

The History of The Caves at Batu Caves

by
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Batu Caves is the name given to the limestone hill which is penetrated by caves, and lies on the northern outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. It takes its name from the Sungai Batu and the massif covers an area of about 385 acres. Although the rock is some 400 million years old, it was first discovered by Europeans in 1878.

Geology

The rock forming Batu Caves is from the Palaeozoic era, and is Silurian limestone, some 400 million years old. After the rock itself was laid down, millions of years later in the triassic period (about 200 million years ago) it underwent a process of uplifting, compression, heating and folding, although this may have already started in the Devonian - Carboniferous era (300 million years ago). Much of the limestone metamorphised to crystalline marble and was uplifted to form the mountain ranges. The formation of the caves probably occurred in the late Mesozoic, Cretaceous or even Tertiary period (60-120 million years ago). So it is probably safe to say that the caves are about 100 million years ago.

Today Batu Caves is an isolated hill and is typical of the type of karst scenery known as turm karst. This is produced in a warm, humid climate. The hill rises abruptly to an altitude of 304m above the broad alluvial plain of the Sungai Batu and Sungai Gombak at 53-61m. It is the only natural exposure of limestone in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur. The rest of the Kuala Lumpur limestone lies at or below the present water table, forming a karst topography beneath the alluvium. It is only exposed in tin mines. However there are two other exposures to the north, in Selangor, at Bukit Takun and Anak Bukit Takun. Batu Caves is the southernmost large limestone hill on the Asian mainland.

The limestone is some 1850 meter thick. It is formed of very pure finely

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crystalline marbles, composed almost entirely of carbonate. Calcite is the major mineral.

The mean elevation of the hill is 100 meter. More than two-thirds of the undisturbed margin of Batu Caves comprises tower walls i.e. precipitous rock walls. Of these sections approximately one-sixth have foot caves. The surface is broken by enclosed depressions and narrow, steep walled corridors. In some cases, vertical shafts connect to cave systems below.

Archaeology

There are very few archaeological records for Batu Caves. Malaysian cave archaeology began in 1886-1891 when Leonard Wray, the first Curator of the Perak Museum at Taiping conducted archaeological excavations in caves in Perak and Pahang. Then there was no more work until I.H.N. Evans resumed work in 1917-1931. Other prominent people include Dr P.V. van Stein Callenfels in 1926 (Perak); H.D. Noone (Kelantan); W.M. Gordon (Perak); M.W.F. Tweedie 1935 (Pahang and Kelantan); H.D. Collings 1935 (Kedah and Perlis). Then the Japanese occupation and the onset of the Emergency stopped serious archaeological work for a number of years. P.R. Williams-Hunt re-examined previously recorded cave sites and recorded new ones during the Emergency, 1951-53 (Perlis and Kelantan). G de g Sieveking followed on in Kelantan in 1954, then various others to date.

Archaeological discoveries in Selangor include waisted flattened ground axe-like tools from a tin mine, possible Hoabinhian. Hoabinhian was the period between Paleolithic and Neolithic, i.e. about 10,000-4000 years ago, and the people also lived in caves and rock shelters and were hunters and food gatherers. Bronze Age finds have been made near Klang, and include kettle drum, 3 bells, and celts or adze heads. Then Iron Age implements such as spear heads were also found. In the Bernam Valley, cyst graves were found between 1919-1939 by Collings and Wilkinson. They are dated at pre 900 A.D.

Batu Caves hardly gets a mention and has been the most disappointing archaeological cave site in Malaysia. Unfortunately guano has been dug from the caves since about the 1860's thereby disturbing and removing any archaeological evidence. Incidentally the oldest archaeological site in Peninsula Malaysia is Kota Tampan in Perak, where finds have been made dating back around 30,000 years. Work by Ridley and Williams-Hunt will be covered later: they have done most of the work at Batu Caves.

Discovery

Batu Caves was almost certainly known to the aborigines in prehistoric times; the Besis aborigines used the upper caves but left the lower ones to the tigers and bears. By 1824 Goa Batu was known as a tin mining centre and was called a "village". And the local aborigines knew about the caves, and guano was dug since the time of the earliest Chinese settlers, around 1860. At some time in later years there used to be a factory near the foot of the steps to process the guano.

However Batu Caves was first discovered by Europeans in 1878. An American naturalist, William T. Hornaday from the U.S. National Museum was on a prolonged tour of South and Southeast Asia collecting specimens. Captain H.C. Syers, formerly a private in the 10th Regiment, became the Superintendent of Police in Selangor. Hornaday and Syers were out on a hunting party looking for elephants in early July 1878 when they were shown the caves by the locals.

The following is an extract from Hornaday's account written in 1885.

"We fell in with an old Malay and some Jacoons, who walked along with us for some distance. As we were going through the forest, a short distance from the foot of a gray limestone cliff about two hundred feet high, covered on the top with forest, we noticed in the air a very curious, pungent odor, like guano, the cause of which we could not divine. Mr. Syers turned to the old Malay, and inquired:

"What is it that stinks so?"

"Bat's dung!"

"Where is it?"

"In the cave yonder in the rocks, sir."

"Why did you not tell us of it the other time we were here, old simpleton?"

"I didn't know you wanted to know about it sir," said the old fellow innocently.

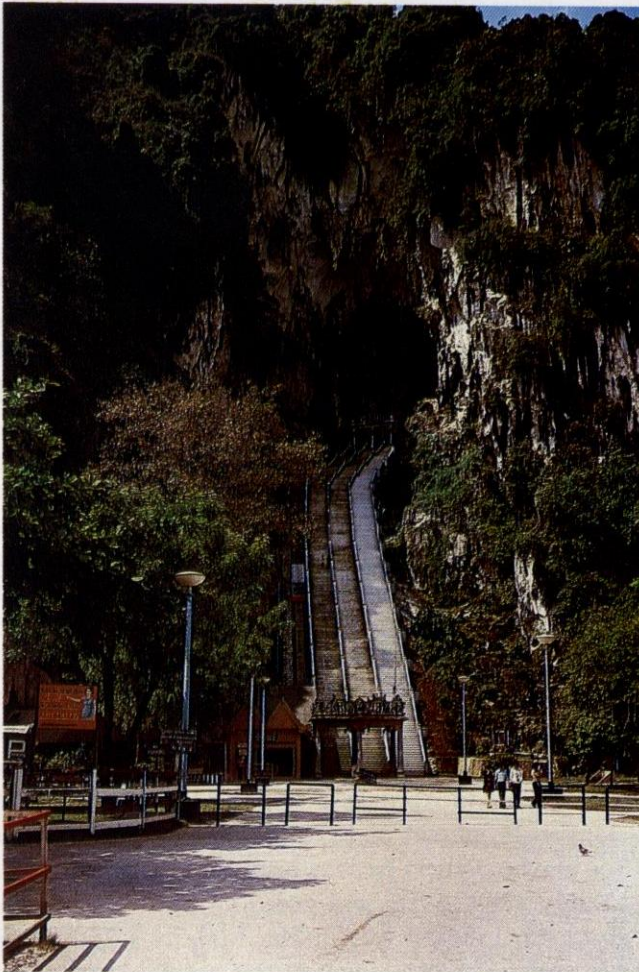
We turned about directly and made for the cliff, under the old man's guidance. The cave was soon reached. We climbed up forty feet or so over a huge pile of angular rocks that had fallen from the face of the cliff, and on going down a sharp incline found ourselves underneath a huge mass of bare limestone rock, leaning at an angle of forty-five degrees against the side of the cliff, forming a cavernous arch, open at both ends and a hundred feet high. It was hung with smooth, dull-gray stalactites which, when broken off, showed such a clean white limestone formation that it might almost be called marble.

From near the bottom of this curiously formed arch a wide opening led into the cave proper. We procured a torch of dry bamboo and entered forthwith. This cave, which it seems is called Gua Belah, or the Double Cave, is about sixty feet wide, a hundred and fifty feet long, to where it terminates in a narrow cleft in the rock, and about forty feet high at the highest point. The ground plan of the cavern is therefore an isocles triangle. The walls were smooth, of a light-gray colour, and without stalactites. The floor was covered to an unknown depth with a layer of loose and dry bat guano, which gave off the odour we had noticed half a mile away.

The cave was full of bats (*Eonycteris spilla*) which left their resting places on the walls as we entered, and flew round and round above us in a roaring swarm, at times coming within a foot of our faces. Our footsteps fell noiselessly on the soft and spongy bed of guano, and had we been provided with sticks we could easily have knocked many bats from the walls. There must have been two thousand of them there. In the outer cavern we easily shot a number of specimens as they clung to the rocks high above us.

Not far from that cave was another in the same mountain, which we visited on the following day. The mouth was simply a hole in the base of the rocky wall, leading straight into a low, but very extensive, cavern, which must have been an acre and a half in extent. The low roof reminded me of a mine, and numerous galleries and narrow passages leading off in either side rather heightened the resemblance. In the light of our torches the roof was yellowish-white and very clean looking, generally smooth, and without stalactites. The floor also was bare rock.

We found the mouth of the cave entirely stopped with branches - excepting one opening about a foot square - and were informed that, after thus blocking the mouth, the Jacoons send two or three men inside to scare the bats out so they can be knocked down by the sticks of those who stand outside at the opening The Jacoons have almost entirely depopulated the cave of its winged inhabitants.



View of Batu Caves

After leaving this cave, which is called "Gua Lada", or Chilli Cave, we were conducted through a mile of very wet jungle to a third cave, called "Gua Lambong" which is really a very fine cavern. At the mouth there is a perfect little vestibule scooped out of the solid rock by the hand of nature for the express accommodation of the party who will keep a stand there for the sale of refreshments, photographs, and torches to the tourists who will visit the cave during the next century.

On entering the cave at the yawning black hole, we found ourselves in a grand cathedral, whose floor, walls and roof were of smooth white limestone rock. Descending for a few yards from the mouth we came to a clear stream of water rippling across the rocky floor and seeking an exit near the mouth. Crossing this, we walked forward along a grand gallery, with clean and level floor, perpendicular walls and gothic roof like the nave of a cathedral, fifty feet wide and sixty feet high. At the further end of the gallery - which was by our estimate about three hundred feet in length - the roof suddenly rose in a great round dome ninety or a hundred feet in height, completing so perfectly the resemblance of St. Peter's at Rome, that I had the privilege of naming the cavern I could call it nothing else than Cathedral Cave

Under the dome the floor began to rise as we progressed, and sloped up all the rest of the way to where the cavern terminated in a narrow cleft. This portion of the floor was covered with a thick deposit of bat guano, loose and dry, but there were very few bats in the cave.

All these caves are about three miles east of Batu and nine from Kwala Lumpur, in a northerly direction. The whole hill is a solid mass of white crystalline limestone, and its greatest height is about three hundred feet. Besides catching bats in the caves the Jacoons say that they often retreat to them for safety at certain seasons when the woods are over run by wild elephants and other dangerous animals."

A few weeks after Hornaday and Syers "discovered" the caves, there was the official follow up of the original discovery. Syers made a second trip to the three most accessible caves, accompanied by a small party including Captain Bloomfield Douglas, Dominic D. Daly, Lieutenant R. Lindsell, some Orang Sakai and some police. Douglas was Her British Majesty's Resident of Selangor at Klang. The British had first arrived in Selangor in 1871. In 1875 due to disturbances of the peace, the Sultan's son in law requested a British Resident. Mr Davidson took the post and was succeeded in 1876 by Douglas, who was at that time in his fifties. The Residency moved to Kwala Lumpur in 1880. Daly was Douglas's son in law, and Selangor's Superintendent of Public Works. Born in 1844 he reached Singapore in April 1875 and in May made a rough topographical survey of Selangor. From part of 1876 onwards he was in Perak etc., but by February 1879 (or maybe earlier) he was back in Klang. He died from fever at Mempakul on 15 July 1889. Syers was gored to death by a wounded seladang in 1897, aged about 45. Lindsell was of Her Majesty's 28th Regiment.

In 1870 Daly wrote a short account of this second visit, which was read at



Gua Tasek

a meeting of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society on 7 April 1879, and on the strength of this he has been regarded as the first European to explore the caves. He admitted the place had been discovered by Hornaday and Syers, but hardly reveals that they had actually entered the caves, thereby erroneously giving the impression that he, Daly, was the original explorer. However it is not actually known when this second trip took place as in his April report Daly says the discovery was made "a few days ago". He goes on to describe the three caves: Gua Lambong (swinging or hanging cave), Gua Belah (divided cave) and Gua Lada (pepper cave). He ends with:

"It is strange that fossils could not be found anywhere. Nothing but thousands of tons of bat's dung, itself a great fortune in guano.

From the absence of fossils and shells, it would appear that the sea never reached any part of this hill.

There are seven different entrances to this hill."

By this last comment I wonder if he means seven different caves?

Daly's party followed a different route and obtained a clearer impression of the relative position of the three caves.

Hornaday wrote up the original visit although he made little mention of the caves - his report to the S.B.R.A.S. was read by proxy also at the meeting in Singapore on 7 April 1879, and published in the Society's journal in July 1879,

along with Daly's report. Hornaday's 1885 account is much more detailed and from his book (1885 Kegan, chapter 27) it is clear that he and Syers went into several caves. Hornaday was in Selangor in June and July 1878, then he left for Borneo via Singapore before the end of July.

Soon after his visit, a tough and experienced English woman "adventurer" Isabella Bird (1831-1904) made an "unexpected and hastily planned expedition into the Malay states" during five weeks of January and February of 1879. During that time she met efficient man . . . speaks Malay fluently . . . is studying the Chinese and their language, as well as the flora, fauna and geology of the country". However she did not meet Hornaday who was at that time in Singapore prior to his departure back to America in early February 1879.

Bird mentions Batu Caves, which had been discovered some 7 months prior to her visit. "At Batu there are magnificent limestone caves richly adorned with stalactites and stalagmites. The dome of the one cavern is three hundred and fifty five feet from floor to roof. An important fact connected with these caverns is that they contain thousand of tons of bats' manure, which maybe as valuable guano to future planters."

At the time of her visit, tin mines were in great abundance "with Kwala Lumpur being the most important mining entrepot in Selangor". Bird also mentions the caves of Gunong Pondok in Perak. She married John Bishop in 1881, and in 1892 became the first woman fellow of the Royal Geographic Society.

H.W.C. Leech wrote about the limestone hills in Kinta and said "but further to the East they are not to be found, nor I believe, to the South, as I have never met them or heard of them in Selangor, although I saw a good deal of that country while in the service of the Selangor Government". This was published in a report in December 1878, but was obviously written prior to that date.

Sir Frederick Weld was one of the next people to write about Batu Caves. He visited Selangor in July 1880, and his journal was printed by Lovat. On July 12 he went from Batu Village (occupied mainly by Orang Asli) into thick jungle with fine forest trees and "after proceeding for some miles, we suddenly came on to a huge rock; about four or five hundred feet high, absolutely perpendicular and rising like a great fort or castle out of the forest, with trees and twisted roots growing out of it and clasping and crowning it. I have never seen anything resembling it. It seemed like an island in the vast forest, and its upheaval was probably due to volcanic action. There is another rock very similar to this one in Perak, they tell me, called Gunong Pondok. A river was running at its feet and partly surrounded it".

Weld's party then spent the morning hunting but returned to the rock where they had left the rest of the party. "We then climbed up a steep path, and at the height of about a hundred feet above the ground level we found ourselves at the mouth of a huge cave, in which luncheon had been got ready.

I must describe it: picture to yourself a huge banqueting hall, with a dome-shaped roof about three hundred feet high, and at least one hundred and fifty feet long, with great apertures in the roof through which the light streamed, softened

into green and gold by overhanging trees. The Malays have a legend that a fairy princess lives in the summit of this great crag - into which no human foot has penetrated - and that when she shows herself to a man she brings him good fortune. I can imagine no more appropriate spot for a fairy dwelling place. Standing within the cave, and looking out of its dark framework of stalactites pillars and buttresses into the sunlight, and wealth of tropical vegetation stretching away for miles below me, I really felt that it was worth making the tour of the globe if only to see that sight

After luncheon we explored the cave, by torchlight; thousand of bats, disturbed by the light flew over our heads. I shot one or two for Dr. Barrington, and the noise of the reverberation through the caves was very grand. When we came to the last one they gave three cheers for 'the Governor' - the first one who had ever penetrated into these wilds".

Today there is no jungle surrounding Batu Caves, and no elephants or buffalo or tigers. Just busy roads, quarries, housing and industrial estates.

By the 1880's Batu Caves was a famous show place and Kuala Lumpur was very proud of it. People used to go there for picnics and explore the caves by the dim light of candles.

Ambrose Rathborne visited in 1883, and describes the cave in his book. He only mentions one cave, so presumably the general public and picnickers only went into the one cave, situated up the hillside.

The S.B.R.A.S. published a map of the Klang River and area around Kuala Lumpur in 1879, which featured the limestone caves at Bukit Batu. On the 1887 map, limestone caves are marked at Batu Caves, and at Bukit Takun a "remarkable limestone crag". Bukit Takun is now situated in Templers Park, to the north of Batu Caves, and was also missed by Leech.

In 1885, there is mention of padi areas at Batu, and Liberian coffee was planted in a large area near Batu Caves, 1882-83. The coffee industry failed but around the same time there was an increased demand for rubber. Henry Nicholas Ridley (1855-1956) initiated the first really successful tapping in 1889, working in the Botanical Gardens of Singapore. He had arrived in Singapore in 1888. He made his first botanical collecting trip to Batu Caves in 1889 when he travelled by bullock cart. His last visit was in 1920 by car.

The British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) appointed a committee to explore the caves in the Malay Peninsula. Ridley undertook these investigations in December 1896. In 1898 Ridley made the first attempt to study the fauna of Batu Caves. In his report (Ridley 1899) for that year, he indicated the general character of the caves and their fauna, but no attempt was made at a detailed study. But he made the first thorough exploration of Dark Cave which was missed by the earlier European visitors. His visits to Batu Caves include June 1889, December 1896, July and August 1897, 1898, August 1908, December 1920. He listed the vertebrates. The invertebrates were later dealt with by A.C. Abraham, then by Cedric Dover and his wife 25-30 years later for the Museum Department, Federated Malay States.

Ridley sent some animal specimens from the 1896 expedition to the British Museum (London) including invertebrates from Dark Cave and molluscs from the limestone cliffs. Some were lost or muddled up in transit, which may explain why species were not described and named until 25 - 30 years later. For example the spider *Liphistius batuensis* was described by Abraham in 1923. He mentions the *Liphistius* builds its nest on the cave wall and not on the floor as noted elsewhere.

In 1898 Ridley published a paper on the white snake of the Selangor caves. He and Mr. C.B. Harvey had captured several in December 1896 and sent them to the Natural History Museum (London) which were identified as *Coluber taeniurus* (today known as *Elaphe taeniura*). They were previously unknown in the Malay Peninsula. He went on to say they differed in colour from the book description.

Ridley made the first floral studies. At that time the forest extended to the base of the cliffs, and he found many rare species of plants. He also described the topography. But unfortunately he was not consistent with his nomenclature, using Gua Batu, Gowa Batu, Batu Caves and Caves KL, as well as Batu Caves Estate, Jackson's coffee Estate Gua Batu. The Coffee estate later became Batu Cave Rubber Estate. Eventually this was sold off to the Temple or the quarry companies, also the rifle range.

In 1891 the Temple Cave became the Sri Subramaniam Swamy Temple. However Gullick says the Indian communities were still very small in 1895.

Ridley explored many of the caves at Batu Caves. Apart from Dark Cave, he describes three other caves.

Quarry Cave — "opens on the eastern side of the rocks, at the foot of the cliff, about a quarter of a mile from the Dark Cave; a low cave of no great size, traversed near the mouth by a stream; the mouth is a narrow opening about seven feet high, nearly closed by an immense mass of stalagmite; bats in myriads".

Quarrying had already begun in 1896 and this cave was probably completely destroyed before Ridley left Malaya. It was probably somewhere in the area now occupied by the PWD quarry.

Sakai Cave — "A good way further to the east, along the same face, are several other caves, one of which is known as the Sakai Cave . . . quite a small cavern with a rather wide mouth; the greater part of the floor broken down by a stream which formerly ran across the cave and out of the mouth, but was evidently long dry".

Fallen Cave — "between Quarry Cave and Dark Cave, and only about 50 yards from the former; a small cave 66 feet long, in a vast mass of debris fallen from the cliff; the talus covered with trees of fairly large size".

The cave became inverted in the fall.

None of these three descriptions match Lambong, Belah or Lada. Another cave, High Cave, was mentioned but not described by Ridley, it was near the top of a cliff, and had no traces of human occupation. The numerous smaller caves (Dover 1929) and the caves west of Dark Cave at ground level were not mentioned by Ridley, although Daly and Syers may have visited the latter, now called Art Gallery and Museum Caves.

Ridley did a lot of archaeological studies in the caves. Both he and Daly had noted aboriginal charcoal drawings (now gone) at some cave mouths, including some found on the wall near the entrance of what is now Temple Cave. The Besis aborigines used the upper caves because they feared bears and tigers in the ground level caves.

At Fallen Cave Ridley found charcoal, and the bones of monkeys on the floor (then the ceiling). Since the Besis used fire to cook the flesh of monkeys, these were remnants of past human occupation, before the cave fell from its high position.

In Sakai Cave, Ridley found a hearth stone and bone fragments.

In 1896 Ridley blasted two holes in the floor of the mouth of Dark Cave, and found Chinese pottery fragments, ox bones and bat skeletons. He found no sign of fire, and as bats normally roost further in, in darker areas, he assumed it wasn't the prehistoric cave mouth. This was perhaps several yards or more further south until it fell down the cliff. There are indications that a platform or rock overhang fell at one time from the mouth.

Quarrying started in 1896 and obviously destroyed some caves. Also guano has been dug from the caves and since Ridley's time from deep inside Dark Cave, thereby destroying any remaining archaeological evidence.

According to Harrison C.W. (1910/1923) the itinerary of tour (by train) through the Federated Malay States from Singapore to Penang suggested a visit to Batu Caves, by train, during the one day spent in KL. Whereas the itinerary of inclusive tour through the FMS, from Penang to Singapore, lists an afternoon trip by motor car, to Batu Caves (and Sungai Besi tin mine).

Wooden steps were installed up to Temple Cave in 1920, prior to that it was a hard scramble. These were replaced by stone steps in 1940. But Dover (1929) reports Dark Cave is approached by series of irregularly hewn steps. Today there are about 272 steps up to Temple Cave.

Following in the footsteps of Ridley, N. Annandale, J. Coggin-Brown, and F.H. Gravely (1913) published a paper on the fauna of caves in Burma and the Malay Peninsula. They indicated the literature on the subject, and the animals then known in the Burmo-Malay caves including Batu Caves. Next was Abraham (1923).

A pioneer survey of Dark Cave was done by Cerdric Dover and his wife Mercia Heynes-Wood in 1926. They studied the cave biology, made extensive collections of fauna and produced the first faunistic list, and also examined the

topography. Their detailed description of the cave and named chambers A - E, terminology still used today.

Cedric Dover (1929) wrote "... the fauna of Dark Cave, the only cave in Batu Caves hill which was likely to yield results of any speleological interest. The numerous smaller caves in this hill may excite the interest of other observers, but for the most part their fauna (such as it is) is identical with that of the cave I have studied."

Interestingly they only found the *Liphistius* spider in the Central Hall (Great Room), whereas today it is not known there, but only in Chambers B and C. The *Liphistius batuensis* is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as a rare trapdoor spider. Another point of note is that Dover described the pool in Chamber E as "remarkable for the clearness of its water". Today it is a mud bath!

Dover and Heynes-Wood published the first survey of Dark Cave (1928). This was not redone until the mid 1980's by the Malayan Nature Society (MNS) Cave Group.

Following their studies for the F.M.S.M., the greater part of Batu Caves which hadn't been leased for quarrying was gazetted in 1930 as a reserve for public recreation by the British Colonial Office. However the quarries which started in the previous century had already done considerable damage. Temple Cave was due to be destroyed but protests saved it.

In 1954, the same colonial office leased a portion of the hill for quarrying. In 1959 the MNS and some scientists recognized the danger of quarrying to the caves and protested, but were ignored. The Batu Caves Protection Association (BCPA) was established in 1964.

During the Second World War, the Japanese used some of the caves as factories for the manufacture and storage of ammunition. They had a machine plant at the foot of the cliffs near the PWD Quarry.

The chief executive of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) died in Dark Cave as a result of information given to the Japanese by the traitor Loi Teck, alias Wright, who was the Secretary General of the MCP at that time. Wright, having been captured by the Japanese, gave the names of his colleagues and arranged that they should meet in the cave. When they were assembled, the Japanese massacred them. Thus Loi Teck served his life, gained a large sum of money and purged his party of those leaders who were becoming too strong.

In January 1955 a human skeleton was found in Dark Cave, believed to be a Chinese man who committed suicide in 1940. He climbed a dangerous climb high up onto a ledge in the cave, wrote a message on the wall, giving his name, age and race and where he came from in China. His last request was that if anyone should find his bones, he should write his name upon the wall above his. He lay undiscovered for almost 15 years.

There is much graffiti in Dark Cave. A lot is old Chinese writing. Often the date is given, messages and stories have been written e.g. a message from a man hiding from the Japanese during the Occupation. Even epitaphs to people who have died.

The first cavers to explore the caves were from the Selangor Speleological Association in 1938. The MNS was established in 1940, and although various cavers (especially from England) went into the caves over the years, the MNS Selangor Branch Cave Group was not set up until 1984. Worthy of a mention are the Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club (RRCPC) from the north of England who did a lot of exploration in the 1960's and 1970's in Dark Cave, and found the crawl passage, and explored the pothole series.

H.E. McClure continued the study on fauna in the 1960's. He recorded 144 species of invertebrates, all but 9 of which are arthropods. Obviously this list is not complete. J.A. Bullock did further work in the early 1970's. By 1988, 170 species of invertebrates had been recorded.

Williams-Hunt furthered the archaeological work in the early 1950's. He records a shallow rock shelter just to the west of the steps leading up to Cathedral Cave. The site was disturbed and was used by local Tamils as a goat shelter. He found large fragments of cord marked pottery and *Melania* (a mollusc) shells. This is probably Museum or Art Gallery Cave. Batu Caves is probably the most disappointing archaeological site of all Malaysian caves.

Quarrying

The quarrying started in 1896, maybe earlier. Dolomite Industries Quarry started in 1954, "528 yards from Dark Cave" and to the east of Temple Cave. In 1959, the next quarry was established, Kenneison Quarry, to the north of Dark Cave. Then the lease to one of the quarries was extended in 1970, and the PWD/JKR Quarry set up to the east of Temple Cave. There was also Railway Quarry.

In 1971 the Tourist Development Corporation (TDC) took over Batu Cave Reserve, controlling access to Dark Cave, installing paths and lights. People paid 50 sen to enter Dark Cave and walks around with no guide resulting in much damage and graffiti.

In 1976, the Third Malaysian Plan published and recognized Batu Caves as a unique national heritage and proposed it as a National Monument. This did not stop the quarrying. In 1980 it was announced that all quarrying would stop by 19 June. However the deadline was extended until 31 December. A special committee was set up with the result that blasting was restricted but not stopped. Finally after much continuous quarrying, despite 25 years of protests, quarrying finally stopped in 1980/81. But Dolomite and Kenneison still have plants there.

Also in 1980 it was announced that Dark Cave was in danger of collapsing (as result of continuous blasting) and the cave was closed to all visitors. In 1984 the MNS began guided tours into Dark Cave using a prebooking system, and are still running these educational tours today. In 1989 the Cave Group got a financial grant from the local council to clean up Dark Cave was declared unsafe when the quarrying stopped, and therefore stopped running.

In July 1991 an MNS Management Proposal for Dark Cave to be opened as a show cave was submitted to the Gombak District Council. But to date, no decision has been made.

The Temples

The first temple, the Sri Subramaniam Swamy was established in 1891, and dedicated to Lord Muragan or Subramaniam. The Thaipusam festival has been celebrated there every year since 1892, and today attracts some 800,000 people. The temple lighting was installed in 1952, and improved in 1967. In September 1991 the temple celebrated its centenary.

Other temples include the Art Gallery Cave (Small Dark Cave) and the Museum Cave which are to the west of the steps upto Temple Cave. Museum Cave is part of the Ganesh Cave System. On 15 January 1995 Lower Ganesh Cave was opened as the latest temple, the Ramayana Art Gallery.

To the east, are the Ayapam and the Sitanggan temples.

In December 1993 it was again declared the caves were in danger of collapse, which filled the news until they were announced safe on 5 January 1994 in time for Thaipusam on 27 January.

The Caves

The caves known to have been discovered more than 50 years ago have already been mentioned. Dark Cave remains the best documented and described cave, and is some 2.8 kilometer long, but I will not go into any more detail here. Instead I will mention the remaining caves.

The Cave Group discovered Inchibawa and Chili Padi Caves on 12 August 1984. They lie to the north west of Dark Cave on Kenneison's land. Ichibawa is at ground level, and is an old river passage. Chili Padi is higher up and accessible by scrambling up a slope, and basically consists of one big chamber with a well decorated upper chamber. There is another small, un-named cave above Chili Padi. Fig Tree Cave is through cave in the same area.

The Ganesh Cave System has the greatest vertical range of any known cave at Batu Caves, 180m. It comprises Upper Ganesh, Lower Ganesh (Ramayana Art Gallery) and Museum Cave. In October 1994 cavers connected a pothole up on top of the hill, at 275m asl, with Upper Ganesh, thereby extending the system. The pothole entrance is reached after a steep scramble and climb up the sometimes vertical hill. On the way one passes Gua Serow and other small un-named caves which are situated in the sides of a small valley below the summit.

The only other known cave on the summit is Gua Pandan, found in 1984. To get to it one passes the top of the shaft which leads to Chamber C in Dark Cave, also the shaft which leads into the Great Room.

Round on the east side, near Seri Gombak Indah is Gua Tasek and Gua Tasek Kechil. Gua Tasek is a through cave and the lake extends through out the cave.

Caves now destroyed

Belah (Double)
Lambong
Crystal

Caves remaining today:

Temple (Cathedral, Main)
Dark Cave
Small Dark

Quarry
Sakai
Fallen
High
Lada

Ganesh System:

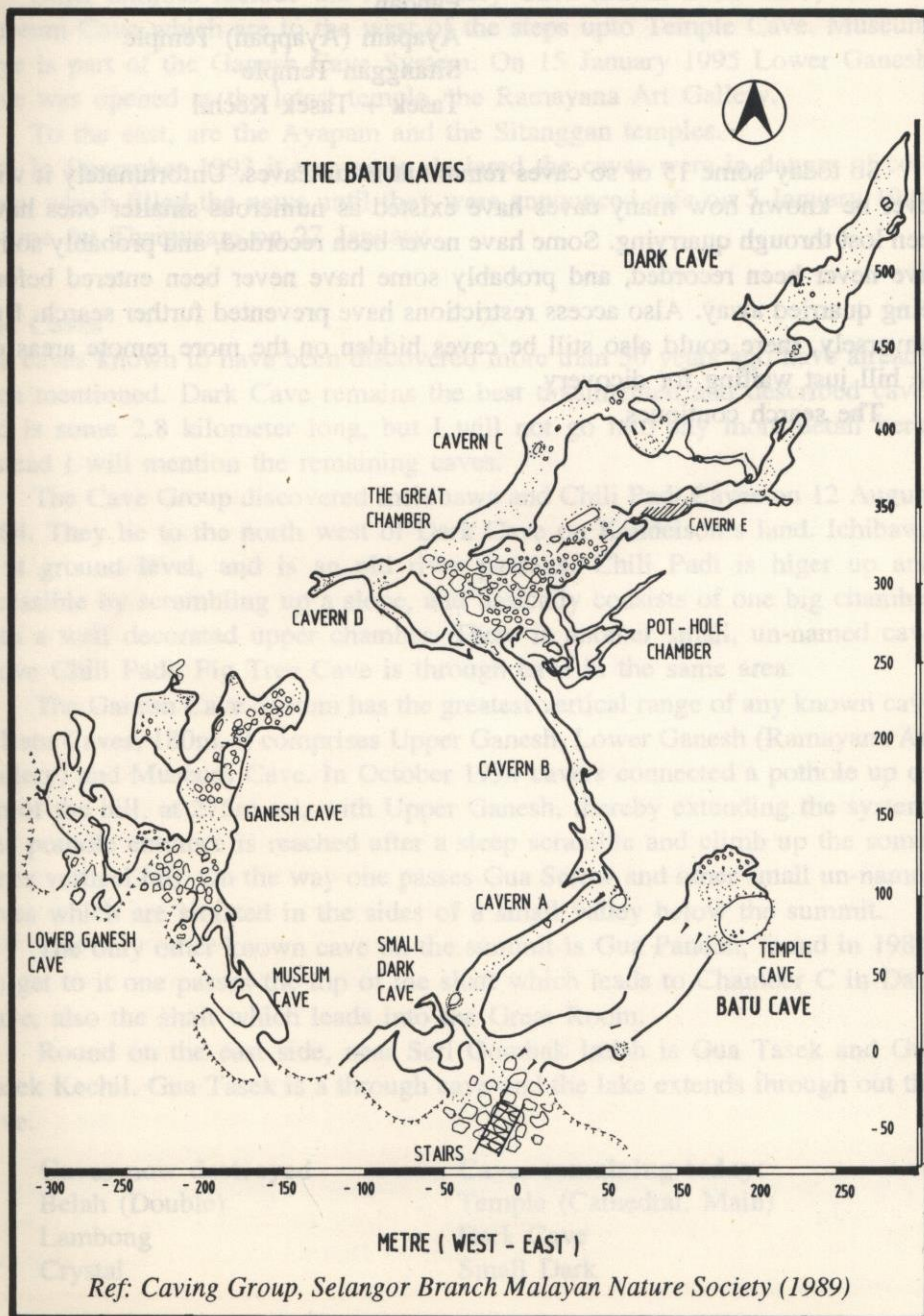
Upper Ganesh
Lower Ganesh
Museum

Ichibawa
Chili Padi + un-named cave
Fig Tree
Serow + small ones
Pandan
Ayapam (Ayappan) Temple
Sitanggan Temple
Tasek + Tasek Kechil

numerous small un-named caves

So today some 15 or so caves remain at Batu Caves. Unfortunately it will never be known how many caves have existed as numerous smaller ones have been lost through quarrying. Some have never been recorded, and probably some have never been recorded, and probably some have never been entered before being quarried away. Also access restrictions have prevented further search. But conversely, there could also still be caves hidden on the more remote areas of the hill just waiting for discovery.

The search continues.



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(Generally newspaper reports have been excluded)

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Abbreviations:

CN	-	Nature conservation in Western Malaysia, 1961.
CSS	-	Cerberus Spelaeological Society (England)
FMJ	-	Federation Museums Jnl
JFMSM	-	Jnl Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
JMBRAS	-	Jnl. Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.
JSBRAS	-	Jnl Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
MN	-	Malayan Naturalist
MNJ	-	Malayan Nature Jnl.
MNS	-	Malayan Nature Society
OUP	-	Oxford University Press.
PI	-	Pacific Insects