Mountain Salt is a special product from the Krayan Highlands in the Heart of Borneo, Nunukan District, North Kalimantan. Since a long time ago, salt from this area has been an important commodity traded among Dayak communities in the interior of Kalimantan. The salt is produced and consumed by the local people who believe the salt is a specialty with unique and organic values.
MOUNTAIN SALT (Tusu Abu)

Mountain salt is a special product from the Highlands in the Heart of Borneo. In the old days, it was traded for high price from the Krayan to other Dayak communities in the interior of Kalimantan. To this day, the salt is still produced in a few areas (including: Long Midang, Pa’ Kebuan, Long Layu) for local consumption and sale to Malaysia and Kalimantan. The salt comes in two kinds: a rocky, pinkish kind and one with soft texture and light gray in color (due to the smoking process). It is traditionally sold in small, solid and rounded bars wrapped in leaves.

Generally, mountain salt is used locally to preserve meat, as a traditional medicine and health product. In the Krayan Highland, the salt is extracted through boiling from salt water springs that flow from the hillsides and creeks. The salty water is seawater trapped in the geological strata over a million years ago when the highlands were covered by sea.

Mountain Salt Processing

The salty water from springs is channeled through bamboo stems or collected with a bale from the well into big pans or drums for boiling until all water has evaporated. This might take a couple of days. A lot of firewood is used in the process, but the communities have started to replant trees for continuous supply. Once the water has dried up, the salt is dried or smoked slightly before it is put in bags or molded and wrapped in leaves.

Local History: How the People in the Krayan Discovered the Salt

Long time ago, there was a hunter from Krayan Hilir who went into the forest to hunt. Lun Dayeh Peoples used blowpipe and poison darts to kill the prey, animals or birds. The poison was very effective and the animal would be dead in 3-5 minutes. After the hunter found his target, a bird named “bulud” in Lun Dayeh Language, a bird which has the size of a dove but with bigger body. He kept waiting and lurking from a far. After he shot the bird with the blowpipe, he managed to flap its wings and fly away but eventually fell into a marsh. After the hunter looked around for its prey and found it, he plucked the feathers off and washed it by using that water. Then, the hunter went home and cooked and ate the bird. As he was eating, he realized that the meat tasted differently, better. He tried to recall what could have made the meat taste so delicious this time. Then he remembered having washed the bird in the marshy water. So the hunter walked back to the marsh area in the forest and tasted the water. He realized that the water was salty and that is why the bird also tasted salty.

After that, people in the Krayan started using that water to cook vegetables and meat. Eventually, they came up with a way to produce the salt from the salty water, and they continue to do so to this day.

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