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Sarawak Penan Culture



PEOPLE OF THE FOREST:
THE PENAN



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The Sarawakiana Series – Culture & Heritage

SARAWAK PENAN CULTURE

**People of the Forest:
The Penan**

Bibi Aminah Abdul Ghani, Terry Justin Dit
& Mawi Taip

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Ketua Kampung Sedin of Ba' Data Bila



*Three-peaked Batu Siman (above)
Uket and Beran heading home after setting up the trap.*

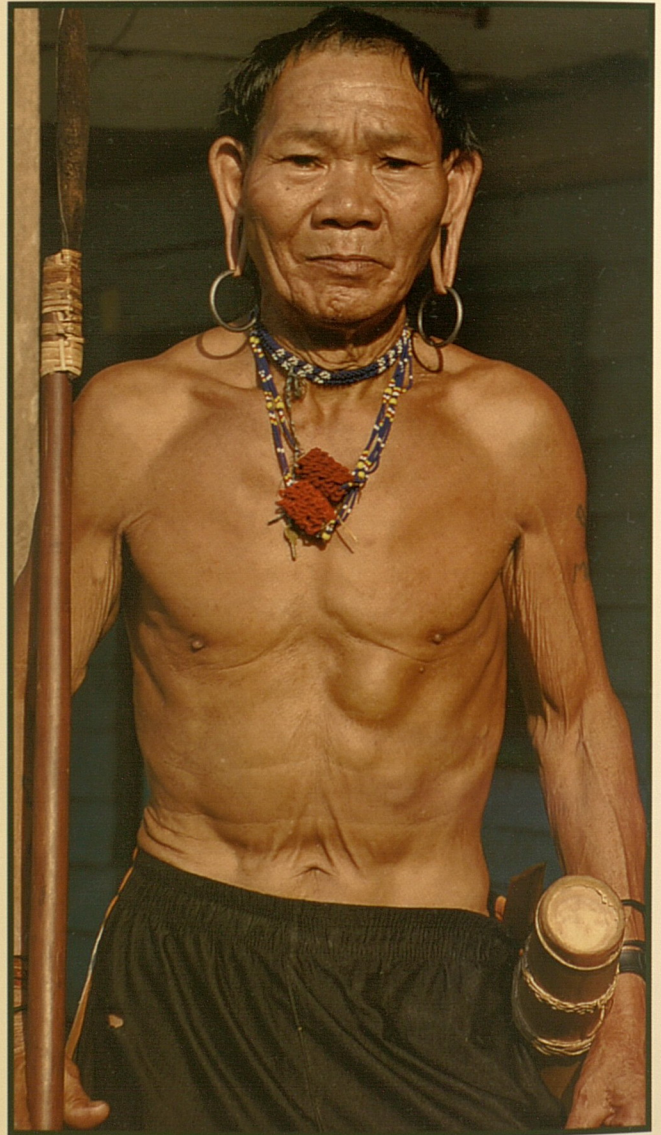


A young mother with her baby in Ba'Puak

Introduction

The *Penan* are included in the politically coined term *Orang Ulu*. The *Orang Ulu* is a complex cluster which includes about 27 indigenous minority groups in Sarawak (Ding Seling and Langub, 1989, p19). The term *Orang Ulu* literally translates as “people of the upper river”. The *Penan* are a gentle people with a highly egalitarian society with little gender division amongst them. Whilst tribes like the *Kayan* and *Kenyah* have long settled, the *Penan* are divided into two groups. One group continues to find solace in their nomadic way of life. However an increasing number of *Penan* are shifting to semi-nomadism or even to a settled existence. Many live within or at the edges of the jungle and take advantage of the jungle as their source of food, shelter and domestic materials.

Traditionally, the *Penan* have led a nomadic way of life. Their settlements consisted of huts or *sulap*, made out of wooden poles and roofed with palm leaves which were once readily



An elderly Penan male with his hunting gear, Long Latei'