From Borneo to Rodeo

Derring-do. Peter Ashton, a pioneer in the study of Asian tropical forests—particularly of the towering dipterocarps that dominated the canopy he investigated on foot in Borneo in the late 1950s, before they were largely felled—served as director of the Arnold Arboretum from 1978 to 1987 ("Honorable Forester," September-October 2007, page 34). The Bullard professor of forestry emeritus learned much from life, on occasion in circumstances more exciting than those in Jamaica Plain. Writing about his early fieldwork in a recent Arnoldia, he recalled attempting to navigate back to his home base on a bark raft after tropical downpours put the river into sudden flood:

"Within little more than a minute, the waters had gone up 15 feet, swirling, carrying whole trees, the rocky bottom shaking and rumbling... We proceeded with caution. Ladi and I had ascended the Temburong some months earlier, and we were stopped by a two-meter waterfall called Wong Uan, which was practically impossible to portage or descend. Below it, a cataract known as Gerugu Rimau raged between the cliffs. After little more than one hour on the river, we rounded a bend, and Ladi and I recognized the terrain—only too late. We leapt into the torrent, while our Murut assistant attempted to haul in the raft by its attached cord. All to no avail. The raft turned, bent in two, and flipped over the fall, and within it our clothes (including our shoes!), our remaining food, and our parangs—everything... Our only option was now to find the nearest Iban longhouse, several days walk downstream."

You can learn how Ashton's adventure turned out at arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/2019-76-4-in-bornean-rain-forests-exploring-the-flora.pdf.

Heartland, continued. Also lampooning coastal Harvard, the undergraduate humorists of Satire V posted "New York Freshman Mistakenly Makes Non-New York Friend" early in the school year. "[F]reshmen Rachel Stein ’23 and Jessica Williams ’23 were seen studying in the Smith Campus Center when Williams let slip to Stein that she was not of New York blood," ran the report. As Williams revealed that she was from, gasp, Nebraska, "Stein immediately seemed to disengage..." While the newly outed Cornhusker gushed about making new friends, "especially ones with such different backgrounds from my own," the shaken Stein "also expressed excitement" about enlarging her own circle of friends with "amazing people from all over Manhattan!" ~primus vi

Note to real cowboys, who may look down on the competition: try riding your horse through Harvard Square at rush hour.

At left: The field team included (from left) Asah, Naban, Ashton (note his indispensable leech socks), and Ladi. Photograph by Timothy Whitmore/ Courtesy of Peter Ashton and Arnoldia. Video still above courtesy of Harvard Campus Services

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