

KARST NEWS

Vol. 5, Issue 1

The Newsletter of the Malaysian Karst Society

April 2008

For members only

Message from the President

The MKS 6th AGM was held a few weeks ago marking one year since this Committee was elected into office. This may be a good time to reflect on the last year and also to think about the future of the MKS.

In the past one year, MKS has been able to gain some recognition at least among its fellow environmental NGOs, when it was accepted as a member of MENO or the Malaysian Environmental Non Governmental Organization. Membership in MENO allows MKS to network and cooperate with other environmental NGOs for mutual benefit. An advantage for a small young organization like MKS.

The past Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Dato Seri Azmi Khalid was also introduced to the MKS when yours truly met the Minister at his office in Putrajaya. We discussed several projects of national interest, specifically the Cave and Karst Database Project, the Kinta Valley Project and the Wang Mu Streamway Expedition. The latter project was brought up as it is located in the Minister's home state of Perlis. I also took the opportunity to introduce MKS to him. He indicated that his Ministry would be very supportive of our work and promised to assist us in any way possible. He mentioned that he may not be the Minister after the election but promised to help in his personal capacity.

The formation of the MKS Technical Advisory Group (TAG) with 8 members occurred last year. Currently with 8 members and the President as the Coordinator, it had its first meeting last year. It is hoped that TAG can help strengthen MKS's technical capacity.

Another group of limestone hills is threatened by quarrying. This time it is

Gunung Senyum and Gunung Jabak Puyuh in the Jengka Triangle in Pahang (see the Trips Section if you'd like to visit these two hills). MKS with support from other fellow Malaysian conservation organizations wrote to YTL's CEO to record our objection to this plan. We have not heard from YTL although they said that Tan Sri Francis Yeoh has read the letter.

As for the immediate future, MKS will be taking advantage of the change in governments in several states, particularly Perak, where we hope to engage with the State Government especially regarding the ongoing rampant quarrying activities that is resulting in the destruction of Ipoh's scenic limestone hills.

We also hope to obtain new funding sources to diversify MKS's income. This is very important as we are already 5 years old and it is really time to start ensuring the long term sustainability of our society well into the future. To this end, several projects will be actively marketed for funding.

It goes without saying that there is much to be done with the limited resources available to MKS. This society is crucial to the future of Malaysian Cave and Karst and we are hopeful that MKS will eventually play an important role in the conservation, better management and increased awareness of the importance of our cave and karst.



Caves of Gunung Senyum

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MKS Committee 2007/2008

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Committee Members

COMMON CAVING MISTAKES & CONSEQUENCES

1. Primary light failed; did not carry backup lights or backup lights inadequate – stranded.
2. No map, no guide and poor route-finding skills – lost.
3. Wore inadequate or inappropriate clothing for conditions – hypothermia.
4. Did not bring extra clothing – hypothermia.
5. Moving but not paying attention – caver fall.
6. Free climbing more than a body-length without belay – caver fall.
7. Traversing above drop without belay or safety line - caver fall.
8. Ignore rainy weather forecast; entered water cave – flood entrapment or drowning.
9. Careless movement in tight passage or crevice – stuck.
10. Entered bat cave or passage without precautions – histoplasmosis.
11. Solo caving and something went wrong – stranded.
12. Did not tell anyone of plans – delayed rescue by hours or days.
13. Did not clear loose rock from lip – struck by falling rock.
14. Climbing or descending hand-over-hand – lost grip and fell.
15. Climbing cable ladder without belay – fell off.
16. Lost control of rappel; no bottom belay or rappel safety – fell to bottom.
17. Out of shape or unfamiliar with climbing system – stranded on rope.
18. Did not know how to change from rappel to climb or climb to rappel – stranded on rope.
19. Hair or clothing stuck in rappel device; did not know how to recover – stranded on rope.
20. Rappelling without wearing climbing system – stranded in pit or on rope.
21. Attempted pull-down trip without map or guide – stranded.
22. Sharing vertical gear; lost equipment passing it up or down the pit – stranded.
23. Did not tie knot at end of rope – rappelling off the end and fell.
24. Moving around lip of pit without being belayed or being on rope – fell into pit.
25. Did not check attachment of rappel device to harness – detached from rappel device and fell.

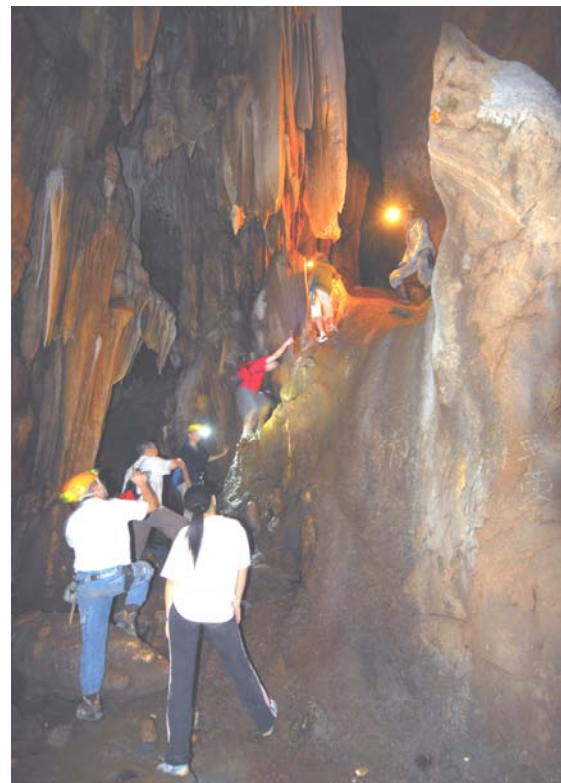
WARNING!

Some Stats (from the NSS, USA)

7% of reported regular caving accidents results in death while 76% of reported cave diving accidents results in death!!

Half of all caving fatalities involve novices or un-trained cavers.

Make sure that you are well prepared and are familiar with all caving procedures and equipment before exploring a cave!



Climbing in Gua Kelawar

Cave News

Importance of Bats

US: April 4, 2008

WASHINGTON - Bats play a bigger role than birds do in controlling tropical insects, and the loss of bats might mean that your morning cup of coffee gets more expensive, researchers said on Thursday.

Two separate studies show bats eat far more insects than birds do, protecting plants of the rain forest and, in one of the studies, coffee plantations.

The studies, published in the journal *Science*, suggest that the loss of bat populations worldwide might affect agriculture -- not to mention make warm evenings outside more uncomfortable, the researchers said. "Bats are impacting ecological systems in all kinds of ways, and I just want them to get the credit they deserve," said Kimberly Williams-Guillen, a tropical ecologist at the University of Michigan who led one of the studies.

Williams-Guillen and colleagues studied bats at Finca Irlanda, a 740-acre(300-hectare) organic coffee plantation in Chiapas, Mexico. In previous studies of insect damage, scientists have simply covered plants to keep off birds and then counted the bugs and measured what they ate. They forgot to account for what the bats did at night.

Williams-Guillen and her colleagues set up three types of enclosures -- one that only excluded birds, one that only excluded bats at night, and nets that kept out birds and bats day and night.

During the summer wet season, the coffee trees under the nets that kept the bats out had 84 percent more insects, spiders and other bugs than unprotected plants, they reported. Birds had far less of an effect, they said.

HANGING OUT ON PLANTS

Margareta Kalka of the Smithsonian Institution in Balboa, Panama, and her team did a similar experiment in what she described as pristine rain forest.

"Insects could freely pass through the nets to eat the plants, hang out on the plants," Kalka said in a telephone interview. "Both bats and birds had a significant effect on plants, and in our particular study ... we found a bigger impact of bats than from birds," Kalka added.

Plants shielded only from birds during the day had double the insect damage of plants that were uncovered, Kalka said. But plants netted at night to keep bats out had three times the usual insect damage.



Horseshoe Bats

CAVES REVEAL OUR PAST

by Robert Percival

“Caves can provide some well preserved archaeological discoveries because of a number of factors.”



Perak Man

Limestone hills have been part of the landscape for millions of years. Our early ancestors discovered the numerous caves and rock-shelters that form part of this landscape and found a variety of uses for them. These natural features provide opportunities for shelter, concealment and lookout for both humans and animals. In many instances, high cave entrances provide vistas that allow the occupants to observe the surrounding landscape from a position of security. It is thus not surprising that during the Stone Age, caves were used as dwellings by some of the early humans. Archaeologists are now actively looking for fossils, artifacts and cave drawings in caves and rock-shelters all around the world to learn more about our early ancestors and how they lived.

Caves can provide some well preserved archaeological discoveries because of a number of factors. Most caves are located in rugged terrain which tends to limit the extent to which archaeological deposits are damaged or destroyed by agricultural practices or urban and Industrial development. Another factor contributing to the potential of caves to preserve ancient remains is that the cave environment provides protected circumstances where remains can be insulated from external forces of erosion. The stable environment of the caves, including relatively constant temperature and humidity and reduced biological activity, enhances the preservation of organic remains and also the artifacts, tools and cave drawings made by the inhabitants.

“The earliest human remains found in Malaysia, a skull dated to be about 40,000 years old was also found in a cave, the Niah Caves of Sarawak.”

Niah Cave Painting



Archaeological research in caves and rockshelters has been the major source of data about cultural developments in Southeast Asia during late Pleistocene (~30,000 BC) and early Holocene (~10,000 BC) times. During Late Pleistocene times, caves were used only as brief campsites, often selected for their seclusion. In the early Holocene epoch, they were frequently used as dwelling sites. In the middle Holocene time, the more accessible caves and rockshelters were often used as religious and burial sites.

Archaeological surveys of caves are needed to establish a baseline framework of knowledge which can be used to guide future research projects. The survey can also identify vulnerable sites where active conservation management is required to protect the important deposits, as the Limestone hills are now under threat of destruction.

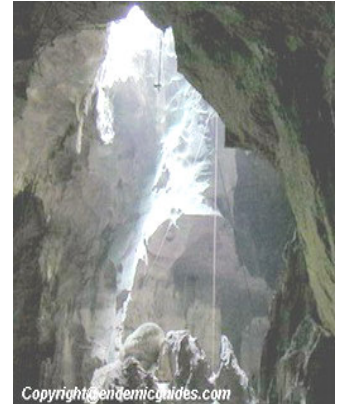
In Malaysia, the oldest known complete human skeleton found is that of Perak Man. This 11,000 year old skeleton was found buried in Gua Gunung Runtuh near Lenggong in Perak. Remnants of tools, shells and animal bones were also found in the cave, helping archaeologists to find out how these people lived at that time. A study of his bones showed that he had a physical deformity but still managed to live well into adulthood. This showed that they had a well established social structure which did not condemn the disabled to a short lifespan. Other sites nearby have produced signs of human activity dating back as far as 75,000 to 100,000 years but only the cave site managed to preserve a whole human skeleton. Another cave nearby, Gua Harimau is a burial ground yielding human bones and the earliest evidence of bronze usage in Malaysia.

The earliest human remains found in Malaysia, a skull dated to be about 40,000 years old was also found in a cave, the Niah Caves of Sarawak. The skull was found buried in the West mouth of the cave. Further inside the same cave mouth is a neolithic burial site where over 166 burials had been discovered, with associated stone implements and pottery. In a separate limestone outcrop nearby the Niah Great Cave, wall paintings stretching 200 feet in length were discovered. The paintings were generally drawn in bold and thick strokes and depict an array of boats and dancing human figures on a boat journey of the dead into the afterlife. These paintings are estimated to be about 1,200 years old.

The Tambun rock-shelter drawings depict the lives of the Orang Asli hunter-gatherers and the animals they hunted. Drawings of deer, tortoise and water creatures are found on the rock wall. The bottom is littered with thousands of snail shells. These drawings were made with haematite and are estimated to be about 2,000 to 3,000 years old. All these discoveries have helped archaeologists to gain valuable information on how our ancestors lived in ancient times .

Some caves also hold records of our more recent history such as old temples and abandoned mining activities of the past hundred years or so.

There are yet many untold stories of the development of life hidden in the limestone hills that surround us. We must actively support their preservation so that this 'buried treasure of knowledge' will not be destroyed and lost in the pursuit of progress and material wealth.



Niah Great Cave

More Cave News

The Daily News Record - Virginia (24 Jan 2008)
Learning Below The Surface. Sixth-Graders See Impact Of Pollution On Caves - By Hannah Northey

More than 100 sixth-graders visited Luray Caverns to learn how underground limestone caverns, sinkholes and other features are affected by pollution above ground.

At the county's second annual Karst Field Day, students toured the caverns, an example of a limestone feature created by water and possibly threatened by pollution in the water, said Jill Keihn, an environmental scientist and event organizer.

Water-carrying pesticides and hazardous materials or raw sewage, for example, could threaten wildlife in the cave and drinking water flowing through the underground system, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. "Water is the connecting element," she said.

Pollution also threatens water quality in Page County, which sits atop an underground karst limestone network, according to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Taylor Beahm, 11, a sixth-grader at Luray Elementary School, was surprised by how many pollutants existed in the county.

"There are more different kinds of pollution than I thought there were," Beahm said. "What we put on the ground affects our drinking water." Organizers say they hope Page County Schools continues the event, currently funded by state grants through the county.



Preventing Pollution

Sources of pollution are bacteria from livestock waste and septic systems, pollutants from factories, nutrient from fertilizers and even salt applied to icy roads.

"Although the presentation was simple, Chris Anderson, Page County's environmental coordinator, said the county's pollution challenges are not. Residents illegally dump materials that can contaminate drinking water such as furniture, garbage and hazardous material along rivers, streams and highways.

Some drinking wells in the county have tested positive for bacteria contamination, but no comprehensive groundwater studies have been completed, Anderson said. By educating children about conservation in the caverns, she is hopeful environmental stewardship will spread. "A lot of times, kids teach their parents," Anderson said.

Sixth-graders from Luray Elementary School learn about the effects of above-ground pollution on subterranean habitat and water sources.

Photo by:

Thomas J. Turney

The Telegraph - Calcutta Jan 19 2008
Cave campaign goes global- Adventurer on
exploration & awareness mission by E.M. JOSE

Shillong, India: He is four personalities rolled into one — caver, bonsai cultivator, wine-maker and poet — but Shillong resident Brian D. Kharpran would rather be remembered as someone who dedicated a lifetime to saving the unique caves of Meghalaya.

Come February 3, Brian will give his campaign a global touch. He will guide over 50 adventurers from eight countries, including the UK, Germany, Ireland, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark and Canada, on a journey that will be as much about discovering the mysteries of the caves in the Jaintia hills as about raising awareness on the threat to their existence.

“The expedition will be a long one, continuing till the end of the month,” said Brian, a winner of the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award instituted by the Union sports and youth affairs ministry.

As the general secretary of the Meghalaya Adventurers' Association, Brian's focus of late has been on caving and highlighting the hazards of coal and limestone mining.

Most of the caves, concentrated in the Jaintia hills, are not just tourist attractions but also repositories of life forms that are presumed to have been lost elsewhere. “Caves are natural museums. They offer an exceptional spectrum of biodiversity and are a natural scientist's paradise, be it an archaeologist, hydrologist, bio-speleologist or palaeontologist,” he said.

It is said that the history of the subcontinent's monsoons can be reconstructed through a study of the caves. On the Nongklich-Shnongrim ridge, around 60km from Jowai, as many as 118 cave passages have been mapped over the years. The area is also known for the longest cave in Asia, the 25-km Liet Phrah Umiam.

Simon Brooks from the UK is already in town for the February expedition. He praised Brian for exploring the caves every year with the help of international cavers.

Like his friend, Simon is concerned over coal and limestone mining threatening the existence of the Siju cave in the Garo Hills and others in the Jaintia hills.

Simon said international cavers would gladly support Brian and his colleagues in protecting the cave system.

Coming Cave & Karst related Events (from ACKMA)

DATE	EVENT
2008	ACKMA Annual General Meeting Weekend, Capricon Caves,
25—27 April	Rockhampton, Queensland
2008	USGS Karst Interest Group Workshop, Bowling Green, Kentucky
May	
2008	Europe Speleo Congress, Vercors, France
23 August	
2008	Climate Change: The Karst Record, Chongqing, China
2—5 June	
2008	Australian Earth Sciences Convention, Perth
20—25 July	
2008	Inaugural Global Geotourism Conference, Perth
17—20 August	
2008	11th Multidisciplinary Conference on Sinkholes and Karst, Tallahassee,
20—24 September	Florida
2008	19th International Symposium on Subterranean Biology, Perth
21—26 September	
2008	XIII International Symposium on Vulcanospeleology, Jeju Island, Korea
September	(Contact Kyung Sik Woo: wooks@kangwon.ac.kr)

Register for your trips

Registration is crucial for the safety of the participants as sufficient equipment needs to be prepared for each trip. We also need to know the number of members coming, as the trip may be cancelled if there are too few participants. Registration can be done thru email or by calling the MKS office. Contact info is located on the last page of this newsletter.

COMING TRIPS

Dabong and Gunung Stong State Park (GSSP)

Date	17, 18 & 19 May 2008
Time	Contact MKS
Cost	RM200 (approx)
Transport	Please car pool (pay your driver!). Save fuel.
Challenge Rating	★★★★☆



Gunung Stong Waterfall

GSSP is among Malaysia's latest protected area. Gazetted only in the last few years, it is an area rich in biodiversity and abundant in interesting physical features. The multiple peaks of Gunung Stong, the spectacular Jelawang Waterfalls and the caves of Dabong are its main attraction. The area's fauna and flora may also be of interest to the nature lover. The climb up the mountain will be slow, giving all an equal opportunity to take in the sights and sound.

The caves of Dabong located nearby, is not part of the GSSP although there are efforts to include it or at least for it to be under the same management authority. The caves are relatively easy with most passages wide, roomy and dry.

This three day trip will have us visit the 4 caves of Dabong and climb to 500m to reach our accommodation for the first night. The second day will have us climb up to one of the peaks and back to our accommodation and the third day the climb down. This trip is slightly difficult and suitable for those who are relatively fit.

Dark Caves

Date	22 June 2008
Time	Contact MKS
Cost	RM35
Transport	Please car pool (pay your driver!). Save fuel.
Challenge Rating	★★☆☆☆



Dark Caves is among the two more famous caves found at Batu Caves. The other is the Temple Caves located right at the top of the 275 steps. Dark caves is about two thirds of the way up. After it was visited by H. R. Ridley, the man who brought rubber to Malaysia, many scientists have worked in this cave, making it among the best studied cave in tropical Asia.

Dark caves is among the longest cave in Peninsular Malaysia (about 3.6km long) and is a very popular cave for the casual visitor. Although it has walkways, this cave is still an interesting and fun cave to visit. Known as the cave of life, it does not disappoint. It has a large population of insects and other animals. Some of which are endemic to this cave! In addition, many beautiful formations are found here. The first half of the tour will have visitors being acquainted with the cave life and formations.

Visitors will also be taken on an adventure for the second half of the tour. Visitors will experience how it feels to explore a cave by going through crawl passages, mud and short climbs. So be prepared to have fun and get dirty.

This trip is relatively easy and would be suitable for persons 7 years and above.

Future Trips

Gunung Senyum/Jabak Puyuh in July or August

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See us online at

www.mykarst.org

Views and opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Executive Committee of the Society.

Gunung Senyum and its smaller neighbour Gunung Jabak Puyuh are threatened hills as there are plans to quarry it for cement. MKS plus several other NGOs wrote a letter to YTL recently to voice our objection to the plan. This trip is being organized to show support for the conservation of these hills.



Gunung Senyum is located about half-way between Mentakab and Jerantut in Pahang. It's probably a 4 hour drive from Ipoh. This two day trip will have us visit Gunung Senyum on day one and Gunung Jabak Puyuh on the second day. Senyum is easily accessible and is a well visited hill with the State Forestry Department keeping a watch over visitation. They provide guides and some interpretation. The caves are generally large with a few smaller caves.

Jabak Puyuh on the other hand is reached by a 45min trek through secondary jungle and is less visited. The caves although smaller and shorter, are more pristine and interesting. This trip is suitable for most people although very young children below school age are not encouraged. Accommodation will be in simple chalets and hostels.

If you are interested in this trip, please call MKS office (05-5498407) and leave your contact info. We will contact you in June once all the trip details have been finalized.

Membership Application / Renewal Form

Membership renewal: You are only required to fill in fields indicated by an asterisk (*), unless there is (are) change(s).

Name (*) _____

IC / Passport _____ Membership No (*) _____

Address _____

Post code _____

Tel (O) _____ Tel (H) _____

Tel (H/P) _____ Fax _____

E-mail _____

Occupation _____

APPLICATION RENEWAL Signature(*) _____

Payment: Cash / Cheque / Bank In (RHB A/C: 2-58066-00001593)

Ordinary Member - subscription RM30.00 per annum (Malaysian citizens / voting member)

Associate Member - subscription RM 20.00 per annum (non-Malaysian citizens / non-voting member)

Life Member - RM500.00 (one single payment)

Send this form with payment to MKS. Please make cheques payable to Persatuan Karst Malaysia.