

Headline	preserving the Lenggong Valley		
MediaTitle	Sunday Star		
Date	31 Dec 2023	Color	Full Color
Section	Focus	Circulation	175,986
Page No	18,19	Readership	527,958
Language	English	ArticleSize	1301 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 65,474
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 196,422

DESIGNATED a World Heritage Site by Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in 2012, the Lenggong Valley in Hulu Perak 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 Peninsular Malaysia, including the world famous "Perak Man", the name given to the skeletal remains of a man believed to have lived during the Palaeolithic era.

This why it is important that these assets inherited from the past are preserved and protected, says Mohd Syahrin Abdullah, who has been the National Heritage Department's World Heritage Division director since 2015.

Proof of the earliest human civilisation in Malaysia – and among the oldest in the world – the assets serve as reference for future generations to learn about their past, he says. Mohd Syahrin is referring specifically to the skeletal remains unearthed at Gua Gunung Runtuh in the Bukit Kepala Gajah complex – the oldest and almost complete human skeleton discovered in Malaysia and in South-East Asia, believed to have lived between 10,000 and 11,000 years ago.

World heritage

The 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.

It is Malaysia's first archaeological site to receive this Unesco recognition (in the cultural category). The archaeological heritage of Niah National Park's Caves Complex in Sarawak is currently still on Unesco's tentative list for World Heritage Site recognition (mixed: cultural and natural category).

Describing Lenggong Valley as unique, Mohd Syahrin says it did not take long for this site to be awarded recognition compared with other World Heritage Sites in the country, such as Melaka City and George Town, which took nearly 10 years.

He says that the Heritage Department – with the assistance and support of local experts, specifically Universiti Sains Malaysia's archaeological team – under-



Valuable heritage:

Visitors learning about the history of one Malaysia's earliest civilisations at the Lenggong Archaeological Gallery. – Photos: Bernama

measures related to protecting and monitoring of the site for tourist visits.

"The department has also installed fencing around all cave entrances in Lenggong Valley and provided boardwalks to prevent any destruction of the surrounding areas as well as giving easy access for tourists," says Mohd Syahrin, adding that a total of RM25mil has been spent for preserving and conserving Lenggong Valley since it was awarded Unesco status.

Much of the work undertaken, which is within the department's jurisdiction as stated under the Act, is in the background, such as land surveys to determine boundaries, preparing CMP documents containing the key plan for site development and tourism products in the surrounding areas for added value, 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," says Mohd Syahrin.

The number of visitors to the temporary Lenggong Valley Archaeological Gallery as of September this year stood at 20,840. (The main gallery is still under renovation.)

On July 30, the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry, through the Heritage Department, handed over the management of Lenggong Valley to the Perak state government, which has entrusted the day to day running to the Lenggong District Council. However, the Heritage Department still manages four archaeological sites that are on federal land, namely Bukit Bunuh, Kota Tampan, Bukit Jawa, and the archaeological gallery.

The department is also still prepared to assist and monitor the area, as well as assists in preparing the periodic reports for Unesco, Mohd Syahrin notes.

A treasure trove

The Lenggong Valley world heritage sites are divided into

Preserving the Lenggong Valley

The National Heritage Department, in partnership with the Lenggong District Council, has gone all out to conserve this treasure trove of Malaysian history – the country's first Unesco World Heritage site for archaeology.

took the necessary initial efforts to convince the Unesco evaluation team for the preservation and protection of Lenggong Valley.

"We had a management plan and Alhamdulillah, we managed to convince them [Unesco] with respect to the recognition," says Mohd Syahrin at an interview recently.

Starting with recognition for the heritage site, the management plan also includes the mechanism to protect it.

"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 in its World Heritage List. Malaysia signed the convention on Dec 7, 1988.

"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 suitability and prepare documents to suit the needs and requirements of Unesco," says Mohd Syahrin.

Cultural protectors

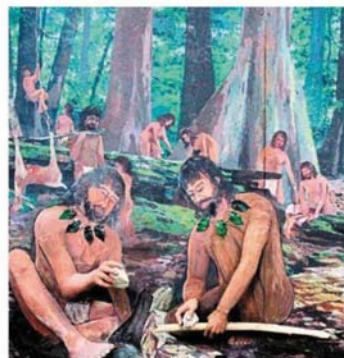
The National Heritage Department was established on March 1, 2006, with the responsibility of preserving, conserving, protecting and promoting the rich treasures of Malaysia's various forms of heritage.

The department, which is under the administration of the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry, is entrusted with archaeological research, conservation of buildings and monuments, gazettement and enforcement, and safeguarding intangible heritage and natural heritage, as stipulated in the National Heritage Act 2005.

With the Lenggong Valley, the department is responsible for several matters such as ensuring the world heritage site status is maintained based on the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) document which has been prepared and gazetted under the Town and Planning Act 1976.

"We have created a document that empowers us to protect 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



Artist impression of the pre-historic community living around Gua Gunung Runtuh, where archaeologists found the Perak Man's skeleton.



A replica of the Perak Man at the Lenggong Valley Archaeological Gallery. The number of visitors to the temporary gallery as of September this year stood at 20,840.



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two clusters located on opposite sides of the Lenggong town centre, covering the open-air and cave sites as well as human cultural heritage.

Citing the Boh Tea plantation in Cameron Highlands, Pahang, and the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in Selangor as examples, Mohd Syahrin says the cultural heritage aspect also has to be protected as it is proof of ancient human interaction and activity.

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

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

"Based on the discoveries, it was found that Lenggong had a large population. The open-air site shows, among others, evidence of human habitation at Kota Tampan going back 75,000 years while Bukit Bunuh shows existence of early settlement dating over 1.83 million years ago, which proves that it is the oldest in Malaysia and among the oldest in the world," says Mohd Syahrin, adding that the open-air sites in Lenggong Valley are unique as most of them were left unaffected by disasters such as landslides or floods. This includes avoiding being covered in volcanic ash from the eruption of Mount Toba in Sumatra more than 74,000 years ago – ash is known to have covered many parts of the valley.

Bukit Bunuh is also a meteorite impact site. A crater spanning 8km in diameter along with a scattering of suevite rocks on the ground are said to have been created from the impact of a meteorite which hit Lenggong more than 1.5 million years ago.

Ultimately, Mohd Syahrin says, 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 the need to attract more tourists to visit the site," he says.

And now with Visit Perak 2024 beginning tomorrow, it is hoped that many more will make the trek to the northern part of Perak to discover this fascinating archaeological gem. – Bernama



Bukit Sapi still contains volcanic ash from Mount Toba which erupted more than 74,000 years ago.