



Going for Gold : Newsletter 4

Crawford School for Public Policy
ANU College of Asia and The Pacific

January 2015

Greetings of the New Year 2015 to all!

The end of 2014 saw our ANU researchers Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt and Keith Barney, along with our Indonesian research partner Dr. Rini Soemarwoto (Padjadjaran University, Bandung), and Minelab representatives Martin Foran and Stephen embark on a field trip to Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan. Minelab demonstrated how, under specific conditions, metal detectors could be used as an alternative to traditional dredging and amalgamation – and thereby removing the use of mercury from the process.

As part of the fieldwork, the team members linked up with a local NGO, ASPERA-KT- or the *People's Mining Association of Central Kalimantan*. While in Palangkaraya, the team members also met with Dr. Sam Spiegel from the University of Edinburgh, and Mr. Sumali Agrawal, Technical Director for Yayasan Temuhak Sinta (YTS), another local civil society organisation engaged with the social and environmental dimensions of informal mining. Other highlights included informative sessions with Professor Hendrik Saga from the Department of Forestry, University of Palangkaraya, Mr. Ambang Wijaya from the WWF Heart of Borneo project, and Professor Usop, a retired journalist, provincial senator and academic who founded a local organisation called the *Development Dialogue for Dayak People in Central Kalimantan*. The Mayor of Palangkaraya helped to explain some of the policy framework for ASM mining in central Kalimantan.

Field visits took place to community informal gold mining zones in Gunung Mas District, Banama Tingal District, and to the historic Katingan- Hampalit site a few hours from Palangkaraya.

One of the most interesting aspects of this research trip was learning more about the calculus by which informal miners make decisions around dredging for gold. For local miners, it's all about the daily equation between the litres of petrol spent (for operating the dredging pumps), versus the grams of gold that a team can capture. A typical range in Central Kalimantan was approximately 200 litres of diesel pumping fuel for 1 ounce of gold. While this system can be quite effective for unearthing gold, it can cause significant environmental damage. The basic idea behind metal detectors of course is that instead of digging and dredging a very large hole in the ground and hoping to locate small gold grains, one focuses one's efforts to in shallow, alluvial sites, trying find slightly larger, nugget-based gold (indicative minimum sizes of gold that can be detected would be half a grain of rice). While not appropriate for all locations, Minelab's metal detectors have a proven track record for helping informal miners earn a living in many countries.

The research team are interested in such questions of appropriate technology for alleviating pressing social and environmental concerns with informal mining, as well as better understanding the conditions under which different types of miners are making a living, and their relationships to agrarian pasts, and new, (possibly post) agrarian futures.

February 2015 will see Dr.'s Lahiri-Dutt and Barney, and Martin Foran from Minelab, travel to northeast India, to learn about the local conditions of informal mining in that locale.

Sharing few photographs of the trip:



Local miners testing a Minelab detector that is also waterproof for use along river and streambeds (Model SDC 2300)



Chief investigator Dr Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (far left) with local miners



National Researcher Partner Dr. Rini Soemarwoto (left) with a female gold miner, at the Katingan-Hampalit site



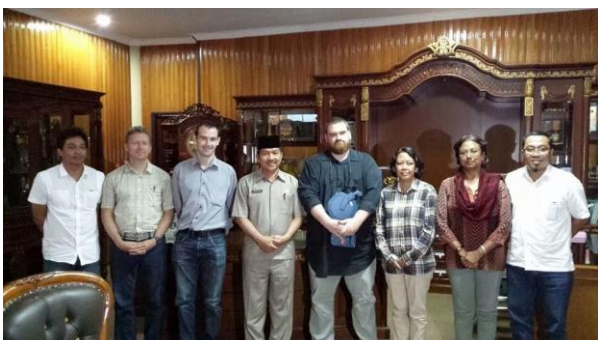
Local miners sifting for gold, Gunung Mas District



Post mining boom conditions in Hampalit, near Palangakaraya



Informal gold mining dredging site, Gunung Mas District



Team members meeting the Mayor of Palankaraya



Martin Foran with a demonstration to local miners (Model SDC 2300)



Keith Barney with Professor Usop, University of Palankaraya



Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, Keith Barney and Professor Hendrik Saga, University of Palankaraya

We would also like to share some interesting web-links examining issues and conditions in artisanal and small-scale mining across the globe:

Artisanal and small-scale mining sector in Mongolia is getting formalised:

- <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2014/12/03/formalizing-mongolias-artisanal-mining-sector/>

An information piece on Kalimantan Gold Corp. that describes some of the local issues and conditions of both corporate and informal gold mining in central Kalimantan:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiRiwz2hrt8>

The website of the local civil society group ASPERA— the People’s Mining Association of Central Kalimantan

- <http://www.aspera-kt.org>

Fascinating photos of tropical deforestation in Peru due to small-scale gold mining:

- <http://mashable.com/2014/12/08/peru-rainforest/>

A nicely written piece from Harper’s Magazine from 2011, on informal gold mining in French Guiana:

- “*Like Butterflies in the Jungle: The Quest for the New El Dorado*”, By Damon Tabor
<http://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/QuestforNewElDorado-HarpersMagazine.pdf>