

Krem Liat Prah: the story behind the exploration of the longest cave of Indian sub-continent.

Krem (=cave) Liat Prah was explored as a part of an ongoing project, "Caving in the Abode of the Clouds Project". The name is based on a Sanskrit word "Meghalaya" which is indeed also the name of an Indian State of great interest to the International Caving fraternity. Due to its unique geographical location, Meghalaya is blessed with world's highest record rainfall. This feature, added to a warm climate and extensive areas of limestone, has created various prominent caves. It was the year 1992 when a small team of four European Cavers visited to Meghalaya in search of caves and realized the huge caving potentiality within the state. Consequently, in 1994, they came in contact with Meghalaya based the members of Meghalaya Adventurers Association Mr. Brian D. Kharpran Daly and Donbok Syiemlieh and from then onwards the systematic exploration of caves across Meghalaya started as an enduring partnership between Indian, European, Middle East and American Cave Explorers.

Through this productive collaboration, supported by the Meghalaya State Tourism Department there have been 25 exploration visits to various parts of Meghalaya and as a result, the whereabouts of over 1,540 caves and cave sites are tabulated out of which 925 caves have been explored / partially explored to yield in excess of 41.4 kilometres of measured (Mapped) cave passage, still awaiting discoveries. To shape this work acknowledgments are also due to the Grampian Speleological Group, UK for its regular financial support and the Ghar Parau Foundation, Mount Everest Foundation and NSS International Grant Fund for financial help at various times. Many of the caves explored till date contain impressive river passages, deep shafts large and ancient relic passage. Together these features create cave systems equal in size and beauty to those found anywhere else in the world and put Meghalaya firmly on the world-caving map as a

significant Cave and Karst Region.

Among all the explored caves, the most prominent one is Krem Liat Prah cavernine system. This is not only the longest cave of Indian subcontinent, but has also secured its position in the world's map of longest caves.

Several years before the initial exploration of the system actually began, the members of Caving in the Abode of the Clouds Project was informed of the likelihood of a massive cave system that would traverse the Shnongrim Ridge..The information came first from a coal and limestone extraction contractor, Mr. Larsing Sulian, from the Sutnga area, who was well aware with the Shnongrim Ridge and surrounding areas and had an amazing amount of information about the local caves. In the year, 2000 when Mr. Larsing was assisting the exploration team in conducting a reconnaissance of the Shnongrim Ridge area he outlined his belief that there is a huge cave system that drained water from the North West side of the Ridge through to the Liten Valley on the South/South West side of the Ridge.

During the year 2002 Exploration visit a new section of the Shnongrim ridge for expedition yielded in great success : Krem Liat Prah. Referred to as the "aircraft hangar" by the exploration team members, due to the sheer size of the cave passages, a large entrance in the base of a cliff led into a vast (40m wide) passage where the stream was flanked by high mud banks and dotted with enormous boulders. Dry leads of a comparable scale led off on either side, along with smaller and wetter passages. After 5.9 km of surveyed passage the main cave was found to get strong. Returning in the year 2003, exploration of the Krem Liat Prah was extended from 5.9 km in length to 8.3 km taking it from the 8th to the 6th longest cave in India.

In the year 2004 a cave, Krem Um Im situated on the South West flank of the Shnongrim Ridge, was originally explored in 2002 and 2003, extended from 1.2km in length to 3.2km.. During the course of the exploration few more caves were also found to be connected to Krem Liat Prah.

These connections were very significant as they not only increased the length of the Krem Liat Prah System from 8.4km to 14.9km, but also lifted its position from 6th to the 2nd longest cave of India.

Exploration in the year 2005 saw a new shaft entrance added to the Krem Liat Prah and the other end of the system Krem Um Im-5 was extended from 943m in length to 1,623m measuring the total for the cave system to 15.9km, further strengthening its position as India's second longest cave. In 2006, the Krem Liat Prah/Um Im cave system was further linked with a newly explored Krem Labbit (Khaidong) to create a single cave system of 22,202.65m in length and at that point Krem Liat Prah became longest known cave at that time in the Indian Sub-continent. Year 2007 saw further exploration and linking of several other new caves (sinks) to the Krem Liat Prah Cave System extending it from 22,202m to 25,225 in length.

In 2008 the linking of the Liat Prah Cave System to Krem Labbit (Moolesgni) via a 3m sump free dive and the connection of two other potholes into the system along with the exploration and mapping of new side passages characterized a cave system of 30.397km in length and the first cave in Indian Subcontinent to exceed 30kms in length.

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April 2014

The Unearthed Hollow: a documentary to popularize the sports of Caving in India

In 2013, Mr. Ashay Sahasrabuddhe from Dept. of Communication and Journalism, University of Mumbai was pursuing his Master of Arts in Electronic Media and for his final documentary project, he thought of a very different and exciting topic of caving. Caving is not one of the popular sports in India and choosing this subject, was a brave choice. For him, the topic was perfect because of his passion for adventure sport as well

as film making.

He began with an initial research about the caving as sport and caves in general. By tried to understand various aspects of this topic included current status of caving in India, technicalities of the sport, equipment required etc.

His documentary sheds sufficient light on caves biodiversity, and formation of caves as well. Dr. Jayant Biswas, President of National Cave Research and Protection Organization provided very nuanced and helpful information on cave science for this film. Mr. Bal Bendkhale who has registered over 300 small-big caves in Maharashtra also gave his insights. The cave he chose for the film has historical context too, and Ashay hasn't missed to highlight it in his film.

Before the actual shooting of documentary began, Mr. Ashay visited few times to plan for the actual shooting, especially for lighting and other technical arrangements to the targeted cave which is located in the Bhagwati fort, Ratnagiri, Maharashtra. Just for few shots, an underwater camera was used. The adventurous shots of the film really stimulate the audience to get a feel of the real caving. He also prepared an animated map of the cave for better understanding of cave exploration. All these efforts have made this film a very good one considering the self-funded low budget.

With limited technologies and expertise Mr. Ashay's effort really paid off. The film will definitely attract the adventure lovers, to every cave lover and to every enthusiastic person who wants to see an exciting film on human-nature interaction. Hope, these types of films will be promoted by government of India in future to promote Adventurous Sports in India.

The film is available in YouTube

["https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yrt4U4CffTE"](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yrt4U4CffTE)

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