

Ancient Buddhist Sites of Sri Lanka

Buduruvagala

Mulkirigala

Dimbulagala

Buduruvagala

The figures at Buduruvagala are thought to date from the 10th century CE, and are of the Mahayana school, which flourished briefly in Sri Lanka. The standing Buddha in the center still bears traces of its original stuccoed robe and a long streak of orange suggests it was once brightly painted.

Of the 3 figures to the Buddha's right, the central one is thought to be Avalokitesvara. To the left of this white painted figure is a female figure in the "thrice bent" posture, thought to be Tara.

The 3 figures to the Buddha's left look like they are from a different period. One of them is holding up a *dorje* – an unusual example of Tantric Buddhism on the island. One is said to be Maitreya and one, Vishnu.



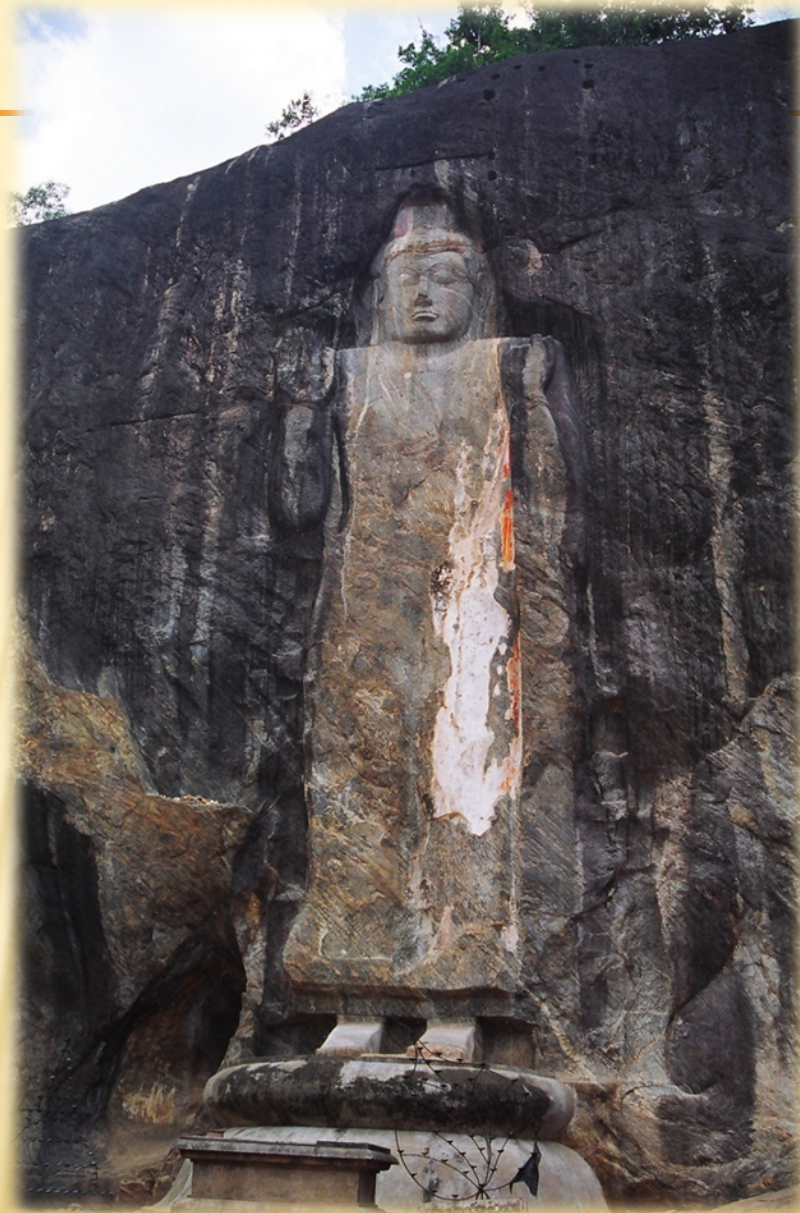
Local devotees



Maitreya
and
Vishnu?



Remnants of
an orange
painted stucco
robe.



Mulkirigala



A young novice welcomes visitors to this remote monastery.



It was from the library of this monastery in 1826, that a Pali copy of the *Mahavamsa* was brought to George Turnour in Ratnapura. It was his translation that allowed much of Buddhist history in India to be decoded. From it, Alexander Cunningham was able to identify a number of historical sites and personages.



Doors to the bhikkhus' rooms off the central courtyard.



The monastery complex from the first flight of steps up to the caves.



Further up the steps, the “boss” monkey watches me from the corner of his eye.



A well informed villager acts as my guide and holds my lotus offerings while I take his photo in 1 of the 7 caves.



From the topmost cave.
The setting could be
from a Joseph Conrad
novel.







A Sal tree blossom along the stairway. In Sri Lankan art, the paintings of the *parinibbana* always feature the Buddha lying between 2 Sal trees.

Dimbulagala

Located southeast of Polonnaruwa and once very close to Tamil occupied areas, it was perhaps not wise to visit here. In fact, the late Ven Dimbulagala Nayaka Thera, a previous abbot, was assassinated by the Tigers.



Dimbulagala Viharaya is the centerpiece of the Maduru Oya Basin. It is bounded to the North by Gunner's Quoin, south by a vast plain, east by the Batticaloa district, west again by a vast plain, north-west by the Polonnaruwa District and north-east by the Maduru Oya. The viharaya complex is tucked at the foot of the imposing Dimbulagala rock and originally it encompassed around 8,000 acres. Historically, it would have been as old as the Polonnaruwa period. Thereafter with the shift of capitals, foreign invasions and malaria it became neglected and the abode of animals and the Veddas.

The ruins of a monastery including a Chaithiya, bodhigara, poyage, dhamma saba mandapaya, ancient guard stones and moon stones are evident. The ruins are enclosed by a stone parapet with four cardinal entrances, immediately outside is a pokuna (nil mal vila) and a stone bridge. The jungle path leading further up takes you to the Akasa Chaithiya on the summit of Dimbulagala, passing ancient caves of the forest hermitage. The Dimbulagala range is said to house a number of caves cut into the rock with Brahmi inscriptions over their drip ledges as proving their antiquity.

It is said that King Pandukabhaya lived here for a short period in the 4th century. In the Anuradhapura period there was an important vihara here. An inscription of Sundaramaha devi in the 12th century says that 500 monks resided there at that time. A most notable period of its history was associated with King Parakramabahu II, in the 13th century where the Dimbulagala Maha Kassapa Thera helped the King with the purification and renewal of the Buddhist order. In the early centuries Dimbulagala was known as Dhumarakkhapabbata or Udumbarapabbata.

King Dewanampiyatissa, the first properly acclaimed king of Anuradhapura our first kingdom was responsible for the erection of many Viharas. One of the first such Viharas was Dimbulagala. It is also historically important in that from Arahat Mahinda's time up to the tenure of the last Arahat, Maliyadeva's time many great Arahats dwelt in Dimbulagala. This is mentioned in the great literary work 'Saddharmalankaraya. Then there followed unstable and disturbed political periods, with threat to general administration and security as well.

Dimbulagala is also noted for having being the abode of Kuththagaththatissa, an Arahat who attended the writing down of the scripture at Aluvihare Matale along with five hundred Bhikkus.

Dimbulagala which had deteriorated after the Parakramabahu era saw a revival with the devotion and dedication of the late Maha Nayaka and the discovery of Udumbaragiri - which had become the home of the Veddhas. The late Maha Nayaka is also remembered for establishing village settlements in the area through granting land, housing facilities and guidance in the last two decades. He encouraged and helped the settlements in Welioya, Janakapura, Welikanda and Kadawatha, Maduwa, but his plans of settlements in Kantale and Vavuniya suffered disappointment.

Dimbulagala had once been a great centre of learning - it had had religious connections with Burma and Thailand. It had conducted religious teachings in eighteen languages. It had given advice and guided the great kings like King Vijayabahu I and Parakramabahu I. The Royal Queens like Sundara Devi had patronised the erection of Dimbulagala. The great writers like Gurulugomi and Vidyachakravarthi had received their instructions from the great clergy residing in Dimbulagala.

A Thai inscription of 1292 found on a slab at Polonnaruva states that king Rama Khamheng founded an *aranna* monastery, and offered it to the Mahathera from Nakhon Si Thammarat. The *arannavasi* fraternity had become very prominent in the 12th and 13th centuries in Sri Lanka, and had its centre at Udumbaragiri or Dimbulagala in Sri Lanka.

King Lothai (1317-1347), son of Rama Khamheng requested the famous Sri Lankan monk Udumbara (that is Dimbulagala) Mahasami who had arrived in Pegu, (lower Burma) to send a monk to perform *Upasampada*. Udumbara Mahasami sent the Sukhothai monk Sumana, his student. On return, Sumana Thera established the *Sihala Sangha* sect in Sukhothai.



Dimbulagala, a hermitage occupied by monks since the 3rd century.