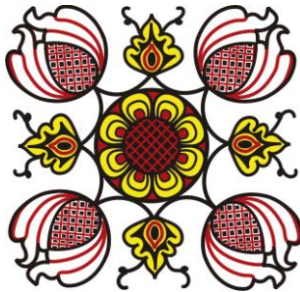


Quarterly Tours – No. 13



National Trust – Sri Lanka

27th February 2010

Compiled by Nilan Cooray

National Trust – Sri Lanka

Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 27th February 2010.

Programme

0700 hrs.	Leave PGIAR
0915 - 1000 hrs.	Visit Regional Museum (Ehelepola Walauva) at Ratnapura
1015 - 1100 hrs.	Visit to a gem-mining pit at Ratnapura
1115 – 1200 hrs.	Visit to a Lapidary and a gem museum at Ratnapura
1230 - 1330 hrs.	Visit Bopath Ella (falls) at Kuruwita
1330 – 1430 hrs.	Lunch at Minara Hotel which is located on the banks of Kuru Ganga and overlooking Bopath Ella
1500 – 1615 hrs.	Visit Batadomba-lena (prehistoric cave site) off Ekneligoda
1630 – 1715 hrs.	Visit Ekneligoda Walauva at Kuruwita
1715 hrs.	Leave for Colombo
1930 hrs.	Arrive PGIAR

Heritage of Sabaragamuwa

One of Island's nine provinces, Sabaragamuwa is located in south-central Sri Lanka and offers the visitor a plenitude of natural beauty, culture, history and adventure found on a variety of terrain.

Gem industry



Sabaragamuwa is most famous for its gems, one of Sri Lanka's first exports, like elephants and spices. Certainly most of the people of this province have connections with the gem trade, in its many facets, either mining cutting, polishing and making jewellery. At the centre of this, quite the most beautiful of industries, is Ratnapura (City of Gems). Here you will find stones of excellent quality, luster and variety ...sapphires, rubies, amethysts,

topaz, garnets, tourmalines, cat's eyes, star rubies and sapphires and the mysterious moonstones (feldspar), to name a few. Craftsmanship of high quality, all cutting and polishing is being done the traditional way by hand.

Pre-history

Sabaragamuwa's gem mines have yielded more than jewels for ornament. The numerous fossilized faunal remains of already extinct varieties have been found from the gem-bearing alluvial gravels of Sabaragamuwa that are dated to a period 250,000 to 10,000 BP. They contain remains of an Upper Pleistocene fauna, notably the animals with single horns like hippopotamus (one with six incisor teeth), two species of rhinoceros, dated to ca. 80,000 BP, unicorn, lion, three species of elephants, pigs, porcupine, crocodiles, dogs etc. that were endemic to Sri Lanka, as well as the Bengali tigers and other animals presently found in the country. These remains suggest that the island had been inhabited by now extinct fauna in Sri Lanka during pre-historic times. Associated with these faunal remains are stone artifacts comprising, typically, large choppers and flakes of quartz and chert.

The Sabaragamuwa province is of great ethno-archeological importance with the discovery of several sites belonging to the Mesolithic Age. Several cave sites in Sabaragamuwa have yielded the earliest evidence (at ca. 40,000 BP) of anatomically modern man in South Asia. These anatomically modern prehistoric humans in

Sri Lanka are referred to as ‘Balangoda Man’ in popular parlance (derived from his being responsible for the Mesolithic ‘Balangoda Culture’ first defined in sites near Balangoda). He stood at an estimated height of ca. 174 cm for males and 166 cm for females in certain samples, which is considerable when compared with present-day populations in Sri Lanka. The bones are robust, with thick skull-bones, prominent brow-ridges, depressed wide noses, heavy jaws and short necks. The teeth are conspicuously large. These traits have survived in varying degrees among the Vaddas and certain Sinhalese groups, thus pointing to Balangoda Man as a common ancestor. He appears to have settled not only in the steamy equatorial rainforests of Sabaragamuwa, but practically every nook and corner of Sri Lanka ranging from the damp and cold High Plains such as Maha-eliya (Horton Plains) to the arid lowlands of Mannar and Vilpattu. The camps were invariably small, rarely exceeding 50 sq. meters in area, thus suggesting occupation by not more than a couple of nuclear families at most. This life-style could not have been too different from that described for the Vaddas of Sri Lanka. They would have been moving from place to place on an annual cycle of foraging for food. It appears as if every conceivable type of animal had been eaten, ranging from elephants to snakes, rats, snails and small fish. This diet would have been well balanced as attested by the robusticity of the human skeletal remains.

The tool kit of ‘Balangoda Man’ is distinguished by the occurrence of geometric microliths, comprising small (less than 4 cm long) flakes of quartz and (rarely) chert

fashioned into stylized lunate, triangular and trapezoidal forms. Beads of shell have also been discovered from the excavations and the occurrence of marine shells at inland sites such as Batadomba-lena points to an extensive network of contacts between the coast and the hinterland. According to charcoal and other remains found during excavations, it is believed that the 'Balangoda Man' used fire.

Nature and culture

Sri Lanka's holy mountain Sri Pada, or Adam's Peak, which is sacred to the followers of world's four major religions is also located in Sabaragamuwa. The common element which binds the devotees of these religions is the belief that the foot-print mark on the rock summit of Sri Pada, is associated with the Lord Buddha, God Siva, Adam, St. Thomas and Al-Rohun.

The province also offers the remnants of the feudal system that existed in pre-colonial Sri Lanka through numerous walauv (residences of aristocrats).

Sabaragamuwa is famous for its great natural beauty and some of the island's most scenic waterfalls are located within the province.

It is hoped that the present tour of Ratnapura will provide a basic introduction to the multi faceted heritage of Sabaragamuwa.

Regional Museum (Ehelepola Walauva) at Ratnapura



The regional museum at Ratnapura displays Sri Lanka's prehistoric period and also provides valuable information on Sri Lanka's gem industry, specially the process of gem-mining.

The stone implements, crystals, stakes made of animal bones, the remaining parts of animals such as rhinoceros, hippopotamus and species of buffaloes lived during the Mesolithic age found from gem mines as well as archaeological excavations are on display.

The museum also displays a collection of different type of gems and numerous objects which depict the traditional folk life style of Sabaragamuwa.



The museum is housed in the Ehelepola Walauva, the country / official residence of Ehelepola, a chieftain / provincial ruler under the king Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe the last during the early 19th century. The popular local belief is that Ehelepola was sent to Ratnapura by the king to develop the irrigation systems to support local rice farming. The irrigation works that are still visible in and around Ratnapura and belong to the period before the British colonial rule are ascribed by the locals to this chieftain / provincial ruler. Later Ehelepola became the chief Adigar of Kandy's royal court (a position equivalent to the Prime Minister) under the same king.

The gem industry in Ratnapura

Home to a thriving gem and jewellery industry that dates back to ancient times, Ratnapura (the City of Gems) has been a vital source of precious and semi-precious stones for centuries. The city is world famous for its Blue Sapphires and other precious and semi-precious stones found here include Red Rubies, Cat's Eyes, Alexandrites, Tourmalines, Zircons, Garnets, Amethysts and Topaz. The mining, cleaning, cutting, and polishing of these precious jewels is a skill that is passed down to generations and is still done manually according to traditional methods.



Gem-mining pits, mainly located in paddy fields on lower ground, and simply covered open-sided huts with thatched roofs, are a part of

Ratnapura's rural landscape. The majority of the gem-mining pits do not measure more than three meters square, and go down to a maximum depth of 25 meters. The fascinating process of gem mining, cutting, and polishing can be observed with a visit to a gem mining pit and lapidary.

The prospecting for minerals is rooted in deep traditions and often exploration begins with astrological consultations and a religious ritual of food offerings to “*Bahirawaya*,” a spirit who is considered to be in charge of earthly wealth.

The arranged visit to a gem-mining pit within a paddy field, located just outside the Ratnapura town will provide an insight on how the miners work their way through layers of gemstone-bearing soil. Miners bring gem-bearing gravel called *illam* to the surface. Workers then wash the mud and dirt out of the gravel in plaited baskets. The washed gravel is usually examined by the supervisor or the owner of the mine.



In sharp contrast to the elegance of the finished product, the gem mining methods in Sri Lanka are often crude and rudimentary, and have changed little in generations, except for the modern addition of the water pumps for dewatering of the pits. The supports for the excavations

are still mostly the logs. Although the mines are operated as small scale ventures using primitive methodologies, the sheer multitude of them still makes the Sri Lankan gem industry a world leader.

The arranged visit to a lapidary will provide an insight into the art of cutting and polishing of the gemstones.

Bopath Ella at Kuruwita



Bopath Ella associated with the river Kuru Ganga, is a perennial and premier waterfall in the Sabaragamuwa Province. The 30 meter high waterfall is said to have derived its name from its shape of a 'Bo-leaf' as it cascades down a towering boulder to a pool below which is filled with a sea of white bubbling foams.

Of all the waterfalls in Sri Lanka this is the only one closely connected with folklore. The traditional stories surrounding the waterfall have been made with a religious fervor. This is also the only waterfall situated in

close proximity to the Adams Peak and its immediate surroundings believed to have been a bathing spot of the royal household of Sitawaka during the royal visits to the Maha Saman Devale, Ratnapura.

This is by far the most popular tourist attraction around Kuruwita and attracts many local as well as foreign visitors especially during the weekend.

Batadomba-lena off Ekneligoda

Batadomba-lena is of great archaeological importance due to some fascinating archaeological findings such as the skeletal remains of the pre-historic ‘Balangoda Man’ which dates back to 40,000 BP. The ‘Balangoda Man’ is



a Mesolithic hunter gatherer, and Batadomba-lena has yielded one of the earliest evidence (at ca. 40,000 BP) of anatomically modern man (*Homo sapiens*) in South Asia.

The site is best approached by proceeding for about 3 kilometers from the turn off at Ekneligoda (on the Kuruwita - Erathna road) along the Siripagama road, one of the ancient pilgrim routes to Sri Pada. The caves could be reached by trekking through the mountainous slope for about 30 minutes.



The site has an occupational sequence of seven phases spanning from 40,000 to 12,000 BP. Archaeological excavations at the site has also revealed many artifacts including flints, functional geometric microlith tools fashioned into various shapes along with other materials made of bone, clay and deer antler. The bones of Bengali Tiger, dated to a period of 13,000 BP, which is an extinct animal in Sri Lanka, have also been discovered. The marine shells discovered during the excavations at the site points to an extensive network of contacts between the coast and the hinterland.

Ekneligoda Walauva at Kuruwita



This is the home of the Deraniyagala family, which produced two of Sri Lanka's well known pioneer researchers (father, P.E.P and son, Siran) on Sri Lanka's pre-history. Located not far from the pre-historic habitation site of Batadomba-lena, on the Kuruwita - Erathna road, Ekneligoda walauva is a feudal manor house dating from the Kandyan times.

The great overhanging roof, covered with half-round clay tiles is the dominant feature of the building. The house consists of two sections with a wide internal court yard of the traditional Kandyan type. The front section of the house has two wide central reception halls linked by a pair of two wide arch ways. On either side of the reception halls are internal rooms which are relatively



small and enclosed. Marked by two rows of columns, the double verandah of the building's front section faces towards to a walled-in square garden. The double verandah in front is spacious and allows the eves to come closer to the ground to protect it from the intense sun and monsoon rains. Outside the garden lay the estate. The timber furniture and other decorations of antiquarian value within this front verandah enhance its spatial character to make the verandah the most habitable space within the house. The arched type high and wide doors and windows on the high back wall of the verandah add grandeur to this space.

The internal court yard serves private family living. It is flanked by small rooms used as kitchens, workshops and rooms for the servants.