

Ivy's jungle jaunt

By James Ritchie

If you think that kayaking is an activity reserved for only the young and strong, ask Ivy Chin, a passionate kayaker.

It was she who introduced a group of city folk on a river ride they will never forget.

It started when "Jungle Ivy" as she is called by her friends, suggested that we go on a water jaunt along the Sarawak River. It was mind-baffling because the famous river is often seen as a murky meandering waterway, often associated with crocodiles.

To prove that the Sarawak River offers more than "Bujang Senangs", she brought along the seven-year-old of kayak guide Biko Sirip for the kayak trip along the Sarawak River. Also tagging along were an elderly couple and five teenagers.

First we had to drive to Kampung Bengoh village, barely 45 minutes from Kuching, where the adventure started. Everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, had to chip in by carrying their own kayaks down to the river before a briefing on basic kayak skills and the "do's and don'ts" of river travel such as polluting the waterway with waste.

"We want to preserve our environment and that is why rule number one is that no one must throw any plastics, bottles or bags, tins or anything non-biodegradable into the rivers. Ever since I discovered the joys of drifting down our beautiful rivers on a kayak, that has been my top priority," said Ivy.

Ageless Ivy, who weighs a trim 115 lbs and stands a petite 5ft 3in, said that the love of nature has always been in her blood ever since she was a teenaged tomboy. "When I was young I cut my hair short and there was never a tree that I didn't climb. I was like one of the boys in the neighborhood and my mother just shook her head," she reminisced.

Ivy, the mother of two boys, was certain that she was not destined to be confined to the four walls of her abode for the rest of her life. So in 1980 she joined the Sarawak Nature Society (later the Malaysian Nature Society) to keep in touch with nature.



'Jungle Ivy' with Pitcher plants 'N. Ampullaria'

For more than a decade her passion was jungle trekking, scuba diving, caving and mountaineering with friends.

However, eight years ago she and buddies Miriam Loke and Captain Yu, met Nicholas Law of Sematan Dive Centre, the man who introduced them to kayaking. "It was my first time on a kayak. We went on a six hour journey from Damai Lagoon to Karangan (on the peninsular) and it was painful. Upset and after being sun-roasted and blistered, I vowed never to sit on a kayak again," she said.

But how wrong she was. Within a week she was back and had bought her own kayak and was raring



Getting ready to start the journey.

PHOTOS: IVY CHIN

to go. Then she discovered treasures and the beauties that the upper reaches of the Sarawak River offered.

Initially she invited her friends and they invited their friends. When the interest began to grow she decided to make kayaking a business and since then has not looked back.

"Sarawak has so many scenic rivers which are our treasures. But in the past, people used to take the river for granted, using it as a rubbish dump. To make things worse, people used poison and other means to catch the fish destroying the marine life and everything that lived in the river," she lamented.

Initially two girls on a twin-kayak found it difficult paddling, let alone maneuvering down the gentle flowing river. But within 30 minutes of coaching, and "change of captains" they drifted past beautiful scenery—gnarled trees, some several hundred years old, over-hanging the river banks, massive durian trees that literally belong to anyone who is able to venture thus far, and elaborately designed and carved

rock formations flanking the river.

Protecting this scenic stretch is the towering Bengoh Range on the true left of the river bank and one or two rubber smallholdings on the other.

During the three-hour journey, we stopped along the way - at Kampung Danu for refreshments and for lunch, just before our destination, Kampung Semadang.

In the end the group, though tired, gave the trip top marks. Indeed the Upper Sarawak River kayaking adventure will be something to remember.

Ivy said her kayak takes seasoned travellers on longer journeys as far down such as from Kampung Anna Rais to Kampung Git, along the Sarawak Kiri River - a journey of seven hours. Another route is the Pengkalan Tebang-Wind Caves stretch which also takes seven hours along the Sarawak Kanan River.

"That's as far as we go for the long-haul journeys because further below to Landeh and Siniawan there are crocodiles and we don't know how they would



Kayaking past an old tree with massive roots.



Tranquil river.



Flat and peaceful water.

react to intruders," she joked.

Ivy also organises jungle trekking, hiking, orangutan watching, caving snorkelling, scuba diving and arranges for home stay in the villages. Apart from organising group kayak trips, she also rents out her kayaks. She can be contacted via email at ivy2001@pd.jaring.my or phone 013-8048338.



Beautiful limestone formations.



Kayaks placed on the riverbank.