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Ecotourism Attractions of Ruteng Nature Recreation Park, Indonesia

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Ecotourism Attractions of Ruteng Nature Recreation Park, Indonesia

Prepared by Bill Buffum, Team Leader of the Indonesia Biodiversity Conservation Project in Flores

February 1996

Description

This document describes the major ecotourism attractions of the Ruteng Nature Recreation Park in Flores, which was established in August 1993. Development of the Park began in 1995 with assistance from the Indonesia Biodiversity Conservation Project (IBCP) funded by the Asian Development Bank. I served as the Team Leader of the IBCP in Flores (1995-1996). My major tasks were supervising the completion of a 25 year management plan for the Park, and providing technical assistance during the first year of implementation of the new management plan. Another task was preparing this short booklet for visitors that describes the major ecotourism attractions in the Park and the surrounding buffer zone. The attractions include hiking trails to a volcano, lakes, and waterfalls in areas with diverse wildlife and vegetation.

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1. RUTENG NATURE RECREATION PARK

The Ruteng Nature Recreation Park was established by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry in August 1993. The Park includes 32,256 ha of montane forest in Manggarai District, Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur Province. The Park consists of a range of mountains, the highest of which is 2,350 m. Development of the Park began in 1995. During the next five years the Ministry of Forestry plans to protect the biodiversity resources of the Park, promote ecotourism, and implement an environmental education and community development program in the 52 villages that surround the Park.

This booklet provides a brief description of the major ecotourism attractions inside the Park and in the surrounding buffer zone. If you would like additional information about the Park, or if you have suggestions for improving this booklet, please contact the Project Manager, Ruteng Nature Recreation Park. Jl. Satar Tacik, Ruteng, Flores, NTT. Tel: 385-21733.

2. ATTRACTIONS INSIDE THE PARK

2.1 LAKE RANAMESE

Lake Rana Mese (1200 m) is located 22 km east of Ruteng on the Trans Flores Highway. The lake is surrounded by dense forest which supports a wide variety of birdlife. The lake attracts aquatic birds that are not seen in other areas near Ruteng. The crater lake of Ranamese will be the center attraction of the Ruteng Nature Recreation Park. The Visitor Center constructed in 1996 will offer exhibits and other facilities for visitors.

Fauna: Monkeys (*Macaca fascicularis*) are common. The forest is also inhabited by Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa vitatus*), Porcupine (*Hystrix javanica*) and Civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*), but they are rarely seen. Many species of birds can be seen near lake Ranamese, including aquatic species such as the Sunda Teal, Garganey, Little Pied Cormorant and the Common Moorhen.¹ In the forest is a wide variety of species including the Ruddy Cuckoo-dove, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Sumba Cicadabird, Bare-throated Whistler, Little Minivet, Russet-capped Tesia, Rynomias, Flowerpeckers, Thrushes and Drongos.

¹ For more information see "Birds of the Ruteng Nature Recreation Park".

Flora: The forest surrounding the lake is rich with native plants, including: Ara (*Ficus variegata*), Rakas (*Ficus fulva var timorensis*), Wuhar (*Acer niven*), Lyanas, Giant Ferns (*Cyathea contaminant*), Rattan, and Wild Raspberry. The marsh on the north side of the lake contains Watercress, Hydra and Water Lilies.

Hiking Trails: The Park will construct several hiking trails in 1996. At present only the trail connecting the Visitor Center to the lake has been developed. There are also several small trails used by local fisherman.

From the Visitor Center, a trail leads to the outlet of the river that flows out of the lake. Cross the stream, and a set of stairs leads up the hill to a trail that runs counter-clockwise around the lake. Soon the trail enters thick shrubs and is difficult to follow. Adventurous trekkers can follow the stream downhill from the lake and reach a small but pretty waterfall after about 20 minutes. This walk passes through beautiful cloud forest with many ferns and orchids. Watch out for leeches!

To reach the north side of the lake, backtrack to the main highway heading north (right) towards Ruteng about 100 m, and enter the small, unmarked footpath to the right towards the lake; The path goes through healthy forest habitat with a short steep section leading down to the lake. It is set in the forest with good look-outs over the lake. The northern shore gets very swampy, and eventually the trail peters out.

Transportation: There are frequent busses travelling past Lake Ranamese from Ruteng. Take a public bus to Borong from the bus terminal in Ruteng for Rp 2,000. Or take the public bemo (minibus) to Mano for Rp 500 and walk the 6 km to Ranamese. Flag down a vehicle to return to Ruteng.

2.2 MT ANAK RANAKA VOLCANO

The 2140 m peak of Mt. Ranaka, or Golo Ranaka, is the second highest of the seven peaks of the Park. In 1987 the mountain erupted, creating a new, still active, volcanic cone, Mt. Anak Ranaka (Child of Ranaka). The eruption resulted in the Telecommunications Station moving from Mt. Ranaka to Pagal, North of Ruteng. However, the 9 km access road to the old Telecommunications Station still provides visitors with a special opportunity to drive or walk directly up to the top of Ranaka through the unique elfin montane primary forest. This is one of the most accessible montane cloud forests in Flores. The Park intends to construct a viewing tower on the top of Mt. Ranaka in 1996. Besides the birds, enjoy the Tree Ferns, Fern Ground Cover, Orchids and other montane forest vegetation. Go early in the morning as the clouds and rain on Mt. Ranaka start even earlier than in Ruteng.

Fauna: High altitude areas historically have provided refuge for animal and bird species during periods of climatic changes, and the forest is home to rare, endemic bird species, including the Timar leaf-warbler, Brown-capped Fantail, Bare-throated Whistler, Yellow-browed Darkeye, Sealey-crowned Honeyeater and the Wallacean Drongo. The area also contains rare small mammal species. The Ministry of Forestry, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (UPI) and the Western Australian Museum are currently collaborating in a study of ground mammals and have already identified several new species.

Flora: The lower three km of the road passes through logged over shrubs with few native species. As you climb further, you enter a diverse cloud forest dominated by Mpui (*Syzigium spp.*), Giant Ferns (*Cyrtosperma ontaminant*), Lyanas, Kenti (*Laptospermum flavescens*) and Rhododendron. Many species of Orchids can also be seen.

For a forest walk and a close up view of the volcano, walk 200 m back down from the top of Ranaka and turn left (across from the 7 km road marker) onto a small footpath into the forest. The small footpath follows the contour through beautiful primary forest, cuts through some heavy undergrowth, and then turns downward steeply. Following the path for 2 km brings you into the forest that was devastated by the eruption in 1987. Usually the clouds break to give you a spectacular view of the volcano smoking away.

Transportation: Charter a bemo (minibus) to take you to the top of Ranaka, wait one hour, and bring you back to Ruteng for approximately Rp 10,000, or Rp 7,000 to just drop you at the top. It is also a good road for motorcycles, albeit rough in a few spots. Or take a public bemo to the village of Robo for Rp. 500 and walk the 9 km to the top, which will take approximately 3 hrs. Along the way up, at 6.9 km (clocked from the beginning of the access road) is an excellent look-out to the volcano. At 7.6 km, is a turn off to the left to a small pond about 25 m off the road.

Walking back down the access road (9 km) to the main Trans Flores highway takes 2 hours. You can easily catch a bemo or bus from Robo on the main road back to Ruteng for Rp 500.

2.3 GOLO LUSANG LOOKOUT

South of Ruteng on the road to Heng, the 1,600 m pass between Mt Lika and Mt Watu Ndao offers a spectacular view over the southern coast of Flores including the majestic Mules Island. If it is very clear, you can see Sumba Island. Get up here early for the morning symphony of birds - an exquisite feast for the ears with Whistlers, Babblers,

Thrushes, Doves and all giving their best. Look overhead for Raptors, in the forest for Sunda Woodpecker, Babblers and Warblers. The Brown-capped Fantail, Bare-throated Whistler, Parrot-finch, Lesser Glossy Starling, doves and the Wallacean Dongo are all commonly seen here.

Trail to meadow: You can bushwhack up to a pretty ridge top meadow in about 30 minutes from the pass. From the Sindha Hotel, if you look up at the Golo Lusang pass you get a clear view of the meadow. A dirt road used by illegal loggers leaves the pass to the east (left as you face away from Ruteng). The road quickly peters out, but keep following the ridge and eventually you will find a small trail that continues on to the grassy meadow. It is easy to lose your way, but the meadow is very pretty with excellent views back to the north. Do not attempt this walk without sturdy shoes and long pants!

Ulu Wae Ces: Returning towards Ruteng, back north from the pass, walk down the road 1 km to Ulu Wae Ces. A footpath cuts into the right (southeast) across the cultivated fields. This path is used by villagers coming to Ruteng from remote villages on the southern slopes of the mountains. The path slopes upwards through the Sensus Shrub (*Chromolaena Odorata*) that forms a tunnel. After 1 km the path winds through secondary forest, and gradually gets steeper. Many small scale illegal loggers operate in this area, and you will probably meet them carrying hand-sawn boards out of the forest.

The top of the pass is about 2 km from the main road. The forests on the far side of the pass are less disturbed, and there is a small meadow about 1 km southeast below the pass. Keep your eyes peeled for Hawks, Falcons, Quail, Swifts, Kingfishers, Wagtails, Pipits, Bushchats, Flycatchers and Munias in the fields and the edge of the forest. In the forest, you will find Russet-capped Tasia, Sunda Bush-warbler, Fantail, Bare-throated Whistler, White-eyes and Darkeyes.

Transportation: For an early departure, arrange a charter the night before for approximately Rp 5,000. Or take a bemo to Ponggeok or Iteng from the Ruteng bus station for Rp 1,000 and get dropped off at the pass, which is 5 km from the cathedral. To return to Ruteng, flag down a bemo or truck for Rp 500-1000. Bernos are infrequent on this road, so be patient.

2.4 CUNCA REDE WATERFALL

The Cunca Rede waterfall on the Wae Musul River is the tallest (30 m) and most beautiful of the Park's waterfalls. It is a four hour walk from the nearest road, and is best visited as part of a two or three day trek (see Section 2.5). The easiest

approach is from the town of Sita on the Trans Flores highway between Ruteng and Sarong. You can sleep either in the village of Ntaur, 30 minutes before (east) of the waterfall or Pupung or Colol, 30 minutes west of the waterfall. Pupung is the most attractive village, and the best place to stay if you are continuing on to the west. There are not yet any homestays in Pupung, but the Village Head (Kepala Desa) will arrange lodging. You should take a guide unless you have good language skills.

2.5 TREKKING FROM ULUMBU TO SITA

The southern slopes of the Park offer some beautiful trekking that includes traditional villages, excellent forests, good bird watching, and the Cunca Rede Waterfall. The Park plans to develop this area for trekking by establishing homestays and preparing a trekking map. For the time being you should take a local guide to find the trails and arrange food and lodging, both of which are very basic. This trip is only for adventurous travelers. There are several variations of the trek, depending on how much time you have.

Ulumbu-Lungar-Pupung-Sita: You start this three day trek by driving one hour from Ruteng by chartered bemo to the Ulumbu Hot Springs, and walking three hours to the small village of Lungar. In Lungar you can drink fresh palm wine (tuak puti) and see traditional agricultural practices. The next day you walk into the Park and through a beautiful forest to the village of Pupung. This walk takes about six hours, and offers good bird watching and views of the mountains and rivers. There are many edible plants in the forest, which your guide can identify for you. Sleep in the pleasant village of Pupung. The next morning you can reach the Cunca Rede Waterfall in 30 minutes, and then continue on to the village Sita in four more hours. Sita is located on the Trans Flores highway, and it is easy to catch public transportation back to Ruteng.

Wae Uwu-Lungar-Pupung-Sita: This three day trek is slightly shorter than the trek described above. It does not include a stop at the Ulumbu Geothermal Springs, but it can be done by public transportation without the expense of chartering a bemo. Take a bemo to Ponggeok or Iteng from the Ruteng bus station for Rp 1,000 and get dropped off at Wae Uwu, which is about 10 km from Ruteng. From Wae Uwu, which is not a village, but just the place where the trail meets the road, you can reach Lungar in about 1.5 hrs. From Lungar the trek is the same as the Ulumbu trek.

Ulu Wae Ces-Pupung-Sita: This trek can be done in two days, and offers the most forest walking and the least driving. From Ruteng, take the Ponggeok or Iteng bemo to Ulu Wae Ces (1 km north of the Golu Lusang pass). The trail cuts into the right (southeast) across the cultivated fields. After 1 km the path winds through secondary

growth forest, and gradually gets steeper. After crossing the pass, the path drops gradually through a beautiful forest to the village of Colol. The last section before the village is open and offers excellent views of the mountain range and Pupung valley. You can sleep in either Colol or Pupung. There are several forks in the trail and few people to ask directions from, so you should take a guide. From Pupung, the trek is similar to the Ulumbu trek.

2.6 PONG TODA RAVINE

This walk brings you into a forested ravine with old Casuarina stands in the lap of Mt. Dukol. Take a bemo from the bus station for Rp 250 to Leda, where the paved asphalt road turns into dirt road. Walk west on the dirt road. In front of the Sisteran (nunnery), look westward and you can see the ravine and the footpath following the contour into the forested area. The forested mountains are inside the Park. You want to climb up the right (west) side of the ravine because the forest is less disturbed than on the more easily accessible and logged left side. Continue walking up the dirt road for 1.5 km, across the stream bed with new roadwork and along the grassy area, until you reach a small foot path leading up to the left, south. The path climbs into the Park, and brings you along a gentle contour across the grassy slope into the ravine.

You will walk across open grass and shrub lands with scattered Eucalyptus trees. This is a good place to see birds such as the Golden-headed Cisticolas, Zitting Cisticolas, Friarbird, Tits, Munias, and Bushchats. Follow the path up into the sensus shrub past a couple of field houses. Keep your eyes open for Brown Quail and White-eyes. After about 1 km the path forks. Take the left hand fork which leads you along the side of the ravine where you will find old Casuarina and many feeding parties. (This is actually a water system trail and pipeline.) The Little Minivet is a common sight as well as Pigeons, Parrots, Kingfishers, Fantails, and Honeyeaters and others.

For a less strenuous walk, stay on the dirt road rather than climbing up the small path. The dirt road runs parallel to and just outside of the Park boundary. It passes through beautiful, uninhabited grass lands with occasional Eucalyptus plantations. After several km the road ends at the Trans Flores highway at the village of Kuwu, where you can easily catch a bus or bemo back to Ruteng for Rp. 500.

2.7 CUNCA WERAK WATERFALL

This small waterfall in the Wae Mantar River has a bath sized pool at its base. The river walk to the waterfall is beautiful, and birds and butterflies can be seen. Scramble steeply down from the road through gardens for 200 m, and then 700 m through

secondary forest to the Wae Mantar River. Then walk 500 m up the river through Ara trees (*Ficus variegata*) to the waterfall.

Transportation: The waterfall is 14 km from Ruteng on the road to Iteng. It can be reached by taking the Iteng or Pongok bus from Ruteng for Rp 1,000.

3. ATTRACTIONS IN THE PARK BUFFERZONE

3.1 ULUMBU GEOTHERMAL SPRINGS

The Ulumbu geothermal springs are located just outside the Park an hour drive south of Ruteng. The two hectare complex looks more like a volcano than hot springs - the water is boiling hot and the springs emit thick clouds of steam and vapors. It is possible to bathe in one place where the hot water mixes with a small stream, but the main attraction is walking around the steamy springs, a scene from another planet. The New Zealand government is helping to develop a geothermal power plant just downstream from the complex, but fortunately the plant can not be seen from the springs.

Public transportation is irregular to the springs, so the best option is to charter a bemo for the day. The road to Ulumbu passes through the Golu Lusang Lookout, so you should start early and admire the morning view from the pass. Another option is to start a three day trek to Sita from Ulumbu (see Section 2.5).

3.2 TENKE LESE WATERFALL

This dramatic waterfall can be visited in a long day trip from Ruteng by chartering a vehicle. It is actually three waterfalls, each approximately 25 meters tall. During the dry season it is possible to swim in a pool under the lower falls. It is a strenuous climb up to the upper falls. The 1 hr. walk to the waterfall passes through some beautiful rice terraces and traditional, isolated Manggarai villages.

Transportation: The Hotel Desember organizes trips to this waterfall. Drive to the village of Ndehas, south of Kuwu, approximately 1.5 hrs. drive from Ruteng. From Ndehas you walk approximately 1 hr. through rice paddies to the waterfall. During the dry season, it is possible to drive further than Ndehas to a small hospital that is only a 30 minute walk from the waterfall.

3.3 WAE GARET WATERFALL

This small waterfall can be visited as a half day trip from Ruteng using public transportation. It is located in a pretty gorge a 30 minute drive west of Ruteng on the Trans-Flores highway, and has a small pool for swimming at the base of the falls. Local villagers often visit this river to search for fresh water shrimp, so dress appropriately.

Transportation: Take a public bemo for Rp. 500 to Cancar from the Ruteng bus station, and get off at the Wae Garet river, which is at the bottom of a steep gorge. Walk 100 m west (away from Ruteng) from the bridge over the Wae Garet river, and enter a small paved road to the right. This is the entrance to an abandoned small hydro-electric plant. Go down a very steep and slippery set of concrete stairs to a second building, and then follow a small trail down to the river. The waterfall is about 100 meters upstream.

3.4 LIANG BUA CAVES

Three small limestone caves are located 13 km north of Ruteng. The largest cave, Gua Dingin, has a large chamber 50 m wide and 20 m long with stalactites and stalagmites. This cave was previously used as a classroom. The small paved road to the caves passes through attractive farmland, and ends at a river several hundred meters from the caves.

Transportation: Public transportation to Liang Bua is irregular, but it is possible to take a bemo to Rambasasak from Toko Sentosa in Ruteng for approximately Rp. 750. Another option is to charter a vehicle from one of the hotels.

3.5 GOLO CURU HILL

Golo Churu is a small hill with a magnificent view of the Ruteng mountains, town, and surrounding country side. It is located in Karot, just north of Ruteng. The hill-top is sacred to Catholics because the Virgin Mary was once sighted there, and an outdoor chapel has been constructed. Halfway up the hill is a small graveyard. The hill is frequently visited by local and international tourists, and is a lovely spot. It is possible to walk east from the hill and follow the edge of the steep drop off north of the airport. In 30 minutes you can walk around the airport in a clockwise direction and emerge near the Ruteng Nature Recreation Park Office on Jl Satar Tacik where you can catch a bemo back to town.

Transportation: Galo Guru is a 30 minute walk from downtown Ruteng. Follow the road north to Carep past the Kopi Flores plant, and turn right on a gravel road just after crossing a small river. It is possible to take a city bemo to the turn-off for Rp. 500.

3.6 OLD RUTENG VILLAGE (RUTENG LAMA)

The original village of Ruteng is located on the outskirts of the present city of Ruteng. It is easy to visit and is located in a peasant rural setting. The small village is built around a traditional round stone circular stone walkway. In the center of the circle is an alter (compang) which is used for traditional ceremonies. Previously the villagers were buried in the center of the circle. The village has a traditional drum house which tourists are welcome to enter for a small fee. Take a look at the new graveyard, which is surrounded by old Ficus trees. A small trail leads west from the graveyard through bamboo groves and farmland. Also visit the natural spring across the paved road from the graveyard where the villagers bathe and collect water.

Transportation: Ruteng lama is a 20 minute walk west of the main Ruteng market (Pasar Baru). You can take a city bemo from the market for Rp. 500. The market, which is open every day, is worth visiting. Merchandise includes fruit and vegetables, hand woven sarongs, and caged birds that have been recently caught in the forests.

3.7 TODO TRADITIONAL VILLAGE

The village of Toda is located just outside the buffer zone to the west of the Park. The village contains a large, recently restored clan house in the traditional round shape. It is one of the best examples of traditional Manggarai architecture. The village is scenically located at the base of the Todo mountains. The area is also well known for its distinctive hand woven textiles, and it is a good place to buy them directly from the producers. There are no hotels or restaurants in Toda, so you should visit it as a long day trip or take a guide to arrange food and lodging in the village for you.

The even more traditional village of Wae Robo is located high in the Todo mountains. Wae Robo includes several large traditional houses that are more than 100 years old and are each still inhabited by several families. Wae Robo can only be reached by trekking several hours, and you need a guide to arrange lodging. Pak Konradus, a Manggarai guide from the Wae Robo area who can be contacted via the Park office, can arrange a 2-3 day trek to the area.

Transportation: Several bemos leave the Ruteng bus terminal each day for Todo for approximately Rp. 3,000. The trip takes 3 hrs. by bemo, or two hours by private car.

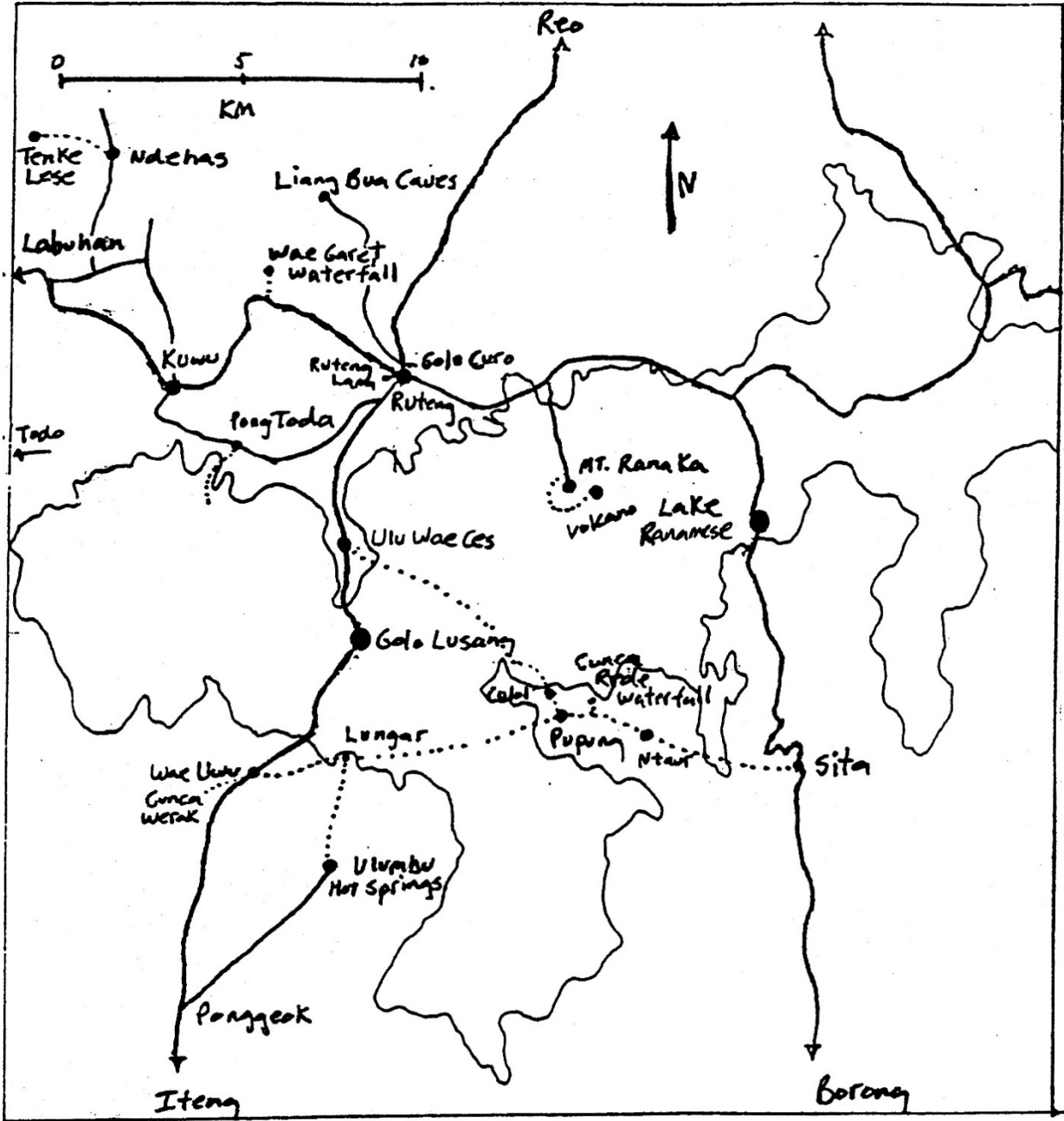
3.8 HORSE RACING

An unusual and colorful horse race takes place in Ruteng several times each year, especially in August and October. The jockeys are young boys, 12 to 14 years old, and they ride bareback. No starting gate is used, the handlers of the horses spin the horses around in circles until a bell announces the start of the race. The local businessmen gamble heavily, but most people just enjoy the spectacle. Food and drinks are available. The race track is between the airport and Golo Guru. Ask at your hotel whether any races will be held during your stay in Ruteng.

3.9 TRADITIONAL WHIP FIGHTING (CACI)

Perhaps the most exotic cultural attraction in West Flores is caci, or traditional whip fighting. This ancient ritual is still very popular in Manggarai District, and is practiced regularly in village festivals. Men dress up in colorful traditional outfits, and take turns fighting each other with whips made of buffalo skin. Each attacker gets once chance to strike his opponent, who defends himself with a shield and a long piece of bamboo. The whole village turns out to watch, and there is lots of music and merriment. Tourists are welcome, and the whip fighters are happy to be photographed and have their virility documented. Ask at your hotel if any caci festivals will be held during your stay.

4. MAP OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS



Ecotourism Attractions of Ruteng Nature Recreation
Park