

BORENORE RE-VISITED

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The main entrance of Arch Cave, Borenore

Recently, I found myself in Orange, New South Wales, on business, and I took the opportunity to again visit Borenore Caves – which are located 17 km to the west, off the Orange–Forbes road. It is years since I was last there; the previous occasion was in the company of Ernie Holland and Mick Chalker – not quite in the Pleistocene, but close!

Actually, my last visit was in late 1998 – about twelve years ago... It is probably marginally useful to quote from my resultant ACKMA Journal Report at that time:

One fine (hot!) morning, Mick bundled me into his Hilux, and 'dragged' me off on a full day trip to Abercrombie and Borenore. After leaving Abercrombie, we drove onto Borenore Caves, near Orange, which last year was passed over to the management of the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust. And the new Manager of Borenore? You guessed it – Mick Chalker! One has visions of Mick being manager of most of Australia's karst, the way it's going! Upon arrival, we were met by Ernie Holland and thereafter spent several hours trying to keep up with him as he tromped the karst. I had visited Borenore some years ago, but this was my first extended look. I was previously unaware just what a substantial karst area it is, and how cavernous. We checked out several entrances in our sojourn, but just a fraction of those tagged. The biggest management problem

currently is feral flora, particularly blackberries, with a spraying program urgently needed. It was rather late that night when we finally got back to Wombeyan – considerably later than expected after somebody lost his car keys (which were finally found), but I will not embarrass the person concerned by mentioning his name. ('A Karst Odyssey'. ACKMA Journal 34 – March 1999).

Ahh – the good old days! But let us not dwell.



A view through the Arch at Arch Cave

HISTORY

While obviously known to aboriginal groups for thousand of years, the first recorded European visit to Borenore was John Henderson (no relation, as far as I know...) in 1830. Major Thomas Mitchell visited the caves during his Third Expedition in 1836. An interesting association with Borenore is that of Frank Rusconi, the Italian stonemason of (mostly) Gundagai – famous for the *Dog on the Tuckerbox* and *Rusconi's Marble Masterpiece* (See ACKMA Journal 81 – December 2010). Borenore was the source of much of his marble. Like many Australian karst (particularly marble) areas it possessed quarrying operations for some years. Its 'glory' days were over the first half of the 20th Century, but mining did not completely cease until 1994.



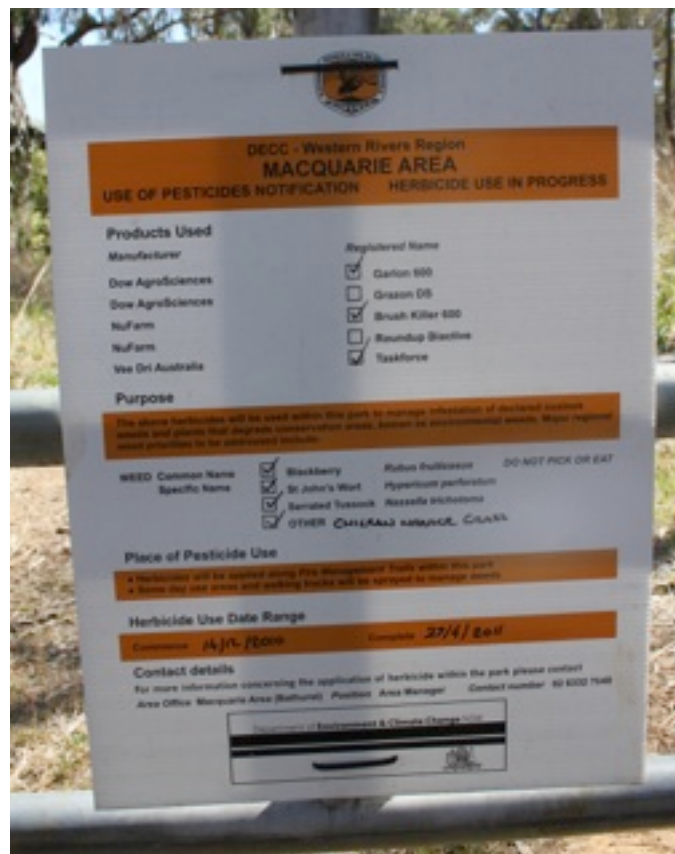
Above: Boree Creek entering Arch Cave
Below: A view of the creek section in Arch Cave



The Borenore Karst Conservation Reserve was initially dedicated as a *Reserve for Public Recreation* in 1959. The area was managed, together with a further 32 other small parcels of land, by the Canobolas Regional Parklands Trust. In 1997, Borenore Caves was included in the lands controlled by the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust (JCRT), and as noted above was managed by Mick Chalker from Wombeyan (Wombeyan and Abercrombie were then under the JCRT).

When the JCRT was 'effectively dissolved' in 2006, management of the Jenolan, Abercrombie, Wombeyan

and Borenore karsts reverted to the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS); with only the Jenolan Show Caves themselves remaining under the rump JCRT. This is the current situation. The Borenore Karst Conservation Reserve is registered as a natural heritage site on the Register of the National Estate.



Signage denoting the spraying of feral plants at Borenore

GEOLOGY

The Borenore karst is partly-metamorphosed Silurian marble (approx. 500 million years old) which outcrops along Boree Creek, irregularly, over about five kilometres. It is totally surrounded by igneous rock that flowed from volcanic eruptions at nearby Mount Canobolas. At this time, or possibly earlier, the limestone metamorphosed into marble. Several small (now-abandoned) marble quarries are spread throughout the area.

Boree Creek runs through the best known cave in the Reserve – Arch Cave – at the East end. Tunnel Creek runs through Tunnel Cave at the Reserve's west end, which itself feeds into Boree Creek. A number of springs continually flow into Boree Creek.

The water from these springs is of high quality and is an important source of water in maintaining the general health of Boree Creek and the Reserve itself. There are about forty tagged caves in the Reserve, mostly small. The other cave of relative significance is Verandah Cave, which is located near the western boundary of the Reserve above Tunnel Cave, and is effectively an undercut cliff.



Interpretive signage at Borenore

MANAGEMENT

There is an excellent Management Plan on Borenore, written under the JCRT and gazetted in April 2001 – a PDF of it is on the Internet.* Obviously, under the *rule of thumb* ‘ten year rule’ is it due for an update and it will be interesting to see if and when the NPWS get this done.

That said, I must say I was extremely impressed with the current Borenore management on my recent visit. I spend a couple of hours or so there. One arrives at a small car park, adjacent to which is excellent interpretive signage. A short 100m walk, transiting a small bridge over Boree Creek, brings you to Arch Cave. All one needs is a light source and decent footwear.

There is a circuitous route through the upper (dark) section of the cave, down to its considerable Arch (not in the Abercrombie Caves league, but impressive nonetheless!), and again through cave along the creek inflow. There are many daylight holes. The dark cave section contains mostly dry bulbous speleothems (no surprise given the great airflow through the cave). While, not unexpected, there has been historical damage and some graffiti in the cave, it is far from obvious. The creek section is particularly pleasant to walk through. The whole traverse is as easy as touring a self-guided show cave which, of course, from the Borenore perspective it effectively is.

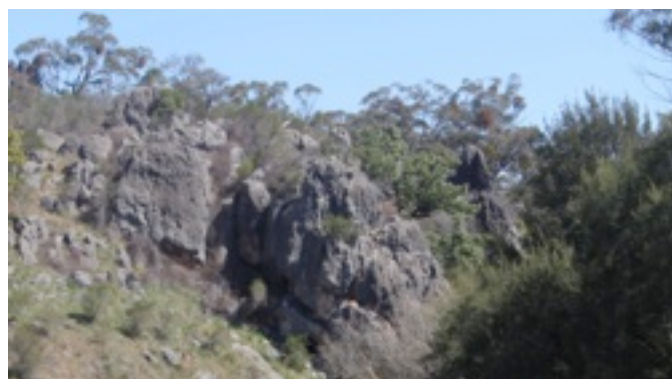
After visiting Arch Cave, I undertook the long walk around Boree Creek to Tunnel Cave. The traverse took about 45 minutes (one way), and I moved at a goodly clip! While there is excellent track signage along the route, Tunnel Cave itself is not indicated, and I had to rely on my memory of over a decade ago to find the entrance. The long trek (1½+ hours return...) and lack of direct signage is, of course, a (wise!) management decision. Clearly, the aim is for casual tourists to visit robust Arch Cave...

Tunnel Cave is used as a roosting site by the vulnerable Common Bent-winged Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*), and is closed from May to September. The long trek to Tunnel, undoubtedly, is undertaken by relatively few, which suits management objectives just fine. Given that Tunnel was still officially closed upon my visit, I only delved briefly into the entrance area.

Tunnel Cave is at the base of a large bluff on the southern side of the creek. As you approach you can see

several entrances, with the true cave entrance being the lowest portal. While it is possible to look down into the start of the Tunnel Cave from the upper chamber (I did), the lower entrance is the practical one that should be used. Transiting the cave you can get wet, so I was more than happy to not progress past the entrance on this occasion in any case, as I was not geared up. The creek has eroded a deep channel in the first part of the tunnel. The cave then opens up into a large chamber followed by a long passage, again often filled with water, but you can normally get around it and keep dry, as I recall.

All the usual speleothems are represented in the cave, although most of it is ‘dry’. Obviously, there is plenty of guano. Near the end of the cave there is another large pool. There is a sink hole at the end, offering an easy climb out. One does need to be/should be geared up, but the traverse of the cave is relatively easy.



*Above: The entrance to Tunnel Cave
Below: A close up view of the Tunnel Cave entrance.*



Probably the greatest management issue in the Reserve is feral flora, with blackberries being the worst offender. I remember, from my first visit to Borenore many, many years ago that blackberries were indeed rampant – as I recall Mick Chalker’s visits to Borenore from Wombeyan were often about blackberry spraying. I am delighted to say the NPWS is clearly on the case – I did not see a living blackberry anywhere in the park (although plenty of the deceased variety) – bravo!

So, if you happen to be in the Orange area, half a day – or more – at Borenore is well worth it. It is a most pleasant, and very well managed, karst area.

*See: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/pomfinalborenore.pdf>