



Scenic: The trail through the Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve takes hikers past lush greenery.

Stopped in their tracks

Hikers barred from entering Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve

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HIKERS at the Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve had a rude surprise when they were denied entry by security guards stationed at the entrance last Saturday.

Process specialist Michael Soong, 50, who lives in Bandar Puteri Puchong and has been hiking in the forest for the past four years, said it was the first time that he had encountered such a situation.

"My friends and I were ready for a weekend hike but were disappointed because we were not allowed in.

"I have never been stopped from entering the forest before but some of my friends have told me that it happens every now and then.

"Many people hike as a form of exercise and people who love nature also enjoy it here.

"Many people also bring their families along during weekends. I bring my children here, too," he said.

Some people may be unaware that the forest reserve is off limits to the public because it has been gazetted as an education and research forest and access to it was upon permission granted by Universiti Putra Malaysia Forestry Faculty.

Signboards have been put up in the forest reminding the public that the area was a forest reserve and those entering without permission could be fined not more than RM10,000, three years' jail or both.

Several jungle trekkers also wrote in their blogs about being stopped by security guards when



Well-used: The trail at the Ayer Hitam Forest is popular with hikers and runners.

trying to enter the area or being cautioned when they tried to take a dip at a waterfall in the forest.

Soong said the public should be allowed to use the trail and questioned why there was a paint ball facility in the forest if it was meant

to be a research centre. According to information from the UPM Forestry Faculty website, the 1,248ha forest was under the jurisdiction of the Selangor

> SEE NEXT PAGE



Spread out: A landing at the site offers a view of the Puchong township.

Hikers who frequent the Ayer Li



Popular: The trail at the Ayer Hitam Forest attracts a big crowd especially during weekends.

Scenic site attracts both the old and the young

► FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Forestry Department.

The Selangor government granted a 80-year lease to the university in 1996 for education, research and extension in Forestry.

Many hikers would enter the forest through an opening at the western border near some shoplots in Taman Wawasan 5/1, Puchong, while the official entrance is at the eastern border in Taman Saujana Puchong.

Businessman Kelvin Choo, 32, said he lived near the forest and would go to the there a few times a week.

"I usually go on weekends and also in the morning before I go to work.

"There are many people on weekends and many senior citizens can be seen exercising here during weekdays.

"This area is beautiful and they should allow the public to make use of it.

"The residents who use the for-

est can work with the authorities to protect the forest together.

"I have seen groups of hikers who pick up rubbish along the trail when they go for their walk," said Choo.

While regular hikers would know the way in and out of the forest, the trails are not marked and there were certain parts where the path branched out.

Serdang OCPD Supt Abdul Razak Elias said the police received an average of one call a month from people who got lost in the forest while hiking.

He said while the number of cases was not alarming, police officers had to be despatched to the scene to search for the lost person.

"Sometimes we even have to fire a flare. We usually work with the fire department during these search operations," he said.

Kinrara assemblyman Teresa Kok said she would be organising a meeting with the Selangor Forestry Department, UPM and hikers at the forest on Sunday to discuss the issue.

Location of Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve

