

Fire Ceremony

BONTOC, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *This fire ritual is observed by the Bontoc in the municipality of Besao, in Mountain Province, Northern Luzon.*



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A ritual place where mounted carabao horns indicate the animals sacrificed.

THE CEREMONY BEGINS the day before when all the houses in the barrio are thoroughly cleaned, swept and washed, including the grounds. Everyone takes a bath in the river. At night, every single fire in the barrio is allowed to go out.

The next morning, all those who are physically able, dress in clean clothes and go up to the designated sacred place with each householder carrying a piece of *saleng* (pine pitch). The sacred place in the barrio is an ancient volcanic fumarole on the shoulder of the mountain. There, a small hut has been built. They squat in a circle, in the center of which is an old priest who chants the ancient ritual, a prayer to fire. As the chanting proceeds, an old priestess starts to make a new fire saw. She holds down on the ground a pithy bamboo-like stick, about three inches in diameter, on which a notch has been made. A young priest places a hard piece of stick on the notch then saws vigorously. Soon, smoke appears and when the young priest removes his saw, there is a small ember. The priestess places tinder on this and blows the ember into a blaze to which she adds her *saleng*. Each householder comes to get his own fire and begins life anew.