

KAYAH – LAND OF THE RED KAREN



28.12.2014 –
11.01.2015

Myanmar Cave Documentation Project 2015

The project visited the first time the karst of Kayah. The objective was to investigate for large river cave systems as known from nearby Thailand. Five townships were visited and two large systems surveyed. Kyet cave near Loikaw has beautiful sinter formations and is with 2.2 km the 3rd longest cave of Myanmar. Two additional river systems were documented with a potential for ecotourism, one being in the area of Demeso designated as future tourist destination. Kayah's tower karst emerges as a promising new caving frontier in Southeast-Asia.

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Results:

The project team could gain a good overview of the karst of Kayah by visiting 5 townships, obtaining detailed information about caves and visiting the easiest accessible cave systems. The key findings are:

- Kyet cave near Loikaw was surveyed to a length of 2.2 km and is the 3rd longest cave of Myanmar. The cave is reached in 30 minutes by car from Loikaw on a good road. The entrance area is developed as a pilgrim site by the monk U Wayama who discovered the cave in a cliff in 2011. A stair case leads to the entrance hall followed by a paved path for the first hundred meters of passage. Many strangely long wood coffins are distributed on the floor after 200 m along the passage. The visitor parts ends after 400 m in a muddy hall of 30 m x 35 m dimensions. Here an upper passage with pristine dripstone formations continues for 300 m into the mountain while a lower active part is dominated by a stream. The cave is well known in Kayah and promoted for tourism development by the local authorities in cooperation with the International Trade Center in Geneva. A reception area for visitors is built and few buildings host the monk and novices. The map and pictures help to increase visibility and interest.
- Big river caves have been found in the township of Bawlakhe. The main discovery is “Red river cave” just ten minutes’ drive south of the town Bawlakhe. The cave is entered after a 15 minutes easy hiking by a narrow entrance with some ladders leading down to a main hall. Here a large river with 15-20 m width and 2-3 m depth discharges with 5 cbm/s from the mountain ridge. Beautiful sinter formations called curtains are found at several places in the fossil part. The survey of the cave was stopped in open passage due to bad air. We assume that the recent burning of forest at the northern part of the ridge resulted in ash being washed into the cave with subsequent decomposition forming CO₂. It is planned to revisit the cave after a waiting period. The findings with pictures were reported to the government head of Bawlakhe. He intends to use the cave for ecotourism when the main road to Thailand is completed and international visitors are expected. Even larger river caves were reported to us further South near Hwapasang township.
- Huge potential for cave systems in the karst landscape west of Hpruso. Many caves, some with appearing rivers, were consistently reported from local people with good knowledge of the area. Employees of the geological survey from Nyapyitaw met during their field survey, confirmed this for the ridge stretching for 30 km west of the town. More than 90 dolines and several resurgences have been identified on topographic maps. At the edge of the area Kwaing Ngant Cave in Demeso at the district border to Hpruso was visited. The cave is reached by 1 hour drive from Loikaw and a 5 minute walk. It is used from the nearby village for an annual harvest ceremony and has a paved path. The entrance area is in a nice jungle setting and Christian sculptures placed in niches give the place a pleasant feeling. The active cave passage with a 10 m wide stream leads 200 m into the mountain until it sumps. This region is designated within the Tourism Master Plan as emerging tourist destination and the cave with the neighboring village Kwaing Ngant could be integrated into the scheme.

Cave Documentation

The project surveyed 9 caves with a length of 5.2 km. The table below gives an overview:

No.	Date	Name	Altitude	Village / Ban	Township	District	Length (m)
1	9.12.14 / 1.1.15	Kyet Gu	888		Loikaw	Loikaw	2.194
2	30.12.14	Matic Gu	380	Pun Chaung	Shadaw	Loikaw	60
3	2.1.15	Kwaing Ngant Spring Cave	915	Kwaing Ngant	Demeso	Loikaw	207
4	5.1.15	Red River Cave	156	Yae Ni Pauk	Bawlakhe	Bawlakhe	1.275
5	5.1.15	Japanese Soldier Cave	131	Yae Ni Pauk	Bawlakhe	Bawlakhe	55
6	6.1.15	Saw Lon Spring Cave	170	Saw Lon	Bawlakhe	Bawlakhe	420
7	7.1.15	Khe Ka Yaw Gu	962	Htee Paw Sol	Hpruso	Loikaw	50
8	8.1.15	Thay Pyay Kone Gu	907	Thay Pyay Kone	Loikaw	Loikaw	815
9	9.1.15	Zoy Yu Thate Di Kuang Gu	906	Num Mun	Loikaw	Loikaw	120
							5.196

The surprise is the length of Kyet cave with 2.2 km making it 3rd longest cave of Myanmar with Red river cave possessing a similar potential due to a large open continuing passage. The 5 longest caves of Myanmar are now:

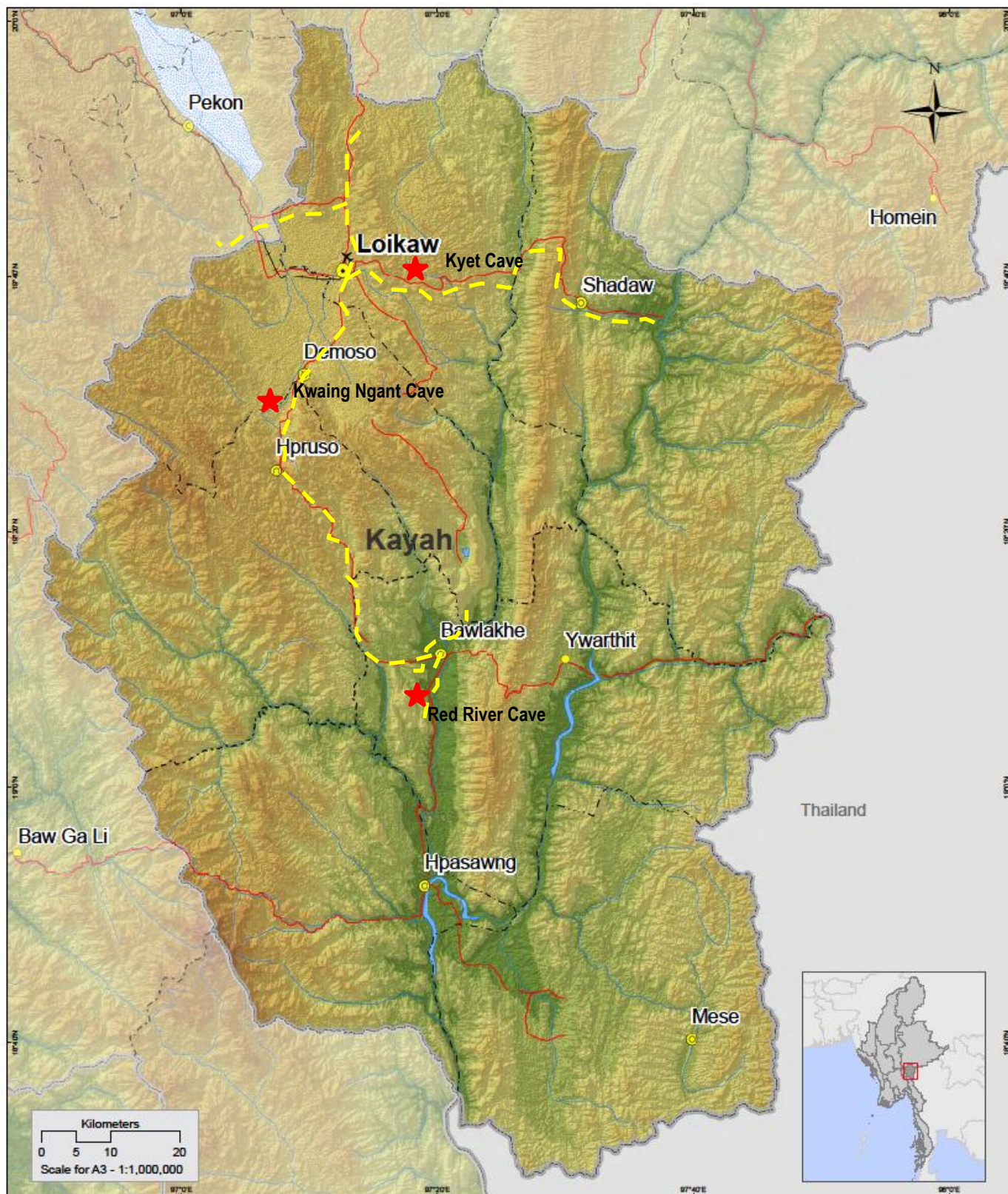
No.	Name	State	District	Length (m)	Year
1	Khauk Khaung (Stone Cave)	Shan	Ywangan	4'790	2012-14
2	Namun Spring Cave	Shan	Pinlaung	2'628	2013-14
3	Kyet Cave	Kayah	Loikaw	2'194	2015
4	Stone Spring Cave	Shan	Ywangan	1'917	2014
5	Mondowa Gu	Shan	Taunggyi	1'770	1998

Challenges and Outlook

An overview of the area and access situation was achieved with several river caves identified in a beautiful karst landscape. This puts Kayah on the map as one new frontier for large river caves so far only known from Northern Thailand. The challenge lies within the access. The Kayah state authorities allowed the visit of major towns and caves close to the road with limited possibilities for overnight stays outside of Loikaw. It was requested to identify in advance the intended areas in order to assess the security situation. Such information can be provided based on the findings for a planned expedition in February 2016.

Visited areas

Driven roads are indicated by yellow dashed line, red stars mark the major caves. Overnight stays in Loikaw, Shadaw and Bawlakhe ▼

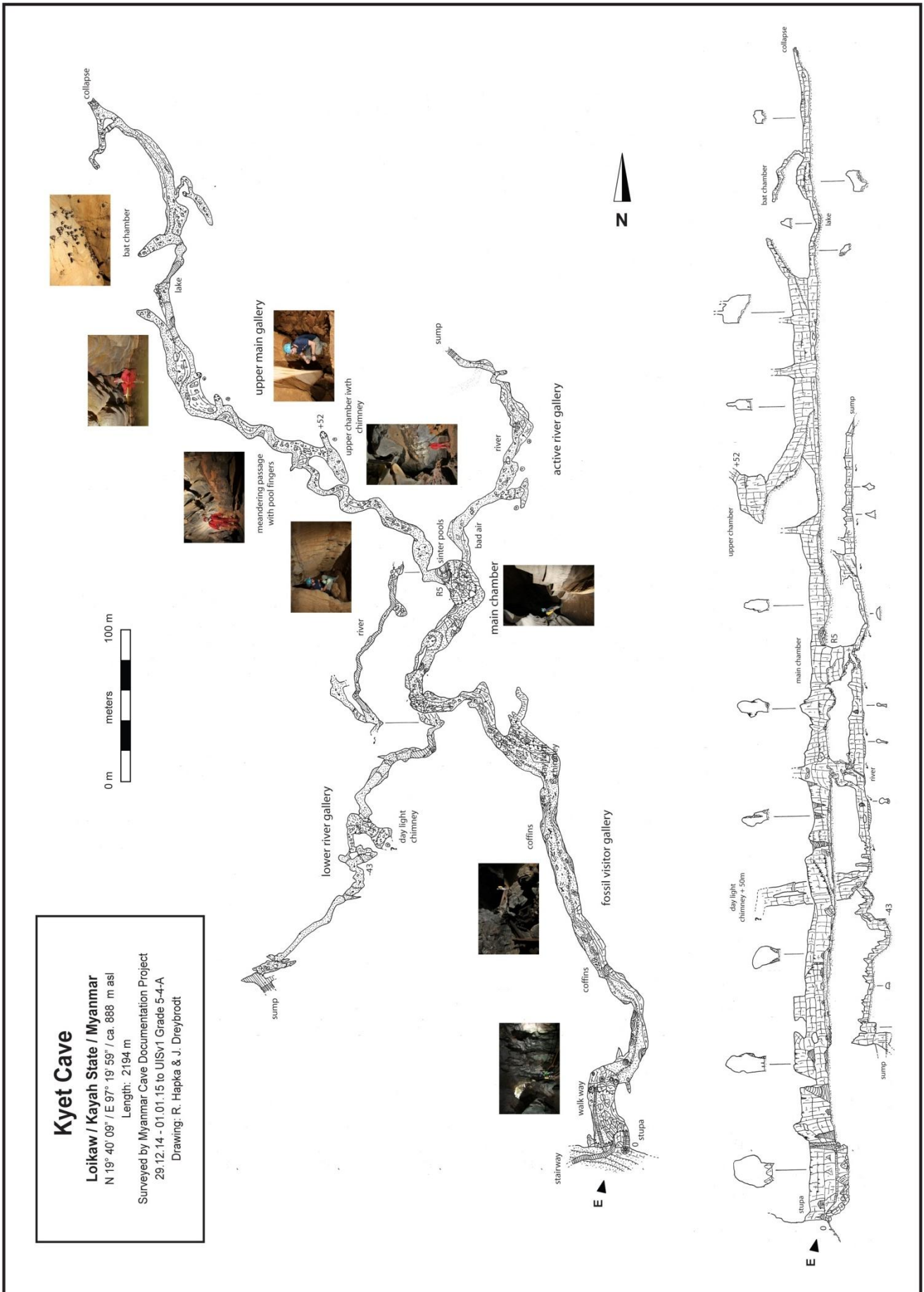


<p>Map ID: MIMU182v03 Creation Date: 17 April 2012.A3 Projection/Datum: Geographic/WGS84</p> <p>Map produced by the MIMU - info.mimu@undp.org www.themimu.info</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✈ Airports ✈ Railway ✈ District Boundary ✈ State Boundary ✈ International Boundary ✈ River/Water Body ✈ Non-Perennial ✈ Perennial ● State Capital ● Township ● Sub-Township — Road — Stream --- Township Boundary 	<p>Elevation (meters)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 - 250 251 - 500 501 - 750 751 - 1,000 1,001 - 1,500 1,501 - 2,000 2,001 - 2,500 2,501 - 3,000 3,001 - 4,000 4,001 - 5,000 5,001 - 7,002 	<p>Data Sources : MIMU Base Map - MIMU Boundaries - WFP/MIMU Elevation : SRTM Place names - Ministry of Home Affair (GAD) translated by MIMU</p>
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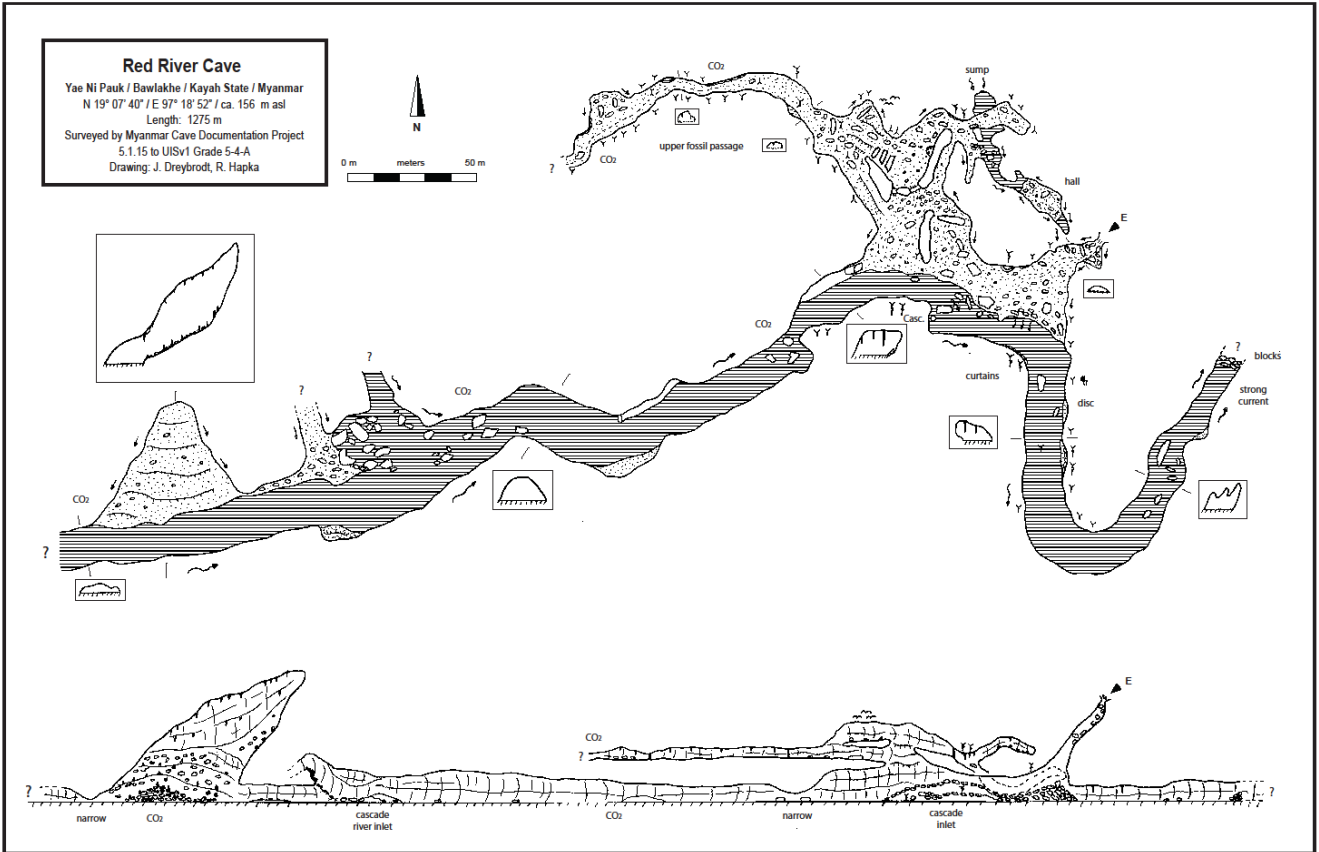
Disclaimer: The names shown and the boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Cave Maps

Kyet Cave with plan view and cross section (© Myanmar Cave Documentation Project)

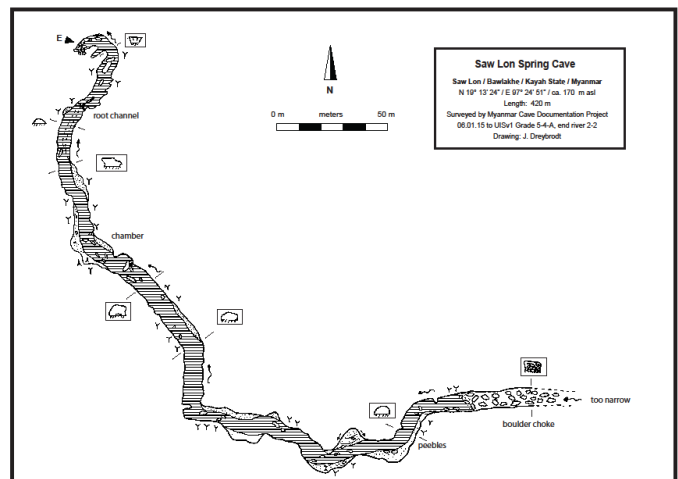
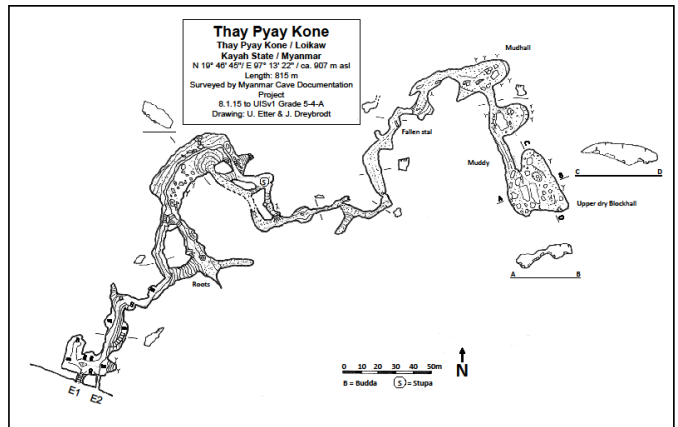
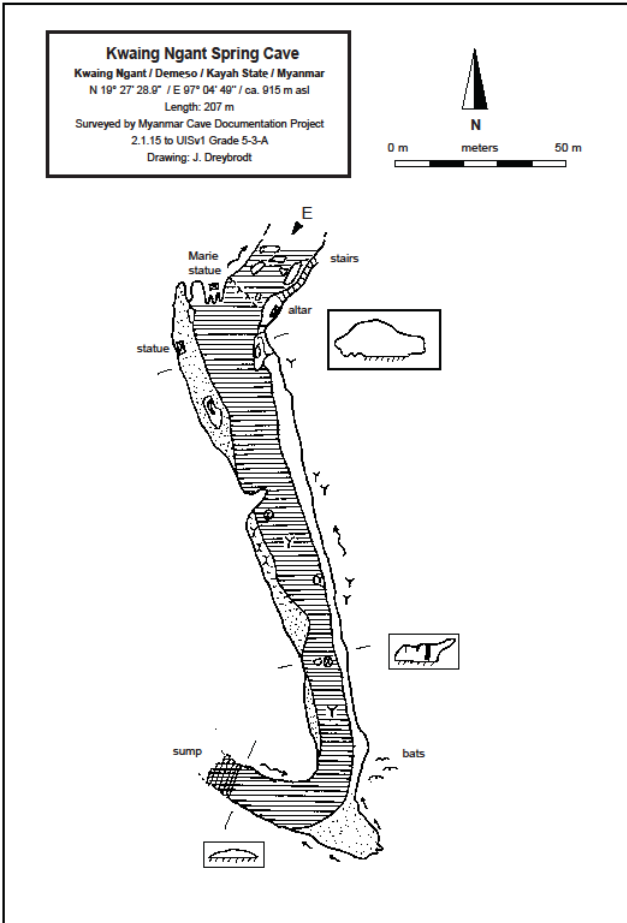


Red River Cave near Bawlakhe with continuing open passages



Kwaing Ngant Cave with end siphon

Thay Pyay Kone at a monastery north of Loikaw, below Saw Lon near Bawlakhe

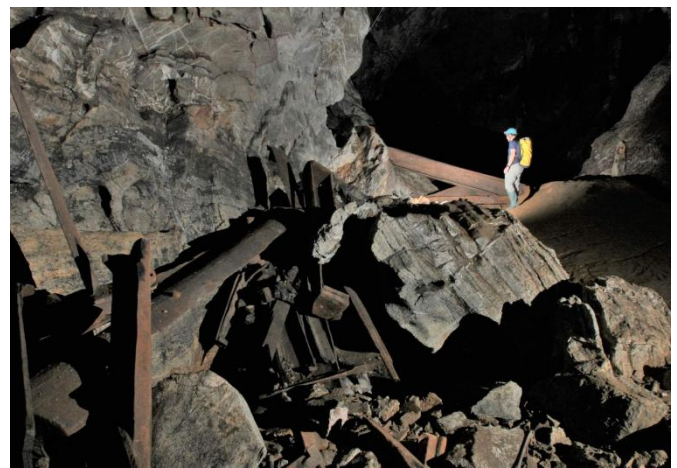


Pictures

Ceiling Kyet Cave (Photos C. Densham) ▼



U Wayama, the monk who discovered Kyet cave with the team showing pictures (Photo R. Hapka) ▲



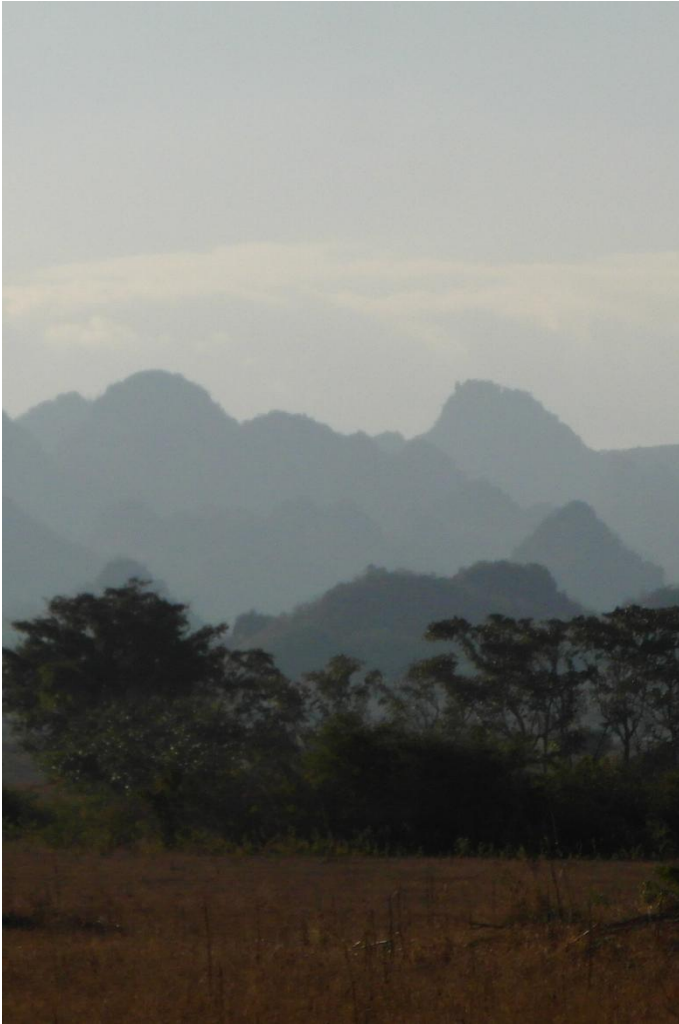
Stalactite chamber with helictites (Photo C. Densham) ▼

Kyet: Coffins near the entrance (Photo: C. Densham) ▲



Pictures

Tower karst near Kwaing Cave in Demoso (Photo J.Dreybrodt) ▼



Kwaing Ngant Cave with Christian statues and emerging river ▲
(Photo J. Dreybrodt)



Sinter curtains in Red River Cave (Photo C. Densham) ▼

Main passage Red River Cave (Photo C. Densham) ▲



Expedition Team 2015

From left to right: Chris Densham (UK), Marc Boreau (F), Khun Soe Kham (Guide, MY), Urs Etter (CH), Roman Hapka (CH), J. Dreybrodt (D/CH, coordinator) with sister Rose from Shadaw Church in the center.



We are

Experienced cavers organized in worldwide national caving societies with a large speleological expertise.

We partner with authorities, NGO and research institutions.

Our Mission

We bring value to Myanmar by a systematic documentation of caves and karst for conservation and ecotourism purposes. 24 cavers of 8 nations contributed in 10 expeditions

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the cooperation with the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism. Especially we thank U Phyo Wai Yar Zar for valuable support and arranging logistics.

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