



## In this issue

- Bapak's Thumb:**  
Mansur Geiger... **F1**
- KGC:**  
Joint Venture with Freeport... **F5**
- YUM:**  
In Aceh and Kalimantan... **F5**
- SESI**  
Financial Services Company... **F9**
- Wedding in Bangladesh...** **F10**
- Favourite Photo:**  
World in a Puddle... **F11**
- Editorial:**  
Month of the Ancestors... **F12**
- Obituary:**  
Mariani Joseph de Saram... **F13**
- Stranger Things Have Happened:**  
Subud Sri Lanka... **F14**
- Subud Voice on Ipad...** **F16**
- Borneo Productions International...** **F17**
- Bradford Moves on...** **F17**
- Book Review:**  
My Subud Life... **F17**
- Gathering in Sydney 2012...** **F18**
- Information about Subud...** **F19**
- Translator needed:**  
Ruslan Moore, Al Baz... **F19**
- Notices...** **F19**
- Advertisements...** **F20/21**



## Bapak's Thumb

*Bapak went to Kalimantan in 1980, opening the way for Subud's involvement.*

### PART 1 OF MY KALIMANTAN ADVENTURE

*An Interview with Mansur Geiger by Harris Smart who writes....*

At last, the story can be told.

It's been a real cliffhanger, the story of Subud's mineral exploration in Kalimantan. A real race to the wire between hero and zero. Fortunately, hero seems to have got there first.

And nobody knows the story better than Mansur Geiger. He has hung in there for 30 years, through thick and thin, through no money and little money, through hope and disappointment. It is not going too far to quote St Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

But now with the signing of a deal with Freeport, one of the biggest mining companies in the world, with the most profitable copper mine in the world, the future of our mineral exploration in Kalimantan seems assured and now the story can be told...

Mansur Geiger was born and grew up in Perth, the capital of Western Australia, and the clearing house for Australia's mineral resource wealth. His only sister, Halimah, is also in Subud, as is his mother.

The name "Geiger" is of German origin and a relative has traced the family back to an area in northern Germany famous for its gemstones. The family has been in Australia for several generations, first as winemakers in Victoria, and then they moved to Western Australia. "But we are a real mixture," Mansur told me. "There's Spanish and English – even an English Lord – in there somewhere." ▶



*Mansur Geiger.*

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*Bapak's thumb.*

At the age of 17, Mansur was already working in the exploration industry in Western Australia. Then he met an American sailor (name) who introduced him to Subud. Mansur was already a 'seeker', had looked into Hinduism and all kinds of things – this was the era of Hare Krishna etc – but as soon as he heard about Subud, he knew it was the thing he had been looking for, and he was opened in Perth in 1970.

In 1971 he went to Cilandak. "Partly it was motivated by a wish to get away from the youth drug culture that prevailed at that time. I was a surfer and the drugs were all around me."

He spent a year traveling in Indonesia, visiting Bali and Sumatra, but then settled in Wisma Subud. He joined with Subud member,

Irwan Holmes, to market Indonesian opals. But these opals, while very beautiful, tended to be unstable and broke down.

This led to a year back in Australia working with the government's scientific research outfit CSIRO. He lived in Sydney and worked with the CSIRO investigating ways the Indonesian opals might be stabilized, related to a project that the CSIRO then had, to produce artificial opals.

Back to Indonesia he began a 20-year partnership with Viviana Bulow-Huber, the outstanding designer in gold and silver who worked with George Jensen. They made elegant but affordable jewellery using Viviana's designs combining silver with local materials like seashells.

Then, in 1980, came the turning point. Bapak visited Kalimantan and soon after his return, a company was set up to begin exploring for gold and copper in Kalimantan.

**Harris:** When did the word "Kalimantan" first enter your consciousness?

**Mansur:** In 1980. Bapak went there and said, "Now is the time". And then, the following year Bapak organized a company and told us to gear up and get organized and get the mining concessions.

**Harris:** And you made a trip then, didn't you?

**Mansur:** The first trip was in '81. The year after Bapak first went. I went with Asikin and Pak Haryono. It happened fairly quickly and we started the great adventure. We had no idea what we were getting into. We were completely unprepared, just took a bag of rice. We got stuck at various places because the river was too high and the rapids were impassable.

**Harris:** Which river was that?

**Mansur:** The Kahayan. We had to wait I think five days in Maharoi, the last village because we could go no further. All we had was an old American military map that had written all across the center of Borneo, "elevations unknown". We struck horrendous rapids that took us five days to go through.

**Harris:** That was above Maharoi?

**Mansur:** Yeah, above Maharoi. And then Asikin and Pak Haryono looked at me and said, "Well, we've come here and now it's up to you to find the gold, bye!"

I stayed with this old Dayak guy Pak Sumbin. He was actually 62 at the time because he's 92 now And I usually visit him and he still remembers better than I do every bit of that first journey together. He's still very bright and alive and he's come into Subud.

**Harris:** The Dayaks have incredible physical endurance, don't they?

**Mansur:** Oh, unbelievable, I mean he was 62. For 20 years he was working with us, going the same places which were very extreme. He was still actively climbing mountains at 75.

**Harris:** And had Bapak already put his thumb on the map when you made that first trip?

**Mansur:** There were two generations of Bapak's thumb because he put his thumb initially on a map which had a scale of one to a million. He put his thumb on the map and said, "There!" So, we made the first little concessions in there and that was the basis of making that first trip. I made preliminary investigations of each of the main rivers and I think there were 33 and I found gold in 31 of them.

So it was a very confusing and undefined outcome because there was gold ▶



*Beruang Kanan mining base camp.*

“He put his thumb on the map and said, “There!””

everywhere. And that's largely the result of millions of years of extreme erosion and re-deposition spread throughout Central Kalimantan. You find gold everywhere that's been washed down from the original mountains.

We estimate that the surface of Kalimantan has been eroded about one kilometer. It was originally formed about 33 million years ago when it was a very active volcanic place, but now it's probably the only place that's inactive in Indonesia.

**Harris:** And the second time Bapak put his thumb on the map?

**Mansur:** We showed him a map that we'd made, a big scale map, and he put his thumb right up at the head of the Katingan River, completely unknown country, it took us months to get in there by crossing over two different mountain ranges.

**Harris:** You had to drag the canoes up one side and down the other side?

**Mansur:** At first we dragged the canoes up and over, but on the second range, we just made boats on the other side.



Top: Jungle team. Right: Pak Mat.  
Bottom: Navigating the rapids.

This was with old Matthew Mayberry. Those were the adventurous days with Matthew. And when we came back, we had a self-made map that was based on some work the Japanese had done, and Bapak saw this map which rather than one to a million scale was about one to a hundred thousand and he said, "Well that's where you should live." And that was a place called (Indecipherable).

Bapak said, "So you guys still live out of canoes and in tents, always on the move. You know that's no way to go, that's not looking after yourself the way you need to." Bapak was really concerned about our well-being and he designed a camp. He did a little drawing and plan. "There's a room for you, Mansur, it should be at least four by four and there's the place for your bed." Through all of those years, Bapak was always mainly concerned about our human welfare and safety.

I once nearly died from diving in a river. I got carbon monoxide poisoning and when I told Bapak about that he said, "Ooh, that's a very big lesson for us all. You need to be more careful."

**Harris:** So, the thumb indicated the base camp but presumably that's near where the minerals were to be found?

**Mansur:** In later years we actually got to the place. Now it's called Mansur. And it's about 10 kilometers from something else we call Baroi both of which have prospects of becoming a big

deposit. So, it makes sense to be about 10 kilometers away so you don't hear the boom, boom and get all the noise and dust and stuff.

**Harris:** And there's a pinnacle you named Bapak's thumb?

**Mansur:** Yes it's a volcanic plug. We made two attempts to get to the place Bapak had indicated and it just didn't work. Until finally I got there one day and it was late afternoon, a beautiful afternoon, and we came around the river and there it was, standing up right in front of me 600 meters tall, and it really looked like someone standing there.

This is where Bapak told us we should live. It is a very beautiful mountain complex, it's very high, and has a beautiful view and a nice temperature.

**Harris:** I know that throughout the last 30 years you have had to face many hardships on every level from living on bamboo shoots in the jungle through financial uncertainty and so on. And often there was real life-threatening danger, wasn't there, from snakes, for example?

**Mansur:** I had a lot of snake experiences. There are lots of snakes in the deep heart of Borneo. In fact, the only really dangerous thing there, other than some pretty nasty scorpions, which don't kill you – and centipedes, all the other animals are benign. But there's quite a variety of very poisonous snakes. There are a lot of non-poisonous snakes too. ▶

*There were 33 rivers and I found gold in 31 of them.*

*Bapak was always concerned about our welfare*



Python. "It came right over my shoulder."

**Harris:** You told me once that you were in a canoe on a river and a python suddenly stuck up its head and looked straight at you specifically with obvious evil intent – it really fixed its eye on you – and its head was as big as a cow's head.

**Mansur:** Wow. I must have been drunk when I told you that. A cow's head?

**Harris:** Yeah. I remember that phrase. You said, "Its head was as big as a cow's head."

**Mansur:** Oh, that must have been one of those wonderful Dayak exaggerations.

**Harris:** Oh, was it?

**Mansur:** They would always love to take the piss out of you.

**Harris:** I see.

**Mansur:** So they probably heard me starting to exaggerate my story and then they all developed it. "Oh yeah. Its head was as big as a cow's head." Probably it started off as big as a goat's head and then became a cow's head. I probably said, "It had a head like a goat", and they said, "Oh, that's not big enough." You know they're great humorists.

One time we were walking along a little river that had flooded and I saw some really interesting rocks on the other bank. So I said, "Well, no one needs to come, I'll just swim over." I mean we used to live half-naked, wet all the time and it was raining, you're already wet, so it doesn't matter.

And so I swam over and I was banging away at these exciting looking rocks. And suddenly these guys started throwing rocks at me. I thought "Gee, what's going on? It's like the troops are in revolution or something." So they're pointing up and I looked up and this python is up on the bank, just two meters above me, and it was coiling up and anchoring itself to a tree, ready to strike.

And I looked at it eye to eye and it coiled up and up and then finally flung itself at me and there I was holding up my little geological hammer like a cross as if to say, "No! No!"

And I don't know what exactly happened but I managed to step to one side, and it came right over my shoulder. And it just kept coming and coming and coming and then disappeared into this muddy water. Everyone tried to catch it but it just disappeared. It must have been seven meters long.

*In Part 2 of this series Mansur tells of an encounter with a king cobra and talks about the nature and quality of the Dayaks who worked with him.*

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