A Drive Through Rattota

Posted on



Beyond Rattota the scenery is tranquil and serene

The little town of Rattota is the gateway to the northern tip of Sri Lanka’s Central Highlands, along the approaches from Kurunegala, Dambulla, and northwestern plains. Crossing the town, this is the only major road running east through this part of the mountains, and it is refreshingly less travelled.

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Rattota lies just over 150km northeast of Colombo, in the Matale District, at the foothills of the Knuckles Mountain Range. Most travellers to the area often overlook Rattota as they travel to Kandy, Matale, and the lush green spectacular mountains

that form the backdrop of the Sudu Ganga (White River) Valley. But for those looking for a novel experience, it provides an interesting diversion, especially from behind the wheel of a car.

After a long drive from Colombo, along the Kurunegala – Dambulla A6 Highway, it was with relish that I turned onto the Dodangaslanda B409 Road and buried my right foot into the floorboards. As I dropped a couple of gears in anticipation of an open road, I listened to the sound of the engine roaring.

It was early in the day, and the traffic was light, allowing me to take in the countryside on both sides of the road. Morning mist shrouded the broad green paddy fields and the jungle beyond faded into a bluish haze. Long legged storks and egrets looking for breakfast in the mud of the fields, took flight at my sounding approach, fluttering into the mist like torn scraps of cotton wool.



Dodangaslanda Road – 30km of pure driving pleasure

If you are driving into the Matale area from Colombo, my route up the A6 and onto the Dodangaslanda Road is probably the quickest. From Matale onwards, the B274 route will take you through Rattota itself and up into the Knuckles Mountains to the east. These two B-roads offer what is probably the most scenic drive through the area.

While the B274 route boasts a broad panoramic scenery beyond and above Rattota, as a pure thrilling driving experience, the 30km-long Dodangaslanda Road is a memorable one. Being a B-road, it’s relatively narrow, and as you climb into the mountains from the northwestern plains, it gets increasingly twisty, with tight, steep hairpins and blind corners. Torque (rotational force) is as important as horsepower on those steep curves, so use your gearbox well. You will find yourself driving

through the broad paddy fields and dense coconut plantations in the lower reaches, and as you hit the hills, through close ranks of rubber trees and dense jungle, until you join the A9 Highway just north of Matale.

By now you would have spent just over three hours behind the wheel and, if you, like me, wish to walk around a bit or get a feel of history, the Aluvihare Rock Temple, just north of Matale, is a great place for a break. The temple is right by the road, and built into, around, and on top of a large rock. It is believed to date back to the 3rd century BC, when King Devanampiyatissa of Anuradhapura built its stupa. The Aluvihare Temple is significant in Theravada Buddhist history as the place, the Pali Canon, Buddhism's most complete early scripture, was first committed to writing in 29 BC, after four centuries of being passed down orally.



Bambarakiri Ella flows close to Rattota

Back on the road, the B274 between Matale and Rattota is a bit busy, especially at the Matale end, but quietens down beyond Rattota. The road twists and climbs, turning southeast until, just below a series of sharp and narrow hairpins, lies the beautiful Bambarakiri Ella. From the road, it is a 300m walk to a wooden suspension bridge that spans the falls. The bridge is rather exciting, swinging with each pace I took, but once across, the series of pools below the falls provide a refreshing dip, especially if you're on your way down from hiking the mountains.

From this point on, the route narrows drastically, as it climbs the 700m to Riverstone, on the north-western finger of the Knuckles. This portion of the route, has to be taken slow and carefully. Enjoy the view of towering forest-clad mountains that soon give way to tea plantations that look like a thick green woollen blanket carelessly tossed down by a giant, but keep your eyes on the road as well. Too long a glance at those spectacular green mountains might result in you being added immediately to one of the beautiful valleys below. The road, however, provides plenty of places to pull over and get out to enjoy the view yourself.

The road itself continues way beyond Riverstone, cutting through heavy jungle and the northern part of the Knuckles Forest Reserve before dropping down the eastern face of the Central Highlands to Hettipola. It then turns south to Hasalaka, where it meets the A26 Highway, itself one of Sri Lanka's great driving roads. As I wrestle with the wheel, turning my faithful steed around on the narrow road for the long drive back down from Riverstone, I take one last glance in my rear-view mirror. We'll be back, I promise.



