A Girl’s Best Friend

Posted on

Carol Ratnaweera sees a new sparkle in the resplendent isle.



Yala game sanctuary: Diamonds on the boundary

Recent findings may lead to the discovery of diamonds on a large scale in Sri Lanka, adding the world’s most dazzling and sought-after precious stones to the already glittering crown of gems that adorns the island.

A local geologist is convinced that a richly-studded belt of mineral wealth girdles the area between the eastern port of Trincomalee and Hambantota in the south. This belief is strengthened by the recent discovery of a single diamond on the seabed off

the west coast tourist resort of Bentota. The discovery is reported to have been made by a research vessel of the National Aquatic Research Agency during an oceanographic expedition.

In addition, four diamonds have been found in the interior of the island, in the upcountry district near one of Sri Lanka’s most spectacular waterfalls, the ‘Bridal Veil’ that links the hill country with the dry zone near the northern boundary of the Yala game sanctuary. Another is reported to have been found at a place called Angamedilla in the Polonnaruwa district.

Some geologists believe there could be many mineral deposits including diamonds as yet undiscovered in the mineralized belt extending from Trincomalee to Hambantota through areas like Maha Oya, Moneragala, and Udawalawe. Koslanda and Diyaluma areas in the hill country could also be possible sources of diamonds.

The English saying that ‘one swallow does not make a summer’ does not apply in the case of the possible sources of diamonds being sound in Sri Lanka. Geologists say that the discovery of only one diamond is an indication -that diamonds could exist in abundance in the island.

From the early dawn of its recorded history, 2,500 years ago, the island of Lanka has been famed for its gems. Men followed the trade winds in ships to reach this enchanted isle, legendary for its spices, ivory… and gems. The world’s most gorgeous and varied blue sapphires, cat’s eyes, rubies. opals, almost every precious gem in the book that could hold its own with the diamond for purity and sparkle, is to be found here.

The story goes that diamonds were first discovered, albeit unwittingly, by a group of children playing near the Orange River in South Africa, which has since become known as the source of the world’s best diamonds. The children did not know that the hard stone they found with glittering points under its dusty surface was a diamond weighing 21 carats.

Some of the most celebrated diamonds, though, have come form India. The Koh-i-Noor diamond, now part of the British crown jewels, originally belonged to an Indian prince. It then fell into the hands of the British East India Company who presented it to Queen Victoria. Its weight is said to have been 185 carats but after being re-cut for the British queen, weighed in at a little over 1OO carats.

The cutting and polishing of diamonds is an art that is hard to learn as it demands patience and great skill. At a particular stage of preparing a diamond to be worn as a jewel, an abrasive, diamond-headed tool 1s held against the diamond to give it the desired lustre which is further brought out by polishing.

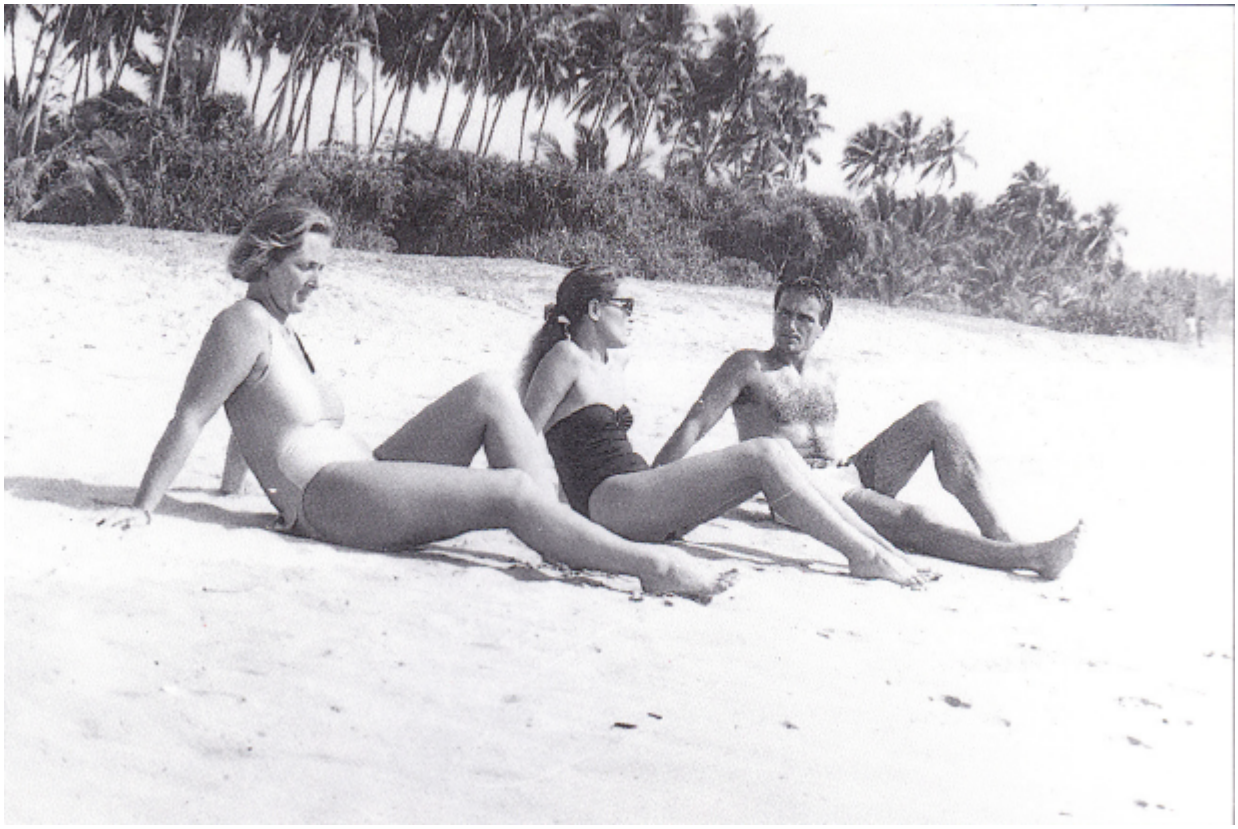
Diamonds are also used in saws for the cutting of rock, and diamond dust is used for polishing other precious stones and in the grinding of lenses. But it is as jewels that diamonds have pas ed into legend and romance.

Antwerp is one of the best known traditional centre of diamond cutting although countries that do not have a tradition of diamond cutting and polishing are going in for the art. In Sri Lanka too, diamonds are imported to be cut and polished for sale on the local and foreign market.

Although to Sri Lankans the diamond remains a foreign stone, one hears the word brilliants commonly used especially when traditional engagement rings are in the making. Brilliants are in fact polished diamonds and feature prominently in the elaborate engagement rings of a generation ago which were usually made of brilliants set in yellow gold. Engagement rings of ornate design that crept up the ring finger like mini-creepers have given way to the contemporary designs popular with the younger generation where brilliants are used to set off a central sapphire or ruby.

Also commonly known in Sri Lanka are Matara diamonds: very elegant stones of a blackish hue. Matara diamonds were widely used in the jewellery worn by our grandmothers, although they are not very common now. These stones were almost always set in silver, which sets them off very richly. They are really Zircons.

If the geologists are right, perhaps soon nature’s treasure chest will yield Sri Lanka’s very own diamonds, a girl’s best friend, that Lankans and visitors alike will be proud to own.



Bentota beach – diamonds out at sea.