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Thrills on the hills

Sneak preview of new forest park at Putrajaya

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THE canopy of tall trees isolated us from the hustle and bustle of the outside world, providing us with refreshingly coolness and a sensation of charming relaxation.

There we were, a group of journalists, basking in the chirping of birds, the rustling of leaves and the occasional buzzing of winged insects, enjoying the raw nature under the clear, translucent sky. It was simply beautiful and delightful!

We were standing in a tropical forest 90m above sea level at Putrajaya for a preview of the forest-cum-park in Precincts 14 and 15, ahead of its official launch this coming Friday.

Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, the wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, is scheduled to open the forest park at 8.30am.

A first for the federal administrative capital and the country, Taman Rimba Alam was originally a rubber estate and oil palm plantation, known as the Sedgeley and Prang Besar Estates.

It was designed as a showcase for tropical rainforest trees on a 160ha site and is one of 12 metropolitan parks on the Putrajaya master plan.

Funds for Taman Rimba Alam were first allocated under the 8th Malaysia Plan and then under the 9th Malaysia Plan.

According to resident forester Rosslan Yaacob, the project team weathered many challenges in creating the lowland tropical forest with a balanced ecosystem.

"From a topographical viewpoint, this park was developed by preserving the natural vegetation and minimising disturbance. The most arduous task was the sourcing for trees because forest trees are sensitive to over-exposure," Rosslan said.

"In the early stages, we had a 15% tree mortality rate but the number has now declined to 5%. From the 400 species of trees, we have produce a wide range of quality wood like cengal, meranti, keruing, resak and nyatoh," he said.

The park's development comprises four



Cool under the heat: The canopy of tall forest trees in Taman Rimba Alam offers a fun and relaxing walk for nature lovers



This way:
Rosslan leading
the media
during the
preview of the
tropical lowland
forest in
Precincts I4 and
I5, Putrajaya.

phases, with the first beginning in 2001.

More than 94,000 trees have been planted so far and Putrajaya Corporation (PjC) will continue to identify new species especially the ones going extinct or are rare.

Taman Rimba Alam will also serve as a gene pool for research and preservation due to PjC's close working ties with the Forest Research

Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) and the Forestry Department.

According to Rosslan, of the 163 meranti species found in peninsular Malaysia, 80 are available at the park.

"Trees are planted close to one another to encourage competition and to accelerate the growth rate.

"It normally takes around eight years to achieve a 10cm-girth around a tree trunk but with Taman Rimba Alam, after barely four years, the girth of trees are already measuring 15cm," Rosslan said.

The components of the park are:

- Avenue trees (planted near the entrance);
- Instant Forest Display (for large trees like palm);
- International Tropical Arboretum (forest trees originating from Southeast Asia);
- Red Meranti-Keruing Forest (dominant species in Malaysian forests);
- Ridgetop Hillside Forest (trees in hilly areas);
- Chengal-Kempas Forest (both important species are currently dwindling in numbers);
- Indigenous Forest Fruit Trees (to balance the eco-system);
- Planting Around Water Bodies (for high moisture species);

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- Kasai Merawan Stand (represented by wide leaf trees); and
- Mixed Species Matrix (for fast-growing species).

After the tour on foot, we travelled on four wheel-drives through bumpy routes. We spotted horse trails used by the mounted police units for training.

Activities such as camping, fishing, trekking and horse-riding will be made available to the public from early next year.

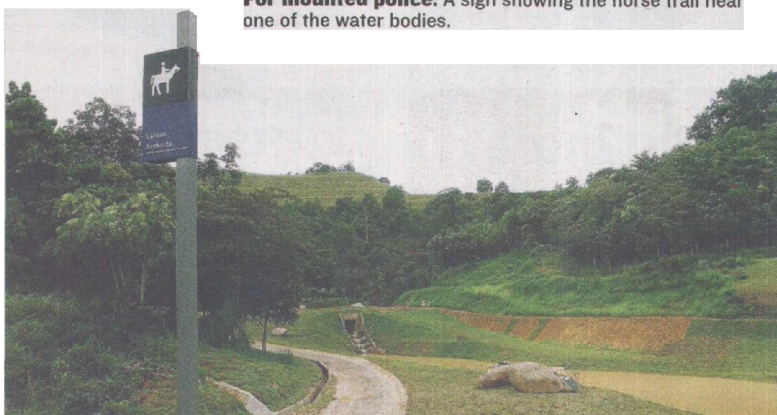
Research, tree identification and related activities will also be opened to higher education institution students and government agencies.

The final phase of Taman Rimba Alam will be carried out under the 10th Malaysia Plan. Included in the final phase are the construction of a forest management and education centre, maintenance building, campsites, chalets, washrooms and park areas.



Closer look: The Kasai Merawan Stand is an area planted with trees with large leaves.

For mounted police: A sign showing the horse trail near one of the water bodies.



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One of many: The Avenue Trees component comprises siput jantan, jelutong, penaga lilin and dammar minyak trees.