

MALAYA - SCALING IN TEMPURONG RIVER CAVE.

Our last weekend visit to this great cave proved to be one of the most awe-inspiring and exciting we had ever made, giving us a fine finale to our explorations in Malaya. We knew that we would have to do some scaling, so took hammer and saws along with us and recovered some scaffolding poles and nails from a recently deserted mining Kelong. (A Kelong is a tin-ore separating structure made from a scaffolding of poles which support a series of shallow wooden troughs. Water, ore and waste tumbles from one to another and the heavy tin-ore sinks to the bottom.)

Norma and I then struggled with our equipment to the cave entrance. Inside we had to raise the poles and gear item by item up a vertical rock climb, then down a huge boulder pile slippery with guano. The next obstacle was a series of stalagmite terraces which led us upwards to a broad platform. At the top we had a rest and quenched our thirst. This was our usual halting point which gave us a chance to view our surroundings. The roof some 40 feet above was pocketed with domes and arched furrows. A little in front of us was a vertical drop of 20 feet over which, when the weather was wet, tumbled a noisy waterfall. Beyond the drop we could see the terraces and beyond the enormous boulder pile we had descended earlier, the chamber below was at least 150 feet high. Further away we saw the green of the entrance at a distance of about 1,000 feet away. This spectacular visage gave the greatest volume of cave I have ever seen from one point.

After our rest we continued over easier ground for the ledge was fairly level and floored with sand, thus enabling us to drag our poles. At the back and to the right we entered a roomy tunnel with similar floor which led to the chamber where we wanted to do the scaling.

The obvious way up was to use a wide crack which had been ascended before in the past by guano-diggers; their now rotten poles were still in place. Bit by bit I was able to cut new lengths and fit them crosswise, gradually gaining altitude until no more were needed. A steep slope led upwards to a breach in a 4 foot high step, and once past this I found myself on one side of a wide but fairly low chamber. There were no signs of digging and a hard crust had formed over the guano. The fill must have shrunk for the hard surface sloped downwards from the walls, and in places had broken away leaving a scar to show the original point of contact. In the centre of the chamber was a thick column of bedrock close to which was a deep pit. The chamber ended at a steep slope leading to a drop into Lake Passage which we had previously explored. At the top of the slope

was a slab of stalagmite floor raised vertically and looking like a tombstone; to my surprise it was inscribed in English "Here passed by the bodies of -----", and below were listed three people from R.A.F. Tengali (I have the names in my log but cannot now recall them). Continuing the exploration of the chamber brought us to a short side passage which was blocked at the end by a stal flow. Having satisfied myself that there was nothing leading off, I returned.

We were still quite early so decided to take our longest pole to a hole which was frequently a rising, forming the waterfall inlet. This water came up a narrow hole some 20 feet deep, one wall of which was rock and the other mud. Since the hole was now dry it gave a good opportunity for exploration. The descent was made but unfortunately it became too tight to progress. I think a dig at this point could prove rewarding.

Back at the waterfall landing we again sat down thinking at first that we had exhausted exploration in Tempurong. Then we noticed that a slope which appeared to end at a nearby wall had a path. We followed this upwards and the wall rounded a bend to reveal a ladder! As usual we found the wood rather rotten and dangerous. I made several attempts to climb but without success.

Next time - The climb and Beyond.

Malcom Cotter.