

## Getting to Know the Igorots - The Igorot Planting Ceremony

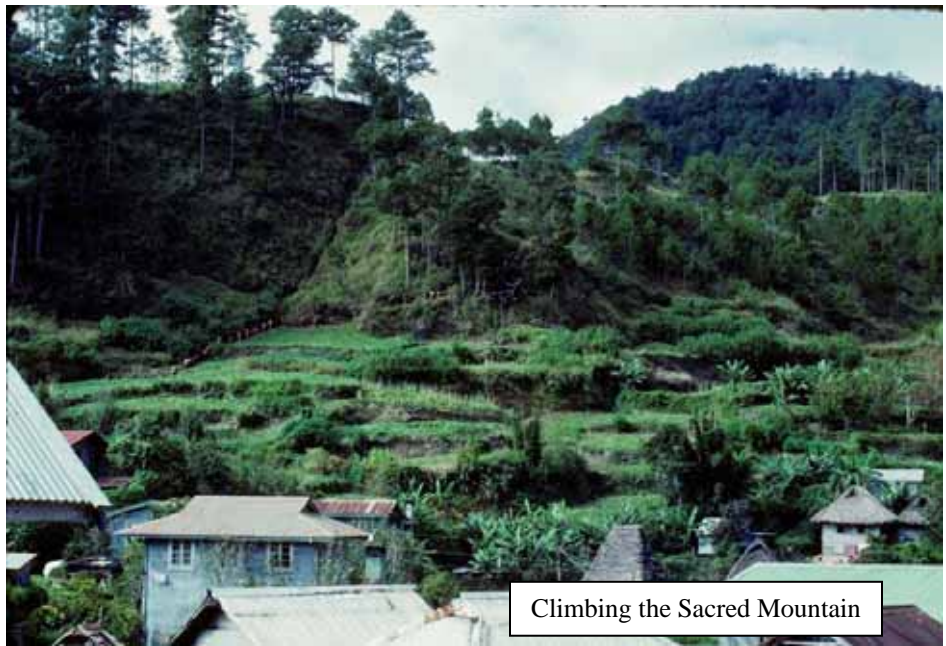
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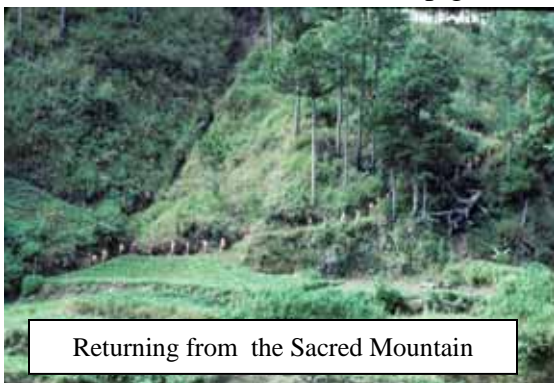


The elders of Sagada watched the birds, the calendar, the moon and the spirits and on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1993 they decreed that the time has come for the planting of the rice. The leaders of all the surrounding communities were then called and instructed to gather their people to assemble at a previously agreed upon dap-ay (meeting place). And they came by the hundreds from as far away as twenty kilometers.

Once they arrived they grabbed a live pig and proceeded with it up to the sacred mountain. Here they called to Kabunyan, their supreme god to oversee the planting and offer a good harvest after which the pig was sacrificed at the sacred tree.



Climbing the Sacred Mountain



Returning from the Sacred Mountain

This accomplished they marched back down from the sacred mountain and assembled in the dap-ay. The first order of business was to surround the dap-ay with their spears. This was not intended only to keep out strangers, it was intended to also keep out evil spirits for this celebration was deadly serious. And of course the women were

not allowed to be within the dap-ay, this ceremony was exclusively a male duty.

Once things had settled down the chief elder, usually the oldest man from all the communities that were participating, stood in all his official



Setting the Spears



The Dap-ay Elder

regalia and, in a loud voice that echoed throughout the valley, he proceeded to chant and call to the ancestors to come to help with the planting and to ensure that it would result in a bountiful harvest.

There were three animals sacrificed after the spirits of the ancestors had been called. The first was a chicken. The chicken is believed to be able to ward off evil spirits and so it was sacrificed so that the ceremony and the surrounding area was not contaminated by any evil spirits.

The second animal sacrificed was a pig. The pig represented a bountiful harvest and once killed the meat was divided amongst us all. Each person in the dap-ay was handed a piece of meat to ensure that we will all share in the subsequent bounty. After the ceremony we all took our piece of meat home to cook and eat.



The Women Bringing Food



Sharing the Feast

The third animal was a dog. The dog has traditionally been the friend and protector of man. As such by sacrificing the dog the spirit of the dog will roam the communities protecting them from evil and also from bad weather and any pestilence that might otherwise contaminate or kill the rice as it grew. The dog's spirit also protected those who worked the fields so they don't get injured.

As the ceremonies continued the women slowly surrounded the dap-ay carrying food which was passed into the centre. The rituals concluded the men ate. It had been hard work climbing the sacred mountain and afterwards invoking the spirits in the dap-ay so the sustenance was welcome. Finally it was time to celebrate the new planting of the rice. And for this the spears were now removed and the women were invited to participate in the feast and in the dancing which went on for several hours before everyone disbursed. This ritual still happens in Sagada annually but alas with ever more elders dying of old age it's unknown how much longer it will continue. Every ten years there is a similar ritual too but one that attracts people from a much larger region than is traditional. These are deadly serious events intended to ensure a bountiful harvest. That year there was a bountiful harvest as well as in later years too so perhaps these people know something we might want to learn.

