

# AUSTRALIAN SHOW CAVES

- Kent Henderson

If one defines a limestone show cave as one that is available for inspection by the general public, then Australia possesses over fifty, at twenty-two localities. Some sites possess one or two caves, others many. Almost all are electrically lit although a few, while possessing made paths and handrails, are shown with portable lighting.

The earliest Australian show caves were opened at Wombeyan (1865) and Jenolan (1867) in New South Wales. Wombeyan, located in the Southern Highlands inland from Mittagong and Goulburn, has six show caves. The three most frequented are Wollondilly, Junction, and Fig Tree caves (the latter being self guided). Smaller caves, less frequently shown, are Mulwarre and Kooringa caves. A sixth, Tinted cave, also self guided, is also open.

Jenolan Caves, located in the Blue Mountains south of Katoomba, is Australia's largest show cave complex, with nine caves open to the public. Its most frequently inspected offerings are Lucas, Imperial and Chifley caves. Other smaller caves open, restricted in both group numbers and their frequency of inspection, are Jubilee, River, Pool of Cerberus, Temple of Baal, Orient, and Ribbon caves.

There are four other show cave sites in New South Wales. Abercrombie Caves, to be found near Trunkley Creek to the south of Bathurst, have been regularly shown since 1888. The feature of the system is its 221 metre Grand Arch, one of world's largest. Aside from the Arch Cave itself, four caves extended from or around it are also shown. These are Bushranger's, Cathedral, King Solomon's Temple, and Grove caves. Abercrombie Caves, together with those at Jenolan and Wombeyan, are administered by the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust.

Yarrangobilly Caves are to be found in the in the Kosciusko National Park in southern New South Wales, between Tumut and Cooma. First shown in 1887, and administered by the N. S. W. Parks and Wildlife Service, those open to tourists are the Jersey, Jillabeanan, North Glory, and Glory Hole caves – the latter of which is self-guided.

Wellington Caves are located near the town of that name in central New South Wales. First explored in 1830, there are three caves available for inspection, namely Cathedral and Gaden Coral caves, and the Phosphate Mine. The latter, only developed in recent years, is part-mine and part-cave. This site is administered by the Wellington Shire Council.

The final show cave in New South Wales is Carey's Cave, located at Wee Jasper, south of Yass, to the west of Canberra. Managed by the Goodradigee and Goobarragandra Reserves Trust, it was discovered on the 1880s and developed as show cave in 1968.

Victoria boasts two show cave sites, at either end of the State. In East Gippsland are Buchan Caves, found one hours drive north of Bairnsdale. They are run by the Department of Environment and Natural Heritage. This site possesses two lit show caves in its caves reserve– the Royal and the Fairy. A further former show cave, the

Federal, is occasionally shown with portable lighting. A short drive north of Buchan, at Murrindal, three further former show caves are also occasional toured. These are Shades of Death, Lilly Pilly, and Murrindal caves. In the far west of the State, near Mt. Gambier and just two kilometres inside the border from South Australia, is Princess Margaret Rose cave.

Tasmania possesses four show caves at three locations, all of which are administered by the Tasmanian Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage. At Hastings, south-west of Hobart, near Dover, is Newdegate Cave, which was opened to visitors in 1939. In the north, at near Mole Creek, are Marakooa and King Solomon's caves. Also in the State's north, to the south of Ulverstone, is Gunn's Plains cave.

South Australia is also blessed with a wide variety of show caves, with six open at four sites. The most famous are possibly the Naracoorte Caves in the upper South East of the State, a world heritage area, managed by National Parks & Wildlife, South Australia. Available for inspection are Blanche, Alexandra and Victoria Fossil caves. The latter is an internationally significant fossil site. A further attraction is Bat Cave. While not open as such, is inspected visually from infrared cameras in the "Bat Cave Teleview Centre" located above it. Recently constructed at Naracoorte Caves is the Wonambi Fossil Centre.

In the City of Mt. Gambier in the Lower South-East is Englebrecht cave, managed by Lifeline (south-east), while half an hour's drive to the west towards Millicent is Tantanoola cave – managed by National Parks & Wildlife, South Australia; as is Kelly Hill cave on Kangaroo Island.

Queensland possesses five show caves at two locations. Just to the north of Rockhampton is Cammoo and Oslens caves. The latter is privately owned, and has been open to the public since 1884. Cammoo, until recently, had two tours available: Chandelier Cave (fully lit) and Flogged Horse Cave (portable lighting). Previously privately owned, it has now been sold to the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. Whether Cammoo Caves will re-opened as show caves in the future presently remains unclear. Adjacent to Cammoo and Olsen's Caves is Mt. Etna. This karst mountain contains many caves one of which, Bat Cleft, receives regular tours to its entrance in summer months, to witness its bat emergence flight each evening at dusk.

In Far North Queensland, inland from Cairns, are Chillagoe Caves. Three caves are open at this site, managed by the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. Its show caves, opened in the 1940s, are Donna, Trezkin, and Royal Arch. The latter is not electrically-lit, but shown with portable lighting.

Also in Far North Queensland, although not in limestone, are the Undara Lava Tubes, near Mt. Surprise. Several tubes are open for inspection using portable lighting.

There are five show caves in Western Australia at three sites, two of which are in the south west of the State below Perth. At Augusta/Margaret River, managed by the

Augusta/Margaret River Tourist Association, the three caves open are Jewel, Mammoth and Lake – the first of which was opened in 1904. Lake cave boasts the recent edition of the “Caveworks” interpretative centre above its entrance. Just to the north of Margaret River, near Yallingup, is Ngilgi cave, managed by the Cape Naturaliste Tourist Association. It has also been open since 1904. North of Perth, near Yanchep, a further show cave has been open since 1903. This is Crystal Cave.

Finally, there are two show caves at Cutta Cutta, near Katherine in the Northern Territory, managed by the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory, but currently under private lease. These are Cutta Cutta and Tindal caves. The former was opened in 1967, the latter in 1992.