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TAPIOCA FOR BREAKFAST WITH THE PENAN IN LONG BERUANG

Valerie Mashman

INTRODUCTION

The Penan settlement of Long Beruang is situated on the Baleh river, a tributary of the Rejang River. It is about an hour by boat upriver from the Kelabit longhouse of Long Peluan. The pioneer settlers came to Long Beruang in 1961 from Long Lamei on the Balong river. Long Lamei had been established some three years earlier. Long Banga, which is a four-hour walk away from Long Beruang, has an air strip that has three flights a week to Miri on the coast. Long Banga also has a primary school and a clinic which serve the villages of the surrounding area, including Long Beruang (Map 1).

As they started a more settled livelihood, the Penan at Long Beruang began to plant padi and tapioca and took up activities such as fishing from boats on the river. Tapioca is an easy crop to cultivate and requires little attention. The root provides starch and the leaves can be cooked as a vegetable. Women can harvest it on their own all the year round.

The tapioca tuberous root is ready to harvest after six months. The amount harvested is estimated according to the anticipated needs of the household. The root, once harvested, cannot be left longer than a few days before processing. The tapioca root is eaten in a number of ways. It can be boiled and eaten on its own, or with the lard of wild boar, or as an accompaniment to meat. It can also be cut into lengths and deep fried in wild boar fat, or it can be processed into flour.

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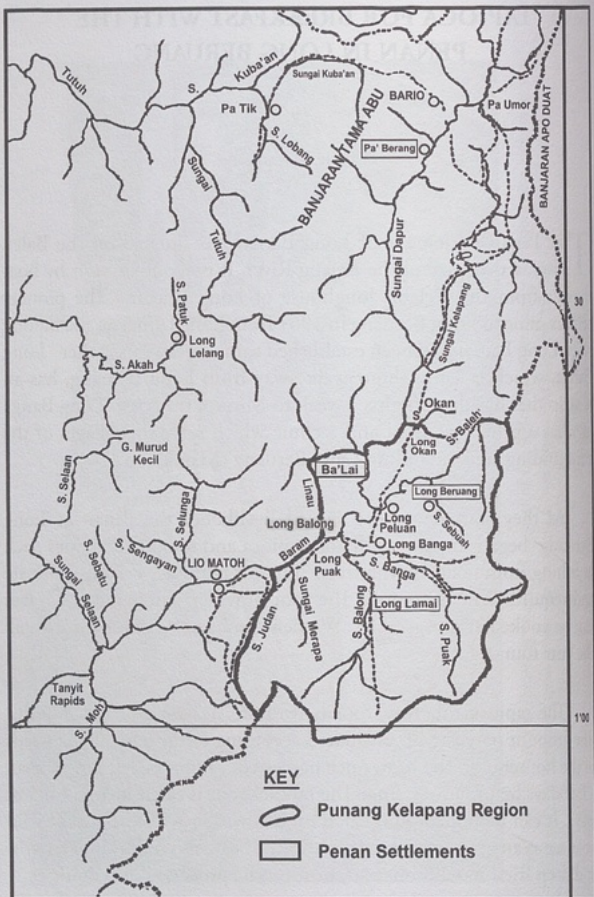
by

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Map 1: Map of site of Long Beruang.