

Quarterly Tours



Jayatissa Herath

National Trust – Sri Lanka

04 th June 2016

Tour Leader

Arch. Ashley de Vos, Vice President of the National Trust – Sri Lanka

Ms. Neranjana Gunetilleke participating in the tour, volunteered to assist Arch. De Vos with organizational aspects, where required.

Route

By bus: Colombo – Kurunegala – Dambulla – Habarana – Ritigala Visitors Centre

By jeep: Ritigala Visitors Centre – Ritigala Site

Return on the same route.

Itinerary

4.30 am	Meet at PGIAR and leave at 5.00 am
10.00 am	Tea, snacks and a restroom stop, at Habarana Rest House
11.00 am – 3.00 pm	Leave for Ritigala by jeep, explore Ritigala and return to Habarana by jeep (appx.15 km one way)
3.00 pm	Late lunch at Habarana Rest House
4.00 pm	Leave for Colombo with one stop en route Time permitting visit the Dambulla Mural Museum.
9.30 pm	Arrive at PGIAR

The itinerary planned may change depending on factors such as time and weather.



RITIGALA

The second quarterly tour of the year 2016 National Trust - Sri Lanka intends to cover a highly fascinating secluded heritage site lies in the North Central Province of the island known as Ritigala.

Ritigala can be reached by the turn-off to the right located at a distance of 12 km from Habarana junction on Habarana – Anuradhapura road and proceed approximately 5 km along the gravel yet motorable road leading to the foot of the mountain. The mountain is elevated to a height of 776 meters above the sea level. It is the highest point in the vicinity of the dry plains.

History of Ritigala Monastery runs back to the period of Lajjitissa (119-109 BC) and believed to be functioned intermittently as a monastery up to 10th -12th century AD.

The monastery complex was endowed with the tradition of *Pansukulika* type monastery buildings by King Sena the first (846-866 AD) for the benefit of *Pansukulika* monks who happened to practice extreme austerity. Ritigala monastery seems to have abandoned by hermits after or around 12th century AD and later taken over by the jungle. It is said that the British has planned

to build their holiday bungalows for senior government officials on this particular mountain after its re-discovery mostly because they were attracted to the special environmental quality and climatic conditions of the site.

Ritigala Forest Monastery area has remarkably pleasant climatic conditions, which is not common within the arid plains around. Ritigala is now an archaeological reserve as well as a protected wild life sanctuary with strict controls.

There are around 70 odd rock caves that believed to be sheltered the monks who inhabited the site since first century BC. The mountain was known as *Arittha – pabbata* during the reign of Pandukabhaya (377 – 307 BC). It was a sanctuary for meditating monks at the beginning and gradually became a monastic retreat for hermit (*Pansukulika*) monks. Most of the monastic buildings now seen as ruins are date back to the period of King Sena (A. D. 846-866). According to Dr. Roland Silva, Ritigala monastery belongs to classification of formal and *Vanavasa* type vihara.

“Vanavasa viharas or forest monasteries have been recorded in history as residences of *Aranyaka* or forest medicants, *punsukulika* or ascetics, *padhana* or meditation monks. *Piyangal* is the Sinhalese name for these monasteries. This sect of monks came into being around the fifth century and the patronage of these monks reached its peak from the 6th to the 10th century. The rise

of this ascetic sect was undoubtedly due to the doctrinal drifts of the main monastic establishments of Sri Lanka mainly the Mahavihara, Abhayagiri, Jetavana, Mirisavati and Dakkina institutions. Buddhagosha in his commentaries had highlighted that these super viharas had moved away from precepts of the *vinaya* and from the simple way of life of the Master. This undoubtedly required to strong decisive step towards the original status quo.”

Modern re-discovery of the site was in late 19th Century A.D. by the government surveyor, James Mantell. A few decades later H.C.P. Bell, the first Commissioner of Archaeology has published a report on his explorations at this particular site.

When entering the site you will see a huge man-made pond walled by stacking dressed granite stones to form the bund all around across two streams flowing from the mountain. This pond is known as *Banda-pokuna* as its walls are bounded. The stone walls itself provides access to the pond as flights of stairs. This was probably the bathing pond of the resident monks. The hot water bath and the multipurpose building are located close proximity to the *Bandapokuna*. According to Dr. Roland Silva, the multipurpose unit could have been used in the tradition of *vinaya* as an assembly hall, *uposathaghara* or chapter house and a *dhammasala* or preaching hall all in one. A short climb off the pond takes the visitor to the ruins of these buildings.

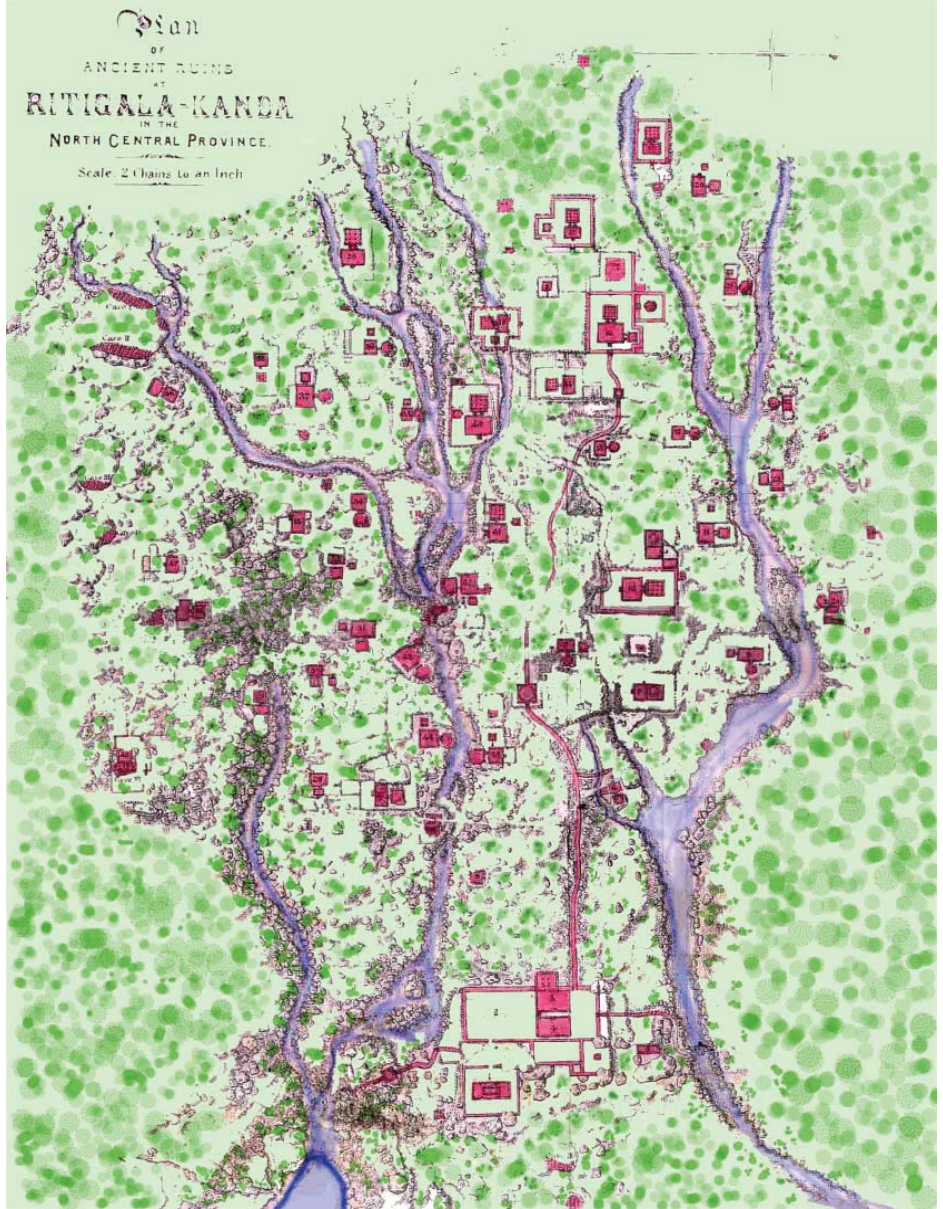


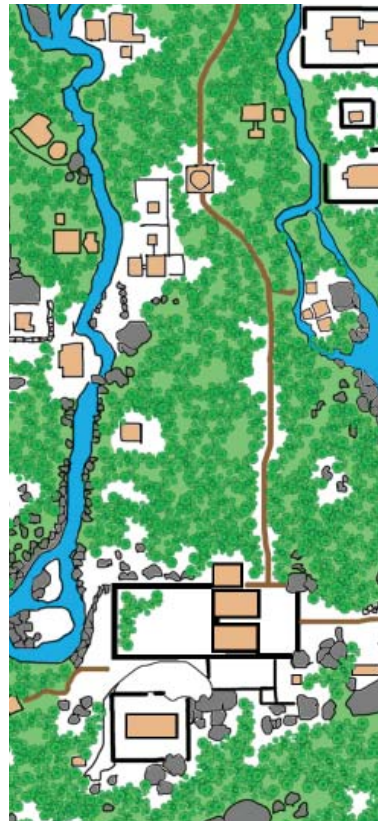
The *janthaghara* or hot water bath, the cold water bathing pool and the multipurpose unit were believed to have been the communal buildings at the lower level. Location of entrances of both buildings facing each other surmises this idea. The first section of the main path terminates at the multipurpose building and thus link the *Bandapokuna* to this complex of communal units. According to Dr. Silva, the strict reserve of the monastery begins here, although the path extends uphill providing access to the five or six double platform meditation complexes in most of which is a *padhanaghara* or meditation hall, a *cankamana* or meditation walk and a refectory for the meditating monks.

The access pathway is neatly paved and edged. It also provides areas for resting in the form of simple “roundabouts”

These double platformed buildings were made of finely dressed large stone pieces or slabs placed and assembled together expressing neat and highly skillful craftsmanship and engineering. The paved pathway runs for about 1000 feet including flights of steps and two roundabouts. The double platforms are made out of huge granite slabs, beautifully dressed and cleverly and finely joined.

Close to these Platform buildings dressed urinal stones are located.









These urinal stones are the only feature found in *Pansukulika* monasteries with any decorations on them at all.

“Minor paths link the double plat form *avasas* or residences and the cave cells with the meditation units, while the lavatories are located at vantage points to merge with the serenity of the natural reserve. Ritigala has a feature uncommon to a *Vanavasa* monastery, in that a small stupa was found outside the *vihara-sima* near the entrance. It was believed to be a cremation stupa where the ashes of the founder or some other dignitary of the monastery could have been enshrined.”

Credits:

1. *Environment, Town, Village and Monastic Planning - Dr. Roland Silva*
2. <https://www.lanka.com/about/attractions/ritigala-mountain/> <http://srilanka.for91days.com/2012/03/18/the-mysterious-forest-monastery-of-ritigala/>
3. srilanka.for91days.com/2012/03/18/the-mysterious-forest-monastery-of-ritigala/