

SLNHS Field Visit Report

Excursion 8th August 2015

Maligatenna/ Varana/ Heneratgoda Gardens Sri Lanka

Article and photography by Druvinka Paul.

PARTICIPANTS

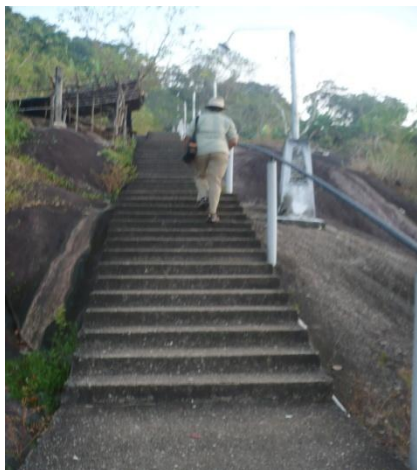
Dr Asoka Thenabadu, Chris Corea, Enoka Corea, Shenuka Corea, Ninel Fernando, Shevanthi Jayasuriya, Nandalal Ranasinghe, Vasantha Dias, Sena Fernando, Srilal Motha, Hafiz Zainudeen, Kumar Perumal and Druvinka Paul.

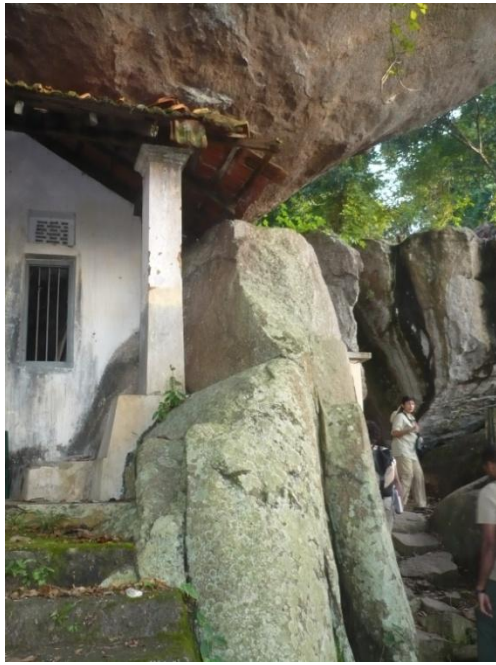
Saturday 8th August 2015

We gathered at the Lobby of Hyde Park Residencies at 5.00 a.m. to commence our excursion. Basement parking had been kindly arranged by Dr. Asoka Thenabadu for the convenience of participants. The fourteen of us, including the driver left in a spacious, air conditioned van at 5.15 a.m. sharp on schedule. We proceeded to our first destination, Maligatenna Raja Maha Viharaya via the Colombo - Kandy Road. An air of cheerful fellowship prevailed between all occupants despite such an early start. Our first stop was at Dons & Sons Kiribathgoda at approx 6 a.m. A variety of freshly made pastries and Sri Lankan favorites were freely available and our participants made good use of this opportunity. We were back in the van in no time to proceed on the rest of our journey.

Maligatenne Raja Maha Viharaya

Maligatenna Temple was our first destination. We turned right from the Kandy road at Miriswatte and proceeded about 9 km to Maligatenna. The history of this cave temple dates back to the period when King Walagamba found refuge here escaping from Indian Chola invaders. Within the temple premises lie several caves of varied sizes on different levels with drip ledge brows. These drip ledges were cut during King Walagamba's period in order to make the caves habitable by disposing off rain water from steep rock surfaces.





The dagoba situated at the top of the mountain seemed to glow against the backdrop of the clear blue sky. The path leading to it was quite rugged and steep. We climbed with great enthusiasm although we were breathless at times until we finally reached the summit by 7 a.m.. It was a beautiful sight to behold. Beside the glistening dagoba were many small and large pools of water with blooming water lilies. It was such a refreshing site that some participants rested their weary feet after the tedious climb. Others of course were admiring and photographing the nearby mountainous rocks and the picturesque scenery. There were families of monkeys in the adjoining rocks playfully enjoying themselves. We found them missing after a short while only to realize to our amazement that they were on our rock, exploring the contents of our bags!! It was such a lovely sight to see how intelligent and cute these animals were. We then descended the rock at 9 a.m. having imbibed the panoramic view that seemed so unforgettable.





Varana Rajamaha Viharaya

Our next destination was the famous Varana Rajamaha Viharaya. This cave temple belongs to the period of King Walagambahu and houses ancient paintings and inscriptions. It was interesting to discover how the name “Varana” was derived. It is a combination of two words ‘va’ and ‘arana’. Va being a kind of tree common to that period and Arana meaning forest – ‘Varana’ Forest of Va trees.

The temple was vast with shrine rooms on each level and a small dagoba at the summit. Climbing towards the Meda maluwa we observed a rock pool and many caves scattered around the area. The rock hewn steps led to the summit through luscious green vegetation, creepers and tall trees. The rock formations were at times overhanging and awe inspiring, adding to the scenic beauty. The view that greeted us on reaching the summit was very rewarding. The beautiful landscape comprised the blue-grey neighboring hills, coconut plantations and lime green paddy fields. We sat there and enjoyed the view for about 30 minutes and commenced our decent.





Awariyawala Ambalama

We then proceeded to see the historic Ambalama. These Ambalamas were built to house the wearied traveler on an overnight stay when transportation was on foot or as a meeting place for important discussions.

Awariyawala Ambalama lies on a flat rock in a scenic landscape with an adjoining pond. According to historical records, it was built by King Walagamba and was used by his Queen. It is believed that on one such occasion she had lost her “Hawariya” (hairpiece) at the pond from which the name Awariyawala was derived. We visited the Ambalama and took many group pictures of this historic and unusual building.



On our way to the next destination we made a comfort stop at Perera and Sons, Gampaha where we purchased our lunch and then headed to the Botanical Gardens by 1 p.m.

Henerathgoda Botanical Gardens

This botanical garden is of great importance because it was home to the first rubber tree for which rubber seeds were imported from the British Royal Botanical Garden in 1876. It was from here that rubber trees were propagated islandwide. We were fortunate enough to view the remains of the first rubber tree which has been preserved for posterity. The garden covers a sprawling 43 acres and we were able to drive through it by van admiring the collection of tropical, sub tropical, wet zone and dry zone trees.

The vast variety of beautiful flowers in different hues and sizes so meticulously arranged, the well manicured lawns and creative topiary was refreshing and pleasing to the eye.



Having selected a good shady spot, we sat there to enjoy a sumptuous lunch discussing the days' happenings with jovial repartee. Around 2.45 p.m. we decided to conclude the trip. On our way out we stopped at the Plant Sales Outlet to purchase some beautiful plants as souvenirs of our enjoyable trip to Henerathgoda Botanical Gardens. We reached Colombo by approx 4.00 p.m. As the curtain falls on our enjoyable trip we extend our grateful thanks to Dr. Thenabadu, Chris Corea and the able SLNHS Executive Committee members, participants and our skillful driver without whom this trip would never have been a success.

This report and photographs were compiled and captured by Druvinka Paul. The views expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the SLNHS.

**List of bird observations on sight and by vocal identification in Maligatenna,
Warana and Botanical gardens in the Gampaha District**

Compiled and Presented by Kumar Perumal

Weather - Warm sunshine

Altitude - 77 m on the rocks.

Date - 8th August 2015

Time - 8.00-15.00 hours

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Asian Open Bill | 21 Little Green Bee eater |
| 2 Black Headed Ibis | 22 BrownHeaded Barbet |
| 3 Indian Pond Heron | 23 Crimson Breasted Barbet |
| 4 Cattle Egret | 24 Black Rumped Flame Back |
| 5 Intermediate Egret | 25 Ashy Wood Swallow |
| 6 Little Egret | 26 Black Hooded Oriole |
| 7 Little Cormorant | 27 White Bellied Drongo |
| 8 Crested Serpent Eagle | 28 White Browed Fantail Flycatcher |
| 9 Shikra | 29 Black Naped Monarch |
| 10 Purple Swamphen | 30 House Crow |
| 11 Red wattled Lapwing | 31 Jungle Crow |
| 12 Spotted Dove | 32 Red Vented Bulbul |
| 13 Pompadour Green Pigeon | 33 White Browed Bulbul |
| 14 Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot | 34 Common Tailor Bird |
| 15 Rose Ringed Parakeet | 35 Yellow Billed Babbler |
| 16 Greater Coucal | 36 Oriental White Eye |
| 17 Indian Swiftlet | 37 Hill Mynah |
| 18 Crested Tree Swift | 38 Common Mynah |
| 19 White Throated Kingfisher | 39 Pale Billed Flower pecker |
| 20 Common Kingfisher | 40 Purple rumped Sun bird |