

# MULU – THE PINNACLES

And other adventures..

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Date : 25<sup>th</sup> December 2013

Present : Alex Ritchie, Cloudia, Jeff & others

Weather : Cloudy, temperature ranging from 20 - 28C

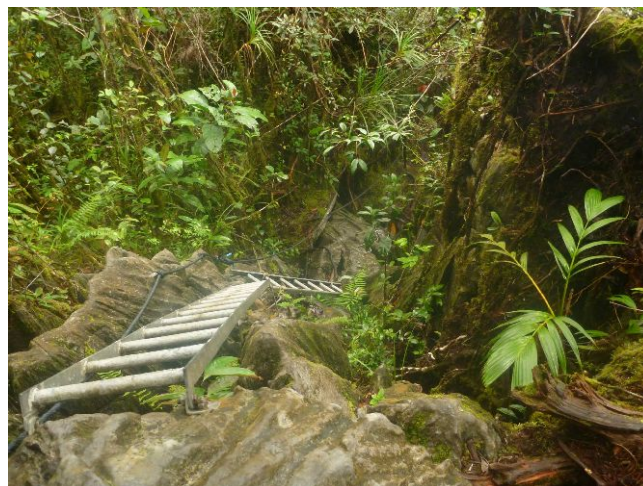
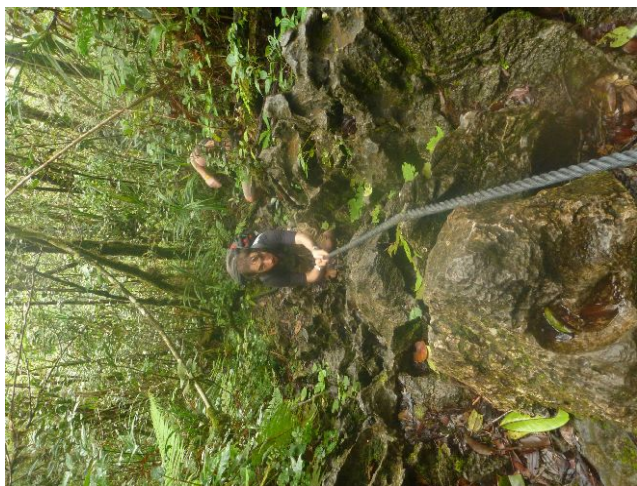
It was an early start, earlier than normal, in-fact the sun had still not risen over the mountains and the air temperature was barely above 20 degrees Celsius. We had a quick breakfast of noodles, rice and chicken and packed a lunch containing the same.

Before we knew it we were off, trudging along the trail we entered camp 5 from yesterday, though only for a short while. We turned left and started the 2.4km hike to the top. “2.4km, is not that far is it? This should be easy” I thought, then why is it considered one of the most difficult trips in all of Mulu?

Soon I would find out. It started off easy enough, a gentle incline led us up the the bottom of a limestone cliff, complete with stals. It was an unusual thing to see, large stalactites in the open air. Soon we reached the first rope climb, taking us up 30 feet. In caving terms this rope climb was quite easy, it was not entirely vertical and it had a nice thick rope on it. However you should also take into account that the rock was extremely slippery, I had quite a heavy back pack on and my right hand was swollen from an insect bite from the previous day.

Still it was not much of a problem and I was soon on the long slog up checking the altitude on my watch as I went. 100M gained, 200, 400. We reached the mini pinnacles and the temperature was beginning to rise. These pinnacles were nothing much to look at, we have similar in the Yorkshire Dales, but these were the only recognisable landmark in the dense jungle.

After a short break we refilled our bottles in our pockets from the ones in our bags and continued the ascent, 500, 600m My legs were certainly feeling it. The trail was steep, no wait very steep & slippery. It did not relent until my watch read we had gained 800 meters in altitude. This all of course was the easy part at least technically speaking. A short section of flat land brought us across a plateau to a limestone cliff on the other side which we followed, ascending again. There was now a sheer drop on the right to the valley bottom below. At about 850m we reached the first ladder.



The sketchy ascent then began, two ladders followed, easy enough but getting off them was a little sketchy. A rope traverse led us to a 40ft rope climb with nothing but air awaiting anyone unlucky enough to slip off. I should mention at this point we had no safety gear like you would have on a European via ferrata. It all depends on how well you can hold on! Thankfully after the rope climb and a few ladders that followed the land flattened slightly meaning that a fall no longer meant death, but looking at the deep holes in the limestone below my feet as I shimmied across a rickety platform, a fall would certainly hurt!.

I was told there was no helicopter rescue up here, too dangerous, no the unlucky casualty would have to be carried down on a brave rescuers back! Before being manoeuvred down the 800m of steep slopes below the ropes and ladders on a stretcher to camp 5 and then moved by boat for many hours before finally reaching at least some sort of civilisation. So like in a cave you certainly don't want to hurt yourself up here.

More slippery ladders and ropes followed if a rope was not good then a tree root would have to do, until finally we reached the top, it was now around 10am in the morning and I am told 40 ladders & ropes were behind me, though I was not counting. The NP claims this point to be 1200m higher than when we started but it was a mere 990 looking at my watch. Still it was a hard and long climb.

The pinnacles were fantastic we took a long while photographing and eating lunch before the descent began. For some reason I went first so I was alone and tackling the obstacles. Climbing down the slippery limestone with nothing but my own arms and feet to stop my falling really put my heart in my mouth in many occasions. It's much harder going down than up I thought. Still I made it and after a bit of singing "We are the champions", I waited for the others. We continued the descent down the steep slope, where I think everyone tripped and slid, an accident here was much more likely but far less serious. I don't think anyone made it down this section without at least one fall, except for me of course. The heat was intense by the time we got to the bottom and as we were already sweating from head to toe, so we just jumped in the river – fully clothed.

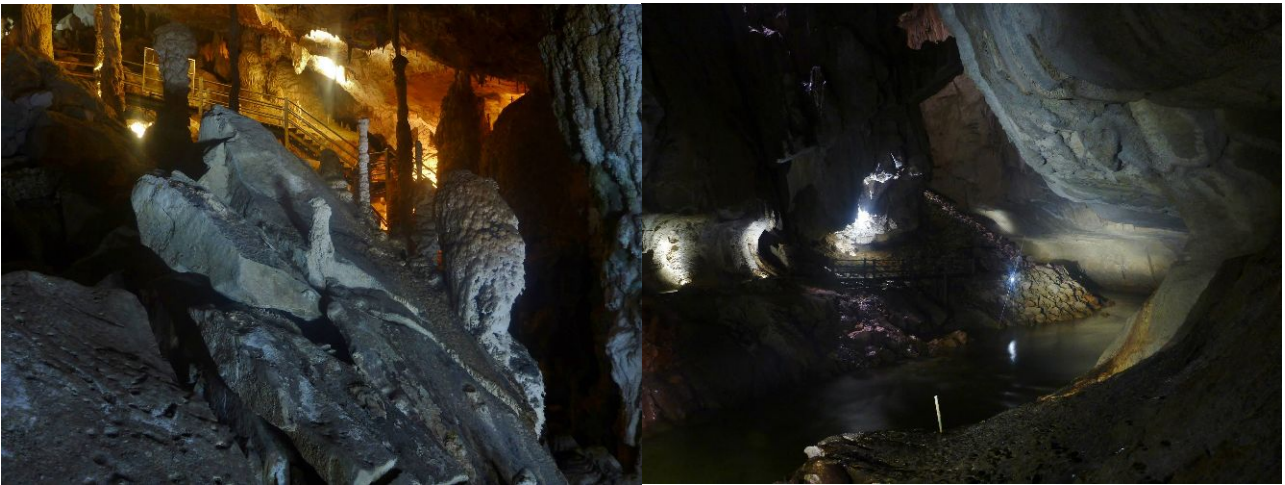


The remoteness of rescue, rope and ladder climbs and other obstacles normally encountered in caves, makes this very much like a caving trip, other than the fact the roof was made from leaves rather than rock. If this was a cave I would grade 4, but would have to elevate that to 5 on the way down!

No caving (not the proper / adventure style anyway) took place on this holiday apart from show cave trips, a couple of photos from these ventures follow below.



*Formations in Langs Cave (L) and the impressive entrance to Deer Cave (R)*



*Wind Cave (L) and Clearwater Cave (R)*

*Alex Ritchie  
Photos: Alex Ritchie*

*A [Black Rose Caving Club trip report](#).*