



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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## Press Statement

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### Protect the 400-million year-old Perak's limestone hills from exploitation

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) urges the Perak state government to seriously review the permit to quarry Zone C of Gunung Kanthan which is located within one of the geo-sites in Kinta Valley National Geopark.

Gunung Kanthan 400-million-year-old site is the largest and most extensive peak remaining of the Kanthan limestone karst complex. Moreover, it is a natural heritage and a non-renewable asset to the country.

Gunung Kanthan offers a potential archaeological and paleontological treasure trove because many archaeological sites of Peninsular Malaysia are associated with limestone caves.

In 2005, the prehistory unit of the Department of Museums and Antiquities found a pottery fragment, probably from the Neolithic age, in one of the caves. How can the government give in to commercial greed to destroy a chapter of prehistory that belongs to every Malaysian?

Another example is the Neolithic paintings found at the Gunung Panjang limestone hill in Tambun which lies on the outskirts of Ipoh. The paintings, dated back to between 2,000 and 5,000 years-old, were discovered in 1959. What would have happened if a permit had been given to a quarry company then?

In 2019, vertebrate paleontologist Lim Tze Tshen said that he found fossils of orangutan in Kanthan Cave and Jelapang. He remarked that he discovered many mammal fossils including wild cattle, wild boar, deer, porcupine, and hippopotamus from caves in Perak. A comprehensive exploration and study is needed.

Karst complexes like Gunung Kanthan is also a home to critically endangered endemic flora species such as *Meiogyne kanthanensis*, *Gymnostachyum kanthanensis* and *Vatica kanthanensi* and fauna species the prehistoric trapdoor spider, *liphistiuskanthanensi* and a lizard called *cytodactylus guakanthanensis*. It was also identified as “the only remnant of limestone forest in Perak” with a population of birds, reptiles, frogs, and the endangered serow, known to locals as *kambing gurun*.

In 2016, scientists from Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Rimba which is a non-government organisation conducted a large-scale survey of land snails at 12 limestone hills in Perak with a grant provided by the quarry operator Lafarge Malaysia. A total of 122 species of land snails were recorded and 34 of these were described as “unique to one of the hills surveyed”. About 30 of them “potentially new to science”.

Limestone quarrying activities has threatened Gunung Kanthan with destruction. There have been suggestions for limestone to be quarried from idle mining land or to conduct subsurface quarrying instead of blasting the karst. By blasting the karst, it will be obliterating the destroying the entire iconic hill, the prehistoric treasures it holds, and price of environmental damage.

In fact, Lafarge Malaysia Sdn Bhd commissioned Petronas University to conduct a feasibility study on subsurface limestone quarrying. In 2020, the results were presented at an international conference in Kuala Lumpur, showing that sub-surface quarrying is indeed feasible.

Prior to this, in 2015, Ramli Mohd Osman, a Mineral Research Centre senior research officer, pointed out that there are 21 billion tonnes of sub-surface limestone reserves that can be mined without destroying Perak's limestone hills. The Mineral Research Centre is an agency under the Minerals and Geoscience Department after a merger of the Department of Geological Survey and the Mines Department in 1999.

We would like to urge the government to explain why it allows the destruction of the limestone hills which are iconic to Ipoh when limestones can be sourced from below the ground as experts pointed out. Is it because blasting the hills into oblivion is the most cost-effective way to obtain the material?

The government should be held accountable for the wanton destruction of the limestone hills and the consequences of environmental damage because it is responsible for the issuance of quarrying permits. Moreover, there were viable proposals supported by studies by experts from various fields without leaving a scarred landscape.

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