

## NEWLY DISCOVERED ANCIENT STŪPA RUINS AT UPPER MALVATHU OYA BASIN

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### Introduction

This research paper is a preliminary archaeological investigation on newly discovered two ancient Buddhist Stūpa sites located at upper *MalvathuOya* basin in North Central province of Sri Lanka. They are *Dambagollagama* (N 7° 59' 54.64" 80° 40' 55.63", Elevation 616ft MSL) and *Veheragodella* (N 7° 58' 12.83" E 80° 40' 48.74, Elevation 715 ft. MSL) which represent highly disturbed two Stūpa mounds. These sites are located in the vicinity of the *Waya Ulpatha* village at *Palugaswewa* divisional secretariat in *Anuradhapura* district. Present writer identified these two sites in early 2013 during his field survey conducted in this region. These Stūpa evidences are vital to understand the regional dynamics and architectural features of an ancient Stūpa construction in Sri Lanka.

### Methodology

Examine the archaeological significance of these two Stūpa ruins is the main research objective of this paper. Field exploration, literature review and personal communication are the main data accumulation methods in this regard. Detail drawings and cross sections are utilized to analyse and conclude the data of these two Stūpas with a comparative approach. In this study eye observation method played the vital role to examine the artefacts and other architectural characteristics of these mounds. These approaches are pivotal to examine the archaeological and an architectural value of these ruined ancient Stūpas.

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## Discussion and conclusions

According to previous researches, the existing cultural landscape of the region can be traced back to the proto historic period or possibly extend to the prehistoric period. (Field survey 2013) However, apart from those data, this region represents ample archaeological evidences to reconstruct the ancient Buddhist heritage of the upper *MalvathuOya* basin. According to the visible archaeological evidences scattered on the sites, it can be noted that these two ruined Stūpas were belonged to the monastic sites. Because a part Stūpa, both *Dambagollagama* and *Veheragodellasites* represent plenty of artefacts related to the ancient Buddhist monastic sites. (Field survey 2013)

*Dambagollagama* (N 7° 59' 54.64" 80° 40' 55.63") ruined Stūpa site is located in the northern side of the present *Waya Ulpatha* village. According to the surface survey the writer believed that this site can be traced back to the early historical period. Retrievable archaeological and architectural evidences in this site proved that there was a large monastic centre in the ancient times. It could be observed that high density of ancient potsherds on the surface in this site. Large amount of Red Ware and interior and exterior decorated potsherds are recovered during the survey.

It can be noted that the *Dambagollagama* ancient Stūpa was highly disturbed by both natural and cultural site formation processes at the time of discovered. At present it is difficult to identify a Stūpa in this place and there is only small mound can be seen. This mound is also disturbed by the vegetation grown on it. Few fragmented small size stone pillars can be observed around the mound. In addition, there are few meters deep two pits can be noted. One is located on the mound and other one is located quite closed to the stone pillars. Observations proved that this was a treasure hunters' activity. It can be claimed that the highly disturbed nature of the mound is affects to imagine an idea about this ancient Stūpa. However, considering the visible evidences it can be noted that this would be a small size Stūpa approximately 12 ft. in diameter. Brickbats scattered around the mound proved that the history of this Stūpa can be traced back to the



*Anuradhapura* period. (Field survey 2013) However, this idea should be verified through the further investigations.

Next remarkable ancient Stūpa evidence recovered from the site called *Veheragodella* (N 7° 58' 12.83" E 80° 40' 48.74). This ruined Stūpa and its adjoining artefacts located in the southern sector of the present *Waya Ulpathavillage*. *Veheragodella* the temple mound is an archaeological site which includes disturbed remains of a Buddha image, a Stūpa, few stone pillars, brickbats and other fragmented artefacts. Evidences of the site prove that there was a small size Stūpa and image house at *Veheragodella* in ancient times. The architectural and morphological characteristics of artefacts at *Veheragodella* show that this site probably belongs to the *Anuradhapura* period. (Field survey 2013, Jayaratne 2013: 45-46) Field observations suggest that the Buddha image of this place was approximately four feet in height with simple architectural features. However, at present it is highly disturbed by the treasure seekers. Quite closed to the broken image there is a small mound, roughly 10 ft in diameter. It may be the ancient Stūpa of this holy place. There are no other architectural evidences in this place related to this Stūpa. The centre of this mound was dug in few feet by treasure hunters. However, it can be observed that there are some fragmented ancient bricks scattered around the mound. Observations proved that this ancient Stūpa was highly disturbed due to the treasure seekers' activities.

In general, considering the retrievable archaeological evidences it can be claimed that both *Dambagollagama* and *Veheragodella* represent small size Stūpas with simple architectural features. Detail drawings and cross section analysis also proved this idea. However, it is difficult to imagine a complete picture on these two Stūpas and their chronology because both mounds are continuously subjected to the cultural and natural site formation processes. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that these evidences provide an ideal navigation to future researchers who desire to uncover the ancient Buddhist heritage in the upper *MalvithuOya* basin.

## References

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Field Survey (2013), A surface foot survey carried out by the writer for his M.Phil research to understand the cultural landscape and environmental background of the *Ihala Klawella Ulpatha* Early Iron Age burial site and its environs in North Central province of Sri Lanka.