Panoramas from Pidurangala

Posted on
Picture-perfect: Historical Pidurangala and Sigiriya soaring high against blue skies.

The thick forest cover shrouds the flanks of Pidurangala in direct contrast to the sheer sides of Sigiriya as both rocky outcrops reach towards the sky from the north-central plains. Of the two, the rock fortress is world-renowned. King Kasyapa (475 – 491 AD) is credited with its feat of engineering and architecture, evident to this day. However, its counterpart Pidurangala demands attention and is coming out of the considerable shadow cast by its sibling.

Photography Menaka Aravinda.

The impenetrability of Sigiriya drew King Kasyapa, ever wary of his younger brother and rightful heir to the throne Prince Moggallana, to establish his short- lived kingdom on its flat summit. However, at the time, it was already a monastery. The King, therefore, developed the rock caves on the nearby Pidurangala rock, relocating the monastery, before building his citadel. Arriving at the temple that leads to the Pidurangala rock, we decided to leave our shoes behind, as requested by a sign posted at the entrance. However, much to our chagrin, we soon discovered that our fellow visitors were much smarter than us. We stopped to admire an ancient Image House built in a rock cave at the base of the rock. Fellow hikers would carry their shoes in their hands up to this point, and then put them back on before resuming their journey!

While there were intriguing paths that seemed to wander away from thevstaircase, we maintained our steady ascent. At one point, the stairs took us through a narrow tunnel between a large boulder and the wall of the rock. The surfaces of both were so smooth that it seemed to have been the result of human interference rather than natural. We wondered whether the King had ordered the rock to be chis- elled to create a passage through.

The cheerful chatter of visitors guided us to a relatively flat area. On one side, a large cave faced the east.

Remnants of stone walls held in place by clay indicated that the cave had been divided into small rooms; perhaps the dwellings of the monks who meditated in the wilderness in centuries past. Walking forward, we soon came into an opening in the relentless forest cover that prevented us from observing the landscape. A stone inscription was carved onto the rocky floor, and we took a moment trying to decipher its message before gazing out at the panorama. Verdant plains stretched beneath us, eventually giving rise to hills.

The reclining Buddha statue built beneath the cave was perhaps the largest Buddha statue made out of bricks that I have seen. And no wonder; at 49 1/2 feet, the reclining Buddha constructed using a combination of brick, clay, and limestone is one of the longest Buddha statues in the island.

From then on, the steps disappeared, giving way to large boulders and tree roots that we had to scramble over. 'Amãru hariya issaraha' (the hardest part is ahead), a gentleman on his way down informed us. With my lungs burning from the climb up, I wondered how much harder it can get. But as we passed a particularly steep phase, where a tree made slippery with thousands of footsteps acted as a stepping stone, we did encounter the hardest part.

To access the top, visitors have to squeeze through a narrow crevice created by the overhanging rock. Several climbers, both Sri Lankan and foreigners, who had gone before us were patiently awaiting their turn, creating a bit of traffic jam!

However, once we were through, we got our first view of the magnificent Sigiriya. Even from the distance that separated the two rocks, the long line of climbers trying to reach its summit was evident.

As for us, only a few footsteps took us to the peak of Pindurangala. My first few steps were tentative, but soon, the 360 degree panorama gave me the courage to explore.

The lush greenery contrasted beau- tifully with the deep blue sky and fluffy white clouds. The rock surface of Sigiriya too seemed to be adorned with different shades, likely as a result of prolonged exposure to the elements. Everywhere our eyes wandered, we were mesmerized by the mountains on the horizon.

We descended from the path we took. Once back on the road, we went in search of a location, which would give us a view of the summit we had just climbed. The

narrow, unpaved road did take us to the perfect place where we could see both Pidurangala and Sigiriya.

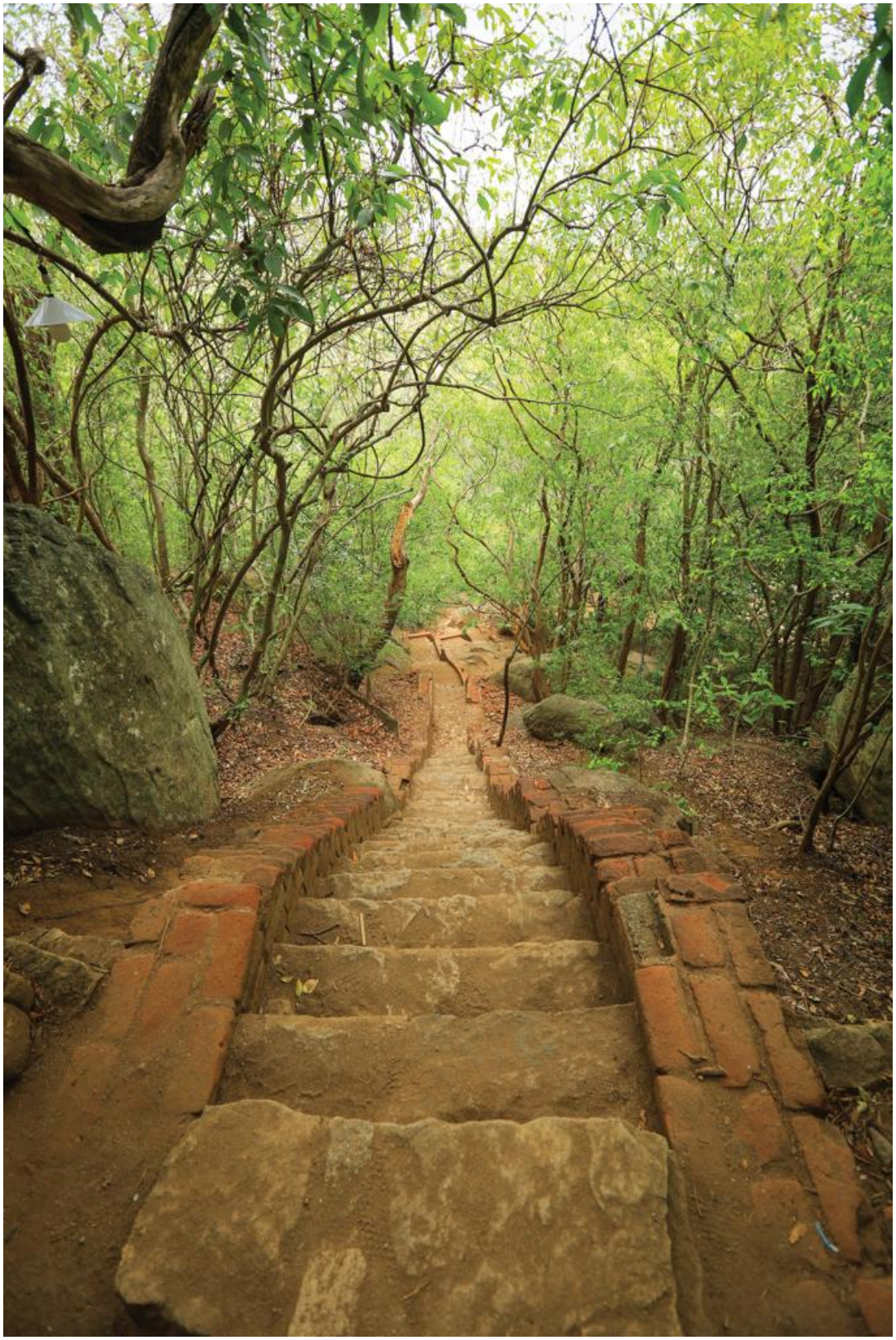
We admired the two rocks, in appearance so dissimilar, yet with a shared history that irrevocably binds both to the fifth century King Kasyapa.



Ascent to the historical summit.



The Image House at the base of the rock.



Long narrow path intrigued us to discover further



Large boulders and shady trees create beautiful passages that connect with nature.



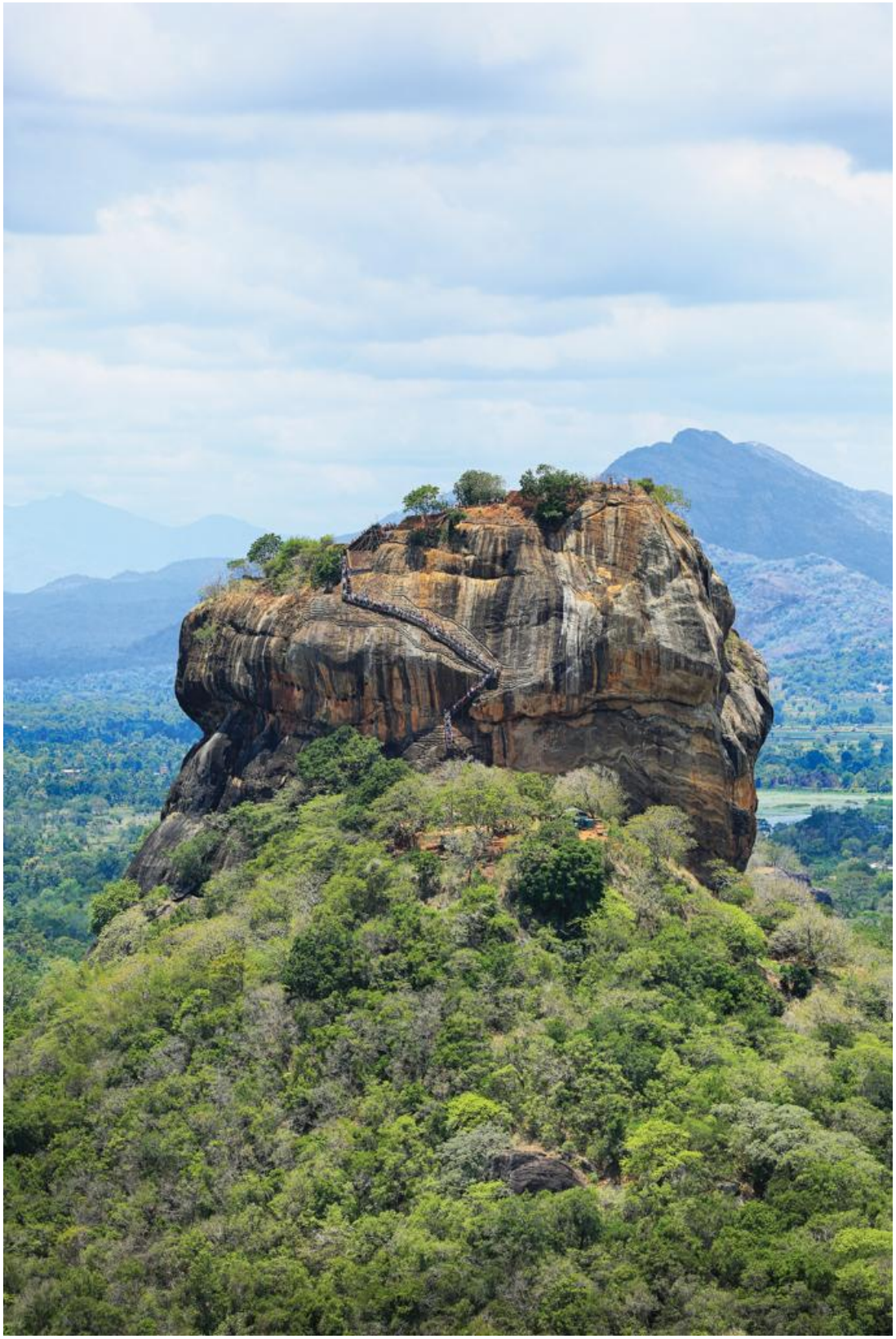
One of the longest reclining statues of the Buddha beneath the ca



Visitors enjoy panaromic views of the ancient citadel and beyond.



The pristine white Buddha statue of the Sigiriya temple rises above lush greenery.



Sigiriya Rock fortress amidst verdant landscape.