

Two from Yarrangobilly Caves, New South Wales

1. Greenpower at Yarrangobilly

Teagan Symons (story + photos)

Well here is a story about Yarrangobilly's little electric-charging bay.



It is not a big, modern, Tesla charger but it does do the job and has its own unique attributes. This charging bay was installed at least three years ago by Yarrangobilly's previous manager, George Bradford. The charging bay became necessary as Yarrangobilly had invested in an electric all-terrain vehicle (ATV). Our electric ATV is used for general duties throughout the precinct, on a daily basis, by cave guides and all the staff at Yarrangobilly.



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Running an electric vehicle at Yarrangobilly is made even more environmental and “green” when you consider where the electricity itself comes from.

Yarrangobilly is completely disconnected from the National Electricity Market. We do not receive any electricity - we generate all our power on site. We are completely “off the grid”, as they say. In the powerhouse, we have a hydro pelton wheel and that is our preferred method to generate electricity. This amazing little generator was installed in 1936 and uses the water from Rules Creek to generate most of Yarrangobilly's electricity. It was recently serviced by our NPWS mechanic and he commented that it only requires a very basic service to keep it operating nicely. Generally, he only checks the lubricant and gives it a basic clean and she is “good to go” for another year. He also informed us that the pelton wheel itself is completely made of brass, which was another surprising attribute.

So generally, when we are recharging our electric vehicle at Yarrangobilly, we are using electricity that has been generated renewably, making Yarrangobilly more environmental and modern than ever before! This was proved, in particular, on one recent weekend. We had guests staying in Caves House and they were charging their Tesla vehicle one morning when another Tesla vehicle arrived and lined up waiting to use the charging station. We had never had a line up before.

The situation became even more entertaining when we spoke to the Tesla drivers. One of the Teslas had the number plate GRN PWR.



It turns out this is a commercial vehicle that is used to take guests on renewable-themed tours around the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. I am sure this business, and all of its Teslas, will become a regular recharger at the new Jenolan charging facility. The Tesla drivers loved the renewable source of electricity offered at Yarrangobilly. The GRN PWR driver even agreed to have his number plate in the ACKMA journal as it was all just a little too ironic!

In this modern world we live in, it is always nice to be reminded of the past. As cave enthusiasts, our fascination with the past becomes stronger each time we step inside our earth. It is humbling to know that Rules Creek is still flowing through the Yarrangobilly limestone and it has done so for millions of years. Having an electric vehicle that is charged with hydro-electricity is one way that Yarrangobilly is helping to honour the past and use it to better both our own and our earth's future.

2. Changing Yarrangobilly

Regina Roach (Canberra Speleological Society) and Gary Bilton (Yarrangobilly Caves Old Boy)

Yarrangobilly is ever-changing. A new Caves Supervisor, Bernadette Zanet, arrived in February 2019. Bernadette joined Yarrangobilly from Bonegilla Migrant Experience at Albury. Since starting work, Bernadette has joined the Canberra Speleos on a caving trip and attended the Guides' School at Naracoorte.

On arrival at the Yarrangobilly Visitors' Centre, a returning visitor notices many changes. Gone are the museum pieces of the past - the assorted bottles, signs, tins and the early rolls of pre-1980s' cave tickets. Surviving on the wall is the 1926 map of the New South Wales railway tracks. The Railway Department once managed Yarrangobilly. On the mantelpiece, there is a magnesium ribbon lantern originating from the days before electricity.

Rest assured, you can feel safe at Yarrangobilly now. Security cameras have been installed. The Visitors' Centre is a cosy, warm environment with its new heaters so you can peruse the wide selection of goods in comfort, and visitors of today are able to now utilise the wifi.

Previous visitors will notice a difference around the Thermal Pool and the Lyrebird Cottage. Recent hazard-reduction burns and asset-protection measures have removed many large fallen trees, and burnt and cleared away the undergrowth.

Scientific research is continuing in Harrie Wood Cave monitoring the effects of climate change.

Visitors booking accommodation at Caves House will notice a change to a dynamic pricing system. When there are many rooms available for booking, the price of the room is lower, so availability affects the price of the room. One single-storey bathroom has been renovated and it is envisaged the other bathrooms will follow. Caves House is now accessible by wheelchair from the Visitors Centre along a new paved pathway.

An expanded range of tours is available - with some tours available using an online booking system. Child-focused tours, including "Little Caves, Little Kids" and "Bake and Bushcraft", are based on the nature-play approach. The "High Plains, Huts, and Heritage" tour transports people in Yarrangobilly's four-wheel-drive bus to a variety of destinations. The Castle Cave, which has never been electrically lit, is now toured more frequently. Adventure caving through Mill Creek Cave or Diversion and River Caves is another option.

The stair access from the track to the Thermal Pool has been reconstructed with more, smaller steps, a retaining wall and pavers.

Just like the Yarrangobilly of old, it is an ever-changing place.

Two from Wellington Caves, New South Wales

Both stories from Ian Eddison

1. Threatened Species Day

On Threatened Species Day on 7 September 2019, Wellington Caves had environmentally based tours available for guests, in addition to the regular tour program. These themed tours were:

- Twitching On The Reserve
- Woodland Wander
- What's A Troglobite?

Unlike many karst reserves around the country, the caves at Wellington are fenced near the visitor arrival area as there are vertical caves close by. As a result, many of our visitors don't see a lot of our reserve unless we run events such as these on Threatened Species Day.

This relatively small karst reserve has Grassy Box Woodland, which is an Endangered Ecological Community. It has typical legacies of the past, such as agricultural and ornamental weeds as well as feral animals. It still, however, has enough diversity of original flora species to support a considerable number of fauna species. Several macropod species, many reptiles and birds are common here.

Our Threatened Species Day started with a cold, windy morning, with a little drizzle, so the 8.00 am "Twitching On The Reserve" was looking to be uncomfortable and unrewarding. However, our walk included the Osawano Japanese Gardens, with lots of cover and an extensive water feature for birds, as well as our open Grassy Box Woodland. We walked through old and restored woodland and a very diverse floristic area on limestone that has had little impact over the years.



**Brown treecreeper
(Tim Bergen)**