

Around the show caves

Introduction

We three contributions—two from Australian sites and one from New Zealand

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Wellington Caves

Wellington Caves in the central west of NSW is currently working towards fitting out the megafauna room of the Visitor Experience Centre. An interpretation specialist company, 'Thylacine', was selected from 5 tender submissions. Thylacine is currently developing content plans for a very exciting interactive series of displays with caves management.

Wellington Caves hosts a series of ongoing scientific studies. These are:

- a paleontological dig in Cathedral cave by Flinders University;
- groundwater recharge monitoring by UNSW and Freiberg University Germany;
- the ACKMA atmospheric monitoring study; and, most recently
- the Red Browed Firetail study by Macquarie University.

This latter study looks at the mitochondrial DNA of Red Browed Firetail finches to check if the Great Dividing Range and East Coast birds are the same when compared to those of Central Western NSW. This study arose because of differences recently found in other birds such as the Eastern Yellow Robin.



Jenolan Caves Shelley China Collection now on display at Caves House

David Cook, Jenolan Caves Historical & Preservation Society

The collection of Jenolan Caves Shelley China, collected by the late Dr Elery Hamilton-Smith, a noted academic, researcher and consultant in all matters concerning caves and karst, was donated to Jenolan Caves Historical & Preservation Society by his widow, Angela Hamilton-Smith in November 2019.

Following a lengthy delay caused by snow, bushfires, torrential rain causing severe flooding and finally Covid19, the collection of 122 pieces has now been placed on public display in the recently lit cabinet in the Guests Lounge of Jenolan Caves House.



A photo of the display taken before the cabinet doors were closed & locked

Spellbound Tours, Waitomo

Peter and Libby Chandler

With the borders closed, we have been making preparations to have a visitor centre closer to 'our' caves, the Mangawhitikau Glowworm cave on Derek and Jill Mason's property, and Te Ana O Te Atua, the Cave of the Spirit, under land covenanted by Graymont. Graymont is a Canadian family owned company who purchased the McDonalds lime quarry in 2015. Recently they have purchased several Australian Quarries owned by Sibelco.

Our new base is at 334 Boddies Road and is a similar distance off Highway 3 as is the Waitomo village, but 6.5 km further south and closer to the town of Te Kuiti.

The close location gives us two shorter options, the "Spellbound Excursion" from the Waitomo village will run morning and afternoon (as required) and takes around 3 hrs and 15 minutes.

The "Spellbound Essential" will be around 80 minutes – just visiting our glow-worm cave by a 2.5 km minibus ride to the site followed by a short walk and then incom-

parable views of the New Zealand Glowworm on foot and by inflatable raft on a 75 metre long section of flat water, this being made possible by courtesy of a 90 cm high weir, for which we have a resource consent. This weir, we disassemble preferably before (but sometimes after) a flood event and during recess times – traditionally our June shutdown but, in 2020, during the Covid-19 Level 4 lockdown.

What we hope will become the most popular, "Spellbound Explorer", will visit both caves without the transfer from Waitomo village, so will time in at around 2 hours 25 minutes.

A toilet block will follow, but right now we are using a 12 m x 3 m portable cabin, with a 4-metre-wide shelter alongside, with associated entrance and drop off, parking and exit. Toilet facilities are the adjacent cottage bathroom upgraded to a disabled toilet with a new outside door. This latter facility is a prerequisite to getting a NZ Transport Authority tourist attraction sign.

With the lack of internationals, visitor number statistics seem more relevant being compared with previous school holiday and term blocks, not calendar months.