveled on and on, looking for tracks, dragging ourselves for hours, ankle-deep in mud, along stretches of swamp, where the rhino feed appeared particularly tempting (although rhino generally feed early in the morning and at dusk), or, crouched until walking was all but impossible, sneaking into every more than usually dense bit of cover which suggested a pool or a rhino bed. It was wet, cheerless work; and what gets wet in that jungle stays wet. Except for the water you have wrung out of them, the soaked clothes you hang at night on a bamboo stake driven deep into the mud are equally as soaked when you try to put them on again in the morning bright-light.

My men did not appear to take much interest in the search for rhino; indeed, they pursued the journey with great reluctance, for at best the Malay is not a hunter; stalking game does not appeal to him. He never, by choice, hunts in the rainy season, but takes the more sensible method of sitting up over an animal's drinking hole in the dry season, or over a bait. Besides, they stand much in awe of the rhino, which they rarely hunt, notwithstanding its blood and horn

being worth almost their weight in gold at the Chinese chemists', who use them in mystical medical concoctions. Once we found plain tracks that in due course led down the mountain to a rushing, roaring stream, which we could not cross, although the tracks showed that the rhino had at least made the attempt, and nowhere for a mile down stream could we find signs on our side that he had not succeeded. This experience came near to stopping the expedition, for the Malays seemed determined to turn back, and as I was without even the first aid to communication which my Tamil servant (before I sent him back ill with fever) furnished, I had recourse to looking pleasant and offering gifts. Finally we did go on, though the Malays had no liking for it, and were sullen.

There had been days of this kind of experience, so that now, when I had actually come on fresh tracks, my thankfulness was both deep and sincere. At first the tracks were distinct, and I had no difficulty in following them, particularly where, for a considerable distance, they led through what may be called a jungle runaway, which is a passage forced through the heaviest underbrush by the rhino, and of such density that, were you standing within a half dozen feet, the beast might go through unseen, though not of course unheard. But on this, the second day, the tracks led up hill from the swampy land of the valley. The rain was falling, unusually hard, and the water flowed down the hillside almost in streams, making it, of course, very difficult to follow the tracks—sometimes entirely obliterating them. Hence I worked forward slowly. I had ceased to depend upon my men, though I kept two up with me, leaving the others to come more leisurely with the packs, so that at nightfall we camped where we happened to be—which was about as good a plan as any other, for there was no choice of camping ground in that country.

All morning I followed the tracks with extreme difficulty, but in the early afternoon they led to drier ground, which as it approached the hilltop became more open, and, far in advance of my two men, I pushed my way along more rapidly, with all attention focussed upon the tracks, and every hunter's sense tingling in exquisite alertness. Suddenly and noiselessly, a something seemed to dodge behind a tree; then another, and yet another—and still a fourth—all in front

and to right and left of me. I saw no definite shape—merely caught the glimpse of a moving object as the eye will, without actually seeing it. I knew it could not be a rhino. As I stood, I caught sight of a black-topped head looking furtively at me from behind a tree, but it popped back instantly on my discovery. Then another head from behind another tree, and again a third, and

of half-wild people, Sakais, that roamed the northern section of Malaya. I am a believer in preparedness, however, especially when the atmosphere is unfriendly, as my sullen party suggested it might be, so I backed against a tree, with cocked rifle, and in addition to the full half-magazine, took four cartridges out of my belt that I might have them in hand did the necessity arise.



The Sakai Women that Live Near Settlements Affect the Malay Dress, but Decorate Their Faces as in the Jungle.

so on until it became a game of hide and seek with some times several heads poked out, turtle fashion, from behind the concealing trees. I could get but the merest glance, but that told me the heads did not belong on Malay shoulders, and yet I knew not what they were, nor was I prepared to see human beings of any kind in this country, friendly or unfriendly, although I had heard tales

Thus I stood ready for whatever emergency might come. There was no movement on the part of my hidden watchers, however, other than that the heads continued popping out and back, and from many new quarters, keeping me busily watchful. It was the most acute case of rubber-neck I have ever developed. Thus I stood waiting for something to happen, and impatient to exaspera-

tion after ten minutes of this rubbering game that nothing did happen.

At last came my two Malays. The heads now all popped out and stayed out, but no body followed from behind the trees. As he took in the situation, Jin Pari, my head man, pointed energetically at the heads and repeated over and again "Sakai"—by which I learned I had indeed fallen in with the tree-dwelling aborigines of Malaya.

Some long-range conversation was now begun between my Malays and the heads, and finally, with evident hesitation, a man stepped from behind one of the trees, and in the course of a few minutes was joined by others, until there were eight of them grouped fifty or sixty feet away, regarding us with very apparent suspicion. Except for a small loin covering, they were naked, and some of them painted in fantastic figures. More long range talk followed, and the strangers' voices sounded curiously high and nasal. Several minutes more of jabber, and my men started toward the Sakais, who immediately darted back in trepidation, and would have fled had not the Malays stopped, and, I judge shouted friendly messages to them. Back and forth, with long intervals, this shouting continued for fully an hour. Mean time, as it was impossible for me to hold conversation with any one, I, of course, had no actual knowledge of what they were saying; but, I surmised the strangers feared us, and that the Malays were endeavoring to pacify them.

By this time the remainder of my party had arrive, and a general babel ensued. Finally, with one accord, the Sakais disappeared, and one of my men went forward, carrying rice, which he deposited at the base of a tree where the strangers had been standing. Then he returned to us. In ten or fifteen minutes the Sakais came back, their numbers greatly augmented, took away the rice, and replaced it with some roots and other things which looked like vegetables or fruit.

It was early in the afternoon when I had first sighted the Sakais, but what with palaver and exchange of gifts and long-range conversation, dusk came upon us while we tarried. I had not forgotten the rhino, but I had not quite found myself in these new surroundings and thought best to make haste slowly. Moreover, I was sincerely glad for the opportunity of seeing something of the Sakais, for I knew they are a people



A Good-looking Type of Young Woman in Gala Costume, Showing Bark Loin-Cloth, Necklaces of Seeds and Animal Teeth, Hair Combs, and Armbands.

about whom almost nothing is known, and of whom only one white man—an Italian—Captain G. B. Cerruti, has made a study.

They seemed to be very curious, and quite desirous of watching us, but were shy of our approaching them. They hung on the edge of our camp, maintaining a constant jabber with my Malays. With a thought of getting better acquainted, I went toward them, but they fled precipitately, and although I walked after them, they never permitted me to get near. It occurred to me that my rifle, perhaps, might be a bar to closer acquaintance, so I went back to camp and laid it down—taking the precaution to unload it and keep on my cartridge belt—the Sakais curiously following like a



A Type of Sakai Found West of Perak River.

flock of birds, all reappearing at a distance of forty or fifty feet, in open sight, so soon as I reached camp. But I got no nearer them without the rifle than with it. Always, so soon as I started toward them, they disappeared, evidently keeping close watch of me, because as I retraced my steps they were visible again.

Determined to stop in the vicinity until I should learn a little more of these people, I moved up the hill to get out of the mud-hole in which we had camped, and discovered a tree with what at first sight appeared a strange new growth, but, on close inspection, developed into a rude tiny house, with a small head and beady eyes peering at me from its platform. Farther on was another tree-house, and near it several others. I

motioned my Malays to stop here, but our camping preparations raised such a commotion among the Sakais hovering on our van, that in order to mollify them we moved on.

These houses are built in forked trees, from eight to twelve feet above the ground, and reached by bamboo ladders, which are hoisted at will. The house itself is very much of the kind of shack we put up for each night's shelter, except that the flooring is lashed together piece by piece and bound securely to the tree limbs with rattan—the sides and top covered with attap. Unfortunately, the continuous rain and semi-dusk of the jungle made it impossible for me to secure photographs of these houses.

I spent a couple of days in the vicinity, even climbed the frail bamboo ladder into one of their houses, keeping my rifle slung over my shoulders however, lest some of the Sakais opposed my intrusion with the blow-guns many carried. But I never got nearer than twenty feet or so of an individual, though I had the opportunity of examining their blow-guns and darts, and their various bamboo ornaments, which, through signs and gifts, I got them to deposit on the ground for my inspection—they always retreating as I drew near. They grew increasingly generous in their presents in return for my gifts to them; yet, always the same method of presentation had to be followed. I never could get within arm's reach of them.

These men of the woods (Orang-utang) or Sakai, as more commonly they are known, are the aborigines of Malaya, and to be found in greatest numbers in the northern part of Perak east of the river of that name—the Sakai population is estimated, I believe, at about five thousand. They are a smallish people, of lighter complexion than the Malays, though not nearly so pleasing to the eye. Indeed, they are far from comely. They have no idols, no priests, no places or things of worship, no written language, and their speech is a corrupted form of Malay. They live in small settlements, invariably in trees if in the jungle, with no tribal head. But though an altogether uncivilized people, by no means are they savage. It is a simple, unwarlike race, so raided by the Malays, in times mostly gone now that British influence has spread throughout the Peninsula, that they are exceedingly shy of all strangers; and particularly fearful of chance Malays in the forests. There are, however,

groups of Sakai living on the outskirts of Malayan settlements that have lost a considerable amount of their timidity, and these have adopted the Malayan *sarong* (skirt); but in the jungle their full dress costume consists of a small piece of cloth, pounded out of tree bark, wrapped about the loins of the adult men and women, while young men and women and the children pursue the course of their untrammelled way clothed only in nose-sticks, earrings, armbands, and hair combs. The women, in fact, are much given to adorning themselves with these things, and employ a lighter quality of bark, which they decorate in black dots and lines, to bind their hair. I marveled at the number of combs one woman would use, but the reason is the very unromantic one that many combs they believe to be preventive of disease.

Both men and women decorate their faces, and some times their bodies, mostly in a pale

yellow with flower and line zigzag patterns. Some times they stripe themselves after the manner of zebra markings; again in spots like the leopard. They seek to make their appearance as terrifying as possible to embolden them on their journeys against the wind, to which they attribute every ill that befalls them. Lightning, thunder, rainbows—all such heavenly phenomena are regarded as the messengers of the "bad ghost" of the wind, from whom they tremblingly implore deliverance. They are excessively superstitious, and on occasions of fright the women offer lighted coals and bundles of their children's hairs, while the men shoot poisoned darts from their blow-guns in the general endeavor to propitiate the evil gods.

Here, deep in the jungle of Malay, did I at last in the Far East find a people for whom the legend "made in Germany" had

no significance; all their articles of ornament (save the necklace, which is composed of seeds and animals' teeth) and utility are constructed entirely of the ubiquitous bamboo, as is the blow-gun, called *sumpitan*. This "gun" is a pipe about an inch and one half in diameter and six and one half feet in length; the bore, drilled most accurately, is quarter inch, and the darts nine inches in length, about the circumference of a heavy darning needle, sharpened at one end, and poisoned. With these they secure all the meat they eat in the jungle: birds, monkeys, snakes, lizards. They also have knives made of bamboo, with which they cut roots, herbs, and fruits. I was amazed at the marksmanship of the Sakai with these blow-guns; frequently I saw them hit with precision and repeated accuracy small targets full sixty feet distant; and they appeared able to drive a dart into the crawling flesh of lizard so far as it could be seen. I did not see them gunning for leeches; from any visible sign to the contrary, the leeches



As They Grow Older the Women Lose Whatever Good Looks They May Have Had.

did not seem to bother them. At the same time I observed they were cautious about drinking the stagnant jungle water, and that they would go far to fill their buckets, which were hollow bamboo about three feet long and four inches in diameter, from the valley streams. They seemed fond of music, if continuous effort may be accepted as indication of a musical soul, and the girls twanged a not unpleasantly queer tune on a crude, two-stringed, hollow instrument. Once I saw a man with a kind of flute, which he blew shrilly with his nose.

The woman has the entire management of the domestic

economy, and is placed at the head of the man's establishment without other ceremony, than climbing the ladder leading to his castle in the air. But the preliminary courtship is unique; the girl (she is usually twelve to fourteen) is decorated in patterns of red, yellow, and black flowers, and is then prepared for the struggle with her wooer, somewhat after the manner of the "Bundlers"—only the Sakai girl is without the help of raiment to aid in her defense of maidenly virtue. I am not familiar with the details of the Bundlers' custom, but the well-chaperoned Sakai maiden is sup-



The Patriarch Whose Tree-House I Inhabited.

posed to successfully resist the "man of the woods" for a good twelve hours; after which period she submits unprotestingly to her lover's embraces, and in due course climbs his bamboo ladder.

And always, so far as my observations went, men and women appeared to share toil and fruits of the chase in common. They are, in truth, the only genuine socialists that I have yet discovered. They divide their blessings and share one another's sorrows. Apropos of which latter I am not likely soon to forget the funeral I witnessed of a Sakai who died the morning I broke



This is an Average Type of Jungle Sakai Man, with the Bamboo Nose-Stick Ornament.



Prepared for Hunting With Blow-Gun and Quiver of Poisoned Darts.

camp to move from their midst. Every one belonging to the little band of twenty gathered around the lamented, who lay stretched out with bark cloth under him and a variety of lizards chasing one another under and over him. The mourners, all be-painted in fantastic and grotesque designs, constantly moved around the dead and the lizards as though performing a dance, and yet their movements were without enough uniformity to suggest dancing. Certainly, it was a very crude and weird ceremony, weird to a degree in the gloom and the rain of the jungle, especially the moaning and wailing. I never heard such direful sounds from human throat; and I have

heard some startling exhibitions by American Indians.

Luckily the body did not long remain in state—the lizards appeared rather impatient—and when it was lashed to a tree limb, together with blow-gun and fishing tackle, the wailing ceased; and I went on my way.

As for the rhino hunt, I must reserve the complete telling for another time, though I may add here that eventually I was successful. The tracks I was on when I stumbled across the Sakai failed me, but others in another direction did not. And there was no fringe of hair on its ears. That rhino is a myth so far as Malaya is concerned.