



Paul Malone braves a high wooden bridge on the Headhunter's Trail in Borneo.

An ominous journey on the trail of headhunters

Trekking through the jungles of Borneo was a risk worth taking, according to **PAUL MALONE**, who retained his head and tells of his expedition.

THE PLAN to go up the Headhunter's Trail from Limbang in Borneo seemed like a good one until I read a book recommended by a friend.

Stories of guides abandoning their charges and tourists being robbed or even beheaded put a few doubts in my mind. And here I was planning to go alone with a guide I had not yet met on a three or four day trek and longboat ride up the Limbang River and through jungle to the World Heritage-listed Mulu National Park.

Maybe I should fly to Mulu as tourist operators recommended and as most people actually did?

But on paper my plan seemed a good one. The cheapest flights to Borneo were via Royal Brunei Air into Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital of the tiny oil-rich state of Brunei. The flight would land early in the afternoon and then, according to *Lonely Planet*, I could take a 30 minute boat ride to Limbang in Sarawak, Malaysia, and be ready the next day to start trekking up-river to the national park.

But my trip did not get off to a promising start. The flight was fine and immigration and customs in Brunei a pleasure, but when I got to the wharf in Bandar Seri Begawan I found there was no boat to Limbang. The service had been discontinued!

With the help of some locals I discovered that I could catch a boat to Temburong, still in Brunei, then a taxi to the river where a ferryboat would take me across and another taxi would take me into Limbang, where I could present myself to immigration.

Limbang proved to be a quiet, pleasant

little town. My guide spotted me on the afternoon I arrived, even though I had not planned to meet him until the next morning.

"There wouldn't be any other 50-year-old European walkers in Limbang," Clive Lim told me when I asked him how he had known I was his client when I'd simply been walking by the market.

Clive proved an excellent choice. From the moment I met him I had no fear of being abandoned or beheaded. Speaking good English and having a wide range of contacts, including welcoming people in the longhouses on the river, he also turned out to be an excellent trekking cook.

The Mulu National Park is one of the jewels in Sarawak, boasting huge limestone caves inhabited by millions of bats, hundreds of species of butterfly, thousands of moths, 262 species of birds and 75 species of mammals.

But first I had to get there. I am relatively fit for a 59-year-old and I had trained for the jungle walks by throwing a six litre container of water and other assorted goods in my backpack and hiking up and down Mount Majura on the weekends before I left.

But would this be good enough for the 11.3km real jungle walk which would come on the afternoon of my first day?

The day started at 7am with an easy drive to the Limbang River where we boarded our longboat taking us on to the Medamit tributary and visiting two sharply contrasting longhouses. One was old and rundown, and the other tiled and sparkling like a hospital foyer. For a modest charge, those who wish to can stay overnight at the longhouses,

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Then I realised that it actually was raining. In the heat and humidity of the rainforest I hadn't noticed.
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