

KARST NEWS

Vol. 3, Issue 1

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Malaysian Karst Society

Jan - Mar 2006

For members only

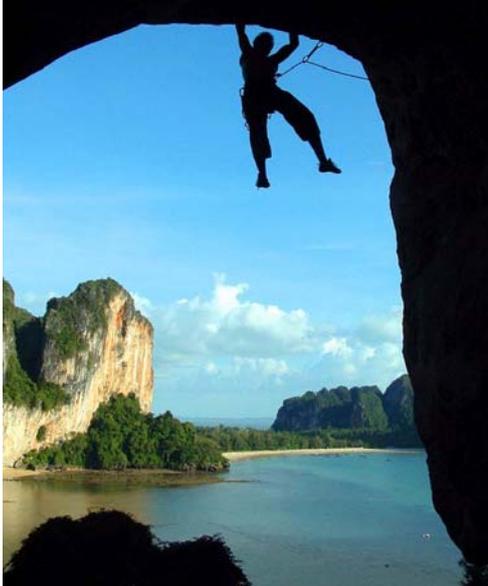
Romancing the Stone

By Philip Leong

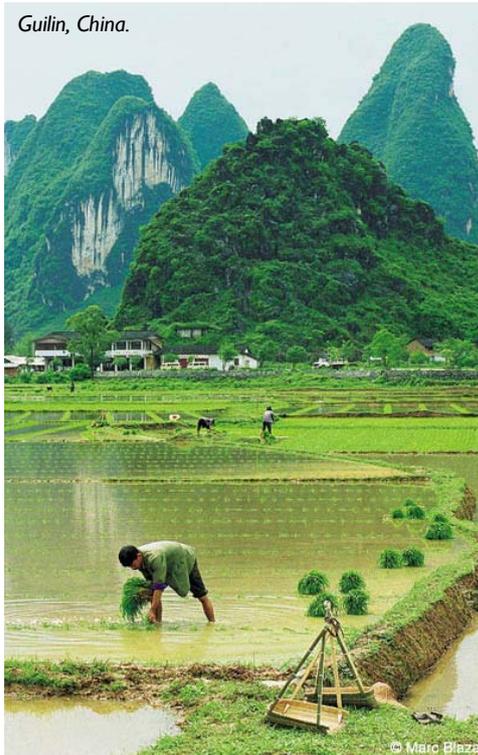
The fantastic karst landscape in Guilin, China is truly breath-taking (ref: The Star 5 Oct: *Tapping into Karst and Culture* and 24 Oct: *City of Landscapes, the Canvas for Nature's Masterpiece*), but we should not forget that in Malaysia, we too have bountiful karst landscape, particularly in the Kinta Valley, Perak, Perlis and Gua Musang, Kelantan. To create public awareness of their unique beauty and the need for their preservation, MKS is actively involved in the promotion of activities at these hills.

Next door in Thailand, rock-climbing has made the limestone hills of Krabi a world destination; it has built a new sports-tourism industry for the area. In Malaysia, the relatively unspoiled karst regions of Perlis, Kelantan and Pahang are potentially major tourist attractions. In the little northern state of Perlis, for example, its government has created a night tourist attraction at Wang Kelian (The Star 6 Jan: *Nocturnal visitors to serene lake*). There, an interpretive trail traces the old route taken by tin-miners, while chalets and dormitories by the serene Tasik Meranti

Krabi, Thailand.



Guilin, China.



await those who hike up the hills at night. Rock-climbing on the face of limestone hills in KL and Gua Musang are already attracting the adventurous.

What about the Kinta Valley, Malaysia's Little Guilin?

When the tin-mining industry collapsed twenty years ago, it was limestone which attracted intensified exploitation in the Kinta Valley. In fact, for over a century, the outcrops in the Kinta Valley have been quarried for limestone, which is crushed for aggregate used in building and road construction. More recently, marble slabs are produced, and limestone powders have become a significant downstream industry. These products are important to the construction and manufacturing industries; they are also export-earners.

Obviously, profit and revenue are important but at what cost to our

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environment? Like tin, limestone is a non-renewable resource. In this awe-inspiring landscape, outcrops are just indicators of limestone reserve. Much, much more is underground. It just does not make sense to destroy the uniquely picturesque hills dotting the land when 99.8% of limestone lies waiting in the basement.

Basement quarrying is a better way to extract limestone, for this means that the limestone outcrops remain in our world-class landscape. Certainly, pristine hills should no longer be consigned to quarries, especially in the potent archaeological Lenggong Valley and the Kinta Valley, which has important scientific values identified by MNS. We need to study rather than remove them.

Unfortunately, in Perak, previous state

governments have not cared for our limestone hills, many of them have been destroyed and scarred, victims of indiscriminate quarrying and blasting. Though blasting is generally done out of sight in the interest of public safety, encroaching development results in the exposure of these "hidden" areas to travelers on the new highway and expressway. Near Simpang Pulai, a drive along the NS-Expressway towards Ipoh or up the highway to the hills will reveal the ugly and sorry sight. Remember Lat's cartoon of the "bareback mountain"?

Preservation and exploitation clash infamously. Any activity at the hills, it seems, must be economics-driven for short-term gain. Because of vested interest, mere suggestions of non-quarry activities (such as tourism) have faced rebuff from both the quarry operators and the state government. As may be expected, certain members of the state government have paid lip service to the beauty of our limestone. But, except for the inglorious Gua Tempurung show cave and the incidental Gunung Lang recreational gardens, little has been done to find an alternative to the destruction of our national natural heritage.

Cave temples are ubiquitous in the Kinta Valley; they are a unique cultural heritage, an attraction to large numbers of devotees and tourists. For over a century, Taoists and Buddhists have inhabited these mystic cave chambers and created temples decorated with paintings and calligraphy. Hindu cave temples, too, are abundant

LAT's view of our outcrops, NST Feb 2004



although none as big (and commercial) as KL's Batu Cave. More can be done to promote these interesting temples for tourism. Friendly low-impact activities must be considered; rather than changing our topography and erasing the hills from our maps, sporting activities such as cave exploration, rock-climbing and hill trekking can be promoted for economic gain. *Via ferrata* (Italian for iron road) is an exciting way to enable those tourists without rock-climbing skill to ascend vertical faces of the hills and traverse them on cable walkways while safely attached to a harness and safety line. It can be a most exciting tourist attraction.

It is useful to remind ourselves what we set out to do. Let us look at the Principal objectives of MKS:

1. To advance awareness of the scientific, educational, aesthetic, historical and cultural values of the karst outcrops in Malaysia
2. To advocate for the conservation and preservation of these outcrops
3. To conduct research, investigate and draw up proposals for the sustainable development of the resources contained in these outcrops
4. To establish a research and educational facility of international reputation for the study of karst areas
5. To encourage eco-tourism and sustainable development in the karst areas of Malaysia

6. To identify an area with a significant measure of the outcrop and promote its development into an ecological park

In the case of Ipoh, where we are based, there is no category for ecological park in the gazette by Ipoh Structure Plan. The following, however, have been identified:

District Recreational park:

Gunung Rapat

Geological and Cave Research park:

Gunung Kanthan

Natural Habitat Research park:

Gunung Tambun, Gunung Lanno, Gunung Terendum

Historical and Archaeological park:

Gunung Panjang

Township park:

Gunung Lang

Therefore, we need to look into these proposals by the government and offer our help and assistance to realise these designations, even as we want more karst to be preserved and less karst to be scarred. NGOs such as MNS and MKS are just the *right* organizational partners in the strategy to balance the preservation of this non-renewal resource with sustainable development in the lucrative tourism market.

Besides, why can we not have the hills *au naturel* just so that we can enjoy a landscape dominated by these magnificent ancient rock formations?



Perak Tong
One of the many cave temples found in Ipoh

AGM 2006

24 February 2006 (Friday)

You would have received the Notice for our AGM. All members are urged to attend our annual gathering at the **Syuen Hotel** on **24th February 2006 (Friday)**.

Following the AGM, Cheang Kum Seng, Malaysia's premier nature photographer, will give a talk with a slideshow of his work, featuring the Gua Tempurung like you have never seen before. Cheang will also be auctioning some of his work. Admission is FREE.

After the slideshow, and for only RM30 per person, you can join our buffet dinner. Members and friends are all welcome; the more the merrier, but you must book ahead. Email or call us at the MKS office by 20th February 2006 for reservations and inquiries.

✉ karstsoc@streamyx.com ✉

☎ 05-254 2993 ☎

AGM 2006 PROGRAMME

6.00 p.m.
Annual General Meeting

7.00 p.m.
Talk & Slideshow

7.40 p.m.
Q&A, Auction

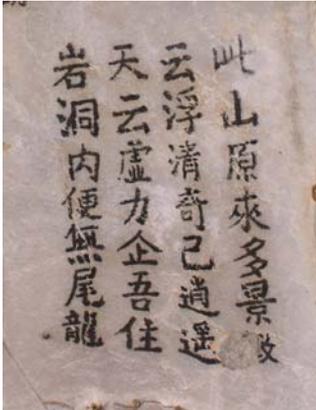
8.00 p.m.
Buffet Dinner (optional)

OUTINGS REPORTED

Gua Toh Sembilan

4 December 2005

By Robert Percival



Chinese writing found in Toh Sembilan cave.

Thirteen intrepid cavers, including some from Penang, gathered on one Sunday morning to explore the Toh Sembilan caves. A journalist from the Vicinity Perak magazine also joined our group to find out more about caving activities in Perak.

We drove into Kg. Kepayang and walked a short distance through a durian orchard before arriving at the base of the hill. Thousands of hungry mosquitoes came out feasting at our expense.

The first cave chamber was a short climb up a slippery slope. We immediately saw Chinese calligraphy on the walls of the cave and two half demolished cement altars. It is said that the cave used to be a temple many years ago, some of the writings date back to 1905.



A broken altar, believed to have concealed treasure.

A Kampong Tale

To the kampong folk who live near Toh Sembilan treasures were buried under two altars by refugees during the Japanese Occupation. They went unnoticed for years. When the war ended, heirs to the treasure returned, they broke the altars to retrieve the treasure. Then, men and treasure left for Singapore. That was 60 years ago.

A most compelling story. It is known that religious objects and items of gold and silver were buried in the ritual to mark the foundation of the temple. These are recovered if ever the temple is abandoned.

A mysterious cave and a hidden treasure. Believe it or not, this kampong tale has survived.

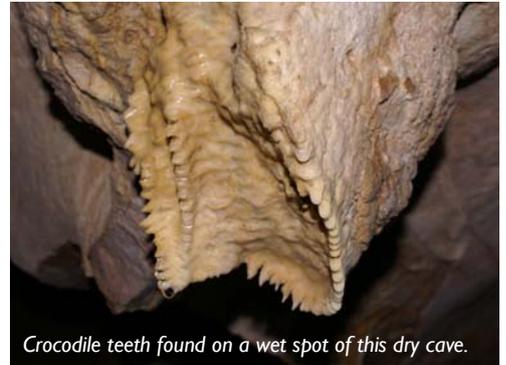
Gua Kandu Cleanup Mission

8 January 2005

By Hill Hugger Hong

Cleaning up Gua Kandu is our first attempt at community service. Unfortunately members' participation was not encouraging at all. Although 12 showed up, only 5 were registered members, the rest were non-member volunteers and members' family. We usually have a participation of about 20 persons on every trip.

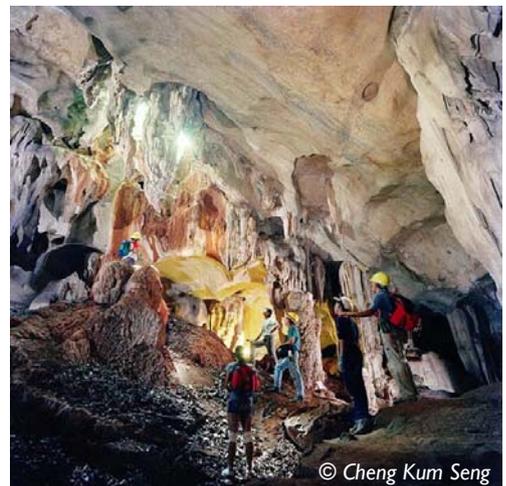
Gua Kandu is MKS' most visited cave as it is multi-level and houses a network of interesting chambers. It is also a relatively easy cave to explore, ideal for beginners and also casual spelunkers lacking proper



Crocodile teeth found on a wet spot of this dry cave.

From the first cave, we crawled through a low passage to get to the 2nd cave. This cave also has a large chamber and a small opening at the back of the hill which leads to a steep slope down to the base. We then proceeded to the next cave which is the smallest. This cave also has religious writings on the walls. If it is true that the writings are 100 years old, then they have survived the passage of time quite well, as they are still very clear.

Next, we climbed to the top of the hill from which we could see the quarries in Simpang Pulau and the surrounding terrain. After a short rest there, we made our way back down to the base of the hill.



© Cheng Kum Seng



caving ethics. Hence over the years, Gua Kandu has accumulated much litter.

As the litter was scattered throughout the cave, we merrily went along our usual Kandu route and picked up litter along the way. Plastic mineral water bottles, sweet wrappers, cigarette boxes were among the garbage collected. It took about 4 hours to complete our mission, not much longer than our usual Gua Kandu excursion.

Last year MKS made some significant awareness visits to Gua Kandu with several



groups, including Universti Teknologi Malaysia; Mount Royal College, Canada, Uplands International School, Penang, Intel Electronics Malaysia, and participants from the EU Eco-Tourism Conference 2005. It shames us that such a wonderful cave is rubbished by litter throughout. Consequently, MKS decided to do something about it.

We must bear in mind that MKS is a conservation society formed to protect karst in Malaysia. We are a group with a purpose. Sure, caving is fun, but as members we should also participate in the seemingly not-so-fun activities occasionally. This is our obligation.

We thank volunteers for their participation, and Rubberex Malaysia for providing us the gloves for this activity.

Our cleaning effort was published in the New Straits Times, Life & Times on 23 January 2006.

*This issue is available in **COLOUR** online!*

Turn to page one of this issue to find out more

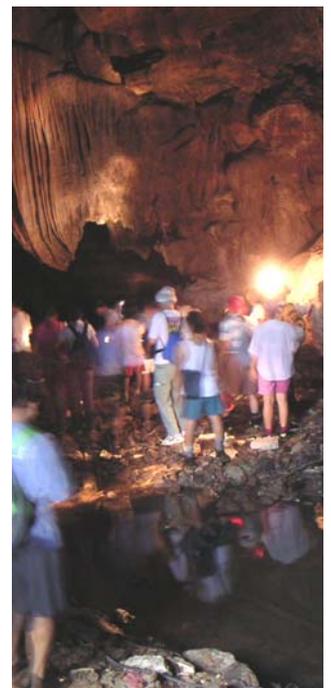
COMING TRIPS

Gua Anak Tempurong 5 March 2006, Sunday

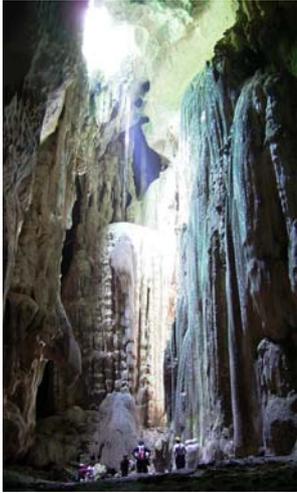
Gua Anak Tempurong which in Malay means 'the offspring of the Tempurong Cave' is a 'river cave' near the southeast end of Gunung Tempurong. The 400m-long stream that runs its length is usually knee-deep, but could get deeper depending on downpour. So be prepared to get very wet! Bring along a change of clothes. You will need it.

The cave is not known to many, therefore quite pristine. There are upper chambers to this river cave but they eluded us the last time we were there. Let's hope that we get lucky this time.

Meet at	Gopeng Toll Gate of the North-South Expressway
Time	9.00 a.m.
Duration	3 hours
Challenge rating	★★★★☆



Gua Anak Tempurong 2004



Gua Khantan - the Cathedral

2 April 2006, Sunday

A most spectacular cave chamber, the Cathedral, complete with a pipe organ and skylight, is located in Gua Khantan, not far from Chemor, Perak.

Photography enthusiasts should not miss this one, for the skylight in the Cathedral is the make of excellent shots!

Meet at	Ipoh Garden Plaza at Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah
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Time	9.00 a.m.
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Duration	3 hours
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Challenge rating	★★★★☆
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Gua Kelawar

7 May 2006, Sunday

This 160-meter long cave has many interesting formations. Its main chamber is home to many bats (hence the name Gua Kelawar). According to early explorers, the number of bats has dwindled since the cave was first discovered in the 1960s. Guano, which was found in abundance in Gua Kelawar, has been illegally harvested.

Meet at	Ipoh Garden Plaza at Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah
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Time	9.00 a.m.
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Duration	3 hours
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Challenge rating	★★★★☆
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A drawing depicting a young girl found on a cave wall in the temple. Red candle wax suggests that it is worshipped. Who is the girl? Perhaps the 'Princess' of the hill.

A Caver's Journal: Gua Musang Recce

By Liz Price

Following the MKS trip to Gua Musang, Kelantan, in September [KN 2(4)4] a small group revisited the area 2-4 November 2005 to look for caves.

Firstly, we went south of Gua Musang to the old gold mining area of Pulai. Today there is no sign of the gold workings. Pulai is also the common name of a hardwood tree of *Alstonia* sp. We went straight to Bukit Tok Chu, which the MKS visited in September. We climbed up the steps to the new temple under construction. Siak Hong was able to talk to the workers who told us that in 1984, a man had a vision of steps going up the hill the locals nicknamed the Princess Hill. Work eventually started in 1997.

However, a shrine was already in existence in the upper cave when an archaeological team dug there in 1991. Back at ground level we were able to enter the main chamber and climb up to the temple, thereby doing the cave from bottom to top!

We then drove back to Kg Batu Papan and stopped alongside 'Gua Batu Papan' as Philip had been told of a cave about 50-feet up the cliff. The vegetation was particularly dense in front of the hill and no one felt inclined to battle through it, especially since none of the locals we asked had heard of a cave here. They all tried to send us to the famous Gua Madu archeological site, which is down the road and now converted to a tourist park.

Bukit Tok Chu, Gua Musang, Kelantan

Next, we called in at the ice factory to ask about the water cave at Batu Neng. We decided to do this cave at the end of our stay as there was no point in getting wet on the first day. However, heavy rain over the next two days meant we didn't get to this cave at all. After a late lunch over which Philip tried asking locals for cave information, we opted to do Gua Musang, the famous cave situated above the railway station.

Next day, we went back to Pulai and to the Chinese temple which is reputedly 500 years old. No one there really knew of any caves, so we followed the FELCRA sign to Gua Gajak as I knew there are caves there. The road ran alongside the hills and we looked for cave entrances from the comfort of the car. We found one muddy rock shelter, then further along we found the Broken Rock Cave. This has white rock with vertical bedding and lots of broken rocks in the entrance. A rift passage leads to various little interconnecting passages.

We drove on to the deer farm but there was no sign of Gua Kijang, so we went on to the Perhilitan centre and asked there. The locals only knew of one cave, Gua Sidang, but warned us that it was hard to find. We drove along the rough track, passing a huge cave entrance on our left, and continued to the end of the next hill. We trekked to and climbed up the hill only to find one short rift passage. That was obviously not Gua Sidang. So, we went down to river level and found the cave further along. It is a very large rock shelter, maybe 300m long. There is quite a lot of graffiti on the walls, but on the far end, I noticed two charcoal drawings and some writing, maybe Jawi. The drawings were of great interest as I think they may be Orang Asli, depicting a fisherman and a boat. Frustrating, for I had left my camera in the car, so Jeffrey took photos on his camera-phone but we were unsuccessful in downloading most of them. I have contacted Muzium Negara to see if

they are interested, as various caves in Kelantan are known to have Orang Asli cave drawings.

We drove back to the cave with the huge entrance, Bombed Cave. A local had told us that the British army had bombed this cave when the communists were hiding inside. As we entered the cave we saw the huge blocks which had been brought down. I wondered how many communists were squashed underneath! The cave is a large chamber maybe 300m long, running through the hill. There were sacks of guano waiting to be taken out. As it was past lunch time we decided to go for lunch and return in the afternoon... but sadly after lunch our plans changed and we didn't go back. Instead, we drove along Gua Serai, which is the middle of the three hills at Gua Musang, and is the one which was burnt earlier this year. Robert likened it to a mangy dog, which was actually quite a fitting description. We then drove through the Chin Teck plantation and when we came out the other side we passed some limestone hills. But monsoon rain intervened and we went back to our chalets.

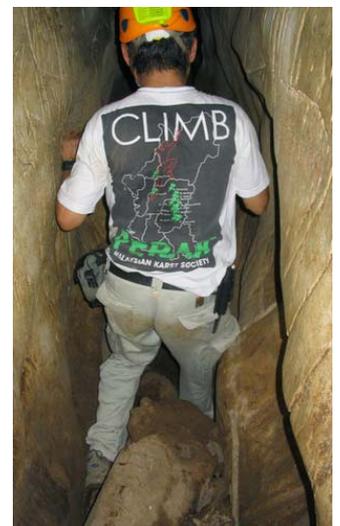


The British army had bombed this cave when the communists were hiding inside.

On the last day, we drove along the road to Kuala Krai but there was no limestone. So after lunch we returned to the Chin Teck hills. We gave up trying to access the first hill as the vegetation was thick and the ground was swampy, and returned to the hill by the roadside. Philip and Jeffrey had looked at a rock shelter by the road on a midnight caving trip! We walked to the back section of the hill and explored Gua Batu Hijau. The passage leads through the hill and has interconnecting upper passages, where we found sacks of guano stored. To the left of this cave are several small holes leading in, but none seemed passable. I was unable to find any name for this Chin Teck hill as it is un-named on the topo map.



A successful download of a possible Orang Asli drawing from Jeffrey's camera-phone.



A narrow path, Gua Musang.

NEW BOOK: EXPEDITION GUNUNG LANNO

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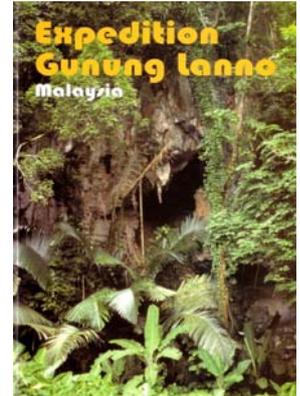
This book is the result of a 3 week speleological expedition to Gunung Lanno, Kinta Valley, Perak.

Gunung Lanno is one of the biggest limestone hills in the Kinta Valley. The expedition explored the whole mountain, covering the surface area, surveying all the known caves, and linking them to the surface survey. Research was also done on the cave fauna.

Authors: E. Geyer, P. Jeutter, S. Kogler, L. Price, J. Segl, F. Schmidt, Dr. H. Steiner, A. Wolf, S. Yian, Dr. H. Kusch, A. Örtel.

Abstract :

In November 2001 a group of speleologists from Austria, England, Germany and Malaysia held an expedition to Gunung Lanno, an isolated, densely forested limestone hill in the Kinta Valley, Perak. The expedition searched for caves and surveyed them. A good overview on the caves in the mountain was established. During 3 weeks, 32 caves were documented and 12 kilometres of passages surveyed. Aerial investigation via aeroplane showed higher entrances of which not all were reached. Four temple caves were also surveyed. On the last day of the expedition the biggest discovery was made. Gua Puncak holds western Malaysia's second largest chamber the "Lanno Summit Chamber", 60 meters wide and more than 180 metres long, located directly below the peak of the mountain. Other big caves are Gua Selari, Gua Lanno and Gua Kong Fook Ngam. The cave fauna was studied, and several new species were discovered. This report documents the results of the expedition in 2001, the pre-trips in the years 1998 and 1999, as well as an introduction into the area. 2005, hardback, A4, 240pp, 253 figures, colour and B&W photos, maps, surveys.



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