



Bukit Larut: the journey continues.

After arriving at the hilltop hostel in central Malaysia and being allocated rooms, we all regrouped in the living area of the spacious colonial bungalow. Andy, my sparring partner from our stomach-churning LandRover journey, emerged with a portable machine to test blood pressure. It gave a few beeps, then silence.

"Oh no! Always same," he announced, exasperated.

"Just when I need, damn thing run out from battery."

No problem, I go get from room."



Andy, a semi-retired doctor, had blood pressure problems. His uncle Mr Lim, a tall, much quieter man sitting alongside, had faced even worse challenges, with two strokes in quick succession. He had been a cardiovascular surgeon. Good reason then, for inclusion of

the BP machine in their bags for Bukit Larut.



My concern came a little later. Our junior doctor, after returning and fitting new batteries, proceeded to test himself, and everyone else in the room. The results all seemed pretty normal, and Andy was looking a bit deflated; his prized machine was not performing.

However, when my turn came, it suddenly came to life with a series of loud noises. I stared at the black box thinking it was another malfunction. But no, much worse. My turn had thrown up trumps. *“Oh, Oh, Oh!”* the doctor exclaimed, clapping his hands above his head. *“This too high reading, my flend. You need lie down and drink cold water.”*

“Cold water for high blood pressure?” I thought. *“That’s a new idea.”* But not wanting to offend, gave Andy a thumbs up, then moved to pour a glass of water. I felt fine, and after a lull in conversation, announced I was going to walk to the summit of the hill, a few hundred metres on from the hostel. *“Would anyone like to join me?”*

“Definitely not me,” Andy responded. *“I must be careful. Too much exertion not good in mountain air. And you too my friend, take care,”* he said, stabbing a finger at me. *“High BP no joke you know.”*

I nodded, but otherwise ignored the remark. *“Anyone else for a stroll?”*

In the end Andy’s wife joined me. She, like me, had suffered a bad dose of nausea coming up in the jeep. *“I need fresh air,”* she declared. *“Good,”* I replied.



Next morning, after goodbyes to the Lim-Lams, I set off on foot to descend back down to Taiping, the town at the bottom of the hill. On the way down, it was noticeable how both climate and vegetation changed, from cool breeze and conifers at the top, to sticky heat and tropical growth near the bottom.

The walk took about three hours; longer than forecast, in part due to stops on the way to chat with locals. At one point I sat watching, as a young boy perhaps 12 years old, set up his food and drinks stall. As I surveyed the scene, I began chatting to an old Malay man with thick rimmed specs and a straggly grey beard, sitting on a rock nearby.

“Yes, I have three children,” I said. “How many do you have?”

“I have four sons,” he replied. “Two girls and two boys.”

“That’s interesting,” I murmured to myself: “Bukit Larut in a nutshell!”

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