

2. Changing Yarrangobilly

Regina Roach (Canberra Speleological Society) and Gary Bilton (Yarrangobilly Caves Old Boy)

Yarrangobilly is ever-changing. A new Caves Supervisor, Bernadette Zanet, arrived in February 2019. Bernadette joined Yarrangobilly from Bonegilla Migrant Experience at Albury. Since starting work, Bernadette has joined the Canberra Speleos on a caving trip and attended the Guides' School at Naracoorte.

On arrival at the Yarrangobilly Visitors' Centre, a returning visitor notices many changes. Gone are the museum pieces of the past - the assorted bottles, signs, tins and the early rolls of pre-1980s' cave tickets. Surviving on the wall is the 1926 map of the New South Wales railway tracks. The Railway Department once managed Yarrangobilly. On the mantelpiece, there is a magnesium ribbon lantern originating from the days before electricity.

Rest assured, you can feel safe at Yarrangobilly now. Security cameras have been installed. The Visitors' Centre is a cosy, warm environment with its new heaters so you can peruse the wide selection of goods in comfort, and visitors of today are able to now utilise the wifi.

Previous visitors will notice a difference around the Thermal Pool and the Lyrebird Cottage. Recent hazard-reduction burns and asset-protection measures have removed many large fallen trees, and burnt and cleared away the undergrowth.

Scientific research is continuing in Harrie Wood Cave monitoring the effects of climate change.

Visitors booking accommodation at Caves House will notice a change to a dynamic pricing system. When there are many rooms available for booking, the price of the room is lower, so availability affects the price of the room. One single-storey bathroom has been renovated and it is envisaged the other bathrooms will follow. Caves House is now accessible by wheelchair from the Visitors Centre along a new paved pathway.

An expanded range of tours is available - with some tours available using an online booking system. Child-focused tours, including "Little Caves, Little Kids" and "Bake and Bushcraft", are based on the nature-play approach. The "High Plains, Huts, and Heritage" tour transports people in Yarrangobilly's four-wheel-drive bus to a variety of destinations. The Castle Cave, which has never been electrically lit, is now toured more frequently. Adventure caving through Mill Creek Cave or Diversion and River Caves is another option.

The stair access from the track to the Thermal Pool has been reconstructed with more, smaller steps, a retaining wall and pavers.

Just like the Yarrangobilly of old, it is an ever-changing place.

Two from Wellington Caves, New South Wales

Both stories from Ian Eddison

1. Threatened Species Day

On Threatened Species Day on 7 September 2019, Wellington Caves had environmentally based tours available for guests, in addition to the regular tour program. These themed tours were:

- Twitching On The Reserve
- Woodland Wander
- What's A Troglobite?

Unlike many karst reserves around the country, the caves at Wellington are fenced near the visitor arrival area as there are vertical caves close by. As a result, many of our visitors don't see a lot of our reserve unless we run events such as these on Threatened Species Day.

This relatively small karst reserve has Grassy Box Woodland, which is an Endangered Ecological Community. It has typical legacies of the past, such as agricultural and ornamental weeds as well as feral animals. It still, however, has enough diversity of original flora species to support a considerable number of fauna species. Several macropod species, many reptiles and birds are common here.

Our Threatened Species Day started with a cold, windy morning, with a little drizzle, so the 8.00 am "Twitching On The Reserve" was looking to be uncomfortable and unrewarding. However, our walk included the Osawano Japanese Gardens, with lots of cover and an extensive water feature for birds, as well as our open Grassy Box Woodland. We walked through old and restored woodland and a very diverse floristic area on limestone that has had little impact over the years.



**Brown treecreeper
(Tim Bergen)**



Diamond Firetail (Tim Bergen)

Our small group of three guests, with Janice Hosking of Dubbo Field Naturalists and me, were rewarded with 32 species sighted (and two of these were threatened ones). We observed small groups of Brown Treecreepers and Hooded Robins. The elusive Diamond Firetail was not seen on the day but previously noted and was seen during the following week - so we have at least three threatened bird species on our small karst reserve alone, emphasising the importance of keeping and caring for our flora for birds.

At 1.00 pm, our “Woodland Wander” had eight guests, with Gay Bennison of Burrendong Arboretum and me. The cool breeze had eased, but we still had to be mindful of the risk of falling limbs, so the route was carefully negotiated, taking in old woodland and a restored area some 10 years old, as well as our diverse floristic area on limestone. We certainly had the opportunities to see the diversity and discuss the unique aspects of certain plant species. We also got to see some of our local history as we walked over the old phosphate mine site. This gave a further insight to our guests about uses of the landscape and flora in the past.



ACKMA Journal No. 116 September 2019



Hooded Robin (Tim Bergen)

“What is a Troglobite?” - you may well know, but our guests often don’t, so I amended our usual 3.30 pm Cathedral Cave tour to have an emphasis on life in caves. Our top entry level has great examples of an ecosystem, organic matter from moss in the twilight zone, leaf litter, Welcome Swallows depositing the odd dropping, and spider webs cleverly showing off the links between them. Further down to the Cathedral Chamber - a totally dark zone except for our visitation - we found more spiders and, eventually, at the furthestmost part of our tour of what is a fairly dry cave, we come to a warm, humid environment in Thunder Cave and behold the troglobites to the surprise of our guests. Children that were “Can we see some more now?” had transformed into Bug Busters and we literally had to drag them away to get out on time.

Overall, our Threatened Species Day events were quite rewarding - not in a huge increase in visitation, but in creating more in-depth and memorable experiences for our guests.

Threatened Species Day is on 7 September each year. It is the anniversary of the date the last known Thylacine died in Hobart Zoo in 1936. For me, it has become special due to our friends at Flinders University providing the opportunity for me to participate in their dig in our Cathedral Cave a few years ago. I had unearthed the ankle of a Thylacine that afternoon, along with a Tasmanian Devil incisor among many bones of small mammals. My guests on the Cathedral Cave tour this afternoon were fascinated with my recounting of that previous experience.

Left: On the Woodland Wander (Ian Eddison)

Wild Wellington

Each of our karst areas has its unique features and challenges when accessing wild caves. At Wellington Caves, New South Wales, we can have a CO₂ issue from time to time. One of our show caves, Gaden Cave, is checked for its atmospheric conditions on a daily basis. This hazard is one of the reasons why staff here do not get to go adventure caving in our wild places very often. Recently, however, some of our learned friends, Andy Baker of UNSW and Andreas Hartmann of Freiberg University of Germany, along with David Head of Weidmüller Lighting, inspected our Anticline/Water Cave.

David Head was demonstrating some of the lighting available through Weidmüller. and Andy and Andreas were checking on some instrumentation set up at Wellington Caves for hydrological study. It was only natural that Anticline/Water Cave was of interest to us all. Our water table is low because of the drought and

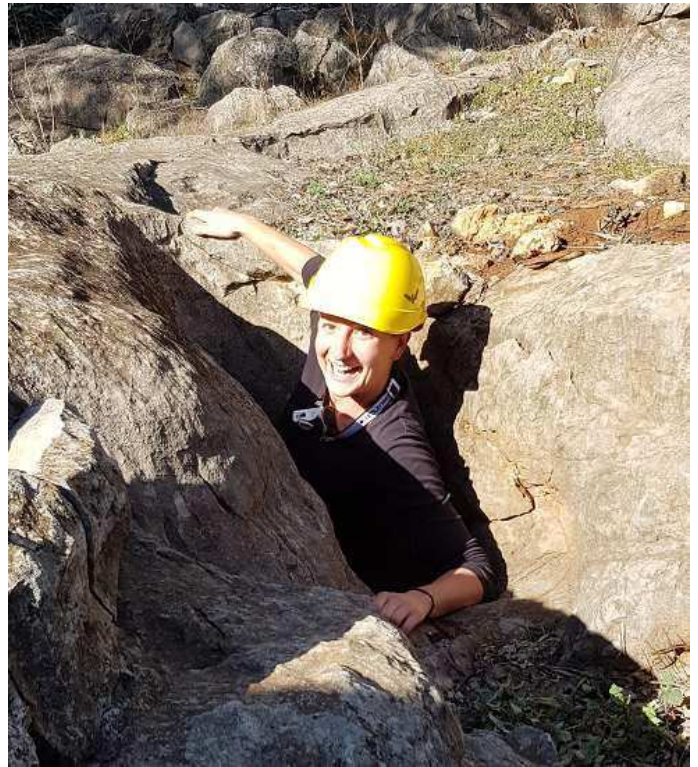


Anticline/Water cave (Ian Eddison)

this provided an opportunity for Andy to retrieve some equipment that was now exposed because of the lowering water table. David's lighting really showed off this cave for us all to enjoy. The folding of thinly bedded limestone is very well displayed here and there is also, of course, the water table. In addition, there are features such as the stalagmite in the floor seen in the photo, which is often covered by water. The water and rafting crystal can be seen in the back of the chamber in the photo taken on this recent trip.

A group of our staff were given access to several of our wild caves and one of our closed but previously developed caves. This was an introduction to caving for many of them. In fact, only Katie Bower (who attended ACKMA in Margaret River) had done some caving previously.

So it was an honour to provide an introduction to adventure caving (with training) and introduce them to Anticline/Water Cave, Triplet Cave and Gaspipe Cave one afternoon.



Katie Boyer in a solution tube squeeze (Ian Eddison)

A squeeze in a surface solution tube began the training fun, with techniques and emergency response being discussed before entering each of these caves. The team had a learning and fun afternoon getting a hands-on experience. Although I was the trip leader, even I had not been in Triplet Cave before. This added to the excitement of the adventure for everyone. We found a safe access route and all the pre-planning of maps and advice of others paid off.

These caves are quite small compared to what many of our ACKMA members would be used to. However, doing them together, as an afternoon event, made for a real adventure, with some challenges to overcome and enough to tempt them to do more when the opportunity occurs.



The team from the training afternoon (Ian Eddison)