MOUNTAIN PROVINCE IN BRIEF

Mountain Province is in the interior of the Cordillera mountain ranges that divides Northern Luzon separating the Cagayan Valley on the east, and the Ilocos Plain on the west. It is bounded by the provinces of Kalinga and Abra on the north, by the province of Benguet by the south, by the provinces of Isabela and Ifugao on the east, and by the province of Ilocos Sur on the west.

The province has a total land area of 229,231 hectares with 83% mountainous and 17% hilly to nearly levels. Only 10% of the land is agricultural, and the rest forest-cover.

Climate is generally cool except in the eastern municipality of Paracelis which is in the foothill with almost the same elevation with its neighboring lowland province of Isabela. Temperatures can drop as low as 9 degrees Celsius during the cold months from October to February in the municipalities of Natonin, Barlig, Sagada, Besao and Bauko.

The province has 10 municipalities and 144 barangays. Composing the eastern district municipalities are Paracelis, Natonin, Barlig, Sadanga and Bontoc. The western district municipalities are Sabangan, Bauko, Tadian, Besao and Sagada.

WATERSHED CRADLE OF NORTHERN LUZON

Mountain Province is host to the head waters of 4 major river systems in Northern Luzon, and many of their tributaries.

The mighty Chico river flowing north to Kalinga, and the famous Agro River that supplies water to 3 hydro-electric dams – Ambuciao, Binga (in Benguet) and San Roque (in Pangasinan) trace their origin in Mount Data, Bauko.

The mountains of the eastern municipalities of Natonin, Barlig and Paracelis are the origins of the Mallig and Siflu River systems that both drain towards the Cagayan Valley.

Two of the important tributaries of the west-flowing Abra River come from Mountain Province. This is the Abit Creek with watershed in Tadian, and the Laylaya Creek with watershed in Besao and Sagada.

These rivers and their tributaries make Mountain Province a watershed Cradle of Northern Luzon.

PEOPLE OF DIVERSE IGOROT TRIBES

Mountain Province has a total population of 147,569 distributed in some more than 29,000 households.

Not considering the lowland migrants, the Mountain Province people are among the indigenous peoples of the country. These are peoples who did not go through the hispanization process from the 16th to the 19th century that majority of the lowland Filipinos experienced. Hence, the Mountain Province people still maintain many of their indigenous systems and practices.

According to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), there are 5 tribal groupings in Mountain Province. These are the Apayai tribe, the Kankana-ey tribe, the Bontoc tribe, the Balangao tribe, and the Bawan tribe.

Some scholars however contend that the NCIP tribal grouping is more of Ethno linguistic grouping. Within this group are smaller self-ascription tribal communities.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for instance has identified 7-9 self ascription tribal communities in the Municipality of Sagada whose people according to the NCIP belong to the Apayai tribe.

In the same sense that within the Bontoc tribe are smaller self-ascription tribal communities like Tocucan, Alab, Betwagan, Talubin, Mainit, etc.
When the barangay system was introduced as the smallest unit of government, many of these self-ascription tribal communities as a whole were made as one barangay units. Others big enough like the tribe of Lias in Bariig, the tribe of Fedilisan in Sagada, and the tribe of Alab in Bontoc were made into 2 or more barangays.

It is also possible that the people of a barangay especially new settlement barangays come from two or three different but neighboring self-ascription tribal communities. For instance, the village barangay of Nacagang is a convergence of two distinct barangays - Taccong and Gonogon. Although not yet validated, Nacagang follows two lines of cultural rituals.

The point is Mountain Province is peopled with diverse self-ascription Igorot tribes with growing lowland-migrants, and is slowly getting assimilated to the evolving dominant national culture.

LINGUA-FRANCA IS ILOCANO

Local dialects of the Mountain Province people are Kankanana-ey, Bontoc, Baliwon and Balangao. Local dialects are spoken with variation in intonation and pronunciation from one tribal village to the other.

Among the Kankanana-ey speaking Igorot, there are tribes where the "g" is more pronounced than the "b", and "n" is more pronounced than "s". Among the Bontoc speaking Igorots, there are tribes where "t" is more pronounced, and in some tribes "ch" is more pronounced.

Aside from their local dialects, most Mountain Province people speak the English language, and few speak the national Filipino language.

The Lingua-Franca however is Ilocano. It is through Ilocano that the Mountain Province can easily communicate with each other, and with the people of the other provinces of Northern Luzon.

SOME NOTES FROM THE PAST

Like the rest of the country, pre-Spanish Mountain Provinces were inter-dependent villages free from each other with no central government. Each had its own indigenous socio-political system the "dap-ay" or "ator", that governed the village. Through these "ators" or "dap-ays" relations with other villages like barter and trades, peace pacts and tribal wars were defined.

Mountain Province remained to be like that even during the more than 300 years of Spanish colonial power in the archipelago when majority of the lowland Filipinos were under its rule. Motivated by the reports on gold coming from the Cordillera mountain ranges in Northern Luzon, Spain organized series of gold and pacification expeditions. Some of these expeditions became punitive when they suffered ambuscades from the Igorots, and against the Igorots who freely grew and sold tobacco to the Ilocanos despite the Tobacco Monopoly.

Suffering the brunt of these expeditions were the igorot villages near the Cordillera foot hills from the Ilocos plains, and Pangasinan. The interior villages in Mountain Province had less contact with the Spanish colonial rule although as early 1667, an expedition headed by Admiral Pedro Duran de Monferte reached...
Kayan in Tadian where it was able to identify some of the early village settlements in the Cordillera interior. It was in Kayan where Spain established its Saint Michael's Mission.

Early Spanish contact and influence among the Mountain Province villages were also through its church missions in the low lands. Between 1754 to 1756, Igorots from Bila, Otocan, Cagubatan, Kayan, Lubon, Mageymey, and Tadian were among those baptized by the Spanish church mission in Tagudin and Bangar. Dr. William Henry Scott said that a list of the names of these igorots with their age and marital status was still existing in the archives of the Augustinian Order in Spain.

By 1891, Spain established 9 military and tax collection districts in the entire Cordillera which were known as the Commandancia-Politico Militar. The CPMs that had jurisdiction of the villages in Mountain Province were Lepanto (originally Kayan) CPM established in 1852, and the Bontoc CPM established in 1857.

When the American colonial government took-over at the turn of the 20th century, it created the Bontoc-Lepanto District as a district administrative unit. The district which was created to facilitate the exploration and exploitation of the gold and other mineral prospects in the area covered as far as Cervantes, Mankayan and Suyoc.

In 1908 through the Philippine Commission, Mountain Province was created with 7 sub-provinces namely: Benguet, Amburayan, Lepanto, Bontoc, Kalinga, Apayao, and Ifugao. The former Bontoc–Lepanto district was divided into sub-provinces: Lepanto and Bontoc. Cervantes became the capital of the the Lepanto sub-province, while Bontoc became the capital of the sub-province of the Bontoc sub-province, and which was also the capital of the entire of Mountain Province.

Between 1916 to 1920, a proposal to carve-out the sub-provinces of Amburayan and Lepanto to be created as another province was receiving serious considerations leaving the sub-provinces of Benguet, Bontoc, Kalinga, Apayao and Ifugao to comprise the Mountain Province.

Later, the proposal was put-off. Instead, most of the coastal towns of Amburayan and Lepanto whose economy were naturally dependent on the coastal plains became part of the provinces of La Union and Ilocos Sur. Although some said that the absorption of Amburayan and Lepanto to the Ilocos Sur and La Union provinces was more of a result of political gerrymandering.

On June 18, 1966, the remaining 4 sub-provinces of Mountain Province became full provinces with the Bontoc sub-province retaining the name Mountain Province.

Sources:
Mountain Province Provincial Profile.