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Endau-Rompin research centre in sorry state (Page 13

By R. Sittamparam

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JOHOR BARU, Wed. - A RM6.5 million forest research centre, which could have been the ideal base for a scientific expedition to find the elusive "Bigfoot", has been shut down in the Endau- Rompin National Park.

The project, started in 2000 with partial funding from the Danish Government, has now been turned into an eco-tourism base.

The centre, spread over 3ha, deep in the forests of Endau-Rompin, had a full-fledged laboratory with sophisticated equipment.

Today, it has all gone missing or is collecting dust.

The Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), which was a scientific partner in the project, is no longer so, and its members are barred from using the facility.

Also gone are four state officers posted there full-time, after receiving specialised training in Europe under the sponsorship of the Danish Co-operation for Environment and Development.

Soon after its opening, researchers from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia undertook a scientific expedition, but their findings have yet to be published.

The local scientific community is now hoping newly-appointed Johor National Parks Corporation director Onn Jabbar will revive the centre. They said the need was particularly urgent in view of the international interest following reports of the sightings of Bigfoot.

The 48,000ha Endau-Rompin National Park is one of the world's richest biodiversity spots, with the forest believed to be over 240 million years old.

It was for this reason that the research centre was set up there in 2000.

Renowned local biodiversity researcher, Vincent Chow said the setting-up of the research station was in line with proposals under the "Master Plan for Scientific Research in Endau-Rompin National Park" prepared by Universiti Malaya naturalist Professor Kiew Bong

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Heang in 1987.

"According to the master plan, the primary objective of the education and research centre is the long-term conservation of the biological diversity of the Endau-Rompin area.

"This was to have been achieved through research, conservation awareness programmes, eco-tourism and by engaging the Orang Asli community in the centre's activities."

Chow said if the master plan had been fully implemented as recommended, Endau-Rompin with its rich biodiversity could today be one of the world's leading field laboratories for scien- tific research on tropical forests.

"We have lost a big opportunity. But it is not too late to revive the research centre," he said.

Johor executive council member Freddy Long, who is incharge of environmental matters, acknowledged that the centre was now used only by students and not scientists as originally envisioned.

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