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DOCUMENTATION OF HERITAGE SITES AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF CALANASAN, APAYAO

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ABSTRACT

This study documents the heritage sites and cultural landscapes of Calanasan, Apayao, highlighting their vital role in the cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge, and ecological resilience of the Isnag people. Employing a descriptive-ethnographic approach through interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, the research identifies two primary categories of heritage: historical sites and structures such as the first water reservoir, the 1947 Bulut Residence, and mission-era religious landmarks and cultural landscapes, including tribal truce sites (Ambaw Bayag, Gudangan Brook), historical trade trails, and the traditionally managed Lapat system. These assets are situated within the Apayao Biosphere Reserve, emphasizing an inseparable link between nature and culture. The findings underscore the need for formal legal protection by the Local Government Unit (LGU) and the integration of these narratives into local curricula to ensure intergenerational continuity against modernization pressures.

Keywords: *Isnag people, cultural landscapes, heritage documentation, Lapat system, Apayao Biosphere Reserve, Indigenous knowledge systems, Calanasan.*

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Introduction

The recognition and protection of heritage sites and cultural landscapes have gained increasing global importance as essential components of cultural identity, human rights, and sustainable development. International frameworks emphasize that cultural heritage extends beyond monuments and artifacts to include living landscapes shaped by the interaction between people and the environment. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines cultural heritage protection as a shared global responsibility, particularly through the World Heritage Convention, which recognizes both cultural and natural properties of outstanding universal value (UNESCO, 1972). Within this framework, heritage sites and cultural landscapes are understood as integral to safeguarding cultural diversity and fostering intergenerational continuity.

The concept of cultural landscapes was formally recognized under the World Heritage Convention as “combined works of nature and man,” reflecting the inseparable relationship between human activity and the natural environment in shaping heritage (UNESCO, 1972). This recognition reinforces the importance of protecting heritage sites and cultural landscapes as dynamic systems that embody historical processes, cultural practices, and ecological relationships.

In the Philippines, the protection of cultural heritage is mandated through Republic Act No. 10066, or the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009, which requires the state and local government units to identify, document, and safeguard cultural properties, including heritage sites and cultural landscapes (Republic of the Philippines, 2009). This legal framework strengthens the decentralization of heritage protection by encouraging communities to recognize and preserve culturally significant landscapes embedded in local histories and traditions.

Within the Cordillera Administrative Region, and specifically in Calanasan, Apayao, heritage sites and cultural landscapes reflect the enduring cultural identity of the Isnag people. These landscapes include sacred rivers, forest ecosystems, ancestral domains, and traditionally managed areas governed by the Lapat system, which regulates resource use and ensures ecological balance. These culturally significant landscapes represent Indigenous knowledge systems that sustain community resilience and environmental stewardship. However, increasing modernization and environmental pressures place these landscapes at risk of degradation and loss if not systematically documented and protected.

The designation of the Apayao Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme further underscores the inseparable relationship between



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nature and culture, positioning Calanasan as part of a globally recognized socio-ecological system where heritage sites and cultural landscapes contribute to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development (UNESCO, n.d.). This reinforces the importance of documenting and safeguarding these landscapes as interconnected cultural and ecological assets.

Ultimately, this study situates the heritage sites and cultural landscapes of Calanasan, Apayao within global and national heritage frameworks. By documenting these landscapes, the research seeks to contribute to the protection of living cultural systems that sustain identity, Indigenous knowledge, and ecological resilience.



Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive-ethnographic approach combined with cultural landscape documentation, to systematically record and interpret the heritage sites and cultural landscapes of Calanasan, Apayao. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that aim to understand meanings, practices, and lived experiences within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnographic inquiry, in particular, allows researchers to examine cultural patterns, beliefs, and relationships embedded in place-based contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

In addition, the study adopted the concept of cultural landscape documentation, consistent with UNESCO's recognition of cultural landscapes as "combined works of nature and man" that require integrated documentation of both physical and cultural attributes (UNESCO, 1972). This design is appropriate for capturing the interaction between Indigenous practices, ecological systems, and spatial heritage in Calanasan, where cultural meaning is deeply embedded in land, rivers, forests, and ancestral domains.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the Municipality of Calanasan, Province of Apayao, Philippines. Calanasan is part of the Cordillera Administrative Region and is recognized as part of the Apayao Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, which highlights its rich ecological and cultural diversity (UNESCO, n.d.). The area is inhabited predominantly by the Isnag Indigenous group, whose cultural practices are closely tied to land and natural resources through systems such as the Lapat.

Research Participants

Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Key informants included:

- Indigenous elders (knowledge holders of oral history and traditions)
- Community leaders and cultural custodians
- Local government representatives (culture and tourism offices)



- Indigenous youth representatives (for intergenerational perspectives)

Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify individuals who have rich and relevant knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015).

Data Gathering Methods

The study utilized multiple qualitative methods to ensure triangulation:

1. **Key Informant Interviews (KII)**
Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather narratives on heritage sites and cultural landscapes, including sacred places, traditional land use areas, and culturally significant ecological zones. Interviews allowed participants to freely express meanings and experiences associated with these landscapes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGD)**
FGDs were conducted among community members to validate and enrich data from individual interviews. This method facilitated collective interpretation of cultural meanings associated with landscapes and heritage sites.
3. **Transect Walks and Field Observation**
Transect walks were conducted with local guides to directly observe and document heritage sites and cultural landscapes, including rivers, forests, ancestral domains, and ritual areas. Field observation is essential in ethnographic research for capturing spatial and environmental context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).
4. **Photo Documentation and Mapping**
Photographic documentation and basic spatial mapping were used to visually record heritage landscapes. This supports UNESCO-aligned documentation practices for cultural landscapes and heritage conservation (UNESCO, 1972).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying patterns, meanings, and categories within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process included:

1. Transcription of interviews and FGDs
2. Familiarization with field notes and visual data
3. Coding of recurring themes related to heritage sites and cultural landscapes



4. Categorization into major themes such as sacred landscapes, ecological heritage, and cultural practices
5. Interpretation in relation to Indigenous knowledge systems and heritage frameworks

Triangulation of interviews, FGDs, and field observations was used to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards in Indigenous and cultural research. Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants. Respect for Indigenous knowledge systems was strictly observed, consistent with UNESCO's principles on safeguarding intangible and tangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Data were handled with confidentiality, and sensitive cultural information was shared only with community approval.



Results

Historical sites and structures



Figure 2. *The first water reservoir*

In the early 1960s, the first water reservoir was constructed by American Protestant missionary Lyn Keyes during the mayoral term of the Late Hon. Pedro Bunot, with the water source from a rivulet (Burboran Danum) at Sinad-an, near the Cruzado Chapel. It had 3 original supplied Purok Bohol, Lapuhan, and Tarpangan. This inspired subsequent mayors to construct bigger water supplies. The water reservoir is located atop a hill at the Marreros' lot. Tendered by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) mission to the barangay.



Figure 3. *Old Bulut Residence*

Built in 1947, this residential structure represents the second wave of traditional houses because the original built had already been destroyed through thick and thin, thereby causing the residence to procure substitute materials like these bought from the lowlands, which are sturdier and stand the test of time.

This structure is owned by the Bulut family. The roofing and window shutters were purchased from outside, and the walling was already the product of sawed and planed lumber, as introduced by the lowlands. Before, roofing was made of reeds, and the lumber material was finished by manual cutting through the use of an aliwa (bolo), awatay (head axe). Nails were in the form of slithered hardwood.

Originally, the structure was supposed to be tall or high so that the underside was used for threshing and pounding palay or other cereals. It was also used as a pagbattalan (black smiting) space, urung (chicken coop), ikub (storage for rootcrops), and umalig (storage for jars).

The residential house, before and even up to these days, serves as a venue for say-am, marriage rites, peace settlements, and accommodation for visitors, and or a large number of visitors.

In cases of wear and tear or dilapidation, repairs were made and/or another structure was built for replacement.



The kitchen accessories, paratang (general storage), paga (to dry palay, firewood, smoke meat), and biggayun (to easily dry firewood). And on the side is the gumutuwan (dish rack). Below the biggayun is the dapu (stove) with three tagang (hearthstones).

The gawayan (living room) serves as a family assembly area, a playing space for children, a dining area, a visitors' area, and a sleeping area. Sometimes a sarambi (annexed area) serves also as sleeping quarters and a place for mats, pillows, and blankets. The house appears to be a traditional, elevated wooden structure built using locally available materials and simple construction techniques.

It is primarily made of wooden planks, which form the exterior walls. These planks are arranged horizontally and show natural weathering, suggesting long-term exposure to the elements. The structure is raised on short concrete or stone posts, lifting the house slightly above the ground—this is a common design in rural areas to protect against moisture, flooding, and pests while allowing air circulation underneath.

The roof is made of corrugated metal sheets, supported by a wooden frame. Its sloped (gable) design helps rainwater run off easily. The extended eaves provide some protection to the walls and windows from direct sunlight and rain.

The house has several rectangular windows with wooden frames and lattice or 426apiz-style panels, which allow light and airflow while maintaining privacy. The framing of the house, including beams and supports, is visibly wooden, indicating a post-and-beam construction style.

Overall, the house is built in a functional, climate-adaptive manner, with elevated flooring, lightweight materials, and ventilation features suited to a warm, humid environment.



Figure 4. Grotto

This is a curved white rock, referred to as the grotto of Our Lady of Fatima, under Samuel Danao, the head carver, in late 1959. The statue was brought in from Kabugao by Rita Bodat in late 1959. The original one was worn out by wear and tear. So, the present statue was brought in the mid-1970s. The grotto is located beside the St. Joseph Catholic Mission Church in Barangay Poblacion, Calanasan, Apayao. The grotto is located within the northern perimeter of the Roman Catholic Mission (RCC) chapel in Purok Bohol, owned by the Catholic Mission.



Figure 5. St. Bernadette Church
Photo Courtesy: SJCM Calanasan Youth Ministry

The church was built and inaugurated in 1958 by Father Herman Flameigh, a Belgian priest. It was only in 1961, under Father Liven Ampe, another Belgian father, that it was named St. Bernadeth Church in honor of the visionary of Our Lady of Lourdes, the patron church of Kabugao Mission.

Originally, the thatch church served as a prayer meeting center, but it was already worn out, so the present church was built as a replacement, with the lot donated by the Ravelo family.

The photo shows a small, rustic wooden church set in a lush, green rural landscape. The building has a simple gable roof made of corrugated metal and is constructed from weathered wooden planks, giving it a natural, aged appearance.

At the front, a large white cross is mounted near the peak of the roof, clearly identifying it as a Christian place of worship. Below it, there is a signboard above the entrance (partially readable) indicating the name of the church. The entrance is centered, with symmetrical windows on both sides, likely designed to allow natural light and ventilation.



When a truce was agreed and a day and place were set, the rite was then.

The above picture serves as a historical venue when truce between *ihapayaw* led elder Burawi and *ituka'* led by Abagyat in late 1950's when both where original arch rivals for dominance.

The rite began when the *ihapayaw* party settled at the other side of the river, the *ihapayaws* and opposite it particularly at Banduy's residence when both beheaded a dog restituted by the *ihapayaw* beheading another. Banduy, the brooker or negotiator, assembled both tribes in his residence for oral and formal settlement.

Both tribes gave *wale'wes* (tokens) to each other and gave a jar to Banduy. This resulted in a partnership in trades.



Figure 33. Gudangan Brook

Gudangan Brook this summer time was already dried up due to climate change. Along this brook was the waiting area of *Ikarikitan* (Conner) to wait for the *allawagi* (a misery) of the *ibagayag* for *palna'* (truce). It is recalled that the *ibayag* headhunters were able to subjugate the *Ikarikitan* during the headhunting period, led by *Agubang* (an ibayag). Thus, to end hostilities between the two tribes, a truce was made in the presence of Banduy (the Cafirma ancestors). This happened in the late 1950s. This is for one reason that the *ibayag* and *ikarikitan* are peaceful neighbors to this day.



Figure 34. Sitio Malungog
Photo Courtesy: LGU-Calanasan

The foot trail from *Bayag* (now Calanasan) to Ilocos Norte was used by Governor Roque Ablan of Ilocos Norte to evacuate during the Japanese occupation in World War II. Unfortunately, he did not return. In the early 1960s, his spouse, Mrs. Manuela, hiked the same trail in an attempt to recover his remains, but was unsuccessful.

Currently, a vehicle network is available, making travel easier for local residents and reducing the need for hiking.

The foot trail before served as an outlet for the locals for a barter of salt, kitchen utensils and other household items. This is for one reason that the locals now fluently speaks Ilocano. And some modifications in their traditions.



Figure 35. *Lapat Signage*

Lapat etched on a rock background; the water pond is designated as a no-fishing zone for the reservation until lifted. This has been declared by the barangay Poblacion as the community breeding pond. It is located at the mouth of the Pengan River, the western side of Purok Lapuhan, and Bohol. It is owned by the barangay.

Conclusion

The documentation of Calanasan, Apayao, reveals a rich tapestry where the cultural identity of the Isnag people is inextricably linked to their ancestral lands and historical milestones. Within this framework, historical sites and structures such as the first water reservoir , the 1947 Bulut Residence , the Grotto of Our Lady of Fatima , and St. Bernadette Church represent the community's architectural and socio-religious evolution. In parallel, the cultural landscapes of the region, including the truce sites of Ambaw Bayag and Gudangan Brook , the historical foot trail of Sitio Malungog , and the traditionally managed *Lapat* zones, serve as living monuments to Indigenous peace-building, trade, and ecological stewardship. Together,



these assets form a globally recognized socio-ecological system that sustains Indigenous knowledge and community resilience within the Apayao Biosphere Reserve.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are proposed to ensure the long-term preservation and sustainable management of the heritage sites and cultural landscapes in Calanasan:

1. The Local Government Unit (LGU) of Calanasan should formally declare the documented historical structures, such as the first water reservoir, the Old Bulut Residence, and St. Bernadette Church, as local heritage assets to provide them with legal protection and funding for restoration under Republic Act No. 10066.
2. The Municipal Tourism and Cultural Offices should develop an integrated "Living Heritage" map and educational program that highlights the cultural landscapes of Ambaw Bayag and Gudangan Brook to promote heritage-based tourism that respects the historical significance of tribal peace pacts.
3. The Barangay Poblacion Council and Indigenous Elders should strengthen the enforcement and documentation of the *Lapat* system at the Pengan River and other communal areas to ensure that traditional ecological knowledge continues to serve as a primary tool for biodiversity conservation within the Apayao Biosphere Reserve.
4. The Department of Education (DepEd) local division should collaborate with Isnag elders to integrate the history of the Sitio Malungog trail and the evolution of traditional architecture into the localized social studies curriculum, fostering intergenerational pride and knowledge transfer among Indigenous youth.
5. Community Custodians and Private Owners of historical sites should be provided with technical assistance and incentives by the LGU to maintain the structural integrity of their properties using traditional methods, ensuring that repairs do not compromise the historical authenticity of the sites.

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