



Nightmare ride to Bukit Larut



“Hi, I’m Andy.” The man opposite held out a plump hand. “Where you from?” We were eyeball to eyeball in the back of the Land Rover. No escaping his question.

“Australia,” I responded. *“How about you?”* He told me he was Chinese but lived in Kuala Lumpur, which like everyone in Malaysia, he referred to as *KL*.

Andy Lam, dressed in Levi’s, and half-buttoned silky white shirt, with blue embroidered collar to match, was irrepressible. From that moment on, we went into a lively discussion, then as we ascended the hill the talking became increasingly one-sided. I’ve never been the best of back seat travellers and sitting sideways, not far from the diesel exhaust fumes, as we lurched around one hair-pin bend after another, began to get the better of me ... and my stomach!



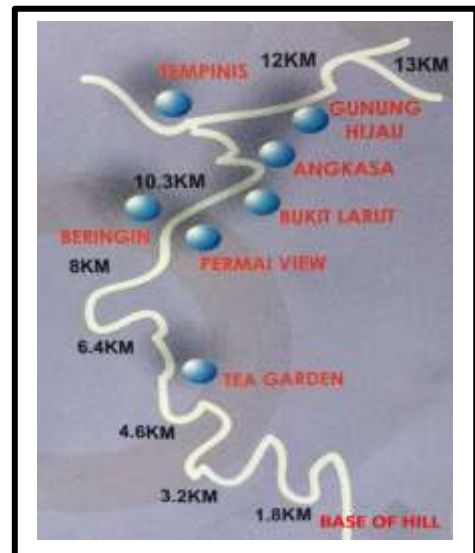
There was a rather large lady sitting next to me, intently focused on a Chinese magazine, murmuring along with her finger. *"How on earth can you read in these circumstances?"* I thought to myself. Then glancing towards Andy's lady friend, a petite figure who sat next to him, looking quite pretty in a floral dress which covered her knees, I slowly realised she was suffering the same as I was, if not worse. But Andy seemed not to notice that either of us were feeling the strains of nausea. He just kept on talking.

We reached *Tea Garden* - the half-way point - having negotiated what felt like a hundred zigzags; by that stage I wasn't counting! The lady in the floral dress spoke for the first time in a long while. *"Oh my God, we're only halfway?"* she cried; her questioning statement delivered almost like a prayer, pleading for someone to tell her it wasn't true.



I was seriously considering climbing down from the vehicle and walking, but I had visions of the floral lady falling on top of me and smothering me with kisses, saying *"Yes, yes; please take me with you!"* So, in the interest of sanity and her obviously wonderful partnership with Andy, I stuck to my seat.

For the second half of the climb, even Andy seemed more subdued, perhaps now also beginning to be overcome by the blue-black fumes which filled the rear compartment. As we slewed around the last few bends - each time with a squeal of rubber on tarmac - our group was in total silence, no one talking or reading, until we reached our home for the night, on top of the hill.





Guests reach the hostel at the summit of Bukit Larut, Central Malaysia.

Mercifully, we pulled up in front of the hilltop villa, before the indignity of myself, or anyone else, having to throw up. I stumbled out of the vehicle and accompanied by floral dress lady, staggered towards the nearest safe and steady seat, which happened to be a large rock at the side of the road. I could see there were ants crawling over the rock, but I didn't give a damn: it was perfectly still, not swaying from side to

side, like a ship in a heavy sea. That was all that mattered!

Duncan Gregory

www.whittlingourniche.com