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**PRELIMINARY REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND EXCAVATIONS
AT BUKIT SARANG CAVES, ULU KAKUS, SARAWAK****Stephen Chia and Ipoi Datan****ABSTRACT**

Archaeological survey and excavations were carried out at Bukit Sarang Caves in Ulu Kakus, Sarawak in 2000-2001. The survey and excavations were conducted by a research team from the Centre For Archaeological Research Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang in cooperation with staff from the Sarawak Museum Department and the Minerals and Geoscience Department Malaysia in Kuching, Sarawak. The archaeological survey was conducted over a period of about one week in September 2000 and was followed by about three weeks of archaeological excavation in November 2001. This paper is a preliminary report on the results of the survey, excavations and analyses of the excavated artefacts at the Bukit Sarang Caves in Ulu Kakus, Sarawak.

Preliminary Report on Archaeological Survey and Excavations at Bukit Sarang Caves, Ulu Kakus, Sarawak

by

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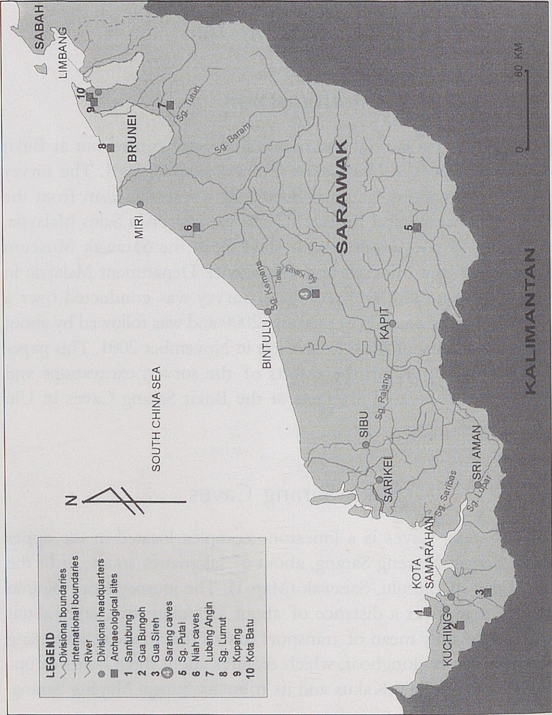
Introduction

Archaeological survey and excavations were carried out at Bukit Sarang Caves in Ulu Kakus, Sarawak in 2000-2001. The survey and excavations were conducted by a research team from the Centre For Archaeological Research Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang in cooperation with staff from the Sarawak Museum Department and the Minerals and Geoscience Department Malaysia in Kuching, Sarawak. The archaeological survey was conducted over a period of about one week in September 2000 and was followed by about three weeks of archaeological excavation in November 2001. This paper is a preliminary report on the results of the survey, excavations and analyses of the excavated artefacts at the Bukit Sarang Caves in Ulu Kakus, Sarawak.

Bukit Sarang Caves

Bukit Sarang Caves is a limestone complex located in the upper reaches of Sungai Mayeng Sarang, about 67 kilometres southeast of the town of Tatau in Bintulu, Sarawak (Map 1). The journey from Bintulu to Tatau by road, over a distance of about 120 kilometres, takes about 45 minutes. The only mean of transport from Tatau to the Bukit Sarang Caves complex is by longboat, which requires about three hours of up-river travel along Sungai Kakus and its tributary Sungai Mayeng Sarang.

Bukit Sarang Caves complex is an isolated and small limestone formation, surrounded by extensive swamps (Plate VII). The geology of the Bukit Sarang Caves complex had been studied by several geologists such as Kirk (1957), Wilford (1955, 1964), Azemi & Rengga



Map 1: Location of Bukit Sarang Caves and other Archaeological Sites in Sarawak.

(1999), and Dana (2001). It consists of two main limestone hills: the larger Bukit Sarang and a smaller Bukit Lebik. The Bukit Sarang Caves complex reaches about 91 metres in height and is elongated in shape with a southeast-northwest orientation. The Bukit Sarang Caves complex is drained by underground streams, which flow into Sungai Mayeng Sarang. The presence of foraminiferal suggested an Upper Oligocene to Lower Miocene age for this limestone complex (Wilford, 1955; Azemi & Rengga, 1999).

Bukit Sarang Caves is presently very well-guarded by collectors of the edible and highly valued swiftlet nests. The descendants of the Punan have traditional rights to harvest the birds' nests from Bukit Sarang Caves. The small Punan communities are scattered along the upper reaches of Sungai Kakus. The main population, however, are the Iban who lived along Sungai Kakus.

Previous Studies, Issues and Problems

Bukit Sarang Caves complex was investigated briefly in 1965 by Harrison and Reavis (1966) and Reavis (1966). Their two weeks of investigations included archaeological surveys and test excavations at the Bukit Sarang Caves. Fourteen caves were surveyed and mapped, and test excavations were carried out at two of these caves, namely Lubang Ringen and Batu Puteh. Human skeletal remains, stone tools, broken pieces of earthenwares and stonewares, animal bones, shells, and hearth areas were recovered during the surface surveys and test excavations. Two wall drawings of mostly crude human figures done in charcoal were also reported at Lubang Batu Puteh and Lubang Ringen. The results of their surveys and test excavations at Bukit Sarang Caves concluded that the caves were used as prehistoric habitation and burial sites as well as recent camping sites.

The previous archaeological investigations by Harrison and Reavis, however, raised numerous questions about the prehistory of Bukit Sarang Caves. Some of these questions include fundamental question such as the dating of the habitations and burials. The human habitations were said to date from the end of the palaeolithic through