Adam’s Bridge: Beyond The Periphery

Posted on

Closing in on the second sandbank of Adam’s Bridge

The overcast skies smothered the afternoon sun in a clump of cotton white clouds, the gushing wind cooed and roared as it swept over the Indian Ocean hitting us with ferocious speed and a few hungry seagulls squawked soaring back and forth in the ceaseless current. Standing there on a little sand bank surrounded by the sea off the Northwestern coast of the island, life seemed a picture perfect dream… A dream I didn’t want to wake up from.

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A Sandy Link…

We were in Talaimannar at the far edge of the Mannar Island gazing out into an unknown horizon. The old pier that had blackened with age jutted out into the sea and close to the pier, an old whitewashed lighthouse towered high into the heavens. The eight seater dingy boat rocked on the fringe of the blue-green waters beckoning us to step in.

Our bodies strapped in lifejackets, thoughts full of anticipation and hearts brimming with excitement we sat huddled in the boat as the engine roared to life and sped

out towards the deep Indian Ocean. We were in the hands of the proficient navigators of the Sri Lanka Navy who conducted the boat service to the sandbanks referred to as ‘Adam’s Bridge’.

The boat weighed anchor at the second sandbank, letting us all debark onto that magical little island

The fascinating 45 minute ride was accompanied by the continuous drone of the engine and an intermittent splash of salty sea water hitting our faces from all sides. At the first glimpse of the sandbanks, we all squinted our eyes against the afternoon glare admiring the long stretch of sand protruding out into the water.

Adam’s Bridge, Rama’s Bridge or Rama Setu (Sand Dunes) is a chain of limestone shoals that stretch between Rameswaram off the Southeastern coast of Tamil Nadu in India and Mannar Island, off the Northwestern coast of Sri Lanka, and is evidence to suggest that there was once a connection to India by land. In the early 1800s, the British have named the sandbanks Adam’s Bridge after the Islamic legend, which asserts that Adam, the first man on earth, used this as a bridge to reach Adam’s Peak in Sri Lanka. The name Rama‘s Bridge had been given to it in Rameswaram.

Adam’s bridge is 18 miles (30km) long and separates the gulf of Mannar from the Palk Strait. The surrounding sea is said to be very shallow ranging from three feet to 30 feet (1m to 10m) deep depending on the place, which is an obstacle in navigating across from the north to the south. It is also said that the sandbanks change shape and shift with the tide.

The boat weighed anchor at the second sandbank, letting us all debark onto that magical little island. The soft sand felt warm against our bare feet as we stepped out. The sand was a rare shade of black and pale gold with intricate designs made from the waves constantly lapping at the shore. As we walked higher, the ground was covered with tall grass and colourful plants that hugged the sand and the wind kept sweeping through from all directions. The sandbank was no larger than a small playground and could be encircled in no more than 15 minutes. At the far end, the water had receded leaving a trail of tiny sea creatures that dotted the wet sand in millions stinging our feet as we walked through.

Standing at the farthest end of the sandy extent we craned forward, scrutinising the far horizon in search of the other visible sandbanks. Counting four more we learned that there are 16 sandbanks altogether, out of which eight belong to Sri Lanka and eight to India. We were also told that on a very clear day one could actually spot the

Indian flag on the last of the Indian sandbanks of the Adam’s Bridge that once had linked the two countries.

After half an hour of bliss spent amidst the serenity, isolation and the unspoiled other worldly beauty of the second sandbank of Adam’s Bridge, we boarded the little blue and white boat to reach the shores of Talaimannar and further explore the farthest edge of the Northwestern coast of Sri Lanka.

An Ancient Tower Of Light

As the afternoon light gave way to a purplish dusk we wound our way inland on a gravel path in search of a unique ancient structure that we spotted from the boat far at sea. As we neared, it loomed in contrast to the combination of sea and sky that lay beyond. Surprised at its massive size we stood gaping at an extraordinary iron tower that touched the luminous skies.

We were in Urumalai a short distance away from the lighthouse, but we soon learned that this iron tower, put up during the colonial era, had actually been a lighthouse that had used fire as a guiding light. Standing on six thin and tall iron poles, a tank-like form stood on top. In the centre a pipe like structure reached the top through which perhaps the guiding flame had been sent up to the top.

Leaving the iron tower behind, we drove further inland to witness another unique cultural monument.

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A Unique Memorial

As darkness gradually enveloped the Island of Mannar we stepped into the compound of a shrine. Referred to as the ‘Adam’s Tomb’ this little place of divinity bore what are said to be the tombs of Adam and Eve and is an Islamic place of worship.

As we entered through its small low doorway, we were greeted by a small wooden platform beyond which lay two long cylindrical structures on the sand covered by green cloth. The tomb of Adam is supposedly 40 feet long and Eve’s 38 feet. By the side of the two tombs lay a replica of a sail boat, which the Muslims believe transported the first woman and man to Talaimannar in 786 BC.

The dim light from the flickering lamp and the smell of incense mingled with the singing wind, transporting us into a state of complete serenity. As we stepped out into the warm sand and on our journey back, we bore in our hearts the incomparable beauty of Talaimannar.

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