

A Day to Remember

AN EXPEDITION TO MOUNT BASILE



It was a sunny Sunday morning of the 9th of November 2008 around 8:00 AM when a group of hiking team from MEGPL-CPSG department converged in front of the main building. Don Fullmer arranged the trip a week ago and fourteen people signed in to be part of the trip. Everybody was so excited probably it would be another kind of experience and a chance to see the beauty beyond the mountain facing the plant and the offices where all of us are working.

We left the compound almost 9:00 AM consisting of four vehicles in convoy. By the way, we were three Filipinos in the group and all from the Project Controls department. I cooked *pancit-bijon* the night before the trip as our “*baon*” in addition to the packed snack prepared by the canteen. It was timely we did prepare something to eat because the canteen provided each of us only a sandwich good for snack.

The trip uphill took us I thought more than an hour and we stopped by the Wildlife Research Station where we left the vehicles for an on foot trek up Lake Caldera. We were given a local tour guide as seen in the photo to accompany us reach the summit of the mountain. Before the trip, we were expecting to see wildlife unique to Equatorial Guinea like monkeys, deers and birds. We were told from a previous trip stories about seeing monkeys along the way so to expect the same. We were also reminded to be vigilant and cautious for we might have an encounter with one of the notorious venomous snakes of West Africa – the black mamba.



It was so exhausting, too draining and the excitement and thrills that before keeping our interests gradually loses each time we drink water to prevent us from dehydration and to relieve the fatigue and stress during almost two hours uphill trek. Never did we able to see any monkey nor deer along the way, we were just hearing the chirping of the wild birds from nowhere and sometimes were able to hear familiar sounds of possibly primates from distance. We learned later that monkeys avoid people especially poachers because they are hunted for food. What a disappointment we felt whilst struggling to reach the summit below the heat of the sun. I was contemplating then that would be my first and last trip to this place in Equatorial Guinea for the toil I've been through.



All the frustrations, exhaustion were gone when we reach the summit of Lake Caldera. It was too surreal and our eyes were amazed by the pristine beauty and serenity of the lake. We took a rest and ate the packed lunch. To our surprise, Laura Mouat, a Scottish and a colleague in the department tried the taste of our own *pancit-bijon* as a real Girl Scout without inhibitions. That was really flattering- a beautiful white expatriate accepting our invitation for a taste of Filipino food and appreciating the taste with gusto. Of course we were hesitant at first to offer the pancit to everybody as they may not like it and hoped it was not the hunger that drives Laura and Kevin McSweeney to have a taste of it.



After sometime, we went downhill to have a close view of the coastal side of the lake. It was another unforgettable experience. Two hikers slipped in the moderate steep slope downhill. Upon reaching the coast, we found no trace of marine animals. It is probably due to the volcanic chemical contents of the water. Not so many Filipinos get a chance to reach this part of the globe thus we declare ourselves – a possible first Filipino (team) to reach the place so we brought a flag to be left there to acknowledge our feat.



We decided to go back at around 2:00 PM satisfied with what we have seen and experienced. Nevertheless, we came back believing it was really a wonderful experience despite the sweats and muscle fatigue this trip brought us. It is true that sometimes, it requires hardship to achieve a goal as synonymous to the real events in our life.

It was close to 4:00 PM when we left the Research Station downhill. I, Albert and Doods traveled with Laura and Kevin in a white Toyota HiLux pick up truck. Albert drove uphill and nailed a muddy four wheel drive encounter before reaching the foot of the mountain while Laura gave us a thrill of the ride downhill managing an exciting turn in every highway curves. We reach the plant compound almost six o'clock in the afternoon.

Carrying the memoirs of the unprecedented mountain hiking trip, it gave us another feather in our cap and a very exciting experience of a lifetime. Somehow, it gave me a three day ordeal of muscle pain and broken skin around the foot fingers.

