Natural world heritage status for Borra Caves sought

Archaeological Survey of India asks State government to present documents to Unesco
VISAKHAPATNAM: The Borra Caves located on the Eastern Ghats in Ananthagiri hills of Araku Valley in Visakhapatnam agency, has been recommended by the Archaeological Survey of India, to be included as a natural World Heritage site under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

In a letter to the Secretary of Tourism Department, Andhra Pradesh Government, the Director of World Heritage of ASI, K. Lourdusamy, has asked the departments concerned to prepare documents to be presented to the Unesco, to consider the Archean Age (4,000 to 2,500 million years) caves as a natural world heritage site.

The cave was discovered by the Geological Survey of India in 1807, and since then extensive research has been done by different departments.

According to Prof. D. Rajasekhar Reddy, Adviser to Geo Heritage Cell of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (Intach) and former professor of Geology, Andhra University, the proposal should have been made long ago.

Geo-Heritage list

“Borra Caves should not only be included into the natural world heritage sites but also in the Geo-Heritage list, as it is one of its kinds in the world and has lots of material to study the evolution of the world,” he said.

The cave created millions of years ago by water activity, mainly by the Gosthani river, is a rare geological formation and is a case study for geo-chemistry. The caves are basically karstic limestone structures extending to a depth of 80 metres and are considered the deepest caves in India, said Prof. Subba Rao from the Department of Geology, Andhra University.

Legends galore

There are many tribal legends associated with the caves and some of the tribals such as the Valmikis associate it with the Ramayana mythology.

But the popular legend is that the cave was discovered when a cow grazing on the top of the cave dropped through a hole in the roof and the cowherd searching for the cow came across the cave. He found the cow alive at a depth of 60 metres below the surface and also found a Shiva lingam shaped limestone, which is still worshipped.

However, scientists have a different version. According to Prof. P.D. Satyapal from the Department of Anthropology, Andhra University, the caves were formed by water activity cutting through rich limestone and many shapes of stalagmites and stalactites have been formed over the years.

The cave is highly valuable for anthropological research, as excavations carried out earlier have unearthed stone tools of middle Paleolithic culture dating between 30,000 and 50,000 years, which confirm human habitation in that area.

It is time that the cave be listed under world heritage sites and protected sites, he said.

Apart from the Borra Caves, the ASI has also suggested the listing of the Venna Mudda Venugopala Swamy in Guntur.