

KARST NEWS

Vol. 6, Issue 3

The Newsletter of the Malaysian Karst Society

October 2009

For members only

Message from the President

Some good news on the conservation front, the Kedah State Government has agreed to establish three new protected areas in the state. 26,000ha in Langkawi with half being limestone areas and 27,000ha in Ulu Muda hopefully including the newly discovered limestone hill there. The other area is Gunung Jerai and surrounding areas which is also significant although there is no limestone there. The MKS will write a letter praising the State Government for taking this bold action.

The MKS, with our partners in the Friends of Ulu Muda II coalition was also involved in a media trip to Ulu Muda in August to help raise awareness of the area. We were involved in guiding the press through the caves of Bukit Labu. Several articles and several 10min clips over 5 days have already appeared in the media. More will be out over the next few months.

Karst in Langkawi



MKS will also be leading a project with other concerned organizations to highlight the plight of the Kinta Valley limestone with the formation of the Friends of Kinta Valley Limestone (FKVL.) It is at a very early stage and we hope to have this coalition formed by the first quarter of 2010.

We will also be organizing several day trips to Baling in Kedah in November and December. Please check the back page of this newsletter for the details

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our friends a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I sincerely hope that all members will continue with their commitment to preserve our majestic limestone and renew their subscription to the society. May the year 2010 bring happiness and joy to all friends of nature!

*Hymeir Kamarudin,
President*

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NOTE:

Please note that Ordinary memberships will expire on Jan. 31st. Members are encouraged to send in your renewals to the MKS office early. Forms are available at the MKS website.

Thank you for your continued support.

MKS Committee 2009/2010

Hymeir Kamarudin	<i>President</i>
Yong Shim Hian	<i>Vice President</i>
Chan Chee Meng	<i>Secretary</i>
Bernard Lee	<i>Treasurer</i>
Cheah Weng Hong	
Mohd. Tajuddin	
Liew Chin Chow	
Foon Hoong Seng	
Robert Percival	

Committee Members

Kinta Valley Limestone Project

The Malaysian Karst Society is planning to carry out a multi faceted project to promote the sustainable use of the Kinta Valley limestone. We hope to work with local communities to raise awareness on the importance and significance of our limestone hills and the threats they are facing. Additionally, MKS plans to empower local communities living in the Kinta Valley to appeal to the state government to conserve the remaining hills and better manage these unique landscape features.

A loose coalition of concerned individuals and organizations to be called the Friends of Kinta Valley Limestone or FKVL will also be formed. Eventually we hope this coalition will be about half a dozen NGOs strong. Members of this coalition will be expected to cooperate to promote the goal of better management and sustainable use of the Kinta Valley limestone hills. Members of FKVL will organise activities that will include scientific investigations, raising awareness, working with local communities and advocacy.

Objectives of FKVL

1. To promote the concept of Protected Landscape in the Kinta Valley with the Limestone features representing the iconic landscape symbol of the Kinta Valley.
2. To raise awareness among and empower all stakeholders to be involved in the conservation, preservation and management of the Kinta Valley Limestone.
3. To protect all major limestone hills in the Kinta Valley with particular attention to Gunung Rapat, Gunung Lanno, Gunung Kanthan, Gunung Datoh and Gunung Tempurung/Gajah from further exploitation.
4. To promote subterranean quarrying as an alternative and less destructive quarrying method.
5. To encourage sustainable use of all the limestone hills.
6. To advance and support the scientific study of the Kinta Valley Limestone.
7. To establish a proper management authority within an acceptable legal framework to manage all limestone hills in the Kinta Valley.

NGOs and individuals who are interested to participate in this project are encouraged to contact the MKS committee.

Kinta Valley Hills



Caving at Gua Kendu, Gopeng, Perak

- by Cheah Weng Hong

I recently went with some friends to Gua Kendu which is located near the quaint picturesque town of Gopeng in Perak. Lately, Gopeng town has been getting a lot of news as it is revving up to becoming a popular ecotourism spot in Perak. In fact, caving at Gua Kendu is one of the must have activities for those who have signed up for any ecotourism package in any one of the nature resorts that operate at Sungai Geruntum, Gopeng. The cave is only a ten-minute ride from Gopeng town and it is convenient to access since it is located not far from the trunk road. There were eleven of us in our group with six adults and five children. Wearing a helmet and head-lamp is highly recommended here because there are a number of low ceiling areas. In addition, there are slopes where you need both hands in order to tackle the climbing process. As it is a dry cave, cavers need not have to worry about their clothing, camera or wallet getting wet. But they do need to worry about getting dirty as they still have to deal with wet spots and wet slopes that could mess up their caving attire.

We arrived at the cave entrance at about 10am after walking a short distance from the road where we parked our van. The short walk through the bushes was not tedious as there is already an existing well-beaten path used by the many visitors to the cave. The cave entrance is quite big. I was told that the Japanese used to hide their tanks in this area to avoid detection by the British during the Japanese Occupation. In fact, the cave could hold up to 6 tanks according to our guide. As in other caves in the area, the communists at one time also used this cave as one of their safe havens.

The cave entrance



Flowstone in the cave

The whole caving exercise took roughly 2 hours to complete. After a short trek from the entrance we came to a pretty large chamber. Here I was told that the communists used to stay and conduct their operational meetings. In order to save on the usage of candles these meetings and other activities were sometimes held in complete darkness. The journey through the whole passageway was quite interesting. There were occasions where the group had to climb up and descend down slopes. Luckily, for slopes that are too steep, ropes are already in place to provide a helping hand. As this cave is on public land, anyone can visit it. For first time visitors a local guide would come in handy. The guide could assist in navigating around the passageway as well as providing a historical account of the cave and the surrounding areas. If you are brave enough maybe you can opt to stay a night in the cave to get a feel of how early cave dwellers lived. There is even a flying fox facility at one of the large cave openings.

As in other easily accessible caves elsewhere, Gua Kandu is pretty much defaced and a lot of graffiti is scrawled onto the walls by some irresponsible visitors, especially at the entrance areas and in big chambers. The early communists did their part too. We could make out some Chinese characters exhorting their idol, Mao ZeDong. No animals such as cave spiders and bats were encountered throughout the trip. Again, this could be due to habitat disruption when so many people visit this cave constantly. But nevertheless, this exercise provided a refreshing and memorable experience for those who treasure caving and nature activities.

The flying fox facility



A visit to the NIAH Caves in Sarawak

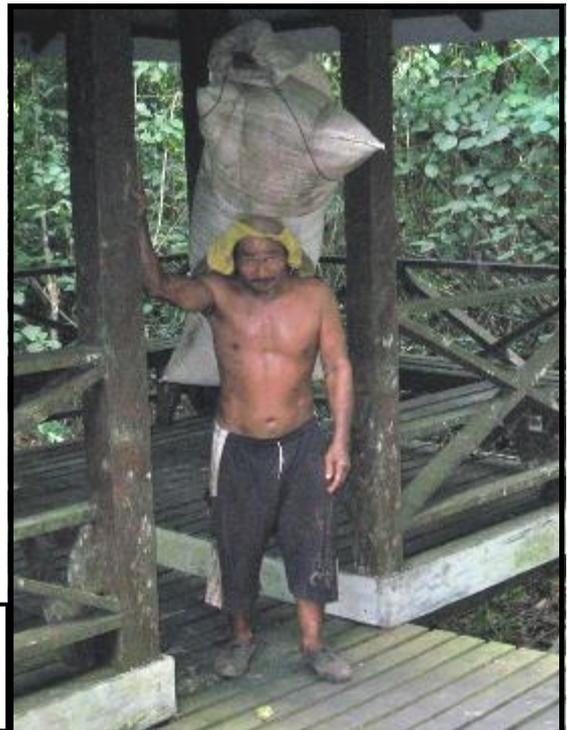
- by Robert Percival

I was in Miri recently with my brother and made a short trip to visit the famed Niah caves. The caves are a well known archaeological site as well as a rich source of Birds Nest and Guano. The Niah National Park is located about 130km south of Miri and there is now a daily bus service which goes from Miri direct to the Park. We arrived at the Park at about 11am. and checked in to our chalet which is quite comfortable and only RM40 for a big 4 bed room with attached bathroom.

After lunch we crossed the Niah River and proceeded first to the museum which showcases some of the artifacts that have been dug out of the caves here, the history of the area and the archaeological work done so far. Human bones up to 40,000 years old, tools, utensils and ornaments made of bone, stone and clay have been discovered buried in the caves making it a significant archaeological find. The caves were also used as a burial site as boat-shaped coffins or 'death ships' have also been found together with cave drawings depicting the journey to the afterlife. From the museum, there is a 3.5km walkway through the forest that leads around the Limestone hills and to the caves within.



Traders Cave



Porter carrying a huge bag of guano to the riverside

The first cave you reach is called the Traders Cave. This is a rock overhang where the Traders and Collectors of Birds Nest and Guano would live and conduct their business from. You can still see some remains of the wooden huts they built here long ago. The business is now conducted from Niah town and no one lives in this cave now. Past this cave is the Great Cave, so called because of its large mouth which is 250m wide and 60m high. Many of the artifacts were found here and the archaeological work is still continuing.

The Great Cave is also home to millions of Swiftlets and Bats and you can hear the incessant chatter of the swiftlets when you enter this cave. High above, from the cave ceiling, hang many wooden poles which the Collectors climb to pick the birds nests. One wonders how they initially managed to climb 60metres up to attach the poles to the ceiling as it seems an impossible task. There is a staircase leading up to a passage at the rear which goes deeper into the hill and finally emerges at the south face of the hill. Following this passage you will come to other chambers named Lubang Padang, Lubang Angus and Gan Kira. There are some interesting stalagmites, stalactites and coral-like formations to be seen in these chambers. Large cave crickets can be seen in Lubang Angus.

The next hill along the route holds the Painted Cave, so called because of the cave drawings found there. The paintings depict the lives and also the death rituals of the early dwellers here. The paintings were drawn using red hematite, similar to that used in the Tambun drawings, and span a length of about 30m. To prevent the paintings from being vandalised, the area is fenced up so one can only view the drawings from a distance. A powerful torch is necessary to see the drawings as there is no lighting provided at the site. The death ships were also found here and some pieces have been placed nearby for viewing. These death ships are believed to be about 1000 years old. Apart from the caves, there is also a Longhouse you can visit and some jungle trails to explore in the Niah National Park. Unfortunately, we had to leave the next day and did not have time to experience these other attractions available at the park. This is definitely a place worth visiting and a minimum 2 day stay is advised to explore the whole area.



The West mouth of the Great Cave. The archaeological site is at the upper right.



Close up of the archaeological site in the West mouth.



Some of the Cave Drawings in the Painted Cave.

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See us online at

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

Cave News

The STAR— 7/10/09

COMING TRIPS

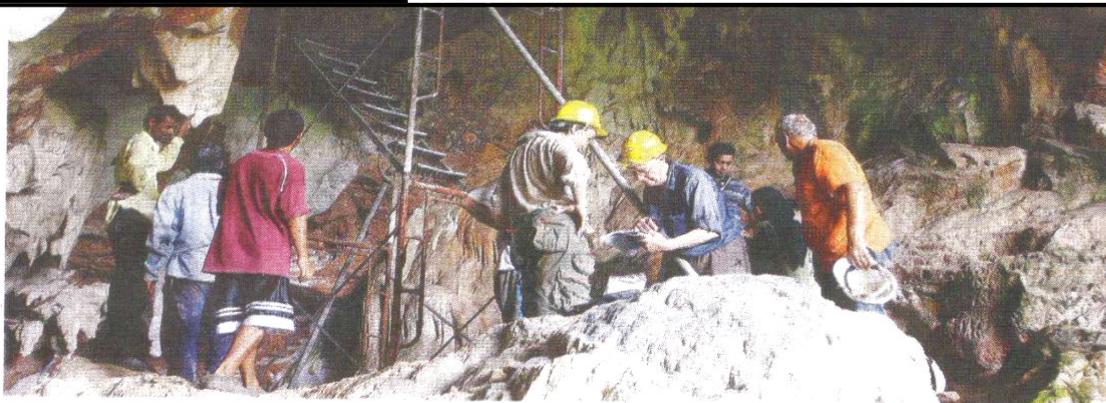
Survey of the Caves of Baling

Nov—Dec 2009

There will be trips to the caves near Baling, Kedah in November and December. The trips will all be day trips on a Saturday and the dates have not been set as the surveyor intends to make these as informal trips ie. can go when time is available. . These trips are organized to explore and survey the caves at Bukit Baling and should be relatively easy and suitable for most people. There will be several trips and most will probably be in December. If you are interested to go, contact Hymeir by email at hymeir@gmail.com and he will ensure that you are informed at least a few days before the trips. He warns that the trips through the caves may be a little slow due to the survey work.

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Northern Cave Group Meeting and Gathering 12 Dec 2009

The Northern Cave Group (NCG) is a collaboration between MKS and the Malaysian Nature Society Penang Branch. NCG will be holding an informal gathering on Sat, 12 December, 2009 at 3pm in Penang at The Reef, Batu Ferringhi. There will be a short talk by NCG coordinator Hymeir that will precede an informal meeting to discuss caving matters for the Northern region. Hymeir will also answer any questions you may have regarding caves and caving. You will be shown and allowed to try Single Rope Techniques (a rope climbing system) that is used in cave exploration. So please dress appropriately. If you are interested in caving or don't intend to go caving but want to be involved in karst conservation, please come. There is a charge of RM10 to cover the refreshments served with the balance to help raise funds for NCG. For more details, please email Hymeir at hymeir@gmail.com .



Prehistoric animal:
(Top) The ancient fossil in the cave and (left) Lord Cranbrook (blue shirt and yellow hat) taking down notes on the fossil after inspecting it.

Good Lord! It's a leopard!

A SCIENTIST who recently studied an animal fossil found in Gua Naga Mas near Gopeng, believes it could be that of a leopard.

Since its discovery by Malaysian Nature Society members in 1992, many have put forward the view that the fossil could be of a tiger or serow.

The latest opinion that the fossil is a leopard came from Dr Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy, the 5th Earl of Cranbrook.

Lord Cranbrook, as he is popularly

known, was invited by Universiti Malaya (UM) senior lecturer in Geology Dr Ros Fatimah Muhammad to inspect the fossil on Sept 29.

He said the fossil was that of a carnivore but too small to be a tiger.

Lord Cranbrook was a senior lecturer in zoology between 1961 and 1970 at UM and the author of several books on wildlife in South East Asia.

On why the fossil was found about 30m above the ground, Dr Ros Fatimah said studies in areas in the Kinta Valley had shown that the ground

level was much higher in the past.

Dr Ros Fatimah said sediment collected would be sent to a researcher in Australia to determine the age of the cave and fossil.

It has been reported earlier that experts believed that the animal could have lived during the Pleistocene age which started 2.5 million years ago and ended 10,000 years ago.

The Museum and Antiquities Department has gazetted Gua Naga Mas as a historical site.