

Geological Heritage And Conservation: The Malaysian Initiative

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The conservation movement in Malaysia began more than 50 years ago and is well entrenched through an administrative and legal infrastructure in the form of the Wildlife and National Parks Department at the federal level, the Forest Departments at both the federal and state levels and Parks Trustees at the state level. Conservation focussed on biological resources which meant that geological conservation arose purely accidentally if the geological heritage site happened to be located in one of the protected areas. While the geological focus in the past has centred around exploitation, current ideology has shifted towards utilization without destruction. Market forces transformed the ideology into one focussing on geotourism which makes conservation feasible politically, culturally and economically. This is a natural extension of the nature tourism concept encouraged by the government. The first step in enabling the implementation of conservation of geological heritage is by utilizing geological sites in existing parks. Mount Kinabalu and Mount Tahan are two geological heritage labs already established. The concept of conservation geology was first introduced to provide the theoretical and systematic framework for characterisation, classification, assessment and ranking of geotopes and geosites. A Geological Heritage Group was established that conducted detailed conservation studies on Langkawi Islands, an international tourist destination and a haven to the geologists in terms of heritage value. Geotopes in other states are being identified and a specific map of the Malaysian geological heritage is being planned. Recently a National Core Group on Geological Heritage of Malaysia was formed to identify and establish conservation sites.