

PLACES



Village head **Abdul Rahman Ahamad** says he used to explore the caves near Kampung Gelok

MORE than 20 years after the Lenggong Valley gained international fame with the discovery of the Perak Man in 1991, it has once again come under the spotlight after being listed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) World Heritage Site in June.

Gua Gunung Runtu, where the 11,000-year-old pre-historic human remains were unearthed, has become world famous as the cavernous grave of the first and most complete skeleton found in the region to date.

But little is known about Kampung Gelok, the gateway to Gua Gunung Runtu and the site of the country's most significant archeological treasure.

According to imam Ustaz Sabri Saleh, 69, the origin of the village is coincidentally related to the discovery of another treasure.

"More than a 100 years ago, a villager called Mak Teh was fishing at the confluence of Sungai Jepai and Sungai Gelok near her house when she fished out a gold nugget the size of a *gelok*.

(*Gelok* is a container made from coconut shell and used for storing spices.)

"The unusual find was re-



Kampung Gelok is the gateway to **Gua Gunung Runtu**, where the Perak Man is found.

Kg Gelok, the gateway to history

PRICELESS: While the Lenggong Valley is famous for its Perak Man, little is known about Kampung Gelok, the country's archeological treasure trove. *Ista Kyra* traces the origin of this historical village

The origin of Kampung Gelok is coincidentally related to the discovery of a gold nugget. Pix by Muhaizan Yahya

garded as a miracle and became the talk of the town," said Sabri.

"As a result, the residents from eight villages surrounding the point where the gold was found decided to unite and thus Kampung Gelok was born."

Sabri, who learnt the history of his village from stories passed down by his elders, said the use of *gelok* as a container had since been phased out.

"But the traditional fishing tool, *tangkal*, used by Mak Teh when she made her discovery is still being used in the village today."

Tangkal is a square net, whose

corners are held together with two bent bamboo sticks.

Sabri said the fishing tool was one of several legacies that were kept alive by the present generation.

"Residents here are known for their culinary skills. They can cook more than 52 types of Malay cuisine, including *rendang*, *gulai* and *kerabu*, based on recipes passed down from generations."

Sabri said he had inherited a wealth of *royat bahari* or local legends from his village teacher.

"There were supernatural beings called Sang Kelembai, who were believed to be able to turn people into stones by talking to them.

"These 'monsters' are said to be as tall as bamboo shoots and supposedly responsible for the life-like rock formations found in caves in the area, including Gua Puteri."

Gua Puteri, which is less than 1km from Kampung Gelok, houses a series of rock formations depicting what appear to be a royal wedding procession, a frog and an elephant's head. It is connected to other cave trails such as Gua Asar, Gua Ngaum and Gua Kajang, which also served as the set for local film, *Sifu & Tongga*.



Fish caught with a '*tangkal*' is salted to make '*ikan pekasam*'.



Ustaz Sabri Saleh with a '*gelok*' made from coconut shell

Village head Abdul Rahman Ahamad, 60, said as a boy, he and his friends loved to explore the caves. "We used to go to Gua Gunung Runtu to watch the bats and the unique wall formations.

"We never realised that one of our hangouts was the spot of an an-

cient human burial ground."

He said from his village, it was several hours' trek on foot to the site where the Perak Man was unearthed.

"Students and tourists arrive in buses or vans and park near the village before continuing the rest of their journey on foot to the site.

"The other alternative route is a more challenging trek up a steep hill, which cannot be accessed by vehicles."

Rahman said since being listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site, the area had been closed to visitors. Permission has to be sought from the National Heritage Department to enter the area.

"Visitors can still view the cave from the junction of Kampung Gelok, at Jalan Baling-Kuala Kangsar. It is a dark brown greystone which stands out from the green hills of the Bintang mountain range near the west."

For details about Kampung Gelok, call Sabri at 019-4522452 or Rahman at 016-5036160.