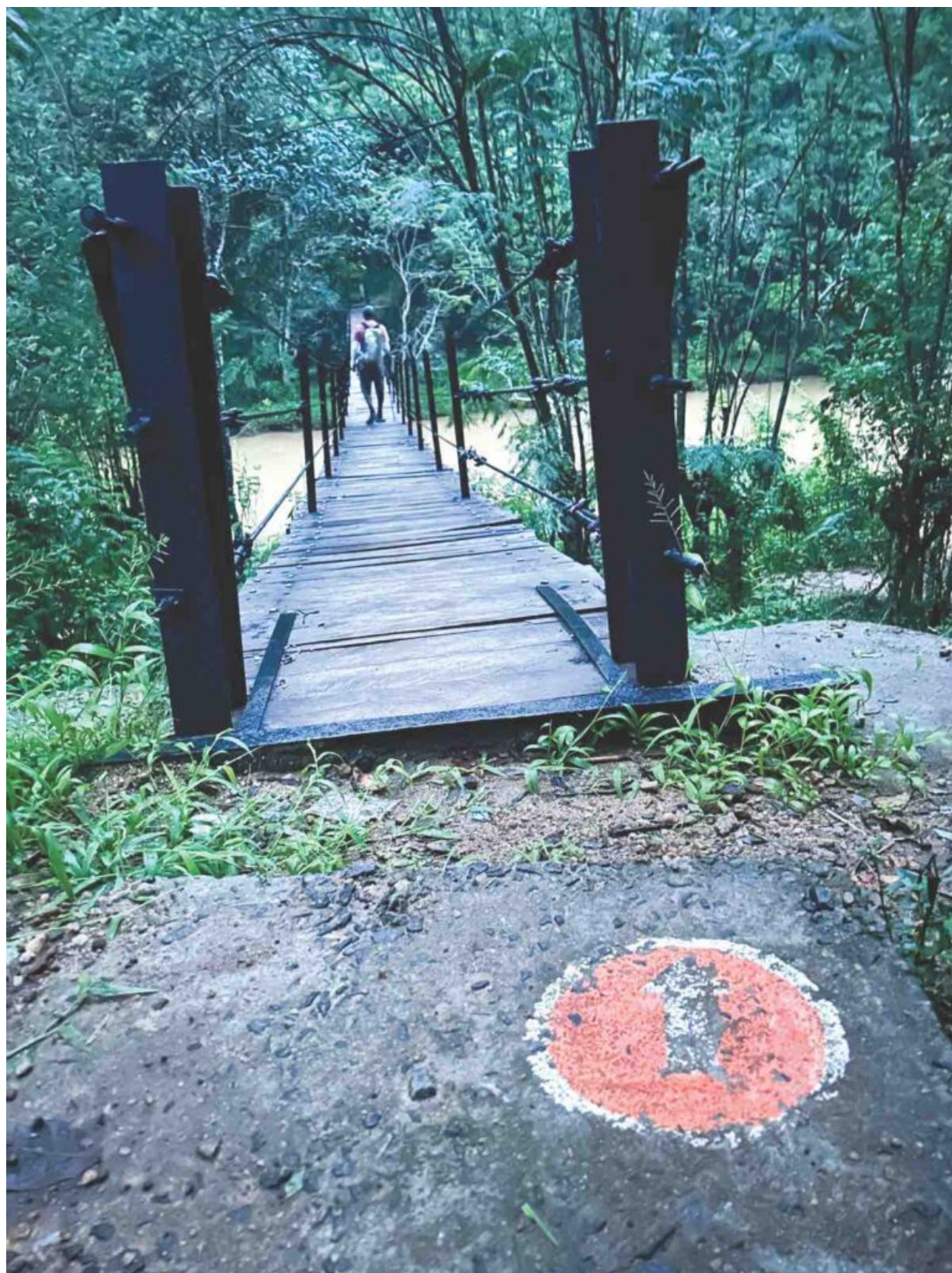


Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

Photography Pekoe Trail Organization.



The suspension bridge on the Uma Oya is one of the most exciting segments of Stage 19.

Prepare for an unforgettable adventure on Stage 19 of the Pekoe Trail, where nature meets excitement in a thrilling fusion of landscapes. This stage offers a dynamic mix of terrains—from winding roads and rugged pathways to towering suspension bridges and expansive rice and tea fields.

With its demanding challenges, Stage 19 is the perfect opportunity to push your limits and set an ambitious goal to conquer.

Stretching 21 kilometers from Ettampitiya to Lunuwatte, Stage 19 is the longest of the 22 stages and is widely regarded as one of the most challenging and rewarding sections of the Pekoe Trail.

The trail forms a V-shape—beginning at an elevation of 1,200 meters, descending to around 800 meters, and then climbing once more. This stage is defined by its two distinct sections, each offering a unique and immersive experience.

The first section features a gradual descent toward the Uma Oya, a river that originates from Sri Lanka's highest peak, Pidurutalagala. The Uma Oya eventually merges with the Mahaweli River, the island's longest waterway, adding natural beauty and geographical significance to this leg of the journey.

After crossing the Uma Oya, the trail begins its ascent through zigzagging paths that climb to over 1,000 meters. This section truly tests one's endurance, but the rewarding panoramic views of the surrounding landscape make every step worth the effort.

Stage 19 begins in the town of Ettampitiya, initially following the Badulla- Colombo highway before turning onto an estate road. From there, it embarks on an arduous descent, dropping nearly 800 meters by the seventh kilometer. Like Stage 18, this stretch features an engaging variety of terrain, alternating between main roads, narrow paths through paddy fields, and winding trails through tea gardens. One moment, you're walking along a busy roadside; the next, you're immersed in a tranquil paddy field. After diverging from the Badulla-Colombo Road onto a small track, the trail briefly intersects a primary road before veering off again— staying true to the distinctive nature of the Pekoe Trail. Passing the Ettampitiya Estate bungalow, it continues downhill along the estate road, offering a closer encounter with the region's natural landscape.

At the two-kilometer mark, the trail follows a tarred road before rejoining the main highway

briefly, only to shift back onto a tea trail. At 4.4 kilometers, the Pallewela Temple emerges as a significant cultural landmark, marking a traditional Sinhala Buddhist village that predates the rise of the tea estate economy. The local farming community has lived here for generations, harmoniously balancing tradition and change.

Paddy fields and tea gardens flourish on either side of the trail—a testament to the region’s dual agricultural identity. As the trail progresses, it winds through tea bushes along steep mountain slopes, offering sweeping vistas of valleys below—a signature feature of the Pekoe Trail.

Soon, the path narrows into a forest trail, flanked by tall grasses that lend a sense of wild adventure. A steep descent follows, leading down the Rathmetiya Steps and toward the Uma Oya.

Just past the seven-kilometer mark, the trail touches another tarred road heading toward Bandarawela, then veers onto a plain track leading to the Wellewela Suspension Bridge. A final flight of steps leads down to this iconic crossing—one of the most exhilarating highlights of Stage 19.

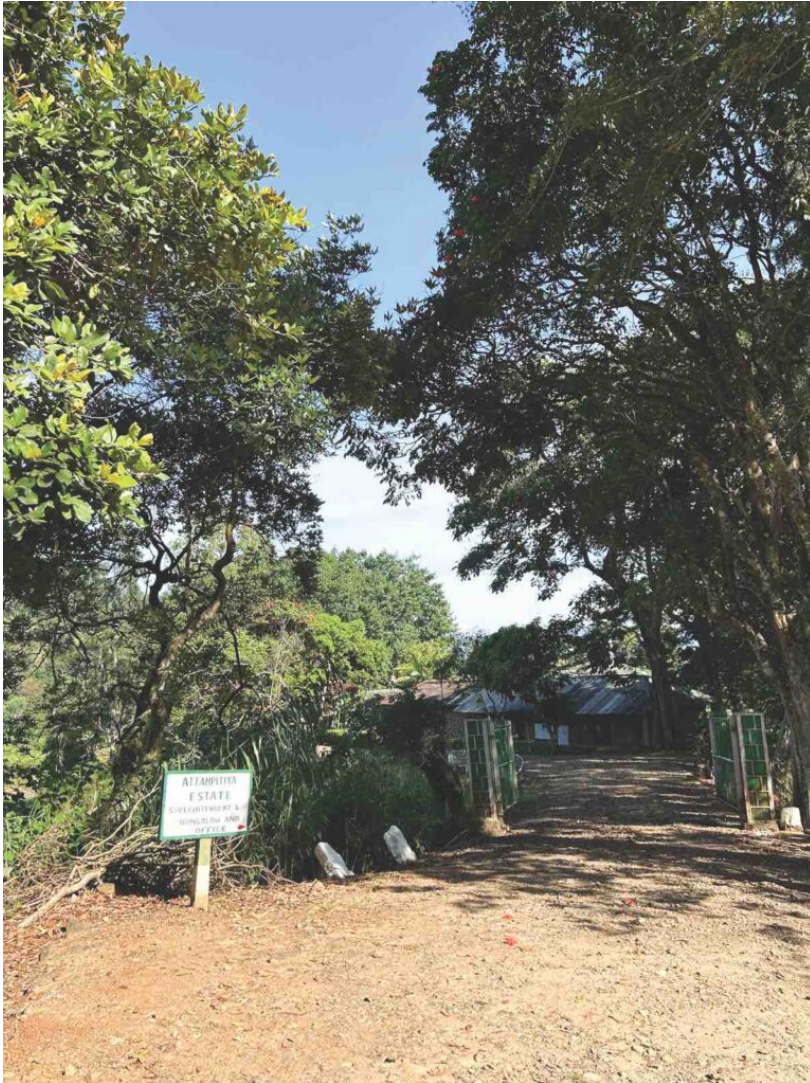
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The terrain switches to trails along towering Eucalyptus trees.



The diverse terrain of Stage 19, the descending and the ascending involves a number of steps.



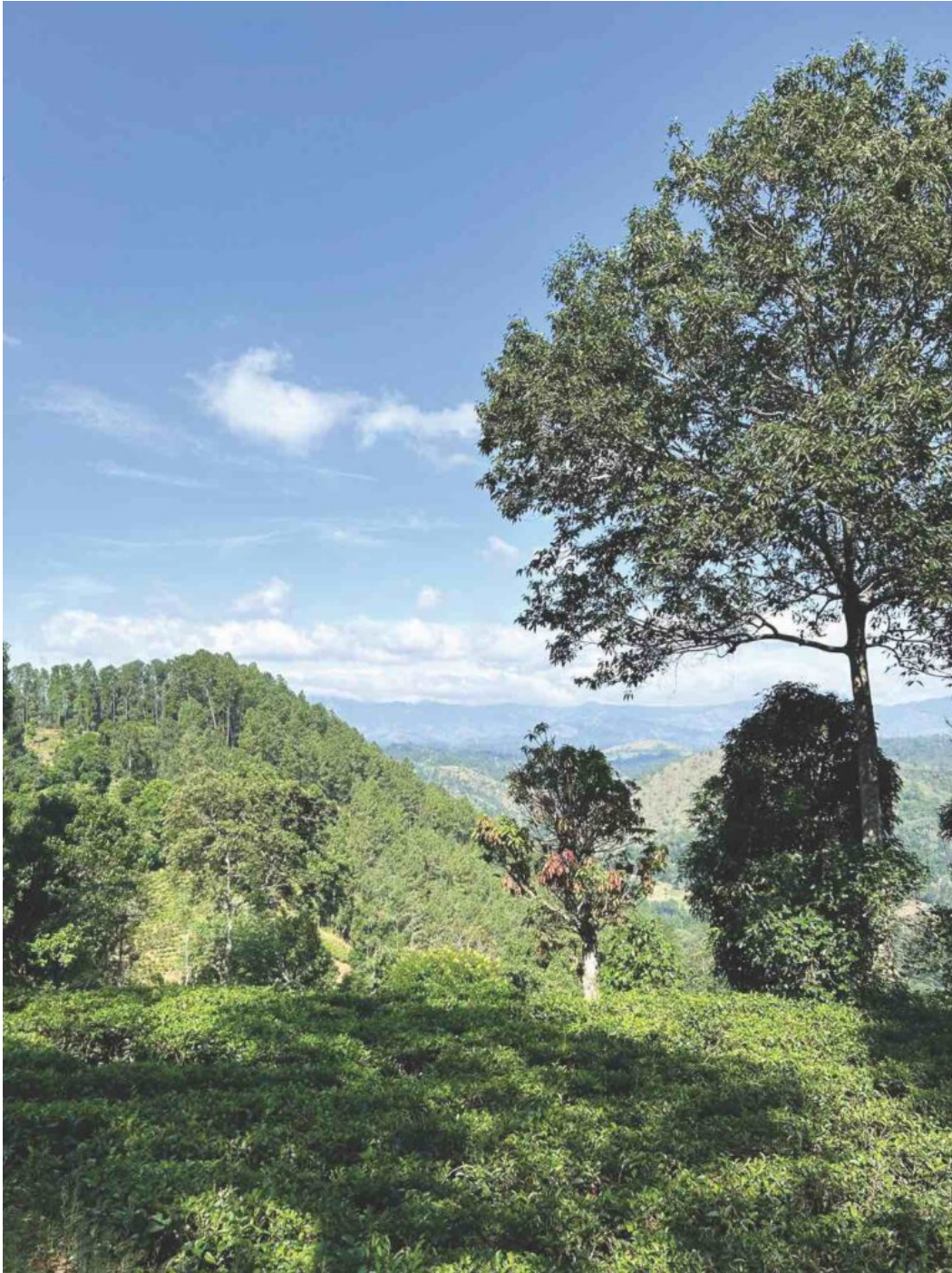
The trail continues downhill passing the Ettampitiya Estate bungalow.



The reward of taking on the challenge of Stage 19 are the viewpoints.



Never to be missed is the bright orange sign of the Pekoe Trail - a constant companion along the trail.



From the tea gardens, mountains stretching to the skies.