

KARST NEWS

Vol. 4, Issue 1

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Malaysian Karst Society

Jan - March 2007

For members only

THE PIL WE HAVE TO TAKE

Yin Ee Kiong

We are not a litigious society. It amuses as much as baffles us when we read of people suing companies, each other, or even the government at the drop of a hat in the United States. Our culture is one of 'give and take', being 'chin chai' and resolving issues quietly and privately. We are taught not to be confrontational. By and large we do not question authority - especially the government. To challenge authority goes against the grain of what is still a very feudalistic society. It's all well and good in an ideal society where the government is receptive to the society's concerns. But what when the government is not? When it refuses to dialogue with those who have expressed concerns for the issues that affect them.

Malaysia's former Prime Minister, Dr. (now Tun) Mahathir reportedly said, "Whisper in my ear and I will listen." The insinuation is that those who shout their concerns or make issues public will be

ignored.

Current Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi said much the same but less eloquently. Those in power seem to have taken a leaf out of Mahathir's trade mark response to public concerns. But where has 'whispering' got us? Many have tried and come away with nothing. Political parties in the ruling coalition have sought to convince their grassroots supporters that more can be achieved 'whispering' behind closed doors. Yet they have little to show for their trouble. Besides, where does all this stand in the face of the promise by the government for more transparency and accountability?

This is the kind of arrogance that a near monopolistic hold on power engenders. Our political masters demand the kind of feudalistic obedience which the sultans once did. The only difference is that the politicians claim the mandate of the people - they have been voted into power. They think success at the polls give them a blank cheque to do as they please. Hence there is no need to heed the concerns of the citizens especially when they interfere with the government's agenda. Ideally the governed and those who govern should resolve issues through dialogue. But this is only possible if those in power want it.

The Malaysian Karst Society (MKS) has tried to engage the government and the quarry operators out of the media glare. It has tried to get the other two parties together to discuss the problem of the degradation of the limestone hills, only to be ignored. The MKS has reiterated time and again that it is not against the exploitation of our limestone resources per se. What it wants is to work out with the government and the quarry operators a policy which will provide long term benefits to all parties concerned.

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MKS AGM

26 March 2007
(Monday)

5.30 p.m.

MKS Office
28 Tiger Lane, Ipoh

Please view attached notice

KARST NEWS NEEDS YOU!

The editorial is constantly looking for materials for KARST NEWS, so send in those articles, photos, journals, etc.

Karst News reserves the right to amend materials received.



**Dialogue is the first step forward in finding a solution.....
Confrontation is the action of last recourse for most NGOs including the MKS.**

A policy which:

1. Is sensitive to environmental concerns – where damage to the limestone hills with significant archaeological, biodiversity, speleological, heritage and cultural interest are halted.
2. Encourages industry players to produce value-added limestone / marble products, i.e. various types of calcium power for industrial application, marble etc. Not mere construction aggregate (crushed stones).
3. Will continue to provide revenue to the state from the exploitation of this natural resource.
4. Will examine the Eco Tourism potential of the karst landscape as an alternate source of revenue.

All four objectives are not mutually antithetical. We can save the hills while at the same time allow commercial exploitation of the limestone resource.

The MKS does not have all the answers and neither does the government or the quarry operators. Dialogue is the first step forward in finding a solution to this problem. However unless the government is willing to lend an ear to the MKS to 'whisper' into, there is nothing else it can do but to raise the issue openly, even confrontationally if necessary. Confrontation is the action of last recourse for most NGOs including the MKS. To put it simply, only when there is no choice will confrontation be sought.

Recent events have shown that put in an embarrassing situation authorities can be forced to change policies. The revelations by the Sun of the shenanigans by various local authorities and politicians have borne fruit – policy U-turns have been made and orders rescinded. In Sarawak, the concerted pressure by the natives have halted logging in the Gunung Gading reserve just outside Kuching, despite the powerful logging lobby.

In this day and age, governments ignore NGOs or the public at their own peril esp when some papers and internet news are outside of direct government control. There is a feeling that even our courts, eager to reestablish their credibility since

the Mahathir years, are more independent. Perhaps after three years of pleading and begging to be heard (only to be ignored) the MKS should consider another tack – Public Interest Litigation (PIL). As a non-legal person it is not my position to comment on the legal aspects of this kind of action. However it is worth noting that public interest litigations in respect of quarrying operations in India have been successful. I believe that there is a heightened public awareness and concern regarding environmental issues. The recent action of bringing in 'green' fuel is a tacit recognition by the government of public concern for the environment. Indeed Federal Ministers have in the past commented negatively about the State Government's management of the limestone hills. If left to the Federal Government perhaps there would be a greater willingness to talk. But land is a State matter and when the State has shown its unwillingness to discuss the problem with all parties concerned – not just the MKS but surely other NGOs also, it leaves one no choice but to resort to the PIL.

The question is not whether one should resort to public interest litigation: having exhausted all avenues for dialogue. The question is whether the MKS is able to afford such action. Public Interest Litigation is not cheap, but the cost of losing the hills is immeasurable.



Crystal Theft! Investigated

Hill Hugger

MKS received a report from a concerned member that crystals were removed from local caves and put up for sale at Kwong Fook Ngam, a Taoist cave temple at Keramat Pulai, Ipoh.

After the visit to Gua Angin, we decided to investigate the alleged crystal theft. Fresh out-of-cave, still stunk of guano, we approached the crystal vendor, a man in his 50's.

A few chunks of natural crystals that looked that they might have been quarried locally were displayed plainly. "This is saltwater crystal", indicating to one of the pieces,



Crystals of suspicious origin displayed on sale.

"from Thailand" he added. "These were picked up in a quarry in Simpang Pulai", indicating to the rocks which were opaque with brownish tint, far from the quality that collectors sort for in crystals. The surface of these crystals were also blemished and damaged, tell-tale signs that they were actually salvaged from the quarries as the vendor had claimed. He asked for RM300 for each of piece, considering their low quality, it was outrageous!

According to Liz Price, "Crystals are commonly found in our karst hills, they can be easily salvaged at quarries." But the quality of the crystals found in this region are not desired by collectors, they lack clarity, and usually comes only in brown or colorless, not very pretty. Karst here is just not ancient enough to produce high quality crystals in every imaginable color like the ones sold in shops, but if given enough time, they just might.

In conclusion, our preliminary investigation yielded no evidence of crystals removed from caves were being sold at Kwong Fook Ngam, evidence collected confirmed that the crystals sold there were salvaged.



Amethyst crystal in vivid purple from Brazil.



A crystal sample from a quarry in Simpang Pulai. Typical of crystals found in Ipoh, it lacks luster, clarity, and color.

Mulu Expedition 2007

Liz Price

A team of 16 British cavers were in Gunung Mulu National Park in January 2007, to continue their series of expeditions.

Following the success of the Benarat 2005 Expedition, where most of discoveries made were actually in Mount Api and not in Mount Benarat, it was decided to name the 2007 expedition Mulu as this covers both areas.

The objectives of the 2007 expedition were to continue exploration in the Whiterock system (south of the river) and in Moon Cave (to the north). The Mulu Caves 2007 expedition was very successful.

Based at Camp 5 in the Melinau Gorge a team of sixteen British cavers, with the close support of National Park staff and local porters, carried out exploration in

Southern Benarat and Northern Api. A total of 25.8 km of cave were explored and surveyed and the total length of the Clearwater Cave System was extended to 151.4 km confirming its current status as tenth longest cave in the world.

Moon Cave

At the end of the 2005 expedition two important leads had been left unexplored. Unfortunately the upper leads were not possible, and the elusive upper series remains for future explorers.

A concentrated effort, which required a small amount of digging to pass a draughting boulder choke, established a connection with Cobweb Cave. This now provides a link between Benarat Caverns, Moon Cave and Cobweb Cave which

makes the Cobweb Cave System 50.5 km long, the second longest cave in the Park and currently fiftieth longest cave in the world. The total length of passages explored within Moon Cave was 3.7 km.

Whiterock Cave

At the end of the 2005 expedition numerous large passages had been left unexplored. The cave is complex and required underground camps due to its extent. In 2007 the major leads were pushed. A great deal of new passages were discovered in the central areas of the cave with passages infilling blank areas. One passage came to within 360m of Camp 5 but no entrance was found. The total length of passages explored in Whiterock Cave was 21.9 km.

RECENT TRIPS

Six-mile Tunnel - access granted

Hill Hugger, Dec 2006



A whip spider in the Tunnel



Straws, Dec 06

A partially-man-made, 700-meter tunnel located in Tambun, Ipoh, nicknamed **Six-mile Tunnel**, is an exciting karst feature located in the Kinta Valley. To gain access to this tunnel one has to wade across a muddy lotus pond. Traversing the length of the tunnel will bring you to a wang (karst feature which means space enclosed by limestone outcrops), continue upstream and you end up at a small, discrete waterfall.

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The previous issue of KARST NEWS reported a failed attempt to explore Six-mile Tunnel in July 2006 as water level in the Tunnel has risen significantly due to development in the area.

The developer concerned, the Sunway Group, was duly informed of the crisis. They promptly rectified the situation. When we visited the site again in December 2006, the situation of Tunnel was 'normalized'.

The group, which consists of folks from K.L., Ipoh and Penang, was especially excited about this one since our last attempt to explore Six-mile Tunnel had not been successful.

The lotus pond which we used to wade across with much difficulty was filled to 1/3 of its original size. A rope is setup from the entrance of the Tunnel to the edge of the pond, easing access to the Tunnel.

Walking thru the dark flooded passage, we noticed the cluster of straws (infant stalactites) that we observed during our last visit a year ago, still dagging from the cave ceiling. We were relieved that these fragile formations were not damaged by the 'flood'. We hope that they will be sufficiently protected when eventually Six-mile Tunnel is exploited commercially.



Straws, Dec 05

Eventually we reached the wang at the end of the Tunnel, where we rested. The more adventurous ones continued to trek upstream to the waterfall.

The waterfall is actually a big rock where water gushes from its crevices. We crawled into a small opening, no larger than the wheel of a *Perodua Kancil*. Into the digestive tract of a giant, I imagined. An eon of water action has shaped peculiar marble sculptures within this rock with elegant swirling patterns decorating its walls. Rock surface here is smooth and slippery, it was almost impossible to get a good grip. To make a mistake here will be hazardous to one's health. The small winding passage, eventually brought us to a small chamber with another waterfall inside! Incredible!

More journals on Six-mile Tunnel can be found at www.mykarst.org



Waiting patiently for permission to enter The Six-mile Tunnel, 3 Dec 2006.

Gua Ta'Boleh, G. Merawan

Hill Hugger, January 2007

Though we have explored many caves in G. Lanno, such as Gua Lanno, Gua Pencuri, Gua Puncak, Gua Ngea, we have not ventured into Gua Ta'Boleh, G. Merawan which is 1.6 km west of G. Lanno.

G. Merawan is a much smaller massif compared to G. Lanno, which houses many caves including Gua Puncak, the 2nd largest cave chamber in P. Malaysia. We should not have any problem locating its cave entrance, so we thought.

Geared with a GPS and coordinates we attained from the 'Expedition G. Lanno' book, we headed confidently to the reference point. But the entrance is not to be seen. Since it's a small hill, we are bound to locate the entrance to Gua Ta'Boleh if we went around it. So we started to trek counter-clockwise, swarms of mosquitoes followed the scent of our warm blood.

After a 30-minute trek, we found the entrance. The only problem was, we were 20 meters above it, and getting there from where we were was too risky. Then it

suddenly dawned on us that we were at where we first started! Just on higher grounds. So we back tracked, going around hill, to where we started an hour ago. The funny thing is that the entrance was just a few meters left of the reference point!

The cave itself was not spectacular, one of the less interesting ones that we have visited. Maybe that is why it so was named Gua Ta'Boleh.

G. Merawan, photo from book 'Expedition G. Lanno'



Gua Angin, G. Lanno

Robert P, February 2007

A small group of six gathered at Kwong Fook Ngam cave temple to explore this new cave. Liz was the only one who has been to this cave before a few years ago. The entrance was easy to find and we proceeded into the cave. The lower chamber is quite narrow and some parts of the cave walls sparkled with tiny crystals embedded in the rocks. From a distance these sparkling walls make a beautiful sight. Around 100 meters into the cave, there is a steep climb of about 15 meters up to a higher level. Hong and Kenny managed to climb up this steep slope bare handed and set a rope to enable the rest of us to climb to the top.

The chambers in this level are wider making our progress easier. A little further in we found the "Fairy-tale Chamber" with beautiful small formations. It gives the impression of a miniature fairy-tale city with glistening tall buildings and pools of crystal clear water. One can almost imagine tiny fairies living in these enchanting surroundings. This is surely the highlight of this cave. Although this cave is called Gua Angin, not much of a breeze was felt in the cave on this day. The upper level ends with an opening facing the south about 25 meters above ground level.



Formations in the fairytale chamber. Photo from book 'Expedition G. Lanno'

Register or get fined!

Registration is crucial for the safety of the participants as sufficient equipment needs to be prepared for each trip; it is also necessary to restrict the number of participants for some trips for safety reasons.

Therefore, **members who fail to register for trips will now be fined RM20.** The trip leader also reserves the right to refuse any member, who fails to register, participation.

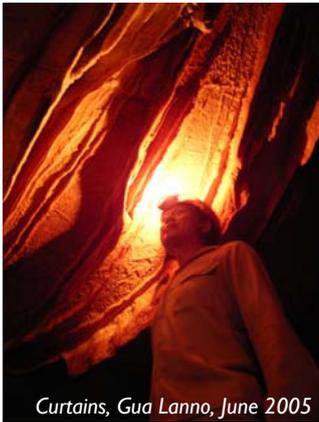
Registration can be done thru email or by calling the MKS office.

Contact info is located on the last page of this newsletter.

COMING TRIPS

Gua Lanno, G. Lanno

15 April 2007, Sunday



Curtains, Gua Lanno, June 2005

Gua Lanno, a large cave with two levels and many chambers. is an old favourite and the most beautiful cave in Gunung Lanno. It is time for a revisit and perhaps discover new passages. There are many large and beautiful formations in this cave such as helictites and calcite formations, flowstones, large columns and a rock that looks like a tortoise.

Meet at Coffee shop opposite the Simpang Pulai Police Station

Time 9.00 a.m.

Duration 4 to 5 hours

Challenge rating ★★★★★

Waterfall at Pos Dipang

13 May 2007, Sunday

From the rendezvous point, we will drive to Pos Dipang. About an hour trek into the jungle will take us to the waterfall, where we will have a picnic and swim. Please bring your own food and perhaps some extra to share.

Meet at Gopeng Toll Plaza

Time 9.00 a.m.

Duration 4 to 5 hours

Challenge rating ★★☆☆☆

Gua Monophyllaea, Gunung Lanno

10 June 2007, Sunday



A colony o of Monophyllaea

Gua Monophyllaea is a small cave situated on the western side of Gunung Lanno. There is a big colony of monophyllaea (a single-leaf plant endemic to karst) growing at the entrance to this cave, hence it's name. It has three levels, the main chamber is on the second level where some nice formations are found. There is a pool of water inhabited by aquatic karst creatures at the lower level.

Meet at Kwong Fok Ngam cave temple, next to Sri Siva Subramaniam

Time 9.00 a.m.

Duration 3 hours

Challenge rating ★★★★★

KARST DISCOVERY

Compiled by Liz Price

World's Longest Underwater Cave

After three years of dedicated exploration, Sistema Sac Actun is now the longest underwater cave in the world, and Mexico's longest cave. Two caves were connected by diving creating a system 154,783 meters long, the longest underwater cave in the world!



That beats the previous record of 146,761 meters for Ox Bel Ha (also in Mexico). The two longest caves in Mexico are now almost entirely underwater.

The underwater portion of Sac Actun is 152,975 m long, but there are also 1808 m of dry cave, thus the longer total. The news was released on 27 January 2007.

Discovery in NW Thailand

Mae Hong Son province in north west Thailand has an abundance of caves, which include some of the longest and prettiest in the country. It is a popular area for cavers and home to the famous Cave Lodge. Thailand's second longest cave, Mae Lana system at 12.8 km is located in Mae Hong Son.

Dunkley's "Caves of Thailand" (1995) lists 257 caves in Mae Hong Son province. This list has been updated in "Caves of Northern Thailand" (2006).

Over a period of nine years, 176 caves were explored in the Pang Mapha district of Mae Hong Son, covering an area of 1,200 square kilometers. The discoveries are important in terms of the geology, archaeology and ecology. Over 50 scientists did the research, supported by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF).

Geologists estimate the caves were formed 10,000 years ago. Some of the caves have been used as burial sites, and there are remains of stone and iron tools.

Of the 176 caves surveyed, 15 will be open to tourists, 112 will be saved for research and 49 have yet to be classified. Cave management plans are underway to protect the caves, as it is known that caves are damaged by tourism.



Mae Hong Son, Thailand

UK's Biggest Cave Chamber

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/leicestershire/6122884.stm>

A cave believed to have the biggest chamber in Britain has been explored in the Peak District in Derbyshire. Titan's main shaft is 464ft (141m) deep. Titan is the longest free hanging pitch in any known United Kingdom cave. The news made the international press in November 2006 when it was shown on British TV.

Cavers discovered the cave, near Castleton in 1999. The team leader began searching for it after reading an account by an obscure 18th Century academic in a university library. He examined the old journal written more than 200 years ago by the Cambridge student exploring old mine works nearby.

This report described a network of caves. The cavers thought the entrance to the system must have been blocked, and spent three years removing boulders before they found a way into the bottom of the cavern. It was a lot of research and a lot of hard work.

The cavers looked up and all they could see was blackness and knew they had found something really big. A shaft was later created to allow cavers to abseil into the cavern from above.

The cave is connected to the famous Peak Cavern and Speedwell Cavern forming a system 17 km long.

The Titan shaft is longer than any known pitch in Malaysia. I estimate some of the biggest Malaysian pitches would be in Dark Cave at Batu Caves, about 70-80 m.

French cavers in Gua Musang

Four cavers from France visited Gua Musang, Kelantan, in February 2006. They visited about 15 caves and surveyed some of them. The results will be published in a French caving magazine.



UK's Biggest Cave Chamber

National Caving Congress of the Philippine Speleological Society

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Monday thru Friday



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.

The 7th National Caving Congress of the Philippine Speleological Society (PSS) will be held on March 04-10, 2007 in Puerto Princesa City and the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in Palawan, Philippine. The theme of the caving congress is "Safeguarding our Underground Treasures: Cavers at the Forefront of Cave Conservation." This is in recognition of the increasing threats posed by the mining industry, unregulated tourism and other resource use. The caving congress aims to increase understanding of the cave and karst ecosystems and help improve their management and conservation. It also aims to strengthen and promote PSS standards in responsible caving within the country's caving community. - Liz Price



Subterranean River National Park, Palawan, Philippine - photo: internet

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)

Mail this page to MKS or fax it to 05-253 5507. Please make cheques payable to Persatuan Karst Malaysia.