

# Spiritual edifice of sylvan charm

## Ancient Buduruwayaya



The 36-ft long rock hewn reclining Buddha statue of Buduruwayaya

**THE BUDURUWAYAYA STATUE IS ALSO KNOWN AS THE 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**

—Text & Pix by—  
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and, taking the Elahera-Giritale road via Bakamuna.

### Reclining Buddha

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 north-central 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 smoothed in the sculpting than in Buduruwayaya.

Some scholars speculate that the sculptors who worked on this statue could not complete their task and had

monastic complex. It is certainly a sacred site which can boast our rich heritage and magnificent masterpieces created by our skilled sculptors in the bygone era.

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 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



Sudu Kanda seen from the Wasgamuwa National Park



Devotees in front of the statue