

SUMMARY REPORT
ON THE MT. APO EVALUATION CLIMB
November 14-17,2003

By
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BACKGROUND

During the Mt. Apo PAMB meeting last September 24, 2003 at Kapatagan, Digos City, PAMB approved the request of Mount Apo Foundation, Inc.(MAFI) to conduct an evaluation climb at Mt. Apo to assess the status of the area in relation to the on going closure policy of PAMB to Mt. Apo climbers and trekkers.

The MAFI evaluation climb was conducted November 14-17, 2003.

The evaluation climb was joined by 4 United Nations Volunteers (UNV) headed by its Spanish program officer Beatriz Fernandez and 10 volunteers from the Human Development International headed by John Largo. Foresters and environment officers from PNOC-EDC also joined the climb as support group.

OBSERVATIONS

The focus of inspection was made at the climbers' popular converging areas, the Mt. Apo peak and the venado lake area. The following are the key observations on the status of these areas:

1. *Garbage and other climbers' thrush* were again visible at the peak area, along the peak-to-venado trail, at the venado forest ranger station and around the venado lake. Campsites in these areas were littered with assorted garbage ranging from tin cans, bottles, plastic cups, sanitary napkins, lighter fluid containers, candy and biscuit wrappers, empty coffee sachets and cigarette packs, and other non-biodegradable materials. Due to the expanding waters of venado lake at the time of the evaluation climb, many hidden piles of garbage were totally submerged in the surrounding waters of venado lake.



Climber's thrash at the peak of Mt. Apo

2. Fresh *stone graffiti* appeared once again around the peak area. Rocks which were earlier cleaned up are again subjected to abuse with new climber's names and writings.



New stone writings on the rocks at Mt Apo peak

3. Despite PAMB closure policy to climbers and trekkers, porters who were interviewed revealed *continuing use of closed trails by unauthorized climbers and trekkers.*

4. The lower part of the venado lake-to-peak trail is now difficult and dangerous for climbers to use due to increasing trail angles and deepening waterflow canals.

5. Expanding encroachment, "kaingin" and agricultural activities on the Davao del Sur side of Mt. Apo Natural Park. This was clearly observed from the Davao side peak area of Mt. Apo



Assorted garbage around Venado lake

6. Interviews and reports coming from the community around the park showed activities of "poaching" of butterflies, insects, plants and other wildlife resources within the park.

7. There is an on-going reforestation activity observed on the venado area involving 25-50 hectares.

8. The tinikaran trees at Ma-ag and Mt. Zion reforestation areas are growing fast and tree canopies are closing in creating a forested environment beneficial to wildlife development (ground signs of wild boar presence were observed along the rails during the evaluation climb).

III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above-mentioned observation, the following findings and recommendations are respectfully submitted to the Mt. Apo Protected Area Management Board thru the Protected Area Superintendent for appropriate action:

1. The appearance of new garbage and stone writings at the peak and around venado lake and the continued use of closed trails by unauthorized climbers and trekkers are signs of weakness in the enforcement of the spirit and intent of the PAMB closure policy as mandated in PAMB Resolution No. 9. It is recommended that:



Davao side park view – a reality of never-ending deforestation

- a) DENR, in coordination and partnership with local government units with entry points to Mt. Apo, imposes appropriate sanctions and penalty against unauthorized climbers and trekkers who will use/pass, without permit or authority, the closed entry points and trails as provided in PAMB Resolution No. 9;
- b) DENR, in coordination and partnership with local government units concerned and other volunteer organizations and concerned sectors, assigns forest rangers to enforce the policy closure in Mt. Apo or deputize local people or group to implement or monitor compliance of the policy;
- c) Local government units (barangay, municipality or city) with entry points to Mt. Apo be encouraged and convinced to enact appropriate ordinance establishing effective and uniform systems and regulations concerning use and maintenance of trail, pre-climbing modalities, proper garbage disposal, reasonable climbing fees, safety and support facility/services for climbers and over all protection and conservation requirements within its area of jurisdiction.
- d) Responsible mountaineering club or organization be tapped to support the over-all protection and conservation efforts for Mt. Apo Natural Park;



Venado side reforestation area – started in 2001 in response to the closure period restoration and rehabilitation agenda

2. To avert further damage of the venado-to-peak trail, reduce risks to climbers and to protect the ongoing reforestation activity from accidental fire, it is recommended that a new trail from venado lake to the peak be established.

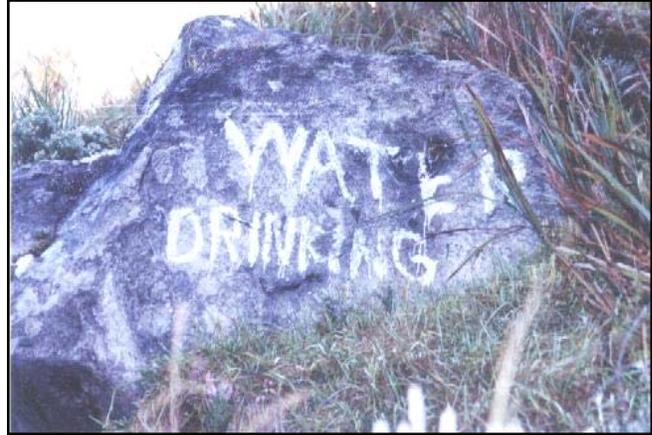
3. The increasing encroachment, kaingin and agricultural activities within the park have to be addressed by DENR and concerned local government units as soon as possible to protect and preserve the remaining “forest frontiers” of Mt. Apo. It is recommended that:



The magical Venado lake – a living victim of indifference and neglect

- a) Delineation of the remaining “forest frontiers” within Mt. Apo Natural Park with visible ground markers be made and strict protection and conservation measures be implemented without fear or favor. This recommendation can be incorporated as part of the project activities of local government units which are presently developing its forest land use plan under the Eco-gov project initiative;
4. There is a pressing need to establish a reliable data base about the wild life resource (flora and fauna) existing within the park. These data can highlight further the continuing need to protect and preserve the Mt. Apo Natural Park for future scientific, medical and biodiversity potentials. It is recommended that:
 - a) A scientific wildlife and resource assessment/inventory in Mt. Apo Natural Park be conducted by expert agencies or institutions;

- b) A wild life behavioral study be conducted by expert agencies or institutions to determine appropriate conservation efforts as regards protection of their habitat and mating cycles.
5. Scientific study on the carrying capacity of venado lake and peak area of Mt. Apo. This is a reiteration of the same recommendation made in 2000. A duly established carrying capacity of the peak and the venado lake area is vital in determining the number of climbers to be allowed at any given time without causing irreversible damage to the fragile environment.
6. Synchronized multi-sectoral clean up of the Venado lake (including its underwater floor), all entry points, connecting trails and graffiti cleanup at the peak of Mt. Apo.
7. Information and directional signage has to be installed in key locations at the peak area and major connecting trails (height of Mt. Apo, water source, trail direction, etc.).



Stone signage beside a water source at the Mt. Apo peak – a good intention at a wrong place

IV. A CALL TO ACTION

In the early morning of February 24, 2002, leaders of local government units around Mt. Apo, DENR officials and personnel, non-government organizations, media representatives and other private stakeholders and well-meaning groups and individuals gathered at the peak of Mt. Apo and made a CALL TO SAVE THE MOUNTAINS OF THE WORLD.

The spirit of the call was so strong and timely that Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nation, signed the call statement to indicate his endorsement and support. The signature endorsement of the UN Secretary General was unprecedented in the history of UN protocols. It made Mt. Apo “taller” than Mt. Everest!

However the burning spirit of that call in the early morning of February 24, 2003 can only be sustained with clear and concrete actions. The call statement partly states,

“The unbreakable interdependence of nature’s ecosystem and the all-encompassing repercussions of the increasing devastation of our mountains demands a resolute and coordinative interventions from all nations, government agencies, private institutions and organizations, local and international bodies and every citizens of the world. A shattered component of this delicate chain of nature’s bio- processes can adversely affect the eco-system and the world’s environment and destroy our very existence regardless of race, creed, nationality or territory. We are calling upon all who have the power, the opportunity and the dedication to initiate, support and maintain local, national and global interaction where resources, expertise, lessons and experiences are collectively pooled, institutionally arranged and effectively utilized for a common direction - to save the mountains of the world! Let us be faithful to the privilege of our responsibility because we only have one world, one earth, one planet.”



The historic Call To Save The Mountains of the World at the peak of Mt. Apo on February 24, 2002. Call participants: Gov. Manny F. Piñol, MAFI, HDI, DENR-PAMB, LGUs of Davao del Sur, Kidapawan, Magpet Makilala and others, PNOC-EDC, media representatives, tribal leaders and other stakeholders

Let us act now.