

Graffiti Removal from Main Cave at Timor, New South Wales

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During 2018, NHVSS became aware that significant spray-paint graffiti elements (vandalism) had appeared on the walls of Main Cave at Timor in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales.

It was decided to do something about removing it during an NHVSS trip to the area in June 2019.

Upon entering the cave, our group was immediately confronted with the horrendous amount of black spray paint graffiti on large sections of wall. Thankfully, none was on speleothems, but there was some on eroded palaeokarst on one wall. The areas were assessed to identify any historic signatures which may be impacted if we cleaned them all. I can hear the thinkers questioning, "at what point in time does a signature change from being graffiti to an historic signature". There are many arguments to be considered here and there are numerous published in-depth articles about this subject. A good example is the paper by Reed and Bourne (2018) under the subheading, "The value of historical writing in caves". However, I am not going to tackle that subject in this short article.

To document our clean-up, we decided to photograph each area of graffiti vandalism prior to and after removal by rubbing it off with wire brushes.



**Above: The team and graffiti before the attack!
Below: The same location with Marcia Kaye, Brian Reeves and Trish Morrow after removal of most of the graffiti**



Luckily, the majority of the walls now covered in graffiti were those which had been vandalised about 30 years earlier and had previously been cleaned at that time using the same method we were about to employ. Back then, I was a member of NHVSS and also heavily involved with Scouting as a Venturer Leader and a Regional Caving Instructor. So the Scouts, on one of my caving courses, were involved in the earlier cleaning of graffiti.

Upon close inspection, the majority of the cave walls were found still to be coated in a layer of soft calcite (not moonmilk) and the graffiti on the whole could be removed by rubbing vigorously with wire brushes. Provided there was still enough soft calcite on the walls, I expected that the same process would be viable again without sustaining any noticeable damage to the cave walls. Wire brushes were used on a small test area and proved to be very successful.

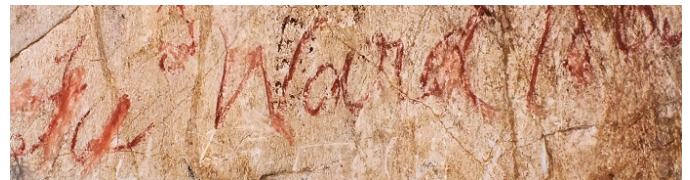


Ellie Brown and Trish Morrow continue the attack.

Our band of enthusiastic, wire brush-wielding graffiti removers then set to work. Even the young children in our group embraced the project with enthusiasm and achieved some outstanding results (in areas within the limits of their reach).

Overall, the clean-up took about two hours and achieved almost total removal of all the 2018 graffiti. The shame is that the caves on the reserve at Timor are freely open to the public to wander into at any time, and thus can be targeted, in the future, by graffiti vandals.

There are many caves outside the reserve and surrounding property owners are very protective of these caves on their land, so those caves have, on the whole, remained undamaged.



Thankfully, the historic signature of "Fred Ward 1865" - alias "Captain Thunderbolt", a notorious outlaw, has not been damaged in Main Cave. Fingers crossed, his signature survives into the future.

Further Reading

Reed E and Bourne S, (2018) 'New evidence confirms Thomas Hannay as the first photographer of Naracoorte Caves and emphasises the importance of historical writing in caves', *Helictite*, 44: 45-58.