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## FEATURES

# Krem Puri of Meghalaya, India, Claimed to be the Longest Sandstone Cave of the World

Every year an international caving expedition is organized by the members of the Meghalaya Adventurers' Association in which renowned cavers from all over the world participate. This ongoing project started since 25 years back by the name of Caving in the Abode of the Clouds Expedition. During this tenure the team explored several notable caves some of which have already been listed as the longest and/or deepest caves in the map of world caves. In the year, 2018 Caving in the Abode of the Clouds Expedition took place between the 5th of February to the 1st of March 2018, returning to the Jaintia Hills District for the first two weeks in order to continue the ongoing exploration of Krem Chympe from its new upper entrance in the village of Sakwa, East Jaintia Hills and then to undertake further exploration in the Mawsynram area in East Khasi Hills, an area that had been visited for quite a number of years.

This year, the now traditionally International Caving in the Abode of the Clouds Expedition Team comprised of 30 cavers at its peak drawn from the UK, Ireland, Austria, Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, Poland and members of the Meghalaya Adventurers' Association. In addition to this, the expedition team was accompanied by 4 Italian scientists from La Venta who was specifically invited to give or clarify on a clearer picture/insight on the structure and genesis of the sandstone caves in Mawsynram area.

The 25 day exploration period was divided into 2 phases with the first (5th to 16th Feb) in the Sielkan/Sakwa/Mulian Area, East Jaintia Hills where Krem Chympe was extended and 10 other new caves explored and mapped. Following this, the second phase (18th Feb. to 1st Mar.) focused on exploration in East Khasi Hills in the Mawsynram area where reconnaissance & exploration had been undertaken in much earlier years and later in the years 2016 and 2017. Here 4 existing and partially explored caves and 5 new caves were explored and mapped. Overall the 2018 expedition explored and mapped 22.8 kms of new cave passage.

The main achievement of the Expedition at Sakwa/Mulian in the East Jaintia Hills was the extension of Krem Sakwa from 5113 m to 7287 m thereby extending the Krem Chympe-Sielkan-Sakwa system to 21,340 m from the earlier length of 18,571m. Further Krem Rupa and Krem Umsngaid which have been mapped to 1450 m and 249 m respectively during the 2017 expedition have been fully

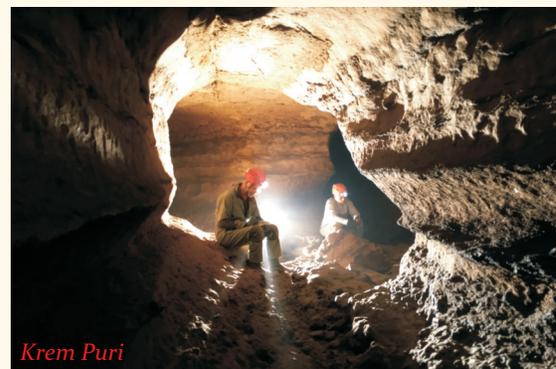
explored to 2439m and 406m. While a new cave Krem Dieng Sim 1 have been explored and mapped to 3,899m and still left ongoing, the exploration of Saisi Dung Khur in the Mulian area was concluded at 1,890m.

The Mawsynram/Laitsohum areas comprised caves developed in sandstone or calcareous sandstone. The main thrust of the expedition this year is the further extension of Krem Puri which was the find of the 2016 expedition. More concentrated efforts were put into the exploration of Krem Puri which was extended from 12,367m to 24,583m with very little leads left open. This sandstone cave has put the big limestone caves of Krem Tyngheng and Krem Kotsati to shame by jumping up to the second slot as India's second longest cave in the general category. More significantly Krem Puri has now claimed the world record as the world's longest sandstone cave – a great fame for the village of Laitsohum, under the sirdarship of Nonglwai, for the state of Meghalaya and for the country as a whole. Yet the significance of this complex system of mazes is on the discovery of bone fossils of dinosaurs, especially it is believed, of the giant marine reptile Mosasaurus (76 to 66 million years ago). Further, with more extensive probe Krem Dam has yielded another 100m to top out at 2879m.

To date (March 2018) the whereabouts of over 1,650 caves and cave locations are known in Meghalaya of which just over 1000 have been explored or partially explored to yield in excess of 491 kilometers of surveyed cave passage, with much more still waiting to be discovered.

Much of the cave that has been explored and mapped in Meghalaya over the last 25 years consists of impressive river cave mixed with massive and often richly decorated relic passage along with magnificent clean washed shafts that create cave systems equal in size and beauty to those found elsewhere in the world, maintaining Meghalaya's status on the world-caving map as a significant caving region.

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Krem Puri

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