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Sayat-Sayat Checkpoint, Kinabalu National Park, Borneo

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Sayat-Sayat Checkpoint*
Kinabalu National Park, Borneo

Sayat-Sayat, final checkpoint on the trail
to Low's Peak, highest place in the park—
13,435 feet above sea level.

A cold wind blows down black slabs of biotite
granite. Where footsteps of pilgrims have worn
a terra-cotta path, a white rope is fixed.

The blasé ranger huddles in his hut, fiddles
with his iPhone, checks the climbers one
by one, staggering toward the summit;

then backtracking, stumbling down
to Timpohon Gate—at 6,122 feet,
three-point-four excruciating,

knee-destroying miles straight down—
a thousand steep, deep stairsteps away.
While up here the adaptable endemic

mountain squirrel skitters under the heather,
searching for orts of energy bars, and, at star-set,
the mountain black-eye sings his sunrise song.

11 March 2019
Marcyn Del Clements

MARCYN DEL CLEMENTS has been a contributor to *Appalachia* for almost 30 years. In 2019, she traveled to Borneo to explore Kinabalu National Park. While in Borneo, she also journeyed to the independent kingdom of Brunei, to a wilderness camp deep in a protected forest.

*The final checkpoint on the trail up the mountain is named after the flowering heather-like shrub, the sayat-sayat (*Leptospermum recurvum*), ubiquitous on the upper slopes.

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