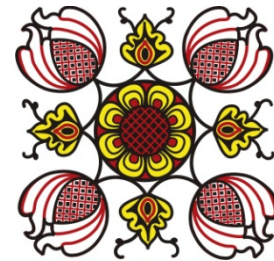


# Quarterly Tours – No. 21



**National Trust – Sri Lanka**

**25th February 2012**

Compiled by Nilan Cooray

## **National Trust – Sri Lanka**

*Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2012.*

### **Programme**

0700 hrs.            Leave PGIAR  
On board:            Observe the trace of the now defunct narrow  
                             gauge railway net-work  
1030 - 1115 hrs.    Pelmadulla Vihara  
1130 - 1215 hrs.    Iddamalgoda Walawwa at Pelmadulla  
1245 - 1300 hrs.    Opanayake Railway Station  
1330 - 1415 hrs.    Lunch at Balangoda Rest House  
1530 – 1615 hrs.    Valagamba Rajamahavihara at Kottimbulvala  
2000 hrs.            Arrive at the PGIAR

(Visit to Ukgalalutnuvara if the time permits)

*Compiled by Nilan Cooray*

*(The text on the narrow gauge railway was compiled from the information provided by Mr. Vinodh Wickremeratne)*

the shrine. Occupying both sides of the main street are the houses of the high priest (*kapurala*), the staff and serfs of the shrine. The example at Ukgalalutnuvara displays a development of the basic typology of the shrine-centered villages, where the compound of the shrine, the depository together with the dwellings lining the main street are all surrounded by another circumambulatory street (processional path or *perahera vidiya*). Lining this street are the houses of the extended families of the original settlers.

## Narrow Gauge Railway Network



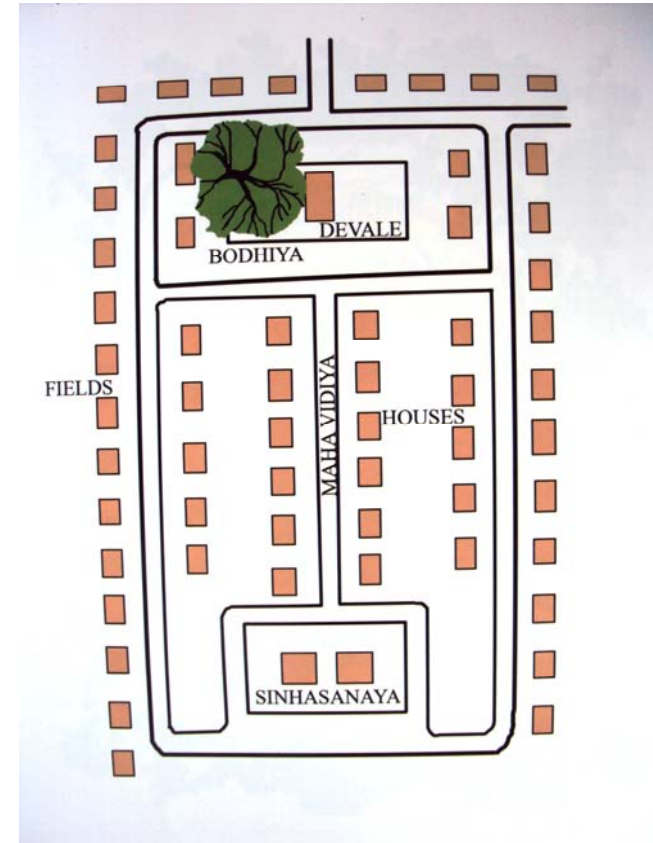
The laying of our narrow gauge railway network commenced about 1900 from Maradana to Yatiyantota as the original Kelani Valley Railway through Baseline Road, Cotta Road, Manning Town, Nugegoda, Nawinna, Pannipitiya, Kottawa, Homagama, Migoda, Padukka, Waga, Kosgama, Puwakpitiya, Avissawella, Dehiowita, Karawanella covering a distance of 77 km (48 miles) and reaching Yatiyantota in 1903. The line titled the Pelmadulla Extension (part of the Kelani Valley & Sabaragamuwa Light Railway) from Avissawella reached Ratnapura in 1912 and Opanayaka in 1919 covering a total distance of 142 km (89 miles) and lifting the line to 140 meters above mean sea level. Although the whole of the narrow gauge

railway network is mistakenly referred to as Kelani Valley, strictly the Kelani Valley was the section up to Yatiyantota. This narrow gauge line, spaced at 2 feet 6 inches with their quaint ‘baby’ trains was initiated for transporting rubber and low/mid-grown tea as well as raw graphite from the Bogala Mine. In the early days there was also high patronage of passengers specially during the Adam’s Peak pilgrim season.



Narrow Gauge trains were very slow and were soon out of fashion with quicker motor transport options from the mid 1930’s. As a result the Avissawella –Yatiyantota stretch was closed in 1941. Services of the Sabaragamuwa Railway were also curtailed from about 1972 and a patchy existence prevailed till tracks were lifted about 1976. Avissawella is now

## Ukgalalutnuvara



This is one of the shrine-centered villages that were established during the 14th century. The deistic shrine (*devale*), Buddha image house, bodhi-tree and other ancillary structures arranged within a compound forms the nucleus of the village. This compound facing east is linked by an axially laid out street (main street or *mahavidiya*) with a depository (*simhasana*) of



The monks' residence at the foot of the hill, which originally consisted of an internal courtyard of the typical Kandyan architecture, has been unfortunately modified, but the original front section is still intact to understand the building's architectural characteristics.

the terminus of this railway line, with mixed gauge operation since 1992 and broad gauge only from 1997. Although the lines were lifted, a fair amount of culverts, bridges and all the station buildings still exist. The former track-bed in some areas is C-grade motorable roads, while the rest has been illegally occupied by squatters constructing unauthorized structures on the track-bed.

During this tour along the High Level Road and the A4 Road, the touring party will have the opportunity to observe on board, the trace(s) of this line together with some of the culverts, bridges and station buildings. At Nawinne one could see the Richard Pieris complex with the current Broad Gauge line and the station. Before 1962 this was Colombo Commercials' fertilizer facility for the Sabaragamuwa Province. There were a lot of narrow gauge sidings and large warehouses here. There still exist inside very British looking buildings! The line may next be seen under the motor road at Panagoda. The route then goes off the beaten track to reappear at Kosgama. There used to be a narrow gauge spur off the main line at Kosgama to the Salawa wood factory. The Kelani Valley line appears with bits of the dual line at Kosgama on your right. At Puwakpitiya the line crossed the main road many times before Avissawella. Till the mid 1970s the motor road went over the Kelani Valley rail yard at Avissawella, part of the abutments of the ramps are still visible. Inside the station complex is an old powder magazine, but not visible from the bus.

From Avissawella the trace of the line (the trained eye can observe the earth-bed and the old telegraph poles) is visible. At Getaheththa (at one time a timber depot) on the right is a typical two floor station building. Eheliyagoda (now a cement store) station is also alongside the road. At Parakaduwa, the station is now a private residence (the only place known where

a levelled crossing exists with rails on it) the trace goes inland to the left and reappears at Kuruwita (at one time Ceramics Corp). Ratnapura station (now the Bus Stand, not visible from the road) is on the left. The track went on a leftward and a bit away from the main road. From the Kalu Ganga road bridge one could see at a distance (through the frames of the old motor bridge) the grand rail bridge at Batakettara. A bit out of town is the old Tiruwanaketiya (now a private residence) station building on the left. From this point the line crossed the road towards the backwoods of the Sabaragamuwa, real wilderness here and the train was the only source of life till about 1970. The line appeared only at Hunuwella just before Opanayake, to cross the road and into the terminus.

### **Pelmadulla Vihara**

Established by Iddamalgoda Nilame, local chieftain and also the Basnayake Nilame (trustee) of the Saman Devale at Ratnapura, this was one of the key centers of Sri Lanka's Buddhist revival movement during the 19th century. Constructed in 1865, the preaching hall (*Dharmasala*) of this temple was a historic building where the religious conclave (*dharmasangayana*) was held jointly by the Siam and Amarapura Sects of Buddhism from July 1867 to January 1868 under the leadership of Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thero and the much patronage of Iddamalgoda Nilame.

around the cosmic lake Anotatta, and its four outlets. The variant inhabitants of the mythical region and its physical features such as lakes, streams, rocks, trees and plants are represented in the most lively manner. The paintings of the wooden ceiling of the verandah is complete with hells, human world consisting of different continents and major rivers, heaven with presiding divinities and many mythical Himalayan scenes. Commenting on the Buddhist cosmology reflected in the paintings of this site, Dr. Nandana Chutiwongs, Prof. P. L. Prematillake and Dr. Roland Silva, in the Volume of 'Kottimbulvala' of the 'Paintings of Sri Lanka' series (1990) declare that 'such a remarkable monochromic scheme is rarely found in the paintings of Sri Lanka'. Belong to the period between 18th -19th century, the style of the paintings reflects a fusion of the Kandyan School and the Sothern maritime tradition. However, the paintings associated with Buddhist cosmology differs in technique from the conventional type, as it follows a free composition as against the compartmentalized and geometric compositions of the conventional type. Heavenly maidens, divinities and God Yama are depicted in the apparel of contemporary times, as influenced by colonial society. Dark red has been used for the background and white for the figurative and decorative forms, while black has been used sparingly to highlight the forms in appropriate situations. The paintings of the sixteen sacred sites on the wooden altar in front of the recumbent image of the central cave constitute a unique feature and are of great interest in that these reflect characteristic social habits of the people of the time.



The central cave, the largest of the three has a recumbent Buddha image of immense proportions as its centre piece. At the southern end of this cave are a stupa and a secluded shrine room at the head of the recumbent image. The southern cave also contains Buddha images. Buddha images of both these caves display typical 18th and 19th century sculptural characteristics of the Kandyan School. Although the northern cave also contains sculpture, they have been re-modelled recently.



The theme of the paintings of the central cave and the enclosed front verandah are largely inspired by the Buddhist cosmological ideas. Major part of the rock ceiling of the central cave depicts the mythical Himalayan landscape centralized



The gable roofed preaching hall follows the typical architectural style of the southern maritime tradition that is influenced by the colonial architectural characteristics. The canopy for the throne (*dharmasana*) is a work of art itself with timber decorative work of exceptional quality. The timber ceiling, the interior walls and the wooden canopy for the throne are adorned with paintings of the southern maritime tradition. The exterior gable facades of the preaching hall also have decorative plaster work. A stupa of modest proportions and an image house on stilts (*tampita vihara*) are the ritual buildings of this temple. The monks' residence which is a long building with a shaded frontal verandah, the roof of which is supported by a row of timber columns is also a significant architectural work.



However, it is unfortunate to see that the vihara is at present divided into two and a road runs across the property and the preaching hall itself. As a result, the preaching hall proper and its entrance porch sit on either side of this modern road.

### **Iddamalghoda Walawwa at Pelmadulla**

Constructed during the first half of the 19th century, this is the manor house of Iddamalghoda Nilame, the aristocratic Chieftain in the Sabaragamuwa Province and the Chief Custodian (*Basnayake*) of Saman Devale at Ratnapura.

work carried out by King Bhuvanekabahu (1273-1284) and Parakkramabahu VI of Kotte (1410-1468). The moonstone associated with this flight of step also reflects 15th century sculptural characteristics. Other documentary evidence suggests that Kandyan kings such as Sri Vijaya Rajasinghe (1739-1747) and Sri Vickrama Rajasinghe (1798-1815) have also contributed to restore, rehabilitate and embellish the cave shrine. The date 1888 written above the entrance of the cella probably refers to the last of the major restorations and embellishments of the cave shrine.





## Valagamba Rajamahavihara at Kottimbulvala



Located about 20 km off Balangoda, the major focus of Valagamba Rajamahavihara at Kottimbulvala from both religious and heritage points of view are the group of three cave shrines situated halfway up on the slope of a hill. The establishment of this monastic site is traditionally attributed to King Valagamba (103 and 89-77 B.C.), a ruler of the Anuradhapura dynasty associated in popular belief with nearly all the ancient rock-shelter monastic sites in the country. Two slab inscriptions installed on either side of the principal flight of steps to the cave shrine record the additions and restoration



Situated on high ground surrounded by estate land, the house consisted of two sections with an internal court yard of the traditional Kandyan type. The great overhanging roof, covered with half-round clay tiles is the dominant feature of the building. The front section of the house has a wide central reception hall. On either side of the reception hall are internal rooms which are relatively small and enclosed. Marked by two rows of columns, the spacious frontal verandah faces towards a walled-in square lawn. The architectural characteristics such as the high roof, colonnaded frontal verandah, the grand and spacious reception halls, high and wide doors and windows reflect the influence of Dutch and early British colonial architecture. The rear section of the house arranged around the internal court yard consisted of rooms for private family living, kitchens, workshops and the servants' quarters. Unfortunately, the superstructure of the rear section has collapsed, leaving only the basement to understand its original layout.



Among the distinguish guests visited this house during the British colonial rule was the Duke of Edinburgh (later King Edward VII), during his visit to Ceylon. He wrote of Iddamalgoda Kumarihamy, the daughter of the Chieftain, admiring her classical beauty.

The well which was used for bathing by the Iddamalgoda Kumarihamy and her family members is located away from the house close to a paddy field. At present part of the property is used for vanilla plantation.

## Opanayake Railway Station



The terminus and the highest point of the Sabaragamuwa Railway line, Opanayake Station was initially acquired by the Fertilizer Corporation and later was given to the Department of Police which still occupies it. Built of granite blocks, the railway station reflects the colonial British architectural characteristics. Although the rail lines are totally dismantled at present, the platform is still traceable.

Of note is a rail weigh bridge with W & T Avery Limited inscriptions still proudly extant. The Bungalow of the Station Master and a large goods-shed which catered the tea and rubber trade of this region also still exist.