

HTAM SAM CAVE

HOPON

HATTI PALA DHAMMASACCA CAVE

THE CAVE, ALSO KNOWN BY ITS FORMAL TITLE OF 'HATTIPALA DHMASACCA', IS SO LONG THAT STROLLING FOR THREE HOURS DOES NOT TAKE ONE TO THE END OF IT; IT HAS YET TO BE EXPLORED FULLY.

by MA THANEGI

Over twenty five years ago, a young Pa O novice discovered a cave that captured his heart, it was so beautiful. However, the entrance, once hidden from view by creepers and bushes, was not easily accessible. This cave is called Htam Sam opens out to a steep cliff face, downwards from the side of a highway that runs from Taunggyi to Tachileik near Hopon.

The cave is 26 miles from Taunggyi and 10 miles from Hopon, a prosperous town. 📍



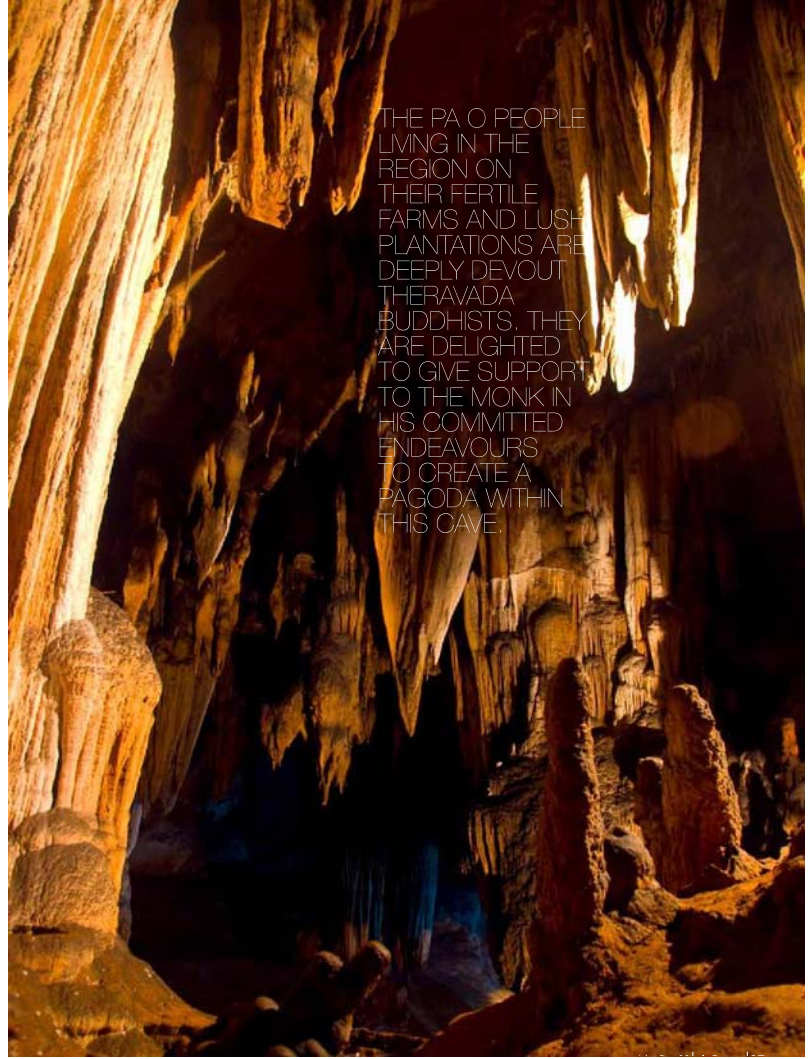


This cave is already well known to locals living in the vicinity as well as by geologists and scholars. Over the decades myths of it being inhabited by magical beings made it all the more famous. However, the difficulty of getting to it has prevented it from being widely visited.

The young novice was struck by the delicate stalactites and stalagmites in amazing formations, making the cave look like a chamber out of magical legends. He vowed to one day 'do something' to enable others to see its wonders.

Having celebrated his 35th birthday recently, the novice, now the Sayadaw U Pawrissa, is able to realise his dream with the support of his devotees, from all walks of life. Since early this year, he has managed to build a road to the mouth of the cave as well as to smooth paths within it. He is determined to make it into a Buddhist shrine accessible to all.

The cave, also known by its formal title of 'Hatti Pala Dhammasacca', is so long that strolling for three hours does not take one to the end of it; it has yet to be explored fully.



THE PA O PEOPLE LIVING IN THE REGION ON THEIR FERTILE FARMS AND LUSH PLANTATIONS ARE DEEPLY DEVOUT THERAVADA BUDDHISTS. THEY ARE DELIGHTED TO GIVE SUPPORT TO THE MONK IN HIS COMMITTED ENDEAVOURS TO CREATE A PAGODA WITHIN THIS CAVE.



Also there are many tunnels big and small leading away from the main one, so the Sayadaw and local authorities are not risking anyone getting lost, so no one is allowed to explore the far depths.

The beauty of Htam Sam fashioned by nature's hand mesmerises the visitor every few steps, even within the area that pilgrims are allowed to go. Inside this cave there are more stalactites, which fall from above, than stalagmites, which push upwards from the ground. Here, they fall from the roof of the cave in delicate, thin needles packed densely together.

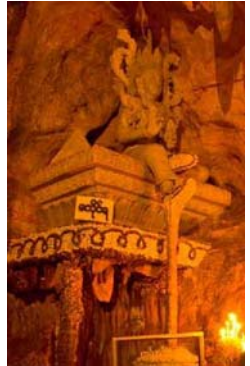


Under this stunning display, curving walls, natural archways and winding paths around throne-like ledges makes it a perfect site for a Buddhist shrine. The air is always fresh inside this cave so its seems there must be a few wind sources further down the tunnels.

On 6 July 2009, the Full Moon Day of the month of Waso, a day of great significance for the Buddhist community, 250 Buddha images are to be enshrined and consecrated herein. This merit of creating another cave pagoda means that a few centuries on, the people of Myanmar will also be marvelling at this holy site.

Even now, with only a few carvings and images inside the cave, the soft shimmer of candle lights offered to the memory of Lord Buddha turns it ethereal, like a golden palace in a fairy tale.

The Pa O people living in the region on their fertile farms and lush plantations are deeply devout Theravada Buddhists. They are delighted to give support to the monk in his committed endeavours to create a pagoda within this cave.





Hopon
Ko Yin Lay



Inside Gambia Cave



Inside Kyauk Sar Cave

ON 6 JULY, 2009, THE FULL MOON DAY OF THE MONTH OF WASO, A DAY OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY, 250 BUDDHA IMAGES WERE ENSHRINED AND CONSECRATED WITHIN THE CAVE.



He gives free vegetarian meals to all comers to the cave and to his monastery, as he is a vegetarian himself since childhood. A dedicated group of volunteers helps him in his deeds of merit, for both construction of roads, clearing of land and of feeding the pilgrims.

There are two other caves in the vicinity, one called 'Gambiya' and another 'Kyauk Sar' but they are as yet inaccessible. 'Gambiya' means magic and this cave too is believed to be the home of magical creatures. The 'Kyauk Sar' Cave, a name meaning stone inscription, is so called because inside are stacks of flat stalagmites that look like the ancient stone slabs used in the old days to inscribe statements about merits made, or to commemorate constructions

of temples. Also, this cave, which has a wide chamber the size of a ballroom, has a strong wind tunnel somewhere in its depths that lets out chilly blasts of fresh air from its entrance. The planners will first make sure of the safety of these two caves before visitors are permitted to enter.

It is nothing short of miraculous that natural wonders are still being discovered in Myanmar in the 21st century, even though unspoilt nature is one of the country's strongest charms. As the renovations of and access to these three caves are not yet complete, tourists are not yet allowed to visit them but one day, they too will have the chance to marvel at the spectacular art created by nature.