Historic find at Bujang Valley

> Metal foundry dating back to 50 BC points to an advanced civilisation

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GEORGE TOWN: The historical significance of the Bujang Valley in Kedah has intensified with the discovery of a structure that has existed there since 50 BC – making it the oldest man-made building to be found in South-east Asia.

The excavation was made late last year at the Sungai Batu archaeological area. The age of the site – a metal foundry – was recently confirmed through radiocarbon tests conducted by the Beta Analytic Inc laboratory in Florida.

In hailing the find, Prof Mokhtar Saidin, director of the Centre for Global Archaeological Research of Universiti Sains Malaysia, stressed that it pointed to an advanced civilisation on our shores as far back as 2,062 years ago.

“This will help us to rewrite history,” he said.

“What we have found is a centre for an iron industry together with a port that existed here during that period.”

The foundry is among 97 ancient structures, all covered over time in mounds of earth, that have been detected within a 4 sq km area at Sungai Batu.

Of these, only 29 have been excavated so far, Mokhtar said.

The structure also pre-dates a nearby 1,900 year old ritualistic monument built with detailed geometric precision, whose discovery was reported by The Sun in March 2010.

Since then, other iron-smelting structures have also been found, dating back to 60 AD, as well as a jetty.

Mokhtar was speaking after the opening of USM’s Archaeology Gallery by Heritage Commissioner Prof Emeritus Datuk Zuraina Majid yesterday.

Also present at the gallery was USM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Omar Osman.

Zuraina said the government has allocated RM20 million through the National Heritage Department for the conservation of the Sungai Batu archaeological area.

The amount would include land acquisition of the oil palm plantations where the mounds have been found, and the development of an information gallery and visitors’ trail.

Prior to the Sungai Batu archaeological project which began in 2009, excavations in other parts of the Bujang Valley during the 70s and 80s had recorded mostly Hindu-Buddhist structures and artefacts dated between the 8th Century AD and 12th Century AD.

It is understood that the system of metallurgy found here is similar to techniques used in ancient India.

The Sungai Batu finds pre-date other man-made structures in South-east Asia, including the Batu Jaya Site in Karawang, western Java (3rd Century AD) and the Siva-Bhadresvara Temple in My Son, Vietnam (4th Century AD).

Earlier, Zuraina inspected three new scientific equipment acquired by USM, with a price tag of RM4.2 million, to facilitate studies on fossils and artefacts.