THE SIGIRIYA ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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The Central Cultural Fund's UNESCO Sri Lanka Cultural Triangle Project at the world Heritage site of Sigiriya has developed a many-faceted environmental program. Much of this work is still basic and elementary, using fairly modest resources, but there are already some practical and scientific results and ambitions horizons. The present paper is an overview of this work, its objectives and the underlying research problems.

Environmental archaeology and history of environmental change

The program's point of departure and a principal area of focus is environmental archaeology, the study of the material evidence of human interaction with the natural world over time. A related and recently initiated area of research is environmental history, the study of environment change.

The type of basic questions that inform the program are these:

How is the present environment related to past conditions?

How has the environment changed over time?

Can we understand causative factors behind these changes?

What role did humans play in this?

How were past environments protected or damaged by human activity?

How did humans adapt to environmental change?

Can we find evidence that environmental change was an important factor in historical change?

The Sigiriya - Dambulla region (SDR)

But why Sigiriya and the Sigiriya-Dambulla region?

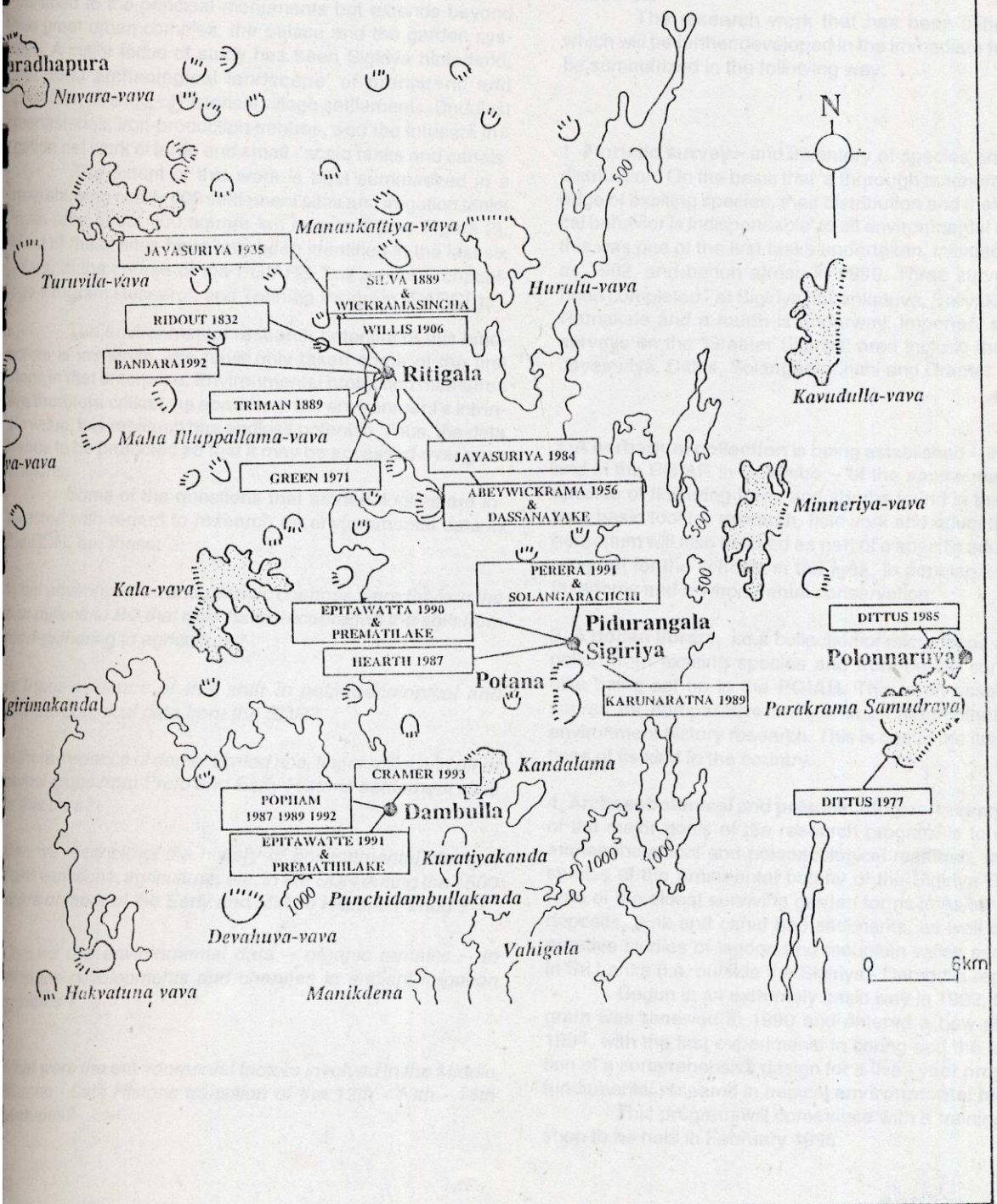
The World Heritage site of Sigiriya has been, for more than a decade, the principal field station and field laboratory for multi-disciplinary research programs by a variety of specialists drawn from a number of universities and research institutes, under the umbrella of the Sigiriya Cultural Triangle Project. There is, therefore, infrastructure support, focus on different and sometimes unrelated lines of research, and considerable research momentum generated around the archaeological program of the Sigiriya Project.

There are also other reasons. The Sigiriya region has a fair sample of its secondary forests preserved, and even a few small tracts of primary forest. These are **tropical dry forests,** a category of forest, which on a global scale, is probably as important as the tropical rain forest and covers a far more extensive area. The tropical dry forest is much more endangered than the rain forest, which on a global scale, is probably as important as the tropical rain forest and covers a far more extensive area. The tropical dry forest is much more endangered than the rain forest, because there has not been the same degree of interest in it, both in terms of research and preservation. For Sri Lanka, in particular, its Dry Zone forests are a critical environmental and economic resource, whose biodiversity and fullest potential has not been fully appreciated or adequately researched.

For Sri Lankan archaeology, the preservation of the Dry Zone forests is a matter of vital interest, as the Dry Zone was the seat of the classical civilization of the Early and Middle Historic Period (circa 3rd century BC to 13th century AC). The preservation of forest tracts also means the preservation of archaeological data -- not just data relating to great monuments, but to the entire society of the historical period, to pre- and protohistory and to man-environment relationships over very long periods of time.

In that context, the Sigiriya-Dambulla area is an important, representative dry tropical microregion for biodiversity, environmental history and environmental archaeology research.

Another related reason is that -- as the map above Figure 1) shows -- the 'Greater Sigiriya Dambulla' area, extending from the Kala Vava, in the east, to Polonnaruva and the Parakrama Samudra, in the west, is one of the most-intensively studied Dry Zone regions from the point of view of bio-diversity research. Ritigala, Sigiriya, the Polonnaruva Archaeological Reserve, the Minneriya - Giritale and



Studies in the biodiversity of the 'Greater Sigiriya Dambulla Area'.