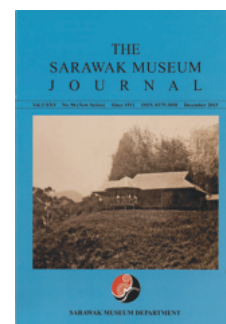




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THE ULU TRUSAN EXPEDITION 1900: REVIEW FROM A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Ipoi Datan

ABSTRACT

In May 1900, the second Rajah of Sarawak, Charles Brooke, launched what was probably one of his last major punitive expeditions¹ against so-called 'trouble makers' from among the Murut (now known as Lun Bawang)² community of the upper Trusan River in present-day Lawas District, Limbang Division. While a fairly good account of the *bala*³ Brooke had been reported by members of the invading force (Ricketts 1900: 113-115) very little is known or recorded about the baweh⁴ and its aftermath from the local perspective. This article attempts to address this literature imbalance.

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Abstract

In May 1900, the second Rajah of Sarawak, Charles Brooke, launched what was probably one of his last major punitive expeditions¹ against so-called 'trouble makers' from among the Murut (now known as Lun Bawang)² community of the upper Trusan River in present-day Lawas District, Limbang Division. While a fairly good account of the *bala*³ Brooke had been reported by members of the invading force (Ricketts 1900: 113-115) very little is known or recorded about the *baweh*⁴ and its aftermath from the local perspective. This article attempts to address this literature imbalance.

INTRODUCTION

Trusan⁵ is presently designated as a sub-district in Lawas District of Limbang Division in north-eastern Sarawak. Lawas District is flanked by Temburong District, Negara Brunei Darussalam and Limbang District in the west; Sipitang District, Sabah in the east; North Kalimantan (formerly East Kalimantan), Indonesia in the south and by the Brunei Bay in the north (Fig. 1). Trusan is the area that immediately borders Brunei. The Trusan region is drained by the Trusan River that emanates from Punang Trusan and reinforced by the Kelalan and Semadoh tributaries that originate from further south. For ease of reference in this study, the Trusan area will be divided into three zones namely Lower, Middle and Upper Trusan. Lower Trusan starts from the estuary of Trusan River to Trusan bazaar, Middle Trusan from the bazaar to Long Tengoa and Upper Trusan from Long Tengoa to Ba' Kelalan (Fig. 1).

Establishment and Development of Trusan

Trusan was the earliest region in Limbang Division to have been annexed by Charles Brooke from Brunei on 3 January 1885. This cession was reluctantly agreed upon by Sultan Abdul Mumin and Pengiran Temenggong Hassim after 18 of the 20 Sarawak traders or jungle collectors (16 Dayak and four Malay) were murdered by the Lun Bawang from Kampung Loagan Kelilang (Edwards and Stevens 1971: 14) in Lower Trusan. As Charles Brooke was on his furlough, Frank Maxwell who was Resident of Kuching Proper or First Division and acting Head of State,



Fig. 1: Map of Lawas District showing the main places mentioned in the text.

aggressively brokered the cession. Trusan officially became part of Fourth Division which comprised of Kidurong and Baram.

Charles Brooke subsequently appointed O.F. Ricketts as the first District Officer of Trusan. Accompanied by 80 Brunei Malay led by Pengiran Abdul Rahim and his son, Pengiran Haji Mohamed, they began to build a settlement at Trusan about 65 kilometres from the estuary. In 1887 a *belian*-wood fort was constructed to accommodate an administrative centre, court room and prison. It was aptly named Fort Florence (Plate XII), after Maxwell's wife. A separate quarters was built to house some 20 Rangers or fort men to guard the fort.

Due to the comparative peace and stability Trusan bazaar began to attract traders from far and near. The Chinese from Labuan began to settle around the

station. Some local Malays generously gave them land to build shops. Traders from Dutch Borneo (present-day North Kalimantan) and Merapok, near to Sabah border frequented Trusan. The Lun Bawang from Lower Trusan and some from Middle Trusan collected and barter traded *damar*, *gutta percha*, rattan, *jelutong*, illipe nut and rhinoceros horns for cloth, salt, sugar, tobacco, *parang* and jars. From 1886 to 1898 Trusan's trade volume was between \$30,000 and \$60,000 for imports and exports (Ritchie 2006: 26). Social and racial harmony was also pioneered in Trusan where most of the Chinese traders married local Lun Bawang women.

What is unclear here is whether Trusan referred to include the whole of Trusan, i.e., from its mouth to Ba' Kelalan or just the area that we have coined as 'Lower Trusan and some portion of Middle Trusan' or the whole three zones? This ambiguity will be highlighted later.

Establishment of Limbang

In neighbouring Limbang, trouble was also brewing especially after Sultan Abdul Mumin died on 30 May 1885 and was succeeded by the elderly Pengiran Temenggong Anak Hassim. This ascension was disagreed to by the other *wazirs*⁶ who subsequently withdrew their support to the new sultan and also suspended tax collection from the Limbang people. Limbang had been traditionally apportioned to several hereditary owners and feudal lords who were allowed to collect taxes, a portion of which would be handed to the sultan. The cumulative taxes, sometimes paid in kind or slaves⁷, thus became a lucrative and reliable source of income to the reigning sultan. When the *wazirs* temporarily stopped collection as a protest against the ascension of Sultan Hassim, it was a reprieve for the long oppressed Limbang population. However, the damage was already done as the Limbang inhabitants started an open rebellion by murdering two Brunei subjects (Ritchie 2006: 26). Sultan Hassim approached Brooke who declined to assist. The Limbang people sent a petition to William Treacher, the British Consul-General, requesting Limbang to be put under Brooke rule. This request was diplomatically declined at first as it was initially opposed by the hereditary owners of Limbang.

In June 1887, a dispute arose over Limbang between the sultan and North Borneo Chartered Company (NBCC). Treacher realising the sultan was up against the wall advised him to hand over Limbang to Brooke as well as to accept a British protectorate. Not surprisingly the sultan agreed to both proposals. In March 1890, all the Limbang chiefs agreed to place their land under Brooke while the hereditary owners also finally consented after Pengiran Muda (son of Raja Muda Hassim, the viceroy of Kuching) agreed to forfeit his feudal rights over a portion of Limbang. Limbang became part of Sarawak's Fourth Division that included Baram, Bintulu

and Trusan. The Brooke government agreed to pay an annual payment of \$6,000 to the sultan. Ricketts who was appointed first Resident of Limbang reported for duty in February 1891. He duly constructed a *belian*-wood fort or 'kubu' on the true left bank of Limbang River slightly above the bazaar in 1897. The Limbang fort, unlike the others⁸, was not given a proper name and thus came to be known simply as 'Kubu Lama' or the old fort.

Trouble in Trusan

Now we return our attention back to Trusan. If the whole of Trusan, i.e., the three zones, were supposed to be under Brooke administration it could be said that the Rajah through Ricketts only managed to control the Lun Bawang in the Lower Trusan; some, or possibly half, in Middle Trusan and very few or none in Upper Trusan. The Lun Bawang in Lower Trusan being much nearer had directly experienced or felt the full brunt of the new administration and had gradually, as did also the Malays, realised that it was to their advantage to cooperate with the white master rather than resist or create problem. As such some of the Lun Bawang leaders and their followers were recruited as 'mercenaries' to beef up the Brooke force. Partial control over the Lun Bawang in Middle Trusan could be had as they could be occasionally visited by boats or in a couple of days' journey on foot. The Lun Bawang in Upper Trusan, due to their remoteness which required more than a week of arduous walk to reach, were more or less left to fend for themselves and thus felt more detached from the Brooke's yoke.

Trusan bazaar as mentioned earlier was a steadily growing trading centre. While most traders preferred to wait for customers to come and bring their products to town other more enterprising or daring ones ventured up the Trusan hinterland to trade with the local communities, especially with the Lun Bawang. Thus, it could be said that some Sarawak traders walked their way up along the established trail passing and putting up at longhouses along the way, such as Long Tengoa,⁹ Long Beriwan, Long Lutok, Long Sukang, Long Merarap, Long Luping, Long Semadoh and eventually to Ba' Kelalan. Likewise, local traders starting from Ba' Kelalan and the then Dutch Borneo (Kalimantan) would walk down bypassing all the villagers just mentioned in the reverse direction. The Sarawak traders possibly hired local guides and porters to carry their merchandise as the only mean of transportation then was to walk and carry load. Besides, one had to bring ration and buy or barter food items from the longhouse dwellers along the way. The traders or travellers had to establish good relations or rapport with the inhabitants so they could sleep comfortably at their longhouses and had decent meals or spent the night in miserable and small jungle sheds with sparse cooking facilities.



Fig. 2: Approximate routes used by the *bala Brooke* during the Ulu Trusan Expedition.