DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

TITLE

Who or what was the first orangutan?
The mysterious origins of a name

SPEAKER

Professor Robert Cribb

Day, Date, Time, Venue

Wednesday, 28 March 2007, 3 pm
HY/PS Lounge, AS1-0401

Abstract

It is widely known that the term 'orang utan', which most Western languages use to refer to the hairy red ape *Pongo pygmaeus* of Sumatra and Borneo, means 'man, or person, of the forest' in Malay. Yet there is no evidence that 'orang utan' was ever used by Malays or Indonesians to refer to apes before the middle of the 19th century. Rather, the term referred, as it often still does, to real people who live in the forests. How did the term come to be linked to the ape? This paper uses historical detective work to suggest it was all a terrible misunderstanding ...

About the Speaker

Robert Cribb is senior fellow in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. His principal research is on mass violence and national identity in Indonesia, and he is the author of the *Historical Atlas of Indonesia*. He takes relief from his work on violence by following an interest in environmental history.

For enquiries, please contact the Department of History