

PILLIGA SANDSTONE CAVES, NEW SOUTH WALES

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*High level caves in cliff of cross-bedded Pilliga Sandstone
Photo: Marjorie Coggan*

Hidden away in the mixed eucalypt and callitris forest of the Pilliga Nature Reserve in north-western New South Wales are some remarkable sandstone caves. They are located just a short distance off the Newell Highway about 35 km north of Coonabarabran and are well worth a short detour for anyone travelling through the area.

The caves occur in an outcrop of Pilliga Sandstone – a Jurassic Age Formation (approximately 150 million year old) which extends across much of north-western NSW and which underlies virtually all of the Nature Reserve.

The entrances are in cliffs 10-15 metres high on both sides of a north-south trending ridge but the most extensive cave development is on the western side. Some of the caves are more than just simple overhangs and are surprisingly spacious and extensive. Much of



*Kangaroo and emu track carvings
Photo: John Brush*



The sandstone is quite friable on surfaces not directly exposed to the elements
Photo: John Brush



Above. Sharpening grooves
Below. Protective gate for cave with sharpening grooves
Photos: John Brush

the passage development is parallel to the cliffs beyond a narrow zone of case-hardened sandstone. Behind the case-hardened veneer along the cliff faces, the sandstone is quite soft and friable and appears to be quite readily eroded once the surface layer has been breached.

Several caves are readily accessible from a 1.7 km walking track that starts from a car park and loops around the cliff line. The caves are an important site for the local Gamilaraay (Gamilaroi) people and in view of their cultural significance, the two most sensitive caves have restricted access and have been gated to protect

axe sharpening grooves and rock art (engravings of kangaroo and emu tracks).

The caves are well worth a visit and are easy to find once you know where to look. At the request of the Gamilaraay Elders, the turnoff from the Newell Highway is not signposted. However, there is a well-signposted car park with an interpretative sign on a gravel road about 1 km from the highway. Directions on how to get to the caves can be obtained from the NSW National Parks Service and from the Coonabarabran Visitors Centre.

