

Documentation of Archaeological Sites, Saitual District, Mizoram, the 2025-2026 Field Season

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a systematic archaeological survey conducted during the 2025–2026 field season in the Saitual District, Mizoram. While previously under-explored, the district has yielded significant evidence of long-term human occupation and cultural complexity. Key discoveries include diverse megalithic structures, including menhirs and stone platforms, and intricate petroglyphs in Zawngin village, revealing a vibrant historical landscape. Furthermore, stone flakes around the cave environs indicate possible prehistoric activity in the region. This critical primary data is important for understanding the evolution of Mizo megalithic traditions and the broader cultural history of the region.

Introduction

This field report outlines the findings of a systematic survey conducted in January 2026, aimed at documenting the archaeological landscape and megalithic traditions of Mizoram, particularly in the Saitual District. Saitual, although comparatively under-explored compared to other districts in Mizoram, recently has yielded some significant finds. In early 2025, archaeologists made a significant discovery in a cave within the Thingkhung forest (between Vanbawng and North Khawlek villages). Archaeologists found skeletal remains, including nine skulls. This is one of the oldest human remains ever linked to the region and has the potential for understanding Mizo migration patterns.¹ In February 2025, an ASI team conducted a village-to-village survey and discovered previously undocumented rock art on a cliff in Maite village. The carvings/engravings include a large central human figure surrounded by animals, gongs, mithun (bovine) heads, and unique symbols. These are stylistically dated to between the 16th and 19th centuries.² Besides, two Neolithic celts have been documented by Sarkar and Lalhminghlua (2025), adding a layer of prehistoric significance to this region. The Saitual District also contains several sites on the state's protected list,³ such as Kumpinu Lung, a historic stone located in Saitual town, and Lung Milem, a carved stone slab located in Suangpuilawn village (Chatterji 1979).

1. <https://assamtribune.com/north-east/asi-identifies-4-previously-undocumented-rock-art-sites-in-mizoram-1574642#>
2. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mizoram/asi-finds-centuries-old-rock-art-sites-in-mizoram/article69460979.ece>
3. <https://mizoculture.mizoram.gov.in/page/archaeology>

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The villages surveyed were Darchhun, Saitual, Dilkhan, Thanglailung, Phullen, Zawngin, Saungpuilawn, Lemherh, North Khawlek and Vanbawng (Fig. 1). By integrating ethnographic interviews with physical site documentation, the study sought to bridge the gap between material remains and the rich oral histories preserved by local communities. Throughout these regions, the team recorded a diverse array of features, from megalithic memorial stones and weathered petroglyphs to historically significant caves.

Megalithic Documentation and Funerary Markers

The region exhibits a rich tradition of commemorative and funerary megaliths (*Lung*), often decorated with engravings reflecting the status and possessions of the deceased.

Vaitaia Lung Cluster (Darchhun)

It is a cluster of three megaliths (23° 50' 52.8036" N; 93° 2' 3.8904" E) (Fig. 2). The central monolith is dedicated to Vaitaia, a figure of significant wealth and stature. The carvings are highly symbolic: he is depicted wearing a traditional bird-feather headdress (a sign of high social rank) and holding a smoking pipe alongside various weapons, signifying his prowess in both leisure and combat. To his right stands a stone dedicated to his wife. Her identity is coded through specific iconography, a horizontal line across the chest representing traditional attire and a distinct two-plumed headdress. This cluster highlights the importance of the family unit and the desire to preserve the legacy of the elite.

Neitlingi Lungdawnh (Suangpuilawn)

The Neitlingi Lungdawnh (23° 57' 7.3548" N; 93° 2' 28.8672" E) (Fig. 3) is a massive slab measuring approximately 198 x 78 x 32 cm. Erected in 1909, it represents a poignant act of devotion by a widow for

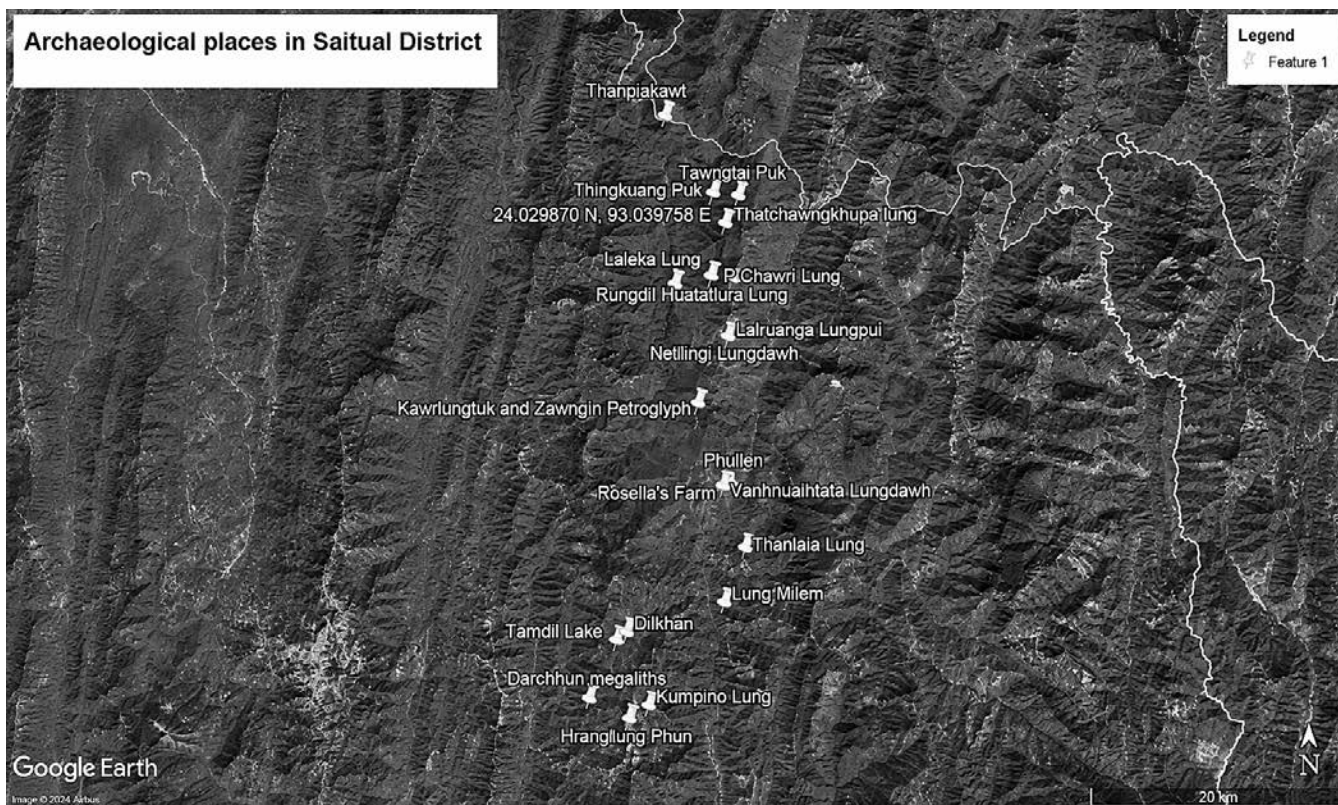


Fig. 1: Archaeological and natural sites surveyed during field season 2025-2026



Fig. 2: Vaitaia Lung Cluster (Darchhun)



Fig. 3: Neitlingi Lungdawh

her late husband. Beyond its impressive scale, the stone is scientifically and culturally significant for its engravings. On the reverse side, two human figures are etched into the rock. It seems that both side engravings are contemporaneous based on the stylistic affinity of the human figures. The lower figure is particularly striking, featuring a depiction of a smaller head and body near the stomach area. This could represent one of the earliest regional depictions of pregnancy, symbolizing the cycle of life, lineage, and perhaps the family the deceased left behind.

Vanhnuaithata Lungdawh (Phullen)

While many Mizo stones are vertical monoliths (*Lungchhu*), the Vanhnuaithata Lungdawh in Phullen is a monumental stone platform (23° 50' 52.8036" N; 93° 2' 3.8904" E) (Fig. 4). This sprawling structure consists of eight meticulously stacked layers of stone, covering an area of roughly 5.02 x 4.18 m. Unlike simple commemorative markers, this platform is believed to be a burial site, acting as a grand mausoleum that reflects the immense respect and collective labour dedicated to a leader of Vanhnuaithata's caliber.

Laleka Lung (Lamherh)

It represents a significant commemorative megalith dating to the early 20th century (23° 59' 47.4" N; 93° 1' 56.1108" E). The monument consists of a stone slab measuring 85 x 51 x 10 cm, originally situated to the south of a former settlement site. Epigraphically, the stone bears an inscription in the Ralte language, which serves as a record of the extraordinary hunting achievements of an individual named Laleka. Dated to the year 1914, the inscription specifically commemorates the completion of a *Thangchhuah* (or equivalent status-based) feat, noting that the individual had successfully hunted one hundred animals.

Huatatlura Lung (Lamherh)

The site (23° 59' 28.2228" N; 93° 38' 43.2708" E) (Fig. 5) features a cluster of three sandstone megaliths arranged linearly upon a prepared stone platform with the following dimensions: the left one (125 x 59 x 8 cm), the middle one (77 x 53 x 10 cm), and the right one (61 x 46 x 6.5 cm). The tallest slab, situated on the left, has a prominent Mithun head and a stylized anthropomorphic figure engraved in close association with the Roman lettering.



Fig. 4: Vanhnuaithata Lungdawh (Phullen)



Fig. 5: Huatatlura Lung (Lamherh)



Fig. 6: Pi Chawri Lung (Lamherh)

Pi Chawri Lung (Lamherh)

At this site, the recording of two megalithic slabs provides important information about the local commemorative or funerary landscape (23° 59' 36.132" N; 93° 1' 35.6484" E) (Fig. 6). The first slab measures 138 x 76.5 x 12.5 cm, while the second, larger specimen (extant dimensions 209 x 153 x 14.5 cm) exhibits a transverse fracture across its centre. This second slab is notable for its intricate anthropomorphic engravings, featuring two human figures in profile facing one another. The right-hand figure is characterised by a larger stature, a diamond-shaped motif in the abdominal region, and a feathered headdress, while the smaller left-hand figure wears a necklace and appears to clasp the right hand of the RHS figure. Centralized between the figures are three vertical, consecutive circles. The surrounding field includes a ritual gong with suspension loops, a Mithun head, and a smaller secondary gong, while three hanging poles are situated beneath the left-hand-side figure.

Thanglaia Lung

It comprises a prominent megalithic feature consisting of two massive sandstone slabs positioned in close proximity (23° 41' 8.3652" N 93° 3' 8.6148" E (Fig. 7). The right-

hand slab measures 188 x 143 x 20 cm, while the left-hand slab measures 154 x 129 x 21 cm. In Mizo oral tradition, the site is associated with a legendary narrative of competitive physical prowess, wherein the eponymous figure, Thanglaia, is stated to have transported these lithic masses from the Chhirdem River using a wooden yoke to demonstrate superior vitality over a northern rival. From an archaeological perspective, the site's significance is bolstered by local reports of subsurface recoveries, including osteological remains and associated artefacts, found during previous informal excavations near the slabs.

Thatchawngkhupa Lung

It comprises a linear arrangement of four megalithic slabs situated within the historic settlement of Hnahthuang, overlooking the Tuivawl River Valley (23° 41' 36.8988" N; 92° 58' 40.3896" E) (Fig. 8). The primary monument (153 x 49 x 7 cm) is an east-facing memorial stone dedicated to Thatchawngkhupa, son of Heuhneha and grandson of Haongura. Epigraphically, the stone is significant for its English script, which records the subject's death on June 6, 1913, and the subsequent erection of the monument on October 2, 1913. Iconographically, the slab features a high-relief engraving of a human figure with a traditional



Fig. 7: Thanglaia Lung



Fig. 8: Thatchawngkhupa Lung

posterior hair bun, wielding a sword in the left hand. This figure is flanked by a Mithun head above and an elephant below; the latter zoomorphic depiction likely serves as a “hero-stone” convention signifying the subject’s success in big-game hunting. The associated slabs further attest to the

site’s commemorative complexity: the second-largest slab (124 x 52 x 6 cm) exhibits traces of weathered, illegible engravings, while the smallest peripheral slab (75 x 36 x 6 cm) features a west-facing anthropomorphic figure depicted with a spear.

Commemorative Stones

Other notable markers include the Kumpinu Lung (23° 41’ 36.8988” N; 92° 58’ 40.3896” E), erected in 1901, which serves as a fascinating historical pivot; it was raised to honour Queen Victoria (referred to as *Kumpinu*), showing how traditional stone-raising customs were used to mark the colonial era. Similarly, the Hranglung Phun (23° 41’ 8.3652” N; 92° 57’ 49.4712” E) stands as a “hero stone”, specifically commemorating the legendary bravery of *Kaikunga*, ensuring that the exploits of local warriors remained etched in the physical landscape for future generations.

Petroglyphs and Relief Carvings

Zawngin Petroglyph

Situated on a weathered rocky slope, the Zawngin Petroglyph (23° 54’ 18.5796” N; 93° 0’ 52.074” E) (Fig. 9) is one of the most complex examples of rock art documented in this field season. The carving features a central human figure flanked by symbols of wealth and social status: three traditional gongs and a Mithun (the ceremonial bovine of the region). However, its most striking feature is a sophisticated, maze-like geometric pattern. This network consists of approximately 52 interconnected rectangles, linked to four smaller human figures. This “labyrinth” design has sparked significant interest as it suggests an advanced understanding of abstract geometry or perhaps a ritualistic map. Alternatively, this could be rows of human figures, as have been found and identified in the Phiangiu Stream site in



Fig. 9: Zawngin Petroglyph

Manipur (Kamel *et al.* 2024). The connection between the rectangles and the human forms likely represents a genealogical record, a village layout, or a spiritual journey through the afterlife, reflecting the intricate social fabric of the ancient Mizo people.

Lalruanga Dep Kuak (Suangpuilawn)

This petroglyph was found north of Lalruanga Lungpui under the Suangpuilawn Salvation Corps building (23° 54' 18.5796" N 93° 2' 29.1552" E). The rock contains a distinct circular perforation at the top. Morphologically, this perforation is central to the local folklore surrounding the legendary figure Lalruanga, involving themes of potency and supernatural intervention. There is a petroglyph on the lower end, which depicts a human figure engraved directly on the rock facing north.

Artefacts

Various artefacts ranging from the Neolithic period to the British colonial era were documented through surface finds and local informants

At Rosela's Farm (23° 50' 43.206" N 93° 2' 5.8596" E) (Fig. 10), there is a private collection of a few artefacts that were found while developing this farm. The lithic component comprises two stone pestles, likely composed of sandstone; the first (7.5 cm height) displays a square cross-section, while the second (7.3 cm height)



Fig. 10: Stone pestles

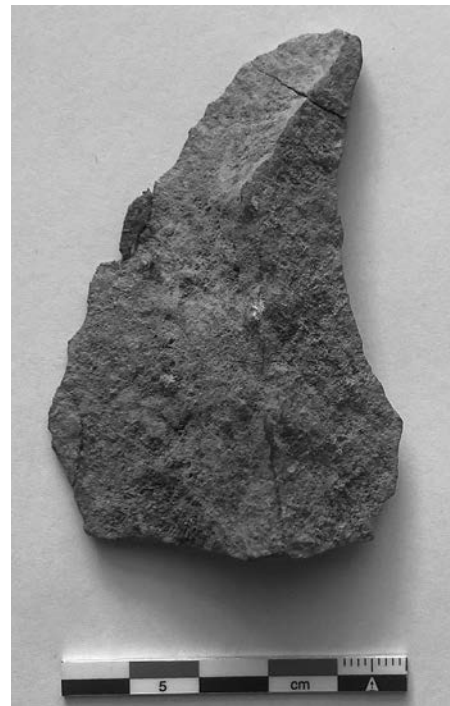


Fig. 11: Flake from Tawngtai Puk cave

is characterised by a rectangular cross-section. The assemblage includes a partially worked ring stone (max. diameter 7.5 cm; width 3 cm), which exhibits shallow bilateral depressions suggesting an unfinished attempt at perforation. In an archaeological context, unfinished ring stones with bilateral depressions are often referred to as “mace heads” in progress or “weight stones” for digging sticks.

A well-defined flake of significant dimensions, measuring 7 cm in length and 5.1 cm in breadth, was found in Tawngtai Puk (24° 2' 52.6848" N; 93° 3' 1.3536" E) (Fig. 11). The specimen exhibits a maximum thickness

of 2 cm, concentrated at the proximal end. The striking platform is distinctly triangular in planform. The flake tapers from the thickened proximal base toward a thinner distal termination. As this specimen represents the solitary lithic artefact recovered from the accessible interior of the cave, a definitive chronological or cultural assignment remains premature. However, the presence of an isolated, technologically distinct flake within a cave context serves as a significant indicator of potential prehistoric activity.

At Rosela's Farm (23° 50' 43.206" N 93° 2' 5.8596" E), the ceramic remains consist of two cylindrical terracotta artefacts featuring a small aperture at one terminus (Fig. 12). These fragments, measuring 8 cm and 4.8 cm in extant height, respectively, are morphologically suggestive of specialised pottery components. Along with these, traditional wooden ploughs were also documented from an ethno-sociological context. These finds together indicate a site of significant agricultural and craft-industrial activity, warranting further archaeological investigation to determine the chronological depth of the settlement.

At North Khawlek, a significant cache of six iron artefacts (private collection) was documented, offering a glimpse into ancient Mizo craftsmanship and warfare (Fig. 13). The most culturally striking item is the Lulakchem, a specialised beheading sword traditionally associated with the rites of headhunting and the defence of the village. This is accompanied by three spearheads and a dao (a versatile all-purpose blade), which highlights the dual nature of iron as both a weapon of war and a tool for survival. Additionally, the presence of a pickaxe suggests early sophisticated agricultural or earth-working practices that depict a community capable of taming the rugged mountainous terrain.



Fig. 12: Terracotta artefacts from Rosela's Farm

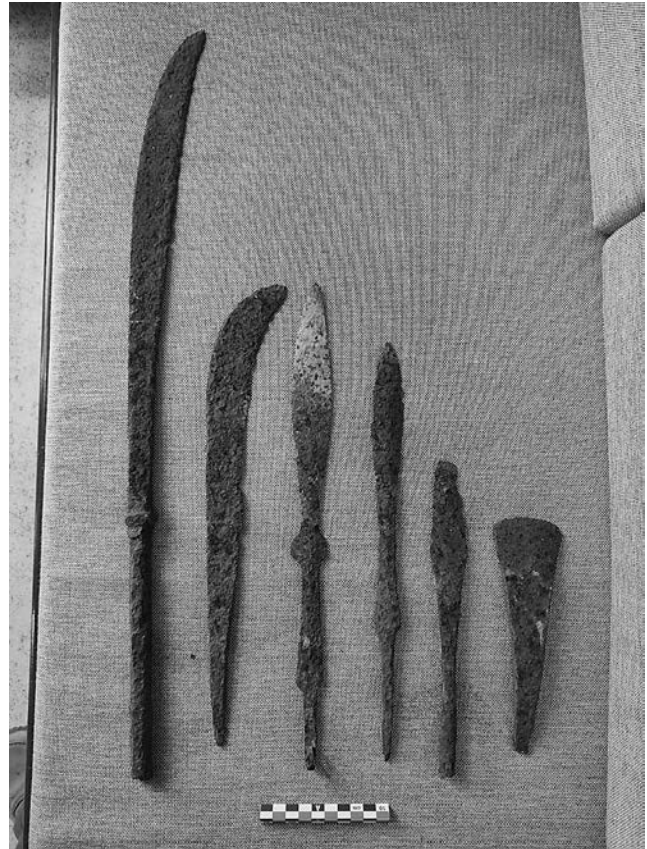


Fig. 13: Iron artefacts documented from North Khawlek

Caves and Features Associated with Folklore

Thingkuang Puk

The Thingkuang Puk cliff cave (24° 3' 7.38" N 93° 1' 52.2912" E) (Fig. 14) serves as a rare bio-archaeological vault. Within its 8.5 m tunnel, researchers discovered nine human skeletons. According to Rin Sanga, a retired IAS officer and convener of INTACH Mizoram, radiocarbon dating has confirmed that remains discovered in a cave within the Thingkuang forest, situated near the Mizoram-Manipur border, date back more than 750 years. The testing was conducted by the Florida-based laboratory Beta Analytic, a global leader in the field.⁴ This site offers invaluable data regarding the health, diet, and burial customs of the early Mizo people.

Tawngtai Puk

Tawngtai Puk (24° 2' 52.6848" N; 93° 3' 1.3536" E) (Fig. 15) represents a cave with a dual heritage of religious and political refuge. Structurally, the cave shares close morphological affinities with Thingkuang Puk, although it is distinguished by the absence of osteological remains.

4. <https://assamtribune.com/north-east/750-yr-old-human-skeletal-remains-uneearthed-in-mizoram-cave-carbon-dating-confirms-1590217>



Fig. 14: The Thingkuang Puk cliff cave



Fig. 15: Tawngtai Puk

The cave system has two separate openings. The main entrance faces northwest and leads into 5.4 m tunnel which later splits into two paths. While the left-hand channel remains inaccessible due to severe constriction or depth, the right-hand passage, despite its narrow profile, was successfully traversed during the present survey, revealing a secondary exit. Historically, the cave served as a secret spot for prayer (Tawngtai) for early Mizo Christians during periods of religious prohibition and later functioned as a strategic hideout for Mizo National Front (MNF) insurgents. As such, Tawngtai Puk stands as a vital “cultural landscape” marker, illustrating the adaptive use of natural geological formations for survival and spiritual resistance in Mizo history. Besides, the cave also yielded the stone flake, physical evidence that the location was likely utilised in prehistoric times.

Lalruanga Lungpui

Mythology takes a physical form at Lalruanga Lungpui (23° 57' 16.5492" N; 93° 2' 28.6728" E) (Fig. 16), where two massive boulders are linked to the legendary sorcerer Lalruanga. One boulder features distinct “cup marks” – hemispherical depressions in the stone – which local folklore humorously attributes to the sorcerer resting his genitals. Beside these is a circular gong motif, a recurring symbol in Mizo megalithic art representing wealth and ceremonial prestige.

Thanglaia Lung

It comprises a prominent megalithic feature consisting of two massive stone slabs positioned in close proximity (23° 48' 9.8532" N; 93° 3' 8.6148" E). The right-hand slab measures 188 x 143 x 20 cm, while the left-hand slab measures 154 x 129 x 21 cm. In Mizo oral tradition, the site is associated with a legendary narrative of competitive physical prowess, wherein the eponymous figure, Thanglaia, is said to have transported these lithic masses from the Chhirdem River using a wooden yoke to demonstrate superior vitality over a northern rival.

Summary

Recent surveys in the Saitual District, Mizoram, have revealed significant evidence of the region’s prehistoric and



Fig. 16: Lalruanga Lungpui

historical past. A major highlight are the skeletal remains, including nine skulls, within a cave in the Thingkhuang forest. Radiocarbon dating has confirmed these remains are over 750 years old, offering a rare glimpse into early human habitation and migration patterns in Mizoram. Additionally, the stone flake found at the Tawngtai Puk suggests the cave may have been used by prehistoric communities long before the documented remains. The survey also documented a rich variety of megalithic structures and petroglyphs. These findings indicate that Saitual, though previously under-explored, served as a vital cultural hub. By documenting these “living” traditions and ancient sites, the research provides essential data to further archaeological research in the district.

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