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## Little indication to famous Perak Man exhibit

**LENGGONG:** The Perak Man exhibit should have been a feather in the cap for the Lenggong Archaeological Gallery in Kota Tampan here, but one could almost miss the display entirely.

Twenty-nine years after it was first discovered, the 11,000-year-old skeleton found buried in nearby Gua Gunung Runtuh was finally displayed at the gallery in 2014.

The two-storey gallery was completed in 2001 and opened to the public in July 2003.

Built to house, exhibit and pre-

serve the artefacts found in Lenggong Valley, including Perak Man, there is, however, little indication outside as to what is being featured in the specially built exhibit room, which is well-lit and clean.

The skeletal remains are shown in a climate-controlled transparent case but while there is some attempt at making it interesting with the display of the Perak Man's "MyKad" - as evidence of him being found in Malaysia - the overall presentation is underwhelming.

Perak Man's skeletal remains were taken on exhibition to Penang and Japan and later put on display at the National Museum in 2010, while a replica was showcased at the Lenggong Archaeological Museum, now known as the Lenggong Archaeological Gallery.

After Lenggong Valley was recognised as a Unesco World Heritage Site in July 2012, a decision was made to bring Perak Man back here.

National Heritage Department central zone director Johar Kadis

said the gallery was upgraded in 2017.

"Because the gallery is under the purview of the department, the Economic Planning Unit pumped in RM3mil in 2017 to upgrade the gallery which was showing signs of ageing," he said.

Elsewhere in the museum, there are displays of stone tools, bronze artefacts, pottery, cave paintings and even a replica cave to walk through.

There are also several displays of what prehistoric life could have

been like, including one of the stone tool workshops in Kota Tampan.

Several areas in the gallery are not well lit, making it difficult to read information on the displays.

No brochures are available or even a souvenir shop, although this is indicated in the gallery's floor plan.

There is no information centre at the gallery about the other archaeological sites in Lenggong Valley, which many visitors would have ended up missing.

## Heritage site in peril

### Lenggong Valley risks losing its Unesco status

**LENGGONG:** One of South-East Asia's landmark archaeological sites is in danger of losing its coveted Unesco heritage status unless something is done fast.

Archaeologists are afraid that the Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) certification for the archaeological heritage of Lenggong Valley in the Hulu Perak district could be revoked as the sites have been neglected.

Today, a little over seven years since its inscription in 2012, the historical sites of Lenggong Valley are literally in shambles.

According to former Heritage Commissioner Prof Emeritus Datin Paduka Zuraina Majid, Lenggong Valley could very likely lose its Unesco certification if something is not done to put things right.

"It is sad that we are a trained society but not educated, and what I mean by that is that we don't have an appreciation of knowledge," said Zuraina, referring to the current state Lenggong is in.

Lenggong Valley's archaeological sites comprise both open-air and cave sites. They consist of Cluster 1 and Cluster 2, separated by Lenggong town.

The sites are located in a valley between two mountain ranges, the Titiwangsa Range and the Bintang Range.

Cluster 1 comprises the open-air sites of Bukit Bunuh and Kota Tampan while Cluster 2 is made up of Bukit Jawa, Bukit Kepala Gajah and Bukit Gua Harimau.

The two clusters, which are 5km apart, combine to make up the Lenggong Unesco World Heritage site.

During *The Star's* visit to Lenggong Valley, the abandoned archaeological digs at Bukit Bunuh were the first sign that something was not quite right.

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The open trenches were left exposed to the elements and filled with rainwater, with shrubs growing inside.

The site is located in what used to be a rubber estate but is now an oil palm plantation.

Over at the Kota Tampan archaeological site, the wooden shelters and information signposts were falling apart. Half of the roof tiles were gone, exposing the site to sun and rain and the area was overgrown with foliage.

If not for the wooden structure, the place could have been easily missed.

The situation was no different at Bukit Sapi, where archaeologists had found stone artefacts caked in volcanic ash left undisturbed from an eruption in Lake Toba, Sumatra thousands of years ago.

The information signboards were broken and the wooden pathway built for visitors was decaying and falling apart.

The situation was similar at the Bukit Jawa archaeological site where the oldest stone tool "factory" in Malaysia, dating back 100,000 years, was discovered in 1996.

Bukit Jawa is believed to be one of the largest prehistoric sites in the world with evidence of early human activities dating back 100,000 to 200,000 years.

Gua Badak, famous for its cave art made about 100 years ago by the Orang Asli (Negrito aborigines) is filled with rubbish. The wooden shelter, signposts and a bridge connected to the caves were damaged and some of the planks rotten.

The graffiti at Gua Kajang, a tunnel cave in Bukit Kepala Gajah, was an eyesore. It was heartbreaking to

see the level of indifference shown towards a historical site where fragments of pottery, stone tools, food and skeletal remains, believed to be thousands of years old, were found.

Vandalism could also be seen in other caves in the vicinity like the Gua Asar and Gua Ngaum series of caves. It looks like very little effort had been put into preserving the sites from further deterioration.

And there was rubbish everywhere.

It is hard to fathom that these historical sites are collectively part of the archaeological heritage sites of Lenggong Valley and even harder to accept the fact that Lenggong Valley is a Unesco World Heritage site.

Besides Lenggong Valley, Unesco has listed the Gunung Mulu National Park in Sarawak, the Kinabalu Park in Sabah as well as the historic cities of Melaka and George Town as World Heritage Sites.

The valley made headlines over three decades ago after a series of archaeological research efforts by the Centre for Global Archaeological Research at Universiti Sains Malaysia, starting in 1987 in Kota Tampan, revealed the earliest signs of civilisation in South-East Asia.

The discovery of a stone workshop in Kota Tampan in 1987 and the 11,000 year-old Perak Man in 1990 - whose remains were buried in a cave site in Gua Gunung Runtuh, the only prehistoric skeleton - provides an outstanding record of the Palaeolithic technological ensemble of prehistoric people.

But its dismal condition today may very well end up in it losing its Unesco heritage site listing.

Is Lenggong Valley in danger of being delisted?

"Yes but I hope it will not be. Considering that it is Visit Malaysia Year 2020, there does not seem to be



**State of disrepair:** The Kota Tampan archaeological site where paleolithic culture was discovered is in a bad shape.

any intention at all to upkeep these places," said Zuraina.

Zuraina was in fact the archaeologist who uncovered the Perak Man, the country's oldest prehistoric man, almost 30 years ago.

It was in 2005 - when she was appointed Heritage Commissioner under the National Heritage Department (NHD) - that work to get the site listed by Unesco began.

After a lot of work and research in preparing the Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the Unesco World Heritage List, Lenggong was declared a World Heritage site on June 30, 2012.

Following that, work to prepare the Lenggong Valley Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was submitted to Unesco in 2014.

In 2014, then Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said the CMP would manage and develop tourism in Lenggong Valley.

But due to the lack of funds and a jurisdiction problem between the Federal Government and the Perak state government, nothing went ahead.

Instead, Lenggong Valley slowly began to deteriorate and the archaeological sites became more inaccessible to the public as basic facilities like signboards, wakaf spots (bequeathed to the public), footbridges and boardwalks started decaying due to neglect.

Many of the sites are also being abandoned because they are not safe, including Gua Gunung Runtuh, the cave where the Perak Man was found.

Read this story in *The Star Online* for an interactive map that will give you an idea of the area.

See more on **The Star Online**



## National Heritage Dept needs funds to maintain sites

**LENGGONG:** The National Heritage Department (NHD), which manages the sites in Lenggong Valley, said its hands were tied when it came to developing the area, revealing that it was facing a major funding problem.

"We have tried many times to get allocations to repair the area from the EPU (Economic Planning Unit) but our requests have been rejected many times due to jurisdiction issues," said the department's central zone director, Johar Kadis.

"Because some of the sites are not under NHD's purview, the EPU is reluctant to release the funds required to carry out maintenance

work in the area.

"Due to these financial constraints, we are only able to maintain some sites but we are aware that the amenities and infrastructure at some of the sites are in bad condition," he added.

Johar said that considering the current situation, the role of the state government was crucial, adding that it should intervene.

For the record, the archaeological sites of Bukit Bunuh, Bukit Jawa and the Lenggong Archaeological Gallery are managed by the department while the rest come under the Perak government.

Lenggong Valley is the only

Unesco site where there is no World Heritage office under the state government.

"I feel it is unfair to put all the blame on NHD as this requires a collective effort and a responsibility that should be shared by everyone because Lenggong is priceless and it is a Malaysian treasure," said Johar.

In a statement, the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry said the responsibility and maintenance of the historical sites in Lenggong Valley should be under the Perak government as per Section 42 (1) of the National Heritage Act 2005, urging it to take "proactive measures", especially for areas under its juris-

diction.

The NHD, it said, had taken the initiative to carry out maintenance work of the various caves even though this was not under its jurisdiction, but no allocation was forthcoming.

The ministry said about RM1.2mil had been spent to prepare a CMP and a Special Area Plan (SAP) for the area, adding that RM160,000 was also used to put up safety gates at Gua Kajang, Gua Teluk Kelawar, Gua Harimau and Gua Gunung Runtuh to prevent vandalism.

It said that under the 10th Malaysia Plan, RM130,000 was allocated for upgrading work while

under the 11th Malaysia Plan, RM17.5mil had been set aside for land acquisition (RM12.4mil), upgrading of the Lenggong Archaeological Gallery Phase 1 (RM5mil) and other maintenance work (RM100,000).

The upgrading of the Lenggong Archaeological Gallery Phase 1, it added, had been completed, including building a special gallery for the Perak Man.

Another RM5mil had been approved for upgrading work of the gallery under Phase 2 and RM3.3mil to strengthen the structure of the Kota Tampan site by early 2020, it added.