

Headline	Lenggong valley, a heritage treasure trove		
MediaTitle	New Sarawak Tribune		
Date	13 Nov 2023	Color	Full Color
Section	News	Circulation	46,471
Page No	16,17	Readership	164,773
Language	English	ArticleSize	1788 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	MOHAMAD HARITH MOHAMAD NIZAR	AdValue	RM 18,881
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 56,643



BY MOHAMAD HARITH MOHAMAD NIZAR

**L**ENGGONG: Designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on June 30, 2012, Lenggong Valley holds exceptional universal value, providing an unparalleled archaeological record of early human habitation.

Several historical artefacts discovered at the site contained evidence of the earliest human settlement in Malaya, including the world famous 'Perak Man', the name given to the skeletal remains of a man believed to have lived during the Palaeolithic era.

According to the National Heritage Department (JWN)'s World Heritage Division Director, Mohd Syahrin Abdullah, these assets inherited from the past should be preserved and protected as they serve as reference for future generations to learn about their past, noting that they are proof of the earliest human civilisation in Malaysia and among the oldest in the world.

He was referring to skeletal remains unearthed at Gunung Runtuh, Bukit Kepala Gajah in Lenggong Valley (Hulu Perak), the oldest and almost complete human skeleton discovered in Malaysia and in Southeast Asia, believed to have lived between 10,000 to 11,000 years ago.

Mohd Syahrin who held the position since 2015 said early efforts were undertaken to

# Lenggong valley, a heritage treasure trove

convince the UNESCO evaluation team for the preservation and protection of Lenggong Valley starting with recognition as well as the mechanism and management plan.

Lenggong Valley was declared a World Heritage Site at the 36th session of the World Heritage Committee meeting held at St Petersburg, Russia on June 30, 2012.

"We had a management plan and Alhamdulillah (praise to Allah), we managed to convince them (UNESCO) with respect to the recognition," he told Bernama, describing the recognition as initial efforts toward preserving Lenggong Valley.

## Maintaining status

Besides ensuring the status is maintained based on the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) document which has been prepared and gazetted under the Town and Planning Act 1976, several

other matters are within JWN's jurisdiction as stated under the act.

"We have created a document that empowers us to provide the sites. From the document, we undertook monitoring activities and were also given permission to undertake planning, etc.

"For purposes of maintaining the status, we have to put in place measures related to protecting and monitoring of the site for tourist visits.

"JWN has also installed fencing around all cave entrances in Lenggong Valley and provided boardwalks to prevent any destruction to the surrounding areas as well as giving easy access for tourists," he said, adding that a total of RM25 million had been spent for preserving and conserving Lenggong Valley since it was awarded the UNESCO status.

According to Mohd Syahrin much of the work were undertaken in the background such as land survey for determining land boundaries,

preparing CMP document containing the key plan for site development and tourism products in the surrounding areas for value added as well as the various stages of land development.

"Not many people know that all these were carried out behind the scenes but we need to forge ahead. We have done our best to ensure Lenggong Valley is prepared to receive more tourists in the future," he said.

According to statistics, the number of visitors to the temporary Archaeological Gallery in Lenggong Valley as of September this year stood at 20,840.

The National Heritage Department was established on March 1, 2006 with the responsibility of preserving, conserving, protecting and promoting the rich treasures of Malaysian heritage.

The department is entrusted with archaeological research, conservation of buildings and

monuments, gazetting and enforcement, safeguarding intangible heritage and natural heritage, as stipulated in the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645).

## Lenggong's archaeological treasures

Describing Lenggong Valley as having its own unique attractions, Mohd Syahrin said it did not take long for this site to be awarded the status as UNESCO World Heritage Site as compared to other World Heritage Sites in the country, such as Melaka City and Georgetown, Penang, which took nearly 10 years.

"All efforts geared toward the preservation, conservation and protection of Lenggong Valley took off in 2009 and within three months, we managed to comply with most of the procedures including submitting the relevant documents — at least a year ahead of securing recognition — or full copy dossier of the nomination documents.

According to UNESCO, only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention, pledging to protect their natural and cultural heritage, can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion



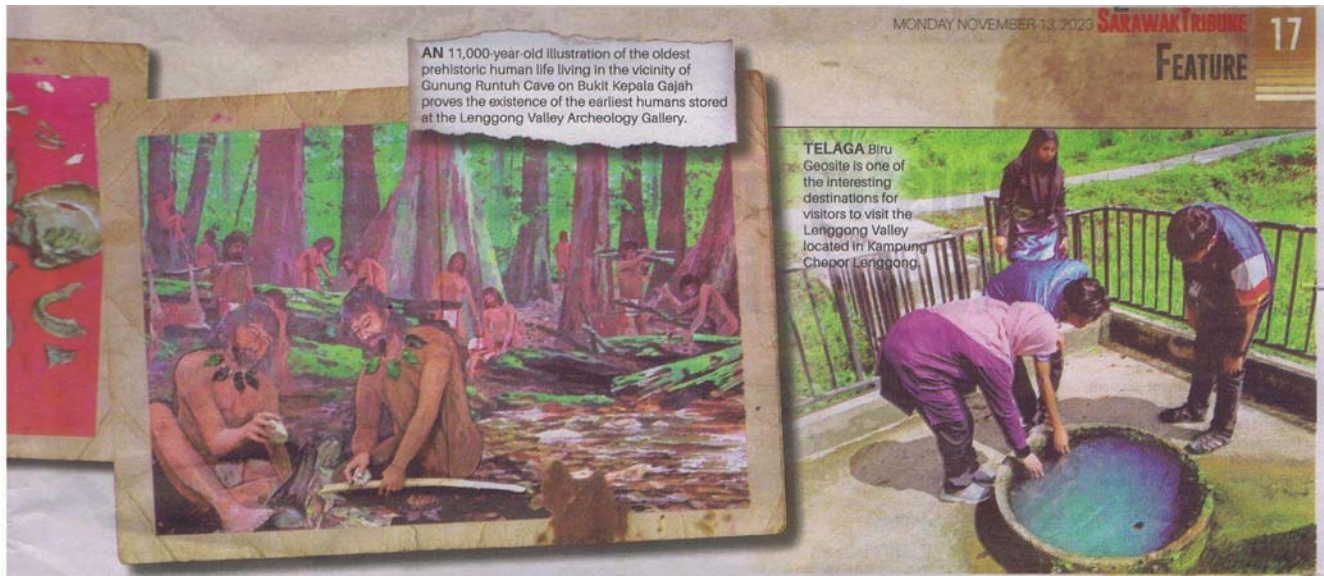
THE skeleton replica of Perak Man or Orang Perak which is the oldest prehistoric human being 11,000 years old found in Gunung Runtuh Cave located on Bukit Kepala Gajah proves the existence of the earliest humans stored in the Lenggong Valley Archeology Gallery.

THE Elephant's Head Bukit Complex which includes Bat Cave, Tiger Cave and Gunung Runtuh Cave is one of the interesting destinations for visitors to visit the Lenggong Valley located in Lenggong.



A couple of tourists see the stone age, pottery and metal tools found around the Lenggong Valley that prove the existence of the earliest humans stored at the Lenggong Valley Archeology Gallery.

Headline	Lenggong valley, a heritage treasure trove		
MediaTitle	New Sarawak Tribune		
Date	13 Nov 2023	Color	Full Color
Section	News	Circulation	46,471
Page No	16,17	Readership	164,773
Language	English	ArticleSize	1788 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	MOHAMAD HARITH MOHAMAD NIZAR	AdValue	RM 18,881
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 56,643



in its World Heritage List. Malaysia signed the convention on Dec 7, 1988, according to data on UNESCO website.

"To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of 10 selection criteria, as such we have to look at the suitability and prepare the document to suit the needs and requirements of UNESCO," he added.

Mohd Syahrin said Lenggong Valley is divided into two clusters, namely open-air site and cave site which have to be protected, while the area is under cultural category, involving human activity.

Citing the Boh Tea plantation in Cameron Highlands, Pahang, and the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), he said it is not a natural site (that can be considered a World Heritage Site) but a cultural site as it involves human interaction.

"As for the cave site or archaeological site in Lenggong Valley, humans have turned the cave there as their dwellings, for shelter and as burial sites.

"For open-air site, it is actually an archaeological site outside the cave with tool workshops found by researchers, which were evidence of early technology.

"Based on the findings, it was found that Lenggong had a large population. The open-air site showed among others evidence of human habitation at Kota Tampan going back 75,000 years while Bukit

Bunuh showed existence of early settlement dating over 1.83 million years ago, which proved that it is the oldest in Malaysia and among the oldest in the world," he said, adding that the open-air sites in Lenggong Valley are unique as most of them were unaffected by the scourge of disasters such as landslides or floods.

He said Lenggong Valley has one of the longest records of early man in a single locality with evidence of human occupation from the Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Metal ages.

"All these discoveries are significant for Malaysia and globally, with the area remaining well under the world's radar, hence attracting more tourists to visit the site," he said adding that on July 30, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), through JWN handed over the management of Lenggong Valley to the Perak state government," noting that JWN is still prepared to assist and monitor the area.

#### Under Lenggong District

Meanwhile, Lenggong District Council (MDL) president Mohd Amzari Mohd Arzami said the council took over the management of Lenggong Valley after being given the mandate and funds from the state government, with cooperation from the local community.

Lenggong Valley was recognised as a Geopark — Lenggong Geopark — in 2021, the second Geopark in Perak after Kinta Geopark.

"MDL was given the mandate to manage several UNESCO sites in Lenggong Valley from the state government starting this year.

"There are eight main World Heritage Sites in Lenggong with four managed by JWN namely Bukit Bunuh, Kota Tampan, Bukit Jawa and the Archaeological Gallery, while

MDL manages Gua Kajang Complex, Gua Teluk Kelawar, Gua Harimau and Gua Gunung Runtuh.

On promotion, he said MDL received allocations from Perak state government, the federal government as well as allocations from Lenggong Member of Parliament and Kota Tampan state assemblyman.

In addition, MDL and several other departments and agencies are also responsible for preserving and upgrading other heritage tourism sites in Lenggong such as the old town site, the cultural area in Kampung Chepor, Kampung Luat, etc, through funds received.

Mohd Amzari said, since MDL was entrusted with the responsibility of preserving UNESCO World Heritage sites, the council together with JWN agreed to coordinate applications related to allocations for the area.

"First is one-off application, second is yearly application and we are working together with JWN to apply direct to the federal government for similar funds provided for UNESCO world heritage sites in Melaka and Penang under Budget 2023 last year.

"We are in the process of applying to the federal government for similar provisions through the State Economic Planning Unit and the state government, possibly RM20 million to RM30 million for basic infrastructure development in this area for the future," he said.

#### Community support

Mohd Amzari said MDL has always stressed on the importance of educating the community on the need to preserve and develop Lenggong through various programmes, courses and training without incurring much capital, noting that they should leverage allocations received from

departments and agencies involved.

He said MDL's current focus is to train the local community as tourist guides for their area, providing them with a source of income from the UNESCO heritage sites and geoparks, while helping MDL to manage the area.

"The local community are the 'eyes and ears' of the council in the event of any property damage in Lenggong. For example, at Gua Kajang Complex, the hiking community in Lenggong, works together with us by providing whatever inputs for improvements.

"Among the issues highlighted are related to trash, cleanliness and safety and based on their feedback, MDL will provide the necessary requirements," he said.

#### Various tourist attractions

Mohd Amzari said there are three attractions in Lenggong, namely the UNESCO World Heritage Site in Lenggong Valley, the sites under Lenggong Geopark and the gastronomic experience as well as the local people's culture.

He said once the Archaeological Gallery and Geopark Gallery are opened to the public, tourists can visit the locations first for a clearer picture on the attractions in Lenggong.

"The Geopark Gallery will be officially opened at the end of this year before the Perak Visit Year 2024. We will try to provide all information on the fun map, translate them onto the board and place them at the end of the gallery for visitors' easy viewing and reference," he said.

Other attractions that are considered 'must-try' activities for visitors include the Raban Lake Boat Trip and the River Cruise along the Perak River.

"Tourists will enjoy soaking up the awe-inspiring scenery at Raban

Lake and Perak River and a relaxing trip to the fish ponds in the village. While having tea amid a kampung-style ambience at the village, visitors get to experience local socio-cultural activities, hence generating income for the villagers," he said.

Within the large karst outcrop of Bukit Kepala Gajah are Gua Kelawar, Gua Harimau and Gua Gunung Runtuh, where Perak Man was discovered.

"Early humans have evolved and lived here. Beyond the archaeological heritage, Lenggong is surrounded by beautiful countryside, waterfalls and a lake that's a result of the damming of the Perak River.

"The abundance of wildlife sanctuaries in the area provides an array of birds and animals, making Lenggong Valley a paradise for animal aficionados. It is a great place for ecotourism due to its extensive variety of flora and fauna," he said, adding that visitors intending to enter any of the caves need to obtain permission and special permit from MDL through their tourist guides, with 30 of them in total.

He said MDL in collaboration with all accommodation operators are compiling the data of visitors for this year to enable it to target tourist arrivals next year for purposes of applying for allocations.

"Lenggong Valley, which holds the potential for further discoveries, beckons tourists with all its archaeological and geotourism attractions, including activities that are geared for trailblazers and adventure-seekers," he added.

MDL's virtual tour portal is accessible via [www.actsugi.com/lenggong-tourism](http://www.actsugi.com/lenggong-tourism) for visitors to pick their locations as well as accommodations that are available, among others, Aguilar Resort, Kuak Hill Resort and Sumpitan Glamping. — BERNAMA

