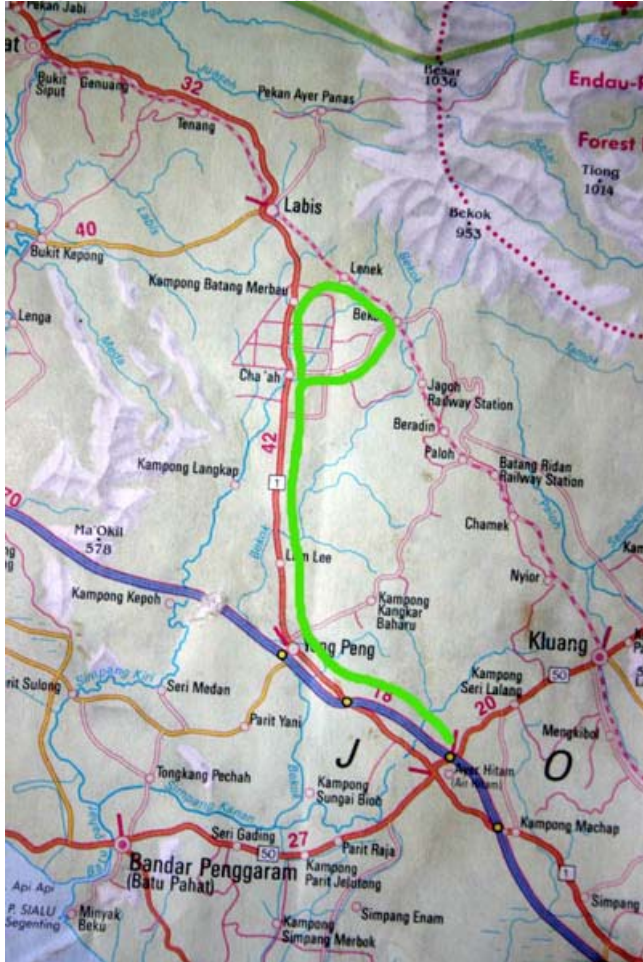


Ayer Hitam & Yong Peng, Johor, Malaysia

24th & 25th April 2004

Ayer Hitam is where we started, and we are back!

I have obtained some accurate and trust worth information on the distribution of *Betta bellica*, *Betta persephone* and *Betta coccina* in this area. NUS has obtained specimens of *Betta persephone* and *Betta coccina* from a local dealer some time back. And a very well-known Arowana farm in Batu Pahat has exported a batch of three species to a friend of mine not long ago. So personally I was pretty confident in finding them. My jungle mate is Benjamine again. So here we go!



We reached the town around noon, it was a comfortable taxi ride from Johor Baru. We visited Mr Eng, but he wasn't around. After we settle the hotel (Well, the only hotel in the town), we went to negotiate with the locals for transportation.

Basically we covered the green route on the first day. From Ayer Hitam to Kluang basically has nothing much.

We had to wait for the taxi driver to arrive, and after we came back to the coffee shop from shopping, we saw our luggage and fish nets are on this car..



(c) Zhou Hang 2004



(c) Zhou Hang 2004



(c) Zhou Hang 2004

No wonder the uncle told us it's ok to dirt the car!!

"Ultra Pegadas Mach ZX-3"

But at the end, the taxi driver arrived and he were supposed to ride on his taxi, which has air-con too! Price wise, as usual, 20 RM per hour. This is kind of becoming standard rate.

So we followed the initial plan heading North to Yong Peng. And the very first place we stopped is a pond a few kilometers away from Ayer hitam. A small road at the left hand side of the road that leads into a small hill, the pond is just over the hill. Other fish aside, I caught a pair of *Betta imbellis* here.

Water Parameter:

Temp: 29.0

PH: 7.0!

Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

We just could see any promising point along the road even after we passed by Yong Peng! And the area around Yong Peng are all plantation!!

So stick to the plan, we moved further North to Cha Ah and then turn right to Bekok and then turning to

the Labis side. All the way what we see is plantation.



When we were so frustrated and especially when Benjamin was already half sleeping at the rear seat, I saw a small stream flowing beside the road. I stopped the car, took a look, it was a stream flowing inside a plantation, but it has a pretty good population of *Cryptocoryne* growing.



Cryptocoryne spp is one our target anyway. And there are always some fish can be found together with *Cryptocoryne* as "combo meal".



However we couldn't really catch any fish here, the stream was definitely somehow polluted. The *Cryptocoryne* wasn't healthy too.

Water Parameter:

Temp: 27.5

PH: 5.5

We couldn't find any flower, but these should be *Cryptocoryne griffithii*.



Still Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

We were about to give up, and started to discuss whether the day 2 we should go Kahang side. Where we can collect some *Cryptocoryne nurri* at Sungai Kahang for sure, and area around Kahang is basically primary forest. We might not be able to catch our target fish, but the fish biodiversity is much more promising.

The very very last point we stopped the car, was a BIG HIT! We stopped at the type locality of the *Betta persephone*, where we passed without notice in the morning. Actually the place is pretty difficult to see from car, but somehow my sixth sense worked! What had appeared in front of us was a primary forest with a straight road leads all the way inside. Great, looks very promising!

It was pretty late, the sky was getting darker and darker. We walked inside, and saw some familiar plants that indicates the source of water, and we saw this small water pool in middle of a cultivated land.

I was in front of him, and I already crossed over the canal. The he caught a Betta from the canal, but initially he thought it was just a *Betta pugnax*, and he passed the fish together with the net to me, and I looked at it. Yeah, just a young *Betta pugnax*. I passed him a plastic bag with some water, and he put the fish in, and instantly he asked me to take a look.

It was a *Betta bellica*!!!!!!

We were very very excited and shout until I lost my voice! He too, of course. Immediately we decided to come back to this place and explore the area around on the next day.

Next