



The Black Triangle Silat tribe students write about their journey in the dark gift of harimau minangkabau pencak silat.

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Minangkabau Harimau Pencak Silat - a set of beautiful words that's meaning, heritage, tribal roots, reputation and very soul are as dark, complex and diverse as the rainforest and marshland it originates from. This is a story of my journey into Harimau Silat. As with any journey they are a voyage of discovery, along the way we experience joy, pain, friendship, solitude and a myriad of obstacles and emotions. My journey so far has been all of the above. I was introduced to the fighting art of west Sumatra by my *Pendekar* (teacher) Scott McQuaid. Although for many years we had shared friendship I knew almost nothing of his art. Only once did I catch a glimpse of him training in Harimau Silat with his Pendekar Paul Bennett in South end Essex. I never questioned my teacher about what it was or where it was from and had no real desire to know. It was at that point in my life simply not my path. However time changes much and fast forward six years, a mortgage, beautiful baby son and wife and I am standing in Hong Kong airport shaking my

Pendekar's

hand. I was about to enter into the humble beginnings of my Harimau Pencak Silat journey.

My first lesson was on a stone floor in a run down gym/hostel in Tsim Tsa Tsui in down town Hong Kong. After three hours of *kudas* (stances) body mechanics and a bucket of sweat I was exhausted but alive. My first taste of Harimau Silat was a hard one and the realisation that you need incredible leg strength and power was a telling sign on my fitness and strength as for three days after I hobbled around Hong Kong! However training continued in the mental applications of Harimau Silat to situations of war, peace and ultimately life. My time with Pendekar had changed me. My mentality, approach and understanding of what a "martial art" is had radically altered. This would stand to be the most unexpected lesson I would learn in my time in Hong Kong. My journey into the realm of the harimau had begun.

I arrived back in England knowing I would not see my *Pendekar* for some time, as his own path of learning and exploring his art is ongoing. I was alone in the art and at many times lost but this was a good thing as I had to fight and struggle to learn from memory, diagrams, phone calls and emails and of course trial and error. I learned a lot from this experience I was happy to explore the art in my infancy and explore what I had learned I was happy like this as I knew I would see and train with my teacher in the future and although on the other side of the world he guided me mentally and physically.

Steadily my interest in the origins of Minangkabau Harimau Pencak Silat and the landscape of Sumatra and Indonesia began to ripen, as did my already ripe love of wildlife and the natural world. In particular the Sumatran Tiger (*Panthera Tigris Sumatrae*), which is the make up and symbolism of the Minangkabau fighting, style. When in battle the *Pesilat* (silat player) embodies the power and resolution of the tiger engaging into war with nothing-in mind but the kill. My journey into Harimau Silat started sculpting me in many ways and is leading me into helping to conserve the Sumatran tiger threw raising money and awareness to highlight the plight of this particular sub species of tiger. It stands that Harimau Silat and the Sumatran tiger are inexplicably linked and my journey is conserving the heritage, roots and soul of a true warrior and also the beauty and essence of our fighting art the Sumatran tiger.

My teacher always placed great respect and emphasis on the importance of history and lineage behind Harimau Silat. From the Indonesian archipelago to the British Isles Guru Richard De Bordes insured the continuation and evolution of Harimau Silat from the dense jungles to the concrete jungles of the U.K. Threw Guru Randolph Carthy, Pendekar Paul Bennett and Pendekar Scott McQuaid our tribe continues in the shadows alongside the tiger and perhaps one day you or me will spread our message like those who fought and walked before us. Harimau Silat raised many issues within my self. The journey I am on is seemingly as much mentally demanding as it is physically. Struggling to understand my place, my role, our place as humans in this world is complex and has been pondered and never understood by anyone. We are not meant to understand life and not meant to understand Silat, we seek to learn, to search, and grow, as humans in all aspects of understanding be it fighting, family life, meditation, training, education, travelling or being at peace. We seek to learn the basics. We grasp the roots never the entirety there is simply not enough time for this. We may master the basics but we never become a master. Perhaps we need to master the basics of respect for human life threw our associated arts and in turn our earth, oceans, forests and wildlife and leave a legacy behind for the generations who follow in our footsteps. And the fight we need to be engaging in is the one to make our planet a better place for all its inhabitants. However with this said the origins ethics and purpose of Harimau Silat are not forgotten. The art is derived from war, survival, the tiger and evolution. And those elements remain the very core and epicentre of the art and in the world we live in today we need that. If out of a system of fighting can come peace then this is a great thing. And in the world we live in today we also need that!

On the 16 of September 2005, I boarded a plane bound for Indonesia to once again meet my Pendekar and train with him, observe, learn, and travel for two weeks in the land where Silat begun. Travelling into Indonesia and the island of Sumatra was a long awaited experience and my anticipation to meet Instructor McQuaid and see the Country had been building for some weeks. Landing at Jakarta airport I was greeted by my friend I was pleased to see a friend and his face amongst an enthusiastic crowd of Indonesians all vying for me to take a taxi with them. Feeling disorientated but in good spirits we headed to the city centre and a place to rest. Jakarta is the capital city of Indonesia and is a colourful busy city bustling with tuk tuks, taxis and some other ingenious modes of transport.

After some food a rest and a good look around the city *Pendekar* trained me on a stone floor in a small room this was to be only my second lesson since starting silat over 7 months ago but the whole time between these long awaited lessons I had been preparing threw my own training. Within minutes the floor was a wet mess of sweat and it was a good lesson in coping with terrain the floor was a barrier to be overcome. My teacher has always taught me to observe and be prepared for any terrain be it carpet or concrete. I immersed myself in being guided and corrected I had to grip hard to the floor and low to keep a steady footing and at many times coming un stuck and fighting to keep control. I used any means necessary to remain balanced even shunting against furniture to get grip and grounding using the furniture to my advantage. This served as a good lesson and my pendekar realiterated that in war there is no rules if you slip or fall deal with it and make it your advantage. There is no reset button, there is no "lets start again".

The next day we flew into Sumatra and I could see the broccoli shaped forests I had longed to observe as we flew over the crest of the Barisan mountain range that stretches down Sumatra like a backbone. Landing at Minangkabau airport in west Sumatra I had my first taste of the land and its transport. Bartering a moped ride from the airport to the bus station in Padang was a funny experience and I got my first taste of the very welcoming and friendly Sumatrans. After agreeing a fee we were off Haring down the road with my mopeds rider in full pantomime mode singing and laughing and shouting "Welshman, Welshman" We boarded a bus bound for Bukittingi. The buses and characters you meet are quite something and the taste of cigarette smoke is never very far away nor is the bizarre driving antics that are a mixture of full throttle over taking on bends and very sudden stopping to beeping the horn at everything that moves.

Finally we arrived in Bukittingi the ground where in 1610 Harimau Silat begun and three hundred and ninety five years of evolution later we stood on the same soil. We booked into a home-stay and rested. Bukittingi is the main city of the Menang province which covers a large part of west Sumatra and is a hive of activity bustling with markets, food stalls, horse drawn carriages, mopeds and mini vans. Next morning we headed to Sianyak Canyon to view the forest, terrain, villages and *Mount Merapi* (Fire Mountain). On the way into the canyon we

spotted the only tiger we would both see on our journey through Sumatra. Standing guard at the start of the canyon was a battered old statue of a tiger bearing the words AWAS meaning look out. Seeing the old stone tiger had a profound effect on both pendekar and myself in many ways it has so many connotations linked to the path we are walking and the path of tigers not only in Sumatra but worldwide. Upon my return to England I have looked at the picture I took many times and the more I look the more it speaks. We carried on trekking threw villages with traditional minangkabau housing and their amazing roofs based on bulls horns that reach for the sky. The jungle backdrop combined with Mount Merapi, amazing views and the people we met where a special experience.

The next day we made time to trek into the jungle with a guide to see the world's biggest flower (Rafflesia Arnoldii). The flower is rare, endangered and is heading for an uncertain future. The flower can reach up to a metre in diameter and weigh up to eleven kg. Pollinated by flies attracted to its stench of rotting carrion it lives more like a parasite and is a botanical oddity. It has no root system, stems or even leaves just the flower is present and it survives by draining all its nutrients and life support from another plant the Tetra stigma Vine. Like all parasites it lives of the host for its life cycle then reproduces and soon after dies. After many photos with the big guy we headed back to Bukittingi to see a traditional dance and performance of Silat.

In a town hall we waited patiently the backdrop was set with rich drapes of coloured fabrics flowing from the ceiling to the floor with gold's and blues encapsulating the stage. A fine array of drums, gongs and flutes awaited their masters on low tables. The dance and music were better than I had expected and the female dancers showed many characteristics of our fighting art. The fluid movement and low stances were important to observe and it showed me where the beauty of our system comes from. When I watch my teacher train or perform a kembangan (flower dance) among the devastation and brutality of the systems movement is a beauty and this element is Harimau Silat's most attractive feature. The music to accompany the dances is a variation of drums, gongs, flutes and singing that at points builds to a thunderous tempo and you can start to feel the stirrings of war as they build the music to a pinnacle then as swift as it arrives it drops to a easy going almost steel drum sounding melody. Again it resembles the easy-going attitude of the people but the undertones are more serious as soon the music flares as quickly as it mellows. This to draws comparisons to Harimau silat as the pace and rhythm is broken, built up, dropped low and then powered of only to relax back ready for the next wave.

Before long, the *Persilats* where on stage and due to perform as they scattered broken plates over the stage, part of a traditional ceremony to accompany a dance known as

Tari Piring

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Pesilats

engaged in a performance of silat and it was good to see silat performed in its home and it was

a good performance. But the silat was an amalgamation of styles and it was hard to pinpoint any of our system in the performance and it pointed strongly to the fact that our Harimau Pencak Silat was not to be found even in its ancestral homeland or if it was we did not manage to find it. Once again comparisons with the tiger are drawn and as it is fast becomes extinct so to does Harimau Silat in its homeland. It's a fact that more tigers are privately owned in America than are living wild in the whole of the tiger's natural range across Asia. With that said it seems our system of silat is also now only to be found in pockets around the western world and is as rare as a tiger in its homeland. However the performance had a positive effect on me and I gained a lot from the dancers movements and I have no doubt it has already started to influence my silat.

We left Bukittingi satisfied and headed for Maninjau, a two-hour bus journey from Bukittingi, and descended into the extinct volcanic crater known as Lake Maninjau. It is a beautiful spot set deep inside the crater with dense jungle climbing to the top of the crater and is buzzing with dragonflies, butterflies, birds and reptiles that constantly dart in and out of rice paddies and streams. We trained hard in Maninjau in the open air on the terrain with traditional houses, jungle and people all around it was good to train and learn on the soil I felt humbled by the experience. The training was harsh and consisted of my teacher demonstrating takedowns and attacks. My legs took a pounding with the force of the attacks but it is simply part of the process you have to experience. We stopped at Lake Maninjau for a few days and spent the time talking about silat and learning and discussing many different topics and issues. The time spent was very peaceful and at times I would look around the borders of the crater that confined us and feel so detached from the outside world that it felt like you did not exist.

The journey continued up into north Sumatra towards Lake Toba and the home of the Batak people. Along the way we trained and observed everything that was offered. Pendekar schooled me on the use of the *Pisau* (small knife) and *Kriss* (wavy knife) and showed me how it's used in war and how it is perfectly at home in the hands of a pesilat. The

Kriss

is a fantastic weapon and seeing its use was a real eye opener and a really important lesson. During the knife lesson I observed a part of silat I knew was there but had perhaps not fully comprehended. For the first time I actually saw silat in its true raw form as

Pendekar

showed me the applications of the pisau. I realised that this art is truly derived from war all intentions and movements are the kill. In that lesson I was stopped dead in my tracks as I looked at my friend and realised that not only was he my friend and teacher but also he is a something more he is a warrior. In his movement I could see the battlefield the blood and I could see his capabilities its applications were clear. Even now looking back to that lesson I still get the same feeling and it still scares me and will stay with me forever. In reality the art is dark but full of light. In reality its applications are as devastating and are patient as a tiger. My time in Sumatra has given me a lifetime of lessons to work on and I sometimes think I will simply not have enough time in my life to even see these basics clearly.

My last destination in Sumatra would be Lake Toba the largest fresh water lake in South East Asia. Lake Toba is a beautiful destination and a great place to train and recover with fantastic views of forest, landscape and good people. The Lake itself has a timeless quality and has seen many ages and was once an active volcano of gigantic proportions and can be seen by the epic proportions of water that now fill its crater. Situated in the lake is the island of Tuk Tuk and has many craftsmen that carve an amazing array of tribal faces and figurines the island also boasts hot springs traditional dances and music as well as some great spots to just relax and take it all in. However my time in Sumatra was coming to an end and we headed further north to Medan the second largest city of Indonesia. Ready to depart from Medan airport I left my Pendekar as I had found him on arrival amongst a sea of bustling Indonesians and said goodbye.

On the journey back to England I had plenty of time to reflect and look back at what I had learned and what I was only just beginning to learn. Sumatra is a great place with really good friendly people and a fantastic array of wildlife, terrain, eco systems and so much more. Indonesia is the world's biggest chain of islands and has something to offer every traveller that visits its many different islands. My journey had been about learning and seeing where our art came from by training on the ground by meeting its people and seeing its nature by catching a glimpse of the Shadows of Sumatra.

Photos credited to Ian Llewellyn, Pendekar Scott McQuaid and The Sumatran Tiger Trust.

I would like to thank the following:

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Those who walked and fought before me.

For information regarding classes in Harimau Pencak Silat in North London, you can telephone 02082271969.

Alternatively email: info@blacktrianglesilat.com.

If you would like to learn more about the Sumatran tiger and the ways in which you can preserve the last of the Indonesian sub species please visit www.tigertrust.info and see the many ways in which you can help.

All Tiger Photographs are copy written by The Sumatran Tiger Trust. Thank you for the loan of these pictures of wild Sumatran tigers.

Dave Russell (Black Triangle Silat Hong Kong Tribe)

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Instinctively since childhood I've felt a connection with two things which i felt were entities within me, a ninja, and the tiger, with their untenable deadly, yet beautiful and above all, rare styles. Thus i developed an interest in oriental martial arts, but never found one that 'called me' or 'clicked' with me internally. Years later, My path lead me to Hong Kong, where i began taking up kung fu, as a 'more practical form' than many popular ones today,(Japanese, Thai, boxing, etc.).

Wing Chun was the one that stood out to me as a highly practical/ tactical and highly mental type of art and I've since been studying this system. But it seemed to be 'incomplete' to me in certain areas, so I started to look for something with ground work fighting involved to help combine with my combat training.

