

The Altar of Mt. Banahaw

By Troy Bernardo

Friday, October 5, 2001

The legendary Agrapino Lontok was the first mystic to declare Mt. Banahaw sacred, a myterious message had told him so. Today around 17 religious sects of different beliefs and rituals echo Lontok's statement, endowing the mountain with special powers; an estimated 60 cults have set up camp within its base.

“Those who are sensitive to paranormal forces often talk about psychic encounters with the unknown here at Mt. Banahaw,” says Sor Virginia Toledo, one of the cultists living in the area. “People have mystical dreams, visions of energy vortices, spirits, UFO sightings, and apparitions of the ‘Father’.”

She explained that if the earth were like a person with energy centers (called chakras), then the earth would have its own natural power centers as well.

Mt. Banahaw could be on one such energy spot. And since energy centers in people can be put into activity through prayer and meditation, the earth would be no different. Thus, with all the spiritually concentrated on Mt. Banahaw, it is no wonder that the mountain has gained a reputation as a healing center, a high concentration of energies, and a mystical vortex.

“Many spiritual groups and mystics consider the mountain sacred,” writes Jaime Licauco, an expert on the workings of the inner mind. “They have identified over a hundred specific places in Mt. Banahaw called puestos, to be sacred and should be respected and even venerated. They consider the entire mountain to be the New Jerusalem.”

Whatever the mystics say, however, the secrets of Mt. Banahaw is best uncovered through experience.

The Mystical Tour

At first glance, Mt. Banahaw, an extinct volcano, is no different from other mountains in the Philippines. This 2,188-meter national park offers the same ambiance, the same serene, consciousness-expanding atmosphere of, say, any other peak. According to Fr. Huerta, a geographer for Estado Geographica, Mt. Banahaw's crater used to be occupied by a lake until 1730, when an eruption burst open the southern rim and let the water and lava flow out. Mt. Banahaw is also called the “vulcan de aqua” because of these numerous springs.

One such spring is the tour's first stop, the Kristalino Falls (Crystalline Falls), a 30-m waterfall surrounded be vine-covered trees, ferns, palms, and bamboos. Less than a two-hour trek away is a second waterfall, whose surrounding area is ideal for a campsite.

A third spring can be found after traversing one of the most difficult portions of the trail, a vertical wall leading to a very narrow ridge over a minute waterfall called Salamin Bubog (Glass Mirror). Named after how its water appear, the water is known for its taste and its boulders, and you arrive at the 30-meter high entrance of Kuweba ng Dios Ama (Cave of God the Father).

Other such sacred landmarks dot the mountain, like the Pintong Lihim (Hidden Door); the Niluhuran (place where trees knelt); the Santong Durungawan (Holy Window), which comprises the first peak; and minor spots like the Kuwebang Usa (Deer Cave) and Katedral (Cathedral).

The crater itself, shaped like a winding canyon with walls 915 meters high and a floor that's spread 27 to 46 meters wide, can be reached on foot in a day. At the far end of the north wall, a good slippery walk through boulders from the crater, is a 152-meter waterfall. But along the eastern side of the crater, one can find two distinct water sources: Tubig ng Gatas (Milk Water) and Tubig ng Dugo (Blood Water); a geographical wonder that allows two springs, one white and the other red, to run down veins from the top to the bottom of the pit.

The Holy Mountain

The mountain tour normally takes 2-3 days and is classified as moderate to strenuous by ESP Travel and Tours, but pilgrims suggest that you take your time.

“There are several spots in the mountain that deserve your time and attention,” said Sor Virginia. “Some people just come here treating these sacred sights like a checklist on a tour guide. They just want to see as much as they can without thinking about what these places mean.”

In many ways, she is right. Whether you believe in the paranormal or not, nature does deserve a little more attention than we often give it. Our souls, in fact, crave for even more. If we devoted as much time to our inner selves as we do our physical appearance, then, as Sor Virginia put it, “the world would have more positive energy.”

For the regular non-spiritual tourist, however, Mt. Banahaw is an interesting place to visit. At the very least, how many tourist sites in the world are described as “ a psychic center where many go for spiritual meditations,” as written by ESP Travel and Tours, “(with) many features like waterfalls, caves, trees, springs, and other sites are attributed to spiritual beings”?

Probably none.

Additional info

Mt. Banahaw is about 170 kilometers southeast of Manila. You can reach it by taking a bus to San Pablo, Laguna, then a jeepney to Barangay Kinabuhayan, Dolores, Quezon Province. Other jump-off points include Lucban and Tayabas, Quezon.

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Ref.: <http://www.urduja.com/spirit/mtbanahaw.htm>

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The Draw of a 'Holy Mountain'

Mount Banahaw, Philippines

By [PAULO ORDOVEZA](#)

- November 16, 2007



Praying at an altar at the Saint Lucia waterfalls on Mount Banahaw.

Three volcanic mountains—Makiling, Banahaw, and San Cristóbal—dominate the otherwise flat landscape about 50 miles south of Manila in the Philippines.

A mix of Spanish, precolonial, and contemporary myths holds that Makiling's native spirit is a fairylike creature whose silhouette can be seen at rest atop the volcano's rugged peak, while the muse of Banahaw is a gruff warrior who battles with the maid of Makiling for ownership of the clouds. The spirit of San Cristóbal is said to be a Bigfoot-like, mischief-making monster who once wrestled with Banahaw for ownership of water flowing through the mountain's streams and waterfalls. Today, Mount Banahaw is blessed with water; Mount San Cristóbal is dry.

Local religious folklore, strongly infused with Spanish colonial Roman Catholicism and the martyrdom mythos of nationalist revolutionaries, has latched on to Banahaw as the "holy mountain," a place that radiates ancient powers of healing and redemption. Although far less well known than more famous sites associated with healing miracles, such as Lourdes in France, it draws both pilgrims and trekkers, the faithful and the curious, the sick praying for a miracle and foreigners drawn by the mystical legends of this place.

Amid towns and villages on Banahaw's slopes, there are monasteries and churches of the "Rizalistas," one of many sects in the region venerating nationalist hero José Rizal, who was born in the nearby town of Calamba and executed in Manila by the Spanish in 1896 for writing insurgent literature. The Rizalistas themselves are divided into diverse subsects, worshipping Rizal as revolutionary, saint, or reincarnation of Jesus, with Banahaw as their "New Jerusalem."

Special places. Any of these churches gladly provides a guide, called a *pator*, who takes travelers on a tour of Banahaw's holy sites, called *puwestos*, to be visited in a sequence similar to the tradition of the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem. The *puwestos* are mainly natural features of the mountain: rocks, caves, waterfalls, even Banahaw's own peak. Some rock formations are noted for their resemblance to human features, such as those of the Virgin Mary or a saint. A spring in the shape of a giant footprint is called *Bakas ni Kristo*, literally Christ's Footprint.

Pilgrims can wiggle through a cave called *Kalbaryos*, or Calvary, a narrow tunnel in the rock through which one must slide sideways, each successful passage earning the traveler an indulgence worth seven years of forgiveness for all sins. In another nearby cave, *pators* take pilgrims down a ladder to a tiny but deep pit in the rock filled with cloudy spring water said to have miraculous healing powers for those who dip themselves in it seven times.

Many stories of Banahaw's powers hark back to pre-Christian animist stories handed down by oral tradition—stories that have survived and evolved to unite those in the area of different

faiths around their spiritual mountain, drawing others from the Philippines and abroad to see if the power is truly there.

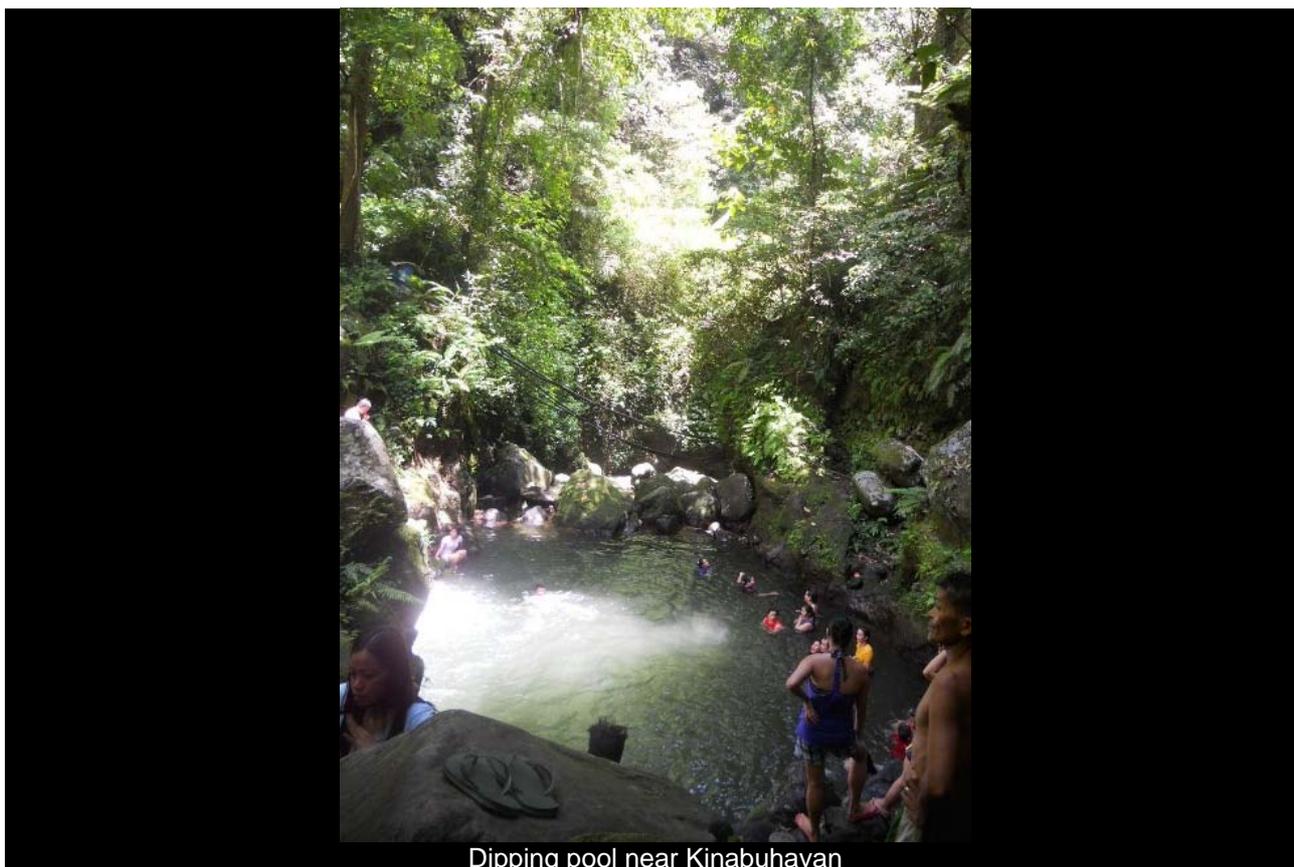
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Discovering my inner goddess on the sacred trails of Mt. Banahaw

Text and photos by **EILEEN PAAT** May 28, 2012 6:50pm

(Update May 31, 4:48 p.m.) - No, I didn't climb Mount Banahaw last weekend. I painfully crawled Mt. Banahaw on all fours—over gigantic boulders, and picturesque, pristine clear streams with gazillion little pebbles that are so painful to walk on—all throughout the two-hour rain that drenched our little group on its way to and from the sacred falls at the foot of this mountain in southern Luzon.



Dipping pool near Kinabuhayan

Mount Banahaw which stands over 7,000-feet-high in Laguna and Quezon provinces was reputedly a volcano sometime ago until its last eruption in the early 1700s. A favorite of hikers and mountain climbers, Mount Banahaw also draws the spiritually and mystically inclined.

Legend has it that a hermit in Spanish times once heard a voice, instructing him to establish Mount Banahaw as a “spiritual center.” Eventually, several religious groups set up their operations base at the mountain. We

met a number of followers of these groups when we went there for “spiritual renewal and meditation”—as well as to cleanse our collection of natural crystals and gems (popular belief has it that you can energize any crystal by bathing them in the clear waters of Banahaw’s streams and falls).

Like any other mountain reportedly to be holy or sacred, Mount Banahaw has its attractions to spiritually-inclined people and New Age followers—and those who are into meditation, yoga, or just want to commune with nature in a natural, primal environment (our group fell into all the categories). Mount Banahaw boasts also of many streams, reputedly sacred and definitely a draw to the sick or those wanting to get well physically as well as spiritually.

Auspiciously called “The Banahaw 13” (you can’t be any luckier than that!) because of the number of people who joined our group, our renegade party arrived at the bed and breakfast place halfway near the foot of the mountain around lunchtime. We were hungry and sleepy (a good number of us were up by 4 a.m. to meet up in separate locations in Metro Manila).

We had been planning to visit the sacred trails of Mt. Banahaw for three long months already. One of the senior members of our group was a regular longtime visitor of Banahaw and regaled us with stories of spooky nights, of enchanted kingdoms of fairies, dwarves and goddesses, and of tales of healing by just dipping into the many natural pools and waterfalls of Banahaw, enabling many of us to be almost sleepless for a great part of the night before the trek. And of course, meeting even just one of the Rizalistas and witnessing their loyal devotion to our national hero Jose Rizal was also a mystery that needed to be fathomed.



Praying before an altar outside Templo Cave

The trek up

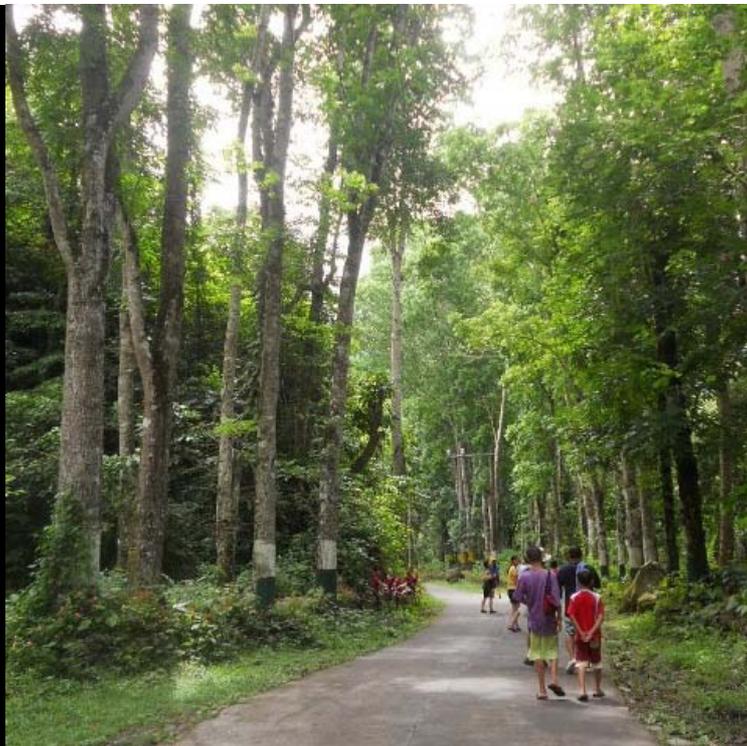
After a hearty meal of sinigang na baboy, we finally began our ascent. And then the rains came down—hard! Never before did I realize that droplets would turn into a river of muddy brown water on the side of a mountain. And so walking through a sudden flood of muddy water to reach green fields of grass, I had to slowly trudge at the back of our group, sloshing in the rain wearing my sandals with heels.

After a five-minute walk, our renegade Banahaw 13 group reached the edge of the thick Banahaw forest, already excited beyond measure, drenched in the cold rainwater of the mountains. And then the “Kalbaryo” started! We had to maneuver ourselves to climb 279 (or was it 268 steps? Locals say the number of steps keep on changing) stone steps leading us to the bottom of the ravine.

I gingerly stepped down onto the mossy-covered steps hewn out of the rocky mountainside, afraid that a fall would be a sheer drop to the ravine below. But no such thing happened. Eventually, we ended up at the bottom and found ourselves on the bed of a shallow, running mountain stream.

Santa Lucia Falls

Clambering through boulders and walking partly on the side of the stream or across it, we reached what they call the “Santa Lucia puwesto.” As popularly known and practiced for ages by the locals, each boulder, crag, falls, cave or natural formation was associated with Catholicism’s Stations of the Cross, or a deity that inhabits the place.



The Artists' Walk at Banahaw

In this part of Mount Banahaw, we were being introduced to the Santa Lucia Falls comprised of two small waterfalls—the “Talon ng Ama (The Falls of the Father) and the “Buhok ng Ina” (Mother’s Hair).

The Talon ng Ama's waters are stronger, dropping from a great height overhead from near the canopy of tall trees that ringed the ravine we went down into—a monumental site to behold. The Buhok ng Ina is not as strong, but its dripping waters are cooler.

Both falls represent the male and female aspects of ourselves, our yin and yang. Popular belief has it that you need to stand beneath the falls to bathe in its therapeutic waters. The locals believe that a bath in these falls will heal you, physically, emotionally and most especially, spiritually.

Moreover, if you wash your crystals and gemstones here, they will sparkle or their colors will be brighter and more vibrant! Many of my friends brought the best stones from their collections and washed them there. Even silver jewelry looks so sparkling in the sun; no need to polish them.

But before you proceed to these two falls, you must take a dip in the pool beside it. A little waterfall trickles into this pool. Popular belief has it that if you bathe your eyes with the trickles of water coming down from this waterfall, they will be cured of any ailment or be as good as new.

The water in Sta. Lucia puwesto, particularly under the Buhok ng Ina, is awesome. Bitingly cold—I can hardly keep from shivering. Same thing with the sacred pond water. But it was worth the trip, even walking over the pebbles that line the bottom of the Sta. Lucia pool—it could be painful sometimes.

When we said our prayers and lighted a few candlesticks on the altar beside the two falls, we proceeded to go back to our accommodation by climbing up the 279 steps. We were so fired up and the air so fresh that the ascent was even shorter and faster than the descent—which proves that the healing waters of the falls really work!

Most of us slept peacefully during the night but not before we had a bonfire and roasted hotdogs and marshmallows. And during the bonfire, we had an “expected” visitor. Within the embers of our bonfire emerged the faint silhouette of Hera, locally known as the Goddess of Fire. Whether it was just a figment of our overactive imagination or the result of being too tired, we can never be certain.

Kinabuhayan

The following morning, waking up a bit later than usual, we trekked toward Kinabuhayan, a little local village in the middle of the forest. Here on the trail, we chanced upon another little stream venerated by the locals because it contains a rock that bears the shape of a footprint. It is now aptly called Yapak ni Hesus (Footprint of Jesus), as it is believed that it is the footprint of Jesus Christ who locals believed visited the area during his younger days.

The stream that runs over this miraculous rock is also called Kinabuhayan Stream. Its waters are believed to have healing powers.



Entrance to the Templo Cave

Further downstream, we come to the mouth of a cave which devotees there usually enter to pray before altars with Virgin Mary statuettes and where you can light candles. But the best attraction of this cave, simply called Templo (temple), is the little tunnel underneath it that you can crawl into and come out just beside the stream outside. It was dank and dark and claustrophobic, because the hole that you climb into is only in parts as wide as your body. Halfway through this tunnel, the water seeps in from the stream outside, and so you wade through ankle-deep water and over pebbles that really hurt.

After the Temple Cave, you trek by another 20 minutes beside the stream and deeper into the forest—until you come to the highlight of the trip—a 10-foot drop into a dipping pool where local children and adults, and some devotees were already happily splashing in. The water was chilling to the bone, and because of the sparse sunlight that filtered in through the canopy of trees overhead, we were hardly warmed by it.

What was the result of this amazing experience at Mount Banahaw? Clearer lungs and minds, and stronger bones and limbs, I suppose. There are those that attest to the healing powers of the Sta. Lucia Falls—like Manang Adelina who seems to be the resident *masahista* (masseur) at our guesthouse.

Manang Adelina has been living on Mount Banahaw since 1969. Brought by her parents who have been deceased for some time, Manang Adelina swears by the healing powers of Banahaw. She said the waters at Sta. Lucia cured her from epilepsy. She said she visited the falls every day then and bathed in and drank from its waters—a great feat to most of us, considering that in those days, there were no stone steps to go down to the ravine, only ropes and vines to hang onto to make the descent.

Whatever is Mount Banahaw to those who worship, climb or visit her, it continues to mystify generations of Filipinos—and will continue to be one of the presumed healing and energy centers of the country. **–KG,**

GMA News

ref: <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/259723/lifestyle/travel/discovering-my-inner-goddess-on-the-sacred-trails-of-mt-banahaw>

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