

### SAGADA LAKBAYAN - 3

One of the reasons to cut the Sagada trip short was because of the driver problem. The contract called for 2 drivers. The morning after our arrival in Sagada, one of the drivers took the bus home. Turns out that he, Oscar, was the proprietor, and had to go back to manage the rest of his vehicles. He told me that the remaining driver, Rico, was much younger and was used to all these mountain roads and could easily drive us back all the way.

Yet, I was skeptical. This would be longer than the 14 hour trip coming over, as we'd be hitting traffic approaching Manila. Besides, when Rico took over the van between Bayombong and Banaue, he didn't seem to know how to use proper engine braking. On a downhill, he'd shift to 3rd gear and ride the brakes. So in Banaue, the smell of burning brakes was evident, and Rico shrugged that that's just natural. It's a good thing Oscar took over the rest of the way to Sagada.

With the return trip broken into 2 days, to Baguio first, and then to Manila, that would be much easier on everybody, especially the lone driver. Secretly, I was more than eager to take over and do some fancy driving, but I didn't even broach the topic to anyone.

The contract for the van, shown below, was a fixed P30,000 for 5 days, wherein the drivers would take care of all costs, meaning gas, tolls, and their food and lodging. Well, both slept in the van. And on the next night, cold as it was, Rico did the same. We took pity on him, and paid for a bunk bed for him at the hotel for the last night. Also started letting him share in the common meals we had. Made us feel much safer that he was well rested and well fed.



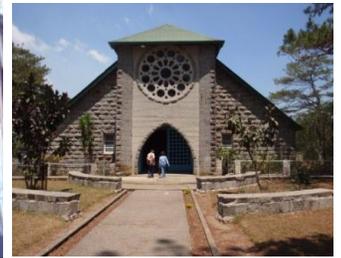
So Thursday, our third full day, and last, in Sagada, we did more sightseeing, and of course shopping. But we still wanted to meet Aclay, and heard that he also bakes special bread that gets sold out fast. There was none left at his Log Cabin restaurant last night. But he also supplies bread to the St Jo Restaurant adjacent to a hostel by the same name which caters mainly to foreign tourists on motorcycles (see van photo on left).

We decided to have lunch there, and order bread.

With our tour guide beside the driver, we got to enter lots of souvenir shops, a pottery shop, including a sari-sari store that had Jimmy's family name (wherein he happily obliged to pose), a weavers shop where the ladies picked up various gift items, and we also visited the Episcopal church.



We explained to the guide that we wanted to see the most with the least walking, so he drew up a list of the must-see places.



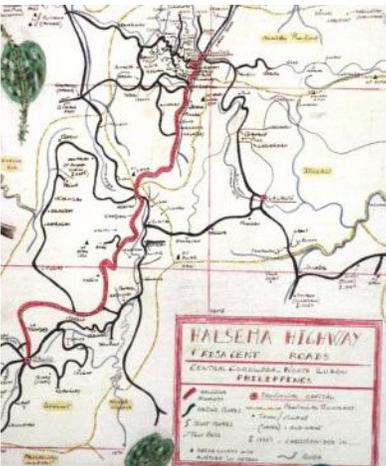
The 3 views above are taken from the road overlooking the valley where the barrio of Aguid is located, and where the road ends. Further beyond the mountain ranges (left bottom photo) is the province of Abra. From the barrio, it would take a 1-1/2 walk to the big waterfall (shown in the previous writeup) tucked between the gorge whose riverbed can be seen as a pale trace in the above photo. The valley has some terraces, too. I included the nearby house on the upper left photo because it seems so representative of the oddity of most small houses: tin roof and tin walls. Seldom did I see a grass thatched roof or a wooden wall.

The tourist map mentioned of a "small water fall" and swimming hole, and it was only 100 meters from the road.



Surely, we could handle that distance. Alas, it was about 100 meters horizontally from the road and perhaps another 100 meters down. Above view is a telephoto shot.

Now, it was time for lunch. Off to St Jo restaurant we go. And whom do we meet as the chief waitress? Joanna.



That's she in the above photo standing behind Mercy. I wish to correct the previous writeup's statement that Joanne had text'd Mercy about the jackets. It was the hotel manager. In any event, she apparently works there noon time, and at Aclay's Log Cabin at night. The food was good, and this time, was served correctly as we had ordered. But there was no special

bread yet. It was to come mid-afternoon. We promised to be back just for the bread.

Here, Aclay's virtuosity became more evident. There were scores of wall paintings depicting detailed maps of the area. He obviously was a good cartographer, too. See above photo. Many were framed with paintings of flora and fauna. And some of the maps were of Palawan, where we understand he had spent a number of years. But the elusive one was not around.

After lunch, we dropped off and paid/tipped our guide double the posted P200 daily rate. He was very good and knowledgeable, and aside from the usual tourist talk, had delved into the religion of the area (mainly Episcopal), the old time tribal warfare, politics, etc.

We all went back to the hotel for siesta. And in my case, also have a massage by a blind, diminutive, elderly woman. She had serviced Tony yesterday and had fixed his frozen shoulder. I mentioned about the occasional numbness of my left forearm, but she finally admitted that "... perhaps my massaging is inadequate to cure your ailment" or something to that effect. She had been led in by an assistant who promised to come back in an hour, but didn't, so I had to lead this blind lady back to the foyer.

We ate supper at the Yogurt House which had special combinations of dishes, then hit the sack early in preparation for our trip to Baguio tomorrow.

If I were to have chronicled all the gustatory delights we have had, this tale would become a cookbook. But no, it is easier as a travelogue.

After breakfast (complimented by Aclay's bread) in the hotel, we hit the road. Since we now had only one driver, I occupied the seat up front beside him.



Down the dirt road from Sagada to the main road.



Occasional one-lane sections undergoing upgrades on the Halsema road towards Baguio.



The first rest/view stop on the Halsema Road.

... to be cont'd, last series ... Danny Gil, 4/2/10