Taste of traditional Bidayuh life for Australian expedition crew

New friends: Australian and Bidayuh youngsters resting before continuing their journey uphill.

KUCHING: A group of 16 environmental students from Deakin University in Melbourne are spending three nights at Bung Bratak, a historic Bidayuh site which was ransacked and burnt down by the Sea Dayak pirates from Skrang and Saribas some 700 years ago.

Led by associate professor John White of Deakin's Environmental Faculty, the students aged between 19 and 30, are undertaking studies on biodiversity while working closely with the locals and also Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas)'s Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation (IBEC).

Six Unimas undergraduates undergoing their Masters degree, under associate Dr Alexander Kiew Sayok, will join the expedition at the 600m Bung Bratak (Bung means mountain or hill in Bidayuh).

On their arrival near the site recently, the team were given a traditional Bidayuh welcome with youths performing the entertaining Berjang and Belangi dances. The expedition members later scaled the Bung Bratak and set up camp close to a Bidayuh longhouse proposed under the state government's "Heritage Mountain" scheme.

The uphill climb took between 20 to 30 minutes.

One of the organisers Joseph Jindi said the visitors would be living like the traditional Bidayuhs throughout the four-day outing — eating what the locals ate, and using leaves as plates and bamboo containers as drinking cups. Gravity-fed water from the mountain would be used for cooking, washing and bathing, he added.

After the Bung Bratak trip, the Australians will go visit Kubah National Park, Semenggok Orangutan Rehabilitation Sanctuary and Asap Resettlement Scheme in Bakun. They will leave for Melbourne on Dec 11.