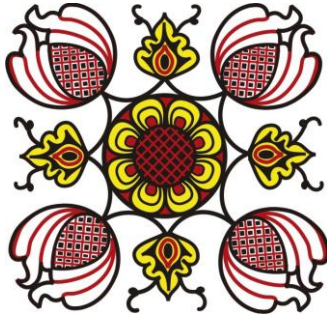


Quarterly Tours – No. 10



National Trust – Sri Lanka

30th May 2009

Compiled by Nilan Cooray

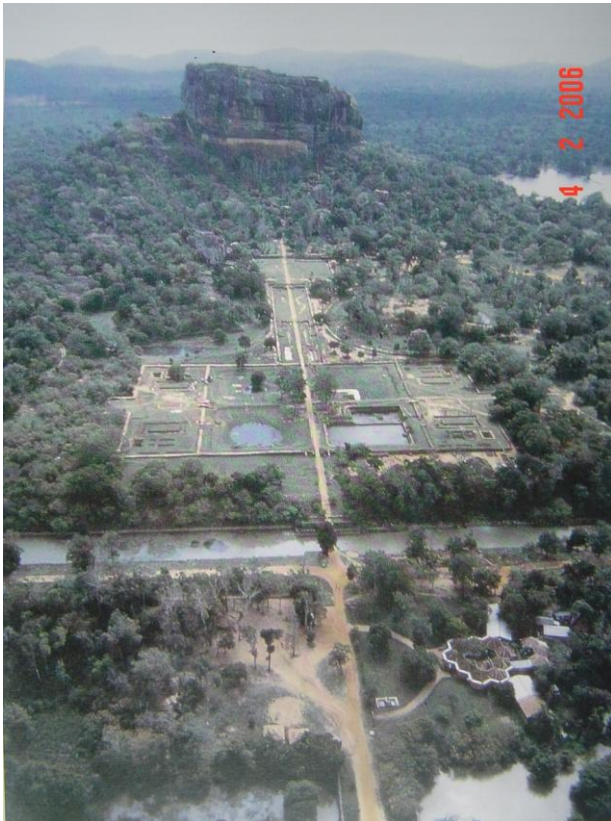
National Trust – Sri Lanka

Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 30th May 2009.

Programme

- 0600 hrs: Leave PGIAR
- 0830 hrs: Comfort stop at Ranthaliya Rest House,
Kurunegala
- 1100 hrs: Arrive at Sigiriya and visit to the site
- 1330 hrs: Lunch at Sigiriya Rest House
- 1430 hrs: Visit to the Museum, Herbal Garden and
Pidurangala
- 1600 hrs: Leave for Colombo
- 1800 hrs: Comfort stop at Ranthaliya Rest House,
Kurunegala
- 2030 hrs: Arrive at the PGIAR.

World Heritage Site of Sigiriya



Located in the northern extremities of the Matale District, Sigiriya is Sri Lanka's most sensational and most visited heritage site. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Sigiriya reflects the 5th century Sri Lankan and South Asian culture, art, science and technology at its best. This versatile and many faceted site showcases various aspects such as town planning, architecture, landscape design, civil and hydraulic engineering, literature and fine arts of the period.

The site has several distinctive phases from prehistoric times to the more recent Kandyan era. The recent excavations carried out at the cave and rock outcrop site at 'Aligala' (Elephant rock) which is situated at the base of the Sigiriya rock on its eastern escarpment has revealed remains of pre-historic human settlements that existed here around 5,500 years ago. Evidence of proto historical remains (10th – 9th centuries B.C.) has also been discovered at the same site, lying above the pre-historic layers. The natural caves formed by numerous boulders scattered on the western escarpment of the Sigiriya rock are associated with Sigiriya's next phase. The artificial drip ledges and donatory inscriptions in Brahmi script made just below these drip ledges suggest that by the 3rd century B.C., this site has been a monastic site of cave dwelling Buddhist monks. Most of the constructions and interventions that are to be seen today at Sigiriya, however, are attributed to King Kasyapa I (477-495 A.C.) and it is the major constructional phase at the site. During this phase, Sigiriya has become Sri Lanka's principal political centre. Although the narration of *Culawamsa* projects Sigiriya as a hide – out of a patricidal king, the built features and works of art reflect a well planned and designed royal capital of a pleasure loving king.

The next phase of Sigiriya commences when Moggalana, the half brother of Kasyapa and heir to the throne became the king after the demise of Kasyapa, when he decided to shift the capital back to Anuradhapura and convert the site once again into a Buddhist monastery. During this phase (6th up to 12th – 13th centuries A.C.), the cave shelters were further improved, new ritual structures such as a stupa, Bodhi-tree shrine and an image house constructed and some of the Kasyapan period buildings re-utilized for monastic needs. During this phase, Sigiriya had also become a major visitor attraction, where people from various parts of the country as well as from



foreign lands visited Sigiriya, purely to appreciate its splendor. This is clearly evident from the graffiti inscribed on the Mirror Wall, where they have left their impressions of this magnificent site. According to Prof. Senake Bandaranayake, the terracotta figurines unearthed during excavations, which clearly resembles the famous Sigiriya damsels on the paintings, and the main theme of the graffiti, were replicas that the visitors had taken away as souvenirs.

Terracotta figurine

After the 13th century, Sigiriya was abandoned yet again, until the 19th century, when it was used as a military out post of the kings of Kandy. Modern antiquarian interest in the site was aroused in 1832 when Major Jonathan Forbes made an account of the site. H.C.P. Bell, the first commissioner of archaeology in Sri Lanka initiated archaeological exploration, research documentation and conservation programmes and these activities are continued to this vary date with a holistic approach by the Central Cultural Fund.

The site is centered upon a monumental rock rising 180 meters above the surrounding plain. The designers have made Sigiriya rock, the focal point of the entire city plan by laying out several precincts in an axial arrangement. The Palace complex is located on the rock summit. The elliptical shaped hilly terrain immediately around the base of the rock, which is

defined by a high and thick brick cum stone masonry wall, was the citadel. Extending to the east and west beyond the citadel are two rectangular precincts that are fortified by earthen ramparts and moats. The western precinct was the royal pleasure garden. The eastern precinct is yet to be explored and investigated to identify its function. All these precincts are again enclosed by a larger rectangular area by means of an outer rampart. An outer moat has still survived on the western side of the complex, just inside the outer rampart.



The entrances to the city are placed to the north, south and west through the ramparts and across the moats. The gateways placed in an east-west direction are aligned with the main east-west axis of the complex. The incorporation of natural features such as boulders into its architectural and landscape design is indeed a remarkable achievement at Sigiriya. Almost all the boulders have a man-made pavilion on top and a natural cave

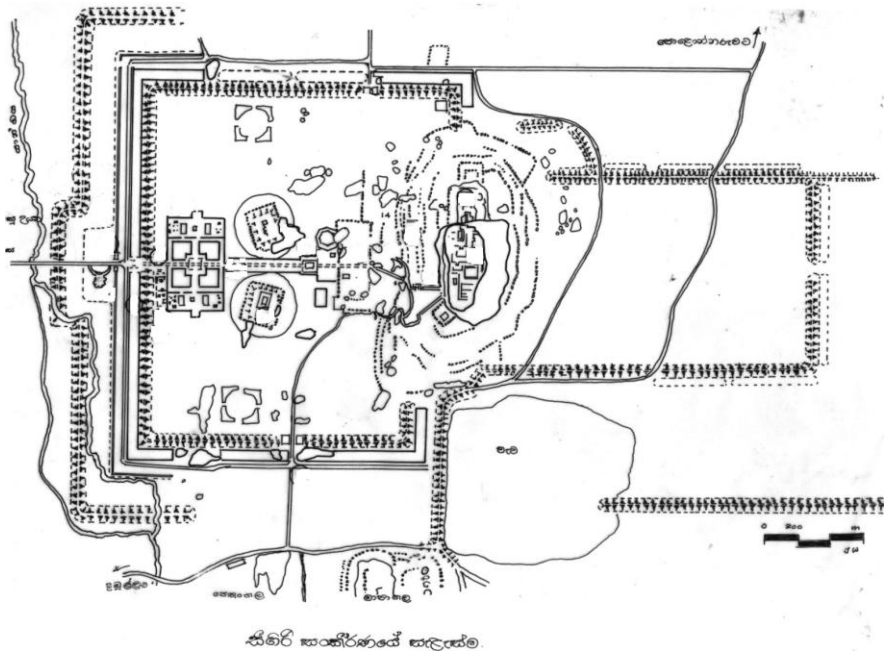
shelter below. The terraces of the escarpment follow the natural contours of the terrain. The pathways through this area are laid out as winding foot-paths that are punctuated by natural boulder arches and through court yards. A large number of terracotta architectural decorations and embellishments have also been unearthed during excavations at the site.



Terracotta architectural decorations

The serpentine streams, water cascades, fountains, ponds and pools, pavilions surrounded by water that grace the pleasure garden are the remnants of the hydraulic features at Sigiriya. The supply and activation of water works show how elementary hydraulic principles have been utilized for creative work.

The whole of the western and northern rock face were originally plastered and painted with damsels. This plaster band, against the eastern skyline would have provided a floating effect to the aerial palace on the rock summit.



1. Western entrance to the pleasure garden.

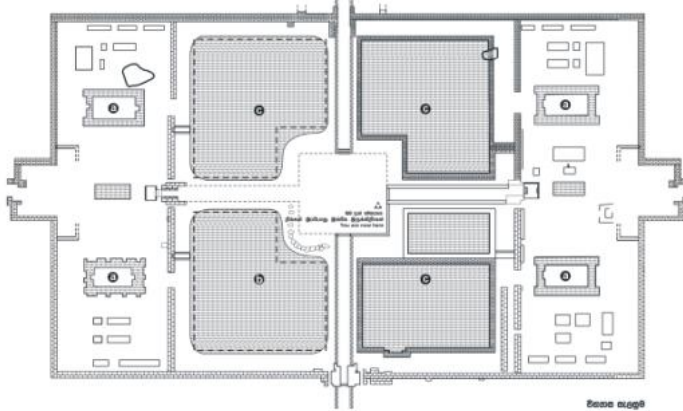
This is the only entrance to the complex with a flight of steps, suggesting that it is meant for pedestrians. Since it is laid out on the principal east – west axis, it was probably the ceremonial entrance to the pleasure garden. Originally there would have been a draw-bridge across the moat to reach the flight of steps. The remains of a triple entry gateway paved with limestone, which was unearthed recently, could be seen upon ascending the flight of steps.

2. Miniature water garden.



Located at the south west corner of the pleasure garden, the garden complex that was unearthed and conserved by the Central Cultural Fund. The striking feature here is the pavilions surrounded by water. The troughs surrounding the pavilions are paved with pebbles or lime stone and filled with shallow, slow moving water of great aesthetic appeal. Since this complex is a miniaturized refinement of other garden complexes found at Sigiriya, and a kind of micro-scale model of the total concept of the water garden, it is called the miniature water garden. A similar garden also exists buried under the earth deposit to the north of the axial pathway.

3. Central water garden



மேல்	திறப்பு	Key
a. சமீபம்	மண்டபம்	Pavilion
b. வலிமீ வளைவு குடி ஒதுகு	அகழ்வு செய்யப்படாத குளங்கள்	Un - excavated pond
c. வலிமீ கல் கட்டுவலை கட்டு குடி ஒதுகு	அகழ்வு செய்யப்பட்டு பாதுகாக்கப்பட்ட குளங்கள்	Excavated and conserved pond

Just beyond the miniature water garden, the walled compound at the centre of the axial zone is considered the heart of the pleasure garden. It consists of three compartments. The central compartment is square in shape while the two compartments to the north and south are rectangular. The central compound which has gateways oriented in four principal cardinal directions consists of a central square island surrounded by a moat. The island is approached from the four principal directions through causeways, which divides the moat into four 'L' – shaped ponds. This quartered or '*char-bagh*' plan is a popular garden form of the ancient world of which, the Sigiriya version is one of the oldest surviving examples.

The remnants of a brick basement and the flight of steps aligned with the cardinal directions on the central island

suggests that there would have been an elevated open podium or a roofed pavilion on this island, which is a characteristic feature of the Moghul garden designs of the 17th – 18th centuries. The two rectangular compounds on either side consist of two pavilions each that are surrounded by water. A number of brick built deep cisterns are also found within these compounds. Corbelled arch tunnels provide access from these compounds to the ‘L’- shaped ponds within the central compound. The whole complex would have been used for water sports and associated ceremonies of royalty.

4. Fountain garden



The uniqueness in this garden is its fountain system. The circular lime stone slabs with symmetrical perforation, laid out two on each side of the axial pathway were to activate fountains. The forces of gravity and pressure have been used to make the fountains work. The moat around the summer palaces abutting the northern and southern boundary walls of

the garden conveyed water to these fountains through the brick – built pressure chambers located within the garden. The water issued by the fountains flowed along a westerly directions to cascade into elongated pools on either side on the axial pathway. These fountains function on rainy days, even today. The eastern half of this garden is at a higher elevation where a serpentine stream is found to the south of the axial pathway, with the slow movement of shallow water.

5. Summer Palaces



The mounds to the north and south of the axial zone are the elevated terraces for summer palaces. The one to the south is conserved while that to the north is without any intervention. The archaeological investigation carried out at the summit of the elevated mound to the south and the remains of stone footings for the pillars thereon suggests that there would have been a timber pavilion once. The mound is rectangular in ground plan and its sides are retained by rubble masonry. It is surrounded by a circular moat and access to the pavilion on top of the mound is through a rock out crop that lies across the moat to the south.

6. Octagonal Pond

Located to the north of the axial pathway and at the extreme eastern limit of the pleasure garden is an octagonal pond. The western face of a towering boulder has been utilized to form the eastern side of the octagon. Built against the boulder within the pond is a rectangular podium of stone masonry, which appears to have been a bathing pavilion. The drip ledge and the sockets on the boulder above this pavilion suggest that the pavilion once had a canopy.

7. Buddhist Monastery

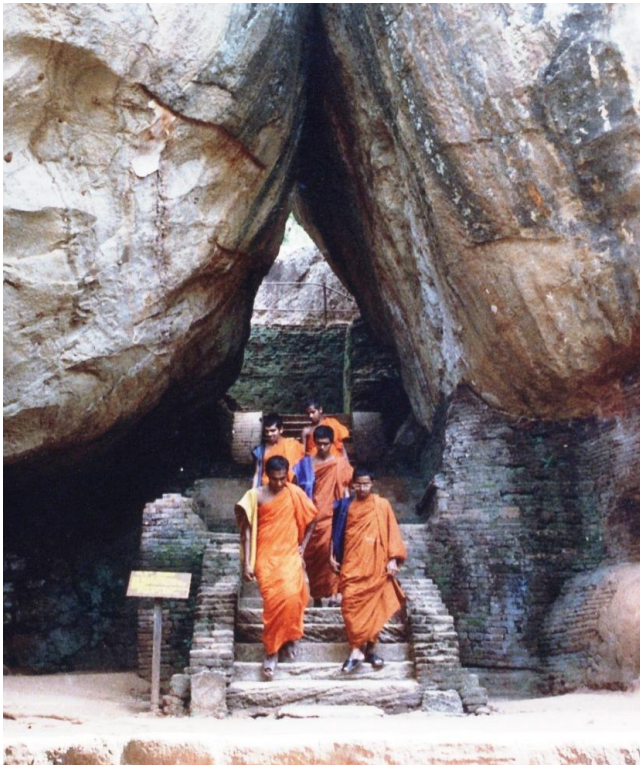
As you enter the citadel and to the south of the axial pathway are the ritual structures such as the stupa, the Bodhi-tree shrine and the image house belonging to the second monastic phase after Kasyapa.

8. Deraniyagala Cave



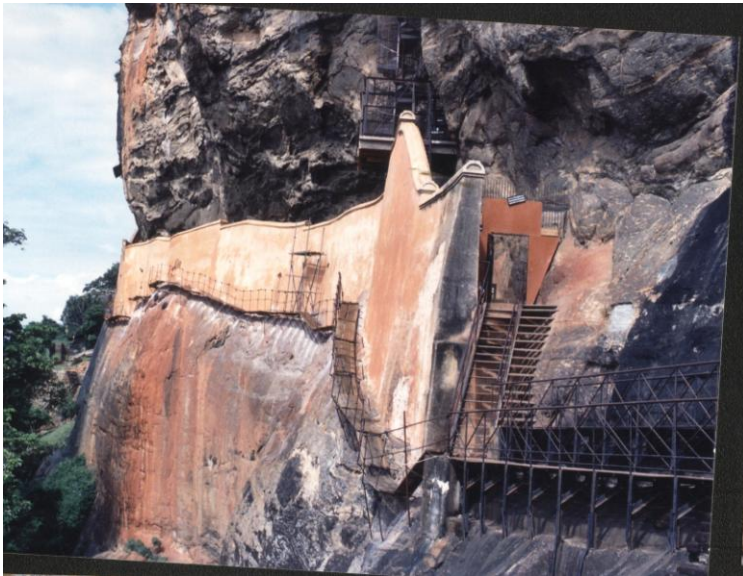
The remnants of the paintings found within the ceiling of this rock shelter are strikingly similar to those found on the main rock. But they are different in that they are full – figure representations. This rock shelter came to be popularly known as the ‘Deraniyagala cave’ due to the discovery of these paintings by the former Director of the Department of National Museums, Dr. P.E.P. Deraniyagala.

9. Boulder Arch



Here the main pathway leading to the rock summit is laid through a narrow gap naturally created between two boulders that lean on each other. This is a fine example of utilizing natural features of the site by the Sigiriya builders in making the climb more dramatic. A similar boulder arch could also be found associated with the south western approach.

10. Mirror Wall



The western and the south western pathways across the hilly terrain converge at the south west base of the main rock. From here, the gallery leading to the rock summit is firstly through a covered walkway along the western and north-western rock face. The greater part of this walkway was set along a collar – like declivity and hence it is protected by the overhanging

rock. This walkway is also protected by a high parapet wall of brick masonry at its western edge. This parapet wall is popularly known as the ‘Mirror Wall’ due to the highly polished plaster on its inner surface. Apart from its architectural and civil engineering values, graffiti scrawled on it from the 7th – 13th century A.C. retaining cultural records that have high literary value. Numerous visitors to Sigiriya had left their impressions of the site in neat lightly incised letters in poetic language and they constitute the earliest extant examples of Sinhala verse. Female figures similar to those on the main rock with full figure representations were discovered during recent conservation work on the outer plaster of the mirror wall.

11. Paintings on the main rock

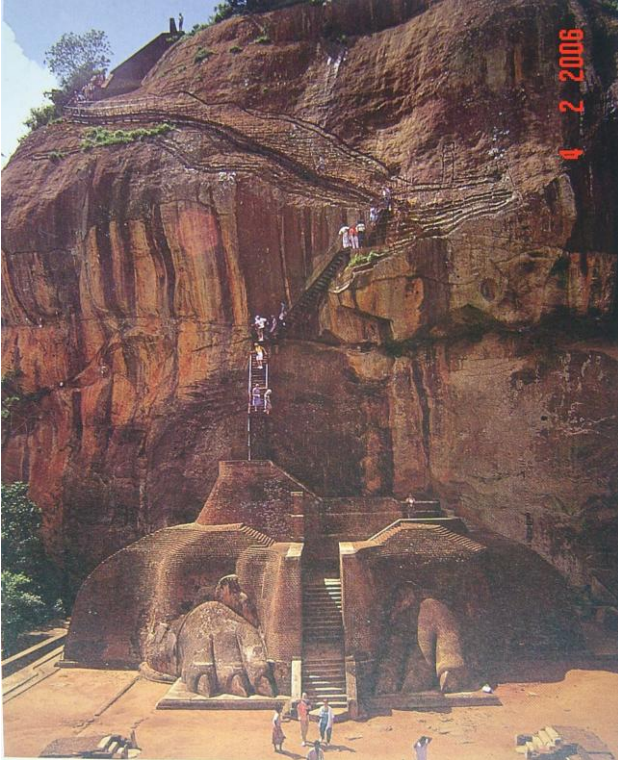


On the rock face above the mirror wall are the remnants of the plaster work and paintings of female figures. The drip ledge running across the whole of the western and northern rock faces indicate that originally it was an immense backdrop of paintings covering an area nearly 140 meters long and about 40 meters high at its widest point. As the British writer John Still observed 'this is perhaps the largest painting in the world'. According to the graffiti on the mirror wall, there had been about 500 female figures. However, at present there are only 19 such figures surviving in two pockets.

Only the bust cut off at the waist by clouds has been shown in the paintings, as if the females are floating among clouds. The figures are drawn either singly or in pairs. Many scholars have come up with various interpretations of these paintings. One school of thought initiated by H.C.P. Bell assumes that they represent women of Kasyapa's harem. The fair skinned ladies represent queens or princess while the dark skinned figures represent maid – servants. The second school of thought initiated by Ananada Commaraswamy believes that the paintings represent '*apsaras*' – the celestial nymphs, a common motif in Asian religious and royal art. The school of thought developed by Prof. Senerath Paranavitana suggests that fair skinned ladies represent lightning (*Vijjul Kumari*) and the dark skinned ladies represents rain clouds (*Meghalatha*). He further argues that Sigiriya had been modeled on, or is a symbolic representation of the sensuous city of *Alakamanda* of the mythical God Kuvera.

This is the earliest example of a painting which is known to contain oil in the binding medium, both in the laying of the plaster as well as in the paint layer, In 1967, a vandal smeared green paint on the paintings, but they were restored to their original state by the Department of Archaeology with the assistance of an Italian expert, Lucciano Maranzi.

12. Lion stair case and terrace



The walkway along the western and north- western rock faces lead one to an elevated plateau or terrace which projects from the northern rock face. On this terrace and built against the rock are the remains of a gateway with a staircase, which gave access to the palace complex on the rock summit. The surviving brick masonry with the massive fore paws of a lion, provide, a clear picture of the form and scale of this staircase. This staircase was in the form of a crouching lion, as if it was emerging from the rock behind. According to the *Culavamsa*,

Kasyapa has engineered a staircase in the form of a lion to ascend the precipitous rock, and the staircase was one of the key features of Sigiriya's overall design conception, from which the great rock derived its name *Siha-giri* (the Lion Mountain).

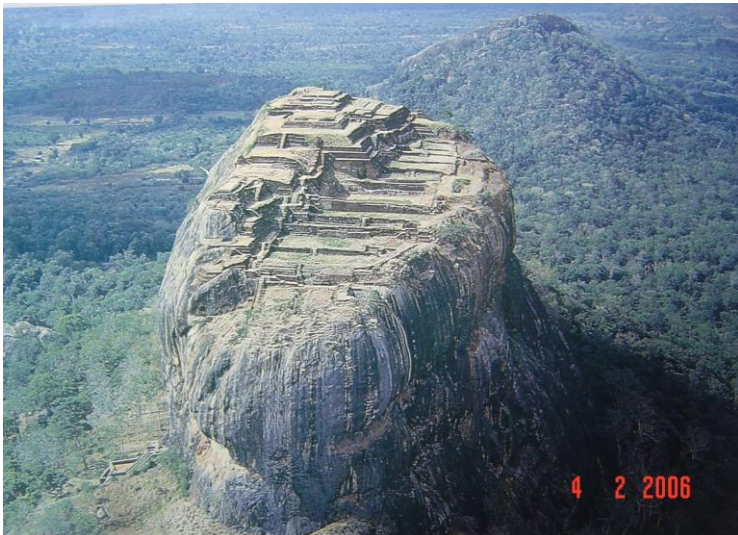
A central passage with lime stone steps through the stylized mouth of the lion would have continued above its body in a zig-zag pathway with landings to reach the rock summit. Only the upper part of this pathway is still intact, which is similar to that associated with the mirror wall.

The terrace, on which the lion staircase stands, was originally enclosed by a parapet wall of brick masonry of which only a part of it is still intact at the western side. The ruined structures in front of the lion staircase suggest that they were either rest rooms or guard houses. The recent archaeological excavations have revealed a pathway leading from the northern gateway and giving access to the terrace from its northern side.

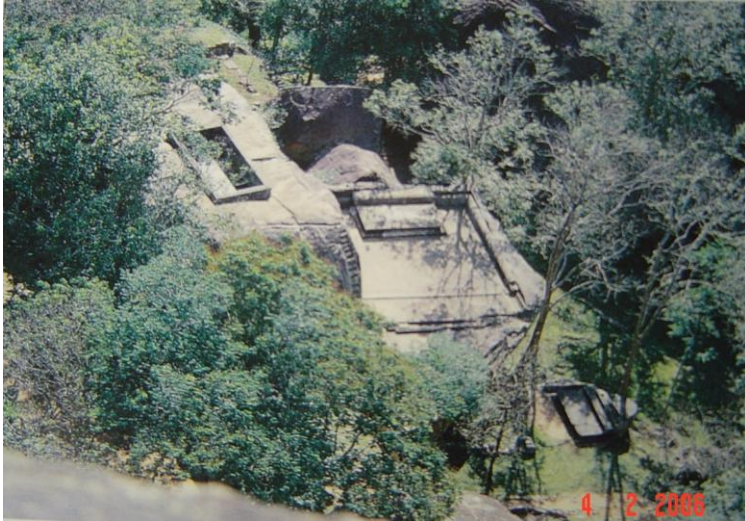
13. Palace Complex

The palace complex located at the rock summit is the only example of such a complex in Sri Lanka dating from before the 12th century. It consists of palace buildings, pavilions, utility buildings, terraced gardens and rock cut and brick built water retaining structures spread out in an area of 1.5 hectares on the entire rock summit. All these structures and elements are linked by a system of foot paths paved with slabs and steps made of lime stone. The palace building with pavilions occupies the north – western sector of the rock summit, which

is the highest level and offers a 360 degree panoramic view. It is about 180 meters above the surrounding plain. The utility buildings are to the south of the palace building. The terraced gardens occupy the eastern half of the rock summit at a lower elevation. A throne cut out of the living rock which is located to the east, below the palace building and facing the terraced gardens with the eastern panorama as its background would have been a royal throne. The holes cut at the base of the seat suggest that it was provided with a canopy. On the south-east is a rock cut pool of monumental proportions. The two natural depressions on top of the precipice to the south and west would have been the sentry posts. The elliptical ground plan of the rock summit was originally surrounded by a parapet wall of brick masonry, rising from the sides of the rock, simulating an upward continuation of the vertical sides of the rock.



14. Cistern Rock



The boulder on top of which a cistern has been carved in is presently known as the 'Cistern Rock'. The cistern is protected by a stone built parapet wall. The exact function of this cistern is not known, but some speculate that it was for ultra contemplative bathing purposes.

15. Asana Cave

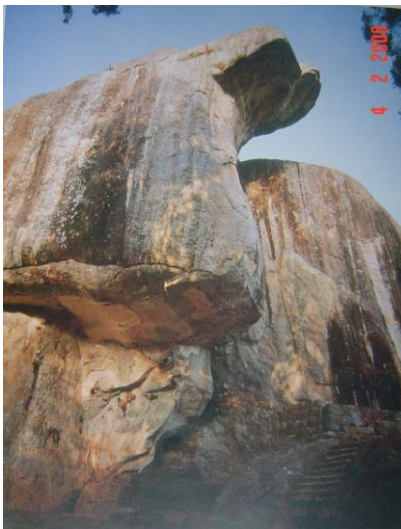
The rock shelter at the base of the Cistern Rock takes the present name from the seat inside, carved out of the living rock. It is enclosed by a low rock cut moulded kerb. A peculiar feature is the carved – in holes of unusual shapes on the rock floor. Layers of paintings of different periods can be seen on its wall and rock ceiling. This rock shelter would have

been used for long sessions of meditation of the Buddhist monks.

16. Audience Hall

Cut out on the exposed vertical surface of the boulder that is naturally cleaved off from the Cistern Rock, and lies in the horizontal position at presents, this is popularly believed to be the Audience Hall in the citadel of king Kasyapa. The principal seat is to the extreme south, while other seats at a lower level than that of the principal seat are on either side to form a 'U'- shaped arrangement. The small holes cut out on the flattened rock floor indicate that there was a roof held aloft by timber posts.

17. Cobra – hood Cave



The artificial drip ledge and early Brahmi inscription of the 3rd – 1st century B.C. associated with this cave indicate that it has served as a dwelling for monks during Sigiriya's early monastic phase. The painting on the rock ceiling has floral and stylized animal motifs with a geometric composition. The brick paved floor of the cave has been finished with

lime plaster. The boulder associated with the cave has been cleaved from the mother boulder and resembles the hood of a cobra, and this rock shelter takes the name from this unusual feature. A fallen off piece of the boulder is still to be seen in front of the cave.

The archaeological excavations conducted at the fore- court of this rock shelter has led to the discovery of nine human skeletons.

18. Southern Gateway

This gateway has been constructed as a wide entrance through the inner rampart of the inner western precinct. The floor of the gateway is paved with flat stones. The flight of steps on either side of the gate leads to an upper level, where the guard houses were probably located. The elevated walk (soldiers' parade) on the earthen wall of the inner rampart is also laid out at this level. The scale of the gate suggests that it was meant for large chariots that were drawn by elephants or horses. A similar gateway could also be seen at the northern side of the inner western precinct.

19. Museum and Information Centre

Established with Japanese financial and technical assistance, this facility is part of the Central Cultural Fund's programme on heritage information for the visitors to this most visited destination of the Cultural Triangle. The museum and information centre is to be opened to the public shortly. This

will have facilities for audio – visual presentations and displays artifacts brought to light during archaeological excavations carried out at the site, topographic model of the entire complex and reproduction of the Sigiriya paintings to make it a valuable resource centre of heritage knowledge, and to offer a rewarding and complex experience of Sigiriya to visitors of all strata as well as scholars. It will also have an information desk, counter for sale of publications and souvenirs and a cafeteria.

20. Herbal Garden

Situated on the bank of the Sigiri Oya (Yan Oya) and on the opposite side to the museum of the axial pathway, it contains rare medicinal herbs and dry zone plants.

21. Mapagala

Popularly known as Mapagala (the rock of the Viceroy), this rocky formation is located to the south of the Sigiriya rock. It is linked to the citadel through the massive tank bund of Sigiri Mahaweve. The fortifications skirting the base of this rocky formation consist of a wall constructed out of stone blocks of immense proportion.

22. Sigiriya Mahaweve

This partly man made and partly natural reservoir is located to the south of the Sigiriya complex, and to the east of Mapagala. Although the present reservoir is seen as comparatively small, its 8 km long earthen bund extending in southern direction confirms that it was originally much larger than that of the

present one. Located at a higher elevation than the water garden, this reservoir, apart from fulfilling utilitarian needs of the city has supplied water for the water works of the pleasure garden.

23 Pidurangala Monastery

Located about 1km to the north of Sigiriya, the Pidurangala rock rises to a height of about 160 meters above the surrounding plain. The artificial drip ledges and Brahmi inscriptions on the rock shelters scattered at the site suggests that it was a monastic settlement belonged to the early monastic phase of Sigiriya. By about the 8th century, the monastery has been evolved into a Pabbata Vihara (five fold type monastery) consisting of a stupa, Bodhi- tree shrine, image house, chapter house and a hall located on an elevated central square terrace with monks cells located around this terrace in a geometric layout. The layout of the monastery complies with the specifications and guidelines given in the silpa text '*Manjusri Vastuvidya Sastra*', a work of about 7th - 8th centuries.



Situated near the rock summit is a long rock shelter where in a vandalized 12 meter long recumbent brick built and lime plastered Buddha image could be found.