


Headline	Mishaps aside, we need to let forest heal		
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 FOREST RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF MALAYSIA

Mishaps aside, we need to let forest heal

THE Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) decided recently to close the popular forest trail, Rover Track, for safety reasons.

We know that we will be facing protests from regular visitors, who have been using this trail for their exercise routine for many years. It was not an easy decision but one that we must take for the long-term sustainability of the forest in FRIM.

The Bukit Lagong Forest Reserve, where Rover Track and Canopy Walkway are located, is an important water catchment area, supplying water to Ulu Kepong residents for years.

In recent years, we have observed that with the increased number of visitors to FRIM, the top part of the hill, farther up where the Canopy Walkway is located, had been encroached by visitors.

We have noted an increased numbers of tree-falling incidents and are worried of soil erosion occurring along the trail leading up to the walkway.

We closed the old path leading to the Canopy Walkway trail for recovery and opened a new one, but the old area continued to be used. Some regular visitors even made new trails of their own that led to the top of the hill.

With the increased number of people going up the illegal trail, ignoring the no-entry signage, soil erosion becomes worse and these pathways become streams during downpour.

We have had a few frightening incidents of "head water"-like flooding at the Sungai Kroh picnic area. The recent one happened last weekend. We were fortunate that these incidents occurred late in the evening when there were no visitors.

Following the downpour, many trees and branches fell along the Rover Track, and the Canopy Walk-

way was damaged by an uprooted tree last Monday night. We shudder at the thought of what might have happened.

But our visitors could not care less as they continued to use the trail, walking across the fallen branches, oblivious to the fact that there may be snakes. While they do not mind putting their lives in danger, FRIM cannot allow this to continue.

We need to conduct damage and safety assessments, as well as get some work done there once the weather stabilises. In the meantime, we cannot have people crossing these dangerous paths. We know that we have to give the eroded area of the forest time to heal and recover from years of use.

In recent years, we have seen a drastic increase in the number of visitors, local as well as foreign. Their interest in FRIM helps to promote the institute as an important tourism destination and we are appreciative of this. We like sharing our facilities with urban folk for rest and recreation purposes. FRIM has opened its doors to the public for recreational purposes for more than 20 years. However, now, we must close part of the forest trails for recovery, and we appeal to visitors, particularly the regular ones with jogging passes, to respect this decision for the long-term sustainability of the forest.

The increased soil erosion uphill may be the reason for frequent flooding downstream, which affects FRIM and the neighbouring houses. The recent floods in FRIM have caused damage to campus facilities — parts of our concrete fence was destroyed and staff members' vehicles were damaged.

It is frightening to imagine this happening when we have a lot of visitors.

After last weekend's flooding and what happened to the Canopy Walkway, we know that we could not delay the decision to close the area. We made the announcement

on Oct 13 and put up temporary notices to prevent visitors from entering the Rover Trail.

However, I was informed that a number of visitors ignored the instructions and followed others into the forest. I was appalled to see the pictures taken by staff members, who were working at the FRIM Canopy Walkway site where signs of further erosion could be seen.

We have no choice but to step up enforcement. I would like to urge visitors, especially the regulars, to understand and respect our decision to close the Rover Track.

We need them to leave the forest alone to recover naturally for a while. We may need to do tree planting later, and only when the area has recovered sufficiently can we consider reopening the trail.

Please understand that forests offer much more than just a place to exercise, rest and respite from your busy, stressful life. It serves many crucial functions, providing natural resources, oxygen and water, and preventing floods.

However, a forest cannot serve these functions well if its health worsens. If our body is unwell, you need to give it a good rest and time for recovery. It is the same with the forest ecosystem.

It took nearly 100 years for the FRIM campus to become what it is today, from an old mining area. It will need a few years for the forest to recover.

In the meantime, FRIM visitors are welcome to make use of other facilities in the main campus and the Kepong Botanic Gardens to exercise.

FRIM is a popular icon for Selangor as a forest park for recreational activities and an important tourist destination. We have been given a four-star rating by TripAdvisor, and received good publicity.

Therefore, it is not an easy decision for us to close our most

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popular attraction. However, considering the safety of visitors, the need for forest health recovery and the long-term sustainability of the area, we must do it, and the sooner the better.

In the coming months, we will need to assess the damage and repair the Canopy Walkway. This could take some time because the walkway system depends on several living trees, of which one was damaged recently, and there is no other alternative in sight.

We hope for understanding and thank all our visitors for their co-operation.

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*The decision to close the **Rover Track and Canopy Walkway** at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia is for the **long-term sustainability** of its forests.*