

A Day in the Past

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Statue which is said to be built by the King Walagamba

Devotion of a religion, silence of a forest, the allure of nature, pride of a past, combined with the perfection of an art... What else would you need to travel through the time and live a day in the past!

Words Dilshi Aberaja Photographs Indika De Silva and Damith Wickramasinghe

In the days of glorious royalty and brave vanguard, there was a king by the name of “Walagamba” who was repeatedly mentioned in the annals of Sri Lankan history. He could be considered as one of the most famous kings in Sri Lanka and the history records say that King Walagamba ruled the Kingdom of Anuradhapura till he came under attack of the Chola army of South India. The King, instead of showing bravado, strategically absconded from his Kingdom with the hope of recapturing his beloved realm in time. It is said that he lived a life in hiding for about 12 years, organising his army to fight back against the invaders. During his time in hiding he created a wealth of landmarks throughout the country that can be seen to this day.

Uva is one of the provinces which has had the fortune of being marked by his royal footprints. Bandarawela, located in this province is a hill station with soothing weather and blessed with natural resources. Though better known as a holiday destination in the hills Bandarawela is rich with a heritage from a bygone era.

Dowa Rock Temple is one such place that enshrines a beautiful story of the glorious past of Bandarawela. The temple, is situated on the Badulla-Bandarawela Road. The temple is unassuming where only once ventured in, that one would be able to truly appreciate the beauty within.

The carvings within the cave and the statue of Lord Buddha are said to be made during King Walagamba’s time. The most interesting fact is that the statue was said to be built by the King himself and he had intended to finish it within a single night.

However being an ambitious King, Walagamba carved a stone into a marvellous piece of art and a sacred statue that inspired faith.

He was true to his word but the statue appears incomplete as though the King had left it in a hurry. However the rustic feel of the statue gives a perfect blend of nature and religion. It can be said that his faith did not waver even during the hardest of times. Amidst the trees and mist the statue seemed to be an actual part of nature as though created not by man but by nature itself. This uniqueness could be seen clearly as soon as we entered the premises.

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The cave is adorned with ancient paintings, which are similar to the paintings of Sigiriya. There are three levels in the cave and each level depicts a unique set of colourful paintings which exhibit various elements of Buddhism. Vibrant colours embodied in the stone walls of the cave were a display of perfection of the paintings of that era. There were hundreds of

various carvings in the cave revealing the stages of Lord Buddha's life, elements such as heaven and hell and also stories about the King. Walking through this dark cave, I experienced a journey through the past.

The pleasant smell of faith, emanating from fragrant flowers and incense sticks offered by devotees is spread throughout the cave. It is said the cave has a way out into a tunnel which leads to the Ravana Cave situated a few miles away from the temple. But for the moment, it is temporarily closed. Hopefully, one day we will be able to walk along the dark path of the tunnel into the cave in which King Ravana had kept Seetha hidden from the world.

Dowa Rock Temple no doubt gave me the feeling of travelling through time. The devotion, faith and bravery of a man lie within the caves engraved in rock. As I ventured out of the temple, my mind was filled with the scenes from the unseen past, of the proud, bright days as if I lived in a day from the yesteryear.

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