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PERAK

Efforts underway to gazette Gua Naga Mas

Measurements of Gopeng limestone cave and embedded fossil taken in May, says exco member

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PERAK government plans to gazette Gua Naga Mas in Gopeng — where a fossil of a mammal was found embedded in the cave wall — as a historical site.

State housing, local government and tourism committee chairman Datuk Nolee Ashilin Mohammad Radzi said the departments concerned had taken the required measurements of the limestone cave and fossil in May.

The measuring process, she said, was part of the work to prepare the site for gazette.

"National Land and Survey Institute (Instnun) is yet to present

its findings of the measurements. "Once the exact measurement of the fossil is produced, the Survey and Mapping Department will present a report to the land office to gazette the prehistoric cave," she told *StarMetro*.

It was reported earlier that an animal fossil found in the cave during a visit by Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) members to the site in 1992 was that of a tiger.

The confirmation came from expert conservationist Dr Geoffrey Davison and zoologist Dr Alf Gathorne-Hardy, working with a team of researchers from Universiti Malaya (UM).

The vertebrate fossil is exposed on the cave wall, about 7m from

the cave floor.

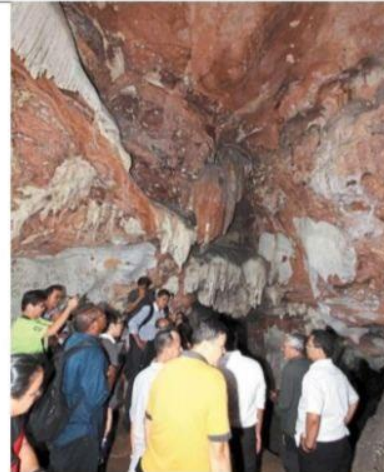
The cave itself is 30m above ground level.

The 98cm-long fossil in the cave, located in a Siamese temple, is being worshipped. A tiger painting next to it has joss sticks and other prayer items placed beside it.

When contacted, UM Geology Department senior lecturer Dr Ros Fatimah Muhammad, who is part of the research team, said the Covid-19 pandemic delayed some of their work.

She added that her students managed to carry out some research in March.

"We are working on details of the sediment the fossil is embedded in. We hope to describe the



Tourists looking at the fossil, which is about 7m from the cave floor at Gua Naga Mas. — Filepic

nature of the sediment, including looking at the geochemistry factor.

"Other than that, I am trying to get a more accurate measure of the age of the fossil by dating more sediment samples," she said.

Ros Fatimah said her sediment samples were still at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

She expressed concerns for the safety of the historical site.

Besides temple activities taking place at the cave itself, which is currently closed to visitors, she was also concerned about tremors

from construction activities carried out next to the fossil chamber. "Other concerns include the natural degradation, which should be addressed.

"At this stage, I do not have any idea about the management plan, which I hope will fall in place once the site is gazetted," she added.

Ros Fatimah said researchers were also relying on a cast of the fossil made by the Museum Department many years ago for reference purposes.

"The cast is currently under the museum's safekeeping," she added.