

Promoting Pahiyangala Cave as a Tourist Attraction

P Sumangala[#] and GBI Weerasingha

Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

[#]chapa.weerasingha@gmail.com

Abstract – *Pahiyangala Cave at Bulathsinhala is a prehistorical site that dates back 43,000 years by present. Research problem was how to attract domestic and foreign visitors to Pahiyangala site. Major objective was to identify the potential for promoting Pahiyangala site among both domestic and foreign visitors. The other objectives were to recognize the deficits and issues encountered by the visitors at the site. Research was based on both primary sources including filed observations, interviews and structured questionnaires while secondary sources used including reports, magazines, websites etc. The site and its periphery were explored and the visitor related facilities also were observed to identify the current situation of the site. The sample was consisted of 50 domestic visitors and 20 foreign visitors who were randomly selected at the site during weekends. Visitors were interviewed with structured questionnaires to identify their perception, knowledge and comments regarding the site. The site is highly attracted by domestic visitors more than foreign visitors. Most of the foreigners are from China and the other major markets are German, Thailand, and UK. Most of the domestic visitors are not entirely aware of the historical value of the site and still they are not provided proper guidance within the site. Visitor related services and infrastructure facilities also are not in a satisfied level. Information knowledge on the site and its value are not being updated accurately. There should be a proper site management plan, as this is the cave premises where the oldest pre-historic man had been settled as groups. Visitors should be given an opportunity to examine the site with accurate and updated information which should be provided by the site, Department of Archaeology, travel and tourism related companies, and the community within the area.*

Keywords: Pahiyangala Cave, Pre-historic Man, Visitors

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is an ideal destination to observe the disciplinary of prehistory since the island is inherited abundance of evidences of geological landscapes, faunal and floral remains, humans' skeletons and remains all dates back to the prehistoric period. It is reported that the oldest prehistoric human settlement in South Asia

has found in Sri Lanka that is the human skeleton dates back to 43,000 years BP that was found from Pahiyangala, Bulathsinhala.

Pahiyangala, Batadombalena, Kithulgala Belilena, Pothgul Lena at Gampaha, Miniha Gal Kanda are some of the fine examples regarding the prehistoric settlements in Sri Lanka. More than 40 caves have been scattered over the island including wet zone, intermediate zone and dry zone. Geological position, eco system, flora and faunal diversity, natural landscapes, climatic condition, temperature and the drainage system of the island make huge potential for establishing human settlements since the prehistoric era.

II. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research was to identify the potential of Pahiyangala cave for promoting cave tourism among both foreign and domestic visitors. To achieve the major objective prehistoric evidences and the natural value of the research area were observed. Thereby the significances of Pahiyangala cave were analyzed and it supported immensely to identify the potential of the site promoting cave tourism. The site can be promoted as a soft adventure based site with huge educational experience.

Minor objective was to recognize the deficits and issues encountered by the visitors at the site. To achieve that object a field observation and a filed based survey were carried out at the site. To identify the visitor related issues and their perception about the site, it was appropriate to conduct a survey with structured questionnaires and personal interviews with the particular parties at the cave site. The sample was consisted of 50 domestic visitors and 20 of foreign visitors as both of the categories were highly important to achieve the minor objective of the research. The visitors were interviewed with the questionnaire that was based on visitor profile, visitor perception on the site in aspect of prehistoric value, satisfaction of the visitor related facilities and their comments. In addition to that the guardian reverent of the temple, few vendors, and few souvenir sellers also were interviewed personally to gather information on the present situation of the cave as a tourist attraction.

Significant Speleology Cave Sites in Sri Lanka



Figure 1. Significant Cave Sites in Sri Lanka

III. RESULTS

Pahiyangala Cave is one of the most significant site in prehistoric field since the oldest human skeleton and the complete skeleton have been found at the cave complex through the excavations. Pahiyangala cave is located in Bulathsinhala Secretariat Division of Kaluthara District in Western Province, Sri Lanka. The cave is located above 585ft of elevation from the sea level. The cave is positioned on a huge rocky area and it can be identified as a land mark which separates the Kalutara District from Rathnapura District. As it is reported length of the cave is 282ft., width is 175 ft. and the height is 150 ft. 180 degrees of angle is covered from the top of the cave rock and when it comes to the main cave entrance only 45 degrees of angle can be covered.

The cave provides natural protection from the rain so that about 3000 people can be stayed inside the cave at once. Naturally the cave is built with granite, quartz, and chertz which are mostly abundant in the cave periphery and it has been explored that the prehistoric man has used these rocks and minerals for making stone tools, firing, hunting, for making ornaments, and even for ritual purposes. The eco system near the cave site belonged to evergreen tropical vegetation region of the island. Annual rainfall is recorded as 3000mm-4000mm and

thetemperature of the area is recorded as 23-27celsius degrees in general.

Pahiyangala cave is rich with floral and faunal bio diversity even since the prehistoric period. Most of the floral and faunal remains found in the cave area are still visible around the vicinity of the cave complex. *Spersn Bubalns arne, Axis Poreinus, Cervus unicolor, Muntiacus Muntjak malabaricus, Sus Scrofa Maximus, Elephas Maximus Maximus, Panthera Pardns Kotiya, Prionailurus Viverrinus, Prionalilurus Rubiginosus, Paradoxurus up, Herpestes SP, Viverricula Indiacca, Canis aureus lanka, Trachypithecus Vetulus, Macaca sinica,* are some of the recorded faunal species whose fossils and remains have been found during the excavations. *Canerium zeylalicum, Wild banana and Artocarpus nobilis,* are some of the recorded floral species even present those floral evidences can be witnessed around the cave area.

For the first time the Pahiyangala cave was identified as a prehistoric site by Dr. Shiran Deraniyagala in 1966 as a result of an archaeological exploration. Afterwards the site was excavated by Dr. Shiran Deraniyagala and Dr. W.G. Wijepala in 1986-1987. During the excavations four human skulls of Homa Sapiens Sapiens which date back to 37,000 years BP were found at this cave complex.

Between the period of 2007-2012, Dr. Nimal Perera and Mr. Oshantha Wedagedara carried out an excavation project at the cave site and as a result of that excavation, a complete human skeleton dates back to 43,000 years BP, was found at the site. Significantly there was a mark at one side of the skull and the legs of the skeleton are positioned as they are bent. This symbolizes some kind of ritual practiced by the prehistoric man who occupied the cave.

These evidences of prehistoric and natural value can be identified as the potentials for promoting the site as an attraction of cave tourism in Sri Lanka.

Pahiyangala cave is still not being promoted in cave tourism in Sri Lanka since various issues generated at the site. The visitor survey paved the way for identifying the deficits and issues encountered by the visitors at the site. The cave site is one of the most important prehistoric heritage sites in the world.

Thus the visitors should have acquired at least a basic knowledge about the site when they have a visit to the site. Visitor perception or their awareness on the heritage value was evaluated by the questionnaire. Five basic questions were asked at the questionnaire and 1 point was given for each correct answer and then visitors' awareness about the site on prehistoric value was evaluated in general.

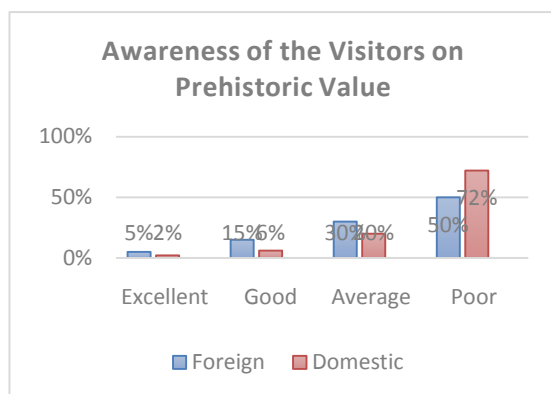


Figure 2. Awareness of the visitors on prehistoric value

The questions were based on the aspects of pioneer archaeologists, prehistoric period, latest excavations, floral and faunal diversity and geological background of the cave site.

Visitor satisfaction of the site was evaluated as depicted in the above table. Separately foreign and domestic visitors were asked about their satisfaction

on five criteria including accessibility, information, guidance, safety & security, foods and sanitation.

Table 1. Visitor Satisfaction on the Site

Criteria	Satisfied		Neutral		Dissatisfied	
	D %	F %	D %	F %	D %	F %
Accessibility	42	20	30	40	28	40
Information	66	40	30	45	4	15
Guidance	20	25	50	20	30	55
Safety & Security	32	25	56	35	12	40
Foods, Sanitation	24	10	52	35	24	55

IV. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The research focused on evaluating the prehistoric and natural value of the site for promoting the cave site and to identify the visitor related issues within the site. Pahiyangala cave is extremely rich with both heritage and natural value. Even though the visitors are not totally aware of the value and the importance of the site. Visitors' perception on the prehistoric value was evaluated and thereby 50% of foreigners and 72% of domestic visitors have poor knowledge regarding the site. It is only 5% of domestic visitors and 2% of foreign visitors are with excellent knowledge about the site significantly, this group is consisted of researchers and students who are involving in higher studies in Archaeology and History.

Awareness of the visitors on the prehistoric value of the site should be improved through a promotional program. Already the site has implemented few steps for site promotions including a Sinhala medium 35 minutes compact disk titled on 'Historical Pahiyangala' and three types of brochures have been published in both Sinhala and English medium and being sold at the premises. But this promotional step is not enough comparing with the present tourism industry. The site is being promoted via an official website of www.pahiyangala.org since 2005. The web site should be further upgraded with new technological strategies such as virtual tours etc. The visitors can be given a basic knowledge on the prehistoric value with details on past excavations and future projects.

Concerning the information requirements of the visitors, An Information Center can be established with visitor relation officers whose responsibility should be welcome the visitors, providing necessary details to the visitors and to handle the visitor related issues occurred at the site. Site map, a guide book or other relevant documents can be distributed at the information center and that might be supportive for the visitors to fulfil the visiting experience.

Visitor satisfaction should be evaluated for further site management strategies at the site. Accessibility, information, guidance, safety and security, foods and sanitation were the selected criteria for collecting data on the visitor satisfaction at the site. The data is depicted in the Table 01 and it highlights that mostly both domestic and foreign visitors are dissatisfied with the facilities provided at the site. Information services available at the site are quite enough for the visitor satisfaction.

There is only one person has been appointed as the site manager who is the responsible person for guidance, information providing, managing the site, and concern the security of the site. But it should be concerned to appoint at least few laborers and assistants to the site in order to manage the site in an effective manner. Young groups can be trained as the site guide for promotional activities of the site.

The site is overcrowded with domestic visitors immensely during the weekends and Poya days. When the carrying capacity is exceeded at the site it should be paid attention to manage them minimizing the human vandalism and effects at the site. It is responsible of the site manager to protect the site and conserve the heritage value of the site.

28% of domestic visitors and 40% of visitors are dissatisfied with the accessibility available at the site. There are two vehicle parks are available at the site and the visitors who are arriving at the site can access via Horana, Bulathsinhala and the site is located 5 km away from the town.

The site should be introduced a proper site management plan in order to target the foreign markets because mostly the site has been attracted by China, German, Thailand and UK. The accurate details with excavations and researches can be spread over the world through the mass media.

24% of domestic visitors and 55% of foreign visitors are dissatisfied with the food and beverages and the

sanitation facilities provided at the site. As the cave is located at a top of a rocky land those services and facilities should be provided at the site in an efficient manner. Thus the sanitation facilities provided at the site is not adequate for the visitors. It is important to manage visitor facilities properly in order to offer a valuable experience for the visitors.

Accordingly these facts prove that though Pahiyangala cave is extremely rich with heritage and natural value still the knowledge dissemination of the site is not targeted by the visitors. Being one of the significant sites in prehistory in the world, the site should be concerned by the visitors more than the present condition. Specially the authentic historical value of the site should be revealed because still even the domestic visitors are not fully aware about the prestigious worth of the site. This research was based on the identifying the potential of the area and identify the visitor related issues at the site. Moreover a site management strategies also have presented through this research.

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INTERVIEWS

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHORS



Rev. Pahiyangala Sumanagala Currently working as an assistant lecturer attached to the Department of Archaeology. I have obtained B.A. Special Degree in Archaeology from the Department of

Archaeology, University of Kelaniya by 2015. Currently reading for the M.Phil.in Archaeology at the Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya. Research interests

are based on Pre-history, Geo Archaeology, Ancient Technology, Bio Archaeology and Heritage Management.