

Sumatra Highway July, August 1995, from Bengkulu to Bukittinggi
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This article consists of seven pages



Sumatra Highway near Lahat, 1911



Cable bridge across Lematang River near Pulu Pinang, 1911

Introduction

This article refers to a part of a trip my wife and I made in 1995.

(- Bali, Jakarta, Bengkulu)

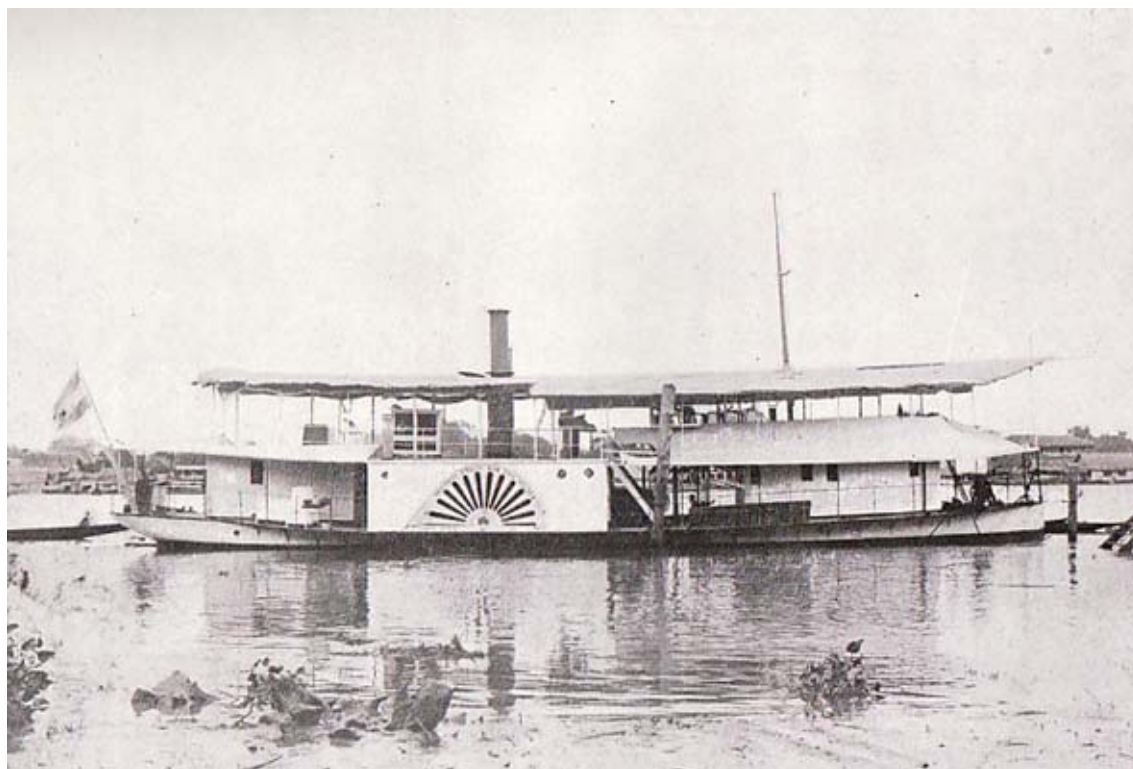
- Muarabungo, hotel Swarna Bhumi

- Sumpur, Lake Singgarak, hotel Sumpur

- Lake Maninjau, hotel Maninjau Indah

- four nights in Bukittinggi, hotel Bukittinggi View

(-Sipirok, Toba, Medan)



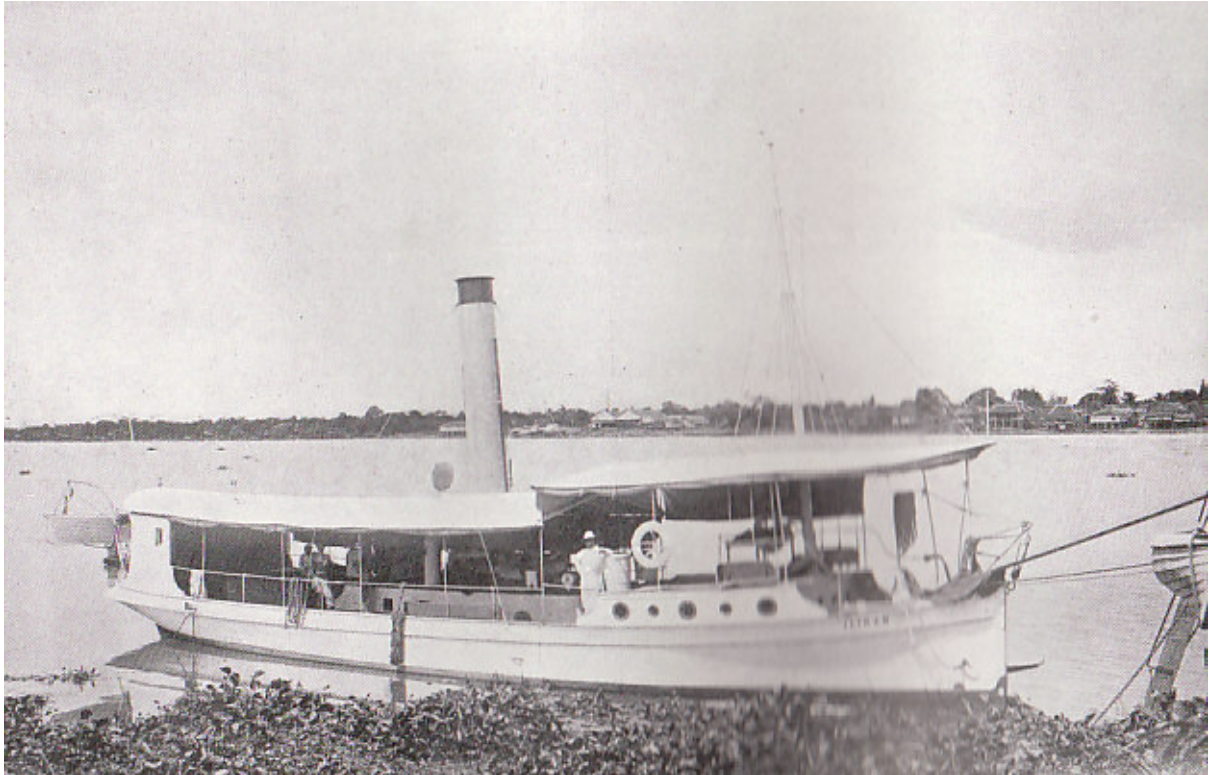
Colonial Dutch inspection vessel "Resident Pruijs van der Hoeven", Musi River 1911

Short remarks about the past

European states first established power on Sumatra in the second half of the 17th century: the Dutch at Padang in 1663 and the English at Bengkulu in 1685. Their fortifications were far from secure. Dutch as well as English were expelled from time to time by locals and by the French. European traders were interested in pepper, tin, ginger, pigments. At the end the Dutch emerged as the dominant influence. In 1824 the Dutch renounced their claims to Malaya and India, the British renounced, in return, theirs to parts of Sumatra.

This did not mean that Sumatra was under Dutch control. They had to fight out many wars. The most violent ones were the "Padri Wars" (1803-1838, with Dutch intervention 1821-1838) and the "Aceh War" (1873-1903). The Padri Wars were bitter fights between Islam and Sumatran traditions: between "adapt" (traditional law) and Islamic law. The name Padri comes from Pedir, a seaport town in Aceh. In Pedir started Sumatran Muslims their hadji-voyage to Mecca. Padris, fanatic Muslims, tried to force the Minangkabau at central-Sumatra to abandon their traditional beliefs and to embrace Islamic faith. The culture of the Minangkabau included gambling, drinking and the taking of opium. Conservative Muslims detested such habits. The Minangkabau matriarchal customs were also a thorn in their flesh. The Padris murdered every Minangkabau who resisted their Islamic "reforms". The most of the Minangkabau royal family was killed by them. Even the Bataks were not safe. In 1821 the remaining Minangkabau royals signed a treaty with the Dutch to save their kingdom, which came under Dutch supervision. At last, in 1837, the Dutch captured the Padri leader Imam Bonjol (1772-1864). Imam Bonjol died in exile much later. Today the Minangkabau are Muslims, but their pre-Islamic beliefs are still present. Their society is a matriarchal adat organization.

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Colonial Dutch inspection steamer "Iiran", Musi River 1911

Route

Information about Sumatra and specially this can easily be found in guides as Lonely Planet etc. Only a few visit the area between Bengkulu and Padang / Bukittinggi. Nature's beauty is overwhelming, but so is architecture (colonial, Indonesian, Minangkabau in particular). Lake Singkarak and Lake Maninjau are a must. Padang (though we have not been there, but we know!) and Bukittinggi are colonial relics. Weaving in, for example Pandai Ikat, is not just weaving: it is an art. Sadly, the jungle is fading away and so are its animals as well as its inhabitants the Kubus.



Sumatra Highway 1995



Solok 1995



Sumpur, Lake Singkarak, 1995



Near Lake Maninjau, 1995



Lake Maninjau



Kota Baru 1995



Bukittinggi (formerly Fort De Kock), Ngarai Sianok (formerly Karbouwengat)

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