

Participants of the Perak Heritage Society's Lenggong Valley Trail outing admiring the charcoal drawings (right) at Gua Badak.

Perak caves tell of Man's history

STORY & PICTURE BY
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BREATHING heavily, participants of the Perak Heritage Society's Lenggong Valley Trail outing clambered up the last stretch of rocks and found themselves in the ancient cave of the Perak Man.

Although the Perak Man's bones had long been unearthed, the group still felt a rush of excitement standing at the excavation site and imagining what

life was like 11,000 years ago.

Some participants squatted and held what might have been stone tools the Perak Man once used, while others inspected the pit where he was buried.

The famous Perak Man, unearthed in Gua Gunung Runtoh, is the only complete skeleton discovered in Malaysia. Datuk Dr Zuraina Majid of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and the Museums and Antiquities Department found him in 1991.

Perak Man, measuring 157cm tall and probably 40-50 years old, was buried in a foetal position.

Remnants of tools and food like shellfish carapaces and animals bones were also found at the site.

The trip to Gua Gunung Runtoh was one of the many stops during the Perak Heritage Society's first "Heritage Walk" to Lenggong Valley, about 100km from Ipoh, on March 28. The one-day trail was aimed at opening the eyes of participants to the valley's natural and archaeological wonders.

The group of 15 started from Ipoh at 8am on a northward journey that took them past lush green padi fields, limestone hills and the picturesque Tasik Raban. Their first stop was the Lenggong Archaeological Museum in Kota Tampan, built on a 3.2ha palaeolithic site, which took four years to complete.

The group spent an hour going through photographs of the dig and saw excavated artefacts like jewellery, pottery, weapons and stone tools. However, the biggest thrill was actually seeing the bones of the Perak Man, which were in a sealed, climatically-controlled display case.

Participants next travelled to Kampung Ulu Jepai from where they hiked 15 minutes to Gua Gunung Runtoh, led by guide Rosli Mat Ali, 43.

"I was with the group from USM when they first asked to see the cave years ago," recalled Rosli.

"At first Dr Zuraina went to the cave to take notes, and then we found bits of teeth. After we unearthed the Perak Man, I remember television crews coming from all over to see the site. I feel very proud to be part of that moment," Rosli said.

The group then drove to Lenggong for a sumptuous lunch of steamed *belida*, a freshwater fish, before setting off for Gua Badak to the north.

This cave, discovered in 1927, is famous for its charcoal drawings, the only one of its kind made by the Negritos.

For half an hour, participants marvelled at drawings of a man on a horse, a man carrying coconuts, animals such as monkeys and monitor lizards, a hunting party, and even intricate weave patterns.

Later, the group travelled to nearby Kampung Labit on the banks of Sungai Perak where they witnessed villagers unloading boatloads of *siput etak*.

After that they boarded a sampan for a lazy cruise on the river, enjoying spectacular views of the hills and afternoon sky.



The trail ended with tea at the Tasik Raban Tourism Complex.

Architecture student Hayati Hashim, 20, who had come all the way from Kuala Lumpur with her friend, was very happy with the trip.

"I wanted to go on the trail because I feel it is important to know your heritage, your culture and where you came from. To me, the Perak Man is a metaphor for mankind in Asia," she said.

Museum consultant Nick Coffill, an Australian, commended the Perak Heritage Society for the laidback nature of the trip.

"Driving around with a group of friends, seeing the villages for yourself and tasting what the countryside has to offer is much better than just going to a museum and looking at everything there."

Coffill also lauded the government for committing funds towards the Lenggong Archaeological Museum but felt the attraction focused too much on the archaeological aspects of the Perak Man dig.

He said many of the terms used on the exhibits were too "scientific", and this makes it difficult for the layman to understand. He said the human aspect did not come through, such as how the Perak Man's tribal members wrapped his body in cloth or bark before burying him.

"His people did all of this some 11,000 years ago, and that is valuable to know because it reflects the wonderful nature of what makes us human beings. They obviously cared for him and believed in an afterlife to send him off like this, even in their grief. It's profound and beautiful and sad.

"Here is the emotional content of the story, and this is what will ultimately encourage people to treasure his burial site and not damage it in the future," said Coffill. The man should know because he spent the last 20 years designing museums and creating exhibits for museums in Toronto, Sydney and London.

For more information, contact Kim at (05) 242 5933 or e-mail perakheritage@hotmail.com.

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






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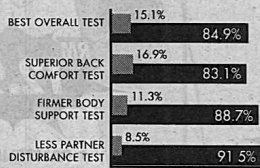


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