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This is Buduruwayaya.

lmost a metaphor for our heritage - cultural wonders destroyed by a greedy humanity and lost to history, an ancient stone sculpture of the Buddha reclines in a jungle glade in the depths of Sri Lanka's remaining wilderness.

About an hour's drive along the Polonnaruwa-Dambulla highway, we turned left from Giritale junction taking the Giritale-Bakamuna secondary road which winds through the Minneriya-Giritale Natural Forest Reserve with the Elahera Oya winding its way parallel to the road on our right. This 20 km stretch of road is sheltered by massive trees on either side. Passing Diyabeduma, we soon reached Baka-

From Bakamuna town we proceeded another six kilometres on the newly built Pallegama- Hettipola road and turned left and drove about another half kilometre along a rugged, gravel road littered with fallen branches and dotted with potholes which led to Buduruwayaya, our final destination. One can also reach this site by travelling from Naula to Elahera along the road alongside the Yoda Ela ancient canal

Buduruwayaya is one of the lesser known archaeological sites along the Amban Ganga, with its statue of the reclining Buddha delicately sculpted out of a solid rock. One side of Buduruwayaya is bordered by the Wasgamuwa Natural Reserve. The serene sound of Amban Ganga flowing rapidly through the forest could be heard nearby. Unfortunately, the elephant protection fence that divides the Wasgamuwa reserve from Buduruwayaya deprives us of a clear view of the Amban Ganga. The sylvan elegance of Wasgamuwa forest with its flora and fauna, further enhances the ambience of ancient Buduruwayaya.

With the fall of the Polonnaruwa Kingdom following the Chola invasion in the tenth Century AD, the Sri Lankan monarchy was compelled to relocate its capital several times. As besieged kings retreated to the south and south western parts of the island, the ancient 'Rajarata' centres in the northcentral region were abandoned to the wilds and the jungle soon regained lost territory. Known as the Buduruwayaya Buddha statue, this site, which is believed to have been built by King Prakramabahu of Polonnaruwa, has historical significance.

Today, set amid lush green vegeta-



The stone ruins scattered in the vicinity of the Buddha statue

tion near the bank of the Amban Ganga and bordering the Wasgamuwa National Park, the Buduruwayaya Buddha statue lies forlorn, deep in the heart of the jungle. But the excavated as well as un-excavated ruins that lie all around the statue are extensive and bear testimony to a glorious past when this, now forest-enriched, place was a centre of monastic life and social activity of medieval times. This ancient social significance probably came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of internecine wars and invasions that severely depopulated the Rajarata.

## Hewn out of rock of quartz

The Buduruwayaya statue is also known as Atharagollewa statue among the local villagers. The ancient Pali chronicles record that the Buddha statue was constructed by King Prakramabahu I. The 36-foot long Buddha statue had been hewn out of rock of quartz. Scholars drew comparisons between this statue and the more famous reclining Buddha statue seen at Gal Vihara in Polonnaruwa.

Although the Buduruwayaya statue does resemble the statue at Gal Vihara, it does not aesthetically compare well. The rock carving in Gal Vihara has been found to be more precisely smoothened in the sculpting than in Buduruwayaya.

Some scholars speculate that the sculptors who worked on this statue could not complete their task and had to abandon their work due to the enemy invasion and sudden collapse of the Polonnaruwa kingdom. Then Buduruwayaya went into ruin and was enveloped by the jungle over the centuries of isolation.

Buduruwayaya was said to have been resurrected in modern times by the late Ven. Kitalagama Sri Seelalankara Nayaka Thera, the chief Bhikkhu of the Dimbulagala hermitage which lies not too far away. He had lived here for over 12 years. But in the intervening centuries before the revival, vandals have wreaked havoc here as the damage done to the ruins revealed to us as we explored the historic site.

We could see the destruction and desecration done to the statue by treasure hunters over the centuries, in their attempt to find hidden treasure. Dangerously close to the head of the statue, the base rock had been blasted and dug out by the treasure hunters.

Though other similar sites are protected, vandalism and the destruction of stone monuments goes on unabated throughout the country. Those who visit the statue will realise the extent of the damage generally done to archaeological sites in remote areas simply to satisfy the greed of people.

Buduruwayaya is another ancient site that deserves more attention and appreciation for its monastic, aesthetic as well as its one-time social significance. A close look indicates the magnificence of the sculpture and the architectural lay-out of the ancient

I first visited the historic site in 2005 and came upon the ancient stupa then little more than rubble - a heap of broken bricks and earth mound covered with shrub jungle.The place was long neglected and forsaken.

Beside the statue, there are various ruins scattered around which include a ruined ancient stupa, moonstones, Siripathul stones (stylised replicas of the Buddha's footprint) among other artefacts. The ruins indicate that there was a reputed Buddhist monastery in the past.

When we re-visited the site recently, however, I found the ruined stupa had been restored by the Department of Archaeology. A few yards away from the stupa are numerous stone ruins such as a flower altar, circular shaped stone bases on which cavities were carved to install upright stone pillars, the top having a round formation on which was placed a circular stone disc hollowed out to function as an oil lamp for illumination.

## Sudu Kanda

The chief bhikkhu told us that evidence had revealed there were several structures built in the vicinity of the ible. It is believed to be a place where Buduruwayaya archaeological site. He said that there were five more structures and stupas built around Buduruwayaya. There is another ruined structure lying at a place called Sudu Kanda at some distance into the Wasgamuwa

BUDDHA STATUE WAS CONSTRUCTED 36-FOOT LONG BUDDHA STATUE HAD BEEN HEWN OUT OF ROCK OF QUARTZ

National Park. The structure faces towards Buduruwayaya and is believed to have been connected with Buduruwayaya hermitage in the past.

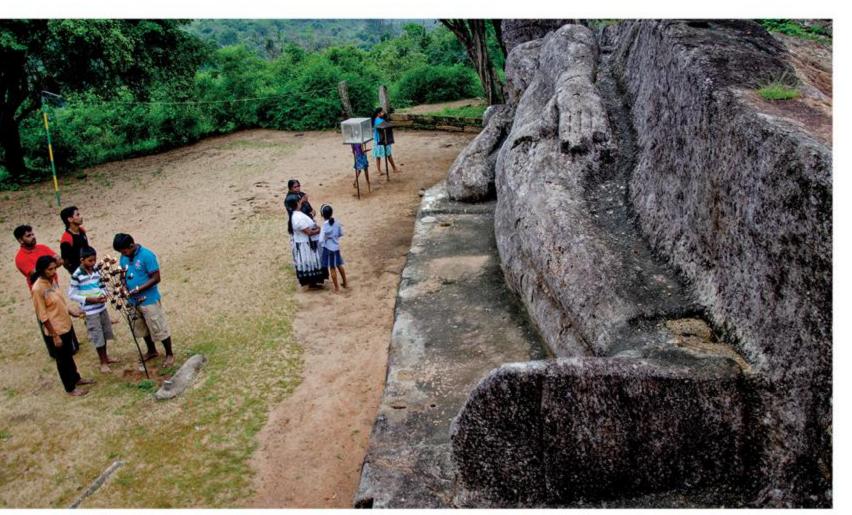
Scattered across a large area around the site are stone slabs, torso of statues, moonstones, stone inscriptions, pillars and other stone monuments. The area seems to have been vandalised by treasure hunters. The chief bhikkhu who had taken up lonely residence in the Aavaasa Ge of the Buduruwayaya temple told us that, even today, treasure hunters constantly cast their eyes around looking for the stone monuments of the temple.

Even after this historic battering, Buduruwayaya nestles in an enchanting atmosphere. Across the forest canopy, a soft cool breeze blows through the leaves of trees. The Amban Ganga flows a little distance away from the Buduruwayaya Buddha statue. On one side of the bank of the Amban Ganga is a boundary of the Wasgamuwa National Park.

A sea of green, infested with elephants, leopards and sloth bears, the forest canopy and vegetation of Wasgamuwa stretches out as far as the eye can see. From here, Sudu Kanda is visthe remnants of a ruined palace or a monastery stand connecting the Buduruwayaya archeological site.



Sudu Kanda seen from the Wasgamuwa National Park



Devotees in front of the statue