

Temple Caves in Kayin and Mon Province Myanmar



Results of the Speleological Project January 2009 in cooperation with the Myanmar Tourism Promotion Board

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1. Introduction and Summary

Caves are of high religious importance to the people of Myanmar and are frequently visited by Buddhist pilgrim groups as a place for offering and worshipping. The Pindaya caves in Shan state are well known for its ancient Buddha images and are therefore included in most tourist itineraries. Other areas are hardly known to the international traveller despite many limestone areas with an interesting cultural heritage in temple- and natural caves.

The Northern Lao – European Cave Project is a team of European cavers that explore caves in Laos since 2002. It cooperates with the local authorities and development projects to promote cave eco-tourism as part of conservation and contribution to the local economy. The project made in 2008 contact to the Marketing Committee of the Myanmar Tourism Promotion Board and suggested a cooperation. It was agreed to start a cave documentation project and a small group visited Myanmar in January 2009.

The project focused on the Hpa-An and Mawlamyine (Moulmein) area in the Southern Kayin and Mon states. The area has an impressive ridge and tower karst with limestone hills dotted in plains of rice fields. The sceneries are very picturesque with big cave entrances containing Buddha images and golden chedis with green rice fields in front. The visited caves were mostly temple caves which were known from colonial reports. The passage sizes were impressive with 20-30 m width and chambers as large as 60m x 60 m. Most of the caves are through caves and with two or more entrances. The longest documented cave was Saddam cave in Hpa-An with 800 m length followed by several other caves of 400m length. We were surprised by the size and extend of the caves.

Saddan cave revealed huge spiders. Some species were collected and send to the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt/Germany for taxonomical determination. Such sizes have been found so far only in Laos which has the world biggest spiders.

The project surveyed in total 14 caves and documented 3.8 km of passages. The Tourism Board and the Cave Project agreed to continue the documentation in Hpa-An and to extend the activities to other areas. The work will provide the necessary basis for university institutes and tourism organizations to develop and preserve caves as important cultural heritage.

Number	Name	Village	Township	District	State	Length (m)
1	Hai Sin Gu	Eaindu	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	300
2	Saddan Gu	Eaindu	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	800
3	Kawka Taung Gu	Kaw Kyaik	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	53
4	Padamya Gu	Kaw Kyaik	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	117
5	Htaung Wi Gu	Kaw Kyaik	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	65
6	Bayin Nyi Gu	Bingyi	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	207
7	Nat Ye Kan Gu	Bingyi	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	161
8	Pa Done Gu	Takhin Lone	Hlaingbwe	Hpa-an	Kayin	438
9	Pa Dan Gu	Takhin Lone	Hlaingbwe	Hpa-an	Kayin	282
10	Kawgon Gu	Kawgon	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	52
11	Ya Thea Pyan Gu	Pagat	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	433
12	Kayon Gu	Kayon	Mawlamyine	Mawlamyine	Mon	302
13	Saddan Gu	Kayon	Mawlamyine	Mawlamyine	Mon	516
14	Nagamauk Gu	Mudon	Mudon	Mawlamyine	Mon	74

Table 1: The surveyed caves in Kayin and Mon province

2. Temple Caves for Tourism

The caves around Hpa-An and Mawlamyine are horizontal systems that are easy to visit for tourists with proper footwear and lighting. The caves are impressive due to partially large passages with sinter formations. The combination of chedi and Buddha decorated entrance halls and cave passages creates a unique experience. Some caves offer splendid views from upper platform over the landscape.

Particularly interesting for tourism are:

1. Saddam Gu & Hai Sin Gu, Hpa-An

Access: 1 hour drive South East of Hpa-An, road direct to Monastery.

To see: Impressive 20 m wide and 15 m high passage with various large stalactite and stalagmite formations, through cave with impressive light from rear entrance, Hai Sin Gu is reached from the rear exit of Saddam Cave in 10 more minutes. The end chamber has a huge column of 5 m width (see pictures).

Difficulties: None, rice fields between both caves can be muddy.

2. Ya Thea Pyan Gu, Hpa-An

Access: 30 minutes drive South West of Hpa-An, directly in front of the cave.

To see: Very nice entrance portal with a good view over the plains. The main terrace has several chedis and Buddha statues. A small sinter pool containing holy water is near the entrance. The main passage continues for 300 m to a rear entrance hall. An impressive sinter wall separates an upper area from the lower part of the hall.

Difficulties: The passage is sometimes muddy and slippery. Some climbing, partially on wood ladders, is necessary to reach the rear entrance.

3. Baiyin Nyi, Hpa-An

Access: 1 hour drive North West of Hpa-An on good road.

To see: The monastery has a hot spring pool that can be used for swimming. The buildings offer a colourful view with the cave entrance in the back. A steep staircase leads to an upper platform. The cave is relatively short with 200 m and a mid-size passage width of 10 m. Impressive is the back lit Buddha statue in a small end chamber.

Difficulties: None, some efforts to climb the staircase at the entrance.

4. Pa Done Gu (Padong Gu), Hpa-An

Access: One hour North of Hpa-An. The last kilometers are one a dirt road through fields towards an isolated karst ridge.

To see: Small entrance area with a large lying Buddha in front of an upwards tilted rear entrance hall. The entrance area has a squeeze that is said to heal sicknesses of people who crawl through it. The staircase to the top winds upwards to the top of the hill decorated with a golden stupa. The 360 C round view is stunning.

Difficulties: None in the upper cave, the lower caves requires crawling on the knees in a muddy passage of 1 m width. The climb to the hill top is strenuous.

5. Saddan Gu (Farm Cave), Mawlamyine

Access: 20 minutes on road.

To see: Big entrance chamber with large dripstone formations, prehistoric excavations, side passages to explore.

Difficulties: None, flat walking, easy climb at entrance

6. Kayon Gu, Mawlamyine

Access: 5 minutes from road past a maize field, short climb to entrance

To see: Big entrance chamber with large dripstone formations, prehistoric excavations, side passages to explore.

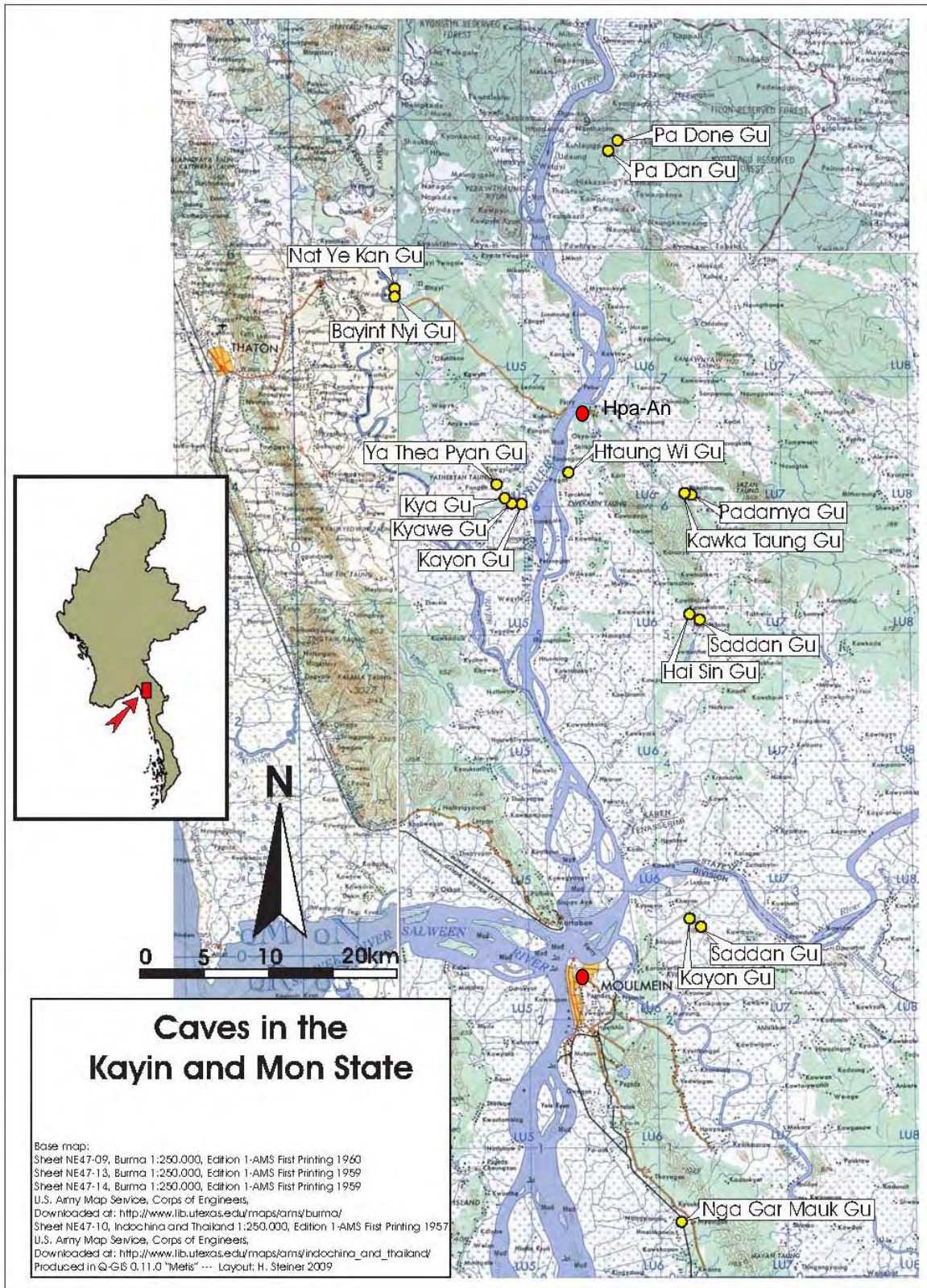
Difficulties: None, flat walking, easy climb at entrance

Remark:

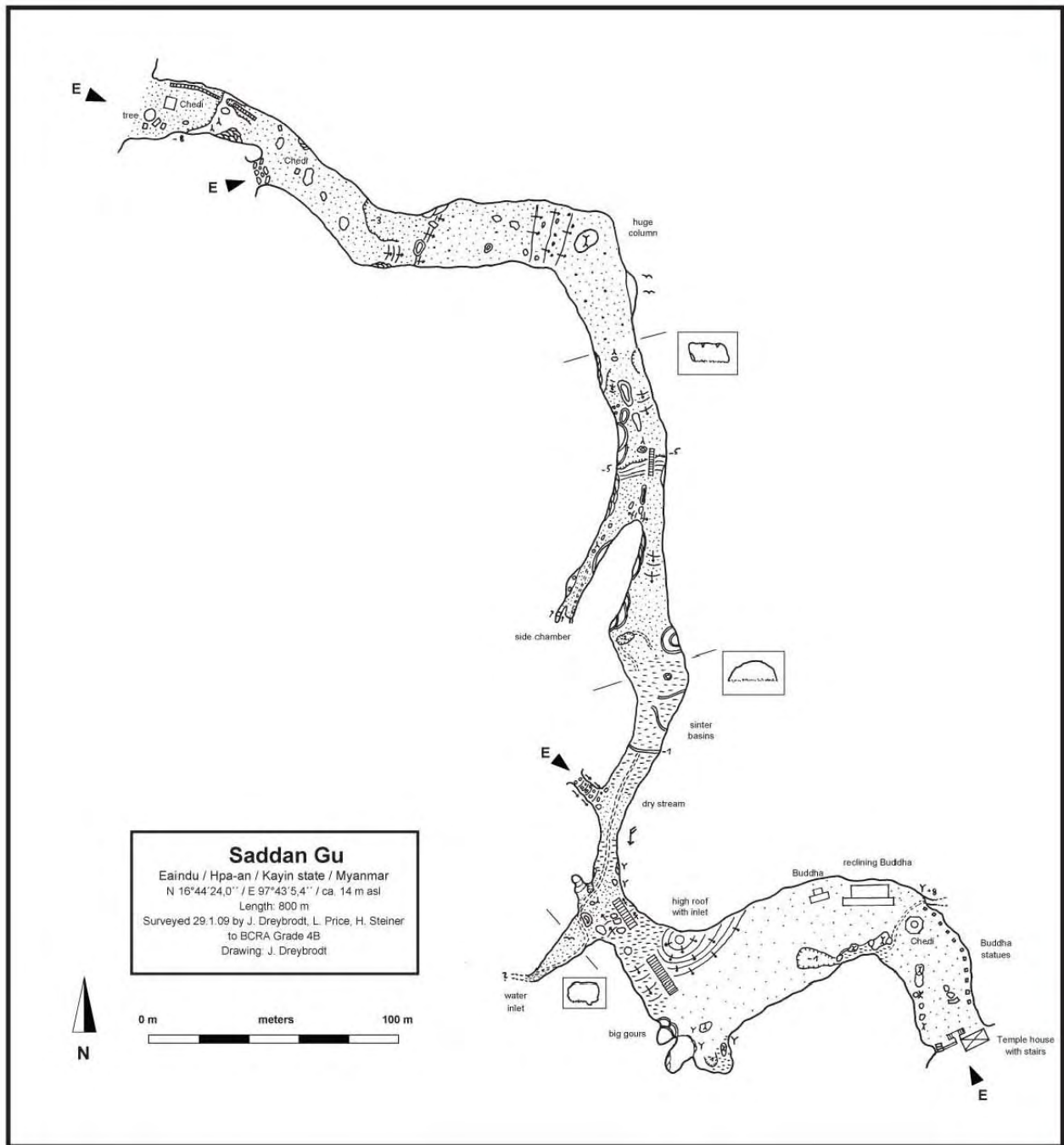
The caves were visited during the dry season in end of January. The water level inside the cave might be different in the rainy season.

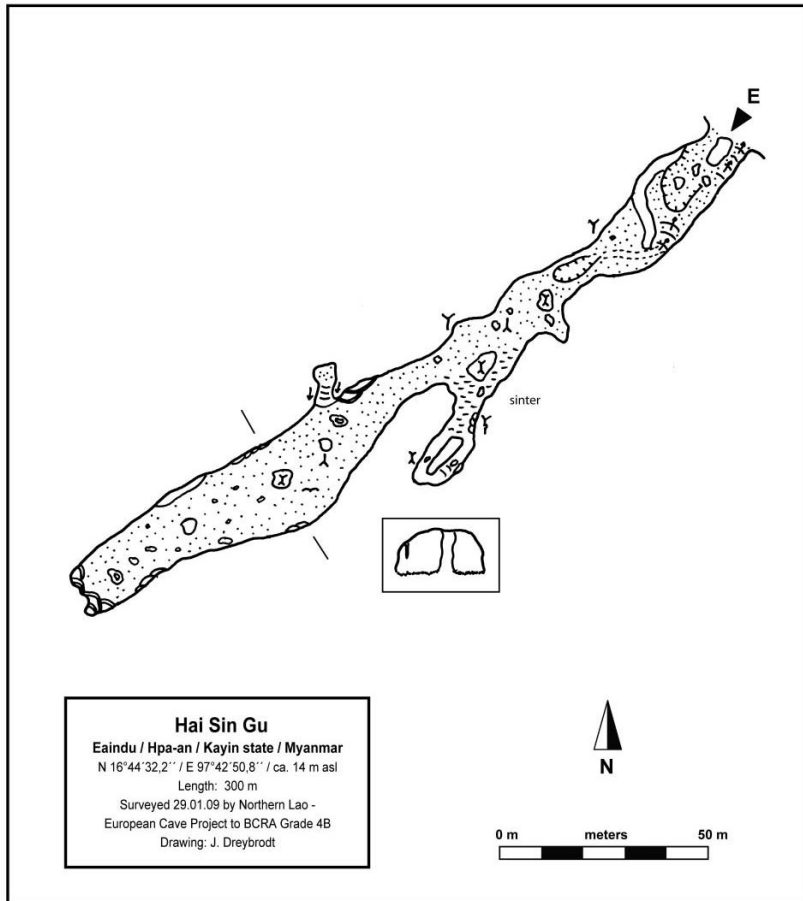
3. Location of caves

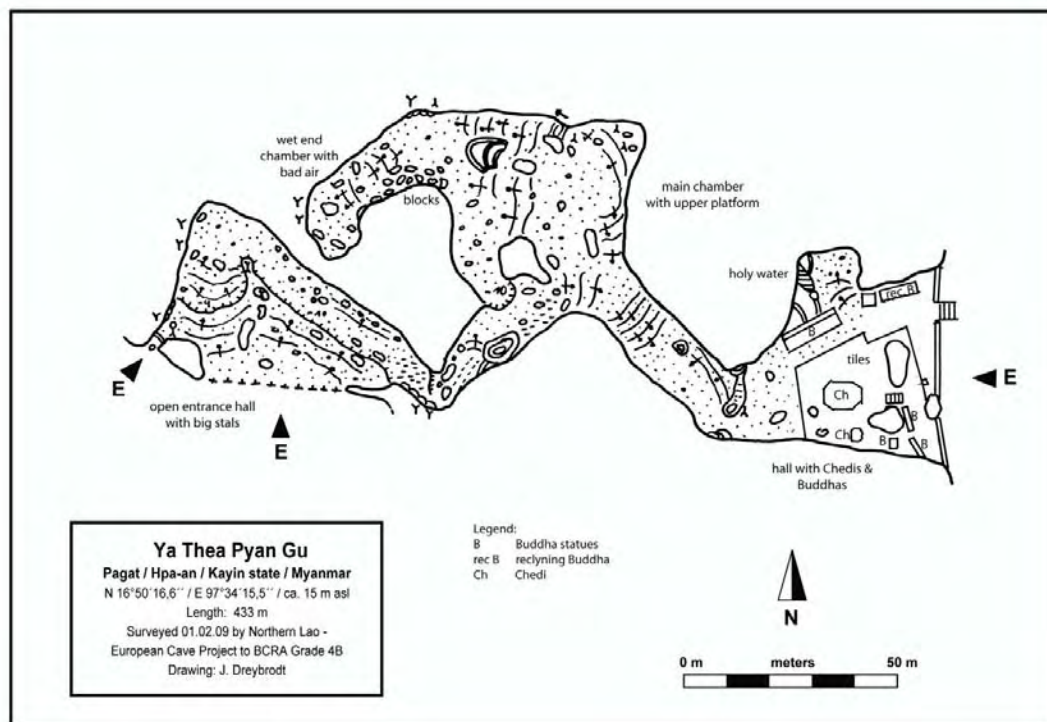
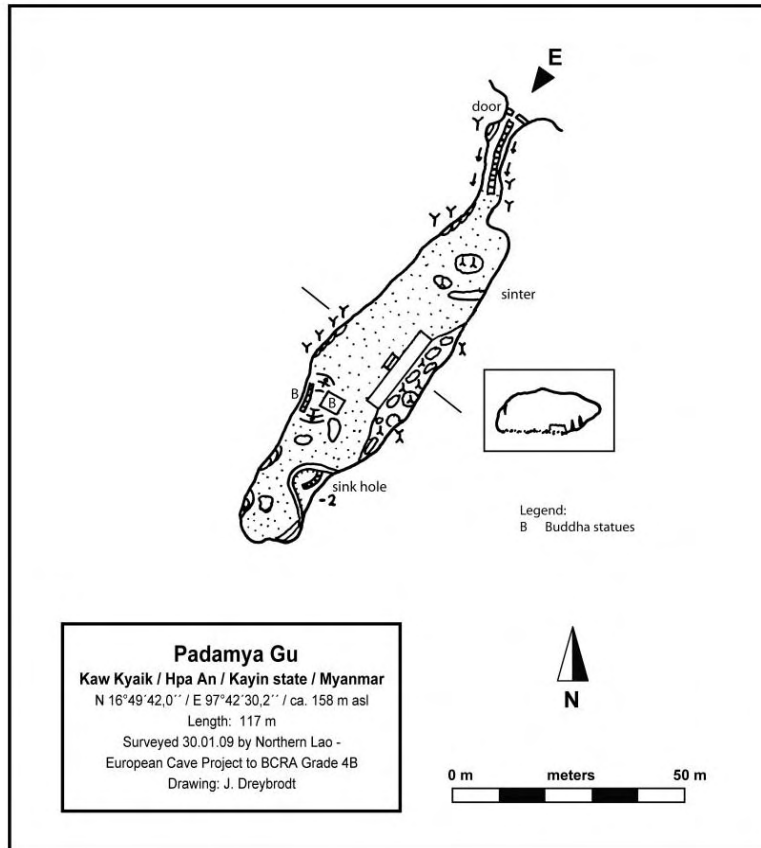
Topographic map of the visited area with cave entrances marked as yellow dots.

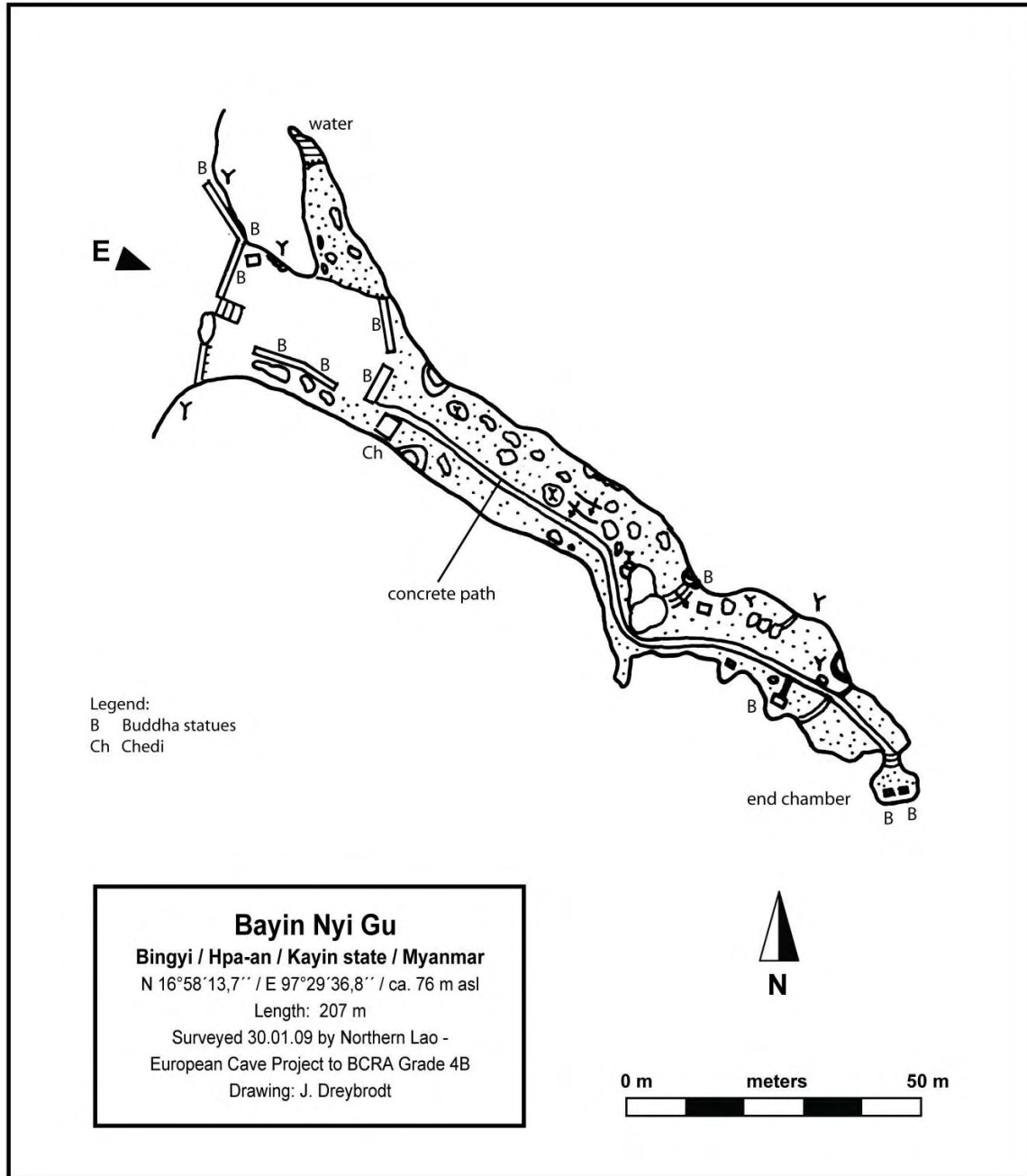


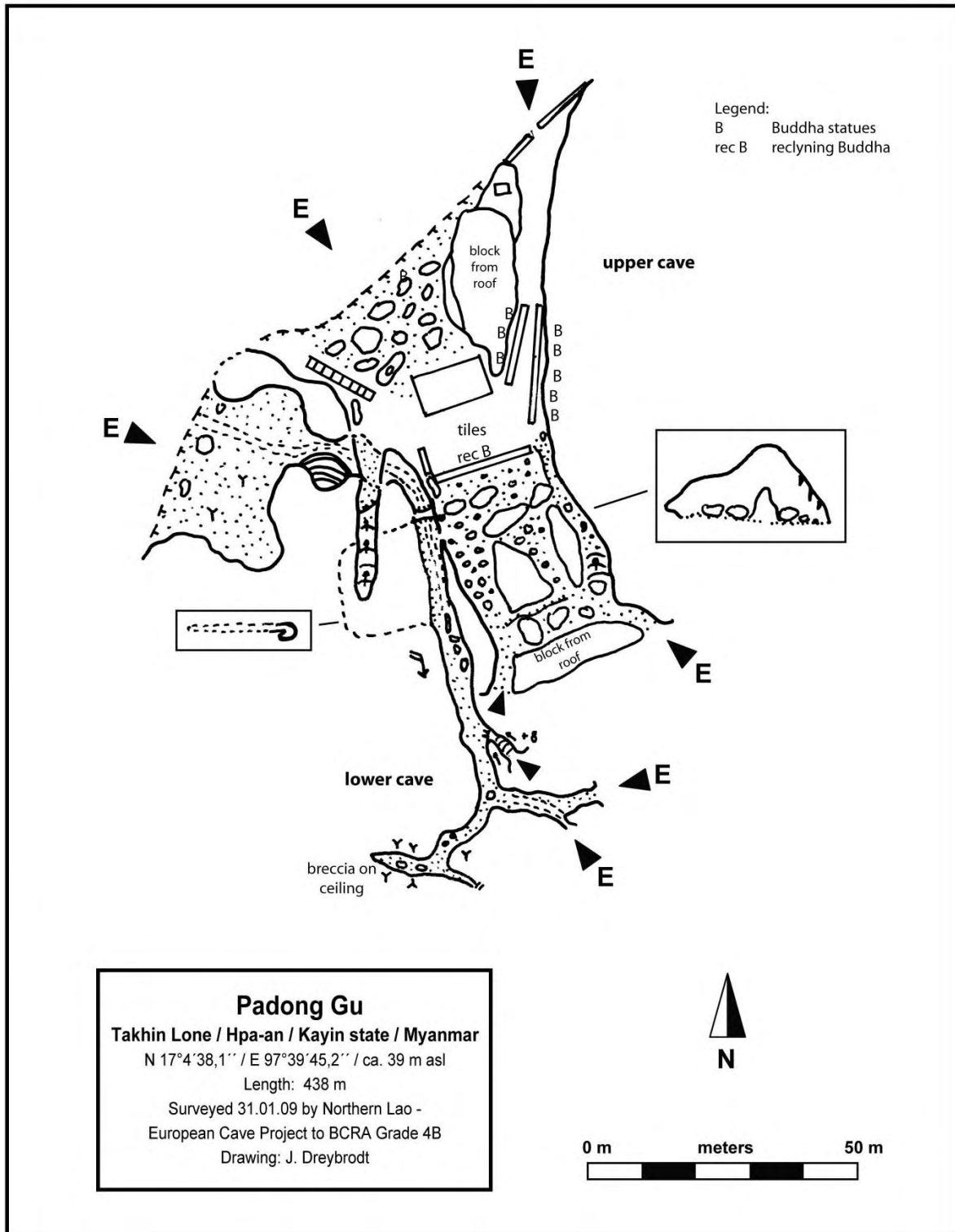
4. Maps of the Caves around Hpa-An



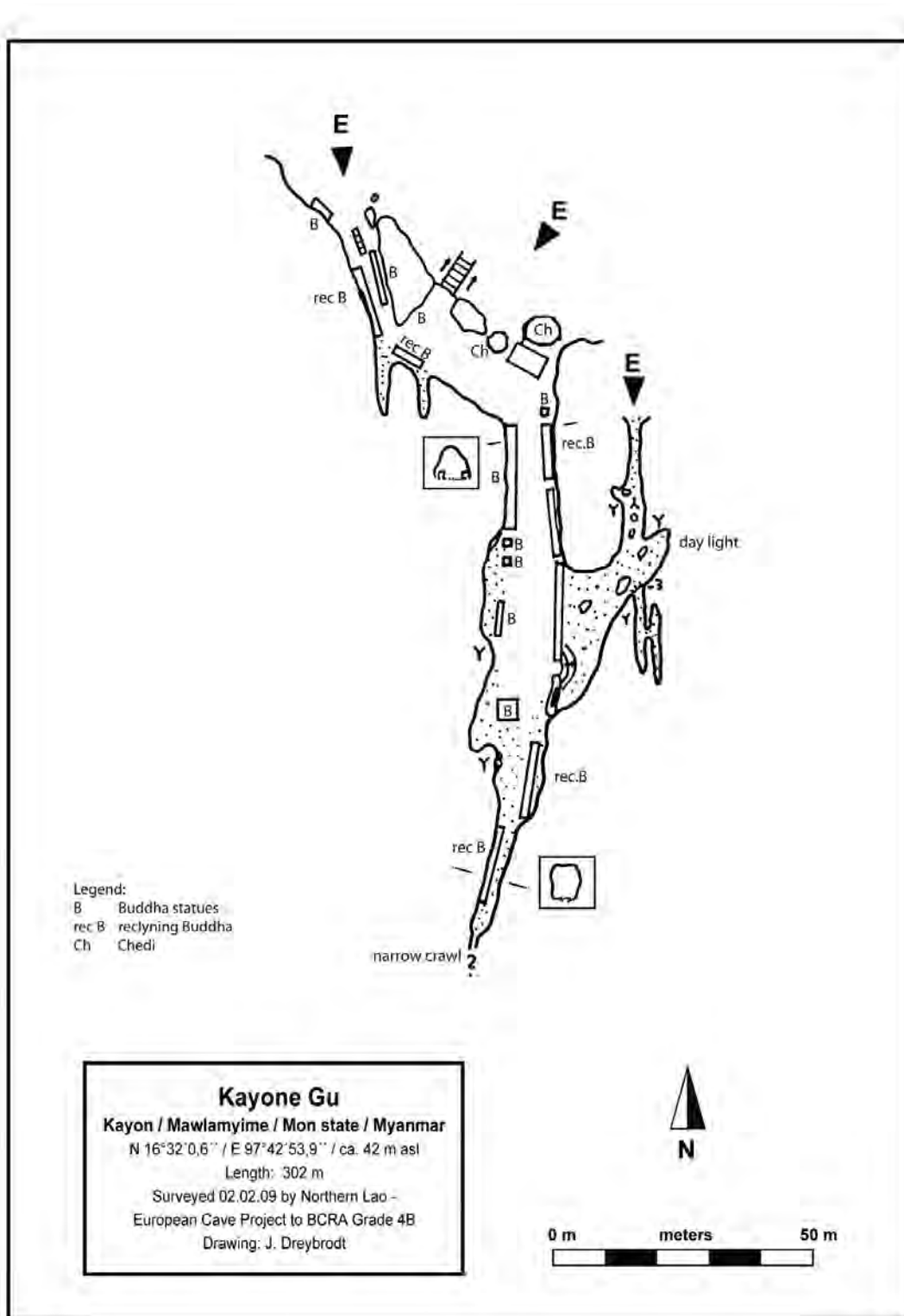


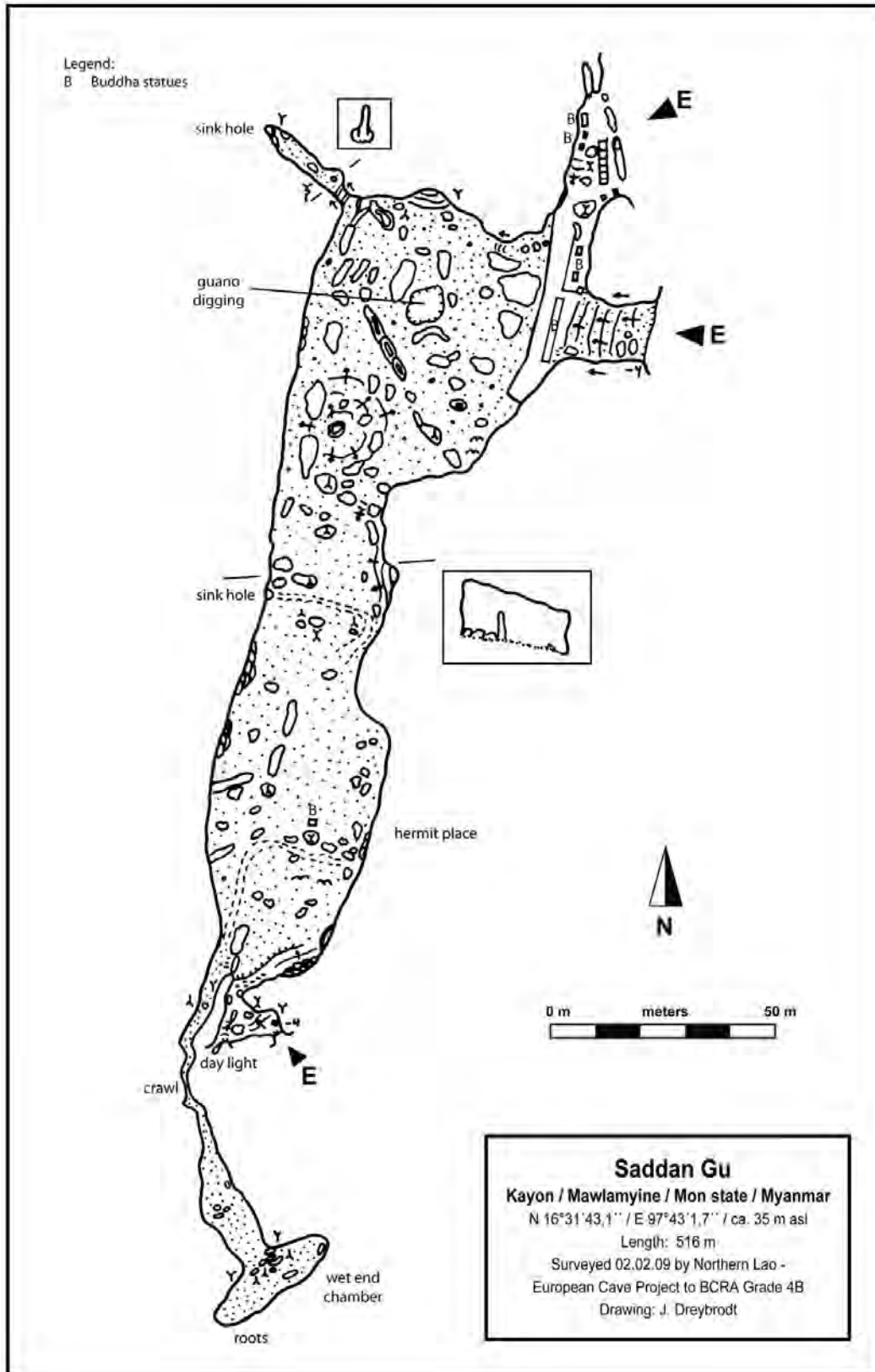






5. Maps of Caves around Mawlamyine





6. Biospeleological Research

Several Spiders and insects were collected for taxonomy of the species. Some of them are send to research institutes and universities for determination.



Helmut Steiner collecting a spider



Extremely huger spider in Haisin Gu



Whip spider in Saddan Gu

6. Pictures of Hpa-An Karst Ridge Landscape:



View from Hpa-An town



Limestone ridge on the way to Saddan Gu



Approaching the ridge to visit the cave



View over the rice field plains from karst top of Pa Dong Gu



Stupa on Karst tower of PaDong Gu



Kyauk Lan Latt Lake Pagoda

6. Pictures of Hpa-An Caves:



Entrance of Yat Thea Pyan Gu



Light on a passage from a side exit in Saddan Gu



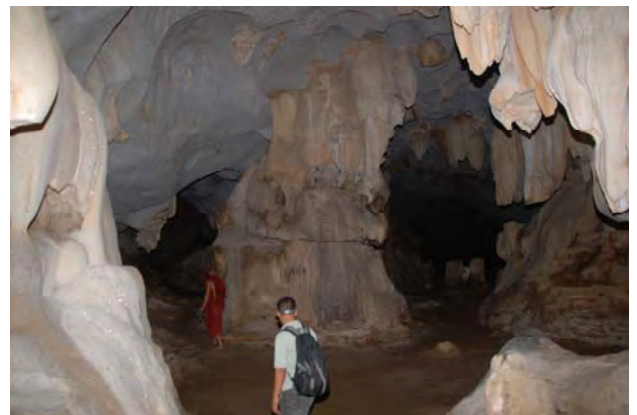
Historical Kawgoon Gu



Monastery in front of Bayin Nyi Gu



Lying Buddha in Saddan Gu



End chamber of Hai Sin Gu with column

6. Pictures of the Mawlamyine Caves:



Kayon Gu



Buddha statue in Kayon Gu



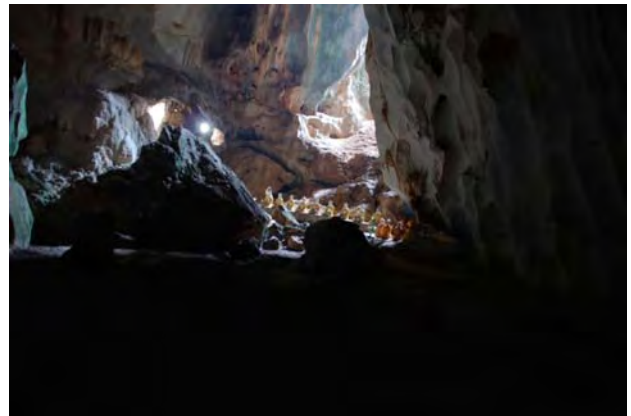
Mystic light in Kayon Gu



Entrance of Saddan Gu with monastery



Column in Saddan Gu



Huge passage of Saddan Gu

7. Cave Protection

Caves are very sensitive systems and develop very slowly over hundred of thousands of years. Any damage done is not repairable and has a severe impact on the beauty of the cave. Therefore it is important when visiting the caves not to touch any of the dripstone formations and not to leave any rubbish in the cave. It is also important to stay on the main path to avoid any damage to pools and formations on the floor. If there is any cave fauna e.g. bats or insects, these should not be disturbed. All these measures help to preserve the beauty and ecosystem of the cave and to maintain its long term attraction as a tourist site.

Please keep in mind the three golden rules:

- **Take nothing but pictures**
- **Kill nothing but time**
- **Leave nothing but footprints**



Fragile eccentrics - Do not touch !

8. The Northern Lao – European Cave Project

We are a group of European cavers from national caving societies in each country. The members are experienced cavers and have participated in several international expeditions in Europe, Asia and Africa. The project was initiated in 2002 after a visit to the limestone area of Muang Ngoi in Lao PDR by German and Dutch cavers.

Our *Mission* is to visit and map all major caving areas in Northern Laos !

We achieve this by:

- **fruitful cooperation with the local authorities and international development projects**
- **including the local villagers in our expedition as scouts and guides**
- **inviting interested cavers to participate in our expeditions**
- **maintaining good contacts with other active caving groups**

The visit to Myanmar was the first step to extend our activities to neighbor countries and to bring in our expertise in the development of caves for tourism.

For more information about our work, please visit our website at

www.laoscaveproject.de



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Acknowledgement

**We acknowledge to cooperation of
the Myanmar Tourism Promotion Board in arranging permission and logistics**

Especially we thank

Mr. Phyo Wai Yar Zar (Vice Chairman)

Minh (Guide and Translator)



Sunset at Salween River

9. Caves visited during the Myanmar Cave Documentation Project 2009

No.	Date	Name	Koordinates	Altitude	Village	Township	District	State	Length (m)
1	1/29/2009	Hai Sin Gu	N 16° 44' 32.4"; E 97° 42' 50.8"	14	Eaindu	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	300
2	1/29/2009	Saddan Gu	N 16° 44' 24"; E 97° 43' 5.4"		Eaindu	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	800
3	1/30/2009	Kawka Taung Gu	N 16° 49' 42.7"; E 97° 42' 22.4"		Kaw Kyaik	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	53
4	1/30/2009	Padamya Gu	N 16° 49' 42"; E 97° 42' 30.2"	158	Kaw Kyaik	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	117
5	1/30/2009	Htaung Wi Gu	N 16° 50' 31.2"; E 97° 37' 18"	19	Kaw Kyaik	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	65
6	1/30/2009	Bayin Nyi Gu	N 16° 58' 13.7"; E 97° 29' 36.8"	76	Bingyi	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	207
7	1/30/2009	Nat Ye Kan Gu	N 16° 58' 25.1"; E 97° 29' 37.7"		Bingyi	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	161
8	1/31/2009	Pa Done Gu	N 17° 4' 38.1"; E 97° 39' 45.2"	39	Takhin Lone	Hlaingbwe	Hpa-an	Kayin	438
9	1/31/2009	Pa Dan Gu	N 17° 4' 13"; E 97° 39' 28.5"	14	Takhin Lone	Hlaingbwe	Hpa-an	Kayin	282
10	2/1/2009	Kawgon Gu	N 16° 49' 20.9"; E 97° 35' 11.3"	53	Kawgon	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	52
11	2/1/2009	Ya Thea Pyan Gu	N 16° 50' 6.6"; E 97° 34' 14.5"		Pagat	Hpa-an	Hpa-an	Kayin	433
12	2/2/2009	Kayon Gu	N 16° 32' 0.6"; E 97° 42' 53.9"	42	Kayon	Mawlamyine	Mawlamyine	Mon	302
13	2/2/2009	Saddan Gu	N 16° 31' 43.1"; E 97° 43' 1.7"	35	Kayon	Mawlamyine	Mawlamyine	Mon	516
14	2/3/2009	Nagamauk Gu	N 16° 19' 4.3"; E 97° 42' 20.4"	16	Mudon	Mudon	Mawlamyine	Mon	74

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