



DESTINATION : MT HALCON

LOCATION	Mindoro Oriental and Occidental Provinces
COORDINATES	
ELEVATION	2,586 meters above sea level
LEVEL	Major Climb, Level III, Strenuous
DISTINCT CHARACTERISTICS	Most difficult to climb in the Philippines; Knife Edge Ridges, Scenic View of Mindoro Island, Endemic Plants and Animals, Ethnic Mangyan Tribes
ACTIVITIES	Hiking
JUMP-OFF POINT	Lantuyan Baco, Mindoro Oriental
AVERAGE DAYS REQUIRED	5 days (including travel time from Manila)
MINIMUM DAYS REQUIRED	3 days (including travel time from Manila)
IT CREATED BY	Long Henson
DATE LAST UPDATED	Januray 20, 2002

● INFORMATION

Mt. Halcon is the fourth highest mountain in the archipelago. It's 2586 meters height towering over the hills and verdant mountains occupies the north-south mountain range of the province. Around it's slopes are found the eight ethnic minorities with their preserved culture and heritage and unaffected civilization, one of the few remaining here in the Philippines. Generally, these people are called the "Mangyan". And each one of these groups is a bit different from one another. Halcon is one of the few mountain here in the Philippines where you will have the experience of the cultural interaction with people living in the mountains.

Although only the fourth highest, most mountaineers claims that Halcon is the most difficult to scale here in the Philippines concluding that climbing Mt. Halcon makes a mountaineer a 'true mountaineer'- Filipino mountaineer that is. In fact climbing Mt. Halcon would entail five straight days of continuous ascent and decent using the same effort on the two days to the summit and the 2 days back to the trailhead. The vast mountain range has also it's own micro weather wherein rain is due almost everyday even during the long dry season at the lowlands.



During the rainy season, climbing may have to be aborted when flash floods sets-in making the trail crossing the rivers unpassable. Another factor that adds up to the difficulty of climbing is the presence of the Philippine limatik on almost 90 percent of the trail. These small leeches silently clings to your boots and makes their way to any exposed skin where they begins to suck the blood of their host. The bite however is painless but after sucking the blood, the blood then flows continuously from the victim for about 30 minutes due to an anti-clotting substance it injects when it bits you. It's more of a messy uncomfortable feeling than pain. Last 1994, Halcon was in the headlines of the national newspapers due to the death of one of its climbers. It was caused by hypothermia due to the cold winds of typhoon Katring and inexperience in the part of the novice climber. Because of this incident, locals began monitoring and requiring permits to the climbers of Halcon. It also proves that Halcon is not your ordinary "hike-in-the-park". Climbing Halcon really demands months of preparation and proper planning to make the ascent not only a successful climb but more importantly a safe one. Though years of experience have shown that it's not only preparation and planning that counts but it seems like the mountain chooses who will be able to set foot on its sought after summit. Nature will always be a factor in the success of this climb. So it is best advised to climb it during the summer months of March to May to make the chances of success of the expedition the better.

The hardship in conquering Halcon has a lot of rewards other than the feeling of conquering the Philippines hardest and setting foot on its sacred summit. The entire hike has a lot of wonderful sights and sounds to offer. It has unique and exotic flora and fauna, countless rivers and waterfalls, spectacular views, particular from the summit wherein you can see the entire island of Mindoro and the surrounding islands. In a clear day, you can see Banahaw, Maculot and even Mayon from the summit. Different terrain from rain forest to mighty rivers, mossy forest, bonsai forest and a wide variety of highland floras are some of the unique encounters. The contact with the natives will also give you a new perspective in life that is why it is advisable to take them as your guide.

Definitely, climbing Mt. Halcon is the ultimate in Philippine mountaineering. There you will come face to face with the question of why do you climb. And maybe come into conclusion that "mountaineering is the art of suffering!"

● LEGENDS

The Mangyan people have rich culture and heritage and with that comes rich stories and legends about the mountain which they come to call "Lagpas Ulap" or "over the clouds". The native calls the summit "Sheldang" and they traditionally believe that to climb Halcon would entail you to climb a total of seven mountains. A 'seven-summits' adventure for the local mountaineer who comes to climb the mountain. If you hire Mangayans as your guide, take the opportunity to exchange stories with them so that you will have the chance to get a glimpse of the rich legends of the mountains as well as their rich culture, beliefs and traditions. One guide I had told me of stories of a different tribe at the other side of the mountain who are afraid of white skinned people. They claim that it was due to an

experience with the early Spanish missionaries who bore children from the women of the tribes. He explained that it was the reason why that tribe has better complexion and pointed noses than the other Mangyans of the mountains. If you are also planning future expeditions especially to uncharted sections of the mountains, they are the ones who can help you plan and eventually guide you to these new and exciting territories. The best experience the encounter can give you is a better understanding of these people and if ever you have some prejudices, it may help you grow to overcome this. It's quite funny how some lowlanders create amusing but at the same time disturbing stories about them, some to the extent of telling you that Mangyans have tails.

● WHEN AND HOW TO GO

The best time to climb Halcon is during the dry months of March to May because in Halcon, when it rains, it pours and when it's rainy season...it floods. Climbing it during the summer months gives you not only spectacular clear views but a better chance for a getting to the summit. A rainy season forebodes a miserable climb.

To climb Halcon, you start with a bus trip to Batangas City since there are no other options for there are no flight going to Calapan. Some bus that plies this route includes BLTB, JAM, and Tritrans. At the Batangas pier, the most modern pier in the Philippines thanks to a Japanese grant, you have two options to go to Calapan. A slower but cheaper VIVA ships or a faster and comfortable but a bit expensive speedboats like the Aboitiz' Super Cat. If the seas are rough, however, the bigger the ship, the more it is unaffected by waves making it more comfortable to cruise. From the Calapan pier, you can hire a Jeep for your private use throughout the entire trip or you can take a tricycle to Calapan Public Market. After buying additional supplies, catch a jeepney ride at the same market bound for Baco municipal hall. At the municipal hall, you will have to get a permit to climb Halcon. Then a last trip to the jump-off point, Lantuyan signals the start of the expedition. The trail in Halcon is actually visible but we suggest you get a guide not only for "guiding" purposes but more importantly, the local Mangayans are the best thing to have in times of emergency due to their familiarity and sturdiness in that environment.

Halcon actually have other trails going to the summit. But there are only two trails being used by mountaineers. They are the Lantuyan trail and another trail from another barrio not far from Lantuyan called Mayapi. But these two trail joins early in the part of the mountain so it is usually considered just the same trail. There are also approaches coming from the Puerto Gallera side.

● POINTS OF INTEREST



The island of Mindoro has interesting root name. It came from the Spanish words "Mina de Oro" or gold mine despite the fact that no gold mine exist in this island. The island is divided into two provinces, the Mindoro Occidental, the western part and the Mindoro Oriental, the eastern part. A lot of tourist destination are located on the western part compared to Oriental side but this one has the most popular destination on the island, Puerto Gallera. It's the nearest white sand tropical island beach to Manila. There are also other famous climbing destination in Mindoro, namely Mt. Baco, Mt. Malasimbo and Talipanan. But along the route going to the jump-off point, there is nothing much to see and do.

● SUGGESTED ITINERARY

DAY 1

06:00	Assembly at Buendia corner Taft (Tritan, Jam)
06:30	ETD Manila to Batangas City (90Php)
09:30	ETA Batangas Pier, Get ticket for Ferry/ Speed Board Ride to Calapan Oriental Mindoro (145Php)
10:15	ETA Calapan Pier, Hire tricycle to Calapan Market Place (15 Php)
10:30	ETA Calapan Market Place, Ride jeepney bound for Baco Municipal Hall (30 Php)
11:30	ETA Baco Municipal Hall, Arrange for permit
12:00	Lunch Brak
12:30	ETD Baco Municipal Hall to Lantuyan, Baco Oriental Mindoro (10 Php)
13:00	ETA Lantuyan, Arrange for Mangyan Guide (Guide 150 Php per day)
13:30	Free Time, Setup Camp, Make Final Preparation, Stay with Aling Mary's Store (You can already start hike to a higher camp but it is not advisable since its not convenient and higher elevation already has limatiks. Anyway, the climb to Aplaya Campsite will take one full day the next day

DAY 2

06:00	Wake-up Call, Breakfast
07:30	Start Trek
08:30	Last Major Mangyan Settlement
12:00	Lunch Along River
13:00	Resume Trek
15:00	Cross Major River
18:00	ETA Aplaya Camp, Setup Camp, Prepare Dinner
18:30	Dinner
20:00	Light's Out

DAY 3

06:00	Wake-up Call, Breakfast, Breakcamp
07:00	Start Trek
09:00	At Dulangan River
12:00	Lunch Preferrably Along the River
13:00	Resume Trek
15:00	Last River, Last Reliable Watsource, Snacks
17:30	Knife Edge Ridge
18:30	ETA Summit Camp, Set Camp, Prepare Dinner
19:00	Dinner
20:00	Light's Out

DAY 4

06:30	Wake-up Call, Breakfast
07:00	Summit Assault
08:00	Back to Base Camp, Break Camp
09:00	Start Decent
12:00	Lunch Along Waterline
13:00	Resume Trek
16:00	ETA Aplaya Campsite, Prepare Dinner
17:00	Dinner
18:00	Light's Out (Believe Me it's Not Too Early)

DAY 5

06:00	Wake-up Call, Breakfast, Break Camp
08:00	Start Trek, HEavy Snacks Along the Trail
13:00	ETA Lantuyan Settlement, Take Lunch
14:00	ETD for Calapan
15:00	ETA Calapan, Arrange for Speedboat Trip to Manila
15:30	ETD Calapan
16:15	ETA Batangas City Pier, ETD for Manila
17:30	ETD Batangas City
20:00	ETA Manila

PICTURES

Photos by : Arin Desembrana (2001)



Campsite / Knife Edge Ridges



Campsite 2



Above the Clouds



At Aplaya Campite

● CHARTS

● SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permits are required in climbing the mountain. The permit system is being required by the local government unit of Baco and is being implemented by the Mangyans. Since jump-of points are located within the Mangyan villages, without the permit, you may encounter problems not only in passing by the place but more so, in securing a guide. Before the Halcon incident of 1994, no permits are necessary to climb the mountain. After that, there are a lot of confusion as to the official process of securing one. Lately, there has been controversies since the local mountaineering club, the HALMS who previously issues a permit to climb are no longer honored by the Mangyans after an incident that placed the club in bad terms with the Mangyans. As of this date, the official process in securing a permit is by getting it from the Baco Municipal Hall either through the mayor, vice-mayor or the local tourism representative. It is actually frustrating to go there not knowing this process since it will delay your expedition significantly.

Within base camp, pass by Aling Mary's store. She has been serving mountaineers for a long time so you can really get a lot of information from her. You can also ask her to store stuffs that you don't need during the climb like clothes you will use after the climb. It helps lighten the load.

Regarding water source, this is one of the mountains here in the country wherein water source is not a problem. Actually water is everywhere. Just bring the appropriate purifying or filtration system for your own protection.

Mindoro is also notorious in terms of local insurgents (NPA) but Halcon is an exception since the mountain is solely occupied by the native Mangyans. The Mangyans can be considered friendly but not as friendly as the usual local provincial folks in the Philippines. This is because they have been cautious in dealing with outsiders due to past experiences. They actually felt that some lowlanders are exploiters and like most of the other minorities here in the country, their ancestral lands are always threatened by these lowlanders. Individually, most Mangyans don't want to be photographed.

If you really want a picture, ask for their permission first. Be cautious in choosing a guide for there are already reported theft. Ask advice of Aling Mary for which best guide to take.

In planning the climb, you have to plan for emergency procedures in detail and be sure you are really prepared in case such emergency arises since the place is really inaccessible. Rescue helicopters also find it difficult to access the upper portion of the mountain as well as the dense jungle below.

Finally, the limatiks are really not a problem since they don't cause pain and any serious injury but as I have said, it's a bit messy. The locals use either tobacco or betel nut as repellants to these creatures. Alcohol is also effective as well as insect repellants such as Off Lotion but this can be washed away by the rivers, rains or sweat. You need to reapply over and over again. Its better to put it on the garments such as socks than the skin itself. But be cautious however since limatiks are persistent creatures. If you secure your lower part, they may force themselves to try accessing your upper parts instead. Same as true when you wear tights. But nevertheless, five days is a long day to encounter these creatures and I tell you, you will get at least one bite after the expedition is through.

CONTACTS

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