

F-02: Recreational potential of Wavulpane limestone cave

K V Deepani Edirisooriya

(Sabaragamuwa Affiliated University College, Belihuloya)

Tourism is important in the Sri Lankan economy. The abundant natural and anthropogenic resources in Sri Lanka increase the recreational potential of the tourist industry. The coastal and cultural resort areas have been popular in recreation industry. The Wavulpane limestone natural cavern in

Tambagamuva pattuva of Kolonna Korale in Kamburugamuwa of the Ratnapura district is an unexploited natural resource. Due to its remoteness this is not very popular among the tourists. This pioneer work was done by data gathering and data analysis.

The objective was to identify the tourist attractions, problems on development of a recreational industry in Wavulpane and increase awareness of local people on importance of protecting the resource.

At the moment the local people are taking away the calcium carbonate of this limestone cavern, destroying the surrounding wilderness, gemming inside the cavern etc. slowly destroying the natural balance of this cavern. Wavulpane limestone cavern is the largest of the few limestone caverns of Sri Lanka. There was a similar cavern in Isthreeepura in the Kandy district but it was submerged by the Randenigala reservoir and no research was done on it. Thus the research on the Wavulpane limestone cavern becomes important in understanding limestone caverns of Sri Lanka.

The basic field research consisted of gathering information from the local people, surveying, mapping & photographing, observing the socio-cultural conditions etc. The information thus gathered was systematically analysed using socio-logical, geological and other scientific methods.

The following was identified as possible attractions of the Wavulpane limestone cave: shape of the cave; geomorphological structures of the cave; the natural drainage system; marble rock.

The cave is 410m long. There are 2 entrances which are parallel to each other, they are 6.2 and 5.1 m wide. In between the entrances there is a large limestone post. The height of the cave differs in places.

This cavern was created as a result of the gentle seeping of the hard water spring 250 ft south of the cavern. The spring is very small, only 5.4 m at its widest, but it has a flow of $0.7083 \text{ ft}^3\text{s}^{-1}$. This flow of water created all the geo-morphological structures of this carven as a reaction to chemical weathering. The most important attractions are: (1) Stalactite (2) Stalagmite (3) Ponds (4) Doling.

Stalactite and Stalagmite are of different heights and circumferences. These Stalactite and Stalagmite are found in various shapes: Bulb shaped; post shaped; spreader shaped; leaf shaped.

Andolu river, a stream which joins the Rakvana river, flowing through this cavern, makes a fascinating picture.

A large and a beautiful marble rock is found at the back of the cave. This marble rock is hundreds of years old. This was created by the influence of heat and pressure.

The natural landscape made up of (i) drainage system of the area (ii) springs, (iii) flora of the area, (iv) distribution of the limestone, makes it a very important tourist attraction. The water flow through the cavern which is called Andulu oya, flows through the rocky ground of the cavern making it most attractive to the recreational geographers. The natural beauty and hidden waterways makes it attractive to the ordinary tourists.

The hard water spring on top of the cavern which forms the water flow inside the cavern, consists mostly of calcium carbonate and iron hydroxide which makes it an excellent spa resort for skin diseases.

Around the Wavulpane cavern, there is an abundance of flora and fauna, consisting of many endemic species. This would attract the eco tourists to this cavern. The geomorphological structures have been a scenic attraction for the local tourists for generations. The various shapes of stalactite and stalagmite post, spreader and leaf etc. has been fascinating generations of local people.

The following proposals are forwarded to make this natural cavern a tourist attraction in Sri Lanka.

- (1) Develop transportation facilities.
- (2) Introduce tourists resorts around the site.
- (3) Safeguard the cavern from pollution.
- (4) To prepare a brochure about the cavern.
- (5) Conservation and enhancement of the limestone cavern.
- (6) Introduce self employment handicrafts etc. and to exploit the handicrafts of this area.
- (7) Develop infrastructure facilities such as electricity etc. in the cavern.
- (8) Specific directions on how to get to the cavern.
- (9) Develop Wavulpane area.