

He played a key role in the introduction the cave watering filtering system into the Buchan show caves system to enable cave restoration and treatment of decaying calcite surfaces.

Cave visitation was over 80,000 visitors per annum and growing and the Buchan Caves campground often packed with visitors particularly during the peak holiday periods.

In the early 1980's he was instrumental in overseeing one of the first Waste Water Sewerage Treatment Plants being used by Parks Victoria. He fondly referred to it as the "Shit Machine" and would often humour his family when he regularly went to check the "bugs". Again, in an era when sustainability was not a key focus, he was ahead of the game for environmental preservation.

Many of Alan's initiatives can still be recognised today at Buchan which is a living testimony to him and his extraordinary vision in environmental protection.

May he long be remembered.

Andy Spate adds his memories of Alan:

I have three very fond memories of Alan Costigan. I am not sure which memory comes first. He had a remarkable sense of humour – perhaps a little warped at times. The first story relates to Buchan – when you drove into the Buchan Caves at that time you encountered a sign saying “Motorists – please read the next sign”. The next sign directed to you to the ticket office in the manager’s house above the road. This may be apocryphal, but it is said that Alan put up a second sign that said “Motorists – please ignore the previous sign” – what evolved is open to conjecture.

My other main interaction with Alan was at the 1981 Cave Tourism Conference in Western Australia. I was met off the plane by Joy ‘My Smith’ Smith from the Bussellton Tourism Association – and introduced to Alan – who denied ever knowing me in spite of many meetings over the years. Minutes later the manager from Cutta Cutta arrived – who denied knowing either of us. Much laughter ensued over the next few days.

The third interaction was camping beside Cossie’s ‘shit machine’ – no odours or other issues – but other campers kept on asking what the green ‘shit machine’ was and why did we camp near this unsightly green brick – it was the quietest part of the campground but most didn’t understand why but avoided that site for some unexplained reason. Good for us then ...

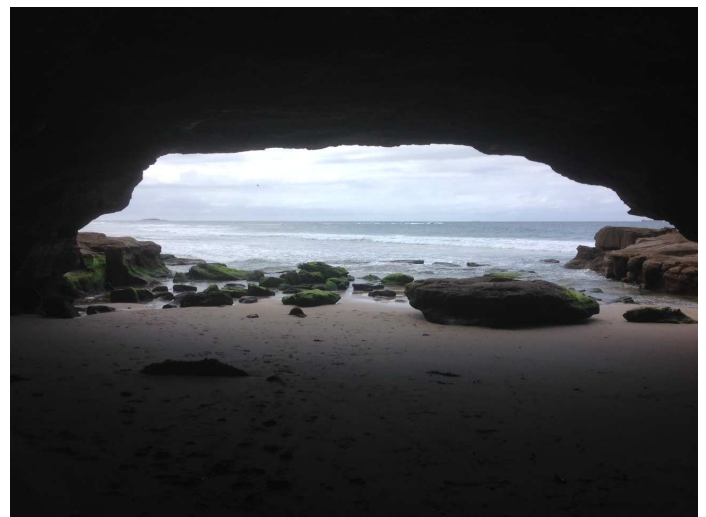
Caves Beach (south of Newcastle)

Kent Henderson (story and photo)

Recently I was in the Newcastle region of New South Wales - for only the second time in my life. Driving up the Pacific Highway, I noted a sign to 'Caves Beach'. Intrigued by the name, I diverted.

Caves Beach is a locality on the Swansea peninsula south of Lake Macquarie. It is named for the large number of sea caves on its nearby coastline, adjacent to a popular surf beach. There is a lookout at the top of the cliff face, offering excellent views over the caves below. A walking track brings you down to the beach to left of the field of sea caves which, not surprisingly, are best accessed at low tide.

My luck was in - low tide greeted me. There are a substantial - well over a dozen - sea caves in the cliffs, some of quite reasonable size. I spent a pleasant hour rambling between them. And I was not alone; maybe a dozen other people were 'wandering around' (on a Monday morning - hardly a peak tourism time!). Clearly, these sea caves are very well-known locally. The geology is fairly straightforward. The cliffs are conglomerate, dumped by fast-flowing rivers about 250 million years ago during the Permian period. The caves probably began forming about 6,500 years ago, after the last glacial period when the rising sea stabilised at its present level.



View out from the largest sea cave

Management of the area, if you can call it that, is interesting. Happily, many sea caves at various Australian locations are largely protected by their relative inaccessibility. Not so here! Of course, the name itself is something of a magnet. Given that people will go regardless, the local council response has been to make it as safe as possible, with an excellent lookout at the top of the cliff and proper tracking down to sea level. Other than that, appropriate interpretative signage at the lookout would be useful, but was sadly absent. That said, if you too are passing at some stage, a stop at Caves Beach will not disappoint!