Girikumhiila Tissa Pabbatha Viharaya in the Rajagala Archaeological Reserve at Rajagalatenna, Ampara, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: *Rajagala Archaeological Reserve situated in the Ampara district of Eastern Sri Lanka had been initially identified as the "Grikumhiila Tissa Pabbatha Viharaya" of which "Girikumhiilla" depicting the name of Crocodile Mountain as the mountain in which it is situated looks like a lying crocodile to the distance and using part of the name of the King Lajjatissa who build this monastery.*

The monastic remains of the monastery could be identified on the mountain approached through two stone stairways build in the dense forest blending with the slope of the mountain. The common buildings such as Stupas, Refectory, Uposathagra, Hot Water Bath House, A house with two large stone bowls, a Chapter House, Lahabthage, a small tank and several other buildings are scattered in this area. The dewing units of the mediation monks were located in the rocky hill above this area converting the caves into dwellings. As much as about 50 such dwellings in which about 500 monks would have lived together could be identified in this area. This monastic complex has been vacated due to the South Indian invasions in 993 and 1017AD and had been gradually deteriorated due to the natural causes and vandalism by treasure hunters in near past.

After the commencement of the Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka in 1890 there had been several attempts to document the archaeological remains in the Rajagala but no systematic archaeological activities were carried out. After the end of the civil war the Department of Archaeology has decided to commence archaeological activities and invited the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura to take over the site for the provision of all necessary archaeological services in order to arrest the deterioration process prevailing in the site and to present it for the fulfilment of needs of the present and future societies. Since 01st September 2012 activities are carried out as a joint project of the Department of Archaeology and the University of Sri Jayewardenepura of Sri Lanka. Over the years several international pre-historic research programmes were also conducted in the monastery with the participations of national and international universities and organisations. This monastery is now included in the World Heritage tentative list of the UNESCO.

Keywords: *Archaeology, Monuments, Research, Excavation, Conservation*

Introduction

The most ancient name of the present Rajagala or the Rassahela is Girikumbbhila. (Law 1959: Chapter 20, 10). Thereafter it has been identified as Ariyakara Viharaya. (Geiger 2003: Chapter 45: 60 -61, Chapter 49 : 32). Several ancient books have identified this monastery as Ayiyakooti Viharaya (Hewavitharana 1933: 44-45), Kumbalthispav Ariyakara Viharaya (Buddhadatta Thero 1959: 187), Ghirithimbilathispav Viharayas such (Gunaratna 2007 : 56 & 238) or Ariyakara Viharaya. According to all these names identified in the ancient text it is now evident that the name of this monastery - Grikumbhila Thissa Pabbatha Viharaya has been derived from the name of the mountain identified as Grikumbhila and adding the names of the people such as Thissa Pabbatha. Since the monastery has been built by the patronage King Lajjitissa in the mountain identified as Kumbhhila, the name Tissa might have been used. Kumbhila is the name identified for a Crocodile in the Pali text. (Buddhadatta 1998:163). Since this mountain looks like a Crocodile to the distance this name may have been used.

View of the Rajagala Mountain Range from Divulana Lake – Looks Like a Laying Crocodile

Ariyakaththa means the suitable for the nobles or most suitable for nobles. According to ancient texts this monastery has been famous for the preaching of Ariyavansa. As such the name of Ariyakara Viharaya also may have been used in ancients to identify this monastery. Therefore, it is very clear that the all these names depicted in the ancient texts are the names used for the identification of the present Rajagala Monastery which could be identified as Ariyakara Viharaya in the Rajagala Archaeological Reserve.

1. Historical Account

According to the ancient text as well as inscriptions found in the area the King who is responsible for the establishment of this Rajagala Meditation Forest Monastery is King Lajjitissa. The explanations given in the ancient text Deepavansa it has been noted that the King Lajjitissa did establish a monastery named Grikumbhila. (Ghanawilmal Thero 1970: Chapter 20, 11). In the ancient text Mahavamsa it has been noted the during the period of when King Saddatissa living in Deegavapi, Lade the eldest son of Saddatissa, Lajjitissa to established a beautiful monastery named Girikumbhila while the second son Thullaththana established the monastery named Kandara. (Sumangala Thero 1946: chapter 33 (14-15)). This note in the ancient text Mahavamsa is very important to establish the period in which the commencing of the establishment of this monastery. It has been identified that the King Saddhatissa was living in Deegavapi during the rule of King Dutugemunu which is between 167 - 137 BC. As such it is evident the King Lajjitissa commenced the establishment of this monastery during the period of 167 – 137 BC when he was a prince living in the Eastern Province with his father King Saddhatissa - the brother of King Dutugemunu - while he was ruling as provincial King of the Eastern Province. During the latter

period of King Dtugemunu, King Saddatissa went to Anuradhapura with his second son Thullaththana. (Sumangala Thero, Batuvanthudawa 1946, Chapter 33 (16-17)). As such it could be identified that Prince Lajjitissa has remained in Deegavapi and continued the establishment of the monastery. After the period of 18 years of ruling the country by King Saddhatissa, his second son attained the throne with the help of Buddhist Monks without informing his brother Lajjitissa. After the period of rule of one month and eight days of King Thullaththana, Lajjitissa came to Anuradhapura and dethroned his brother and became the King of Sri Lanka. The explanations given in the ancient text Mahavamsa with regard to the services rendered to the Buddhist Affaires during the period of ten years' rule of King Lajjitissa, it has been noted that the King has donated noble wearing cloths to 60,000 Buddhist priests to mark the occasion of donating the completed monastery to the Buddhist Society. (Geiger 2007: Chapter 33: 26). But according to ancient text the King Lajjitissa did not had good terms with the Buddhist Monks with in the first three years of his rule. As such the completion and handing over the completed monastery to the Buddhist Priest might have happened in between the period of 116 – 109 BC. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)).

The above records in the ancient texts have been proven by the inscriptions found from Rajagala. According to the seven inscriptions found in Rajagala three of them states about the elder princes of the Chief King Gamini Tissa. (Paranavithana 1970: Ins. No. 422,423,425). Next three of them states about the son named Tissa of the Chief King Gamini Tissa. (Paranavithana 1970: Ins. No. 424,426,427). Final one clearly states King Lajjitissa is the son of King Saddatissa. (Paranavithana 1970: Ins. No. 428). All these inscriptions states about the donation of caves to the monks to use as residences. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/   -(Written by the Author))

They are –

- The donation of a great cave constructed by the son of the great king of Gamini Tissa named as Tissa (inscription No. 424)
- The donation of a cave constructed by Buddhist follower Samika the wife of the son of the great king of Gamini Tissa named as Tissa (inscription No. 426)
- The donation of a cave constructed by Buddhist follower Abhijatha the wife of the son of the great king of Gamini Tissa named as Tissa (inscription No. 427)
- The donation of a great cave constructed by the eldest son of the great king of Gamini Tissa (inscription No. 423)
- The donation of a cave constructed by Buddhist follower Yasassani the wife of the son of the great king of Gamini Tissa (inscription No. 422)
- The donation of a cave constructed by Buddhist follower Buddhadatta the wife of the son of the great king of Gamini Tissa named as Tissa (inscription No. 425)
- The donation of a twenty-five cool caves constructed by the son of the great king of Gamini Tissa named as King Lajjaka (inscription No. 428)

As such it is very clear about the association of this monastery with the King Lajjitissa who ruled Sri Lanka from 119 – 109 BC. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/- (Written by the Author)).
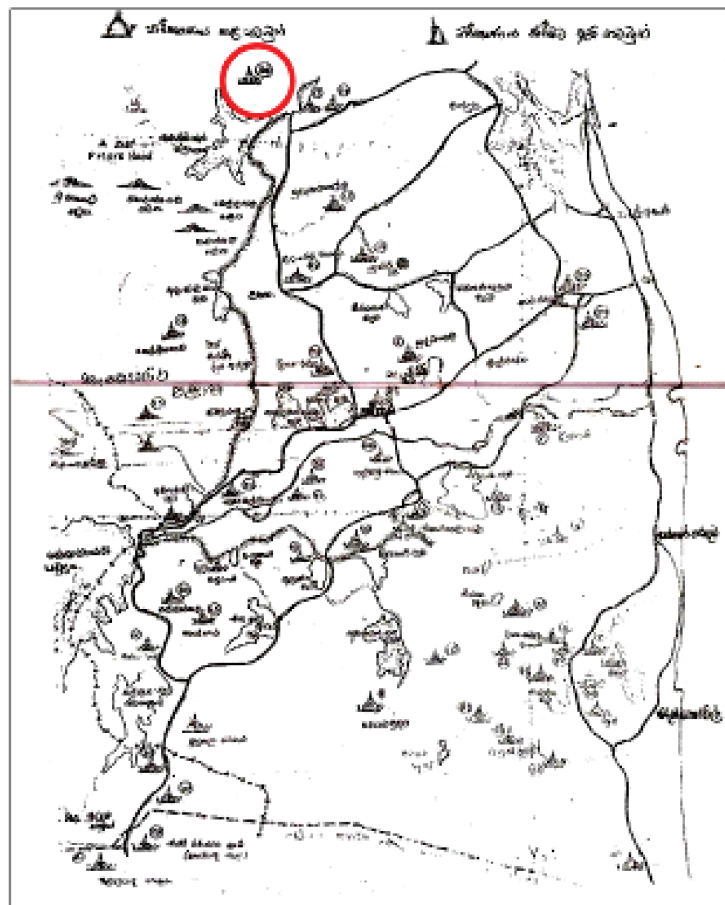
After the donation of this monastery in the 2nd century BC by King Lajjitissa there are no records in the Mahavamsa for a period of 700 years. But several inscriptions found in the area provide evidences of the existence of this monastery. They are –

- Donation of a village name Atusaba for the uses of the monastery in 44 BC during the period of sub king Kuttakanna Tissa (Paranavithana 1983: 4 – 5)

- Donation of Avasa and demarcation of the boundary by golden plough and donation of a reservoir named Maragama to the monastery, Donation of a part of the water tax of the Maha Raja Canal and donation of paddy fields to the monastery, Construction of a Bo-tree shrine and establishment of asana in the monastery, Donation of reservoirs and water taxes to the monastery, by King Bathika Tissa during 136 – 143 AD (Paranavithana 1983: 17 – 21)

- Donation of privately-owned reservoir named Kabaduka to the monastery, by deputy King Naga during the period of King Bathaika Tissa (136 – 143 AD) (Paranavithana 1983: 15 – 16)

- Donation of 100 Gold Coins to obtain the interest to the continuation of the Ariyawansa Preaching, by the Naga the son of Kabakadara Naga of Deegavapi (Paranavithana 1983: 259)

- Donation of 1000 Gold Coins to provide the offerings to the temple, by the Naga the son of Kabakadhara Naga of Deegavapi (Paranavithana 1983: 260)

- Donation of 100 Gold Coins to the continuation of the requirements of monks of the temple by the King Mahasen (274-301 AD) (Paranavithana 1983: 194)

- Donation of 300 Gold Coins to obtain the interest of the continuation of Ariyawandsa Preaching and Bana Preachiling by Minister Badalaka Suva during the period of King Buddhadasa (304-368AD) (Hettiarachchi & others 2018: 67-68)

- Donation of income of the Malatthe, Gulawelle and Mivangamuwe to obtain the Milk and Oil for the Monks of the temple, by the nobleman Dathasiva during the rule of King Mahinda (777-792 AD) (Paranavithana 1943: 169-176)

- Donation of the income of Saratwega and Mahawegana to obtain the needs of the Monks, by Veerankura during the rule of King Mahinda (777-792 AD) (Paranavithana 1943: 169-176)

- Donation of the income of Soruyur of the Digamadulla of the Southern Bank of Galoya and Kalweli of Lamjanawuwe to obtain the needs of the Monks, by Weerankura of Lamjanawuwe Veerankura by the order of seena during the rule of King Mahinda (777-792 AD) (Paranavithana 1943:169-176)

- (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/(Written by the Author))

Next identification of the monastery is during the period of King Dappula I (692AD). It has been noted in the Mahavamsa that King Dappulla the I, has constructed a beautiful Image House in the monastery and donated the village named Malawatthu. (Geiger 2003: Chapter 45:60-62) & (Giger 2007: Chapter 43, 58-62) The final identification of this monastery is stated in the Mahavamsa during the period of King Udaya I (797-801 AD) as it is stated as the King Udaya has repaired the monastery and constructed two new buildings which were identified as missing. (Geiger 2003: Chapter 49: 32-33). Thereafter during the period of King Mahinda I the country experienced the invasion of the South Indian Chola Kings and finally, during 1215, due to the invasion of Maga the Rajarata Civilization was completely fallen and the entire population was moved southwards and as a result, the Rajagala Monastery, which was in existence and inhabited by Buddhist Priests for about 1000 years was also was depopulated and became ruined. As such, the monastery has a great historical significance thus has a great Historical Value over 10 centuries. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)

2. Early Archaeological Activities

After the establishment of the archaeological survey of Sri Lanka in 1890, the main emphasis was to document and protect the archaeological remains in the ancient capitals. During 1933 several inscriptions which were found in Rajagala were read by Prof. Senarath Paranavitha. But the systematic identification of the inscriptions was carried out only in 1969. Thereafter no attempts have been made by the Department of Archaeology to carry out a systematic identification of archaeological remains in Rajagala up to the year 2012. On the other hand, the ethnic conflict that was prevailed in the North and East also prevented the Department of Archaeology to commence any archaeological activities in the area since 1979. Ancient Sri Lanka was divided into three administrative sections, namely – Ruhunu, Maya and Pihiti. Degavapi or Digamadulla District is part of the Ruhunu administrative section. It had been identified that there are about 100 different archaeological sites in the Digamadulla District. Out of these 100 identified archaeological sites, about 60 were located in the Gal Oya Basin all are belong to the Anuradhapura Period. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author) (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author)

Archaeological Monuments in Galoya Basin-1950

Out of these, the Rajagala has been identified as the best-preserved meditation forest monastery in the region, which is yet to be archeologically conserved. After the completion of the civil war in 2009, the Department of Archaeology commenced its archaeological activities in the Eastern province and one of the sites which were to be attended was the Rajagala Monastery. The preliminary investigations

carried out by the Department of Archaeology have identified the following archaeological remains in the monastery that scatters over 400 hectares. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author) (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author)

1. Eastern Stairway leading to the top of the mountain, which is 1340 meters long
2. Northern Stairway leading to the top of the mountain, which is 1090 meters long
3. Stairway connecting the Northern and Eastern Walkways at the top of the mountain
4. Walkway connecting the uncompleted Buddhist statue to the Stupa platform in which two Stupas are located
5. Two Stupas in a Single Platform
6. Asanaghara near the Stupas in a single Platform
7. Walkway connecting the area where two stupas are located to the area where common buildings are situated
8. Ruined building believed to be the refectory
9. Ruined building believed to be the Uposathaghara
10. Ruined building believed to be the Janthaghara
11. Building in which stone bowls are situated which was used for the collection of spring water to the cooking purposed of the refectory
12. Unidentified ruined building behind the Uposathaghara
13. Ancient Tank of Rajagala used for the collection of water for the purposes of the monastery
14. Walkway connecting the Stupa to the Buddhist Statue
15. Ancient Spill way of the Tank
16. Eight Ponds located in various locations caved in natural rock to collect the spring and rain water
17. Five small Stupas located in different locations
18. Sixteen ruined buildings located in various locations
19. Specially carved Cave
20. Small resting places within the water way
21. Inscription near the stone bowl building
22. Six stone stairways caved in natural rock
23. Pathway leading to the cave residences of Buddhist monks
24. Specially constructed stone entrance way to a cave residence of meditation monk (may be the chief priest)
25. Twenty-Eight caves used as the residences of the meditation monks
26. Three meditations cells build using stone blocks
27. Two caves used as resting places in the stairways
28. Toilet located in a cave (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

According to the above identifications it was observed that there are about 80 different archeologically important Monuments in the area which are to be conserved and maintained for the sake of future generations. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author))

3. Values Associated with the Monastery

Apart from the above significant monuments, the recent archaeological explorations that have been carried out since 2012 have revealed that there are about 593 archeologically important remains within the area. All these remains have to be carefully studied and identified to propose suitable interventions. As such, the **Archaeologically** significant value also transforms into an **Educational and Academic Value**. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

According to the survey carried out in the entire monastic complex total monuments identified are 593

Name of the Monument	Nos.	Name of the Monument	Nos.
Ambulatory	30	Quarry	20
Ambulatory with building structure	1	Quarry with Ambulatory	1
Ancient Latrine	1	Refectory	1
Ancient Building	1	Retaining wall	1
Asanagaraya	1	Rock cut Step	11
Buddha Statue	1	Rounded cave (Umbrella cave)	1
Building Structure	52	Saddle Stone	1
Building structure with rock cut step	1	Shiva Thero Cave	1
Burial Mount	152	Siha Muka Cave	1
Cave	161	Stairway	1
Cave and Building structure	1	Step	10
Cave with painting	3	Stone bowl building	1
Cave with rock cut steps	3	Stone bridge	4
Cool cave	3	Stone chair	1
Grind Stone	7	Stone Conical	23
Hand Rail Mark	1	Stone Covert	1
Inscription stone	4	Stone Hearth	1
Janathagaraya	1	Stupa	25
Mihidu Stupa	1	Stupas with a Foot Print Stone	2
Pond	57	Up stair Cave	1
Pond and Ambulatory	1	Water Spant	1
Pond with rock cut steps	1	**Total Monuments**	**593**

Rajagala Monastery complex has been identified as one of the three distinctive types of monasteries build during the early Anuradhapura period. As it has been identifies as a Pubbatha Vihara Type, but no distinctive sacred edifices are identified. Instead of such edifices, the common buildings are located in the flat plain in the top of the mountain. The monastery has been constructed as a meditation monastery in which the number of monks who has attained enlightenment was residing. In one of the stories stated one of the texts, it has been noted that there was an enlightened monk named Maha Dattha who was living in the monastery. (Hewavitharana 1933): 44-45). In another text it has been stated that 300 ordinary people became monks in this monastery after hearing the Ayiyavansha preaching and became enlightened after hearing the Satipattana preaching. (Buddhadatta, Thero 1959: 187). In a story stated in another text, 500 monks who were residing in this monastery became enlightenment during the period that they were observing religious observances in a year. (Gunaratna 2007: 581 & 583). In another text it has been stated that the chief monk Dammaguptha had 300 enlightened students who were residing in the monastery. (Buddadatha Thero 2006: 145)

According to these stories, it could be identified that the Rajagala meditation monastery was famous for the Ariyawansa Preaching and there had been about 500 enlightened monks, thus having a **Cultural, Religious and Spiritual Value.** (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

According to the ancient texts and inscriptions Rajagala meditation monastery has been associated with Kings, Deputy Kings and Noblemen who has donated villages, paddy fields, taxes from water

streams and reservoirs, Golden coins and has also constructed building for the development of the monastery thus having a significant **Cultural Value**. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

On the other hand, the significant feature of this monastery is that the ordinary people have climbed up to the flat plain of the mountain and gathered in that area were the common buildings are located in order to offer various donations to the meditation monks of the monastery and in return the monks have provided religious blessings to them. This could be identified as a significant **Social Value** of this monastery. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

The monastery has been built in a mountain creating stone stairways, religious buildings, service buildings, pathways and monks' residences in caves dwellings blended with the natural environment. When approaching the monastery through the eastern stairway, the approach has been constructed to admire the distant landscape in the area. The pathways leading to the cave dwellings and the other build residences are constructed in a way to admire the distant landscape in the vicinity. As such, this monastery could be named as a monastery of a mixture of Pubbtha Vihara Type and Vanawasa Vihara type, which is very rare in Sri Lanka. As such, the monastery could be identified as a special Buddhist Monastery with a significant **Aesthetic Value**. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

As explained above the monastery has been built in a mountain which consists of 400 hectares of natural forest. The entire area has been declared as a forest conservation area by the Department of Forest Conservation under the Flora and Fauna Protection Ordinance No. 2 of 1937 subsequent amendments and Act No. 44 of 1964 and No. 1 of 1970. The forest of Rajagala contains several species of Flora and Fauna. According to the preliminary investigations the site contains **76 different species of Flora** and **61 different Species of Fauna**. As such it had been revealed that a separate study has to be made for the proper identification of these species and their protection. The entire monastery has been laid to blend with the natural environment. All access paths to the monastery and monuments have been constructed with the minimum damage to the natural environment. All water ways have been preserved and simple stone bridges have been constructed when laying foot paths across the water ways. The stone boulders identified with in the site have been preserved and the foot paths have been created by blending the stone boulders. As such the entire site is created as site which has a valuable cultural landscape thus having an exceptional **Ecological Value**. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

The remains identified so far in the monastery has provide evidences of stone build structures, brick build structures, construction of stone stairs ways blended with the natural hill slopes, Ponds carved out of natural rocks, cave dwellings constructed using natural or manmade caves with stone walls constructed in the 2nd Century BC, paintings in cave walls, etc thus having a potential **Scientific Value** to identify and learn the ancient construction technology and methodology. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

After the end of civil war in 2009 the site has now being declared safe for the visitors. As such the site has now being visited by national and international visitors. The entire visit to the

site takes about a half a day and the site is closed for visitors by 5.00 pm as there are several wild elephants in the area. As such it has an economic **Existence Value**. The government of Sri Lanka together with the Department of Archaeology has invested in the site preservation and had allocated financial provisions through its annual budget and the 2013 and 2015 American Ambassadors Grant for Cultural Preservation has also provided two financial assistance grants through their Large Grant programme. The line ministry of the Department of Archaeology also has provided financial assistance for the site through the Central Cultural Fund. Since the department is short of human resources, the site has now been handed over to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura to carry out the Archaeological activities commencing from the 1st September 2012. As such the site is now equipped with an economic **Optional Value**. Since the commencement of the archaeological work in the site by the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, not only the Department of Archaeology but also the different government department in the area together with the clergy and the ordinary people has come forward to join hands in the preservation of this rare monastery in the aim of handing over it to the future generations thus having an economic **Bequest Value**. Since the monastery is a rare example of an ancient mediation forest monastery, it may be developed as a possible destination of a Cultural and Eco Tourism for the national and international visitors after its conservation and provision of services. As such the site is potential of having an economically viable **User or Market Value**. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)), (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

As such the site could be identified as an Ancient Meditation Forest Monastery having a very significant **Socio Cultural** and **Economical Values**. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/significance-of-the-rajagalaarchaeological-reserve-and-values-associated-with-it/ - (Written by the Author)),
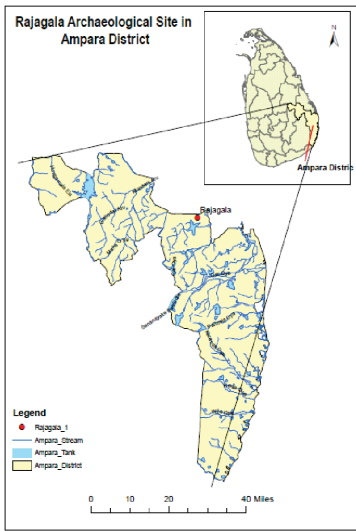
4. Location and Setting of the Monastery

Grikumhiila Tissa Pabbatha Viharaya in the Rajagala Archaeological Reserve is situated within the Ampara District of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka.
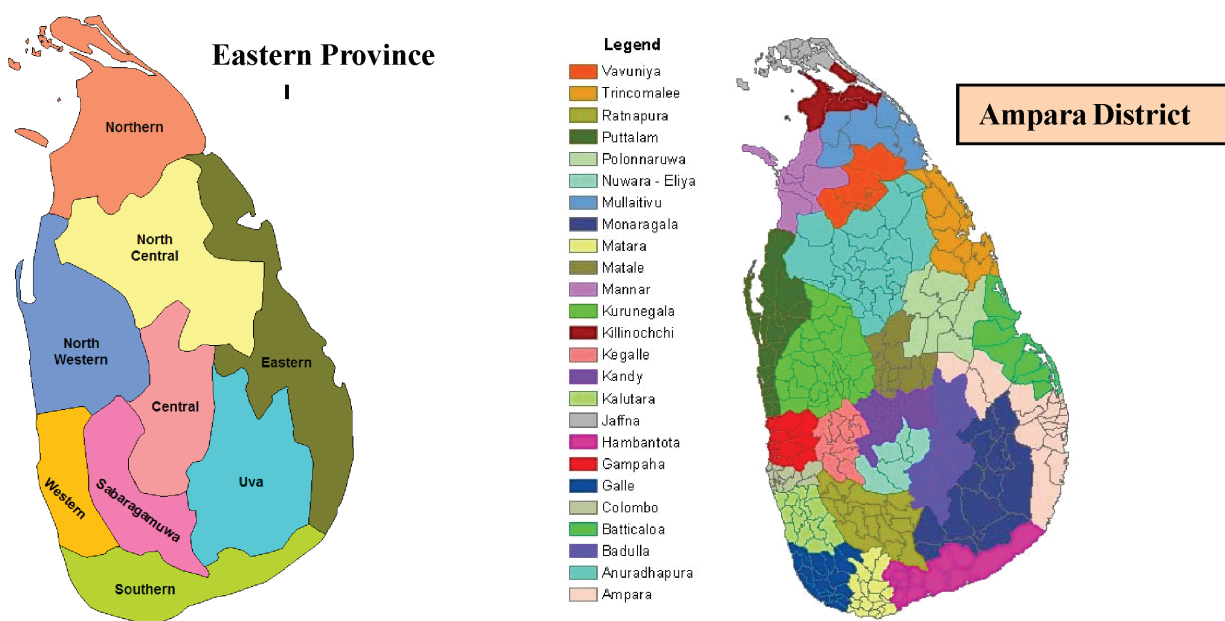
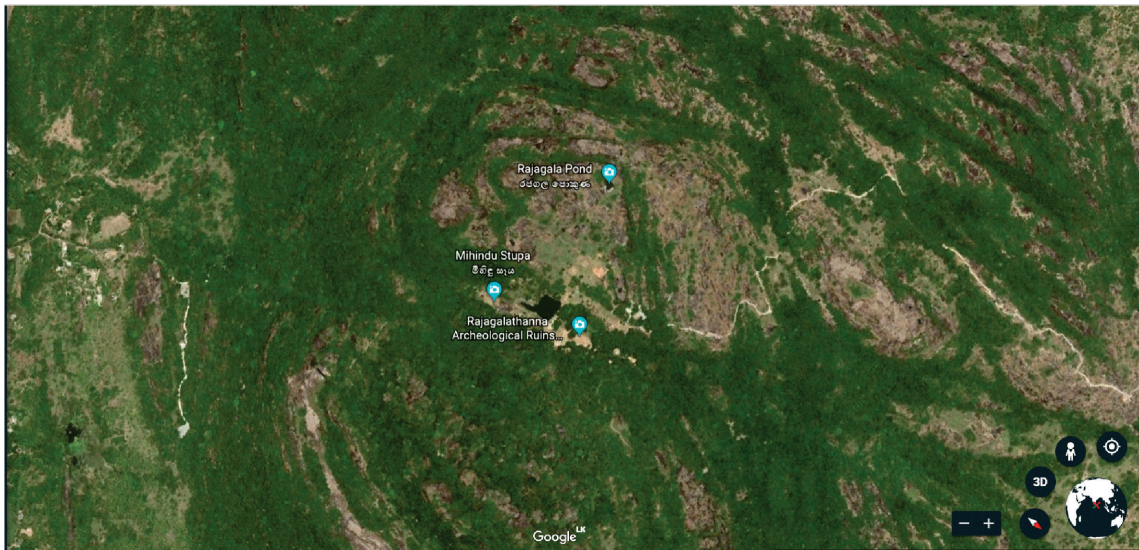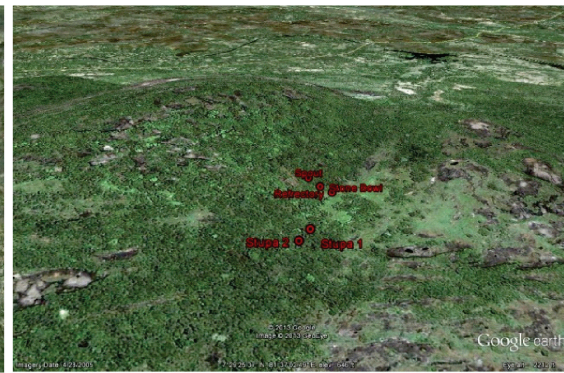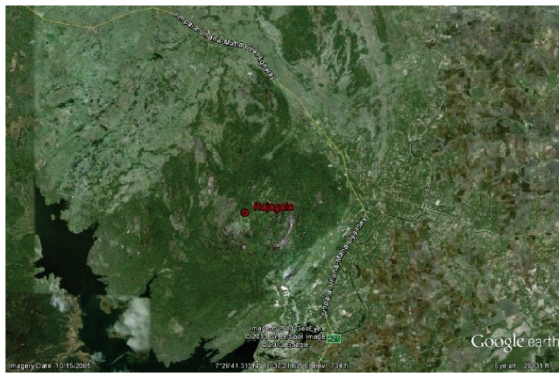Map of Sri Lanka   Location of the Ampara District of Sri Lanka

Location of the Site
in the Ampara District

Location of the Site in Relation to the Google Map of Sri Lanka

Location of Project

The monastery is constructed about 346 meters from the Mean Sea Level spanning about 400 hectares of natural environment using a two mountain ranges and a flat plane in between. This could be identified in the survey plan and the contour plan given below.

RAJAGALA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE
(Contour Plan)
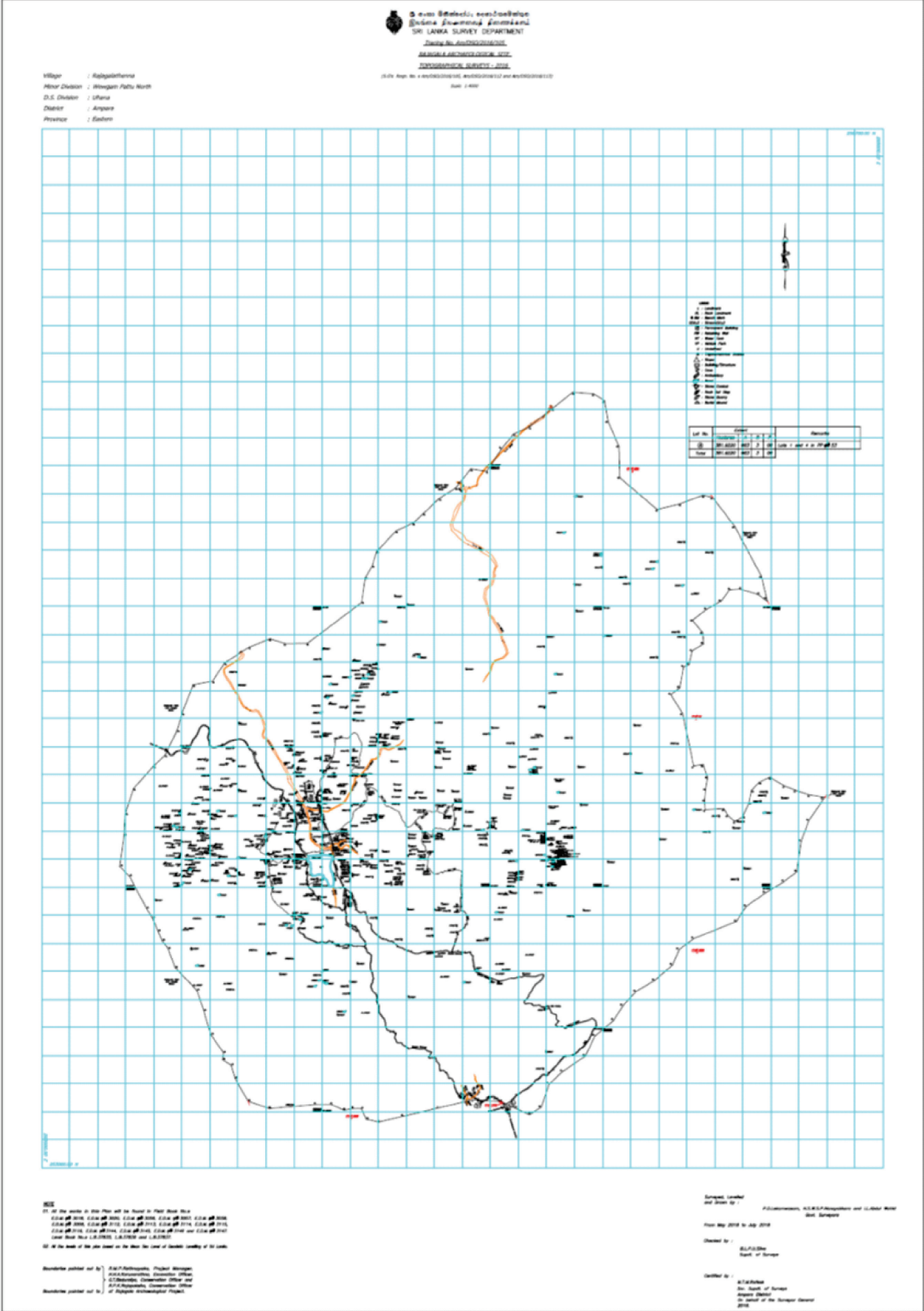
The monastic remains in the Rajagala could be identified on the mountain which is about 346 meters above the mean sea level spread in about 382 Hectares (943 acres) declared as an Archaeological Reserve. The approach to the flat plain of the mountain is through beautifully build two stone stairways through the dense forest blending with the slope of the mountain. The common buildings such as Stupas, Refectory, Uposathagra (Building devoted to religious observances), Hot Water Bath House, A house build to collect spring water for cooking purposes with two large stone

bowls, a small tank and several other unidentified buildings are scattered in this area. (http://fhss.sjp. ac.lk/rajagala/rajagala-location-and-monuments/ - (Written by the Author)). The dwelling units of the mediation monks who were residing in this monastery were located in the rocky hill above this area converting the caves into dwellings. As much as about 50 such dwellings could be identified in this area together with stone walls build during the 1st century BC still intact. Accordingly, about 500 monks would have lived in these cave dwellings. It is interesting to note some of these caves have inscriptions as "Seethalena" which is depicting the name of cool cave. This monastic complex has been vacated due to the South Indian invasions in 1215 AD since then it has been gradually deteriorated due to the natural causes and also due to the vandalism by treasure hunters in near past. (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/ - (Written by the Author))

The Dipavansa and the Mahavansa, Sri Lanka's two great religious chronicles, contain accounts of Arahath Mahinda, first-born son of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka of India, travelling to Sri Lanka and converting King Devanampiyatissa to a Buddhist. (Holt 2004: 795–799). Inscriptions and literary references also establish that Buddhism became prevalent in Sri Lanka around the 3rd century BCE, the period when Mahinda lived and remained as the national religion from that date. (Holt 2004: 795–799). Mahinda Thero outlived Devanampiyatissa, and died at the age of 80 in Sri Lanka. King Uttiya, who succeeded his brother, organized a state funeral for Mahinda and constructed a stupa to house his relics at Mihintale. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahinda_(Buddhist_monk)). The inscription in Rajagala monastery confirm the fact that Thera Mahinda came to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism and lived there until his death. (Paranavitana 1962: 159–162).

Transcript: Ye ima dipa paṭamaya idiya agatana Iḍika [tera] Mahida teraha tube
Translation: "This is the stupa of the elder Ittiya and the elder Mahinda, who came to this Island by its foremost good fortune." (Paranavitana 1962, 159–162)
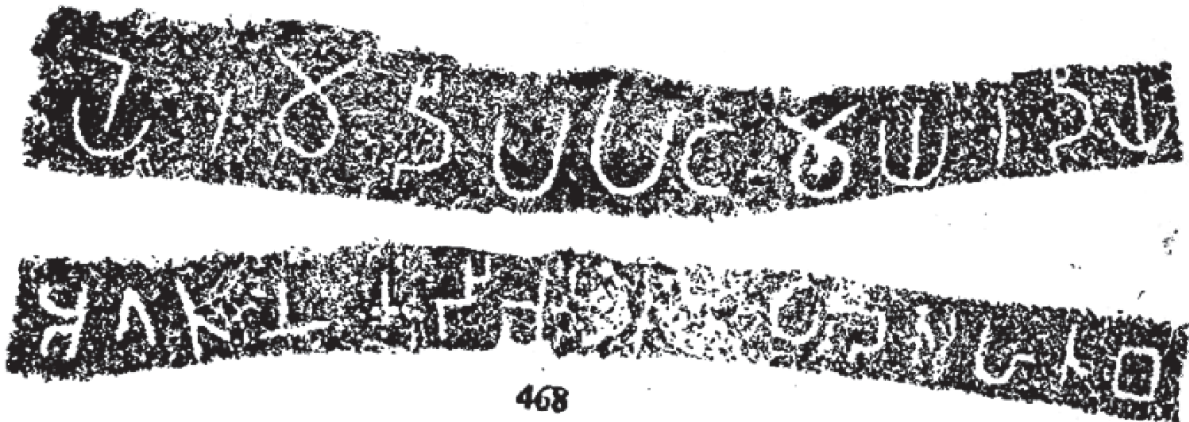

Archaeological remains in the area could be identified in four distinctive sections in the site. They are –

1. Area in which the common buildings are located

2. Area where caves are located

3. Area from Grand Stairway from the tank up to the Northern Stairway

4. Area from two stupas to stairway to caves
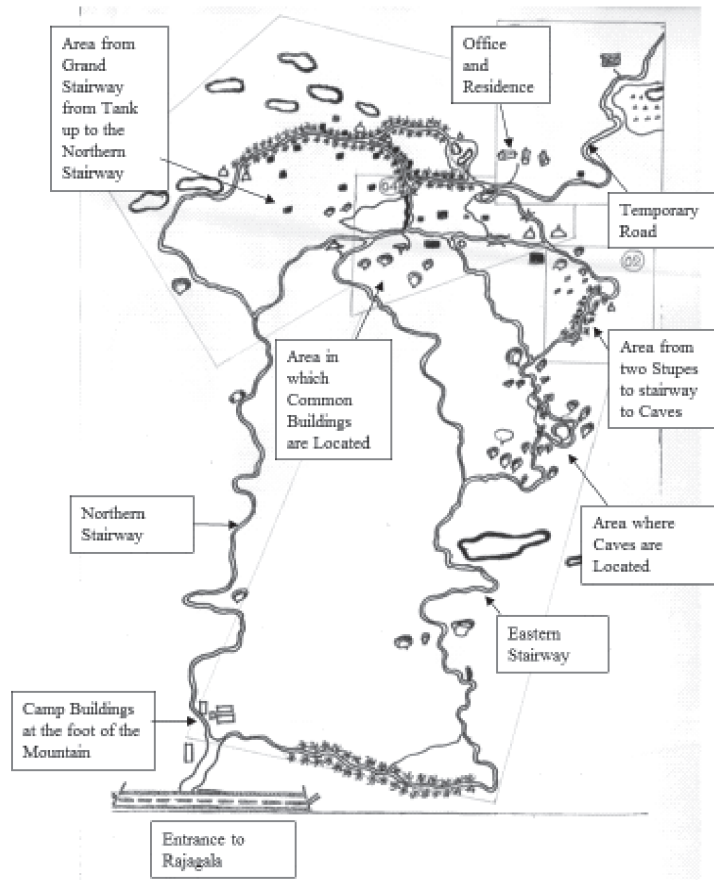
The flat plain of the Rajagala Mountain in which the common buildings are located has to be approached trough two stairways one in the North and one in the east. The one and half hour climb will provide a present experience of walking through forest environment, hardship of climbing of stone steps, resting in the way side cave resting places, walking through natural rock outcrops, experiencing the mingling water in rock cut water ponds and experiencing the distance landscape. This will also allow the present visitors to refresh their minds how the enlightened monks would have walked through these stairways by discussing their noble preaching and resting in the way. The visitors will also be able to refresh their minds about ancient the people who had used these stairways to reach the common area to carry out their religious observances and to provide offerings to the enlightened monks.
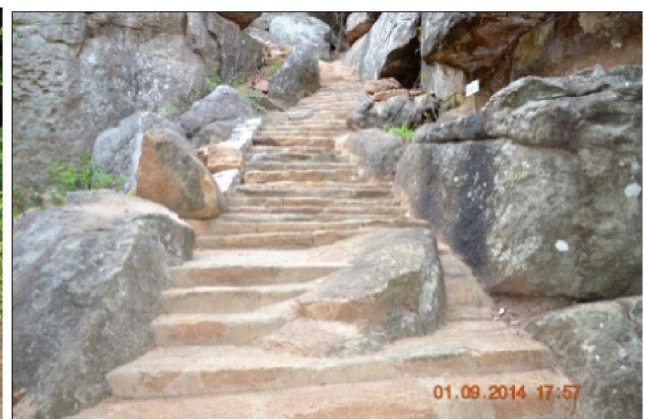
Stairway Leading to the Top of the Mountain
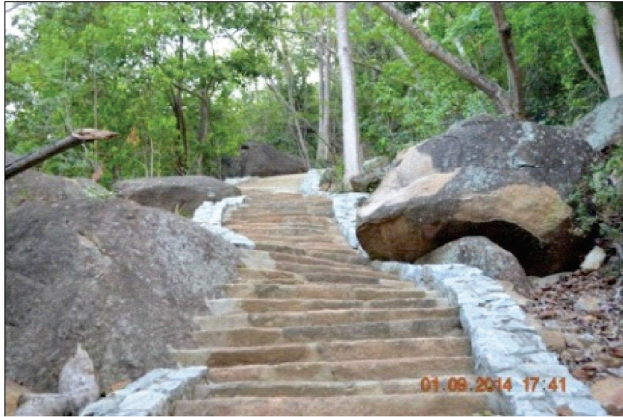
Stairway Leading to the Top of the Mountain


Distant Environment

Natural Pond

Umbrella Cave

Stupa of the Relics of Arahath Mahinda

After reaching the common area experience 0f the setting out of the monuments, their inter relationship with each other, their gradualness, their construction methodology, their usage, etc. could be seen. The environment has become pleasant as the reservoir is filled with water. The visitors could sit by the in the embankment of the tank under the shade and admire the beauty of the landscape around the tank. The landscape around the tank has been be laid out with resting places to provide more relaxation. The monument with stone bowls in which how spring water is collected to two stone bowls for storage and used for cooking purposes in the refractory is one the key monuments that could not be seen in any part of the world. The special cave carved to look like an umbrella may

be to assemble the people to hear the preaching of a priest is also rare in the world. In this area the common buildings such as Mihindu Stupa, Refectory, Hot Water Bath, Poyage, Tamptage, Stone Bowl Building, Path way, Lahabthage, Two Stupas in Single Platform, Bodhigrara, Grand Stairway, etc are situated showing the creativity of the ancient builders. This area has been designed exclusively to the common people as they were not permitted to go to the private areas of meditation monks.
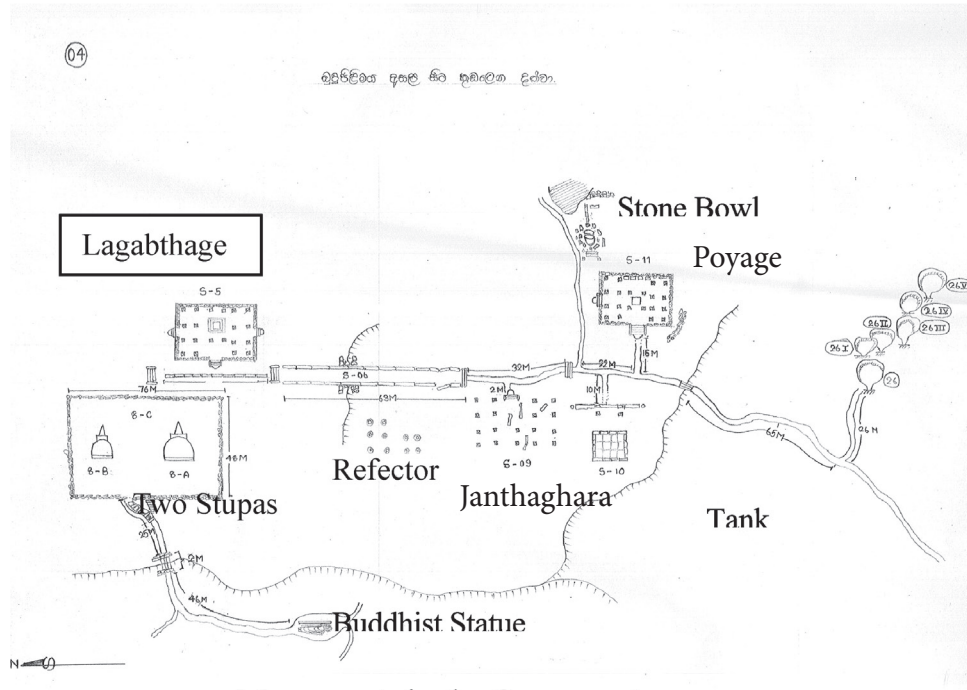
Monuments in the Common Area

Small Tank at the Top of the Mountain

Poyage

Stone Bowl Building

Refectory

Janthaghara

Lahabthge

Tampitage
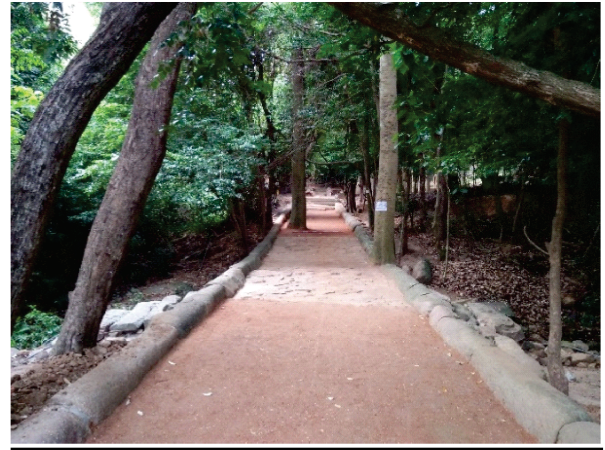
Pathway

Small Stupa

Buddha Statue

Bo tree Shrine

Large Stupa

Area Around the Tank

Grand Stairway

Area where caves are located

Thereafter the private areas in which enlightened monks which was not opened to the public in ancient times were situated in the higher plain of the mountain. This could be reached once again walking through forest environment and climbing stone steps through natural stone boulders. The remarkable experience of creation of cave dwellings for meditation monks with the construction methodology of stone walls in Anuradhapura Period to convert the caves into cells of monks could be identified in this area. The technological and scientific experience of the construction of the superstructure during the 2nd century BC is identified as there are no such surviving walls in any part of the country build during the 2nd century BC. The inscriptions caved in these caves to identify the persons names and their family who has donated these caves are remarkable The specially build stone entrance ways to caves and how the toilet has been created in a cave to experience the natural environment when a person get into it and close the entrance door by hanging the robe in a wooden pole placed between two rocks are also excusive. The remains of ancient paintings in the caves will also provide a pleasant experience of the painting technology prevailed in this era. Walking through the forest by admiring the natural environment, distance landscapes and mingling of the insets will provide a great experience as how the natural environment has been planned to create the a pleasant environment for the meditation monks. Fauna species roaming around the forest is also provide a great experience. The stone build mediation cells located on top of rock outcrops show how the monks have been mediated by admiring the distance landscape and the cultural environment. It is worth mentioning that some of these caves

have an airconditioned environment inside the caves by relating a wind path flow in to the caves and the inscription in these caves state that they are cool caves (*Seetha Lena*).
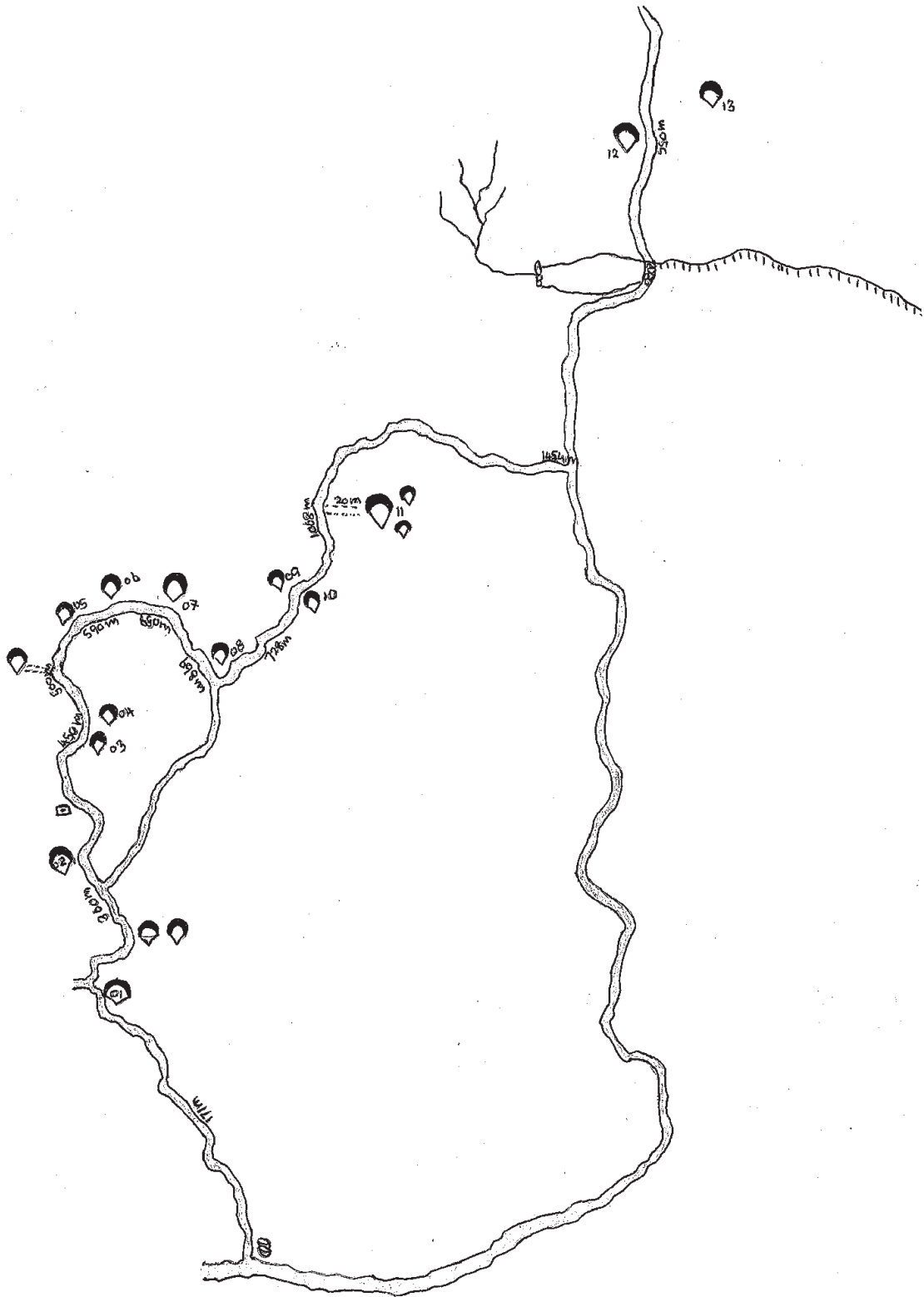
Area where caves are located

Shamika Lena

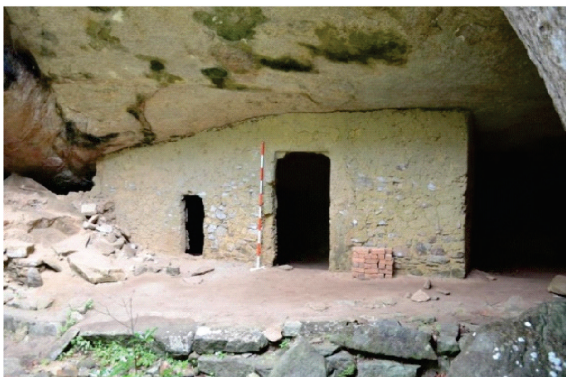Caved with a Stone Doorway

Stone Door Way
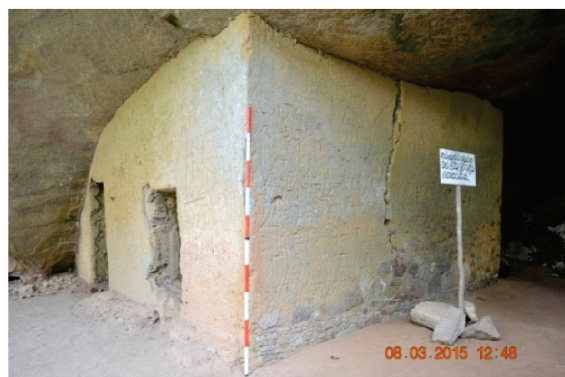

Caves with the Stone Doorway

Sihamuka Cave

Stairway Leading to the Caves with the Doorway


Cool Cave

Grand Cave

Cave

Landscape seen from the Top

Landscape seen from thetop

Area from Grand Stairway from the tank up to the Northern Stairway

The grand flight of steps leading from the embankment of the tank in which thousands of enlightened monks had descended towards the tank to have their bath before leading to the refectory to obtain their daily meals shows the creativity of the ancient builders. This flight of steps will lead to a different area where the different types of buildings which are constructed by using bricks, stone columns, etc. with entrance flights of steps decorated with Guard Stones, Balustrades, and Moonstones etc. There are several ruined Stupas and stone cut ponds could be seen within this area. Walking through this area will have different experience of ancient monastery structures and their construction methodology. Since the area is opened to a distance landscape admirable experience of the natural beauty of the distance landscape could be experienced.
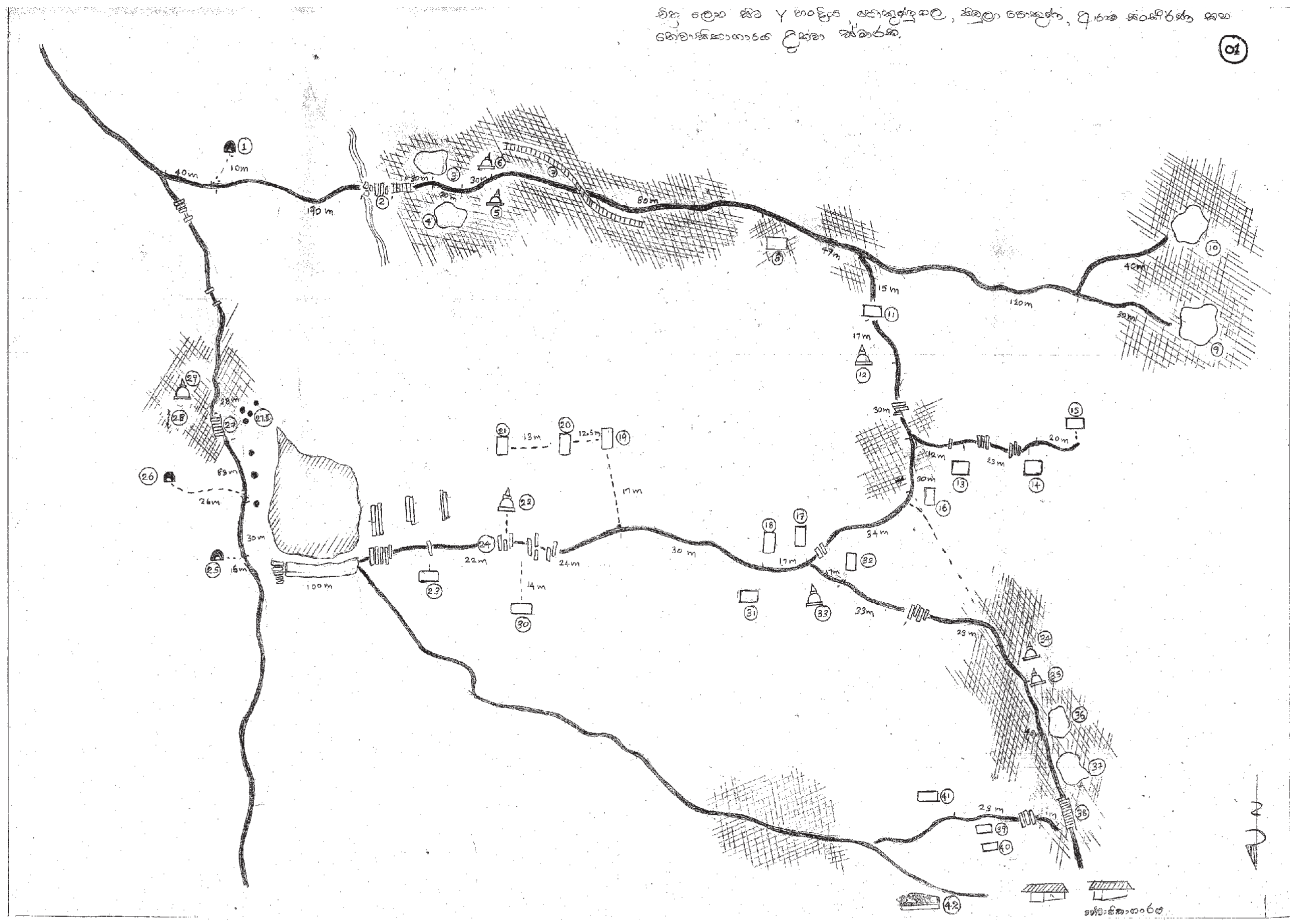
Area from Grand Stairway from the tank up to the Northern Stairway

Grand Stairway

Area Above the Rajagala Small Tank

Pilimage

Building with Octagonal Columns

Stupa

Landscape in the Area

Landscape in the Area

Landscape in the Area


Landscape in the Area

Landscape in the Area

Tank Bund

Area from two stupas to stairway to caves

The pathway leading from the platform of two Stupas towards the cave in which paintings of natives could be seen shows that this are have been inhabited even during pre-historic period. Beyond that there are several buildings with mediation walks, residential buildings, etc.
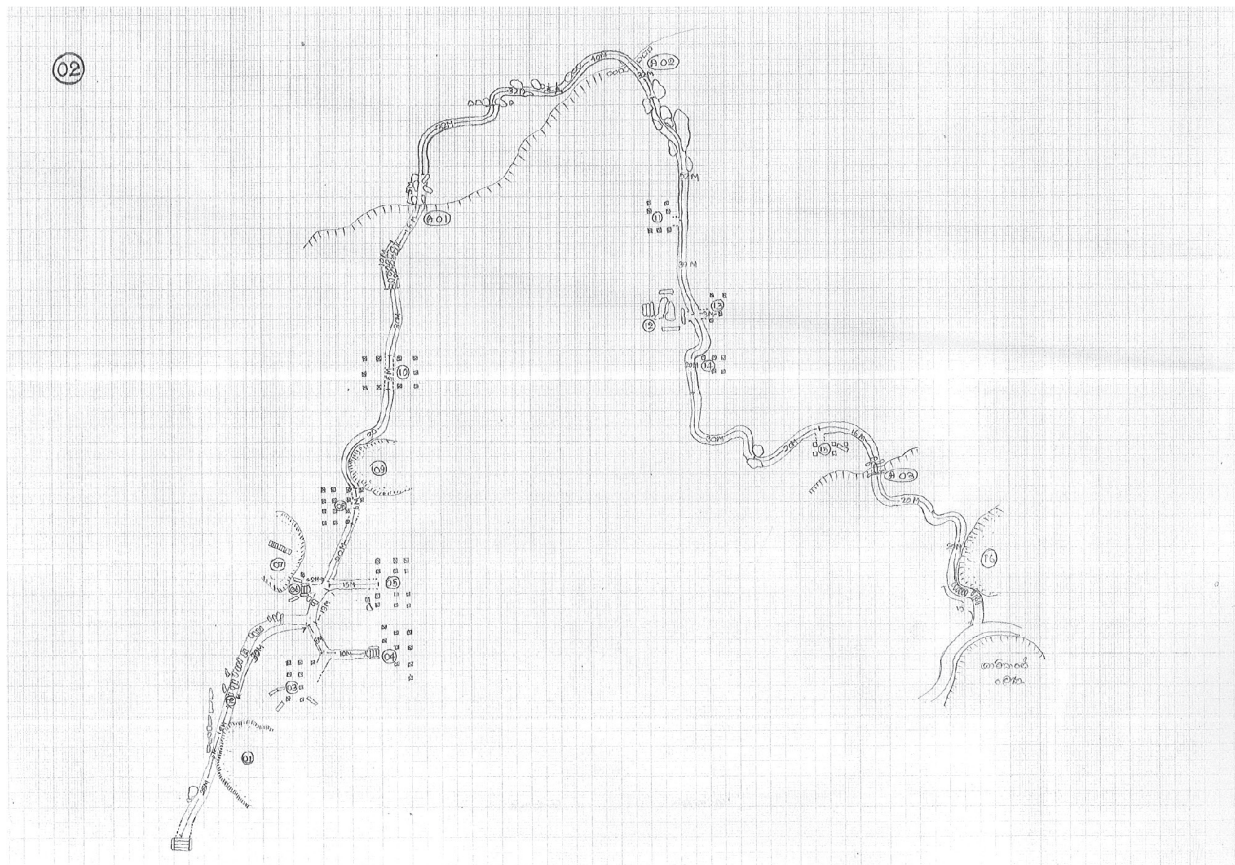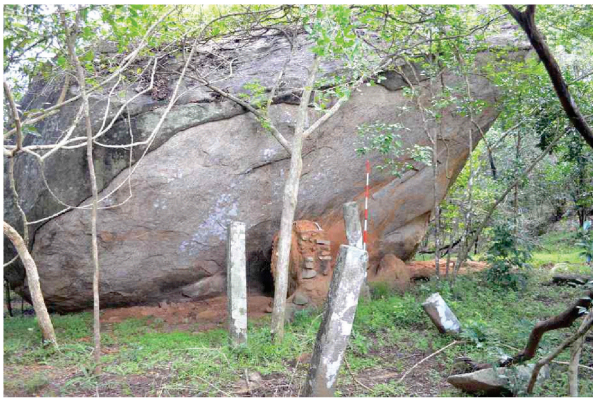

Area from two stupas to stairway to caves

Cave Dwellings

Monuments

Monuments

During explorations 45 Cave Inscriptions, 16 Rock Inscriptions, 03 Slab Instructions and 02 Pillar Inscriptions have been identified so far.

5. Transfer of Rajagala Archaeological Activities to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the Activities of the Rajagala Integrated Archaeological Project

5.1 Transfer of Rajagala Archaeological Activities to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Rajagala Meditation Forest Monastery has not been inhabited since the fall of Anuradhapura Kingdom in 1215. During the 800 years of neglect the monastery has been decayed due to the natural causes

and man-made intervention especially as result of treasure hunting. Almost all monuments including approach stairways have been destroyed due to the accumulation of earth and root penetration. The treasure hunters have dug holes in all monuments including stupas and caves and some of these holes are about 15 m deep. The Department of Archaeology felt that it is now the correct time to commence archaeological activities in this great exceptional monastery, they did request the Sri Lankan Government to allocate fund from the annual budget. The Sri Lankan Government accepted the request and allocated LKR 10 million in the year 2012.

Department of Archaeology did commence work in June 2012 but soon realised that they are lack of manpower and recourses to handle the work that has to be carried out in the site. Since it is essential to commence work immediately, the Director General of Archaeology invited the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in July 2012 to take over the site to provide necessary archaeological services urgently. The academic staff of the Department of History and Archaeology visited the site in July 2012 and decided to take over the site as it is urgent to commence the archaeological activities in order to protect the site and review it to its ancient glory to present it to national and international visitors. Over and above the academic members of the department also felt that it is their utmost responsibility to serve the nation with their experience in the field of history and archaeology.

In keeping this in mind an agreement was signed between the Vice Chancellor of the University and the Director General of Archaeology for the *"Procuring or Furnishing the Archaeological Investigations, Archaeological and Architectural Conservation, Infrastructure Facilities, Landscaping, Layout, Maintenance, Security, Public Relation, Construction and Administration Services at the Rajagala Archaeological Reserve"* and site was taken over on the 01st of September 2012.

The initial work programme was to conserve the monuments identified with in the common area only. After the work commenced in September 2012 the project authorities did a detail study to identify the monuments in the site and it was felt that it is quite urgent to continue the restoration and protection work within the entire archaeological reserve as the other monuments are also in a quite poor state. Since the entire archaeological reserve of Rajagala is unique and irreplaceable property, which belongs to the entire nation, and demonstrates the importance of safeguarding it urgently, quick action has to be taken before it is vanished through due to natural and man-made deterioration process.

University of Sri Jayewardenepura appointed a Project Team to carry out the work identified in the Rajagala Archaeological Reserve. They are; Prof. P. B. Mandawala as the Director in Charge of the current AFCP projects and the Consultant Director of Conservation and Maintenance, Prof. Padmasiri Kannangara as the Coordinating Consultant Director, Prof. Karunasena Hettiarchchi as the Consultant Director of Documentation and Research, Prof. Alexander Kapukotuwa as the Consultant Director of Archaeological Excavation and Ven. Dambara Amila Thero as the Coordinator of the Spiritual and Ethical Development Centre.

The operations of the site is carried out through a team comprising a Project Manager, Chief Archaeological/Conservation Officer, 12 Archaeological/Conservation Officers, 02 Technical Staff Members, 05 Management Staff members, 20 (Maximum) Skilled Workforce recruited according to the annual work plan and 100 (Maximum) Unskilled Workforce recruited according to the annual work plan thus comprising a maximum of 141 work force members.

The vision of the project is to revitalise the ancient character of ancient Ariyakara Viharaya at Rrajagala archaeological reserve to a forest monastery for the use and enjoyment of the present and future societies. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/ - (Written by the Author)). The mission of the project is to preserve the architectural remains and the cultural landscapes of Rajagala as an ancient meditation

forest monastery and as a site of archaeological importance and develop it to a spiritual and ethical Development Centre. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/ - (Written by the Author))

Rajagala Team

Main objective of the project is to preserve the architectural remains and the cultural landscapes of the ancient meditation monastery of Rajagala by arresting deterioration processes and carrying out interventions to revitalize the ancient character of a forest monastery for the enjoyment of the present and future societies and to revive it as a spiritual and ethical Development Centre. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/ - (Written by the Author)) The sub-objectives of the projects are to provide training to the archaeological undergraduates of other universities in Sri Lanka with regard to the mitigation measures that have to be taken to arrest the deterioration of archaeological monuments and to teach them in the international standards of interventions - ie. Preventive Conservation, Stabilization, Conservation, Consolidation, Anastylosis and Restoration - by allowing them to obtain on site practical training. preservation of the natural and man-made environment; to educate the local community on the importance of cultural preservation and raising awareness on the protection of archaeological sites bay way of conducting seminars, workshops, educational programmes, etc.; to obtain participation of the local community for the project activities by recruiting technical persons, skilled and unskilled laborers from the project are; to invite local community to participate in the project activities by helping by way of rendering free services to transport materials to the top of the mountain; and to provide spiritual and ethical development to university community. (http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/rajagala/ - (Written by the Author))

Desired main result of the project is to revitalize the ancient character and cultural environment of the site for the enjoyment of the present and future societies by way of extending the life span of the monuments and to use the environment for the spiritual and ethical development of the intellectuals. Expected Sub - desired results of the project are to set an example to the country of harnessing resources

available in universities for the participation of the preservation of cultural heritage; to produce a practically trained Archaeological Conservation Graduates; to obtain participation of the local community members to safeguard the heritage remains in their community by helping the Department of Archaeology; to raise social and economic levels of the community through the upliftment of cultural tourism and eco-tourism in the site by the conservation of Archaeological Remains and Natural Environment and to uplift spiritual and ethical attitudes of the intellectuals.

5.2. National and International Support to the Project

In the year 2013 University of Sri Jayewardenepura submitted a proposal to the 2013 American Ambassadors Fund for the Cultural Preservation Large Grant Programme. It was a competitive grant of US $ 1,000,000.00. After evaluating the proposal Large Grant Programme provided a sum of US $ 100,000.00 which is equivalent to LKR 13.855 million to the project to conserve identified monuments in the Common Area. The University of Sri Jayewardenepura also allocated a sum of LKR 3 million to restore the dilapidated tank at the top of the mountain. In the year 2014 University of Sri Jayewardenepura decided to prepare a five-year plan for the Archaeological Excavation, Conservation, Presentation and Reuse of the Rajagala Archaeological Reserve. The total cost of the project was identified as LKR 323.897 million. A Memorandum was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers requesting LKR 268.382 million to complete the project by end of March 2020, which was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in their decision of 05th August 2015 and allocations were provided on annual basis. In the year 2015 University of Sri Jayewardenepura submitted a proposal to the 2015 American Ambassadors Fund for the Cultural Preservation Large Grant Programme. It was a competitive grant of US $ 1,000,000.00. After evaluating the proposal Large Grant Programme provided a sum of US $ 150,000.00 which is equivalent to LKR 23.76 million to the project to prepare a comprehensive survey plan and to conserve identified monuments in other ares. Since the expected progress of the project could not be met as expected due to the reasons beyond the control of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Cabinet of Ministers in their decision on 05th February 2020 has decided to extend the project till the end of December 2022.

Progress Achieved so far

Work commenced on the 01st September 2012 by establishing a camp at the foot of the mountain to house the Site office and Dormitories together with temporary building at the top of the mountain.

Site Office at the Foot of the Mountain

Dormitories at the Foot of the Mountain

Temporary Buildings at the Top of the Mountain

The initial work programme began with the commencement of the restoration of the Eastern Stairway, Tank and the Lahbathage (initially identified as Asanaghara). An exploration programme and copying of inscriptions were also carried out with the participation of the Archaeology Special Under Graduates.

Exploration of the Site

Copying of Inscriptions

Since there was no acess way to the top of the mountain project team did a survey in the forect area and a new acces was created to reach the top of the mountain.

Thereafter work extended to the excavation and conservation of the ruins identified in the common area followed by the conservation of caves and monuments identified in the area above the tank. Progress achieved so far is given below.

1. Eastern Stairway – Conservation is Completed

2. Rajagala Tank - Restoration is Completed

3. Lahabathage (Asanaghara) – Conservation is Completed

4. Chapter House (Pohoyage) - Conservation work completed
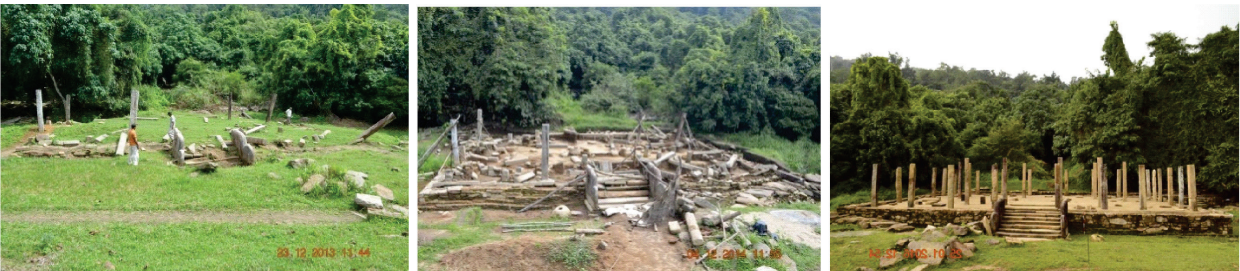
5. Small Stupa Which is also believed to be the Stupa Enshrined with the Relics of the Arahath Mahinda Thero – Conservation is Completed

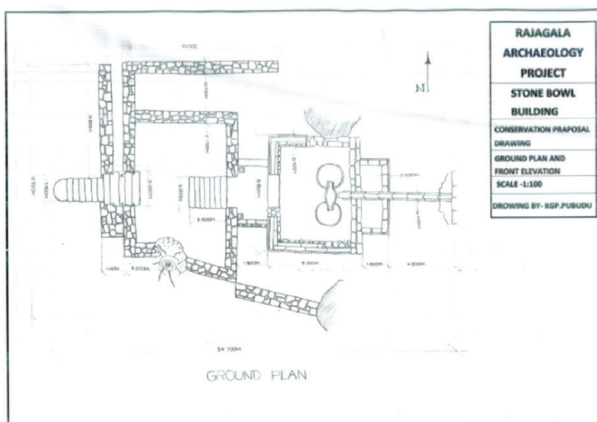6.   Large Stupa – Conservation is Completed

7.   Parapet Wall around the Two Stupas – Conservation is Completed

8.   Bo-tree shrine (Bodhighara) in between the two Stupas – Conservation is Completed
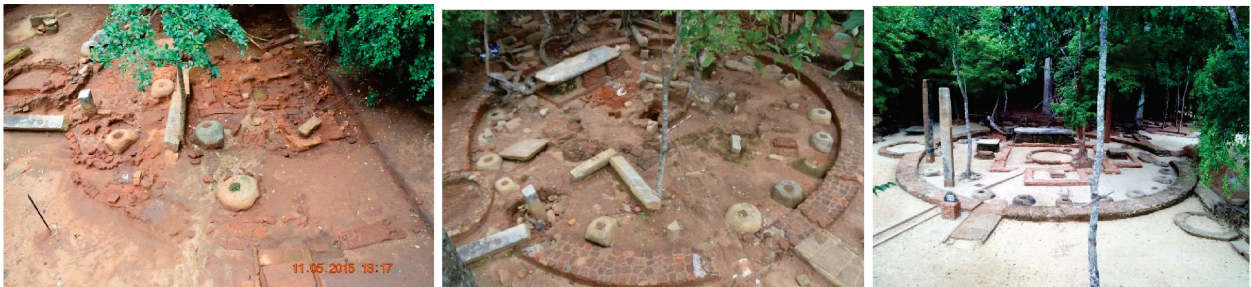
9.   Stone Bowl Building – Conservation is Completed
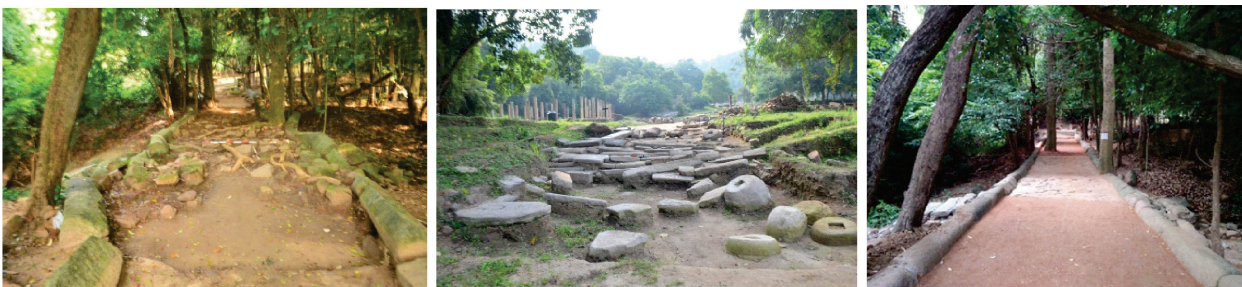
10. Refectory - Conservation is Completed

11. Hot water Bath - Janthaghara- Conservation is Completed

12. Building on Posts - Tampita Building - Conservation is Completed

13. Walk Way in the Common Area - Conservation is Completed

14. Landscaping Around the Tank - Work is Completed

15. Pathway connecting the Shamika Cave from the Cave with Native Paintings - Conservation is Completed

16. Grand Stairway near the Rajagala Tank – Conservation is Completed

17. Habited Cave No. 01 - Conservation is Completed

18. Cave No. 01 Donated by Devotee Shamika – Conservation is Completed

19. Sihamuka (Lion Mouth) Cave with Stone Doorway- Conservation is Completed

20. Platform of the Mihindu Stupa – Excavation & Conservation is Completed

Monastery Complex situated above the Tank

21. Building No. 22 (Building with Guard Stones) - Conservation is Completed

22. Building with Octagonal Columns - Conservation is Completed

23. Conservation of the Unidentified Building No – 24 – Partly Completed

24. Unidentified Building No. 25 – Partly Completed

25. Stupa No. 26 – Partly Completed

26. New Buildings

Site Office   Site Residence   Police Post

Antiquities Analysis Office   Archaeology Office   Information Centre

Sanatory Facilities– At the Top of the Mountain   At the Foot of the Mountain

27. Carparks at the Entrance – At the Foot of the Mountain

28. Regional Activities carried out by the Project to Promote Relations between the People of the Eastern Province and Rajagala


29. Educational programs

30. Religious Programs

31. National activities carried out by the Rajagala Archaeological Project to introduce it to the country
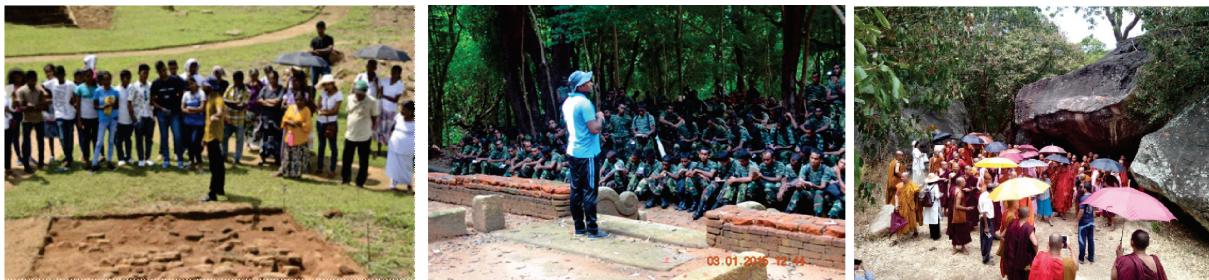

32. International Activities carried out by the Project with the Objective of making the Rajagala Archaeological Site a Centre for the Exchange of Knowledge of Local and Foreign Archaeologists

  (a) Three research excavation programmes were carried out to identify the Human Settlement and the Pre-historic era of Rajagala with the participation of Local and Foreign Universities. Following Universities and Institutions were invited to participate in this programme.

- Deccan College – India
- University of Sri Jayewardenepura – Sri Lanka
- Max Plank Institute – Germany
- University of Cambridge – England
- University of Queensland – Australia
- University of Delhi – India
- Department of Archaeology – Sri Lanka
- Central Cultural Fund – Sri Lanka
- University of Peradeniya – Sri Lanka
- University of Kelaniya – Sri Lanka
- University of Ruhuna – Sri Lanka
- University of Rajarata – Sri Lanka
- Central University of Haryana – India
- University of Delhi – India
- Mythic Society, Bangalore – India
- Post graduate Institute of Archaeology – Sri Lanka
- Bhikku University, Anuradhapura – Sri Lanka
- National Museum Institute, Janpath, New Delhi – India
- Department of Anthropology and Sociology, IISER, Mohali – India
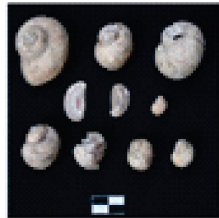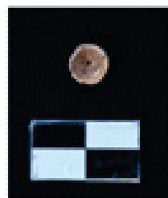
Animal Remains
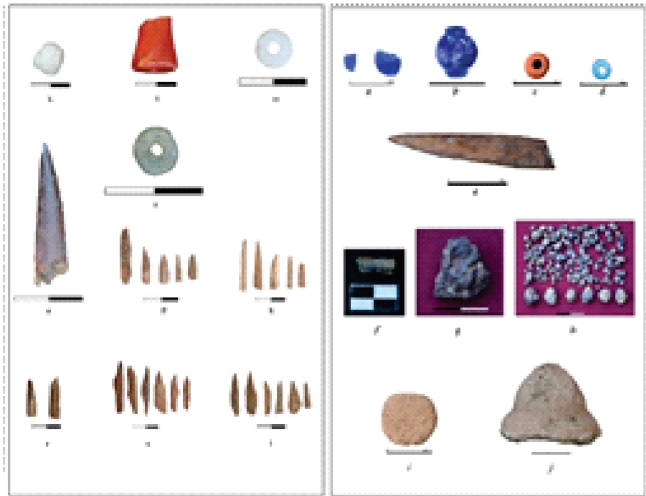
Small Objects

Pottery Discoveries   Lithic Tools

(b)   Visits by American Diplomats and Officials

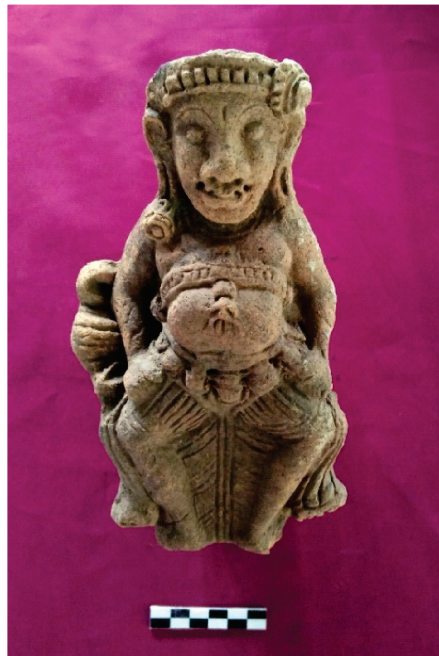Her Excellency the Ambassador for Sri Lanka

Director of the AFCP Programme   Official from the American Embassy

33. Artifacts Found from Rajagala

34. Rajagala Publications

(i)   Historical Rajagala (Printing in 2015)

(ii)   Rajagala Archaeological Research (Printing in 2018)

(iii)   Rajagala Inscriptions (Printing in 2018)

5.3. *Listing of Rajagala to the UNESCO Tentative List of World Heritage*

Considering the nomination papers prepared by the Author the Monastery Complex has been now included in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List on the 27th February 20202. (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454/)

5.4. *Budget and Expenditure*

Since its inception in 2012 the projects have been allocated a sum of LKR 325.542 million from which LKR 238.373 million up to the end of December 2019. It is estimated that LKR 154.347 million to be spent by end of December 2022 to complete the project.

6.   Future

The completed site will be presented to the viewer transmitting the significance of the built heritage, in terms of its authenticity and aesthetic value. A visitor centre will be established at the foot of the mountain. Once the conservation and restoration work is completed Department of Archaeology have to carry out the maintenance work of the site. The Centre for Spiritual and Ethical Development of the University Community established within the Rajagala Archaeological Reserve and will be continued with the participation of two institutions. Steps have to be taken to include Rajagala as Sri Lanka's 9th Site in the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

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https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6454