



RPU members cross river in route to apprehend illegal logger.



Illegal logging suspect arrested with chainsaw.

A Day in the Life of an RPU Member

By Sectionov Inov, Yayasan Badak Indonesia

Rhino Protection Units (RPUs) are a unique collaboration, which combine government officers and community in securing and patrolling inside National Park areas in a professional and well managed manner. We know that rhinos are a key species and protecting rhinos and their habitat is our main task. That means we also protect tigers, elephants, and other species.

The following is an excerpt from a story direct from the RPU team:

One day, while patrolling in the northern section of Way Kambas National Park, RPU Unit 1 received a report of illegal logging activity. Recently in that area of the park, there has been lots of illegal logging which also disturbs rhino habitat. After arriving at the location, RPU heard a chainsaw but it was still quite far away. They tried to follow the noise. Slowly and carefully, the team walked to the location, crossing a river on the way.

After three hours of walking, RPU arrived at the location. They saw three people cutting trees with chainsaws. Two of the men had heard RPU coming and ran away, but one of them was still cutting a tree and RPU were able to catch him and arrest him. RPU tried to interrogate him, to ask where they came from, and to find out who is in charge of the illegal logging operations. RPU also collected all evidence and took a picture of him, and then wrote our report.

After interrogating and collecting all information from the illegal logger, RPU unit 1 called RPU base camp via walkie talkie and asked to be picked up at the check point. It was going to take them at least four hours to walk to the check point, and it would not be easy, because they had to also bring the logger in handcuffs. So they decided to take a shortcut, but they had to cross two rivers, Way Nibung and Way Pegadungan. The second river was quite deep.

Luckily, they had confiscated one small boat belonging to the suspect and several big plastic bottles that were used as gasoline containers. The team, with the suspect, was seven people, but the boat could only hold three. Head of unit and one member of the RPU accompanied the suspect across the river. Meanwhile the other members decided to swim across the river. Actually they hate to swim across this river because there are too many mosquitos and leeches, but they had to do it.

Each of them used one of the big plastic bottles to help us float and swim across the river. They started across the river at 6:00 PM – almost dark. When they started to cross, they realized the current was much higher and stronger that they had thought. They were swept down the river, and they just had to float along, using the plastic bottles, trying to survive. They were in the river for more than 5 hours before they were able to climb out and then make it to the checkpoint around midnight. It was terrifying.

After arriving at the checkpoint, they used the RPU boat to go to the base camp – another three hour trip – and then drove the suspect to the National Park office, where they handed him over to the police. It is probably the hardest job, It's not an easy job, but I know they proud to be a member of the Rhino Protection Unit.