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# Zuraina's Lenggong find

## WORLD HERITAGE

**SITE:** 25 years later, Unesco agrees people lived here 1.8 million years ago

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**B**ACK in 1987 when Lenggong Valley was first discovered, little did it cross her mind that she was about to excavate a slice of the history of mankind.

"I was on a personal mission at that time. Not many people in the country knew about archaeology and there were very few archaeologists back then," said Professor Emeritus Datin Paduka Zuraina Majid.

"As a trained social scientist, I felt it was my responsibility to develop archaeology as a respectable field and no longer depend on foreign archaeologists to excavate our historical sites."

Twenty-five years have passed since and Zuraina can now stand proud that Lenggong Valley is listed as a world heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco).

Situated in Perak, Lenggong Valley is regarded as one of the earliest site of human civilisation in Southeast Asia.

"I started exploring the valley after I finished my work in Gua Niah, Sarawak. It provided the earliest information on the existence of man in the country.

"After that, I reckon that man had to pass through the peninsula in order to go Borneo, Indonesia,



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Her readings of colonial literature brought her to Kota Tampan in Lenggong Valley in search for the place where British civil servants claimed the discovery of manmade tools from paleolithic era.

"After a long journey, we found some stones on a slope. When I dug into the earth, I chanced upon what looked to me like manmade tools. And after that, it was one discovery after another."

Zuraina, who is also the director-general of the National Heritage Department, explained that Leng-

gong Valley's successful recognition depended on its Outstanding Universal Values made compulsory by the World Heritage Committee.

"Lenggong Valley proved that Peninsular Malaysia played a global role in the dispersal of early man. People had to cross the peninsula in order to go to Indonesia, Australia and Thailand.

"We are the only place known in the world with evidence on the existence of man as early as 1.8 million years ago, until 1700 years ago when there was a volcanic eruption which destroyed life-form.

"Kota Tampan also revealed how paleolithic man made his tools and this information had not been discovered earlier."

The valley is also the home of world's first pre-historic skeleton that suffered from congenital deformity, the Perak Man.

Its discovery was not only significant in the development of Malaysia's natural history but also in the field of medical science.

On June 30 this year, Lenggong Valley was inscribed as the 953rd World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Committee in a meeting at St Petersburg, Russia.