

**The Sarawak Museum Journal****Vol. LXXVIII No. 99****December 2017****ISSN: 0375-3050**

Citation: *Sarawak Museum Journal*, LXXVIII (99) (2017): 119-138

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT TRADER'S CAVE, NIAH NATIONAL PARK:  
REPORT ON THE FIRST (2017) FIELD SEASON**

Darren Curnoe, Ipoi Datan, Mohammed Sherman Sauffi William, Go Hsiao Mei, Michael Slack, Rohan Peiris and Xue-feng Sun

**INTRODUCTION**

over 60 years the Niah Caves in Sarawak has been an iconic archaeological locality in insular Southeast Asia (iSEA) (Fig. 1). Moreover, until recently, the so-called 'Deep Skull' found in 1958 during excavations in the West Mouth led by Tom and Barbara Harrisson provided the earliest physical evidence for Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH) in the region (Brothwell 1960; Harrisson, 1967; Kennedy 1977). The most recent dating estimates for the Deep Skull from direct uranium series analysis of two skull fragments place it at 35.2±2.6 ka (error weighted average) (Pike 2016), and through Bayesian modeling combining AMS 1C of charcoal and direct U-series dating of human bone to c39-30 ka (at 94.5 per cent probability) (Higham et al. 2016). However, the recent re-dating of AMH at Lida Ajer in Sumatra within the range 73,000-63,000 years ago (Westaway et al. 2017) means, of course, that the distinction of 'earliest' no longer rests with the Deep Skull. Still, the historical importance of the West Mouth shouldn't be underestimated as much of our current understanding about late Pleistocene-late Holocene prehistory in the region centres on the discoveries made by the Harrisson's in the Niah Great Cave Complex (NGCC).

**Keywords:**

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During the period 1954-1967 Tom and Barbara Harrisson oversaw the excavation of more than 260 isolated human bones and partial skeletons making the West Mouth one of the largest repositories of prehistoric human remains in iSEA (Harrisson 1967, 1972; Barker and Farr 2016). A further 11 Iron Age inhumations were exposed during excavations led by Zuraina Majid in 1977 (Zuraina 1982), while Graeme Barker and co-workers investigated an additional 12 burials during fieldwork from 2000-2003 (Barker 2013; Barker and Farr 2016; Lloyd-Smith 2016). In total, 262 burials have been